

How Can Sultan Qaboos University Respond to the Contemporary Challenges of the Omani Labour Market Needs and Community Expectations?

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Abstract

Higher education systems in developing countries have mixed results in satisfying their nations' labour market requirements, and community needs and expectations. Oman, a member of the Gulf Country Council (GCC), sustained the rapid economic development that has featured within the region over the past three decades. However, a contentious issue for the GCC, including Oman, is the provision of higher education qualifications sufficient for graduates to compete successfully in local labour markets dominated by experienced expatriates.

This study explores the factors contributing to high unemployment for the mass communications graduates of Oman's principal educational facility, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). Semi-structured interviews with graduates, students and their parents, university and government representatives and public and private employers have revealed a range of views about the employability of the graduates and the university course which sought to prepare them for the labour market. The analysis of the interview data revealed that conventional human capital themes failed to account for the range of views about the effects of the course on graduate employability.

Until a decade ago, human capital principles that value years of learning served Oman well as it provided sufficient educational capacity to deliver graduates for its expanding public services. However, when the country's burgeoning public sector ceased the automatic acceptance of SQU graduates, later cohorts from mass communications courses were unable to source work in Oman's small private sector mass media industry.

The findings from the study were that traditional human capital accumulation is insufficient to deliver jobs; the human risk capital is too high. Risk factors for mass communications students include course admission, curriculum content and delivery, language fluency and technology. Further, employer perceptions of the mass communications qualification and of graduates' commitment to a work ethic were barriers to employment. A significant contribution of the research is the recognition that the framework of educational practices, associated with what has been termed social capital, provides an alternative and more constructive means of analysis the data. The findings of the research point to the need for a university in a country such as Oman to expand its educational responsibility by taking on a social capital curriculum whose principal feature

is the establishment of communicative links between local communities, the university and workplaces.

A social capital curriculum, increasingly pursued as best practice for developed countries, can deliver work ready graduates acceptable to employers. Valid for GCC and wider use, a model of the capital theory elements, processes and risks is included in this comparative study.

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

I, **Abdul Latif Al-Balushi**, declare that the PhD thesis entitled **How Can Sultan Qaboos University Respond to the Contemporary Challenges of the Omani Labour Market Needs and Community Expectations?** is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendixes, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature

Date

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Acronyms

GCC	Gulf Cooperative Council
SQU	Sultan Qaboos Univeristy
MCD	Mass Communications Department

Appendix

University Approvals for Research

Chapter 1 The Research

This study explores paths by which Oman's higher education establishments can build stronger community connections to satisfy the country's socioeconomic development and safeguard its cultural values. As the country's most important educational resource, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) adds to the nation's human capital of skills and knowledge; it may also contribute to the country's social capital of informed networks and community growth through engagement with representatives of its civil society. To explore the university's contribution to capital accumulation for the country, and to analyse data on capital risk, recent cohorts of graduates from SQU's Mass Communication Department (MCD) were selected for study on the grounds of their unacceptably high level of unemployment.

Within its framework of human and social capital theory, the research statement at section 1.2 explores antecedents for SQU MCD's unemployed graduate cohorts. Section 1.3 sets out the aims and objectives of this study and s1.4 states the significance of this research. Following on, s1.5 shows the methodology to address the thesis and its aims. Briefly, the thesis progresses from an exploration of contributing factors leading to an inability to translate a mass communications credential into the workplace in a chosen profession such as media presenter, public relations, or a print journalist. The methodology for the study stems from five semi-structured open-ended interview questions supported by specific probes, and this part comprises chapter four of the research.

Returning to the plan of this chapter, s1.6 presents the data collection method and process undertaken for the study. Section 1.7 explores the strengths and weaknesses inherent in this qualitative research, and a comprehensive organisation of this thesis is presented at s1.8.

1.1 Research Statement

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge supporting both human capital and social capital theory. The study uses the considerable literature on these theories to build a thesis through original research. The results support strategies applicable to countries

within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)¹ and similar economies on emerging issues regarding education and employment. Thus, this thesis is an attempt to apply a social theory to a specific educational question.

Human capital theory states that a country's investment in education has positive returns in both its community and economic development (Mincer 1961), whereas social capital theory's strength lies in the thesis that such investment applied to social networks both accumulates human capital for a country and also aids in sustained social and economic nation-building as a civil society (Woolcock, 2001). Developing economies face a shared challenge in that their higher education systems, as national change agents, are not meeting the nations' labour market needs or community expectations. There is a lack of policy coordination at the juxtaposition of a quality graduate supply, and community and labour market standards.

In a rapidly evolving knowledge development environment, SQU, as Oman's major determinant of professional capital, faces a challenge in its ability to define the country's future labour market needs and deliver appropriate job placements for its graduates. On SQU's campus, this challenge is nowhere greater than the estimated 90 per cent of mass communication graduates from the four preceding years' cohorts who are unable to utilise their bachelor's degrees in mass communications to begin their media careers.

The principal aim of this study is therefore to determine factors impacting the employability of SQU's mass communication graduates, focusing on five research questions:

- Q1:** Identify issues relating to the lack of employment options for SQU College of Arts' Mass Communication Department graduates.
- Q2:** Determine skills required for SQU MCD graduates to gain employment.
- Q3:** Explore factors relating to graduate employment that the university, government and employers can address.
- Q4:** Determine whether SQU prepares the MCD graduates for life-long learning.
- Q5:** Determine whether SQU prepares the MCD graduates for workplace training.

¹ The Gulf Cooperation Council countries are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to apply to the subject matter individual and connective dimensions from capital theory, in this case human and social capital, and extract replicable strategies for a developing economy's higher education system. The purpose is to propose structural reforms both to integrate national resources and to contribute to sustained economic development and the aims of civil society. The intended outcome of the study – its thesis – achieves a critical appraisal of Omani higher education, supporting a risk-based capital model, and thus is a valuable contribution to knowledge.

A primary research objective is to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the extant literature and to select lines of inquiry and recommendations that fit the antecedents of graduate unemployment. This entails identifying regional and specialised research to support and promote the area of study that focuses on an individual's successful transition from study to meaningful work within the policies and resources of a national environment such as that of the GCC countries.

The part of this study devoted to original research is based on in-depth interviews to identify the primary causes of obstacles to graduate under-employment, particularly among SQU mass communication graduates. The views of a wide range of participants from the university and its stakeholders are systematically collected, transcribed and translated, differentiated and analysed to identify factors contributing to the graduates' lack of entry into the labour market. A further objective of this research is to determine and examine the SQU MCD course structures and curriculum, and the faculty's relationships and coordination with Omani employers and other stakeholders.

The interviews are conducted and results determined through the experiences and perceptions of nine categories of interview participants. The outcomes from the interviews are filtered and analysed according to the following prompts:

- whether SQU through its MCD program invested sufficient resources in both its human and social capital structures (relates to all research questions)
- to determine the extent to which the SQU MCD programs meet the perceived career needs of its graduates (specifically, research question 2)
- decide whether SQU MCD's curriculum and achievement standards are based on the demands of the mass media labour market (research questions 2 and 5)

- consider whether specific findings relating to the SQU MCD program may be applicable to other undergraduate programs and mass media courses within the GCC (all research questions, with some emphasis on question 3)
- identify the characteristics of sample partnership structures applicable to the SQU, its graduates, and stakeholders, including employers from both the public and private sectors (research questions 1 and 5).

The final objectives relate to discussion of the principles of social and human capital theory and the interpretation of the research outcomes within these frameworks. A capital risk model is introduced, discussed, and recommendations are then propounded, drawing out conclusions, strategies, and areas of further study.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This thesis is a contribution to capital literature, reintroducing the concept of risk applied in economic capital equations. Its results provide evidence for the application of modified capital theory in the transition from higher education to the workplace. This is an important area for emerging economies in addressing the efficient allocation of resources to improve their graduates' skills and knowledge base (employability) as a socioeconomic measure of leadership.

There is little research guidance for emerging economies regarding graduates' transition from university to professional employment, despite considerable resources employed to achieve the twin aims of future civil and economic national leadership. This work contributes to the capital literature by providing debate on the causes by which SQU MCD graduates are not acceptable to employers. It extends the small body of extant literature surrounding the transition of graduates to employment through its capital risk analysis of qualitative data on Omani processes and structures. The thesis results are also useful for policymakers from other emerging economies in strategies for job creation, and for planning higher education systems, especially curricula, to better prepare graduates for employment.

This is an innovative study in its use of an adapted capital model to introduce the concept of risk to a clearly significant area of capital theory. A model, which identifies risks during knowledge acquisition at university and through the processes to successful job placement, facilitates identification of barriers and opportunities. Further, there is a

balance between human and social capital principles that may be achieved through civil society, in this case, the networks between higher education authorities and the wider Omani community and external stakeholders. These may culminate in the dismantling of structural barriers to national development.

This research is particularly complex and comprehensive as these examples show:

- collection of data in Arabic, transcribing and translating copious material into English
- the necessity to building trust in interviews in an extremely sensitive cultural environment
- a significant literature review across different cultures and languages.

The work also serves as a seminal study to create a framework to bridge university/community relationships and, by its reintroduction of concepts of capital risk, assist in alleviating unemployment among university graduates.

1.4 Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study relies on qualitative data analysis.

In selecting research techniques to maximise outcomes from the insertion of original work in dimensions of capital theory consideration was given to the most appropriate type of methodology. As detailed in chapter 4, the raw data required for this study, that is, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs, are best approached qualitatively rather than quantitatively. Building upon the evidence provided by the literature on the topic, semi-structured interviewing was deemed to achieve superior results. Semi-structured face-to-face interviewing is a valued tool in examining participants' perceptions. It uses a constant cross-comparison method of referral to stated and non-stated responses to elicit rich and valid data. As expounded within the literature, open-ended and semi-structured questions were formulated with supporting questions as probes (Patton 2002, Wengraf 2001). Based on specific pre-determined themes and categories related to this study's objectives, the questions were structured to explore participants' perceptions of their experiences and perceptions, as the interviewees are key information suppliers to this research (Miles & Huberman 1994). A guide was then developed to focus the interviewees' responses on issues critical to this study's aim and objectives: the SQU MCD

curriculum, community expectations and job specifications. This approach was selected to provide deeper and wider insights into the causes of the SQU MCD graduates' unemployment.

1.5 Data Collection

Data for this research was obtained from 52 stakeholder participants, placed in nine categories. Perusal of extant literature did not identify specific sources, or categories, of participants for their surveys, an omission regarded by this researcher as of significance when undertaking a comprehensive analysis of qualitative data. To address this structural omission, the following nine categories of interviewees were selected to assess their individual perceptions and experiences, to enrich and add depth to the data, to identify commonalities, and to elicit greater variation in cross-comparison of probe questions.

Key targeted participants in this study are:

1. SQU MCD academics,
2. employed SQU MCD graduates in the government sector,
3. employed SQU MCD graduates in the private sector,
4. fourth year SQU MCD students,
5. unemployed SQU MCD graduates,
6. parents of SQU MCD unemployed graduates,
7. employers from the government sector,
8. employers from the private sector, and finally,
9. policy makers.

1.6 Study Strengths and Limitations.

The study's strengths and limitations relate to its aims, research questions, structure, literature availability and capital theory. The strengths and limitations are selected in turn.

1.6.1 Study Strengths

This study's strength is its contribution to capital research through dimensions of human and social capital by the reintroduction of risk to both aspects. To achieve this aim, the study explores the antecedents of mass communications graduate unemployment,

discussing issues as perceived by stakeholder categories of interviewees and placing these in a framework of capital risk theory. This is a theoretical structure that is robust, applicable to the graduates, the university and the structures of government. For example, recommendations emerge that university programs become engaged with the business community and wider society, providing lifelong learning opportunities in partnerships with the emerging Omani media industry.

This research is characterised by a large number of categorised interviewees; the categorisation providing opportunity to compare and contrast majority views, differentiating between providers, recipients and stakeholders, and using their various experiences to contribute greatly to the depth of this study. This process reflects the deep bonding capital of Oman, the families, tribes, and the socio-economic status that the categories of participants represent. The transcription and translation from Arabic adds a cultural benefit to capital theory, in the manner of Woolcock and Narayan (2000), whilst the discussion raises issues supporting criticism of human capital applications and presents benefits from future use of social capital principles. To mitigate the anomalies in capital theory, the risk concept is portrayed within a capital relations model. The further strength of this research is that it opens up a range of initiatives for facilitating media educators and media graduates' employment prospects, and the structural reforms that are required to achieve success. Thus there is a succinct theoretical structure which can be used by researchers, as well; it applies to a state's policy structures to achieve 'real world' outcomes.

1.6.2 Study Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to SQU graduates in the Sultanate of Oman, with a focus on the causes relating to unemployment among MCD graduates. Although participants mentioned specific undergraduate MCD programs, these are not generally under discussion, as this study undertakes an analysis of the entire MCD curriculum and uses individual courses for illustrative purposes only. Similarly, this research does not concentrate on particular employers, but gives equal weight to employment access in the private and public sectors.

A qualitative methodology including semi-structured interviews was the preferred vehicle to collect data to strengthen the quality of response from interview participants - their experiences, perceptions and attitudes. The alternative, quantitative methodology, was

considered inappropriate for this particular form of study. Qualitative analysts recommend inductive analysis to interpret semi-structured interview data (Coffey, Holbrook & Atkinson 1996; Miles & Huberman 1994; Silverman 2001; Thomas 2003). Thus this research depends on inductive data analysis, specifically concentrating on a methodology requiring constant cross comparison. Because interviews were conducted with different categories of participants, the qualitative constant cross comparison method is an appropriate approach for this type of research (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

1.7 Organisation of the Study

This chapter provides an overview of the structural flow of the thesis. It contains a research statement, the aim and objectives of the study, its significance within the literature, the selected research and data collection methodology, strengths and limitations of the study, and finally this sub-section which is the organisation of the body of the thesis.

The thesis proper is presented as follows:

Chapter 2 is entitled, Human and Social Capital Trends and presents a synopsis of the literature of both mature and emerging countries' perspectives of human capital and social capital. This chapter is divided into three sections:

- Section one, which discusses developed countries' perspective of human and social capital theories.
- Section two, which profiles developed nations and recent trends in teaching and learning in their higher education systems. A comprehensive literature review on life-long and work-based learning approaches to learning itself, skills demand and employability themes is presented.
- Section three, which describes the developing and Arab countries' higher education systems. Perusal of this literature identifies commitment of the developing countries to investment in human and social capital outcomes for sustained community and economic growth.

Chapter 3 is entitled Media Education and Employment in Oman and the aim of this chapter is to identify factors of Oman's commitment to developing the country's human and social capital bases. Chapter 3 is comprised of four areas of discussion:

- Section one introduces the Sultanate of Oman, providing the background for the original research for this study and a profile of modern Oman, concentrating on its human capital development.
- Section two examines the higher education and employment system in Oman, the development of the higher education system and its ability to integrate with the labour market - in particular, SQU graduates' employment prospects
- Section three explores the SQU mass communication curriculum, educator processes and its commitment to graduates' employability in the Omani labour market
- Section four, Media: GCC and Oman, considers the wider mass media industry in the Gulf countries and Oman in particular, and the labour markets and the job environment to which the SQU mass communications graduates are directed.

Chapter 4, Methodology and Research Design, presents and justifies the design and methodology of this research in order to meet its stated aim and objectives. Its five parts are presented as follows:

- Section one is the research theoretical framework. This section considers social research paradigms and positions the research within the ambit of this thesis.
- Section two discusses qualitative and quantitative research systems, the selection of qualitative methodology in this thesis and the rationale of the sampling process.
- Section three presents the development of the semi-structured interview questions, interviewing techniques in a particularly sensitive environment, and recording and translation systems; and
- Sections four and five consist of data analysis and data interpretation, respectively.

Chapter 5 commences the data analysis process, first as Characteristics of the MCD Course with its four sub-sections: the MCD graduate program overview; the curriculum; student intake procedures and student experiences. The intention is to investigate the participants' perceptions of the MCD educational system.

Chapter 6 examines the second section of data analysis, Elements of Graduate Employment, considering the media employment situation in Oman, especially the influences of Omanisation on the job market and *wasta*, or nepotism, on recruitment. Chapter 6 continues the analysis with its identification of employment-related characteristics of MCD graduates and stakeholder relationships that can be forged or improved to gain a better outcome. The objective of this chapter is to explore how interviewees perceive the labour market and the education system in Oman, concentrating on SQU's mass communications' graduate qualification standards in relation to employers' expectations.

Chapters 7 and 8 are discussion chapters, taking the capital dimensions from chapters 2 and 3 and the analyses of chapters 5 and 6 to build the thesis. For chapter 7, Implications of Primary Research: Graduate Outcomes, human capital is the prism for analysis of graduates' experiences; the inherent human risk factors are identified and then means to counter these risks are explored. The contributions of the university for future curriculum development and lifelong learning are the final topics of this chapter.

Chapter 8 Implications of Primary Research: Structural explores social capital implications for the university and Oman, focusing on characteristics of a mass communications curriculum embedded in its community. Fruitful partnerships with stakeholders identified by the interview categories are raised for consideration. This chapter also presents the capital relationships model, adapted from Stone and Hughes (2002), and introduces into it the concepts of capital risk.

Chapter 9 reports the conclusions drawn from this qualitative study and examines the implications from the research outcomes for the purpose of further study. It then presents the research recommendations.

1.8 Summary

This chapter introduces the research statement, aim and objectives of the study, significance of the research, research methodology, data collection method and process, and finally demonstrated the organisation of the thesis.

The following chapter presents an overview of the research environment within capital theory. It begins the body of research by which theory is examined and principles drawn from original enquiry relating to GCC higher education policies and practices with the aim of promoting successful careers for the countries' graduates.

Chapter 2 Human and Social Capital Trends

Employability is a complex issue. On the one hand, it relates to the attributes with which university graduates seek to enter the workforce. On the other hand, the term also focuses attention on the nature of the employment environment for those graduates. While this research is located within the discourses of education, its conceptual scope demands the inclusion of the features of the labour market in general and those of potential employing organisations, and also of the broad socio-economic conditions affecting the employment process.

This chapter introduces the underpinning theoretical framework for the research: that of human capital, social capital and their interrelationships. The chapter summarises and evaluates the research on human and social capital and discusses how they present a means of understanding employability in a way which will enable the researcher to move beyond the restricted possibilities in existing higher education and employability research in Oman and similar countries. In its reference to human and social capital, the research presents a structure for understanding the variable economic development patterns in countries with similar socioeconomic characteristics. In their practical applications, both forms of capital embody the connections between university courses, the employability of graduates in the labour market and the community connectivity that forms the environment for these processes.

The focus of this chapter is a discussion on the investment of developed countries in human and social capital principles in order to meet community needs, to reach sustainable rates of economic growth and to enhance social cohesion (Grootaert 1998, Preston & Dyer 2003). The evidence presented shows that developed countries, in seeking to fulfil their societal and economic needs in the twenty-first century, have taken specific strategies relating to human and social capital development: lifelong and work-based learning approaches, and knowledge, skills and training development within a community where the strength of its networks are their *weak ties* (Nayaran 1999). Development of this kind is linked to the continued growth experienced by economically and socially successful nations and the increased or stable satisfaction levels evidenced by their communities.

As an initial observation relating to the application of these principles, many

developing countries, including the Arab nations and specifically the Gulf Cooperation countries (GCC), earlier experienced weak economic growth. This review seeks to identify the extent to which developing economies such as those of the GCC acknowledge the significance of both human and social capital in their development strategies. The study also examines links and differences arising from the disparate strategies regarding these model theories that nations use, evidenced by generalised levels of application in promoting socio-economic development, as distinct from developed nations. Chapter 3 relates the general discussion to the specific experience of Oman, which has invested heavily in the development of human capital, but may have given little attention to the formation of principles of social capital aligned with social development and economic growth.

2.1 Human Capital, Social Capital Theories

Human capital alone appears insufficient explanation for a country's economic success in the modern world. Despite uncertainties about its definition, social capital adds a valuable conceptual dimension to theories of economic development by directing *attention to the relationships that shape the realisation of human capital's potential for the individual and collectively* (Schuller 2001, p.19). For example, Schuller goes on to argue that while human capital is defined in terms of the gaining of qualifications by individuals, social capital identifies the manner by which those individuals participate in networks; an important characteristic is that they are information relationships.

Socially and economically developed countries are recognised as technologically advanced, highly urbanised and wealthy, and they have generally evolved through both economic and demographic transitions to a level of growth and societal stability. It is posited here that these economies committed to human capital principles as a means of continued development after their initial investments simply in physical capital, that is, any non-human assets used in production. Human capital acquisition is prized as the economic value that is derived from the actual application of knowledge, collaboration, and process-engagement. From this viewpoint, human capital is regarded as the source from which decisions relating to service, quality, effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity are generated. This is part of the economic and social evolution to a more developed nation, as perceived by a given country's status in world affairs, shifting from an agriculture and manufacturing base to include developing knowledge and competencies of its people

(OECD 1998 & 2001a). For instance, the OECD states that human capital is both a private and social good and the organisation regards it as central to the competitive edge of economic enterprises and nations (OECDa 2001 p.66). Countries that have a high ratio of human capital to physical capital appear to grow faster through the ability to adjust their application of physical capital (Barro 2001 p.14).

In keeping with a human capital stance, extensive research shows that investment in education leads to economic growth and enhanced prosperity (Barro 1996, Bils & Klenow 2000, Sianesi & Van Reenen 2003). For example, Baldacci, Hillman and Kojo (2004, p.22), in their empirical findings state that one additional year of schooling for children increases the growth rate of the nation in GDP terms between 0.4 and 0.8 percentage points per year. However, Hanushek and Kimko (2000) argue that in the development and growth process, quality of education is more important than quantity.

For a nation's population, human capital acquisition, that is, skills development and the training of each generation to become independent and life-long learners, has gained wide support among more developed nations. Substantial research on issues relating to education and training links education outcomes to market needs, to develop core skills in higher education curricula and to reform education systems to satisfy the growing demand for quality graduates (Dunne 1999). In reporting an Australian perspective, Kearns and Grant (2002) argue for a combination of human capital and social capital acquisition for an information economy: learning, technology, community and partnership. They stress that lifelong learning is the currency of growth.

An important indicator of the relationship between a nation's education system and its economy is evidenced in the benefits of education and training experienced by individuals, employers and the economy itself. For example, Blundell, Dearden, Meghir and Sianesi (1999) report that workers and employers benefit equally from work-based training. The researchers found that employee training offers higher employment stability and when a worker does move on, previous training is well-regarded by the new employer. Confirming this finding, Lillard and Tan (1992) also point out that, as specific skills fade over time, vocational training needs to be renewed to retain its benefits. As an adjunct and in an earlier work, Blundell, Dearden and Meghir (1996) found that women with children receive less training than men, whether or not men provide for their children.

Notwithstanding the power of human capital investment, emphasised by the preceding research, to enhance a nation's physical capital, Woolcock (2001 p. 69) argues that

... (the) latest equipment and most innovative ideas in the hands of the brightest, fittest person, however, will amount to little unless that person also has access to others to inform, correct, improve and disseminate his or her work. Life at home, in the board room or on the shop floor is both more rewarding and productive when suppliers, colleagues and clients alike are able to combine their particular skills and resources in a spirit of cooperation and commitment to common objectives. In essence, where human capital resides in individuals, social capital resides in relationships. Human and social capital are complements, however, in that literate and informed citizens are better able to organize, evaluate conflicting information and express their views in constructive ways.

Human capital and social capital present a mutually supportive relationship. International organisations advise that planning and implementing both forms of capital serve the development and growth of nations (OECDa 2001) and Lin (1999) argues that social and human capital play equal roles in a nation's growth and economic development. Similarly, Teachman, Paasch, and Carver (1997, p.1343) believe that the structural applications of a nation's social capital and human capital interact to determine school continuation for children. They stress that human capital must be accompanied by social capital to create wellbeing across the generations (ibid, p.1356).

To summarise, during the last two decades developed countries have been investing in education and training to continue their social and economic development and to encourage lifelong learning for workers. A key indicator for economic and social growth is a nation's development and maintenance of high quality educational and training institutions that can deliver work-based learning and skills development for its labour force (Weert & Kendall 2004). Human capital theorists assert that education, knowledge and skill formation for a knowledge economy are the basis for growth and community satisfaction in developed countries (e.g., Temple 2001). Social capital theorists, on the other hand, point to the information sharing potential of certain kinds of social relationships in the enhancement of individuals' participation in community life, education and ultimately in their own economic successes and in that of the nation (Portes 1998, Nayaran 1999).

2.1.1 Human Capital Theory

As an eminent theorist who popularised the theory of human capital, Theodore W. Schultz (1902-1998) was a co-receiver of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1979 for his work. The term itself can be traced back to Adam Smith (*The Wealth of Nations* 1776) and reintroduced by Jacob Mincer, whilst developing the modern concept of human capital in the 1950s. Acknowledging Adam Smith's insight, Mincer (1961) noted that it is through investment in education and training that individuals develop the enhanced competencies which enable them to compete for higher income occupations. However, Schultz (1961 p.2) argued that economists were late in recognising the importance of human capital in economic development:

What economists have not stressed is the simple truth that people invest in themselves and that these investments are very large. Although economists are seldom timid in entering on abstract analysis and are often proud of being impractical, they have not been bold in coming to grips with this form of investment. (ibid)

In his proposition to treat education and training as an investment, Schultz's thesis is that the skilling and training of people yields economic growth and social prosperity to nations (1960, 1961). His student, Becker, built on Schultz's work and analysed investment in education and training to identify empirical evidence regarding returns and growth from this investment to individuals, society and the nation at large (Becker 1962 p.9). In his later research on human capital (1965), Becker states that the higher the level of education and training provided to individuals, the more skills they acquire and as a result the stronger their relative positions are in the labour market.

Recently, the development of human capital theory concerns quantitative measurement of human capital components, or values, such as information, knowledge, skills and competencies. These are viewed by theorists as assets of individuals, as they are not inherited properties. For example, DiVanna and Rogers (2005 p.8) wrote *Measuring human capital is not a subjective exercise for academics, but rather a fundamental business requirement that requires an ongoing exchange of information among investors, managers and employees.*

This interpretation of the theory of human capital as a conceptually complex model is presented diagrammatically in Figure 1.

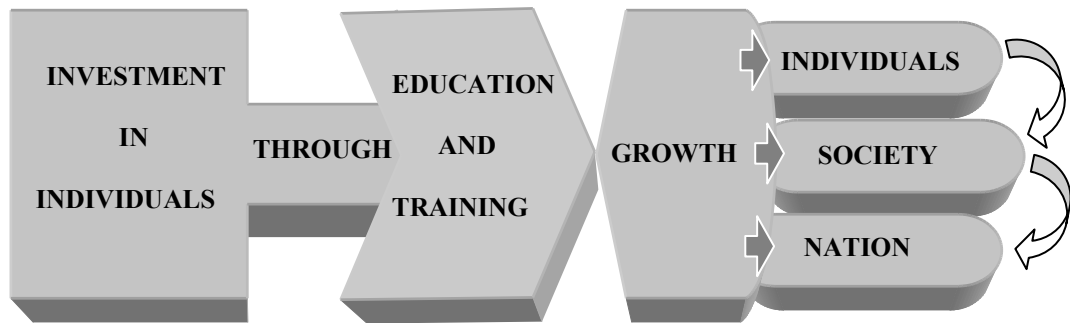


Figure 1
A Conceptual Model of Human Capital Theory

Figure 1 above summarises the logic of human capital theory. It shows that a nation’s investment in individuals through education and training strongly links to economic growth and individual success. Whilst education is undoubtedly the key component of human capital theory, researchers identified other contributing factors, such as an active focus on community health, that have a role in national development (Bloom & Canning 2003, Deaton 2004). However, such factors are outside the boundaries of this research.

In summary, human capital theory postulates that, in developed countries, continuing national economic growth and societal wellbeing are the results of systematic human capital development. These relationships can be summarised as follows:

Investment in training as government policy yields returns, leading to

- preparation of people for future work and lifelong learning, which
- yields personal and societal returns and
- improves productivity rates, as well as
- enhancing personal, societal, and national growth rates, and further
- assists in reducing unemployment rates; all of which
- improves personal, societal, and national performance.

Developed countries’ use of policies incorporating human capital theory is included in OECD recommendations (2001a, 2001b). Generally, these policies aim to satisfy individual, community and employers’ needs to achieve sustained national economic development and wellbeing. These policies are:

- an emphasis on non-cognitive skills to meet rapid knowledge and economic change
- that all learning environments are valuable
- pursuit of equity and social cohesion
- co-ordination between all parties (stakeholders) to link education policies to employment and social protection
- inviting the participation of the private sector
- addressing adverse variations in education and training
- that human and social capital development takes time.

However, the exposition of human capital theory, like other theories, has not escaped criticism. For instance, Bouchard (1998) identifies deficits in human capital theory, arguing that human capital relies heavily on future investment and, as it is impossible to predict employers' future needs, the assumption of a simple relationship between education and training and economic development is thus weakened. In addition, he states that employers' demands for given skills change as the market develops and teaching institutions cannot keep pace with rapid workplace changes and needs. The author notes that employability is improved by the degree of compatibility between available skills and employer demands. Bouchard illustrates this view by commenting that the labour market is full of those who have received training but are not employed, and job seekers who have certain skills but are jobless. Of importance for this research, Bouchard is critical of human capital theory because of its exclusive concentration on earnings and income returns and its ignorance of the social and economic factors affecting employment. This point is particularly relevant in a study of employment in a country such as Oman and is further discussed in Chapter 3.

In another evaluation of human capital theory, Blaug (1970) criticised the assumption that only expenditures on education count as investment. He argued that consumption; that is, the participation by people in education, should also be counted in the investment process. Blaug stressed that the human capital idea concentrated only on wage benefits and ignored other forms of benefits that result from investments in education. Further, Blaug criticised human capital theory, as it stood then, because it emphasised

simple measurable units, the number of years of schooling, for example, and not the quality of education.

Bowles and Gintis (1975) found fault in human capital theory for excluding some minor but crucial aspects related to social capital, such as wage structures for workers and the social relationships of the industrial relations process. In addition, they argue that the human capital theorists misunderstood the process of training workers: *A highly skilled work force is not necessarily a profitable work force* (ibid p.76). Further, *We find the theory to be substantially misleading both as a framework for empirical research and as guide to policy* (ibid p.74). The authors argue that human capital theory restricts its analysis to individual preferences, individual abilities and *alternative production technologies* (ibid p.75) whilst excluding the relevance of class and class conflict to labour market activities.

The OECD prescribes three methods of measuring human capital (1996, p.17): *the acquisition of certified knowledge from recognised schools and training, testing people's skills and competence, and estimating productivity*. The organisation acknowledged, however, that the measurement of these factors as a true reflection of the state of human capital in an economy is speculative and the results have a low level of accuracy. For instance, certification of courses or training levels does not provide accurate information on the nature of skills or competencies achieved by a population. Methods of measurement may also lack validity, rigidity and consistency. Estimating the productivity levels of individuals, based on achievement indicators such as occupation status, income level and job security, presents only estimates of productivity, not accurate values (ibid. p.23). As a result, the effects of human capital cannot be precisely quantified. The OECD concludes that such imprecision may be a condition of education.

In spite of these criticisms, human capital theory gained wide respect and application in developed countries; however, its impact is not all-pervasive. Social justice imbalances occur through practices such as job-hiring discrimination (nepotism, race, nationality, sex or age) and these imbalances decrease the opportunities for investment in human capital, to the extent of sometimes resulting in a negative level of productive capacity for a nation (Arrow 1973, Caputo 2002, Lundberg & Startz 1983, Sunstein 1997). This point is discussed in detail in relation to Oman in Chapter 3.

Problems remain in the use of human capital as an explanation for national economic development. Theorists such as Coleman (1988, 1994) and Schuller and Field

(1998) assert that simple human capital - the education-economic growth relationship - does not fully explain national development. They sought to broaden the conceptual underpinnings to economic growth to include the idea of social capital, recognition that the education of people is closely related to the social and community relationships in which education is embedded. Human capital should be considered as a conceptual partner of social capital through social capital's role to deploy knowledge and skills throughout the community, resulting in a sustainable learning society. Investment in social capital reflects investment in human capital as both promote development. Investment in social capital such as increased communication linkages leads to community and societal development while investment in human capital produces economic growth. Print and Coleman (2003 p.124) acknowledge investment in social capital as *The more a society invests in and accumulates social capital, the better the returns and enhanced condition of members of that society.*

The authors suggest that an increase in student years of schooling, designing citizenship education and engaging students in active participation to build trust, cooperation and networking skills enhances social capital.

2.1.1.1 Human Risk Capital Theorised as an accumulation of an individual's knowledge and skills for the purpose of employment, human capital is subject to risk in its physical acquisition and application. Thus issues relating to the transition of a country's youth from education to the workplace are frequently high priority for governments, and this is the case among GCC members, including Oman. Whilst the Omani government's initial priority, especially in regard to its higher education graduates, was to provide public services, the consequent expansion of the welfare state, including education, led to an inflated public sector. In Oman, the public sector continued to absorb the majority of tertiary graduates until the turn of the century. Absorption of professional competency at this rate is a practice now considered counterproductive to maintenance of a robust economy, and OECD policy (1992) advises one-third or less of graduate cohorts should be absorbed into the state's public sector. Omani graduates therefore face a completely different situation from the previous cohorts in seeking employment, raising their human risk capital.

Principles of human capital, nevertheless, promote acquisition of knowledge. Tertiary education continues to expand, thus the educational level of the population rises irrespective of changes in occupational structures and skill demands. This expansion is

given legitimacy by a strong human capital ideology of economic growth achieved through individuals' acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies, and reducing social inequalities (Ahola, Kivinen & Rinne 1992).

However, in the different domains of educational expansion, market economy and recruitment by employers, there are intensifying issues regarding mismatches between employer demand and educator supply. At Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), for example, the courses of study for which positions are available do not necessarily correspond with young people's career aspirations; and on the Omani labour market, both unemployed graduates and a shortage of skilled labour in specific occupation fields coexist.

In regards to higher education, a factor of this mismatch, *credentialism* (the value of credentials) refers to the monopolisation of certain careers by the holders of tertiary qualifications; that is, a certification of the information the holder possesses on a given discipline. Employers increasingly use such educational credentials as an indicator not only of the job applicant's knowledge, but also as a measurement of performance. However, it is not clear whether the undergraduate process of gaining knowledge translates readily to workplace performance. The credential measures information and this is not sufficient for competency on the labour market, nor is the human capital acquired by the holder in the education process necessarily relevant to gain satisfactory employment (Kivinen & Ahola 1999, p196).

Mass tertiary education today presents a somewhat different picture from the elitism of past generations, offering a greater number of courses in more fields to a generation with higher expectations of career attainment. Further, as university course structures split to accommodate economic and technological change, the connection between education and employment strengthens through *occupational stratification*, as employers demand graduate qualifications for a growing range of jobs. Nevertheless, the traditional bond between graduate employment and extensive career opportunities has been lost. Whilst degrees from well-regarded national universities carry more weight on the job market than regional universities, some new higher education institutions develop partnerships with local employers to produce courses for their special needs. Again, although they serve industry directly, they do not attract the same calibre of student as the elite universities (Kivinen & Ahola 1999, p197)

Whilst researchers either directly or obliquely refer to the education-to-work transition, a report from the UN's Economic and Social Committee for West Asia

(ESCWA), *Responding to globalization: skill formation and unemployment reduction policies* (2003, p19) is adamant that transition is an important issue which needs urgent attention:

Secondary and university students in the region need efficient and clear guidance and counselling systems. Education policies must encourage students to transfer from traditional disciplines to those that are related to the global labour markets of the twenty-first century in order to have access to available employment opportunities. The success of such policies depends upon the availability of a market-related educational and job database that assists students in their choice of study prior to entering higher education.

In summary, Kivinen and Ahola and similar researchers, ESCWA, and the OECD directly view the supply side, that is, the education process, as the protagonist of transition. They opine that, after recruiting a new employee on attributes that may or may not be transparent, employers expect to offer in-house training relative to the workplace processes; they do not expect to offer training for the basic knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for recruitment in the first place. Thus the use of credentials by graduates as a proxy for occupational status, rewards, security and career prospects is increasingly untenable: the ticket obtained on leaving university is no longer for a life journey. With mass higher education, mass unemployment, a shrinking public sector and the emerging technology-based industries, notwithstanding that in certain growth fields graduates are highly successful in their job searches, higher education qualifications are becoming more of a risk investment. In human capital ideology, a person can never be overeducated. In the everyday human risk capital reality, however, real over-education occurs when highly educated people perform routine tasks which do not require all the knowledge and skills they have acquired through education, even if they are satisfied in their jobs (Teichler & Kehm 1995, p127).

Job search for graduates is enhanced by strong networks and influential contacts. The introduction of social capital into the human capital – national development focus is particularly relevant in the context of this research for a developing country such as Oman, which has historically strong family relationships and community networks. Social capital theory is therefore examined in depth in the following sub-section.

2.1.2 Social Capital Theory

Social capital, as a term, was first proposed in 1916 by L.J. Hanifan, a US schools supervisor; however, the French social researcher Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and others,

including Coleman (1990) and Putnam (1995), developed social capital theory over the last decades. Bourdieu argued that socio-economic inequality, including educational achievement, results from the interactions of three dimensions of capital – economic, cultural and social. For Bourdieu, concerned with analysing social division, social capital was represented by groups which might be termed select clubs and old boys' networks. Other researchers widened social capital to include the interrelationships between family, community, education and society (Coleman 1988, Putnam 1995). While acknowledging the critical potential of Bourdieu's insights, this thesis has adopted the more constructive reading of social capital advanced by Coleman and Putnam.

Unlike human capital, and its focus of investment in individuals through developing their knowledge, skills and training to gain sustained development growth, social capital's role concerns the networks, relationships and ties between members in a society (Coleman 1988, Lin 2001, Putnam 1993). Putnam (2000, p.19) makes a distinction between human capital and social capital: that human capital relates to individuals whereas social capital is concerned with relations among individuals, social networks, and norms of reciprocity that arise in communication and daily contact.

Researchers investigating the role of social capital in community development find extensive benefits for a nation in successful social capital outcomes. Putnam (1995) and Coleman (1998) regard social capital as a fundamental component of social development and Putnam draws direct connections between the strength of community networks and community participation, and educational achievement. Putnam (1995) affirms that social capital practices reduce corruption in government policymaking and enhance government performance. More recently, the author (2000) claimed that social capital policies reduce crime rates, and Wilkinson (1996) found that social capital increases community income equality.

Definitions of social capital may fall into two major categories (Daniel, Schwier & McCalla 2003). The authors nominate a structural dimension for social capital (Coleman, 1988, Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), and a content dimension (Fukuyama, 1999; Hanifan, 1916, Putnam, 2000). The structural dimension refers to the fundamental elements of networks such as types of ties and connections and the social organisation of the community. The content dimension of social capital includes the types of norms, trust, shared understanding and values of civil society. Thus there is no single construct for

social capital, but rather a composite of variables, each of which can be interpreted independently.

From these social capital definitions, there is some agreement that the dimensions of social capital comprise networks, shared norms, trust and reciprocity. Woolcock (2001) explains the interrelationships of these components through the dimensions of bonding, bridging and linking. For Woolcock, the *bonding* dimension occurs when family members, and also when ethnic groups, interact. *Bridging* is a relationship external to the range of family and ethnic groups and this brings in the principle of trust; that is, individuals performing in accordance with promises, even if this does not maximise their payoffs. Trusting behaviour and trustworthiness rise with social connection and thus create social capital for high status individuals (Francois & Zabochnik, 2005). The *linking* dimension of social capital occurs when people seek knowledge from those in power (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, OECD 2001a). Coleman (1988) states that, like other forms of capital, social capital is productive but it can be depleted if it is not renewed.

Social capital is created or renewed when people connect through a series of networks, sharing common values or aspirations with other people in a network to the extent that these networks become a resource and thus a form of capital. Networks should be seen as part of the wider set of norms and relationships that allow people to pursue their goals, and which on another level, form societies (Field 2003). The norms, or common values that constitute social capital can range from reciprocity between two friends to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Islam (Fukuyama 2001). Inappropriate actions, strategies and policies may destroy social capital ties and negatively affect economic development. Further, the size of a social network impacts directly on the level of its influence within a society, and the greater the social and community ties an individual commands, the greater the chance of employment (Grootaert 1998).

The dimensions of social capital, as noted, vary according to the tenet of the researcher and Fukuyama (1999) moved focus toward emerging economies. Virtually all forms of traditional culture, such as tribes, clans, village associations or indeed, religious groups, are based on shared norms and members use these norms to achieve cooperative outcomes. Traditionalist groups have a narrow radius of trust and an absence of weak ties into the greater community and these characteristics are typically regarded as a liability. Traditional societies often comprise a large number of identical, self-contained social units, whilst modern societies, with greater access to weak links, consist of a large number of

overlapping social groups that permit multiple memberships and identities. Traditional societies have fewer opportunities for weak ties among their groups, and therefore pass on information, innovation and human resources less easily (Fukuyama, 1999).

For example, in the Chinese parts of East Asia and much of Latin America, social capital resides largely in families and a rather narrow circle of personal friends. It is difficult for people in such societies to trust those outside these narrow circles. Strangers fall into a different category than kin; a lower standard of moral behavior applies when one becomes, for example, a public official. This provides cultural reinforcement for corruption: in such societies, one feels entitled to steal on behalf of one's family (p.5).

Whilst not directly confronting Fukuyama's stance, Coleman (1988) highlights the importance of social capital in tight networks for the acquisition of human capital, and identifies means by which it is generated, such as closure. Closure refers to the existence of sufficient ties between members of a group to guarantee the observance of norms, which tends toward Field's 2003 view. Coleman uses the example of the tightly knit community of Jewish diamond traders in New York City, where possible malfeasance is minimised by the dense ties among the traders and the ready threat of ostracism against violators. This strong norm is then appropriate for all members of the trading community, facilitating transactions without recourse to cumbersome legal contracts (Portes 1998).

As a dimension of social capital, trust is based on a reputation acquired through consistent behaviour over time. Consistency has value, thus there is a *public* role for trust in civil society for the production of social capital. However, *community trust*, in the form of ties, is viewed as superior to public trust in the proper functioning of society (Serageldin & Grootaert 2000). Fukuyama (1999) develops the notion of a *radius of trust*, the circle of people who share cooperative norms. When a group's social capital produces positive externalities, then the radius of trust can be greater than the group itself. If strong ties bind people of similar characteristics, such as Fukuyama's traditionalists, in pursuing their normative and identity-based goals, weak ties may be better at serving instrumental goals, as they can provide access to new types of resources but rely less on shared values (Field 2003).

In examining the role of social capital in the creation of intellectual capital, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) suggest that social capital be considered in terms of three clusters: structural, relational and cognitive. The structural dimensions of social capital relate to an individual's ability to engender weak and strong ties to other networks' members. This dimension focuses on the advantages derived from the configuration of

networks, either individual or collective (Daniel et al. 2003). The relational dimension refers to the nature of the connection between individuals, trust, reciprocity and the status of each actor. Hazleton and Kennan (2000) added communication, necessary to access and use social capital through exchanging information, identifying problems and solutions, and managing conflict. Narratives can help construct strong perspectives within a community, and such perspectives can create boundaries which allow for perspective sharing between groups (Boisot 1995, Boland & Tensaki 1995). The cognitive dimension focuses on the shared meaning and understanding that individuals or groups have with one another.

Bourdieu acknowledged the role of government in regulating society, and the researcher posited that some actors have more capital and so are dominant over those with less in a particular dynamic or situation; others may have equal but different compositions of capital at their disposal which puts them in a different relationship to other actors and the *field* itself. The actor's position is historically determined: that stock of capital has accumulated or reduced over time through exchanges shaped by existing relationships and by the relative value of different forms of capital and the ability to convert capital from one type to another (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Since Putnam's 1993 work in Italy, governments the world over adopted social capital as a contributor to socio-economic growth. Putnam's study concluded that the performance of government and other social institutions is powerfully influenced by citizen engagement in community affairs. Tittensor (2007) took an example of a Victorian government action which was based on social capital precepts. The author explored the theoretical underpinnings of the government's 2005 policy, Actions for Community Strengthening, and its failure to deal adequately with the causal relationship between social capital and its planned community benefits. Tittensor argued that the institution of collaborative/interactive governance needs to be underpinned by sound socio-economic reform.

If social capital is to have relevance in a country like Oman, it needs to be able to explain why cultural connectivity in one location explains educational and economic success but not in another. Perhaps the explanation in Coleman and Hoffer's early pointer to the effects of social capital needs to be expanded to include the distinction between the differential effects of the strong bonding ties within a particular cultural grouping and bridging or cross-cutting ties (Portes 1998, Nayaran 1999, Woolcock 2001) which

characterise economically and socially successful communities. This point is discussed in Chapter 3.

Stone, Gray and Hughes (2003) conducted research using a network typology approach to investigate the impact of trust, bonding and linking relationships upon an individual's labour force status and successful job hunting method. Their findings suggest that social capital ties strongly affect labour force status. Those with strong social capital ties have a better chance to be employed in full-time jobs whereas those job seekers with poor social ties have fewer chances to be employed and most often will be employed in part-time jobs. In addition, Stone et al. (ibid.) found that social networks appeared to be more important than trust in predicting labour status and the job hunting method employed. These findings are of significance in this study in particular, with the inability of SQU MCD graduates to find jobs (Chapter 3).

Building trust is a crucial component of social capital. Brown and Lauder (2000), consider that trust is at the heart of the creation of collective intelligence within a society. High levels of trust enhance economic growth and achievement (Fukuyama 1995). The concept of trust as a component of social capital, and the extent to which it is perceived to exist and interact at SQU is of direct significance to this research. To further embed the interviewing procedure and its outcomes in social capital theory, participants are questioned on their perceptions of MCD graduates' lack of trust in employers' recruitment processes.

2.1.2.1 Civil Society There is broad definition for civil society; public-based groups and organisations that can deliver the first steps toward democracy. However, a serious shortcoming of studies on civil society generally is the absence of empirical studies that systematically measure and establish correlation between civil society and democracy (Abootalebi 1998).

For the purposes of this study, the London School of Economics' Centre for Civil Society (2004), defines civil society thus:

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated . . . Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional

associations, . . . social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.

Social capital emanates partly from the actions of civic society. But social capital is also produced by hierarchical authorities, which mandate norms and expect obedience to them. The world's major religions like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, or large cultural systems like Confucianism, are examples. Norms from such sources accrete over the centuries and are transmitted from one generation to the next through a process of socialisation based on habit. Path dependence - another word for tradition - means that norms that are clearly socially suboptimal can persist for very long periods of time (Fukuyama 1999). Thus strong social structures, part of civil society, may also support and enhance an autocratic government that is antithetical to civil society and its democratic destiny.

Manifestations of civic society, associations, groups and organisations, are viewed as a buffer between state power and the citizenry. Thus, in the absence of such associations, the state dominates socioeconomic and citizens' affairs. In the GCC countries, oil revenues and the growing group of state bureaucrats, technocrats and professionals increased the state's capabilities, and state financial and power structures remain strong and superior to resources available to their social, economic and political opposition (Abootalebi 1998). Further, the civil society debate on the Middle East focuses on changes in formal governance procedures rather than substantive change in state-society relations. Embryonic associations, though they exist, are poorly organised and remain dependent on patrons within the state.

The dominant position in Oman reflects the rule of politics and the economy by powerful families, elites and bureaucratic sub-classes. The emergence and growth of independent groups and associations is slow, an example is labour unions, which are non-existent due to the overwhelming expatriate labour force. Elites who theoretically may seek more flexibility in opening the system to popular participation encounter a weak, divided society, making political reform futile. *In other words, the inauguration, and stability, of democracy is possible not only when its social requisites are present, but also when the state-society relationship is one of balanced power.* (Abootalebi 1998, online).

2.1.2.2 Cross-cutting Ties As discussed above, social capital theory distinguishes between bonding, bridging and linking forms (Putnam 1997, Narayan 1999, Woolcock

2001). Bonding social capital involving trust and reciprocity occurs in closed networks in the family and governorate groups in countries such as Oman, and helps individuals maintain their lives at a given status within the group. The ambitions of such individuals who wish to leave the group's support are facilitated through *cross-cutting ties* that take the form of either bridging or linking social capital. In this case, bridging social capital involves membership of overlapping networks (where an individual can gain access to the resources of another group). Linking social capital involves social relations with others of higher status who may have improved resources or power. Each of these three forms of social capital, bonding, bridging and linking, contributes to the foundation for a strong community.

Bridging ties also create a general form of trust necessary for a country's social and business communications and transactions to enable outcomes of public good. However, the formation and maintenance of bridging ties through cross-membership of groups may be undermined by particularly high levels of bonding social capital (Portes 1998, Stone & Hughes 2002). Little research has been undertaken on the social capital dimensions for Arab nations, with scant research such as acknowledgement of its beneficial effects for Arabs as migrants in Australia, where strategies conducive to bonding and bridging social capital dimensions were identified within Australian-Arabic communities (Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights Deakin University, 2005).

The ability of weak bridging ties to achieve connectivity has been established using physical networks, especially the internet. Initially, Granovetter (1973), working with undergraduates, proposed that strong ties tend to be clustered groups with members having the same information about jobs, for instance, and are less likely to have new information passed along from other networks. Bridges between clusters tend to be weak ties, and strong ties are less likely to be bridges. The experiment conducted by Dodds, Muhamad and Watts (2002) on 67,000 e-mail users and 18 targets in 13 countries estimated a true median distance to targets of six steps, mostly using ties of intermediate—not weak—intensity. Geography accounted for 50 per cent of ties in the first three steps, with fewer than 33 per cent of ties being through work or occupation; those percentages were reversed in steps four through seven.

The absence of research on social capital in Arab countries is understandable, as the concept is a relatively recent inclusion in development research and not common in research in developed countries. It is not surprising therefore, that the role of higher

education in the enhancing of people's employability has not paid much attention to the potential for the strengthening of social capital, through, for example, the building of cross-cutting ties (Nayaran 1999) between strongly bonded community groups. That evaluation applies to both developed and developing nations. Research on the means by which higher education might strengthen graduates' employability has concentrated mainly on human capital initiatives such as the inclusion of explicit programs of workplace learning in university courses and the university's active participation in lifelong learning proposals in partnership with employer groups. In that latter strategy, already, can be seen how the university might be a powerful agent in the building of the weak ties which characterise the social capital of economically successful nations.

2.1.2.3 Challenges to Social Capital Theory Social capital theorists face two major challenges. First, social capital is a multifaceted concept and although as noted above theorists agree on its components, approaches to the theory based on differentiation of the field and context under study debar an embracing definition. Attempts to do so lack completeness, and exhibit vagueness and exaggeration (Woolcock 2001).

In relating social capital theory to this research, however, perhaps the most cited definition suitable for policymakers and community development is that of the World Bank (1998 p.5):

The social capital of a society includes the institutions, the relationships, the attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development. Social capital, however, is not simply the sum of institutions which underpin society; it is also the glue that holds them together. It includes the shared values and rules for social conduct expressed in personal relationships, trust, and a common sense of 'civic' responsibility, which makes society more than just a collection of individuals.

The second constraint facing social capital researchers is that of measurement, due to the range of components and relationships identified by theorists, the lack of methodology to quantify them and thus to measure their impact on education and the economy. Despite these difficulties, researchers continue to identify and refine measures of social capital, concentrating on quantitative survey methodology, statistics, and numerical measurements of either single or multiple variables. The commonly measured social capital variables are trust, social engagement, political engagement, economic performance, government performance, volunteerism, child welfare, health, crime,

violence, education, and employment/unemployment indexes and indicators (Bryant & Norris 2002, Healy 2002, Hunter 2004, Spellerberg 2001, Stone & Hughes 2002).

Research shows, however, that most social capital studies lack rigour in their methodology, and this is often reflected in inconsistencies in the use of variables in statistical analysis to draw out correlating and thus comparable data. The OECD (2001a p.43) considers that the lack of accurate measurements of social capital variables results from a problem with appropriate research methods, and the absence of suitable data, for example the lack of comprehensive survey questionnaires. Nevertheless, social capital has proved to be a useful concept in distinguishing between the educational and economic characteristics of different communities and social groups.

2.1.3 Capital Principles Convergence

From a human capital perspective, education cultivates human capital (Becker 1962), whereas from a social capital assumption, education does more than just provide skills and knowledge; it builds students' whole social lives (Harris & Chapman 2002, Crosnoe 2004). Crosnoe's research findings (ibid p. 276) support the general social capital assumption of positive academic achievements when there are close emotional ties between parents and their children. This social capital outcome consequently cultivates human capital experiences at adolescence, producing the strong bonding ties and weak bridging ties of the social capital dimensions described earlier (Putnam 2000).

Apart from the debate on the influence of social capital principles on outcomes for human capital initiatives, there is a growing concern that higher education is focused on commercial and economic goals to the exclusion of those related to building human identity and community capacity (Feast & Bretag 2005, Marginson 2003). The challenge for developed countries is to restructure their higher education institutions and the services they provide to improve the adaptability of education systems. The challenge for higher education authorities is to engage in national economic development without losing their identities, and retaining their ability to make social and community contributions (Gibbons et al. 1994, Candy 2000). A joint statement from UNESCO and ILO stressed that policies of investment in education and training by nations are crucial to future development - economic and social growth can only be achieved through the development of knowledge and skills (ILO, UNESCO 2002). In an Australian reference, the Productivity Commission advised governments to harness the existing good stocks of social capital to deliver more

effective programs and modify those policies that damage social capital (Productivity Commission 2003 p.68).

Another form of social capital policy is represented by the benefits society gains from education, as personal, community and economic gains. As previously observed, education enhances the productivity of companies (Schultz 1961, Mincer 1962). Under this guise, human capital is embedded in the frame of social capital through its connectivity, enhanced trust and acquisition of skills in thin bridging (tenuous social networks with great reach). Substantial evidence is available on the direct relationship to the level of parents' education and its effects on children's educational achievements and cognitive development (Dunifon, Duncan, & Brooks-Gunn 2000, Ermisch & Francesconi 1997, Haveman & Wolfe 1994). Confirming and building on this research result, Bowles, Gintis and Osborne (2001) show that a high level of parental education is associated with their children's level of non-cognitive skills such as an ability to adapt to novelty and their attitudes towards risk. Through building trust in others from an early age, research shows that educational achievements also lead to social cohesion and membership in community organisations (Helliwell & Putnam 1999).

The United Nations organisations frequently use references to capital theory - human, social and cultural, as well as economic - to place systems, events and processes pertaining to Arab life experiences into a formal framework. For example, a United Nations Development Program publication on Egypt (UNDP, 2000) extrapolates social capital theory from the theory's dimension of strong bonding groups such as families to include concepts of gender (example: women in poor urban settings), or the public sector (example: self-help groups working with the government and assisting with their own funding to provide basic services), or non-government organisations (example: Islamic and Christian organisations). The social environment of developing countries is thus more direct and less pluralistic than that of mainstream social scientists' OECD-directed populations, as the communities in developing nations are based on the primordial loyalty of people from the same quarter, city, town or governorate. In these environments, social capital is equated with teamwork to achieve a goal or to maintain social security, and acts of individualism do not impede collective action. The presence of collective action becomes the norm when members of society trust each other, not necessarily out of a belief in the common good, but simply out of the realisation that individual interests will be better served (*ibid.*).

A society, however, is not an undifferentiated entity. It will contain family, cultural and class groupings which relate to each other in variable trust relationships. This variability, expressed in the concepts of bonding and bridging (cross-cutting) ties, places social capital as an explanatory possibility in this research.

2.2 Human Capital and the New Era of Higher Education

The relationship between social capital and human capital has attracted considerable interest (for example, Field 2003) since Coleman (1988) demonstrated that schoolchildren's performance was influenced positively by the existence of close ties between teachers, parents, neighbours and church ministers. Only recently has the focus turned to the role of social capital in processes of skills acquisition and improvement among the adult workforce (for example Green, Preston & Sabates 2003). The relationship is demonstrated by the emphasis given to lifelong learning as the underpinning goal in reforming higher education to meet labour market needs and community expectations (Field & Leicester 2000). In the more developed countries, scholars' consensus is that quality education can only be achieved through lifelong and work-based learning approaches (Aspin, Chapman, Hatton & Sawano 2001, Beckett & Hager 2002). In applying these two approaches to learning, higher educational institutions are the primary agents to promote human capital through development and societal change (Taylor & Fransman 2004). Therefore universities and colleges have a fundamental role in ensuring national competitiveness, particularly in the information society (Candy 2000). Candy and Crebert (1991 p.572) point to four human capital related challenges Australian universities must overcome if graduates are to make a successful transition to the workforce:

- that graduates are prepared only theoretically
- graduates can lack work related skills
- new graduates are uninformed on the dynamics of the workplace; and
- they may find difficulty in adapting to the new work environment.

The strengthening emphasis on a direct higher education – employment relationship indicates the extent to which the human capital model has motivated reform in the university sector in more developed countries. Initiatives related to lifelong learning, work-based learning and meeting industry demands for skills and graduate employability reflect that human capital emphasis.

2.2.1 Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is human capital development. It directly enhances the quality of life for individuals and their society. Aspin and Chapman (2001), on the one hand, consider lifelong learning as a critical and important philosophy of education and training to *facilitate a coherent set of links and pathways between work, school and education*. On the other hand, lifelong learning is regarded as an initiator to build a learning society in which *everyone, independent of race, creed or gender, is entitled to quality learning that is truly excellent* (ibid. p.xi).

Lifelong learning and the related concept of lifelong education have their roots in the early twentieth century (Jarvis 1995) and were recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1970. Lifelong learning/education was articulated in distinction to *front-end* education, where education was essentially confined to children and young adults. Key features of lifelong learning relate first to the dominant theme of change; second, to economic requirements (globalisation and competitiveness) and societal needs; third, that adults take responsibility for their learning, with the promise of eventual *self-fulfilment*; fourth, lifelong learning contains a role for providers beyond the *front-end* educational system; and lastly that very little is actually specified about the content or costs of a generalised proposal (Tight 1998 p. 253). The author views the portrayal of lifelong learning as either a part or an extension of work, something which is effectively unavoidable.

Another prominent international source (UNESCO: The Delors Report 1996) focuses on life-long learning as the main learning challenge for the twenty-first century and presents four *pillars* as the foundation of education: learning to be, learning to know, learning to do and learning to live together. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) added its aim for *personal, social and economic well-being* (OECD, 2001a, p.18).

Aspin and Chapman (2001 p.29) argue that lifelong learning is of a *triadic* nature, representing economic progress, personal development and fulfilment, social inclusiveness, and democratic understanding and activity. That is, they introduce a social capital dimension to the concept. They argue that it is a challenge for the future for governments, policymakers and educators to fully understand and apply lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning is a critical element in the strategies adopted in more developed countries in upgrading their educational and training systems to serve the *media generation*. This generation, according to Veen at OECD (2003) and Weert (2004), is characterised by competencies such as:

- Multi-dimensional scanning: being able to *absorb text, sound, movement, colour and image at the same time and integrate discontinuous information*
- Multi-tasking: being able to handle *several tasks at the same time and in a non-sequential way* (Weert 2004 p.59).

The Commission of the European Communities (2000) exhorts member countries to focus on:

- guaranteeing accessibility, universality and continuity to learning;
- investment in human resources;
- developing effective lifelong teaching and learning methods;
- easing access to information and providing constant advice about lifelong learning; and
- providing lifelong learning opportunities in their communities.

Other researchers of lifelong learning, Longworth and Davies (1996 p.22), define the concept as:

The development of human potential through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skill and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances and environments.

This definition shows that lifelong learning's aim is to develop human potential through the acquisition in any learners' life process of applicable skills and knowledge confidently, creatively and continuously. Longworth and Davies stress that *we are moving into a society dominated by the power of information* and warn *unless the nettle of adopting a new lifelong learning approach is grasped* educational outcomes will *continue to trail behind society's need*. (ibid.p.41)

The developed countries, as a result, have been evolving and reforming their education systems, especially higher education, to meet the challenges posed by the

knowledge-based society. For instance, Philip Candy from the Australian University of Ballarat states

Universities have a distinctive and enduring educative role in the production of lifelong learners and of graduates capable of informed action. Far from being rendered redundant or superfluous by the move to an information society, universities are in fact needed more now than ever, because, in a world dominated by knowledge, they represent knowledge work at its highest. (Candy 2000, p.276)

Citing Edwards (1997), Roger Boshier (1998), with a clear human capital standpoint, regards lifelong learning as *a key instrument to foster economic development*. He characterises this type of learning as one where *learning opportunities are put on an open market and individual learners, motivated by a need to update their skills – by unemployment, threat of redundancy or restructuring*. (ibid. p.12)

Knapper and Cropley (2000 p.203) suggest a *working strategy* or paradigm of lifelong learning for higher education, arguing that *lifelong learning education should be a major goal for universities and colleges*. Especially within universities and vocational colleges, the paradigm of lifelong learning has been adopted in part to meet their stakeholders' needs (government, employers, community and labour markets). Langworthy and Turner (2003) argue the challenge facing educational institutions is that graduates are no longer leaving universities for single professional outcomes. With dramatic shifts in the nature of employment, the goal of education now is for graduates to be lifelong learners and contributors to their communities. As a result, scholars in the higher education field and economists have been emphasising the importance of human capital (providing adequate knowledge, training and skills) and social capital (creating connections between education and work) for social and economic development.

A critical shift by universities in the development of national commitment to lifelong learning has been the way in which their coursework programs have become directly tied to employability goals. Nowhere is this more evident than in the expansion of the work-based learning approach so that universities will more fully exploit opportunities to diversify their curricula and services and to attract funding (Boud & Solomon 2001, Boud & Symes 2000, Symes & McIntyre 2000). Consequently this review of extant literature considers the work-based learning approach and its application to the human capital theoretical framework for this study.

2.2.2 Work-based Learning

Work-based learning (WBL), although criticised for being market-driven and lacking a research focus (Boud 1998, p.216), is challenging the traditional roles of universities in less-developed countries (Boud & Solomon 2001; Dunne 1999; Holford, Jarvis, & Griffin 1998; Beckett & Hager 2002). Boud argues that WBL *presents an unparalleled challenge to conceptions of what university education is and how it contributes to lifelong learning*, and that the challenge to universities of this approach is to take the *context of learning* seriously (ibid, p.220).

Boud, Solomon and Symes (2001, p.4) define WBL as:

a class of university programmes that bring together universities and work organisations to create new learning opportunities in workplaces...to meet the needs of learners, contribute to the longer-term development of the organization and (which) are formally accredited as university courses.

Beckett and Hager (2002) emphatically eschew the traditional learning paradigm of a split between body and mind, with the brain achieving superiority. Their thesis is that learning is holistic or organic engaging the whole person, so that intellect, emotions, values and practical activities are blended. In both paid and unpaid work contexts adults learn powerfully from their experiences and this *informal learning* is not only more common, but also more effective than formal learning. Beckett and Hager find that informal learning in the workplace has the following characteristics:

- Practice-based informal workplace learning is organic/holistic
 - Practice-based informal workplace learning is contextual
 - Practice-based informal learning is activity- and experience-based
 - Practice-based informal learning arises in situations where learning is not the main aim
 - Practice-based informal workplace learning is activated by individual learners rather than by teachers/trainers
 - Practice-based informal workplace learning is often collaborative/collegial.
- (p.115).

The differences between formal and informal learning are identified by the researchers. Formal learning is individualistic, has a single focus and is decontextualised,

with a teacher or trainer as driver and the learner as a passive spectator (ibid, p.128). On the other hand, they find informal learning as often collaborative, self-actuated and holistic/organic; and occurring with other activities in an experiential environment. The traditional, formal learning paradigm aptly describes the type of education received in many parts of the world.

WBL arguably has potential to enhance the employability of graduates, and bridge the gap between the skills and knowledge levels of recent graduates and community expectations and labour market standards. This notion is supported by Raelin, who explains that outcomes from the successful application of WBL in education relate to merging theory with practice and knowledge with experience (Raelin 2000 p.2). Garrick (1999, p.216) states that learning at work is based on human capital, cognition and experience, and skills; and in its strategy of bringing workers, students and academics together it supports the community networks that develop social capital.

Little and ESECT Colleagues (2003) argue that work-based learning makes graduates more employable, stating, *it needs to initiate students in the knowledge, skills, and values attending to the profession before they can practice it* (ibid. p.14). Work-based learning is a strategy to address a perceived lack of discourse by universities and other institutions with the business and communities of their societal environments. Barnett (1992 p.166) noted that *higher learning is being enjoined to come out of the ivory tower, being too confined both as an academic enterprise and as a preparation for the world of work*.

Whilst lifelong learning through formal and informal channels inculcates knowledge to a greater degree than skills to the population, WBL can be viewed as a technical transfer of skills, with systems knowledge. In Oman, with its very high levels of expatriate workers in certain industries, this on-the-job skills transfer is important. Omanisation is based on knowledge acquisition and skills transfer and, in this study, research is undertaken to determine whether there is insufficient knowledge being acquired by Sultan Qaboos University's Mass Communication Department (SQU MCD) students to win a private sector job and thus to acquire WBL. One of the aims of this study is to determine the extent to which Omanisation, or replacement of expatriate labour by skilled Omanis, succeeded through application of policies consistent with the human and social capital models. The next two sections reviewing the literature examine the methods used

by more developed countries to redefine their higher education strategies and relate skills and knowledge outcomes to national goals.

2.2.3 Higher Education Sector and the Demand For Skills

For many countries, the debate regarding universities' primary role centres on whether university graduates should possess specific employment-related skills, personal characteristics, and technological and linguistic skills to enter the workforce; or whether they should be provided with general education (ILO 2001, McIntosh & Steedman 2002, Trench & Quinn 2003, West 2000). Whilst a university education in itself is recognised as a laudable goal, it is increasingly viewed as a primary means by which students are prepared for later employment (Martin, Milne-Home, Barrett, Spalding & Jones 2000). However, it is difficult for universities to prepare students for their future work roles. Among the uncertainties in the university-work relationship are (Candy & Crebert 1991, Resnick 1987).

- higher learning is relatively individualistic and competitive whilst the workplace experience is frequently collaborative and team-based
- university fosters broad learning while work is often task-based
- university offers decontextualised knowledge whilst graduates experience contextualised knowledge in the workplace
- the sheer diversity of vocations and the passage of time gaining a qualification compromises course preparation for future job specifications.

Although there are times when these roles of education and training are congruent (i.e. university learning is task-specific for more vocational degrees), the two domains can be broadly characterised as distinct.

Nevertheless, education and training are the most important investments in human capital formation, and a college education greatly raises incomes for United States graduates and those from many other countries (Becker 1993). At some stage of education there must be a cross-over from wider, decontextualised knowledge to specific work skills and this is becoming standard in many professions. For example, in an Australian study on graduate perceptions of university education and workplace training, participants recognised the university contribution to their generic skills development. However, they greatly valued the experience of work placement learning and subsequent training whilst employed. Teamwork, responsibility and collaborative learning contributed to their acquisition of human capital (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick & Cragolini 2004).

Generic graduate attributes, or transferable skills, are a factor in higher education outcomes. The development of generic skills is motivated by the belief that there are skills which all graduates should possess, and are applicable to a wide range of tasks and contexts beyond the university setting (Gilbert, Balatti, Turner & Whitehouse 2004). From the perspective of phenomenography, Marton & Booth (1997) show that Australian university teachers charged with responsibility for developing students' generic graduate attributes do not share a common understanding of either the nature of these outcomes, or the teaching and learning processes that might facilitate the development of these outcomes. Instead academics hold qualitatively different concepts of the phenomenon of graduate attributes, in terms of what is learned and how such outcomes are achieved (Barrie 2004). Recent research by Smith and Bath (2006) determines that teaching and program quality are not the only important determinants of students' learning outcomes. They conclude that, whilst universities' concern with the quality of their teaching and programs is germane, the interactive, social and collaborative aspects of students' learning experiences, captured in the notion of the Learning Community, are also very important determinants of graduate outcomes, and so should be included in the focus of attempts at enhancing the quality of student learning.

Discussion continues on whether or not graduates' training should be professionalised to impart the skills demanded by the labour market (Winch 2000). Huggins and Harries (2004 p.65) cited Brown, Green and Lauder (2001) to assert that that policymakers, employers, employees and educational systems should collectively and separately accept the responsibility to create a highly skilled society.

However, Beckett and Hager, (2002 p.5) argue:

Work and its demands upon adults in the workplace has been the focus of policies across the Western world since the start of the Industrial Revolution. Because of new demands, governments have developed policies which support skill-based outcomes which are labour-marketable, rather than time-based initiation into processes which are character forming.

Beckett and Hager (2002 p.32) recognise the importance of higher education in enhancing students' acquisition of work-related skills, but they recommend new practices should expose students to a comprehensive education rather than *relying on narrow, behaviouristic skill acquisition*. Simple skill acquisition, they believe, is not acceptable in lifelong learning and work-based training policy because vocational training concentrates on *skilling the hands and perhaps the head* and forgets the *heart*. The theorists prefer the

concept of *organic learning*, where *know-how*, or learned behaviours and knowledge, are absorbed within a working environment, with the latter's potential to reinforce the notion of a *human at work*, that is, the trainee behaving in a psychomotor manner, cognitively, socially, and physically active at work (ibid. p.38). Beckett and Hager are thus defining a concept of work-based learning that generates both skills formation and broader education outcomes to develop intellect. This role they perceive as a responsibility of universities which then dissolves the opposition between the two goals for higher education, market-readiness and comprehensive education.

Barrow and Keeney (2001 p.55) noticed a medium-term shift in research emphasis in learning systems from *generic-skill development* to adaptable *lifelong learning* to attain congruence with individuals' and society's goals. They argue that the development of the mind, education and personal fulfilment (including employability) are directly linked. This reasoning containing the issue of employability at its core is fundamental to this research, given the problematic employment outcomes of Omani university graduates.

2.2.4 Employability

While the premise that a university education assists graduates to gain employment applies to national higher education policy and planning, it should not be seen as distinct from the personal and social interests of individuals. Gibbis (2000 pp.559-560) notes that *employability is not the end of education, but (is) a competency of the skilled authentic social agent*. He recognises that there is *no difficulty in employability skills being incorporated within a more general set of aims for higher education*. Gibbis sees a danger in that a narrow definition of educational goals could *instrumentalise our education system to such an extent that employability becomes the prime purpose of higher education*. Lifelong learning is an alternative and preferable educational aim.

A focus on employability for higher education establishments means that graduates should undertake professional preparation to meet employer and workplace expectations as they move toward the labour market. For governments, particularly in the developed world, the employability of graduates is now a major concern and a crucial educational aim in higher education curriculum design and implementation (Yorke 2004a). The Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) in England (Yorke 2004 p.7) defines employability as a set of achievements — skills, understandings and personal attributes

that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

Employability is not just a labour market condition, connected to theorists' narrow understanding of human capital. Readiness to enter the work force should neither be characterised as a matter of graduates possessing *bundles of atomised and highly portable skills*; nor should such a simplistic diagnosis be used to remediate perceived employability deficiencies (Beckett & Hager 2001 p.79).

Knight and Yorke (2003 p.4) give three interpretations for the term employability:

- from a graduate perspective, employability is gaining a job
- employability as a student, being developed by their experience of higher education
- employability as personal achievement.

Arguing that employability is a multifaceted characteristic of the individual, the researchers warn against confusing employability with job acquisition, assuming that employability may be enhanced by work experience, or that experiencing a particular curriculum makes a graduate employable. Knight and Yorke (ibid.) state that employability is a condition of *the individual whose appropriateness for a job is appraised by an employer*, and it is more than a set of instrumental skills.

2.2.5 Career Decisionmaking

For a successful transition from higher education to the workplace, researchers find that career guidance, that is, assistance with career decisionmaking, and academic counselling services facilitate the acquisition of job-seeking skills for students and graduates (Hughes & Karp 2004, Lambie 1998). Although universities and colleges in the Arab states, including SQU, established career advisory and counselling departments, the human capital issues inherent in their activities were not the subjects of extensive research. The ESCWA (2003) report discussed at s2.1.1.1, nevertheless, was designed to identify and classify academic research and government policies, define the areas of greatest impact on employability, and then prioritise programs to meet those needs. The ESCWA study investigates whether the employability issue can be located in national education systems, national labour markets, or in both the authors concluded that without more and

better higher education, ESCWA countries will find it increasingly difficult to benefit from the global knowledge-based economy (ibid. p.24).

Programs in higher education institutions are often theoretical and do not correspond to modern technological developments or the changing requirements of the economy. Within universities, various disciplines function in isolation from other areas. There is a general lack of coordination between universities, community colleges, technical education and training establishments and general education systems. Endeavours to improve this situation must be directed at fostering links with industry. Furthermore, R&D activities must be merged with departmental research with the aim of forging relationships with the production and service sectors (ibid. p.31). The task force found that, despite exceptions, the potential of higher education to promote development is only marginally being realised.

Importantly for this study, the ESCWA report found that the benefits of higher education are eroded by the fact that cultural and political factors, namely, favouritism and nepotism, contribute to the unemployment or underemployment of graduates from higher learning institutions. For example, students, in particular females, tend to opt for the humanities and the arts in accordance with their traditional role rather than subjects that would maximise their opportunities in labour markets. Such subjects often offer limited job opportunities and lead to unemployment. Further, as noted, the report found that information concerning future demand in labour markets is not readily available; the interdependence of education systems and the requirements of labour markets cannot be resolved without individual human development programs and implementation of local labour market policies that take into consideration the acquisition of skills. Therefore, to reduce unemployment and underemployment, an assessment process for each country's educational processes must be established in its respective labour management programs.

Without satisfactory higher education or labour market information a graduate's career decisionmaking is adversely affected. Other connecting national policies and programs for career choice for higher education and subsequent careers may also be absent, or if present, their relevancy skewed. One example is career decisionmaking instruments, such as Mau's *Career Difficulties Decisionmaking Questionnaire* and *Career Thoughts Inventory* (2001). In the Career Difficulties Decisionmaking Questionnaire results, Mau found that cultural differences influence decisionmaking difficulties.

As assumptions of adequate access to business knowledge, career paths, and an individual's skill in career selection are inherent in career-choice questionnaires, use of such means to assess Omani graduates' intentions at this time may be counter-productive. Nevertheless, Arabic attitudinal research on employment, whilst rare, is available (Robertson, Al-khatib & Al-Habib 2002). The researchers queried managers and staff from Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia about their cultural values and work-related beliefs. These countries were chosen because of their wealth, that they are diversifying and privatising their economies, and because of their relative homogeneity. The researchers found that support for humanistic (fulfilment, self-regard), organisational and participative decisionmaking were not only the top three for the overall group but also ranked in the same order for each country. Omanis want to work and want good jobs; particularly Omani women, who enjoy the freedom and flexibility of earning money, using their degrees and gaining independence from their families.

Thus in Omani education and public service establishments, *career decision making* has not yet accrued the infrastructure to support best practice instruments used extensively by developed countries to aid individuals' career choices, either entering tertiary education or leaving it. Graduates want to work, but the infrastructure has not yet developed to the extent that there is availability of comprehensive job data, job acquisition skills, and knowledge of workplace conditions to effect the translation of a growing stream of graduates into the workplace. Sultan Qaboos University offers job fairs, corporations and multinationals offer work experience, but, as expressed in the ESCWA report, greater coordination and a disciplined approach from education and business organisations are necessary to create greater opportunities for more graduates.

2.2.6 Section Summary

The survey of literature above has explored the policy options for educators. Satisfying a temporary labour market demand for a set of particular skills and knowledge constitutes a dilemma for educators as technology and business practices, and thus preferred employee characteristics, are continually evolving. Taken together with volatile capital flows, changing economic conditions and company mergers and acquisitions, the global and Omani markets for skills and knowledge are unpredictable and subject to continuous change.

Thus governments of developed countries have two concerns. First, from a human capital perspective, policy outcomes must bridge the gulf between the higher education supply of graduate skills and knowledge and employers' changing demands. However, a body of research considers this theory as too narrow a focus to appropriately reflect the aims of higher education. Therefore, as the second concern, there is a move toward preparing Oman's university graduates to be lifelong learners and socially responsible citizens. Arguably, a purely human capital direction may have within it the seeds for a reform approach which more or less integrates human and social capital interests, inclusive of economic and community-related goals.

2.3 Higher Education in Developing and Arab Countries

Arab countries, following the higher education policy debate around the world, apparently adopted an instrumental human capital principle for educational development. This decision was not simply an outcome of independent government initiative by many Arab countries, but was influenced by informed educational policy advice by international agencies driving the human capital principles.

An example of these observations is the World Bank/UNESCO Task Force on Higher Education and Society Report (2000), *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*, which observed that higher education systems in the developing countries are under-funded with under-qualified faculty, poorly taught students, and under-developed curricula. This report urges developing nations to provide higher education graduates with specialised skills, together with a general education to provide flexibility and foster innovation, concentrating on *know-how* learning. The Task Force concluded that, *without improved human capital, countries will inevitably fall behind and experience intellectual and economic marginalization and isolation* (ibid. p.18).

A second World Bank report (2002a) *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*, considers that higher education institutions in the more developed nations will find difficulty in adapting and improving the quality of their teaching, and in moving from traditional to lifelong learning. This shift in policy, according to the report, allows countries to implement new strategies to make higher education systems and outcomes adaptive to new norms of the market-driven economy, leading to benefits for human and social development. Considering human capital as a source of economic growth, the complementary World Bank report (2002b), *Lifelong*

Learning in The Global Knowledge Economy: Challenges for Developing Countries, continues with this theme, presenting a conceptual framework for developing states to move from inadequate, rigid, and traditional education and training systems by taking effective lifelong learning approaches. As noted above, this new learning approach combines human and social capital principles as it is characterised by being learner-centred, knowledge-rich, and assessment-driven and connected to community values. The World Bank recommends that less developed states promote economic and social development by embarking on strategies of creating, acquiring and transmitting knowledge. To this end, the ability of the population to communicate using the English language has been recognised as a core skill in a country's approach to sustaining growth.

A seminal work, the United Nations Development Program's Arab Human Development Report (2003), *Building a Knowledge Society*, critically comments on the status of education in the Arab world, specifically higher education. This report makes clear the challenge Arab nations face in acquiring knowledge, describing Arabs as passive consumers rather than providers of knowledge. The quality of their education systems is the most serious problem faced by Arab countries, and the authors reported that the curricula of the Arab nations' higher education institutions lacked critical thinking, were dependent on memorising as a learning tool, lacked provision for foreign languages and had inadequate certification processes. Further, higher education systems in Arab nations lack autonomy, focus on quantity rather than quality of outcomes and had poorly developed enrolment procedures. The emphasis in the report is on educational institutions as builders of the nation's human capital.

In a reference relevant to the research in this thesis, The Arab Human Development Report gives a clear indication that mass media in the Arab world lacks independence and criticises its lack of involvement in national development. As the local media does not produce or transform knowledge, it adversely affects Arab citizens in their ability to acquire and use information. The report called for a parallel use of Arabic and foreign languages in education to develop knowledge societies. In effect, Arab countries lack sufficient implementation of human and social capital applied principles.

Research reported in human resource and economic development literature relating to higher education, training and graduate employment in Arab countries is not encouraging. In a comprehensive review, Fergany (2000) finds, compared to the more developed countries, a deteriorating state of university education in the Arab world.

Referring to the importance of higher education in building knowledge-based societies, Fergany believes that higher education plays a vital role not only in building human capital but also in gaining high levels of societal returns in a nation's development process. The researcher characterised higher education in the Arab world as substantially falling short in levels of enrolment in higher education by Arab youth, especially females; having a poor quality of education; and investing relatively low levels of expenditure on higher education. Accordingly, Fergany recommended that Arab countries liberate their higher education systems, upgrade the quality of education to embrace lifelong and work-related learning principles and create a cooperative environment for their universities.

Ali (2002) contributes to the debate, stating that Arab countries continue to experience challenges in the development of their higher education systems, although they have well-regarded levels of achievement in education and thus their accumulation of human capital. However, the researcher questions the quality of training, finding, for example, Arab graduates who have not yet mastered technology. From a human capital perspective Ali argues that education in the Arab world lacks quality output and produces a low rate of return from the investment that is made in education, demonstrated by the high rates of unemployment among university graduates. Similarly Doraid, (2000 p.16) commented:

Bad policies have distorted the output of the educational systems to become grossly out of tune with the requirements of the labour market. This contributed to the high rate of unemployment among the educated in the region – a reflection of the mismatch between excess supply from tertiary education and the demands of the economy.

Doraid continues that *policies in the Arab States should aim at creating a virtuous cycle of growth sustaining human development, and human development sustaining economic growth* (ibid. p.28).

Studies of education and training systems in the GCC countries show deficiencies resulting in graduate unemployment continue to present great challenges to their governments. In 2001, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) warned:

The quality of regional education systems is declining as a result of inadequate investment, which is not commensurate with demand and is unable to meet new requirements. This situation, combined with the lack of appropriate training programmes, has increased unemployment among young graduates. (ESCWA p.54)

The challenge facing the developing countries is to reform their higher education systems to be culturally appropriate, economically sensible, operationally manageable, and strategically effective in the information society era (Chapman & Austin 2002). In addressing the challenges for less-developed countries, Salmi (2002) identifies interrelated factors impacting the development of higher education systems, that is, competing in a global economy, using technical and socioeconomic knowledge as drivers of change and growth and taking advantage of the information and communication revolution. Means to approach these challenges include adapting training to meet commercial requirements.

Kubursi (1999 p.49) states that *the Arab challenge is about sustaining human development in an increasingly globalized and mean world*. The researcher argues that the future for Arab economies will depend on their preparation to benefit, in a human capital sense, from the opportunities offered by the *information and digital economy* and identifies structural issues that hamper their ability to adapt to global change. For Kubursi, the Arab economies have an *under-investment in training and the education attainments of Arab labor do not prepare (the particular country) for international competition*. The author refers to inefficient bureaucracies, proposing that Arab countries adopt:

- substantial reduction of numbers of under-performing public sector employees
- institution-building by implementing effective policies and practices
- raise skills levels
- increase domestic technological capabilities.

To substantially increase investment in human capital, Kubursi recommends governments should invest in people, training, information and knowledge; decrease the separation between the public and private sectors; emphasise the transparency of good governance by implementing policies and practices of efficiency, merit, expertise, accountability, service, objectivity and integrity by restructuring public institutions; and building the required infrastructure in all its aspects (Kubursi 1999 p.42-5). Arab universities, as a coordinated group, provide the means to drive the renewal process through government, commerce and social institutions (ibid. p.46). Here, in essence, is the main justification for this research and for the significance of the research statement to the enhancement of Oman's mass communication graduates' employment opportunities.

Confirming that education and human capital are the main determinants of growth in the knowledge-based economy, Boyer and Atallah (2000 p.2) state:

In a society characterised by the globalisation of markets and the internationalisation of cultures, each country must realise that the best way to compete and benefit from the world growth opportunities is to be credibly aware of the importance of developing its capital stock.

To provide a consensus between demand and supply of valuable skills, the authors propose:

To achieve a high level of efficiency in raising the level of human capital in society, both in quantity and quality, a new set of interaction rules between universities and industries must be designed and implemented. These will represent a major shift of emphasis in both universities and firms: they must become partners, linked by implicit and explicit contractual arrangements, in a redesigned new human capital formation industry (ibid p.6).

The authors argue that the mission of universities is both educational and vocational and that governments should do more to improve teaching quality and that teaching should meet labour market needs (ibid p.28).

It is clear that human capital theory informs educational development in the Arab world and in Oman in particular. Just as apparent is the observation that the poor employment outcomes for graduates from Arab universities also affect Oman. The almost exclusive focus on human capital in education policy development in the Arab countries points to the primary issue they confront with the paradigm, especially in relation to higher education. The issue, which is the starting point for this research, arguably is linked to the adoption of what the Arab countries expect to be universally applicable policy formulations. However, the authorities lack the recognition that national characteristics and cultural commitments and practices are also important in the realisation of policy goals. Therefore, this thesis addresses the research statement through application of a theoretical framework comprising human capital and social capital dimensions.

In Arab countries, the community cohesion characteristic producing high levels of bonding social capital, even containing the vertical social linkages and strong bridging characteristics, cannot be assumed sufficiently robust to support the mixed results of their human capital policies and provide the economic growth they seek.

2.4 Summary

This first chapter of the literature review surveys the research relevant to the employability of graduates from universities in countries relevant to the Omani experience. By reference to research and theoretical frameworks applied in developed countries, notably human capital and associated concepts and practices - lifelong learning, work-based learning, skills and knowledge development, and building a flexible workforce – the review establishes that a purely economic basis for graduate employability is not a convincing stand-alone proposition. Human capital strategies may be only one side of the foundation for a successful economy and for a university seeking to contribute strongly to the nation by graduating employable professionals able to advance the interests of both the nation's economy and its communities. As Woolcock (2001, p. 15) argues, *the broader social message rippling through the social capital literature is that how we associate with each other has enormous implications for our well-being, whether we live in rich or poor countries.*

In the following chapter, the human capital/social capital framework is applied to the higher education sector in Oman, with a specific focus on the mass communication program at Sultan Qaboos University. The mass communication field appears an area of the economy, Nayaran (1999 p.21) notes, that may be an indicator for the extent to which a community is characterised by the kinds of ties associated with high levels of social capital.

Chapter 3 Media Education and Employment in Oman

The literature presented in this study summarises an argument that, by itself, human capital development is an insufficient explanation for the success of developed countries in enhancing their economic power and in strengthening the well-being of their communities. Education and training can be successful contributors to human capital development when they also result in the building of a nation's social capital: that is, in supporting community relationships and social cohesiveness. Educational institutions such as schools and higher education establishments can make significant contributions in this regard.

Although developing countries such as Oman invest strongly in human capital, the aim of this chapter is to show that their higher education systems do not recognise the importance of social capital strategies in the enhancement of community well-being, the growth of the economy and, as a result, the strengthening of the national labour market. This proposition is the question underpinning the research topic.

Chapter 3 presents an account of the developments in Oman's economy and education in the nation's brief modern history since 1970. The chapter identifies the manner by which economic and education policies, especially the policy of Omanisation, demonstrate the application of a human capital philosophy. Omanisation refers to the replacement of a substantial number of expatriates with nationals in Omani workplaces, a successful outcome of the Omani education system and acquired human capital. This study hypothesises that Omanisation did not achieve its intended outcome. Whilst Oman pursued intense development activity in physical and human capital strategies, it is argued that the absence in the Omanisation policy of an explicit social capital dimension results in an insufficient social framework to support socio-economic development.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section provides a brief history of the modern Sultanate of Oman with a particular focus on the nation's economy and education systems. It introduces the Omanisation policy as an entry to the second section, an account of the development of education in Oman over the past few decades. The role of higher education in its goal of training young Omanis as professionals, managers and leaders is then explored. This moves on to an examination of the disconnect that emerges between the skills and knowledge of young Omani graduates and the evolving private sector job market. To focus on the disconnect in this study, the supply-demand dichotomy

of the Mass Communication Department graduates of the Sultan Qaboos University is explored – the supply of graduates’ skills and knowledge and the demands of media employers, particularly in the private sector. The stock of media human capital built in its graduates by the university does not translate into media jobs. That is, it forms high human risk capital for graduates’ futures. This high risk challenges the accepted human capital view that a country’s investment in education is a low risk strategy to full employment and economic growth. The chapter concludes with a summation of human capital and social capital theory drawn from an Arab environment.

3.1 Oman

The Sultanate of Oman, situated on the Arabian Peninsula, is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC). At the 2003 census, the total population of this developing country was 2,340,815; of which Omani nationals comprise some 78 per cent, some 1.8 million people, 49.5 per cent of whom are female. Further, half the population are under the age of 16 years (Ministry of National Economy 2004a). Population growth in 2005 at 3.32 per cent includes a high birth rate of 50,000 per year which, if maintained, may result in a further 1.25 million Omanis by 2020. This rate of growth could increase unemployment and raise social issues (Rippenburg 1998, Peterson 2004).

The characteristics of Omani society have significance for research in which social capital theory contains potential explanatory principles. Oman has a strong tribal system and the families of each tribe, the latter which numbered 225,564 in 2003 (Ministry of National Economy 2004b), are known within and among other tribes. Omani families have strong internal relationships, as parents raise their children and educate them to be financially independent, and then later in life expect support from them. This places a modern and developing economic environment into a strongly traditionalist and Islamic culture and thus the country has witnessed a dramatic shift over a relatively short span of three decades from illiteracy and an agrarian society lacking basic infrastructure to its current status of a thriving nation (Al-Yousef 1995, Bricks & Sinclair 1987, Peterson 2004).

Economic development in Oman lagged its neighbours, virtually beginning after Sultan Qaboos bin Said gained power on 23 July 1970. A government infrastructure established from that decade comprised the Council of Ministers, executive Council of Oman and the judiciary council. Establishment of the legislature culminated in the 1996

Basic Law, ensuring individuals' rights. To reduce its dependence on oil, current Oman policy is to diversify its economy, including privatising public sector services to create employment opportunities, particularly for national professionals and managers. To strengthen Oman's human capital, the government earlier invested in education, particularly in higher education, as a priority objective of its long-term development strategy entitled Vision 2020 (Ministry of Development 1995). The government's plan for Oman's economy depends on four pillars: a sustainable development approach, diversification of the economy, advancement of the country's human resources, and an invitation for private sector participation in the development process.

3.1.1 Omanisation

Developing educational policies to meet the needs of current and emerging labour markets is a great challenge (Al-Yousif 1995 p.102). To enhance the economy, human capital must be developed and deployed to gain optimal national involvement and labour participation – Omanisation.

The policy of Omanisation is a national investment in human capital to improve the country's skills and knowledge. Although the current program is directed primarily to secondary-school and trade skills, graduation places young Omanis in the workforce to undertake on-the-job training, with the aim of replacing skilled expatriates with an equally skilled national labour force. This policy is to be rigorously applied if it is to achieve its objective. Joyce (1995, p.120) cites Oman's Minister of Civil Service: *it is not intended through the Omanisation policy to convert the government into a social security system*, that is, a means of supporting citizens to passively gain work knowledge; that the purpose of the policy is improved productivity.

However, Omanisation is a strategy with some risk. In 2004, there were 1.01 million Omanis of working age. Three-quarters of Omani workers are under 36 years of age and each year another 50,000 enter the workforce. But Oman's total 2004 workforce was 658,000 comprising 467,000 known expatriates and a mere 191,000 Omanis. To absorb 50,000 Omanis per year, without addressing the existing shortfall of jobs and with no further expatriates employed, an economic growth rate of 7.5 per cent must be sustained [GDP growth rates for 2002 – 2004 averaged 7.5 per cent (Ministry of National Economy 2005)]

3.1.2 Omanisation: Public Sector

The public sector first embraced Omanisation in 1988 and by 1999, the majority of ministries and offices reached 86 per cent Omani employees. This figure remains relatively static (84.4 per cent or 83,883 Omanis in 2004, plus 15,500 expatriates) (Ministry of National Economy 2005). A statistical analysis characterises a public service that is Omani-dominated and male-dominated (63,000 men v 36,000 women). A preponderance of female Omani public sector workers in middle wage classifications is mirrored by statistics showing that more than nine of ten Omani female public servants work for Ministries of Education or Health. Again there is a preponderance of qualified Omani women; well over eight of every ten Omani female public servants have post-secondary school qualifications, and despite their numbers, dominate the all-Omani public service qualifications of diploma, post-diploma and bachelor's degrees. Omani men, on the other hand, hold their job positions despite indifferent educational levels. In fact, they surpass women's qualification strata only when Master's and PhD levels are reached. As education is a qualification for a government position, this tendency to employ men at similar or higher grades on grounds other than superior qualifications is one of the weaknesses in the application of human capital theory (Arrow 1973, Caputo 2002, Lundberg & Startz 1983, Sunstein 1997). Section 6.2.3 expands on this possibility in a discussion of *wasta*, or nepotism, which refers to *both the act and the person who mediates or intercedes* (Cunningham & Sarayrah 1993, p.1). *Wasta* occurs in the employment process when a candidate, to gain employment, calls on connections with high social position or influence. *Wasta* is used when an unskilled person is accepted in a particular position while those better qualified are rejected.

A further 8,200 people are employed in public corporations, making up the wider public sector of some 108,000 employees. Omanisation reached 77.9 per cent in 2004 for public corporations, a little under the public servants' 84.4 per cent (Ministry of National Economy 2005, Table 11-4).

3.1.3 Omanisation: Private Sector.

Although the public sector has largely achieved the objective of Omanisation, this is not reflected in the private sector, where private sector employers generally do not, or cannot, select Omanis for skilled work (Goodliffe 2005). Studies and reports on the Omani job market indicate that expatriate workers are preferred by private sector employers (Al-

khaburi 1998; Al-Maskery 1992; Rassekh 2003; Sajwani 1997). Oman's expatriate labour originates primarily (and historically) from the Indian sub-continent with menial workers at one end of the salary scale (78 per cent of all expatriates have not completed secondary school), and professional and managerial positions at the other.

The Omanisation policy includes incentives for private firms to hire locally, offering tax incentives and refunds for employers' training costs for Omanis, but demands employment of each trainee upon completion of training (UNESCO 2006). The private sector reports it is responding to Omanisation. A survey conducted by Ernst & Young (2003) indicated that the majority of large organisations had plans and well-defined strategies to implement Omanisation, including training programs to enhance technical skills for Omani employees. In the private sector, opportunities for Omanisation lie in the service activity centres, where 187,000 jobs are taken by expatriates, and construction and manufacturing with 167,000 jobs.

Whilst Omanisation relates mainly to secondary and trades skills, SQU's mass communications graduates seek work firmly placed in the country's services activity centres. Imported skills and knowledge are highly ranked for services activity centres. These centres thus are open to eventual Omanisation because the educational levels for expatriates of university (bachelor's degrees) are also highly valued, a profile which fits SQU MCD graduates. Therefore Mass Communications graduates are eminently qualified to replace expatriates on these dimensions. However, supply-side problems—the greater cost of employing locals and the additional rights they enjoy once in a job—are likely to continue to slow progress.

3.1.4 Omanisation: Policy Issues

Whilst Omanisation has been successful in the public sector, graduates of SQU's College of Arts and Social Sciences are not achieving work placements in the career of their choice (Al-Jahwari 2001 p.25). Valeri (2005 p.1) questions whether graduates acquire relevant skills and knowledge for employability: the question of foreign workers' replacement by Omani nationals has become one of the most sensitive issues in the economic and political debate.

There are calls to evaluate and assess the Omanisation policy from a number of researchers (Al-Farsi 1994, Al-Harthy 2000, Sajwani 1997, Valeri 2005), despite Omanisation of specific industries which receive financial and other policy incentives: oil

(78 per cent Omani employment), gas (74 per cent Omani employment), banks (92 per cent Omani employment) and, arguably, insurance (56 per cent) (Ministry of National Economy 2005)²

Informed comment attributes the areas of non-Omanisation to, firstly, inadequate educational standards for certain occupations, and a more pervasive inability to instil work-ready skills in Omani youth, that is, a deficiency in job application skills and lack of work experience. Secondly, there is a long-standing issue of insufficient communication between education institutions and organisations to integrate industry trends into coursework at an appropriate standard (Al-Lamki 1998 & 2000, Al-Maskery 1992, Valeri 2005). Al-Lamki (1998) confirmed graduates' preferences for public sector remuneration, conditions and environment: 65 per cent of her respondents preferred the public sector. Graduates also lacked information (awareness) on private sector job opportunities and as a corollary, private sector employers discriminated against Omani graduates by stipulating considerable work experience (up to five years) and English language skills (Rayan 1998, Al-Lamki 1998 p.392). Researchers continue to call for Omanisation reform, including issues of appropriate skills and knowledge (Sajwani 1997 p.5, Al-Lamki 2002 p.83), and summarised by Al-Farsi (1997 p.190) as nine main obstacles to Omanisation, which remain to be fully addressed a decade later:

- lack of awareness amongst expatriates of their responsibility to train Omanis
- inappropriate Omani work attitudes and limited commitment
- lack of clear policy and Omanisation targets
- expatriates' fear of losing their employment
- inadequate co-operation from expatriates
- lack of commitment to Omanisation by expatriates
- preferential treatment of expatriates over Omani nationals
- insufficient opportunities for Omanis to be given responsibilities
- certain existing policies which hinder Omanisation, such as lack of well-planned policies and expatriate participation in training and skilling Omani nationals.

3.1.5 Summary of Omanisation

Oman must develop its human capital through continued education and training, and gender equality is required to reach the country's economic goals (Al-Lamki 2000).

² Table 10-5: Employees in Main Private Sector Establishments and Percentage of Omanis

Whilst generally supporting the dimensions of human capital theory, other researchers characterised the theory's principles as lacking dynamic social dimensions contiguous with social capital theory. Narayan (1999 p.13) views the impact of primary social groups within their communities as dependant on resources and power. Overlapping networks of primary social group members based in everyday social interactions can create multiple communication and influence paths that lead to the collective good. However, networks and associations consisting of primary social groups without cross-cutting ties, the linkages between social groups, lead to the betterment only of those groups. But when power between groups is asymmetrically distributed, it is cross-cutting ties which become critical to both economic opportunity and social cohesion.

Omanisation is thus a construct with its dimensions firmly based in supply-side economic theory; to replace a supply of expatriate labour through a series of government initiatives under Vision Oman 2020 to reach a satisfactory level of Omani workforce participation (Ministry of Development 1995). The nominal theory relevant to economics (s2.1.1) is human capital theory. For Omanisation, a human capital framework may be considered to lack continuity, offer a high level of risk at tertiary level, and cannot respond effectively to increased private sector demand, as it does not take into consideration the relative absence of cross-cutting ties between tribal/familial groups, the university and Oman's media industry (s3.1.4).

Whilst being effective in describing Omanisation's lack of recent progress in stemming the inflow of expatriate labour, social capital theory also has its roots in economic theory and, in one dimension, joins human capital theory in its inability to address the demand-side of the labour-capital dichotomy. However, Narayan's work in exploring responses to these research questions between government and citizen actions draws on the work of Evans (1996) who describes a synergy between a government and citizens as being based on *complementarity* and *embeddedness*. Complementarity describes mutually supportive relations between public and private entities and individuals, as expressed, for example, in Oman's Basic Law. Embeddedness refers to the ties that connect citizens and public officials, such as that of SQU and its stakeholders.

Further, the concept of Omanisation is facilitated through *cross-cutting ties* that take the form of either bridging or linking social capital. As discussed in s2.1.2, bridging social capital involves overlapping networks, in which a member of one group can gain access to the resources of another group because of overlapping membership. Linking

social capital involves social relations with those in authority, used to garner resources or power. Each of these three forms of social capital is arguably essential to a strong community. To date, little is known of social capital distribution within Omani society, or for that matter, the expatriate communities within Oman's borders. No Omani studies identified for this research are sufficiently detailed to enable empirical analysis of the distinction between bonding, bridging and linking forms of social capital.

This review advances the contention that a lack of previous theoretical and empirical Oman research on the social capital construct and its dimensions limits the possibility for the production of a constructive framework for furthering Omanisation. Social capital theory asserts that bonding ties are important for daily life, but that cross-cutting ties (in the form of bridging and linking) and associated generalised forms of trust are essential for achieving sustainability. On this basis, cross-cutting ties between stakeholders of SQU's graduates provide a construct for the dimensions of trust and reciprocity. That is, research which seeks to include both human and social capital considerations in an investigation of graduate employability must take into account the range of diverse social groupings with a stake in graduates' futures.

3.2 Higher Education in Oman: Focus MCD

Oman, as a rapidly developing country, is implementing an educational infrastructure with its policies framework, systems delivery and program implementation in a very short timeframe.

Despite the government's intention through Omanisation to produce the numbers and classifications, or professions, of trained personnel required for the country's economy, the new graduates' career choices or training do not fully correspond to the developing Omani labour market. Initially, there were insufficient higher education establishments for those finishing secondary school who required technical training and higher education. The Ministry of Higher Education, established in 1994, is responsible for developing professional and technical colleges and institutions to absorb the rapidly increasing number of secondary school graduates who require further education and training to meet Oman's future labour demands (Al-Ghailani 2005). Higher education institutions established for vocational purposes are monitored for their graduates' ability to gain employment and thus fulfil the requirements of Vision 2020. Table 1 below presents the public sector higher education institutions in Oman in 2003/2004.

Table 1**Oman's Public Institutions of Higher Education**

Public Higher Education Institutions in Oman 2003/2004		
Institution	Total Students	Enrolment
Sultan Qaboos University	10,242	3,069
Colleges of Education	8,316	1,957
College of Sharia & Law	651	183
College of Banking & Financial Studies	308	196
Colleges of Technology	7,930	4,308
Institutes of Health	2,220	811

Source: Ministry of Higher Education 2004

The government's priority for higher education institutions is to provide careers in teaching, health, vocational and technical areas, and banking – these are the primary skills and professions most needed for continuing development and, except for the technical/vocational aspects, Omanisation has been largely successful in these classifications. These institutes, and the rapidly developing private sector education establishments, are directing human capital formation toward fluency in the English language, communication and information technology acquisition, and personal development and learning skills.

3.2.1 Sultan Qaboos University

In 1986, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) opened as the research and educational centre for Oman, providing a substantive investment in human capital for Oman (Allen Jr. & Rigsbee II 2000, Birks & Sinclair 1986). SQU comprises seven colleges: Arts and Social Sciences; Commerce and Industry; Education; Science; Agriculture and Marine Sciences; Engineering; and Medicine and Health Sciences. The university continues to dominate higher education in Oman with 11,700 students enrolled in 2004: 5,719 males and 5,981 females (Ministry of National Economy 2005).

The College of Arts and Social Sciences comprises eight departments including Mass Communications, and in 2002, 248 (152 male/96 female) students graduated (SQU 2002). Of the departments, Mass Communications was chosen for this research. The health of a nation's mass communications infrastructure, Nayaran (2000, p.21) argues, has social

capital significance in the extent to which it indicates the nation's civil strength and trust relationships. But mass communication is also important because it can demonstrate how a developing country such as Oman can quickly satisfy its shorter term human capital potential through the accelerated development of its physical and administrative infrastructure.

3.2.2 Mass Communications Department

To provide tertiary education for media and journalism, the Mass Communications department (MCD) was established and by 2004, over 260 students had graduated. Table 2 MCD Graduates, 1991 – 2005 shows the rate of graduation for the department from its first class.

Table 2
MCD Graduates, 1991 - 2005

Year	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Grads	18	21	17	21	21	13	12	11	12	17	25	36	24	25	23

Source: Sultan Qaboos University 2004a, plus in-house statistics for subsequent years

Table 2 illustrates the changing interests by students in gaining the qualification, growing initially to average 21 graduates in the mid-nineties, and then after a decline in the latter part of the decade, further growth for the subsequent years. On average, MCD has 75 undergraduates at any one time (Al-Hasani 2004, Al-Shaqsi 2004). However, apart from the data retrieved from the university on graduate numbers, there is little statistical information on employment in mass media for GCC countries.

The university's resources are periodically evaluated and capital allocations are determined through a series of academic plans (Al-Shaqsi 2004). To rationalise the MCD program and assist in its relevance, a workshop for the MCD faculty and employers in the media industry was undertaken in 2002, the results of which formed a redirection for the department. This revised strategy, implemented in 2005, moves away from a generalist mass communications degree which assumed a focus on journalism and ancillary functions toward greater specialisation to reflect the rapid change in the field of communications:

- journalism and electronic publishing
- broadcasting media

- public relations and advertising (Al-Hasani 2004; Sultan Qaboos University 2004).

As part of MCD's development, its physical resources improved substantially, including an industry-level television studio which was commissioned in 2003.

Thus an element of the research for this study, *whether SQU through its MCD class work program has invested sufficient resources in both its human and social capital structures*, is partially addressed (s1.3, interview questions). Physical capital was provided by the university to meet the standards of the private and public sector media organisations that are expected to employ mass media graduates, implying that students were acquiring human capital. Further, formal enquiry by the university to the relevant industry is an application of bridging ties (s2.1.2) which create a general form of trust necessary for a country's social and business communications and transactions to enable outcomes of public good (Portes 1998, Stone & Hughes 2000).

3.2.3 External Relationships

Although universities and colleges in the Arab states, including SQU, have established career advisory and counselling departments, the human capital issues inherent in their activities have not been the subject of extensive research. Universities in developing countries have competing priorities for focus and for scarce resources as part of an articulated vision for the country. Universities, to a degree, consider that they are research establishments; that their role is the unfettered pursuit of knowledge. As the communities and economies that support these establishments develop, the role of universities evolves from research to providing the expertise and the professionalism that the governments, society and business entities demand as part of their social (and financial) contract with the higher education establishments. The United Nations' Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (2003) is quite critical of the GCC's higher education institutions' efforts in the transition of their graduates to the workplace (s2.2.5), placing the employability issue predominantly with the institutions and to a lesser extent with transitional policies.

Universities have always contributed to the social and cultural development of their communities. However, the emerging agenda for higher education institutions are associated with meeting the various needs of a more diverse client population, or in this case, a maturing economy. Among these needs are relatively new demands such as flexible

structures for lifelong learning created by changing skill demands; greater links between research and teaching; and more engagement with the end users of research (Chatterton & Goddard 2000). If it is accepted that SQU MCD serves its community first, then the department's academics require communication with the mass media industry, public (predominantly broadcast) and private (print, and increasingly broadcast) sectors, to determine labour market needs. The concept of cooperation and consultation, or social partnerships such as that which could be applied between the faculty of the mass communication course, and the mass media industry and Oman's policy makers, have gained wide recognition in the more developed countries (Giddens 1998; OECDa 2001; Seddon, Billett, & Clemans 2005). Cooke (2002) notes that national competitiveness and economic development are closely linked to notions of the information society and knowledge-based economies. Policy makers embrace the concept of proximity-based synergy with economic development and Dubai's Knowledge Village, opened in 2003, is an excellent example of higher education and corporate activity in a purpose-built precinct. The social capital outcomes for such partnerships are illustrated by Seddon et al. (2005 p.567), who studied Australia's experience in building social partnerships between its educational community and employers. The researchers found that social partnerships build social capital and stronger communities for sustained development, democratic participation and economic competitiveness and growth. These attributes are a starting point for reviewing the social relationships' environment in which students are located in SQU's MCD.

Although Arab universities recognise that the curricula of undergraduate courses such as mass communications should be directed toward gaining employment for graduates, this recognition has not extended to research to establish current needs and trends in the mass media industry; a focus of this study. In 2003, the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) reported on the standards of Arab mass communication course providers and the quality of their graduates. The evaluation of ASBU concerned two issues:

- media colleges and institutes were not satisfying the needs of media employers; and
- there was insufficient communication and planning between the universities and potential employers of their graduates.

There is little value or effectiveness in designing a discipline's curriculum in isolation from workplace and community involvement (Beckett & Hager 2002).

This inability of Arab faculties to direct human capital into the wider business community for the benefit of accelerated economic development is noted in several regional reports and conferences (UNESCO 1998 & 2003). Asserting the need for a close relationship between the university and workplaces is simple, but how that relationship might be formed and how students contribute to the relationship is unclear. Probing these issues is a focus for this research.

3.3 Mass Communications Studies

Mass communications describes the academic study of the various means by which information can be transferred to large segments of the population through mass media. Mass media denotes that section of the media specifically conceived and designed to reach a very large audience (typically at least as large as a country's population). The term was coined in the 1920s with the advent of nationwide radio networks and of mass-circulation newspapers and magazines. Lately, mass media refers to those organised means of dissemination of fact, opinion, entertainment, and other information.

When the social significance of a nation's mass media industry, as distinct from its economic contribution is examined, it is revealed as an indicator of the strength and effectiveness of national communication. Narayan, quoting Temple and Johnson (1998), suggests *the extent of mass communication maybe a good proxy for the strength of civic communities, as reflected in trust and membership of associations* (Narayan 1999 p.21). That is, the form of mass communications has both human capital and social capital dimensions and these are outlined in the following sections of this study courses and subsequently in the mass media labour market.

3.3.1 Mass Communications Education in GCC Countries

Earlier researchers, for example Abu-Arja (1984), determined that there were deficiencies in media training in Arab states, specifically a lack of well-qualified trainers and training facilities. Subsequent rapid expansion of educational facilities over the next decades, combined with Oman's high birth rate, did nothing to relieve the pressures of adequate program planning or sourcing qualified lecturers. The unmet challenge was confirmed considerably later by Kirat (2002), whose graduate participants from the United

Arab Emirates reported that they lacked training upon graduation, and had no access to upgrade their media skills after graduation. Rayan (1998) concurred, asserting that a major obstacle to the media curricula is that of language. Non-Arabic academics use interpreters in lectures and seminars, thus distorting communications and lacking subtlety in transferring information on constructs and reasoning, a process which weakens the education process.

One critical issue for media education in countries like Oman is the nature of the practical experience organised for students in mass media workplaces. In media education in Western countries, practical media training is of two distinct formats; on campus and at a workplace (Lowrey and Becker, 2001). For structured study, Spurgeon and O'Donnell (2003) relate theory to practice in media education using *learner-centred* approaches to *deliver employment outcomes to graduates*, whilst Burns (2003) recommends reflective teaching approaches to draw together theory and practice. Patching (2001) encourages media students to experience major events to apply practical theory to evolving situations.

The place of practical experience in media education in Oman is unclear. Al-Shaqsi (2004), discussed the arrangements that universities undertake with media organisations to give students work experience over the summer semester break. In general, the outcome from the practical component of their media courses was unsatisfactory. Supervisors in private companies who were allotted students as part of their duties were not trained in instruction, were not released from their other work duties to concentrate on transferring knowledge effectively, and did not receive remuneration for this undertaking. Further, summer is off-season in the industry and the media companies are not seeking journalistic initiatives, thus denying the students the chance to learn from experienced practitioners.

Al-Shaqsi (2004) also touched on a form of negative social capital (Portes 1998 pp.17-19) that is hampering university graduates in their sometimes tentative attempts at independence. Al-Shaqsi discusses the obstacles faced by Arab students in adjusting to a very different working environment that has been imposed on the Arab Gulf countries' culture over the last half-century and the absorption of economic, social and physical changes at different intensities and at different rates by families, tribes and countries. For example, although students learn of 'freedom of speech' as a theoretical construct which may or may not be plausible to them, upon reaching the workplace, they find that norms of *freedom of speech* relate to corporate norms, not necessarily to the 'freedom of speech' construct they learned. Portes' views of social controls exerted by a conservative society

that restrict individual freedoms may constrain a vigorous youth trying to break free of onerous bonds; however, this insight refers to Western values. In this study and discussed in s3.3.4, deeply imbedded values prevent Arab female students from participating in a range of media, particularly television and radio journalism.

3.3.2 Mass Communication Capital Accumulation

An objective of this study is to identify factors relating to MCD students' prospects for employment, that is, the human capital that the students are building. Therefore it is important to identify within their social environment indicators of economic growth to support employment expansion.

A study from the World Bank (Abdel Gadir Ali 2002 p.18) determined that the massive expansion in education in Arab countries during 1960-1985 did not translate into economic capital. The author commented: *it appears that there is surplus education in the Arab countries*, a conclusion that does not accord with the relationship between human capital and economic growth, but fits well with the concept of human risk capital (Kivinen & Ahola 1999). Abdel Gadir Ali (2002 p.19) cites economists discussing the variability of growth rates in Arab countries over the period: that whilst high mid-century, Arab growth slowed for the decades of the 1980s and 1990s at a time when theory predicts constant expansion due to the accumulation of human capital. A study of six Arab countries by El-Erian, Helbling and Page (1998) concurred, and the researchers speculate that this was due to the low quality of education and distortions in the labour market, including the issue of higher remuneration and working conditions for public sector employees. The superior public sector conditions in GCC countries falsely encouraged students, supported by their families, to enrol in tertiary courses suited to public sector employment, when in fact recruitment opportunities were declining rapidly (Ali 2002, p.19).

To test the impact of social arrangements on growth, Narayan (1999 p.21) reported on analysis of four social indicators: kinship, modernisation of outlook, the extent of mass communications, and the importance of an indigenous middle class. The findings are that all social variables examined, except outlook, have statistically significant relationships with growth, with a robust relationship between mass communications and growth. The extent of mass communication has a high correlation to the strength of social capital, in trust and in membership of associations. Arguably, the success of graduates from mass

communication programs in securing positions in the local media industry is an associated correlate.

3.3.3 Mass Communications Curricula Standards

In human capital terms, higher education curricula planning are crucial to bridging the gap between education and the workplace. At a Yemen media seminar in 1996, a perception of undue focus on theory in preparation of undergraduates for mass media jobs was raised and Al-Shaqsi (2004) identified the gap between the knowledge and skills, the human risk capital, of the mass communication students and that required by potential employers. Mass communication courses are considered too reliant on theory (Al-Zair 1984). Al-Jardi's (1993) criticism of the Kuwaiti media curriculum was forthright: academic standards were low, and the school lacked facilities and adequate resources, especially in media technology and English language media references. The researchers Al Hamoud and Al-Asker (2003) had similar findings for Saudi media education. The media students' experience is no different for Oman (Al-Rawwas 2002) where graduates were dissatisfied with the mass communications' curriculum and its focus on theory to the detriment of practice. These findings are crucial to an objective of this study, that is, *investigate the extent to which the skills and knowledge of the SQU MCD graduates meet the standards of Omani workplaces.*

An element of the above objective of the research statement is the admissions processes for mass communications candidates. Research shows that there is a commonality for student admissions throughout the Gulf area and indeed many Arab countries (Al Hamoud and Al-Asker 2003, Al-Hamoud 2004, Yacoub 2003). Student selection and admission procedures have been evaluated by Al Jardi (1993) with the media program at Kuwait University, and by Nabil Hadad (2002) at Yarmok University in Jordan. These researchers, nearly a decade apart, found that lack of rigour in the imposition of an appropriate standard of entry for students in mass communications courses affected the students' employability. Of particular concern were applicants' standards in Arabic and English languages, general knowledge of the media industry, and commitment to a media career.

The concern with course entry and academic standards, facilities and resources demonstrates an adherence to human capital conceptions of education and development. When the focus shifts to the participants – or potential participants – in media courses, the

human capital relationship with graduate employability is less emphatic. What becomes apparent is the social location of media course applicants; that is, attention shifts to social capital concerns with the relationship between families, communities and institutions such as universities. This impression is evident in the pattern of women's experiences in media courses and their eventual participation as workers in the mass communication industry.

3.3.4 Female Participation in Mass Communication Studies

The acquisition of social capital requires deliberate investment of economic and cultural resources, and social structures provide access to social capital that accumulates in groups: families, tribes and countries. Social capital is most likely to have a substantial role in the context of bounded communities in which people share a strong sense of common identity. Portes (1998 p.8) states that, while social capital benefits members of a group, it inevitably excludes others from participating. In this case, it is possible for women in a traditional society, and a particularly conservative tribe or family, to benefit from accrued social capital and yet to be excluded from benefits shared through the group; thus conforming to the group norms. From the individual's view, Portes continues, obligations to family and friends can restrict individual freedom and entrepreneurship. In these dense networks, as conformity to norms is imperative, there is a considerable cost to individual initiative, and a downward levelling effect can result. Social capital, as Portes remarked, *can have other, less desirable consequences* (ibid. p.15).

Tied in with the negative effects of social capital, there is economic discrimination against women in the GCC countries: a theme raised by Gallagher (2004) regarding women's lack of status in the media. Talhami (2004 p.40) concurs, arguing that the GCC countries' educational systems fail to produce an integrated workforce to end reliance on foreign labour, particularly the cultural issues that impinge on women's employment. Female university enrolment and equity matters are slow to gain momentum in the GCC countries' media education literature; hence there are few studies in this regard (Al-Dabbous 2002, Al-Rawwas and Nijim 2002, Kirat 2002). However, this job discrimination appears to be directed at GCC countries' female populations only, not to expatriate women in their workforces. Kirat (2002), studying conditions in the United Arab Emirates, found that 85 per cent of media practitioners in UAE at the time were expatriates, but also over 80 per cent of that expatriate group were women journalists. The researcher reported that there were adequate numbers of female students (although the majority were not nationals)

enrolled in mass communication courses at various universities throughout UAE, but an insignificant number join the UAE news organisations or work in media firms.

Addressing the issue of Arab women's miniscule contribution to the mass media industry is an issue for Omani policymakers, as part of Omanisation and as a means to women's financial independence. Women's equity is a contentious issue in the GGC, where countries are rapidly modernising and offering their citizens, male and female, greater freedom of choice. The Report of the Expert Group Meeting held in Beirut, Lebanon (ESCWA 2002) made reference to Arab women's economic advancement; particularly in regard to mass media, where female journalists could provide role models for Arab girls. As expected, conservatism is a major obstacle to a woman taking a high profile, either through her voice on radio or her image on television. This role dichotomy is a force against Omani females' graduation from SQU MCD. A rejection of media as a female career by traditionalist families was confirmed by Al-Rawwas and Nijim (2002), who found 84 per cent of their research participants had no family opposition to their work in the media profession, and the remainder had overcome opposition by convincing family members of the value of the occupation. However, Al-Rawwas and Nijim did not consider the educational aspect of Omani women's mass media entry, which is part of the framework of this study.

Al-Jazeera, in Qatar, is the benchmark for Arab women's presence in media, although executive roles for women were not in evidence when the television station started up in 1996. Sakr (ibid p.836) claims that *Al-Jazeera, like many other broadcasters worldwide, is said to select female presenters on visual rather than intellectual criteria.* But, Sakr continues, for women in the Arab world, a media presence relies not so much on statistics, but critical mass. Al-Jazeera, without the censorship of other public sector or compliant broadcasters, has a steady flow of articulate, professional women appearing as guests on panel debates. They gained airtime because of the broadcaster's policy to maximise its audience and because they were influential people with something to say on issues of importance to Arabs. *Critical mass in this case was (thus) linked to the further qualitative bonus of credibility* (ibid p.850).

Whilst Omani women graduates' success in attaining media work is not quantified, their futures are enriched through the knowledge and skills, however meagre, they received. As Sakr points out, they are in an excellent position to use these skills in Al-Jazeera panel-type discussions and to acquire future training as technology changes and

they become empowered to take up a greater presence in Arab society. The Women's Expo, established in 2005, is an example of the growing awareness, at least of Omani women's purchasing power, and in 2006 media companies were expected to compete to employ qualified women.

3.3.5 Summary of Mass Communication Studies

This study examines mass communications as a career path for Omanis; and the mass media industry as an example of the issues in job creation for Oman's policymakers. Human capital theory is applied to the former and social capital theory to the transition of graduates from the mass communication course to Oman's mass media industry.

Within the GCC domain, individuals studying to derive economic benefit, that is, human capital acquisition, are not acquiring the benefits that their considerable resource efforts should be delivering. This study's theme, qualified mass communications graduates and entry into the mass media industry, illustrates a distance between the skills and knowledge individuals display upon graduation, and their employability: the skills and knowledge required by mass media job specifications. Reflecting the wider experience of the Gulf countries, these factors operate against Oman gaining benefit from its substantial commitment to education as part of the Omanisation process and a commitment to human capital acquisition and eventual exploitation. They also highlight the risk that individuals assume with their expectations of a facilitated working life.

Similarly, principles of social capital theory may be operating against graduates from SQU's MCD. As products of a conservative religion, first-year MCD students display a lower level of trust similar to that derived from Putnam's example of the Catholic Church which imposes a hierarchical structure on society. Narayan (1999 p.22) cites La Porta et al, who found that countries with more dominant hierarchical religions have, *inter alia*, less efficient judiciaries, greater corruption, lower quality bureaucracies, and a lower importance of large firms in the economy, mass media in particular; thus a lower ability to create jobs.

Another social principle is a lack of cross-cutting ties. Narayan's theme (1999, p.1) applies in this study to the presence of high bonding social capital for students from strong family relationships, that is, the attitudes and values as well as the resources and opportunities crucial to youth; and weak bridging social capital from an inter-group inclusion they lack at this point of their development. University life goes some way to

addressing this; however, especially with female students, conservatism affects connectedness, or cross-cutting ties, between groups outside the primary network as a means to access resources and power outside the group (ibid p.9).

Thus there is a distance to be travelled between the conservatism of the mass communication graduates and their mass media jobs destinations; a very free-flowing environment of technology, *freedom of expression*, yet paradoxically encompassed in another bounded group typified by the work environment and corporate culture. This is partly a rite of passage from the child to the adult, yet, given Oman's recent entry into the world stage, a poignant one for Omanis and nationhood. That is, the question of the employability of graduates for SQU points to an underlying issue: employability in whose eyes? No investigation of graduate career outcomes is complete without consideration of the nature of industry and its labour market in which graduates seek to work.

3.4 Media: GCC and Oman

An objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which the skills and knowledge of the SQU MCD graduates meet the standards of Omani workplaces. This objective is therefore bound to the existence of a robust media industry, vital to the development of a modern state. Efficient communications channels such as television and radio broadcasting and the printed media inform and educate the population in a knowledge-based society. From Oman's renaissance in the 1970s, mass media have had an active role in national development informing Omani society and imparting Islamic values and cultural identity (Al-Marjan 1997, Al-Mashekhi 1996, Wheeler 2003).

3.4.1 Overview of Oman's Mass Media.

Oman's media consists of public sector broadcast facilities, private sector print media, and an emerging broadcast private sector. Media legislation to promote private broadcast utilisation was introduced in 2004 (during the initial stages of this study) and the first private television station, together with three private radio stations, were approved in October 2005. In April 2006, a second private television station was announced, focusing on youth, sport and social events (MEB Journal 2006). The government is also investing heavily in mass media, replacing and updating its television and radio infrastructure. The United States' Trade Representative reports that media imports are subject to censorship (Office of the U.S. Trade Representative 2005 p.458), although Oman and the US

concluded a Free Trade Agreement in 2005. Employability of future MCD graduates is enhanced by media expansion in the private sector, and by the public sector's new digital equipment, which could give opportunity to graduates who were trained in MCD's digital laboratories.

The Omani press is steadily growing and diversifying, with three Arabic language newspapers: *Oman Daily*, *Al Watan*, and *Al Shabiba* and three English language newspapers: *Oman Daily Observer*, *MiddleXpress*, *Times of Oman*, and *Oman Tribune*. The Oman Establishment for Press, News, Publication and Advertising (OEPNPA) is the largest independent media institution in the country, responsible for publishing the Arabic *Oman Daily* and the English language *Oman Daily Observer* newspapers, besides quarterly magazines such as *Nizwa*. The Oman Electronic Network, an internet website, was established in 1996 and the Oman Press Club, established in 1998, encourages social development, providing media training through lectures, seminars and workshops (Ministry of Information 2003 p.163).

Whilst literature on employability for SQU MCD's graduates is available, little research or statistics are available on organisational structures or employment patterns in media in Oman, or indeed, the Gulf countries. It is estimated that at the time of writing, less than two thousand jobs are available in Oman's media, but the structure of the job market is fragmented and expatriates fill many of these positions (see s3.4.3).

3.4.2 Arab Media Standards.

Arab media is frequently criticised for its structure, attitude and content. The Arab Media Forum 2006, (Mirza, 2006,) raised credibility issues for Arab media, with the majority owned directly or indirectly by governments. These discussions, despite their content, reflect well on the future for the Arab media, typified by the establishment of Omani Journalists Association in 2004 (Omanaccess.com 2006), with an official undertaking for journalistic freedom.

Omani society reflects the rule of politics and the economy by powerful families, elites and bureaucratic sub-classes. The emergence and growth of independent groups and associations is slow, but examples such as Al-Jazeera in Qatar and the Women's Expo in Oman may be the vanguard of an emerging civil society in the GCC countries which can undertake political reform. For Abootalebi (1998), democracy is possible not only when its

social requisites are present, but also when the state-society relationship is one of balanced power. Media development in GCC can be a catalyst.

3.4.3 Job Creation in Mass Media

Globalisation has a profound effect on this dynamic interaction between civil society and the government in the creation of jobs. The tendency of businesses, technologies, and philosophies to spread throughout the world has revolutionised professions, specialisations and work systems (ILO 2004, King & Kendall 2004) and the mass media industry is no exception. Graduates are employable only when the education policy makers and leaders understand the changing professional labour market and package skills and knowledge to meet the market's demands and when industry seeks to employ graduates. This issue relating to media graduates is the source of debate, typified by Hadad (2002) in the statement that job opportunities for media graduates are the greatest threat to the success of mass communication and journalism courses offered by universities and colleges.

There is little information available on statistics of the private sector media industry, grossed statistically with Transport, Storage and Communication and which together account for 4,613 employees in 2004, according to the Statistical Year Book, 2005 (Ministry of National Economy 2005). The Ministry of Information, which includes television and radio stations, accounts for 1143 employees in total (ibid). Thus it is likely that the media industry in Oman accounts for 2,000 or less positions at the time of writing, with possibly 1,000 in the target classifications that the MCD services with its graduates.

It is obvious that graduates prefer to work where they are provided with reasonable salary, job security and job fit to their specialisation. Employers especially from the private sector are reluctant to employ nationals as they have negative experiences of previously employed graduates (Al-Maskery, 1992; Sajwani, 1997; Yacoub, 2003). For instance, Sajwani, (1997) argues that private sector employers were not enthusiastic about providing training to those they employ, as young Omanis do not remain in a particular job and seek government employment.

Research in the Omani context suggest that only when the working conditions gap narrows between the sectors, will graduates consider the private sector (Al-Khaburi, 1998; Rayan, 1998). This point is clearly related to the intention of this research.

3.4.4 MCD Graduates' Knowledge and Job Skills

Mass communication is being transformed by rapid changes in technology, pressuring practitioners to speed adaptation and the academy to keep up with industry developments. (Geimann 2001 p.5)

Among several attributes graduates need for employment, technological and job related skills assist graduates' media employment prospects (Lowery & Becker, 2001), whilst it is educational institutions that deliver such knowledge-based standards (Beckett & Hager 2002, Dunne 1999). The evolving mass media technology in particular introduces new professions and jobs and replaces others, a fact that is belatedly realised by the higher education establishments. The Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) (2003) raises this in its debate that Arab media graduates lack technological, linguistic and communication skills. No research was identified on job searching skills, although access to these skills is readily available on the internet. In a study of Omani government's views on the topic, Rawwas (2002) states that the bureaucrats were dissatisfied at the standards displayed by MCD graduates. In 2004, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation concurred with the views that graduates' skills and knowledge did not meet the job specifications of the media industry [Al-Hamoud (2004) for Saudi Arabia and Al-Shaqsi (2004) for Oman].

To identify issues relating to the human capital theme of graduates' knowledge supply and the media industry's skills demands, both in the public and private sectors, SQU's Career Advisory Office held a workshop in 2002 for Omani media employers, policy makers, media students, graduates and SQU media academics to discuss issues relating to the employment of MCD graduates. Issues raised by the employers included:

- graduates' knowledge was highly theoretical and lacked the skills base required in job specifications, including fluency in official Arabic and in English languages
- graduates had not acquired basic job search skills, such as writing résumés or interview techniques.

The graduates agreed that they lacked language skills, especially in English and this was considered a priority for employment in the private sector (SQU - Career Advisory Office, 2002b).

English language research in the social capital literature is generally restricted to studies of the arrival of those for whom English is a second language into an English-speaking population. In this study, English is imposed on an Arabic-speaking population by a common language base for expatriates, who comprise 70 per cent of the work force, and by the necessary access for Omanis to an overwhelming worldwide information stream. The absence of research on the impact of English fluency on Arab populations is therefore regrettable, as a lack of fluency is a strong source of negative social capital, acting as a barrier to wider information-sharing. English language fluency, however, opens up a world of discourse and strongly supports social capital, particularly the dimension of bridging ties – weak bridging ties (s2.1.2) - through an individual's memberships in far wider social and professional groups than is possible with the traditional bonding social capital of the family and tribe (Portes 1998, Stone & Hughes 2001). The outcome is that higher education practices in Oman presume knowledge of basic English and exposure to the language bequeaths fluency on graduates through a kind of osmosis. It is not surprising, therefore, that research is necessary regarding social capital outcomes from the transition of undergraduates to employment, through, for example, the building of cross-cutting ties (Nayaran 1999) between strongly bonded groups.

3.5 Summary

This chapter discusses issues relating to the Arabic experience with creating capital, economic, human and social, drawing from the literature review at chapter two. It has a broad picture of the modern Sultanate of Oman and its economy and education systems. This leads to a discussion on the Omanisation policy, tracing its effects and the issues it raises through the education system and the public and private sectors. Higher educational input to Oman's stock of human capital is explored with relation to SQU and in particular the mass communication students, graduates and the wider audience of stakeholders. Elements of the research statement are then examined; the issues surrounding the skills and knowledge acquired as human capital by mass communications students, and the disconnect that emerges for job specifications in the mass media field of their future employment. The stock of human capital built by the university does not translate into employment for these graduates, challenging the view that investment in education enhances employment and economic growth.

The following chapters discuss the research methodology in detail (chapter 4), and the findings of the in-depth interviews structured to identify the primary causes of obstacles to graduate under-employment (chapter 5). The views of a wide range of survey participants from SQU MCD and its external stakeholders are systematically collected, differentiated and analysed to identify factors contributing to the graduates' lack of entry into the labour market. A further objective of this research is to determine and examine the SQU MCD course structures and processes and management's relationship and coordination with Omani employers.

Thus the findings from the literature reviews in chapters two and three are that the considerable resources being expended by the Gulf States on higher education are not fulfilling community expectations, as they are not translating into employment for graduates, nor do they provide direct economic development for their countries, and Oman is no exception. From these outcomes, employment of mass communication graduates' depends on the resolution of six issues:

- a disconnect between mass communications graduates' knowledge and mass media job specifications
- mass communications' curricula is deficient in areas of technology and language acquisition, particularly English, the lingua franca of the mass media industry
- mass communication programs focus on academic goals rather than the practical pursuit of employability for graduates
- there is insufficient social capital formation in the form of networking between the suppliers (education) of human capital and the proposed recipients (employers)
- there are currently no life-long learning resources to extend and update skills and knowledge and
- inadequate scope for work-based learning.

These six issues are the themes of the interview questions and the data analysis chapters of this thesis. The next chapter presents the methodology, sample and data analysis process to answer the research statement.

Chapter 4 Methodology and Research Design

The focus of this qualitative study is the question: what are the factors that impede the employment of Omani mass communications graduates? The goal of the research is to explore the extent to which a higher education system in a developing country satisfies the nation's labour market requirements, and community needs and expectations. Qualitative inquiry through interviews of the graduates and their stakeholders provides rich data for the research questions; inductive data analysis is applied within a theoretical and comparative framework of human capital and social capital for the research goal.

This chapter covers the research theoretical framework, research statement and qualitative research, data sources and data analysis process.

4.1 Theoretical Framework for Research

The objective of this chapter is to locate the study within its appropriate paradigm of research inquiry, that is, capital theory, and apply methodology to map the intersections of human capital/social capital in a specific educational setting. The subject of this qualitative study is the employment of graduates from the Mass Communications Department of Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. An examination of the perceived skills and knowledge gained by these graduates in their higher education system program and the extent to which this preparation and training meets labour market needs will open up the social and cultural basis of education in Oman.

Human capital theory is the theoretical starting point for the research. The expansion of the higher education system, and the resultant student graduation and employment are the principal processes associated with the role of education in human capital theory. However, a wider perspective of employability in an emerging labour market requires the inclusion in the research framework of the social relationships in which educational institutions and labour market are embedded: that is, of the interaction of social capital within human capital development. As an example, social capital's principle of weak or bridging ties, which characterises open societies (Nayaran 1999) may provide a richer basis for the explanation of the employment experience for the MCD's graduates than a purely human capital approach. Thus, the social entities, the structures and systems that contribute to capital formation in Oman play a strong role in this research. Through its

roles as policymaker, education provider and employer, government is the strongest contributor in a nation's capital formation, thus options to adapt higher educational policies in a developing country such as Oman require examination to satisfy a range of stakeholder outcomes with the ultimate aim of robust capital growth.

There is strong justification for a study embedded in human capital and social capital theory to be placed in the context of a developing country. This chapter draws out theoretical concepts from the structure of the study, highlighting its subjects' diversity and the richness of data available from the research methodology.

4.1.1 Comparison of Research Dimensions

There are two broad social science research methodologies, qualitative and quantitative; the critiques of one another reveal their characteristics. Quantitative researchers criticise qualitative researches in three main areas: First, qualitative research, they claim, argues that the subjective nature of qualitative research hinders the application of conventional standards of reliability and validity. Second, qualitative research has high time consumption requirements for data collection, analysis and interpretation. Finally, qualitative studies are frequently at risk of lacking anonymity, resulting in inevitable bias. Many social researchers assert that, unlike qualitative research which requires extensive verbal expression, quantitative research summarises its findings methodically through statistics, with results clearly presented in tables, or numerical forms (Haveman & Wolfe 2004 pp.5-6).

Nevertheless, qualitative research currently remains a popular social science methodology. Summed up as information gathered and presented in a manner that can be clearly comprehended, qualitative inquiry provides an inductive and exploratory methodology. The researcher focuses on subjects' experiences and interpretations of their environment. As quantitative researchers criticise qualitative researchers, a similar and robust exchange is continued by qualitative researchers against their colleagues. Faulting quantitative study factors, researchers (Guba & Lincoln 1994, Sarantakos 1993) nominate the following: that quantitative findings are overtly objective; that research participants' responses are removed from the context of their environment; that participants' reasoning is removed from the data; and quantitative research rejects drawing theory from data.

This research employs a qualitative research design for two reasons; the first resulting from the design of the research questions which seek an exploration of the

problem of the employability of the SQU mass communication graduates. The second reason is that the literature review, having identified that such an exploration defined the research data as the participants' perceptions and attitudes, oriented the study to qualitative, non-statistical methods. That is, the research has significance for the employment prospects of a specific population – SQU MCD graduates – but it will also point to possibilities that may apply to other graduates in like circumstances.

This work embraces qualitative research because of its adaptability. In qualitative inquiry, the data are participants' perceptions about their actions and the social systems and the environments in which they operate. This study relies on the interpretations that the interviewees bring to the question: why do MCD graduates face obstacles to their employment? Through these responses, rich data is available to draw out principles that meet the variables associated with human capital theory and social capital theory.

4.1.2 Study Perspectives

The methodology for this study is based on the connections between four propositions, derived from the research statement, objectives and the research questions:

- human capital and social capital, especially investment in education and social networks to build human resources and aid community development
- qualitative research methodology to achieve superior outcomes from the analysis
- semi-structured open-ended interviews as the appropriate instrument to acquire in-depth, rich, qualitative data, and finally
- outcomes relevant to both the theoretical structure of the thesis, and the research question, that is, the factors that impede MCD graduates' ability to work in their profession.

The qualitative research methodology selected is significant also in its capacity to provide insight into underlying influences leading to unemployment in circumstances such as the MCD graduates encounter. In its theoretical framework, the research is more complex than a simple employer demand/higher education supply model, however. While it does have the objective of reaching recommendations to satisfy Omani community and labour markets by encouraging the higher education establishments to participate more

successfully in the country's development, it has a research scope extending into Omani social relationships and cultural characteristics.

At this point, it is germane to note the rarity of qualitative research in the settings of human capital and social capital. Much of capital theory is derived from observations drawn from very different economic and social environments, including work from the World Bank (Woolcock & Narayan 2000) which focuses on primary education and poverty. This work breaks new ground, positioning itself in the higher education sector of a vigorous, developing economy.

4.2 Methodology Applications

For some time, Sultan Qaboos University Mass Communication Department graduates encountered employment difficulties in gaining access to their professions in the mass media industry in Oman. At the time of writing, most without work have been unemployed for over three years; further, some are working part time and underemployed, or they are employed in workplaces or in occupations unrelated to their education and career expectations.

This research examines the perceptions of the key participants and stakeholders in the education and employment of SQU MCD graduates to determine whether the knowledge and skills of new graduates meet the expectations of the public and private sectors on social and economic grounds.

4.2.1 Design Implications from the Literature Review

Typically, human capital theory argues that a key indicator for a nation's economic and social growth is the quality of its educational institutions and their ability to deliver work-based learning and skills development, that is, a high level of human capital, for its labour force (see s2.1.1). This observation is endorsed by Becker (1965), who adds that the higher the level of education provided to individuals, the stronger their relative positions are in the labour market; embodied in this study as Figure 2. To utilise these principles, the OECD recommended that developing nations adopt the use of policies incorporating human capital theory to achieve sustained national economic development and wellbeing (2001a, 2001b), a policy to which Oman has heavily subscribed.

In the case of the SQU MCD, the application of human capital theory does not appear to have met Omanisation expectations for the replacement of expatriate media workers by locally educated Omanis. The literature review assessment concludes that human capital theory, by itself, is unable to account for national development in a country such as Oman. For human capital development to be successful, Oman and similar countries should consider the application of social capital principles. That is, the provision of educational opportunity needs to be complemented by strategies, which build on and modify the bonding within social groups and the bridging ties between such groups.

In studying situations which contain both human capital and social capital relationships, a research methodology is required which allows for the uncovering of the nature of the experience by participants in educational institutions. This includes the nature of educational provision, expressed through curriculum and other formal course structures, and also through pedagogical strategies such as work-based learning which point to relationships between universities and workplaces. But research of this kind should also recognise that students, graduates, employers and policymakers are implicated in networks of social relationships which, according to social capital theory, affect the nature of students' participation in education and their success upon graduation in finding suitable employment.

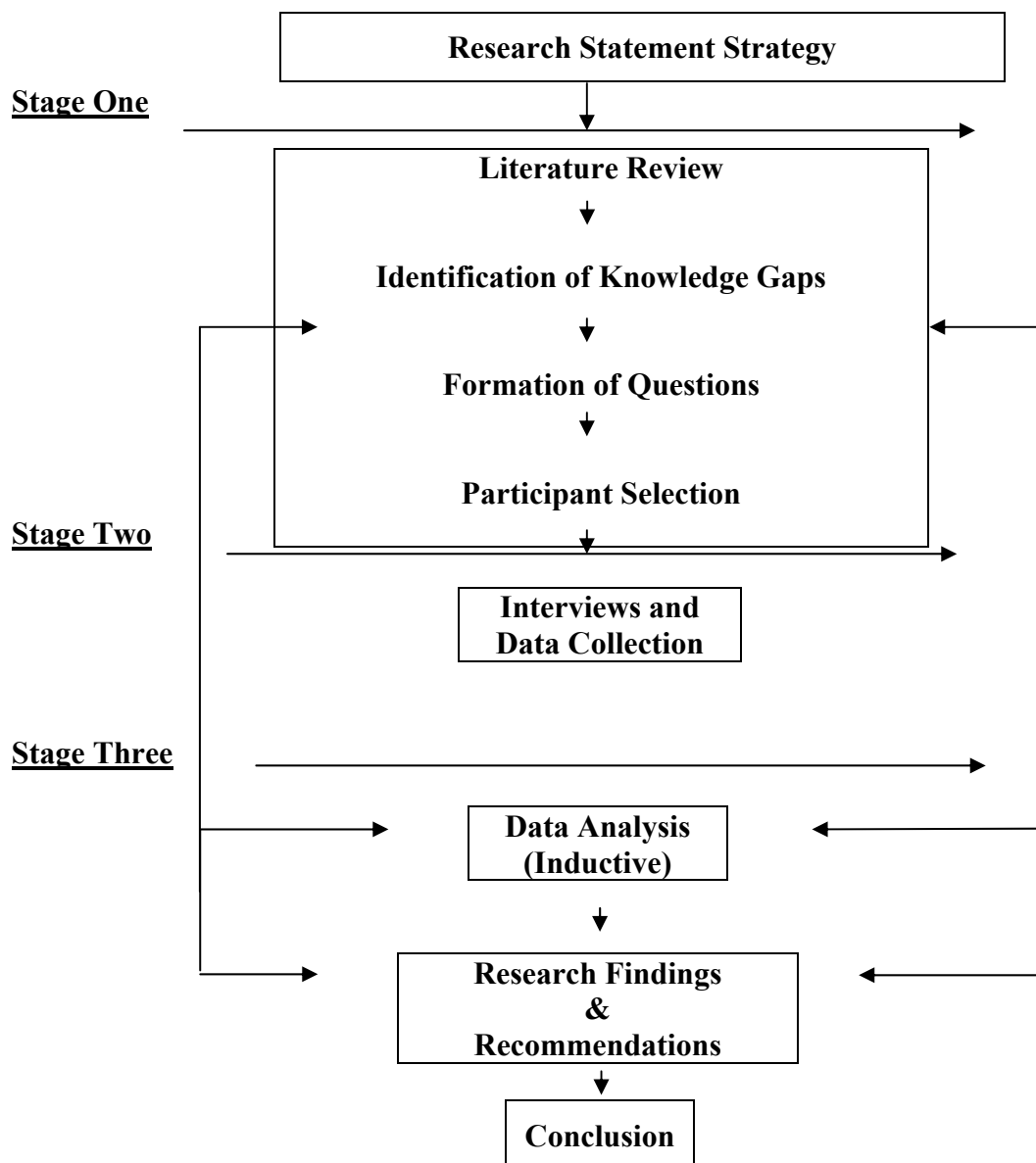
Whilst studies of the employment patterns of SQU mass communication graduates exist in small measures, published research on this topic is limited and focuses mainly on quantitative studies of the graduates' experiences and perceptions. This study intends to build on this restricted research base and investigate the factors forming the experiences and perceptions of both the graduates and stakeholders - those concerned with the graduates' experiences relating to education and employment. This thesis moves beyond existing research and identifies deeper causal human capital and social capital factors leading to the literature's findings of adverse educational and socioeconomic outcomes for current and future graduates.

This study recognises that the complex research domain provided by the integration of human capital and social capital frameworks means that the key stakeholders in the research extend beyond the direct university-workplace actors. The methodology therefore requires the inclusion of participants who can present the characteristics of Omani society and its cultural practices. In addition to graduates, university staff and employers, the

research includes parents and policymakers: the former giving a community-up perspective, the latter group a broader national view.

4.2.2 Methodology Design

While the conceptual framework for the research may be complex, the methodological design is relatively simple. As described in s4.1.3, the use of semi-structured interviews within a qualitative research paradigm (Patton 2002, Wengraf 2001) allows an exploration of multiple stakeholders' perceptions regarding the SQU MCD graduates' experiences in seeking employment. Accuracy and dependability of the data were therefore paramount considerations. A model to illustrate the research methodology, based on Miles and Huberman (1994 p.278), is shown at Figure 2.



Reference: Miles and Huberman, 1994

Figure 2
Design of Research Methodology

Before embarking on the study, the strategy for the research was planned, taking into account the following elements: appropriate sampling techniques, a pilot study, bias minimisation, data validation, and a thorough data review. As Figure 2, Design of Research Methodology, shows, the study comprised three stages. Stage one commenced when this researcher formulated the question *How do research participants perceive SQU Mass Communication graduates' employability in Oman?*

The first stage of the research process consists of literature review (chapters 2 and 3), knowledge gap identification, question formation and interview participant selection. For a methodology to extract data on perceptions of the study's participants regarding the employability of the SQU mass communication graduates, the literature was examined to identify previous studies for factors relating to graduate employment. This review led to establishing omissions in the extant studies' research questions and methodologies. It was at this point that the significance for the research of both human capital and social capital became evident. This preparation framed the research aims for this study and the construction of the semi-structured interview protocol for the data collection. The literature review also guided the selection of participants, including extending the concept of stakeholders to include Oman's socio-political environment. Not only may these influential stakeholders be considered to have crucial roles in the employment of SQU MCD graduates, their participation reflects the social capital interest in the research.

Stage two of the research methodology concentrates on the data collection process through semi-structured interviews. Stage three consists of data analysis, research findings and conclusion. The data analysis process in this stage is inductive, concentrating on constant comparison of the interviewees' experiences, perceptions and views, and their individual and group characteristics within the research statement. The rationale for choosing particular data sources is outlined in the following sections.

4.2.3 Sample Selection

This study follows a standard sampling procedure. After initial population identification (the SQU MCD students and graduates, and two stakeholder groups: those primarily concerned with the university's role including policymakers, and those primarily concerned with the students and graduates including employers), participants were selected by theoretical sampling, as they possessed the nominated characteristics this form of sampling requires. A purposeful sampling strategy provides the possibility for *information-rich* and *in-depth* data. Maximum variation sampling, a type of purposeful sampling as used in this study, is considered the most useful strategy for a qualitative naturalistic study (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The uniqueness of this research comes from its participants' background differentiation and their well-informed ability to address the research questions. In achieving their research goals in the study environment, previous researchers did not consider universities' role in satisfying community and labour market needs; nor

did they consider the need to include a variety of participant sources for the semi-structured interviewing revealing the social ties and trust relationships important in social capital formulations.

4.2.3.1 Categories of Participants Table 3 Interview Categories and Participants shows the nine categories of participants necessary for the diversity in opinion and experiences required within the research statement. The categories represent people who are either directly involved or have a considerable stake in the fortunes of SQU MCD graduates.

Table 3
Interview Categories and Participants

Category No.	Category Type	Number Interviewed
1.	Parents of unemployed SQU MCD graduates	4
2.	Employers from the private sector	4
3.	Employers from the public sector	4
4.	Government policymakers	5
5.	SQU MCD academics	8
6.	Unemployed SQU MCD graduates	15
7.	Employed SQU MCD graduates in private sector	4
8.	Employed SQU MCD graduates in public sector	4
9.	Fourth-year SQU MCD undergraduates	4
	TOTAL	52

As table 3 shows, representatives of the nine categories of participants were interviewed in this study. The objective behind this extensive and varied qualitative research sampling was to select information-rich or informative participants who could provide descriptive detail about the MCD graduate experience, or raise issues that contributed to the research statement and provide insight and views to enrich the study. Therefore, categories of stakeholders were selected for interview who could exhibit variations in assumptions, views and experiences and involve as many as possible of the

well-informed participants, as indicated by the literature, but whose opinions have not previously been sought in research. For example, parents were not used in previous research investigating university mass communication education and media graduates' employability, yet their input is crucial to careers in a traditionalist society. Private sector employers were not previously interviewed regarding their expectations for, and attitudes towards, the employability of SQU MCD graduates; and their views on the mass communications course. Inclusion of participants such as these, the researcher anticipated, opens up previously unexplored perspectives on the outcomes of higher education in Oman. In addition, SQU MCD academics in prior studies were not questioned regarding their views on the employability of their students or their opinions on quality issues arising from the MCD course. Policymakers in Oman control higher education through funding and direct administration, and government labour policies were not a factor in previous studies. Above all, unemployed graduates and fourth-year Omani mass communication students did not have input to previous studies regarding their perceived employability and reactions to SQU's media courses. A distinctive type of triangulation in qualitative research, as Denzin (1978) suggests, is the inclusion of multiple data sources. No research studying the employability of SQU MCD graduates used this range for sampling.

4.2.3.2 Selection of Category Participants. This study uses the following participant selection criteria:

1. willingness and the time to participate in the study
2. knowledge regarding MCD graduates' employment
3. interest in the issues leading to and resulting from graduate employment.

The rationale behind choosing this range of participants is summarised and described in Table 4.2 Rationale for Participant Selection below.

Table 4
Rationale for Participant Selection

Category No	Participants	Rationale
1.	Parents of unemployed graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish how parents contribute to MCD students' education and expectations • identify how parents influence MCD students in their career decisions • parents' views on their graduate children's unemployment
2.	Employers - private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • private sector media employment standards • establish MCD graduates' assumed preference for public sector employment
3.	Employers – public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish public sector media employment standards • identify relevant job vacancies in the public sector
4.	Public sector policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish policymakers perceptions on MCD graduates' employability • explore the category's role in improving graduate media employment prospects
5.	SQU MCD faculty members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish category's perceptions of mass communications curriculum content and standards • find their views on MCD graduates employability
6.	Unemployed SQU MCD graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discover this category's experiences in class and as unemployed job-seekers • request their views on future employment prospects in Oman
7.	Employed SQU MCD graduates in the public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish this category's means of gaining employment • request their views on working conditions in Oman's private sector media industry vis-à-vis the public sector media experience
8.	Employed SQU MCD graduates in the private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish this category's views on employment conditions in the private sector • consider their views regarding their employment experiences in the private sector
9.	Fourth-year SQU MCD undergraduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore their views regarding the mass communications curricula • views regarding the effect of MCD previous cohorts' unemployment on their studies • establish their views on future employment

Table 4 presents a general overview for the wide range of sampling sources and key informants. The procedure used to select participants varied from group to group. It was not possible to have a set timetable to interview people category by category, as participants were at liberty to choose the time and place to be interviewed and their choices were accommodated. The number of participants in each category was selected to best represent their sample weighting and for their knowledge of matters pertaining to the research questions. For example, the four employers chosen from the public sector recruited the greatest number of MCD graduates and they were therefore knowledgeable about issues arising regarding the level of skills and knowledge of recent MCD graduates and, according to research theory, were considered information rich. This also applied to the employers from the private sector. Fifteen unemployed graduates were interviewed to represent a range of annual MCD graduate cohorts.

Through the prism of this study, the data generously given by participants from these categories adds to the body of knowledge regarding the employability of graduates in global workplaces with their expectations for a high standard for graduate skills and competencies in the use of information and communications technology.

4.3 Data Collection

This research explores Oman's priority for future national income to flow from its current acquisition of human capital in its young population; that is, to replace its current, but dwindling, physical resources with human capital resources. This thesis posits that the direct linearity of human capital - that investments are made and economic returns follow - has not delivered the outcomes that Oman expects from its investment, nor will it receive investment returns without social capital policy change. These striking phenomena require qualitative research methodology, therefore, data collection through semi-structured interviews are considered to be the appropriate technique to answer the research question and meet this study's aims.

4.3.1 Interview Technique Review

A primary concern for this study was to establish a good rapport with interviewees to elicit high quality, empirical data, as participants may experience discomfort through both unfamiliarity with in-depth interview techniques, and the contentious nature of some of the issues. The researcher anticipated that the personal interview strategy used in the

research may be confronting to at least some of the participants, as social research is not common in Oman. As recommended by other qualitative researchers (Lincoln & Guba 1985 p.257), it was important for the researcher to gain trust for each individual's interview and to establish a good relationship quickly. The researcher's standard practice in this case was to inform participants of the interviewing protocols to encourage accuracy and completeness in their responses; through anonymity, for example, and by asking permission to record the interview, the latter readily given by all participants. Trust building commenced at an early stage in each interview and this level of confidence continued throughout each session. Further, amicable contact with the participants was maintained after the interviews in order to approve transcripts of interviews and to report back, if required, on the progress of this study.

Qualitative studies highlight the importance of data collection through a friendly, open interviewing technique (Wengraf 2001 p.5) noting that a secure relationship and a semi-structured interviewing technique provide an opportunity to obtain in-depth data. Structured interviews were not used, as the research questions require greater breadth and depth of data from the interviewing process to explore each individual's experience, reasoning and perceptions. Given the focus of this study, the researcher needed the freedom to probe issues raised in interviews, especially when more explanation appeared to be required. As noted, the exploration of participants' perceptions regarding MCD graduate employability is the reason for the researcher's choice of a qualitative methodology using semi-structured open-ended interviews.

4.3.2 Pilot Interviews

Pilot interviews were conducted before the study itself to test that the methodology would yield viable data, and to identify and rectify any inconsistencies before embarking on the main study data collection. In particular, it was important to discover any shortcomings in the design and administration of the interview questions and to assess the clarity and precision of the instructions. The pilot interviews trialled open-ended topics and identified how and when supplementary questions or prompts were required to ensure the depth, range and quality of information.

In this study, the intention was to conduct three pilot interviews, but only two were eventually held; one with an academic and the other with an employed graduate. The third pilot interview was planned for an unemployed graduate's parent but the graduate felt

uncomfortable when asked for permission to interview his parents, probably through unfamiliarity with the concept and this researcher. It became evident that it would not be an easy task to interview parents, partially due to the request being delivered by an intermediary. To meet the demand for a parental category, the intermediaries were advised to emphasise the value of parents' involvement in this research, which was ultimately designed to address issues faced by unemployed graduates. Thus, graduate intermediaries were approached at an early stage to explain the nature of the research to their parents and ask them to participate. Later, the first graduate agreed that his parents could be approached for an interview and this assisted the attainment of sufficient numbers of parent participants.

However, the student's initial lack of trust as described above draws in several other possibilities: parental/student relationships external to this study, parental attitudes to SQU in general or MCD in particular; or adverse relationships between the student and the faculty. The interview category of parents for this researcher was at the outset one of constrained engagement, with Oman's traditionalist social mores preventing a direct approach to parents for interviews. Thus, the level of interpersonal trust that a student derives from membership of the academic environment (Coleman et al. 1966) is filtered through the student's self-esteem and the level of family bonding that he or she can draw upon in this situation.

4.3.3 Interview Guide

On completion of the pilot interviews, it was possible to confirm the main questions that would frame the semi-structured interviews. The five main questions were deduced from the literature reviews. The semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix 1) provided a checklist to ensure that the question outlines and the information framework were maintained at a high standard for category and participant comparison. The interview guide, provided to each participant, also assisted the interviewees to organise their thoughts on the subject matter.

As a substantial proportion of the participants were expected to prefer Arabic for the interviews, the interview guide was translated into Arabic, and both English and Arabic guides were available. Two lecturers from the SQU Language Centre checked the English and Arabic versions of the interview guide to assure the consistency and clarity in translation (see 4.3.4.2 regarding similar process for the interview questions). Each

question in the guide was a starting point for a conversation in which this interviewer sought further detail through clarification and by additional probing questions when required. The use of this guide produced sufficiently systematic and comprehensive interview data to enable a high level of comparability of information for analysis.

4.3.4 Interviews

In August and September 2003, interviews were conducted in Oman with the 52 participants, representing the nine participant categories selected for the research (see Table 4.1 Interview Categories and Participants). These meetings, conducted at a time and place the respondent suggested, were approximately 60 minutes in duration. Many of the interviews took place on the Sultan Qaboos University campus: for SQU students, SQU MCD lecturers, and SQU management. Meetings with government policymakers and employers were conducted at their respective workplaces, and parents were interviewed at their homes. The process of the interviews was significantly enhanced by the participants' interest and willingness to be involved; especially gratifying with initial concerns by members of the parent category, as noted in 4.3.2.

4.3.4.1 Interviewing Issues: Females As a male researcher, my preference to interview women and parents in private was not culturally appropriate, as Islam does not encourage meetings of men and women in private and Arab women spend little time alone. Therefore, three female lecturers were nominated from the SQU Language Centre to help conduct interviews when any female participant requested to be interviewed by a female interviewer; a situation which would add a third party influence to this study. Prior to an interview, female participants were given the option of being interviewed by a woman. Fortunately, all female participants in this study agreed to be interviewed by this researcher. This implies trust between the researcher and the female participants, indicating that expected participant reluctance resulting from Oman's high bonding social capital environment was mitigated through this trust.

4.3.4.2 Interviewing Issues: Interpreter All interviews were conducted without an interpreter; as expected, Arabic was used. This entailed translating the English language research questions into forms that were linguistically and culturally relevant as well as a true and accurate translation of the English questionnaire. Similarly, the accurate translation of responses into a format which met the rigorous data analysis procedure of

this thesis provided further challenge (see 4.3.3 regarding translation of the interview guides for the participants).

4.3.4.3 Interview Technique As noted, open-ended questions were used to build upon answers and thus to explore complex issues related to Omani mass communication graduates' employability. The questions sought to explore factors relevant to the research questions by probing participants' experiences, views and reasoning, with further questioning eliciting concrete examples and deeper explanations of certain issues. The intention of this strategy was to compare and contrast recurring themes.

During the initial telephone contact with interviewees, this researcher introduced himself and the research topic. The majority of the participants expressed a desire to participate in this study, to the extent that some wished to be interviewed immediately. However, interviews of participants by category were planned to gather information from a range of category participants to add weight to technique and questioning for following interviews. As an example, discussions were undertaken with those from the unemployed graduates' category prior to the employer category, in order to widen interview topics with employers. This enriched the data and added depth and credibility to the research method.

Prior to an interview, each participant was provided with a research consent form explaining the purpose of the study. As noted above, participants were assured that confidentiality procedures were, and remain, in place; and permission to tape-record the interview was obtained in all cases. The participants were further assured of the erasure of responses when the research is completed. All interviews were conducted in the Arabic language, common to this researcher and all participants.

4.3.4.4 Testing Questions To further enrich the data and open new lines of enquiry, this researcher sought to test the impressions gained in earlier interviews and in different categories of stakeholders by using them as additional prompts in later meetings with participants (s.4.3.4.3). Within the context of human capital theory, the complexity of the cultural, organisational and educational conditions associated with the employment of the MCD graduates from SQU in Oman was expected to be revealed.

4.3.4.5 Tape-recording Interviewees' Contributions All participants agreed that the researcher could audio-tape the interviews. Two audio tape-recorders were used in case one failed to operate, an event which occurred twice. During the transcription stage, the

recorded tapes proved clear and the transcription process effective, preserving the sequences and conduct of the interviews.

In the interest of confidentiality, this researcher transcribed the interview tapes and then translated the transcriptions from Arabic to English, with the added advantage of greater absorption of the information: responses, nuances and side issues that arose. The Arabic versions of the anonymous transcripts were checked by the relevant participant and approved. To add validity to translations and transcriptions, three lecturers at the SQU Language Centre listened to three randomly chosen interview tapes (with names and references deleted) then read the translated and transcribed hard copies for comment. Their approvals of the translation and transcribing are at Appendix 2, Data Collection Transcribing and Translation. The transcripts were interpretatively coded into categories. The following section discusses the actual data analysis.

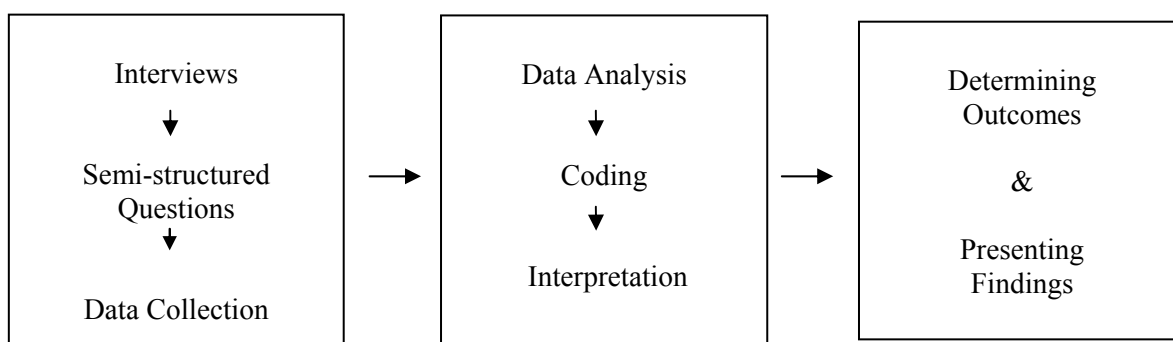
4.4 Data Analysis Process

To maximise the rigour of the process and the quality of findings, the analysis phase of the research received considerable attention. Effective data collection accompanied with good analysis led to valuable findings grounded in carefully selected and dependable views and perceptions of the research question by the study participants. Earlier discussion of the research methodology supported the selection of an inductive data analysis process for information gathered from semi-structured interviews (s4.1.2).

4.4.1 Data Analysis Framework

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, this research followed a systematic process to analyse 52 semi-structured interview transcripts. The process of data management and analysis was drawn from the dominant research paradigm (Miles & Huberman 1994, Thomas 2003). Data analysis was determined inductively through multiple readings of interview transcripts and multiple interpretations of data leading to findings connected to the research objectives. Findings thereby arose directly from analysis of raw data. This process enabled the development of classifications from the raw data which led to a model or a framework to capture key themes. Through multiple interpretations of the raw data, themes arose from the analysis for cross-checking. Relationships and links on a causal basis were also discovered between the responses from participants in different categories.

These multiple layers of analysis strengthened the research's dependability. Figure 3 Data Analysis Framework below shows the framework this research followed.



Source: Miles & Huberman (1994), Thomas (2003)

Figure 3
Data Analysis Framework

4.4.2 Coding Procedures

Following the transcription and translation of the interviews from Arabic into English, the Rich Text File version of the transcripts was merged with NVivo software. Prior to this, a hard copy was made of all the transcripts and saved via a backed-up digital copy as insurance against any unforeseen circumstances.

Using a word program to analyse the interviews, the data were first examined by topic selection. At this stage, core classifications emerged from the data, which required several scans to detect patterns, variations, and similarities in perceptions between groups of participants and within each group. This process of analysis also led to greater familiarity with the data, initiating a constant comparison process. Themes were presented in three steps:

1. initial impact stage to determine issue or issues creating an impact among participants as a whole, and also within each category of participants
2. conflict stage, to identify contrary issues occurring intragroup and/or intergroup
3. resolution stage, where the researcher established statements, suggestions or views regarding solutions pertaining to the research question.

An advanced data analysis process was then undertaken using the NVivo software, a process facilitated by the initial manual data analysis. Five main classifications (coding trees) were derived from the primary research questions. Later, it was decided to reduce the

core classifications into two main classifications (labour market needs and MCD curricula), each with sub-classifications (child nodes). The two core topics with their clustered themes have been discussed, each in a separate chapter, to explore this process comprehensively. Figure 4 Coding Outline below shows the clustering of the core categories and their sub-categories. The rationale is to show that employment can indeed be created by matching graduate skills to the labour market.

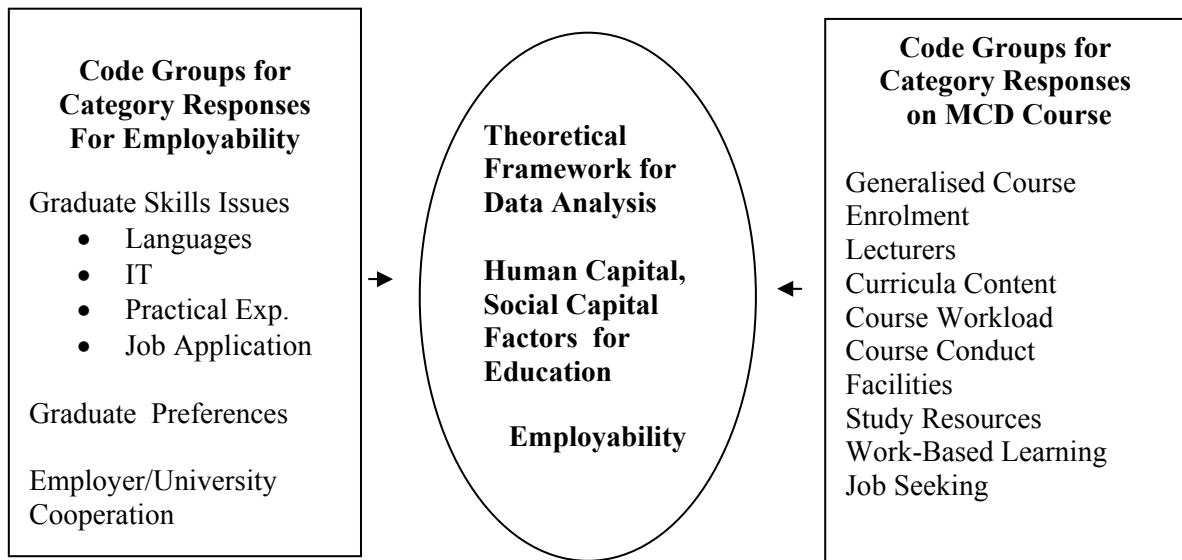


Figure 4
Coding Outline

Using NVivo software, data analysis management was facilitated through the interview guide – that is, asking all respondents the same five questions and adding probes. Codes related to key themes and issues across all respondents were grouped and clustered to support the cross-comparison stage in the analysis process. Preliminary drafts of related results were prepared and interviewee quotations selected. The participants’ responses not only provided positive or negative evidence for issues under query but also gave insights and explanations for secondary matters. Drafts of the analysis were reviewed and verified and thus there is a high degree of confidence in the data analysis and its interpretation. The following section expands on these factors.

4.5 Data Interpretation



Data interpretation was based on the research objectives outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Based on Figure 4, Coding Outline, there were two themes: the labour market

and the MCD educational system. Each has clustered sub-themes, all relating to the research statement; the skills and knowledge which lead to MCD graduates' employability in Oman's media industry which is analysed in chapter five. That chapter comprises interpretation of the theme's data, that is, the participants' responses and views on labour market issues. The second theme, the SQU MCD educational system, is analysed in chapter six, exploring participants' views on the mass communication department's educational program at Sultan Qaboos University.

For each theme, the combined views of each participant category were considered within the analysis model: initial impact, conflict and resolution; in order to describe and present the themes. The interpretation includes an objective for each class of questions within their classifications. Interpretive and comparative analyses are used to examine the views of each category of participant on the phenomenon under investigation. Conclusions were drawn from the participants' perceptions regarding each theme. Outcomes on these themes depended on first, the number of participants within each group who had positive or negative attitudes towards an issue, and then the number of interviewee categories where the majority of participants expressed similar views. An example of this analysis is taken from the statement *lack of female enrolment*. Using NVivo analysis, the number of positive or negative responses in a category was calculated. If, for instance, an academic said there was a lack of female enrolment, the responses of others from this category were examined to see if they shared this view. Finally, the full data set was then searched to build a generally held conclusion on the enrolment of women in the MCD course.

As discussed at s4.4.2, the interview transcripts were first subjected to a search tool to identify responses on recurring primary and secondary issues. Following manual coding, the second stage of the analysis using the NVivo software commenced. A transcript of each interview was prepared in Rich Text File (RTF) and loaded in the software for analysis. The inductive coding technique recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) was applied, that is: open coding, axial coding and finally selective coding. Table 5 Coding Procedures below describes the three procedures used in the analysis of the interview transcripts.

Table 5
Coding Procedures

Process	Action
Open coding	Studying the data and assigning codes (words – lines – paragraphs) Condensing data into categories allowing themes to surface
	
Axial coding	Studying the initial codes, attempting to identify the axis of key concepts Discovering interrelationships in the form of cause and consequence Underlying patterns of interaction, strategies, classes and concepts Clustering classes to make clear concepts and themes Testing through empirical evidence to identify major themes
	
Selective coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further refining themes by seeking evidence - Comparing themes - Expanding major themes in the context of the research statement

Source: Miles & Huberman 1984, Sarantakos 1993

4.5.1 Inductive Data Analysis

In this study, as in the dominant qualitative research paradigm, data analysis is inductive: the findings emerge from the data. The method of analysis is therefore an inductive analytical approach for developing concepts and insights from qualitative data. Although the aim in the data analysis process is to develop codes around the themes that emerge from the literature review, it is also important to identify other issues of significance to the research.

Table 6 General Inductive Approach is an overview of the data analysis process drawn from Thomas's (2003) outline and procedures of qualitative data analysis. This research builds on the following processes.

Table 6
General Inductive Approach

GIA	Aims and Objectives
GIA purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To allow the research findings to emerge from frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodology. • To condense raw data into a brief and summary format • To establish clear links between research objectives and summary findings from raw data • To develop a model or theory evident in the raw data
GIA assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis is determined by objectives and multiple reading and interpretation of the raw data • The primary mode of analysis is development of classifications from raw data to produce a model • The research findings result from multiple interpretations made from raw data • Different researchers are likely to produce findings which are not identical and which have non-overlapping components • Achieving credibility from comparison with previous research and feedback from study participants and users of research findings
GIA process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation and interpretation of data • Identification of issue/response segments • Relating segments to classes where relevant • Linking classes as causal sequences
GIA tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data cleaning • Observation of emerged classes • Overlapping coding texts • Refinement of category system
GIA coding classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labelling classes • Describing classes • Associating classes • Linking between classes • Modelling or theory building
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top-level classes are used as topics • Sub-headings used to further explain findings

Source: drawn from Thomas (2003)

4.5.2 Data Integrity and Validity

To satisfy the criteria for qualitative research through validity of data, reliability of method, and ability to generalise analyses, a high level of integrity was required for the data collection and analytical strategies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have discussed integrity in qualitative research, finding that triangulation, members' checks and purposive sampling generate confidence in the data collection and analysis stages. Triangulation consists of crosschecking data using multiple sources. In this research, the perceptions of participants were checked to gain deeper and clearer insights and to ensure that these insights were valid and could be generalised.

Data validity is defined as the degree to which a methodology measures that which it is intended to measure, using content validity, construct validity and criterion-related validity approaches to validate methodology. In this study, the researcher sought to record interviews accurately, provide an interview guide, be candid, and seek continuous feedback. The research statement was met through the use of interviewing as the data collection method, and enhanced by categorising the participants to establish validity.

Further, the cross-comparison of attitudes and perceptions of participants within each category and between the nine categories provided a triangulation supporting the validity of the data, and thus the analysis.

4.6 Summary

As described by the research design, the nature of this study is purely qualitative; it used semi-structured interviews as its data collection strategy. This research is unique in that it concentrated on a purposeful or theoretical sampling strategy by selecting a variety of information-rich and experienced key participants and interviewing 52 participants in nine categories. This project conducted an inductive data analysis strategy by using a cross-comparison system of data analysis for responses by interviewees from different sources to reach a maximum understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Using a strong theoretical framework of human capital and social capital theory in the context of a rapidly developing country, this chapter has drawn out the theoretical concepts from the structure of the study, highlighting its diversity of sources and the richness of data from its methodology.

In so doing, the analysis seeks to describe accurately a research framework that meets conditions through human capital theory and social capital theory dimensions. As discussed, events occurring through the establishment and collection of the data have met criteria which foreshadow the results of this study – for example, human capital principles of a direct connection between educational resources and employability are already compromised by attitudes set by bounded social capital precluding access to potential interviewees.

The next two chapters are devoted to analysing and presenting the data from the transcribed interview responses. In chapter 5, data relating to employment gateways for MCD graduates, concentrating on human and social capital theory, are analysed and findings reported. Chapter 6 analyses the data relevant to MCD educational system, generally within social capital principles, to elicit findings from the major themes.

Chapter 5 Data Analysis: Characteristics of MCD Course

This chapter inquires into the extent to which the problem faced by graduates in obtaining employment relates directly to the nature of the mass communications program at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). It seeks to identify how specific course features are explicable within a human capital framework in which the program enables students to acquire the knowledge and skills that make them employable in the media industry labour market in Oman. In that inquiry, however, the analysis considers the social capital significance of the SQU mass communication practices.

The four principal sections of this chapter comprise analyses of study participants' views of the purpose and functioning of the Mass Communications Department (MCD) graduate program; the curriculum; student intake procedures; student experiences within the program together with MCD's support for its graduates through lifelong learning. The first section, based on wide stakeholder ties to social capital theory principles, examines the expectations for the program held by the various stakeholder respondent categories. It then considers characteristics of MCD's graduate program as they variously affect the student body's future employment prospects. To this end, issues regarding the course raised by participants resulted in a matrix of views, even within participant categories. Section two examines the curriculum structure, the balances between theory and practice, between antecedence and forward planning, between globalisation and local issues. Again, there were strong views from participants whether the curriculum supported future employment for graduates. Section three is an analysis of responses on student selection processes and the pathways taken by graduates and undergraduates to join the MCD course, with emphasis on gender issues in a traditionalist environment. Participants' views on the quality of the academic program, its resources, faculty, course delivery and the university's attitude to the welfare of its graduates generated further robust opinion.

Research analysis concerns data extracted from questions based on dimensions of human capital theory and social capital theory; in this chapter as they relate to graduate employability. In chapter six, the implications for universities in emerging countries of issues arising from interactions with the economic and social environments they serve will be discussed.

5.1 MCD Graduate Program

Universities produce leaders for research, community service and business. The historical role for universities was, and is, research. This role is supported by transferring that gained knowledge to others, that is, a teaching and learning process. In the twenty-first century, these roles encompass many dimensions of interaction between academia and wider society, requiring a sharp focus on knowledge transfer to ensure the university is widely connected to non-academic partners and able to receive, develop, co-produce and transfer new concepts and their applications. To be effective, knowledge transfer activities should both shape and shadow universities' research and teaching priorities, and the institutions should be informed by active engagement with their social and economic environments (Bontis 2004, Altbach 1998). This study extends upon these concepts of knowledge transfer through discussion and recommendations drawn from qualitative data on processes and structures to facilitate the transition of graduates to mass media workplaces.

5.1.1 Study Basis

This study's research methodology, outlined in chapter 4, is based on open-ended and semi-structured interview techniques to identify the primary causes of obstacles to graduate under-employment for SQU mass communication graduates. The views of 52 participants in nine diverse categories from SQU MCD and its external stakeholders were obtained to identify factors contributing to the graduates' indifferent abilities to acquire jobs. The open-ended questions elicited responses from interviewees that required supporting probe questions to obtain rich and reliable data. The qualitative nature of the probes concerned issues of importance to the participant and enhanced the response to the prime question (Soroka 2002). Thus in this study, responses from the participants resulted in overlap between the structured questions and the unstructured probes, and between the question categories. Themes and sub-themes were therefore grouped from the responses rather than from the question structure itself.

Sultan Qaboos University's College of Arts and Social Sciences, as discussed in s3.2.1, is the major college in social sciences for Oman. As the entry to the media industry for its graduates, the Mass Communication Department is considered crucial to the development of Oman. In 2005, there were some 2200 students studying at the college, but the student cohorts' numbers for bachelor's degrees were unexpected, inasmuch as there

were far fewer in the first year than the later cohorts (364 first-year and 872 fourth-year: Ministry of National Economy 2005). To a large extent, the anomaly is explained by intake from other colleges of SQU at different times during the 2004/05 year. Within the college, the MCD's primary course, a bachelor's degree, comprised 75 undergraduates on average from 2002 - 2005, whilst about 24 graduated each year, 2004 and 2005 (Table 3.2). There is little statistical record of employment from these cohorts, but unemployment is very high. As Unemployed Graduate 1 remarked:

I can say that from each (cohort of) 33 or 34 students . . . only one, two or three found jobs and the rest are jobless. I've been unemployed for two years now.

As noted in the introduction, chapters 5 and 6 reporting on data analysis are structured on themes and sub themes elicited from questions and supporting probing questions of the study participants. A pervading theme for stakeholder opinion was the mass communication program itself. To analyse this theme, the following questions, apart from question 1, which is included for completeness, were considered:

- Q1: SQU College of Arts' Mass Communication Department graduates employability in Oman's public and/or private sectors (Graduates' employment prospects).
- Q2: Skills and knowledge required of SQU MCD graduates to gain employment (graduate skills' standards).
- Q3: Issues regarding transition from university to the workplace (graduates' job-seeking skills).
- Q4: Are graduates supported by the university through offers of further training? (increasing graduates' employability.)
- Q5: Are graduates prepared for Oman's media workplaces? (Work readiness and future learning opportunities.)

Respondents' views on the purpose and perceived intentions for the MCD program are presented at Table 7. The respondent categories for the questions are shown in the table, together with the results of the analysis of the theme.

Table 7
Respondents' Views on MCD Program

Question	Respondent Category	Findings
Q2: Graduate skills' standards	Graduates unemployed and undergraduates	MCD's shortcomings create graduate unemployment
	Faculty	MCD's intention is to introduce language classes to address students' fluency standards
Q3: Graduates' job-seeking skills	Graduate employees, private and public sectors	SQU requires better training for job-seeking skills, as Career Advisory Office (CAO) sessions theoretical and clash with lectures
	Faculty	Mixed response to stronger job-seeking skills focus, those who agree think it is CAO's responsibility MCD needs better relationships with CAO
	Graduates unemployed	MCD does not coordinate with CAO and CAO focuses its resources on other Colleges, eg at job exhibitions
Q4: Improving graduates' employability	Faculty	Universities are educational,, not vocational, institutions MCD is reviewing course structure to meet stakeholder demands
	Government policymakers	University is an educational establishment, not a vocational institute, views ranged from a focus on SQU's Career Advisory Office to a strategy for narrowing the gap between graduates' competencies and private sector jobs Private sector is not represented on the SQU Council, this should be reconsidered
	Employers, private sector	Regular conferences required between university and media industry to discuss trends, define skills needs, design curriculum Most large media employers have training centres, MCD should liaise on training matters MCD graduates are not at a standard for competitive job-hunting
	Graduate employees, private sector	The role of the university is to know the mass media market and supply its labour needs

Continued

Table 7
Respondents' Views on MCD Program (continued)

Question	Respondent Category	Findings
Q5: Work readiness and future learning opportunities	Faculty	University's role to educate students in mass communications to an international standard: job-seeking is not its focus
	Government policymakers	Policymakers role is to instill Oman's culture, identity and citizenship into students, particularly in a higher education environment The university develops knowledge of systems and competencies to meet future conditions, e.g. IT is developing rapidly
	All graduates and students	University focus is an educational institution, not for producing competent individuals The university system is not conducive to achievement of competent mass media graduates, MCD should be an independent college (single view)

The majority of respondent categories expressed opinions on the goals, structure and expected outcomes from SQU's mass communication program.

5.1.2 Conflicting Stakeholder Goals

As a category, academics from the faculty stated with varying emphases that the university's role is that of a research and educational establishment, not a vocational institution whose role is to produce skilled technicians (s3.2.3). As an example, a faculty interviewee said there was little value in teaching current technology content to a class – that the purpose of education is the higher-order knowledge of analysing and absorbing process and trends, and content absorption follows:

Practical experience can be gained during the (course) or after graduation but we cannot give theoretical instruction after graduation.. (If) the students are not given good theoretical knowledge in their area of specialisation they will never have it at a later stage (Academic 3)

Nevertheless, the mass communications course structure was under review by the faculty with the aim of introducing recognised professional streaming into the generalist media qualification: journalism and electronic publishing, broadcasting media, public relations and advertising; and strengthening course content in defined areas, for example languages, technology, and work experience. This review directly enhanced the human

capital responsibility for the university by addressing the acknowledged gap between the skills and knowledge bestowed on MCD graduates and job specifications for the mass media industry. However, this study's sample of final year students and graduates were not supported by MCD's future curriculum plans.

Government policymakers saw their role as that of inducing an educational environment in which citizenship, Omani culture and, particularly in higher education establishments, leadership is instilled in students. This conforms to a social capital philosophy to nurture in youth a desire for membership in Oman's community networks by providing a constant supply of skilled and knowledgeable graduates to act as future leaders and drivers for community-based organisations (civil society). However, there was some discord with this view, as described by one interviewee, as the means (the education process) being more important than the end (a useful degree). Policymaker 2 agreed with the faculty in that a university's role is to educate, not find jobs. However, the interviewee continued:

It is not (strictly necessary) for the university graduate to look for a job in his/her area of specialisation. . . It is known (throughout) the world that undergraduates can work in any (area) and the (professions) are for those who hold masters and PhDs (Policymaker 2)

The policymaker continued that graduates must gain general skills to enable them *to work anywhere*, producing a publication, *Graduates' Skills*, by way of proof.

The attitude of this policymaker interviewee reflected a discordance between the category's goal, that is, education is its own justification as it raises the general skills and knowledge of the next generation for the social good; to an opposing, human capital view, that education is part of an equation leading to individual and national benefit through the accumulation of wealth from business, that is, the workplace. For Oman, the distinction, and the route decided upon, could result in misdirected aims and thus higher capital risk.

The private sector employers' role in the educational process was articulated by this category as the recruitment of work-ready media employees; professionals, if possible, for specific job classifications. They professed firm views on the MCD program, noted in Table 5.1, on communication, resource availability and quality standards of graduates. Whilst SQU's Career Advisory Office initiated a day's conference in 2003 to explore issues and raise awareness for the mass communications course and its graduates, both faculty and corporate representatives admitted that this was insufficient time to consider

the implications of the human risk factors identified. Regular themed conferences were deemed necessary to discuss university/employer positions in regards to graduate employment and trends in the media, and to define skills needs and curriculum standards to meet the corporations' job specifications. Resources at the disposal of the conference parties, for example, include the university's improved technological facilities and the media corporations' in-house training facilities.

Students and graduates' opinions, as to be expected, were very much related to human capital theory – their role was to find an appropriate media job. They faced significant risk in their decision to undertake a four-year bachelor's degree course that unexpectedly did not lead to automatic employment in Oman's mass media industry. The view, particularly of the unemployed graduates' category, was that the shortcomings of the mass communication course created graduate unemployment:

When we joined this department we did not know that there were three mass communication unemployed (cohorts ahead of us) . . . We saw the depressed graduates in the college corridors and they told us their sad unemployment stories . . . Had we known this earlier we wouldn't have joined this department (Unemployed Graduate 4).

Graduates employed in the private sector in particular said that the role of the university was to know the mass media market and supply its labour needs, and in this role it had failed. One employed graduate (Public sector graduate 1) was critical of the theory subjects, and considered them largely irrelevant, as they were taken from mass communications curriculum of other countries such as Egypt or Jordan and as such did not focus on GCC issues. All graduates and undergraduates said the faculty considered the university an educational institution based on theory, and the mass communications course was therefore not focused on producing competent professionals.

The varying stances adopted by the interviewee categories in their response to questions for a study examining the impact of graduate unemployment in the mass media industry are important. Whilst there was a denial of unemployment from one academic, the majority of the 54 interviewees were firmly and often vocally convinced that unemployment was an outcome of the MCD course; in the graduates' view, an indictment of the course itself. However, the decision makers – policymakers and university faculty - were adamant that the university's educational role was not *vocational*; its role was to impart higher-order learning abilities to its students. Work flowed from a university degree, in their view, and training occurred at the workplace.

An important point is the nature of the mass media industry in Oman (s3.4). In 2003, the mass media employers' sectoral roles differed: the public service's electronic media served the country; the private sector's print media was profit-driven. However, both employer categories were moderately interested in recruiting skilled staff. Their shared response to MCD's skill standards on offer in the recent past, and reflected in interview, was either to ignore the graduates or express cordial sentiments for their future success.

The fourth-year students, graduates' parents and alumni categories' mutual interest concerned suitable work for MCD graduates in the Omani media industry. Graduates preferred the superior conditions and remuneration of the public sector, and the inferior standards it demanded. Preferences aside, many of the barriers faced by the unemployed were structural:

- the unemployed could not register with the public recruitment ministry if they were employed or registered with the private recruitment ministry
- the import of cheap, experienced, media expatriate professionals' numbers was largely uncontrolled
- The Omanisation Follow-up and Monitoring Committee misnamed a possible graduate job classification, public relations, as referring to customer service
- public sector employment conditions were perceived to be superior and not reflecting remuneration and benefits of the private sector Omani job market.

For an observer, the graduates and their parents may have unrealistic 'role' expectations; however, the paternalistic role taken in the past by the Oman government, together with its sudden policy change toward the private sector's job market, delivered the MCD graduates an unwelcome lesson into the vagaries of the job market, and thus to human capital risk.

5.1.3 Generalist Qualification

The graduates in this study received a generalist qualification, Bachelor of Mass Communications. The role for a university viewed differently by category participants at s5.1.2 describes the continuing shift for universities of enrolments away from traditional arts degrees to vocationally specific courses and highlights a challenge to the rationale of generalist degrees. As employers advertise job specifications for particular media

professions, study participants generally agreed that a lack of a specific media qualification was an obstacle to job-seeking graduates. In response to mounting pressure, however, the 2002 MCD academic plan moved toward greater specialisation to reflect the rapid change in the field of communications:

- journalism and electronic publishing
- broadcasting media
- public relations and advertising (Al-Hasani 2004, Sultan Qaboos University 2004).

Some faculty members, however, preferred the status quo. One academic (4) considered the content of the degree certificate as *just words on paper* and that, as such, the wording does not affect graduates' employment prospects. This was balanced by two other faculty members who stated that the lack of course streams, or specialisations, within the general degree course does affect a graduate's employment opportunities:

Yes, indeed, this is a problem because the MC is a general term and the (curriculum subjects) are general media and not specific . . . which in the end affects (the students') employment . . . To solve this problem, we suggested specific majors and have on graduates' certificates the exact specialisations . . . The problem will be solved automatically (Academic 5).

MCD provided some streaming of course content for vocational purposes in the later part of its generalist program and this attracted minor criticism from the graduate categories on the basis of relevance and quality. The mass media industry, they believed, was not confident with a generalised mass communications degree, as advertised positions including those of the public sector's new centralised recruitment process have job specifications stipulating certain skills and knowledge. This view complies with a study on online publishing, suggesting that the more specific the technology skill, the better it predicts job success (Lowrey & Becker 2001). Employers were adamant in their need for specific degree information and a private sector representative elaborated on this:

When we recruit a graduate we first look at the certificate and the major. If I want to employ, for example, a journalist, the graduate must be well qualified for the position. We do not want a graduate who has taken some general courses in journalism and other courses in television (Private Sector Employer 4).

The graduates and undergraduates, however, were vocal in their condemnation of a generalist qualification as being of little use when confronted by a sceptical job recruiter. Nevertheless, some were pragmatic regarding titles, as noted by Unemployed Graduate 8:

The students complained that they needed specific specialisations . . . in the mass communication department . . . I think the reason (the university) changed the title of our specialisation is that the department wanted to change its name from 'Journalism and Media' to 'Mass Communications'.

In summary, some survey respondents from the policy and faculty categories defended the generalist approach to qualifications, whilst respondents from the remaining categories demanded, and were receiving, a more directed, vocational approach. Higher education perhaps needs to reclaim ground by identifying the value of generalist degrees to employers (Tranter & Warn 2003, Knapper & Cropley 2000). Graduates not only acquire specialist knowledge, but in the course of their studies they develop generic competencies that are essential to the workplace. By focussing on the specific needs of the current workplace, according to Tranter and Warn's argument, higher education may fail to develop the capacity of graduates to adapt to a changing world and to shape the future for work proactively.

5.1.4 MCD Course Design

Whilst informed course design combined with effective tutor-student interaction is expected to contribute to good student performance (Toohey 1999), the faculty category were defensive regarding the course content. As discussed in findings at s5.1.2, there was discord among the MCD faculty and between the academics and the mass media industry categories on course design, and curriculum content (s5.2). On the one hand, citing the Careers Advisory Office workshop to promote the MCD course and identify employers' expectations, a faculty member reiterated that the curriculum should address the employers' needs and said that changes in the course structure were underway but that they required time to implement. A second faculty member agreed that the new structure was imminent, outlining new course streams of journalism, television and radio, public relations, and multimedia. The purpose of the workshop, the interviewee continued, was to introduce the changed course content to the media industry for feedback and information on graduate numbers and skills they required in future years:

We also need to know how many of these graduates will be absorbed in the labour market. . . if the labour market is not absorbing the general MC graduates now then how would it absorb future graduates in more specialised fields in mass communications? (Academic 4)

This information was of particular importance to the department, given that the industry was not absorbing graduates of the general mass communications degree. On the

other hand, another faculty member declared that non-academics could not contribute directly to the MCD curriculum as it was based on the best practice principles of well-recognised international universities.

Interviewees found the MCD course delivery to be traditional and of a discipline-based approach, and some criticised the course for its lack of a performance or systems-based methodology. The graduates and students reported that the course material often relied on reactive techniques, such as reading and rote-memory, rather than proactive learning, that is, by reasoning and questioning.

5.1.5 SQU's Departmental Responsibilities

Graduates' job-seeking skills were considered deficient by interviewees. This is relevant to the MCD program itself as all interviewees agreed that students required skills training, however, they held different views on how this assistance should be delivered. The alumni, including some existing faculty members, reported that the Career Advisory Office (CAO) did not offer suitable training in writing a CV, researching job prospects, approaching an employer, writing a job application, or interviewing techniques.

We did not know that there was a CAO in the university until the day of our graduation when they distributed their brochures (Unemployed Graduate 1).

In a way, the faculty concurred:

Yes, I think our graduates are given short courses or seminars at the CAO on how to search for a job, attend job interviews and write their CVs . . . It would help if the CAO made a more attractive colourful advertisement for its functions . . . better than just putting a black and white notice on the notice board which will not attract most of the students . . . CAO should coordinate with the lecturers and come to the lectures to have a five minute presentation on their seminars (Academic 2).

However, the policymaker category saw the problem as having a wider significance, as defined by Policymaker 5:

I think the Ministry of Manpower, the Ministry of Civil Service and the Careers Advisory Office at SQU must work together to give those job seekers these job searching techniques and skills.

The participants broadly accepted deficiencies in the MCD program, and to the credit of the policymakers and faculty, they identified responses and management techniques to address these issues.

5.1.6 Summary of MCD Program.

For individuals experiencing the continuing change process of undergraduate courses, program evolution is an accumulation to their human risk capital. MCD's fourth-year student category and the cohorts of graduates, both employed and unemployed, could not benefit from the future course restructure designed to meet partially evolving industry characteristics. Previous MCD graduate cohorts cannot re-enrol to gain benefits from upgraded technology, new course streams or refocused subjects such as language literacy levels. These lost opportunities were high on the interviewees' discussion agenda.

Whilst the participant categories responsible for delivering the program displayed enthusiasm to manage program deficiencies and raise curriculum standards, research findings militate against such minor efforts resulting in a sustained solution to graduates' unemployment. Researchers (Ali 2002, Al-Shaqsi 2004) find gaps between the knowledge and skills of Gulf Cooperation Council countries' media graduates and those required by potential employers. The media students' experience is no different for Oman (Al-Rawas 2002), where graduates are dissatisfied with curricula and a focus on theory to the detriment of practice.

5.2 MCD Curriculum

Like all universities, Sultan Qaboos University is subject to pressures for change; more so in the environment of Oman, with its dichotomy of traditionalism and modernity (Kirat 2002). The Mass Communications Department of the College of Arts and Social Sciences is perhaps at the forefront of the impact of this pressure. From a *process* perspective, it balances the university hierarchy's mission, vision and objectives with the human capital needs and the higher education experiences of its undergraduates and candidates. From a *performance* perspective, MCD operates in a highly visible media industry and, as its name implies, affects the day-to-day lives of Omanis, expatriates and beyond. The study participants responded to this performance aspect addressed through the curriculum's constant change process.

5.2.1 Curriculum Analysis

Data analysis for the curriculum content, following s5.1.1, is structured on themes elicited from the participants' responses to unstructured and semi-structured questions and

probes, rather than the questions supplied by the interviewer. To analyse this theme, the following questions were considered:

- Q1: SQU College of Arts' Mass Communication Department graduates employability in Oman's public and/or private sectors (Graduates' employment prospects)
- Q2: Skills and knowledge required of SQU MCD graduates to gain employment (graduate skills' standards).
- Q5: Are graduates prepared for Oman's media workplaces? (Work readiness and future learning opportunities.)

The views of the participants on the curriculum for the MCD program are presented at Table 8. The respondent categories which responded to the questions are shown in the table, together with the results of the analysis of the sub theme.

Table 8
Respondents' Views on MCD Curriculum

Question	Respondent Category	Findings
Q1: Graduate employment prospects	Graduate employees, public and private sectors	Considered low: lack of specialised streams
	Unemployed graduates	Considered low, lack of language and specialised streams
Q2: Graduates' skills standards	Unemployed graduates, students	Adversely affected by lack of practical training
	Employers, private sector	Graduates have a general media qualification lacking specific skill attainment
	Graduates' parents	Students need job-seeking skills course
Q5: Work readiness and future learning opportunities	Faculty	University is attending to MCD's lack of specialisation with themed majors offered from third year of mass communications course
	All graduates and students	Whilst practical training sessions can show a student's aptitude at a particular subject, this aspect is not pursued for future training by supervisors There is no interpersonal skills subject offered in the mass communications program and few Oman-related topics

Questions to interviewees on the MCD curriculum brought strong responses. For example, the employer categories, both public and private, challenged the curriculum and expressed the desire for input into future course planning by MCD.

5.2.2 Theory and Practical Training

The mass communications course was changing from the generalist bachelor's degree that until a decade ago delivered theory-grounded graduates automatically to Oman's public sector. As discussed in s5.1.4, the course content was changing to better address issues of employability for the country's nascent private media industry and for media-related work in other corporations.

The MCD program's balance between theory and practice was of importance to interviewees and the discussion was asserted upon the divergent goals of the participant categories (s5.1.2). Within a narrowed, category-based and somewhat self-serving view, the majority of participants found that theoretical input overwhelmed the practical aspects of the curriculum. Non-academic categories recommended a greater balance between the two and in some cases preferred the skill attainment, as some media professions require more practical skills than theoretical knowledge, an issue raised by researchers (Lowrey & Becker 2001, Spurgeon & O'Donnell 2003). With one exception, the academics believed the curriculum displayed an appropriate balance between theory and practice, with the 'dissenter' agreeing with the other categories (and denying such balance) and noting as an example that previous cohorts did not experience practical training until their final year – at the time of interviewing, practice-based curriculum subjects began in second year and some other subjects had practical credit hours. However, Academic 5 denied this assessment; there were practical aspects of credited courses, plus practice opportunities during semesters and during breaks for students' learning experiences.

However, as noted above (s5.1.6), there remained several cohorts of graduates who could not benefit from the belated change of direction to balance media knowledge with skills to make the course relevant to the employers. The graduates were vocal:

(1) In our final year we (had) practical training and I feel that there wasn't any attention given by the university and the employers for this aspect of the course... There was no particular follow-up from the university (to assess) our practical training (Unemployed Graduate 1).

(2) *As for follow-up and supervision of practical training; some of the lecturers stayed in the (organisation with us and followed our progress), while other lecturers sent the students for their practical training and did not follow-up (Private Sector Employee 1).*

All parents commented on the unpreparedness of students and graduates for the workplace, their lack of job skills brought about by an imbalance between theory and practical coursework. The public and private sector employers agreed, with a public sector employer of MCD graduates noting a further benefit of practical work. The organisation regularly employed MCD students over the summer break and this work was later counted as experience for employment purposes. However, the private sector category was not impressed by the summer break arrangements, due to the brevity of the assignment, lack of formal agreement with the university, and the fact that the summer season was considered off-peak and did not constitute an appropriate environment for trainees. They believed that the six weeks' student involvement in the workplace in the four years course did not constitute a work-ready status for graduates. Yet the organisation of one private sector interviewee had not been approached by MCD students for practical training, although they employed a number of MCD graduates – despite their varying levels of English fluency or literacy.

The students approached the organisations for summer jobs and practical experience generally through the intercession of the lecturers, who made the informal arrangements and, as noted, occasionally attended the workplace with a trainee, followed-up with the employer, or ignored the episode altogether. Once at a workplace, the employer nominated a person to supervise the trainee, but with no real direction from the university, there is no learning regime, just job tasks. Thus there was no report by the employer on the progress of the student (with one exception), and no credit toward the student's qualification except, as noted above, the intrinsic experience.

For the students, simply a chance to meet others in the workplace may have social capital significance, brought through weak ties of perhaps mutual interest or ambition and possibly built upon by the student with a new acquaintance after the work experience was finished. People move around from job to job and thus an ambitious graduate could become aware of opportunities either at the work experience firm or elsewhere. Graduates frequently mentioned the equivalent of *knocking on doors* (Private Sector Employee 2) but the extraneous activity of cultivating weak ties was not raised by the interviewees.

5.2.3 Curriculum Subjects

The curriculum subjects available to students were debated avidly throughout the interviews, especially by the university faculty, student and alumni categories. Parents and employers were also highly critical of the course topics, lack of relevance of some of the subjects to work-related skills and the little course credit devoted to practical training. The employers expressed interest in course material related to management and organisational courses, skills such as writing marketing and business material, and interpersonal and communications topics. The fourth-year students were not satisfied with their course: *Some of the mass communication subjects do not meet the market needs* (Student 2).

Unemployed graduates in general showed dissatisfaction with their curricula, as an interviewee pointed out:

I think the subjects in the curriculum are not organised on a priority basis (Unemployed Graduate 1).

Literacy was an issue high on the agenda with all categories, English and Arabic literacy having equal impact, followed by computer literacy (s6.2.3.2). The English language, as the lingua franca of the global economy, is a key to employment in the media industry (Rayan 1998, Al-Lamki 1998). Graduates' levels of literacy for both Arabic and English languages were of concern to all interviewee categories. From the faculty's perspective, formal Arabic and an adequate level of English were expected of candidates applying for the MCD course, but the mass communications' selection processes did not identify individuals for their literacy inadequacies. The experience for the majority of the graduates over these years was a curriculum that included introductory English, a few lectures in English and a translation course for media-specific English. The language skills issue, raised prior to and during the employers' workshop, prompted MCD to consider an introductory year of English and Arabic, taking the mass communications degree to five years.

. . . in the new project of specialisation . . . the first year is only languages. . . We start with the Arabic language first then the English language . . . The English language is in the second position because the problem we are facing is that our students are weak in their mother tongue (Academic 4)

Policymaker 1 voiced the general category opinion that it was necessary for media professionals to be confident and articulate: in English to reach an acceptable standard

when interviewing international visitors, and in Arabic for interviewing Gulf countries' officials and other persons of high standing.

The journalist must then transcribe the interview into the alternate language to meet the needs of Oman's dual-language media. To achieve this level of literacy for MCD graduates, the participant said, 25 per cent of mass communications subjects should be delivered in English. This percentage is debatable, as another participant nominated 70 per cent English delivery to meet employment standards for media-oriented English. The graduates produced anecdotal evidence of unfortunate events and experiences emanating from an insufficient grasp of both formal Arabic and English. Perhaps the most telling were those of an unemployed graduate who said that a personal standard of English at the beginning of the course had actually fallen at graduation, due to lack of practice; or of the student embarrassed whilst undertaking practical work in the private sector by a personal standard of formal Arabic. The language dilemma faced by the graduates and by default, also by their stakeholders, encapsulates the risk of human capital gain by the students, discussed more fully at chapter 7.

The participants offered examples of missing, irrelevant or misplaced course subjects. The issue of job-seeking skills discussed at s5.2.5 caused much debate, with the faculty and policymakers categories placing these matters as the Careers Advisory Office's responsibility, and the student and graduate groups claiming an inadequate and ill-timed service from the university. However, Academic 5 noted that other Colleges, such as Engineering and Commerce, offered their students a topic relating to workplace conditions and behaviour. Academic 6, on the other hand, nominated an existing MCD subject on media regulations and work-based behaviour. Further issues interviewees raised on the curriculum were a lack of subjects on Oman's media industry, and on information-related material such as military and police organisations. *Research Methods* and *Media and Behaviour* were examples of subjects misplaced in the final year which academics and graduates believed were better placed as introductory topics for the first year.

However, as Academic 3 observed:

We teach them the media (course) and we hardly have enough time to do so . . . We have an academic plan and a number of credit hours for each subject . . . If we add extra hours the students will complain.

5.2.4 MCD Curriculum Summary

The MCD curriculum was not of a standard that instilled enthusiasm into mass communications students. After four years' study, graduates were deficient in *their mother tongue*, Arabic, could not converse in English, lacked interviewing techniques and were unable to report on other disciplines, such as management or trade matters. Students had little initiative or will to learn as they did not seek out university resources (libraries, alternative laboratories or the Career Advisory Office). Arguably, and given allocation of departmental responsibility, students lacked a curriculum that included job-seeking skills, and graduates were fatalistic about their future careers. They were proficient in theory but had little practical experience.

Again, the conundrum is that the matter of qualifying for a job was allowed to extend to several cohorts of unemployable graduates. Interviewees reported constant change to curriculum titles, subjects, technology input. There appeared to be a watershed where public sector media employment all but ceased toward the end of the last decade and MCD graduate unemployment escalated from that time, irrespective of university policies and cosmetic updates. The theoretical nature of the 2003 – 2004 mass communications curriculum may reflect the public sector milieu where the twentieth century media graduate cohorts were bound for employment, unlike recent graduates.

5.3 Student Selection Procedures

By choosing a degree, students make a human capital investment that allows them to enter a specific career. Saks and Shore (2005) found education, health care, and engineering careers to have relatively safe streams of labour income; business, sales, and entertainment careers are more risky. The aspiring media professionals joining MCD reflect the human risk capital students employed entering MCD, a part of the arts or mass media industry. The students invested human capital in a qualification with a greater risk factor in its outcome than a traditional degree. However, education is free in Oman and the financial impost of four or five years of tertiary education to a student or a student's family does not apply, a factor that may initially serve to conceal the future hard fact of earning a living through that qualification.

For secondary school graduates who are attracted to the mass media industry, admission into the Mass Communication course, as could be expected, is a somewhat

automated process of Oman's education system. Those successfully completing secondary school are given three career choices and, based on their marks, they are placed in the SQU College corresponding to their first choice. The first year in the College of Arts and Social Sciences is a common year and at the end, students choose a specialisation, entry to which is dependent upon their final marks. This is a competitive process and they may not be enrolled in the department of their first choice, therefore there are direct enrolments to the MCD course based solely on marks attained. A second source is first-year students from other colleges of SQU who did not reach their course standard and took the option of remaining at university through a transfer to an Arts College course, including that of the mass communications department. Thirdly, at a university-wide mid-semester assessment, non-performing undergraduates similarly elect to remain at university and are placed in departments of the College of Arts and Social Sciences. These practices were criticised by the the Arab Human Development Report 2003 (*Building a Knowledge Society*) (s2.3), to the extent that the report considered higher education systems in Arab nations as lacking autonomy, focusing on quantity rather than quality of outcomes, and with poorly developed enrolment procedures.

5.3.1 Paths to Mass Communications Course

This analysis is using themes drawn from participants' responses to semi-structured questions and probes, in this case, the concerns of the interviewees for the selection procedures that the Arts and Social Sciences College uses to allocate students to the mass communications classes. The interviewees used the following questions for the observations supporting this theme:

- Q1: SQU College of Arts' Mass Communication Department graduates employability in Oman's public and/or private sectors (Graduates' employment prospects)
- Q2: SQU MCD graduates' skills and knowledge required for employment (Graduate skills' standards)

The views of the participants on the paths toward the MCD program are presented at Table 9. The interviewee categories responding to the questions are shown in the table, together with the results of the analysis of the sub theme.

Table 9
Respondents' Views on MCD Selection Procedures

Question	Respondent Category	Findings
Q1: Graduate employment prospects and Q2: Graduates' skills standards	Graduate employees, public and private sectors; students	Three employees reported they chose mass communications, but noted most of their cohort were transferred (not selected) One student reported a choice for mass communications
	Unemployed graduates	Three interviewees reported that they did not have any interest in mass media Four reported that they wanted a mass media career; one was warned there were no jobs Student selection was made on school results, there were no entry procedures for acceptance to the MC course
	Policymaker	College of Arts and Social Sciences alone among SQU's colleges used Arabic in lectures The low intake of female students was due to their reluctance for public appearances
	Faculty/academics	Whilst two academics said that most students elected to study mass communications, four mentioned that (most of) (50 per cent)* student intake included those from other colleges and/or those whose academic results were not good Transferred students were demotivated A formal selection process was urgently required, although insufficient students elected mass communications for such a system to be effective Few females applied for the MCD course

* Academic 5 said most of the mass communications students came from (transferred from) other colleges; Academic 6 said 50 per cent of MCD students were transferees.

In the views of the study participants, particularly the faculty and the unemployed graduates, the selection system for enrolment to MCD courses proved inadequate to the challenge of achieving an acceptable standard of student at intake and thus enhancing human capital for all class members. Generally, the interviewees knew that the MCD student intake frequently included those with lower secondary school results than some other SQU colleges commanded, and this was exacerbated by the absorption of yet others under probation from the other colleges, a possible attraction due to the fact that the Arts college uniquely (for SQU) delivered all its lectures in Arabic. MCD's faculty could not control admissions to the course because of these practices, and the academics expressed a collective desire for an admission process that included aptitude testing and interviewing of

MCD candidates to determine their suitability and enthusiasm for study in media programs:

There must be different acceptance intake conditions for the MCD . . . Among these conditions are the following: firstly, the desire, language skills, and examinations . . . We need to choose the best available (Academic 6)

The ad hoc enrolment system practised at the department was detrimental to student motivation, and particularly harmful to the students who had selected the course and won a placement. Thus the recipients of SQU's alternative student enrolment practices who eventually graduated did not impress potential employers, could not win job placements; and in their numbers, reflect badly on the MCD programs.

The imbalance between human capital and social capital outcomes, as discussed at s5.1.2, is again evident. Human risk capital is experienced by the students inasmuch as they could not expect a defined benefit from their future qualification, whilst an underlying factor of negative social capital was occurring due to the low status of the course, producing Portes' *downward levelling norms* (1998 p.15) for the students and a reflection on the university's status.

The faculty foresaw difficulties for the course and the qualification when a half of the undergraduates 'arrived' in the course with little knowledge of media and without incentive to learn. The employers' category claimed that student intake practices were sub-standard for a quality degree course. A private sector employer confirmed that disgruntled students who did graduate would not exhibit the qualities of professionalism that employers were seeking and would not succeed in finding work in this job market. As a potential employer, a government representative resolved to approach the university and request that employers' organisations were represented on the student selection panels *to have a say in selecting future media professionals*, thereby opening the possibility of particular kinds of relationships between the stakeholders: the weak ties of effective social capital.

Of the policymakers, only one agreed with the admission practices, surmising that the students' educational experience was the goal, not employment. However, the parents' category, and reports of their views from student and graduate categories, strongly underscored the belief that there was little media work available and the parents had advised against MCD enrolment. For many female students, this was exacerbated by cultural norms that raised barriers against media careers.

A private sector employee mentioned that there were no specific criteria for student selection and that the consensus was that half the existing students had no desire to work in media, but merely wanted to complete a degree for entry into the broader labour market at a professional level. This opinion reflects on the role for universities in higher education discussed at s5.1.2 and the sometimes contrary outcomes the public sector establishes attempting to build human capital for its citizenry. The probability was that a vocational qualification from a technical college would realise a well-paying job equal to, if not greater than the mass communications graduates, who paid the greatest price for their human risk capital and reported variously that they had been warned of a lack of media job opportunities, or that they had discovered this situation upon entry to the course.

Reflecting the majority of opinion on selection procedures, one unemployed graduate commenced in library studies and switched to mass communications, a move the graduate regrets. Similarly, another unemployed graduate, from Commerce, changed to Arts (against parental advice) and joined mass communications on the basis of good grades. As a counter to the prevailing response to unregulated entry into the mass communications course, a more laissez-faire approach to a media career was reported by a third unemployed graduate, who took time selecting a career. Having organised presentations and functions whilst at school, the graduate's attention moved from one possible career to another, *enjoying change and trying different things*, but, because of the initial interest in media-associated pursuits, the individual eventually joined MCD. For this graduate, journalism is now just a hobby. Yet a public sector employer believed there were ample jobs for committed graduates, but that the entry system to the MCD course functioned to exclude, by the department's implied status, those exceptional students it most needed to attract, a point echoing Academic 6's comment that *We need to choose the best* (candidates for the MC course) *available*. Again, Portes' (1998) downward levelling norms eroded social capital accumulation for the university.

5.3.1.1 Female MCD Selections An interviewee from the university executives and government policymakers' category drew attention to the lack of female enrolment in the mass communication program attributed, the participant believed, to a lack of job vacancies rather than lack of family support or for cultural reasons. However, in Portes' view (1998 p.8) women in a traditional society, whilst benefiting from accrued social capital, can be excluded from benefits shared through the group in order to conform to the group norms. This is borne out by Omani statistics; 8,365 Omani women were 'registered

only' for employment in the private sector with the Public Authority for Social Insurance for Private Industry, although 36,000 were registered and employed in the public sector (s3.1.2) and 51 per cent of graduates from SQU are women. Nevertheless, female enrolment in the MCD course maintained a low rate, fewer than 20 per cent of the class, and study participants attributed this to one or more of three reasons. First, cultural values affect the outlook of some parents, who do not wish their daughters to mix with men in a media workplace, preferring a women-oriented career (Talhami 2004); second is the fear of unemployment in the media market; and finally, workplace location affects many women, who prefer to remain within commuting distance of their homes.

The faculty group in particular expressed concern at this situation and its lack of resolution in the foreseeable future, believing that it is in the interests of the country to have good media role models for female children to encourage them into non-traditional career paths.

We are suffering a great social problem... We have few female entrants (to the MCD courses when) compared to the numbers of males... I think mainly it depends on the social environment of the students and their parents' education level.

The notion that it is in Oman's interest to encourage women into the media was shared by many interviewees, although as noted the issues ranged from traditionalism against women in a public role to lack of work. A contrary view emerged that if an individual was determined to enter the media field, he or she would overcome parental displeasure and approach MCD. One parent supported this view:

My daughter liked (the idea of being) a journalist when she was young and she used to take mikes and (imitate) journalists ... Gradually, this developed in her. I can say she had the motivation and the intention to be a journalist and as a result, she joined this specialisation. We did not stop her from joining this specialisation (Parent 2).

5.3.2 Summary of MC Course Intake

Whilst the stakeholder groups disliked the university enrolment and re-enrolment processes, considering them counterproductive to all MCD students, the students and unemployed graduates contemplated the time and resources they were devoting to a qualification that lacked status in a small media labour market; the human risk capital identified by Kivinen and Ahola (1999). That risk commenced with the failure of the university to protect the integrity of the MCD program with adequate admission

procedures, an issue raised by the Arab Human Development Report (UNDP 2003) and Arab commentators (Al Jardi 1993, Hadad 2002). When the underlying economic element of capital theory is employed, there is a high degree of inefficiency in the university's practices in moving its non-performing undergraduates from one discipline to another. If human capital theory is applied to this factor of misplaced effort on the part of the university and to the outcomes for graduates, its practice – it cannot be regarded as a policy – of reallocating underperforming students has inherent human risk capital for the individuals. Economic efficiency is denied, resources are wasted, and reputations are undermined for the university and its graduates. Human capital principles are not served because of a high probability of wastage and unemployment; nor, as discussed at s5.3.1, is there a direct beneficial effect attributable to social capital theory.

On the other hand, it may be argued that the university is indirectly following social capital principles with this practice, inasmuch as it is in fact training individuals, and this could be viewed as a lifelong learning goal (s2.2.1). The students, as individuals, are engaged in the dynamism of the campus and, whether or not as graduates they are employed in media or whether they undertake further study elsewhere to be employable, Oman itself is enriched by its citizens' knowledge and skills in this regard and the matter serves as positive outcome for social capital theory. If this argument is accepted, however, the university may reduce human capital risk by employing a selection process that removes unsuitable students from candidature for the MCD course.

5.4 MCD Course Student Experiences

Higher education should set the basic methods for self-directed learning and adapt to current demands, as well as strengthen and modernise adult education (Aspin & Chapman 2001). Faculty members, as deliverers of these aims, are considered a college's most important resource. Their research qualifications, vocational and professional experience affect program delivery and success (Ashworth & Harvey 1994). However, there are well-documented deficiencies in higher education planning and delivery in Arab states, a situation exacerbated by high birth rates and the continual need to source qualified lecturers (refer s3.1, Abu-Arja 1984, Kirat 2002).

5.4.1 Respondents' Views on Course Standards

This analysis uses themes drawn from participants' responses to interview questions and probes. This section examines sub-themes extracted from participants' views of the standards applied in the conduct of the course: performance of lecturers, standard of resources (facilities, technology and text) used for the course, and the students' preparation for the workplace and MCD's treatment of its alumni. The interviewees used all the study questions for their observations.

The views of the participants on the curriculum for the MCD program are presented at Table 10. The respondent categories for the questions are shown in the split table, together with the results of the analysis of the sub themes.

Table 10
Respondents' Views on MCD Course Standards

Question	Respondent Category	Findings
Lecturers		
Q1: Graduate employment prospects Q2: Graduates' skills standards Q3: Graduates' job-seeking skills Q4: Improving graduates' employability Q5: Work-readiness and future learning opportunities	Graduate employees, public and private sectors, students	Majority preferred new Omani lecturers who were more flexible and understood the students views Some lecturers did not verify practical training; often lecturers did not give feedback on assignments
	Unemployed graduates	Majority of students criticised lecturers' professionalism, many mentioned the new Omani lecturers whom they preferred Majority were critical of emphasis on theory and book-learning and the marking system based on students absorbing text Majority were critical of many lecturers favouritism, and lack of support and feedback; however there were examples of lecturers volunteering time and effort for students
	Parents	A mention that the course was too theoretical and not aligned to the workplace
	Faculty/academics	One agreed there should be more flexibility in imparting knowledge; that teaching style was important; that some lecturers were not professional (qualifications, language fluency) One said that students were responsible for their own learning; they should be punctual and diligent
	Policymakers	Majority said that lecturers need to be more professional and update their teaching styles (continued next section)

Table 10
Respondents' Views on MCD Course Standards (continued)

Question	Respondent Category	Findings
Resources: facilities, technology, printed media (text)		
Q1: Graduate employment prospects	Faculty/academics	Now have equipment equal to or better than the mass media industry and it is up to the students to master it
Q2: Graduates' skills standards	Policymakers	MCD facilities now world-class
Q3: Graduates' job-seeking skills Q4: Improving graduates' employability Q5: Work-readiness and future learning opportunities	Graduate employees, public and private sectors, unemployed graduates, students	<p>Varying responses on equipment and facilities such as studios and laboratories based on graduation date; not at industry standard before 2003, at industry standard later</p> <p>Negative comments on early usage of new facilities – no qualified trainers for the equipment, insufficient availability for practice</p> <p>Textbooks either arabic and decades out of date, or in english, requiring translation; books written by lecturers are sometimes the single source of information</p> <p>Arabic translations from other languages (old or new) are not relevant to gcc</p> <p>Lecturer style requires learning text by rote; no one gets a job by learning a book by heart (unemployed graduate 8)</p> <p>(continued next section)</p>

Table 10
Respondents' Views on MCD Course Standards (Continued)

Question	Respondent Category	Findings
Alumni issues		
Q1: Graduate employment prospects Q2: Graduates' skills standards Q3: Graduates' job-seeking skills	Unemployed graduates, graduate employees, public and private sectors, students	About half believed the university prepared them socially, culturally and educated them, reporting they underwent a maturation or citizenship process; substantial number viewed a lack of interpersonal relationship (communication) skills and non-course factors (family, school) as evidence to the contrary
Q4: Improving graduates' employability Q5: Work-readiness and future learning opportunities	Faculty/academics	Majority reported that the university supported the students holistically – culturally, socially and professionally Some feared that students were not self-sufficient to prepare them for competitive workplaces; subjects required on globalisation
	Policymakers	Majority view that Omani must become citizens of the world having their own culture and professionalism, merely working is not enough to develop the country; alternative view that SQU guards against unacceptable ideas and morals from other universities (Policymaker 3) Every graduate should possess skills such as positive thinking, solving problems, leadership, group work. . (Policymaker 2)

5.4.2 Lecturers

Lecturers are central to students' learning experiences. Biggs (1999) argues that *good teaching is getting most students to use the higher cognitive level processes that the more academic students use spontaneously* (p. 4). For MCD students, barriers to their human capital acquisition included lecturers' attributes, particularly their language constraints. Even when well qualified, expatriate academics who cannot speak Arabic must use interpreters in lectures and seminars, distorting communications and lacking subtlety in transferring information on constructs and reasoning, a process which weakens the education process (Al-Sulayti 2002). Al-Sulayti's finding confirmed an earlier work by Arden-Close (1999) that a major problem in Omani science lectures was the lecturers' lack of knowledge of Omani and Arabic culture and their inability to redress this deficiency.

Further constraints, frequently mentioned, were lecturing and teaching styles of variable effectiveness. Students' and graduates' perceptions of MCD faculty's knowledge-imparting styles were mixed. The practices of some lecturers promoted learning, as Unemployed Graduate 1 reported:

. . . it depends on the lecturer and how they present the content of the course. There were lecturers who did not follow a certain book, like a course we took called International Media . . . The lecturer used to give us a topic and we searched for references . . . We used to go to the ministries and the labour market to get information for our reports or try to find related items on the internet . . . We used to do presentations about those topics . . . We had debates.

Nevertheless, the traditionalist practices of rote learning from books and examinations on content rather than interpretation were continuing:

The MCD educational system has not changed, the lecturers depend on traditional teaching (Unemployed Graduates 3, 4, 9)

although

... some (Omani lecturers) are really good. (Unemployed graduates 3, 5, 9)

The *traditional teaching* issue is an interview theme for student experiences, as it underscores the change facing MCD's traditionalist culture absorbed from its environment, a matter discussed in chapter 7. The students and graduates reiterated the lack of engagement by lecturers for the welfare of some students, for dialogue and argument during lectures, for consistency in marking assignments and examinations, for critical analysis of the media, for English fluency in delivering lectures in that language. However, the participants were frequently positive regarding the emerging new generation of Omani lecturers. There was one comment on gender – that the last female lecturer was appointed in 1996.

Another issue regarding standards concerned the students' training on the new equipment in the MCD media laboratories. Two participants, a fourth-year student and a graduate public sector employee, commented on their technical training, one stating:

The trainers themselves needed training . . . on the operation of the equipment. We did not find them qualified or knowledgeable with this training (Unemployed Graduate 4).

Of concern to undergraduates were in-course assignments, usually submitted at the end of each semester. Partly because of the timing, lecturers did not give students feedback

on the assignments, and at times the work was not returned. An unemployed graduate (7) commented:

Actually, they never return our research assignments. Some of the students insist on getting feedback from the lecturers, but some (lecturers) refuse to return our research papers.

Another participant concurred: assignments were due and submitted ten days or less before the end of the semester, and the undergraduates assumed that their lecturers thus had insufficient time to assess thirty assignments effectively. A further contentious topic concerning assignments was a course subject, *Research Methods*, delivered in the last year of the course, thus successfully negating undergraduates' previous assignments' structures and content. As noted in s5.2 above, students showed dissatisfaction with the standards for curricula, that there was little priority given to the placement of subjects in the course, thus reflecting on their absorption of knowledge and their ability to build human capital in a coherent mass communications learning structure.

In an analysis of frequently conflicting data on lecturers' performances, the first observation is that mass communications faculty were sourced from diverse backgrounds, Omani, Arab or elsewhere. As such, they displayed a continuum of beliefs on methods of imparting knowledge, opposing attitudes (example: a holistic approach to students' development versus a book learning approach), different lecturing styles (conceptualising or rote learning) and certainly evinced variable levels of responsibility toward their students. Whilst such variety of backgrounds and styles may be salutary from a diversity viewpoint, the outcome is not desirable either for the university's social capital accumulation or its students for their human capital acquisition. The university has an image, an intrinsic quality, and its community expects high standards of procedure and outcomes from it – a form of civil society embedded in the country's social capital development. To illustrate this image, the policymakers were lyrical in their expectations for future Omani leaders, professionals and entrepreneurs in mass media whom they expect to embark from SQU's lecture halls.

In contradiction to society's expectations, all categories of participants criticised the mass communications course standards either directly or indirectly, and as noted, the faculty bore the brunt of the criticism. The traditional Arabic pedagogy is rote learning and governments are slowly moving away from iteration to cognitive development as extant education theory expands among the GCC countries. 'Older' lecturers, particularly in

youthful Oman, are steeped in Arab tradition and suspicious of the information explosion they experience. Another factor is language fluency and the Arts College lecture halls, as the remaining bastions of Arabic, attract the traditionalist lecturers. Thus, with the older lecturers and the 'new' Omani lecturers, students and graduates experience the country's crossover of cultures from tradition to globalisation, albeit containing imported traditions. However, the Omani lecturers were frequently recent alumni of the mass communications course, aware of the weaknesses in lecturing styles and addressing those issues; but perhaps less experienced in the *world of work* of the private sector mass media industry. Academic satisfaction directly affected students' approaches to structural learning and the cohorts thus accrued more human risk capital than they envisaged or which they could overcome.

5.4.3 Course Resources, Technology

College equipment must be fit for purpose, match the curriculum's criteria for the program specialisation, and be properly and frequently maintained. These resources should be accessible, regularly updated and available for students' use (Ashworth & Harvey 1994). The writers state that unsatisfactory curriculum delivery is frequently due to inadequate investment in equipment by the university (ibid, p.101). The corollary for this research is that such an investment was made by SQU to increase human capital outcomes for the country.

As a group, the category of faculty interviewees in this study was satisfied with the standard of their facilities, newly refurbished and upgraded. They said that SQU renovated the MCD studios and provided new digital media equipment, which gave access to similar resources as those in use by Oman's media industry. This situation was thus improved from that of the past, when media courses were run using outdated equipment. Nevertheless, one university executive (policymaker) questioned whether the level of technology that SQU now provided, updated at a cost of more than \$US1 000 000, was at that time available in the local media industry, and continued with the comment:

We know that providing a mass communication program is costly. Our aim is to prepare our graduates to be proficient and work effectively in any media establishment they join after graduation (Policymaker 1)

Ashworth and Harvey (1994) noted the value of students' views as both participants and clients of the educational process. In this light, the view of an employed

private sector graduate contributes to the discussion, comparing MCD equipment to that of the media industry:

The equipment (we used) was very old and did not match that of the media marketplace. We could not work on the employer's equipment because MCD's equipment was (analogue) and the employer's was digital.

The graduate categories were without recourse to the university to update their skills on the new equipment and their foregone opportunities relate to human risk capital, both during the learning (accumulation) phase and in a decreasing opportunity to compete for scarce jobs with sub-standard technology knowledge. Further, later cohorts using the equipment were at a disadvantage through the very newness of the technology. Although the majority of the unemployed graduates' category said that the MCD studios and the equipment were recently refurbished and updated to the latest (digital) technology, they were concerned about using the new training facilities:

We did not know how to use the new digital cameras. We benefited from the photography course for our personal use but we did not use this knowledge professionally.

To a regrettable extent, the experiences of the graduate cohorts trained on analogue media equipment in unrenovated studios and laboratories are replicated throughout tertiary education. Provision of resources of an adequate standard is the responsibility of the education provider, but unfortunately in the real world a perfect segue from one *best practice* to a subsequent *best practice* is rarely achieved. Methods used by universities to manage such disruption include deployment of students to other facilities or acquiring similar equipment for the interim, neither of which apparently occurred at MCD. This was a social capital commitment which the university mismanaged.

5.4.4 Course Resources, Texts

A consequence of the Arabic/English language duality issue for the mass communication course cohorts was its application to their print resources. The course itself is delivered in Arabic, including texts, yet the language of media is overwhelmingly English, a point frequently raised in the literature (Rayan 1998, Al-Lamki 1998). MCD's course material, including foreign language research papers, training material and electronic texts, therefore must be translated into Arabic. Thus there is a delay in translation of textbooks that then require republishing; and again a delay between academic journal availability and an Arabic translation, particularly if a reference has a sole

researcher seeking it. In mass media, such delays are crucial if they relate to media content and, in this study, the use of evolving technology.

The student and alumni categories concurred that delays in translation and reprinting affected the learning process, reporting that assigned textbooks were dated and lacking in relevance. An unemployed graduate (6) summarised: *I think our curriculum has not been changed since the establishment of the mass communication department.* Interestingly, as noted by the student and graduate cohorts, the translated material was inherently difficult, related to Western culture concepts, jargon and acronyms, and non-Arab examples.

In summary, the adequacy of facilities and technological resources encountered during the four or five years of the graduates' tertiary education, is a valid element of undergraduates' human risk. However, to a great extent, tertiary education is text-delivered, either by printed media or by screen. English is the language of mass media, and indifferent English literacy – and fluency – accounts for an obstruction to the accumulation of human capital for the students and alumni of MCD.

5.4.5 Alumni Issues

The overview of life-long learning and workplace competency was encapsulated by the policymaker group: higher education builds leaders for Oman's social and economic development. The unemployment aspect is new in Oman and points to the need for administrative adjustment, not necessarily structural adjustment. However, employment, particularly in the private sector targeted by government to absorb the outflow of graduates, is highly competitive. The policymaker group recognises that graduate Omanis are not replacing unqualified Omanis or qualified expatriates in the important field of mass media. This result reflects in an underlying objective of this thesis – that the MCD graduates' predicament exposes a fundamental discordance between higher education and employment for emerging countries that requires continual maintenance.

The academics responded to the question of life-long learning in a somewhat defensive manner – that universities educate, develop an individual, and impart knowledge sufficient to absorb future workplace skills. They are in fact maintaining their curriculum toward this vision. Employers took the other view: the graduates were substandard to the industry job specifications and new recruits required greater resources to make them productive than the employers' respective organisations were prepared to invest. All

admitted that the students lacked confidence and initiative and sought the assumed safe haven of public employment. This reaction to the environment of change may be seen as the graduates' voluntary withdrawal from the job-seeking process as a result of no academic acquisition – or not wanting to possess – the communication strategies which high levels of social capital bestow.

The student and graduate categories had a long litany of purported injustices received at the hands of the university that led the majority to a less than optimal employment status, ironically, a lesson itself in the process of individual maturation. This rite of passage is inevitable, despite the reported prevalence of *wasta*, or nepotism, and the manner by which an individual accepts and adjusts to a new world-view leads to the position that s/he eventually takes in Oman's society, that is, the levels of human and social capital accumulated by the country through the higher education process. However, probe questions for graduates on maturation frequently elicited a balanced response. A private sector employee (4) acknowledged the need for independence in graduates, but that some curriculum adjustment would assist:

I think human resource courses such as communicating with others and self-trust and being independent are very important for the mass communication students

A private sector employee, commenting on lifelong learning, perhaps summed up the university's opportunity for a future social capital return on its investments in its graduates:

I also want to say that there were some distinguished students and once they graduated the university forgot them. I hope the university keeps in touch with its graduates and I think it's the role of the Careers Advisory Office. I hope this office will enhance its role . . . and bring the university graduates closer to the university (Private Sector Employee 2).

5.5 Summary

In this case, a research conclusion that Oman's social and economic capital is undergoing dramatic development, illustrated by the continual change and sub-optimal academic conditions experienced by mass communications' cohorts, is qualified by the nature of that change:

- the mass communications course structure was previously aligned to the supply of media graduates to the policy-based public sector; thus it was modified to

include more practical training and align graduates' skills and knowledge towards the private sector

- the previous cohorts' curriculum used highly antecedent-based theory, again perhaps to fit public sector criteria; current curriculum is adapting towards information technology theory and, importantly, private sector practice
- for recruitment to SQU, lecturers' credentials met high moral standards before performance standards; lecturer availability and arguably fluency in Arabic are then considered before qualifications and experience, and thus lecturer performance
- technology resources for the course were subject to availability; text resources, including screen-based text, are subject to the lingua franca of English and in this study constituted a substantial barrier to the alumni's human capital.

Analysis of interviewees' transcripts exposes a near unanimous opinion that graduates from the mass communications department of SQU cannot obtain work in Oman in their profession, the media industry. From that finding, views, opinions and statements diverge, generally along the interface between the supplier of services (academics and policymakers) and the consumer stakeholders. On the one hand, the service providers maintain that employability is either equal to or subservient to the higher responsibility of the university to impart *a love of learning* and to give graduates the foundation to understand and pursue knowledge. However, this laudable aim is not supported in the varying opinions of provider groups. MCD lacks a coherent culture and cannot provide support for graduates through an offer of continuous lifelong learning. On the other hand, the 'user' groups' opinions are quite uniform: the mass communications students worked to attain a professional qualification that would allow them to pursue a career in media and their standards at graduation fell short of the labour market's requirements.

Issues regarding graduate unemployment, the focus of this study, began with student admissions to the course. MCD's faculty could not control student intake to the course, and this was a matter of frustration for them and many of the other study participants. The consequential lack of engagement in mass communications felt by many of the students proved counterproductive, both to those that were disengaged and to the students who had selected the course as entry to a professional career and had won a placement. Another issue affecting admissions was the low number of female students,

maintained at fewer than 20 per cent, in a course that can be argued as a popular career for women in more developed countries. This was viewed by participants as an outcome of one or more of the following issues: cultural values held by Omani women, including the fear of unemployment (for example, as a journalist) or substantial travel (as a journalist). The human risk capital identified by Kivinen and Ahola (1999) and which forms part of this study's model at Figure 5 (Human Capital and Social Capital in Developing Countries: Determinants and Outcomes Measures) was further affected by the time and the resources students were devoting to a qualification for a small media labour market, a greater risk factor in its outcome than that of a traditional degree. Economic efficiency is denied, resources are wasted, and reputations are undermined for the university and its graduates. Human capital principles are not served because of a high probability of wastage and unemployment.

The next issue was the discord raised within and between study categories on mass communications course design and curriculum content. This was in part referring to prior course structures aligned to public sector employment and, at the time of the interviews, course changes to meet the private sector media industry. Graduates and students accepted the quality of their lecturers, with some reservations. However, traditional lecturing styles and dated material exacerbated a lack of communication in the mass communication course; and although the new technology at MCD is often associated with productivity, such change has yet to prove itself with rising levels of skills. The practical component of the course was an issue that had been addressed by the MCD faculty, and this again was at the core of much of the discussion. *Practical setting* was established as a non-credit, elective six weeks' job experience component of the course, facilitated to varying degrees by some faculty members. The faculty generally maintained that there was sufficient opportunity for workplace experience for students. However, it was made clear by employer categories, parents, graduates and students, and some members of the remaining categories, that work experience establishes knowledge and adds another dimension to the learning process, gives students the social experience of working in a team, acts as an indicator of skills and commitment to an employer, and is a useful addition to a resume. Unsurprisingly, work practice and work experience were to be given an increased presence in the new curriculum. The faculty majority did not countenance vocational topics for the course, such as resume writing and job seeking.

This chapter of data analysis explores participants' views regarding the Mass Communication Department educational system at Sultan Qaboos University. The conclusion is that participants generally perceived that MCD did not meet the expectations of graduates, employers, university executives/government policymakers or parents. There was a greater investment by the university in physical resources rather than meeting the principles of human capital and social capital and this focus is a fundamental reason why MCD graduates face employment difficulties.

The following chapter moves from this focus on the characteristics of SQU's mass communications department and turns to explore the structural relationships between SQU and its environment, including the outcomes for the graduates as SQU deposits them in an unwilling social and business environment. The following chapter, whilst following the study framework for interview analysis, seeks grounding in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2003) *Responding to Globalization: Skill Formation and Unemployment Reduction Policies*.

Chapter 6 Data Analysis: Elements of Graduate Employment

Graduate employment is directly related to the nature of SQU's mass communications program; it enables students to acquire the knowledge and skills for the media industry labour market in Oman. The research findings, discussed in the previous chapter, are that despite the university's large investment in physical resources, MCD did not meet the expectations of the study participants. This reflects extant literature, where human capital is embedded in social capital, and the absence of social capital perspectives strongly affect human capital theory functions (Stone & Hughes 2001 & 2002; World Bank 1998). Further attention by the university to the principles of human capital and social capital is necessary to mitigate the dismal employment prospects for future cohorts of graduates.

This chapter examines the views of the study participants regarding causes for dislocation between the supply of skilled mass communication graduates at SQU and the demand for skilled mass media professionals. As chapter 5 considered the characteristics of Sultan Qaboos University's mass communications course in light of graduate employability, the context now shifts from the supply of graduates, to use capital terminology, to the demand of the mass media industry for skilled labour - in particular, SQU skilled labour. From the perspective of human capital theory, associated with social capital theory, the data analysis in this chapter explores the extent to which the MCD academic program meets the needs and expectations of the students, their parents, prospective employers and the wider community. Central to this chapter's analysis are national structural elements impacting employment: Omani culture, the government policy of Omanisation, *wasta* (nepotism) and the nature of the job market. These factors open up to examination the role of social capital in the development of the country.

The research for this chapter is divided into three sections, each of which analyses a sub theme identified from responses from interviewees. Section one examines employment prospects in mass media, noting graduates' sector preference as a contributing factor; and influences on the job market of a social capital nature, including Omanisation and *wasta*. Section two reports on the outcomes of the MCD program grounded in human capital theory. Whilst the mass communication course inputs are acknowledged in chapter 5 as changing and variable, study participants in this chapter consider the results in terms of

graduates' competencies and work readiness; in particular, language fluency, information use and communication technology, and the transition from university to the workplace. The analysis establishes the extent to which the MCD program is considered by participants as relevant to the media labour market to which its graduates are directed. The third section explores views on improving communications between the university, government and the mass media industry, and the means to improve graduates' human capital and reduce risk.

6.1 Employment in Oman's Media

Oman is a media-oriented country, having the highest number of televisions per head of population among Arab countries. As part of the Ministry of Information, which has achieved over 90 per cent Omanisation, Oman Television trains and employs program producers, journalists and editors. Similarly Radio Sultanate of Oman, also part of the Ministry, produces 85 per cent of its programs with 46 correspondents providing news coverage in Arabic and English. In printed media, there are six newspapers, two of which are published from the public sector: three are in Arabic and three in English. Oman Establishment for Press, News, Publication and Advertising is the largest independent media institution in the country, with two newspapers and quarterly magazines. Oman Press Club, established in 1998, hosts cultural and media events and provides media training through lectures, seminars and workshops. Privatisation of the industry has continued in recent years, responding to the impetus of Qatar's Al-Jazeera.

Despite this growth, there are less than 2,000 media positions in Oman, most of which are occupied by lifetime careerists or skilled expatriates. Less than half, if vacant, would be positions of interest to MCD graduates. This pessimistic situation is somewhat alleviated by public relations positions (external communications positions within organisations) targeted under Omanisation (see s6.1.2). However, *public relations* is a position category ill defined in Omani industry and is generally confined to concierge and similar duties in the tourist industry.

In this study, five questions were derived from the literature review with the intention of opening up the extent to which human capital and social capital can explain the evident disconnection between the goals of the SQU mass communications program and the employment outcomes of its graduates. These questions were used during semi-structured interviews to elicit information from participants:

- Q1: SQU College of Arts' Mass Communication Department graduates employability in Oman's public and/or private sectors (Graduates' employment prospects).
- Q2: Skills and knowledge required of SQU MCD graduates to gain employment (graduate skills' standards).
- Q3: Issues regarding transition from university to the workplace (graduates' job-seeking skills).
- Q4: The support provided by the university through offers of further training (increasing graduates' employability).
- Q5: The graduates' preparedness for Oman's media workplaces (work readiness and future learning opportunities).

The emerging lines of enquiry from responses are clustered under these themes:

- issues relating to graduate employability
- issues for consideration by higher education managers and policymakers, particularly in Oman.

Sub-themes that emerged from the interviewees' responses are appended to their relevant main theme (see s4.4.2 Coding procedures). Table 11 presents the interviewee's views on the sub theme of job availability for graduates.

Table 11
Respondents' Views on Job Availability in Media Industry

Question	Respondents Category	Findings
Q1: Graduate employment prospects are low	All participants	Lack of employment opportunity in Oman's small mass media job market Graduates prefer work in the public sector
Q3: Graduates' job-seeking skills	Employers public sector	Ministry coordinates all public sector jobs and advertises them Selection processes are undertaken for each job Graduates prefer work in the public sector
	Graduates unemployed	Although vigorous job seekers, there is a small job market, and graduates are not chosen by employers Many private sector companies require applicants with fluency in English and extensive experience
Q5: Work readiness and future learning opportunities	Faculty	Employment regulations (including Omanisation) are employers' responsibility to implement
	Government policymakers	Issues regarding graduate unemployment are new to Oman and should not distract attention from the need to produce good citizens who can work internationally
	Employers private sector	Promotion is faster in the private sector that compensates for lower starting salaries.

The majority of respondent categories expressed opinions on job availability in both sectors of Oman's media industry. With minor exceptions and degrees of emphasis relating to respondent categories, all participants agreed that graduates were not being employed at the expected rate, preferring the public sector for employment and facing the prospect of few jobs in a small private sector mass media industry. Interviewees collectively viewed that MCD graduates were subjected to recruitment processes that were inflexible, inadequate and misleading.

Two ministries administer employment in Oman, Ministry of Information for the majority of public sector jobs; and Ministry of Manpower for private sector work. As the Ministry of Information largely controls public sector recruitment, including MCD graduates, taking up work in the private sector in whatever capacity can effectively prevent the graduates from applying for public sector jobs in the media. In addition, with the recent introduction of formal recruitment processes in Oman's public sector, job-seeking methodology was not widely understood by either the country's educationalists or its

graduates. Further, the public sector participants, including employers, did not foresee future government media initiatives for jobs, saying that future entry level public sector job offers would be generally for work experience for as many graduates as possible, and that the liberalisation of Oman's private media industry would produce future jobs on a competitive basis.

Private employers in the study were sceptical of MCD graduates' interviewing and job-seeking skills, as well as their overall employability. Students and graduate participants believed the educational/employment system failed in its purpose to produce skilled and knowledgeable graduates to serve industry and there was no support for those who had missed out in employment.

Unemployed graduates and students had little expectation of future employment in the media industry. If there were jobs in the mass media or public relations groups of major firms, they were not available to the out-of-work graduates. The reasoning the employers offered for the situation ranged from economic policy (greater government support needed for the private mass media industry) to skills levels (lack of graduate fluency in mass media English). The unemployed graduates showed great frustration, detailed in chapter 5, generally attributing blame to the university course structure especially lack of English, computing skills and job-seeking skills; course practices including lecturer quality; lack of communication with potential employers; lack of government and university planning in producing graduates into a small job-market; lack of government jobs, noting that such jobs were filled by lower qualified but experienced people. The graduates with jobs disagreed that the graduates were unemployable. However, they did concur with other categories' summation of the situation: a small mass media job market; graduates' lack of on-the-job experience, lack of English and sometimes Arabic fluency; the general and theoretical nature of the mass communications course; and most of all, lack of overall planning.

6.1.1 Job Market Issues

The Omani mass media industry, as noted above, provides less than 2,000 professional jobs, mainly in the public sector's television and radio stations and therefore subject to the government's centralised recruitment process. In common with Oman's private sector, expatriates effectively operate the industry, serving the largely Omani business owners. However, policymakers saw the private mass media industry as full of

potential for graduates, with greater opportunities for quality work and promotion, both within Oman and in the GCC countries. The participant category of graduates' parents were evenly divided regarding their children's employment prospects, noting a lack of planning in graduates' excessive numbers, debating whether the graduates were employable, or whether the mass communication course was relevant to a career.

Mindful of Omanisation, all private sector employers agreed that they had 'many' jobs available for suitable MCD graduates, as Private Sector Employer 1 stated:

Without any doubt, there are opportunities of employment. We employ those well qualified and (who) prove (their willingness) to work.

The SQU faculty, however, disagreed with employers that there were sufficient jobs available for the graduates, as Academic 4 noted:

The private sector (mass media industry) in our country is still new and in its developing stages and I think that it will absorb (more of) our graduates in coming years.

All graduates and undergraduates were adamant that the size of the industry impacted directly on the ability to source mass media positions. As Unemployed Graduate 15 stated:

The private sector . . . is limited. There are only two (major) newspapers, Al-Watan and Al-Shabiba, the jobs these two newspapers offer annually in the labour market are very limited too, and the university graduates almost thirty (people) every year. . . . We notice that these private sector establishments employed a few media graduates this year - for the next two or five years they do not employ anyone and as a result, the numbers of unemployed graduates increase.

Other graduates reported that the graduate specialisations that were expected to be relevant to the industry did not meet job specifications. In particular, as noted, public relations as a discipline is not well recognised in Oman, and jobs in *public relations* in the hospitality industry refer to customer service. Several graduates noted this, as summarised by Unemployed Graduate 14:

The employers themselves do not know what public relations people do and they do not have clear job specifications. . . . I think almost every company and ministry in the country has a public relations department but the type of work the employees in the Omani labour market do is totally different than what we've learned in the university.

These participants therefore viewed job availability as a function of the size of the Omani mass media industry and employers' evaluation of the job classifications associated with the MCD qualification.

The unfulfilled expectations for a majority of mass communications graduates convey a discontinuity between their acquisition of human capital and their ability to profit from it. As noted in s2.1.1, Bouchard (1998) touched on this point, arguing that human capital relies heavily on future investment and, as it is impossible to predict employers' future needs, the assumption of a simple relationship between education and training and economic development is thus weakened. This situation is further exacerbated by the employers in both sectors, who admitted to (previously) discriminatory practices, but also referred to misaligned curricula and low standards for graduates from MCD that affect their employability.

Issues in graduate employment nominated by the private sector employer category centered, not on the absence of jobs that were the focus of other participant categories, but on MCD graduates' deficiencies in the job application process, which was contraindicated in their journalistic profession; and that they have general media knowledge and training when specialisation is the key to employment. Other issues (see s2.3, Fergany 2000; Ali 2002) nominated by this category, similar to others, were insufficient English fluency and difficulty in retaining trained graduates who were interested primarily in public sector employment (Al-Maskery 1992, Sajwani 1997, Yacoub 2003), and remained unaware of commercial conditions in private sector media:

Private sector establishments are profit-driven. Generally, the university graduates ask for very high salaries without experience or specialisation. We can employ an expatriate who is a well-known journalist with considerable experience for a lower salary (Private Sector Employer 2).

To summarise, participants attributed MCD graduates' lack of employability to four main causes: scarcity of media job vacancies implied through private employers' perception of graduates' unemployability, graduates' attitudes inasmuch as they preferred to work in the public sector, and deficiencies in job-seeking skills.

The participants agreed simply on a small media market and the graduates' preference for the public service. Both these variables are aspects of human capital. At a time three years and more prior to the unemployment issue arising, graduates received public sector work – permanent jobs, automatic promotion and superb working conditions.

This was a direct payoff to human capital acquisition: choosing a career, achieving a qualification, and receiving that career. The government's assumption regarding human capital bore fruit; the individual was employed; the economy developed. Thus, human capital is an aspect of capital acquisition. The next stage is social capital. Arguably, the university is in the position of initiator to extend offers of communication to potential employers for their students' work experiences and graduates' careers. MCD's focus on social capital should aim to build social and business links through society to avoid the disconnect between the transient expatriates and the citizens of Oman. A stronger communication platform that could withstand changes of players from both the university and employers, notably private employers, is a step toward future implementation of Omanisation. This is elaborated upon at s6.3.

6.1.2 Omanisation and Labour Policies

Omanisation, the government's labour policy to replace expatriates with qualified nationals, focuses on skilled and semi-skilled positions for mass employment and is not as applicable in the tertiary-qualified professions, with the exception of *public relations* jobs (often hospitality counter staff). The Omanisation policy (s3.1.1) includes incentives for private firms to hire locally, offering tax incentives and refunds for employers' training costs for Omanis, but demands employment of each trainee upon completion of training. (UNESCO 2006). Public sector employment has generally reached target levels set in Oman's five-year plans and this further reduces the recruitment potential for the graduates in the public sector.

The Omanisation Follow-up and Monitoring Committee is responsible for issuing decrees to organisations to establish a voluntary percentage goal for Omanis to hold jobs in a particular industry and a particular job classification at a given urban location. As noted in s3.1.1, recruitment policy for the private sector requires that foreign nationals may not be employed in a range of unskilled, and semi-skilled jobs such as technical assistants, Arabic typists, forklift or mixer operators and public relations officers, unless the employer can show that there are no Omanis available for the position in Muscat and district. The process of Omanisation has not yet reached mass media graduate level, as the higher education system, including SQU, is producing graduates who are expected to be taken up by Oman's industry growth. Further, as an academic observed, the mass media industry is small and largely unqualified.

One media position, public relations, is subject to Omanisation. However, as noted by Unemployed Graduate 1, there appeared to be no coordination between the study undertaken by the mass communications graduates in public relations, essentially managing external communications for an organisation, and that of the public relations employee, which the interviewee described as minor administrative and reception duties. As the *public relations* positions are allocated to Omanis, then the employers fulfil their quota at low pay levels. Thus, as the interviewee demonstrates, the university is producing mass communications graduates qualified in organisational communications for work that largely does not exist. This education/employment coordination problem was adverted to, somewhat ruefully, by a government participant.

The (government) has Omanisation policies and the problem they face is that they get false numbers from the ministries and companies. For example, when the government issued a decree that the position of recruitment manager must be an Omani; the companies just deleted this profession and replaced it with human resource manager. So the companies know how to play the game. (Policymaker 2)

As a summary, general labour policies, such as Omanisation, are unsuccessful when media firms are not investing at a rate to absorb the graduates SQU is producing; a problematic outcome, given the graduates' competency issues. As discussed in s6.1.1, improved communications by MCD staff, extended to all stakeholder groups represented in this study, could enhance the weak bridging ties of effective social capital.

6.1.3 Wasta

The unemployment problem facing the mass communication graduates in Oman was not only an outcome of the structural conditions of the SQU course and its relations with employers. Through nepotism, or *wasta*, the employability of graduates possesses a cultural dimension too.

Wasta occurs throughout the Arabic-speaking countries and can refer to either mediation or intercession (Cunningham, Sarayrah & Yasin 1994; Abdalla, Maghrabi & Raggad 1998). It is used differently: intermediary wasta to resolve interpersonal or intergroup conflict; intercessory wasta involves a protagonist intervening to obtain an advantage for the client - a job, a government document, a tax reduction, admission to a prestigious university. Wasta may be viewed as an example of strong intercultural or clan ties that in developing countries have a negative impact on social capital formation (Cunningham & Sarayrah 1993).

Nations with the capacity and willingness to succeed in reducing corruption experience higher growth rates in their economic and social environments (Mauro, 1996). This is a great challenge for Arab countries. Due to a perception of ingrained nepotism, recruitment and employee selection processes in Arab countries can be characterised as corrupt, as there is a disregard for recruitment based on organisational goals and applicant qualifications and experience (Cunningham & Sarayrah 1993; Cunningham et al. 1994; Hutchings & Weir 2006; Whiteoak, Crawford & Mapstone 2006).

Intercessory *wasta* angers unsuccessful candidates who have outstanding credentials, and creates dependencies among those who are less capable, yet obtain power and position because of their *wastas*. Competition for positions and resources increases the importance of intercessory *wasta*. In wider society, critics condemn intercessory *wasta* as illegal and/or inefficient. Paradoxically, these critics continue to seek and provide *wasta* benefits. A public sector employee (1) made this point emphatically:

Wasta is increasing rapidly because there are fewer employment opportunities and the graduate numbers are increasing and this means those who are the best will survive and get a job and those who are weak in any specialisation will get a job only through wasta.

Employed graduates were greatly concerned about intercessory *wasta*, citing many incidents of applicants being aware of who was going to be chosen for a job prior to anyone attending interviews.

A public sector employer noted that a previously *laissez-faire* approach to recruitment, which was prone to accusations of *wasta*, was replaced in recent years with internationally practised selection processes, including advertising available jobs, interviewing selected applicants, and selection based on merit:

I can assure you that no one can interfere in the employment process and this centralised employment process ... in the Ministry of Civil Services was implemented for this reason, that is, to stop any sort of influence or interference (Policymaker 3).

Other public sector employers were equally emphatic that the Ministry of Civil Services' central employment policy process, including a selection panel and approval system removed the past influence of intercessory *wasta*. A government employer added that the whole employment process depends upon budget availability and job vacancies. Nevertheless, parents showed the greatest concern regarding *wasta* influences:

Wasta is dangerous, it affects productivity and affects reputations (Parent 4).

In summary, the public employers' attempts at removing wasta through transparent recruitment processes had mixed results. There was no indication from those reporting wasta of an alleviation of its effects. Wasta thrives only in restricted circumstances so that the new generation was resorting to wasta connections for jobs, which their parents deplored but were presumably unable to prevent. There are, of course, structural responses to wasta: an anti-corruption commission; continue opening the economy to foreign ownership; and scale back public sector working conditions, particularly employment for life, introduce productivity measures for advancement. However, in the long term, positive and not punitive approaches are needed to change Omani employment practices so that they result from a fit between graduate capability and position work requirements. This shift will require agreements between the university, graduates and employing organisations; agreements which only come about from the kind of communication existing in the weakly bonded knowledge-based links characteristic of effective social capital in a community.

6.1.4 Graduate Employment Prospects

In 2003, the United Nations' Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA, 2003) examined skill formation and unemployment reduction policies for the Arabian Peninsula countries. The Commission reported that the majority of graduates from higher institutions in those countries were not employable. Cited by the respondents to this study, lack of opportunities for women is part of the overall unemployment problem, but the ESCWA report states that the issue is cultural.

As discussed in chapters 7 and 8, risk associated with social capital principles accumulates in the bonding of the elite, particularly in the decision-making corridors of the public service. It is noted, however, that MCD bachelor's degrees holders were giving way to secondary school certificates in the employment stakes, grounded in cost effectiveness (and productivity). However, ESCWA attributes widespread public sector employment to lack of productivity, noting until recently countries in the region guaranteed graduate employment in government offices and public enterprises. Students, states the Commission, are not taught the skills required by modern labour markets. Arab preferences for urban, office and management positions impede the flexibility of labour markets and entrench expatriate positions.

These ESCWA summations reflect the findings abundantly clear in this research. Yet the renewed warnings to the GCC countries of Arab joblessness received from researchers, and internal and international scrutiny had yet to affect the university, the government (despite its constant decrees) or the Omani private sector. The government made plans, invested its funds, provided the educational infrastructure, placed supporting legislation to implement Omanisation, but the capital equation of input equals output failed.

6.1.5 Summary of Media Opportunities

A direct relationship between human capital acquisition and its beneficial consequence relies on an uncompetitive labour market that automatically accepts all accreditations. In this study, rapid economic and social development in Oman initially absorbed all graduates into the non-competitive public sector; now that door is closed and graduates face competition in the nascent private sector. This route is much more difficult for the graduates, as evidenced by cohorts of unemployed building up over the years. For individuals, human risk capital can be mitigated only by navigating the complex factors of social capital's networks. Moreover, the easiest network to access is equally destabilising to individual and society: *wasta*.

This summation accords with Kivinen and Silvennoinen (2002) in their findings that both capitals are implicit in job-seeking. Mora, Garcia-Montalvo and Garcia-Aracil (2000) take this further, relating human and social capital to produce an organised, or civil, society. Although higher education promises skill formation toward employment, the transition from university to work is now more complex, requiring greater planning and preparation (Aamodt & Arnesen 1995, Teichler 1996).

Barriers to media employment for MCD graduates were derived from the small Oman job market and were further affected by employers' perception of graduates' unemployability, graduates' attitudes inasmuch as they preferred to work in the public sector and deficiencies in graduates' job-seeking skills. The government's policies to reduce these barriers, such as Omanisation, are unsuccessful when media firms are not investing at a rate needed to absorb the graduates SQU produces.

6.2 Characteristics of MCD Graduates

This study examines graduate unemployment within two theoretical constructs: the first, human capital and its corollary human risk capital for individuals and collectively for Oman; and social capital for the social environmental processes involved. Such processes involve Arabic attitudinal research on employment, for example that of Robertson, Al-khatib, Al-Habib (2002) who examined cultural values and work-related beliefs among managers in Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia (s2.2.5). The researchers found that job satisfaction and organisational and participative decision-making were ranked as most important to the study participants. Omani want to work and want good jobs; particularly Omani women, who enjoy the freedom and flexibility of earning money, using their degrees and gaining independence from their families.

Data analysis on the characteristics of graduates, including competencies, is structured on themes elicited from the participants' responses to unstructured and semi-structured questions and probes, rather than the questions supplied by the interviewer. To analyse this theme, all questions were considered (see s6.1 above for the text of the questions). The views of the participants on the skills, attitudes and competencies are presented at Table 12. The respondent categories are shown in the table, together with the results of the analysis of the sub theme.

Table 12
Respondents' Views on MCD Graduates' Characteristics

Question	Respondents Category	Findings
Q1: Low graduate employment prospects	Faculty	Graduates prefer public sector employment
	Policymakers, employers	Graduates lack incentive
	Unemployed graduates, undergraduates	Graduates have insufficient work experience and skills acquisition
Q2: Graduates' skills standards	Faculty	Students and graduates do not show initiative
	All employers	Graduates have attitude and initiative problems
	Graduate employees private	Inadequate skills impact attitude and initiative.
Q3: Graduates' job- seeking skills	Faculty	Graduates prefer generous government jobs Students should market themselves to private sector employers earlier in their course Mixed response to wasta, believers think that wasta undermines MCD standards
	Government policymakers	Students do not seek work experience during semester breaks, or acquire job-seeking skills Job-hunting is competitive, graduates have high expectations and do not persevere Graduates want public sector jobs; private sector employees are ineligible for government work, thus they do not register for private sector Graduates only want public mass media jobs
	Employers public sector	Wasta is not an issue now a professional recruitment system is in place for government employment
	Graduates' parents	Students and later graduates demotivated with earlier cohorts unemployed

Continued

Table 12
Respondents' Views on MCD Graduates' Characteristics (continued)

Question	Respondents Category	Findings
Q4: Increasing graduates' employability	Faculty	Graduates want only public sector jobs and will refuse private sector jobs
	Government policymakers	Students do not show initiative in seeking out available resources at the university, unemployed graduates are not proactive with their job-hunting
	All graduates Undergraduates	Regulation on public sector employment is too confining, public sector jobs should be opened up The recruitment process in the public sector should be made more transparent to combat wasta
Q5: Work readiness and future learning opportunities	Government policymakers	Graduates should be leaders in their country and look to the challenge in building it; but they show little initiative in this direction
	Employers public sector	Graduates lack initiative to seek out jobs; they need to perform well to gain respect in the marketplace by improving their knowledge and skills Graduates should be self-employable so that they can provide contractual services rather than seek employment

6.2.1 Public Sector Preference

The near-universal preference for public sector employment by parents, students and graduates stems from the rapid development of Oman over the last thirty years and the public service's ability, through oil rent revenues, to offer generous working conditions to all university graduates. Rodrik (2000) surmises that this policy, shared by all oil-producing GCC countries, stems not from the distribution of oil rents to favoured segments of urban populations (against the opinion of UN ESCWA, 2003); nor, it appears, from a desire to provide social insurance through job creation. Rodrik argues that across many developing countries, exposure to external economic risk is closely associated with levels of public sector employment. This theme to promote human capital was adopted by Oman's succeeding five-year plans. However, the government's subsequent reversal and promotion of private sector employment comprises a high level of human risk capital for those caught in the education system.

As examples of such risk, a graduate employed in the private sector (3) finally obtained low skilled part time work for eighteen months in the Ministry of Information but was replaced by a certificated secondary school applicant. The Ministry cited insufficient funding to hire university graduates. An unemployed graduate took the matter further:

As for the government sector, there are limited job opportunities, job vacancies are scarce, and there are plenty of unemployed mass communication graduates. I can say that from each (annual cohort) of 33 or 34 students only one, two or three found jobs. I've been unemployed for two years now (Unemployed Graduate 10).

As noted (s6.1), graduates working in the private sector at any job cannot register with the Ministry of Manpower to apply for a public sector job – certain positions that arise are allocated for the unemployed. With a narrow mass media private sector, ill-defined mass media work in the wider job market, and a history of public service employment subject to wasta and public pressure, mass media graduates arguably consider years of unemployment as more human risk capital leading (wishfully) toward satisfactory public sector employment for life.

In a culture that values conformity and the relationships that define status above self-reliance, initiative and the individual, free education and automatic jobs are expected by citizens. The government provided for Omanis from the cradle to the grave through windfall oil rents from the 1970s, until the oil price faltered in 1985. The oil price trend then was to rise one or two per cent each year until the turn of the century. Thus the oil-rich GCC countries first used these gains to establish social and economic networks, allowing for high birth rates and a great influx of foreign workers. All graduates were employed in the new public services, but the exponential factor in oil price rises faltered and, to a degree, governments reined in their expenditure. Competition and wasta reappeared and the expectations of the next, more numerous generation of receiving government support throughout their lifetimes generally will not occur. Government planning accounts for physical capital allocation, human capital receives resources for education, but the change of government direction over the period was not obvious to those unemployed and waiting for acceptable jobs to be provided. Nor do the unemployed understand commerce – why does not the government find them work in the private sector? There is a grain of reason in this question, as individuals in the government sector frequently control private and public corporations as well. Further, using the social capital

lexicon, as dense family or clan ties become destabilised, graduates must now look elsewhere for their future livelihoods.

6.2.2 Graduate Commitment

Statements about student and graduate commitment frequently recur through the interviews. Commitment of students to a mass communications degree, given MCD's various intake practices, is presented in s5.3. Commitment of the MCD students to learning, given their comments on the perceived quality of curriculum, lecturers and facilities at chapter 5, is variable at best. Commitment of graduates to finding suitable work was acknowledged as low by all participant categories except unemployed graduates. The few graduate women, as noted, also faced separate gender and cultural barriers to employment. The UN ESCWA report (2003 p.26) notes that structural imbalances such as these are obstacles to the formation of human capital. However, not all graduates lacked initiative, as described by a private sector employee (2):

We had a friend who decided to go to Malaysia (to improve his English) because he was sure that he was not going to find a job in Oman. . . (He returned) after three months in Malaysia and there was an advertisement for a mass communication graduate. We all went for the job interview and we were sure that if the tests and the interview were related to our specialisation we would do well. On the day of the interviews, there were thirty graduates from my year and thirty from the previous year besides many more from the earlier years. My friend got this job because his English was better than all of us. The English language helped him to get the job. I can say that when I graduated my English language was very poor.

The initiative shown by one graduate as described by this private sector employee shows both the barriers facing MCD graduates but also how personal commitment, in this case to learn English, interacts with structural constraints.

The extract above is a precise example of the relevance of the weak tie thesis of social capital and the role of English as a global means of communication in social capital formation. However, this perceived lack of initiative exhibited by the majority of several cohorts of unemployed graduates that were participants to this study was learned late and learned hard. They variously reported (s5.3.1) that they realised their employment dilemma late into the course, but that transferring into another Arts College course or leaving tertiary study for less than professional positions were not contemplated. For these graduates, a bachelor's degree formed its own human capital, its own reward. The MCD situation is duplicated in Spain, where it is generally agreed that the educational system

cannot further employment prospects for its graduates as the solution lies with the country's economic system (Mora, Garcia-Montalvo & Garcia-Aracil 2000).

In summary, the MCD graduates demonstrate little specialised competence through their generalist degree, nor do they exhibit the participatory leadership competence desired by the study category of policymaker. It is a moot point whether the methodological competence imparted and claimed by the faculty group is sufficient for recruiters.

6.2.3 Social Capital Enhancing Competencies

Currently, faculty members in many universities are under pressure to adapt their educational style to deliver quality outcomes to meet the expectations of employers, and broadly, contribute to a learning society (Dunne 1999). Whilst s6.3 analyses the communication links between policymakers, employers and the MCD faculty, there is a strong focus by all the categories on the curriculum standards of the course, and the relevance of the curriculum to the mass-market workplace and its job specifications.

Graduates' skills play an important role in the employment process. For an analysis of this theme, all questions were considered (see s6.1 above for the text of the questions), albeit clustered to address the three identified deficiencies – language fluency, ICT levels and job-seeking skills. The views of the participants on these issues are presented in Table 13. The respondent categories are shown in the table, together with the results of the analysis of the sub themes.

Table 13
Respondents' Views on Work Skills Acquisition: Language, I.T and Job-seeking

Question	Respondent Category	Findings
Q1: Graduate employment prospects are low	Graduate employees, public and private sectors	Reasons for unemployment were that graduates are deficient in their language standards, and they lack work and job-hunting experience
Q2: Graduates' skills standards	Unemployed graduates, undergraduates	Lack practical training, deficiencies in languages, both Arabic and English, and computer-based skills.
Q3: Graduates' job-seeking skills	Faculty	Job-hunting skills training is available from the Career Advisory Office (CAO), which advertises workshops but is not attracting students MCD lecturers assist with job-hunting skills
	Government policymakers	Graduates do not have job-hunting skills
	Employers, private sector	Graduates cannot write CVs, cannot market themselves Graduates do not interview well, journalists must be good interviewers MCD graduates are not at a standard for competitive job-hunting
	Graduate employees, public and private sectors	Graduates are not competent in job-searching skills SQU should deliver better training in CV writing and interviewing, CAO sessions were theoretical and clashed with lectures
	Unemployed graduates	Graduates were under prepared for job-hunting CAO training for CV writing and interviewing was theoretical and clashed with MCD lectures
	Graduates' parents	Require improved job-seeking skills
	Faculty	University provides few interpersonal skills' courses; this aspect is considered part of the intrinsic learning process at university and before; respondents mentioned social development courses are available Optional view that university should train students in job-seeking skills.

6.2.3.1 Language Skills as a Bridging Social Capital Factor The English language is the lingua franca of the global economy, penetrating to most aspects of life and science to the extent that it is a key to employment (Crystal 1997, Spring 1998). In this study, and with minor degrees in emphasis, all interviewees selected the graduates' levels of English and Arabic fluency and literacy as being structural impediments to their employment. For the majority of the graduates, MCD's curriculum included introductory courses in English, occasional lectures in English, and a translation course with some focus on the specialised English used in the media industry. The language skills issue prompted MCD to consider a course restructure to include an introductory year of English and standard Arabic, taking the mass communications degree to five years.

In a study of Canada's bilingualism, Pendakur and Pendakur (1998) found a competitive edge and enhanced human capital in the acquisition of a second language. Similarly, although not an official language in Oman, the benefits attending the English language have assumed increasing importance in recent years. English-language media are actively encouraged and of long-standing in the country, whilst children start to learn English as a second language from entrance level in many schools. This is of particular importance for higher education colleges, where science-based courses are conducted in that language and half SQU's student body studies at its Language Centre. Given this national interest in English and other languages, MCD's prior lack of interest in high standards of English and Arabic may again reflect the bonded social capital culture within SQU's colleges and departments, which is working to the detriment of all. Such negative bonding implies a culture-based group which adopts change primarily to maintain its social status and economic capital within the larger bonded group that is the university itself. For example, Academic 3, discussing whether MCD should address the language issue, said that a mass communications curriculum should include only media-related linguistics, not language education per se. For the remaining participant categories and other academics, however, the opposite view was the norm and they had a different view of the university's role, that is, education or knowledge transfer. An employed graduate in the private sector (4) observed that, because previous graduates recruited lacked English skills, employers were not recruiting new graduates. This participant also said that low proficiency in English not only hinders job-seeking for current graduates, but also affects their future higher education studies:

I had an offer from a private sector news agency and as soon as I signed the contract this agency would support me for higher qualifications. The main obstacle was English language although I was recommended by the lecturers and the department. My personal profile was accepted by this news agency. Their only comment was that I lacked English. Had I (studied) English I would be now doing my master's (Private Sector Employee 4).

Arabic, as the national language and an icon of cultural identity for Oman and the Gulf nations, has a pivotal role in the country's broadcast and printed media. Nevertheless, the language and its culture are under attack from globalisation and the world's majority languages. Although the study's participants emphasised English language skills in employability more so than Arabic, they concentrated on the importance of good Arabic for skilled media workers in an Arabic-speaking country. Interestingly, given Pendakur and Pendakur's findings, Arabic was given a lesser priority in MCD's curriculum changes than English, although one policymaker expressed the belief that 70 per cent of its courses should be conducted in English and 30 per cent in Arabic, to maintain Arabic as a living language. The Arabic language, nevertheless, relates to strong social capital ties within Oman. English makes available weak ties between Omanis, SQU and, to an extent, the media employers, public and private sectors.

The depth of focus and length of discussions on languages in the mass communications course is ironic, given that English deficiency was a barrier to employment, or to further research. Of the participant categories, employers refused to employ SQU's media-skilled graduates as the recruiter must devote considerable resources on retraining them in English to communicate effectively with their work colleagues; a further deterrent being that low standards of English hinders in-house training processes to update knowledge and skills of staff. Graduates and students found the effects of substandard English hindered academic performance; typified by a journalism student who mentioned a function at SQU as an example:

The Language Centre conference is held once every year and I'm a member of the press committee to cover this function. I always face the problem that I cannot interview in English those who participate in this function simply because my English is very weak (Fourth-year Student 4).

Graduates employed in both business sectors found they were inadequately prepared in Arabic, having undertaken only two general language subjects, and this lack of proficiency affected not only their recruitment potential but also their ability to communicate effectively once employed. Similarly, parent and employer categories viewed MCD graduates as lacking in Arabic language skills, one private sector employer

noting that the firm had advertised several times for an Arabic-speaking journalist, but no MCD graduate responded and an expatriate from an Arabic-speaking country was eventually employed.

Graduate employment prospects are closely linked to the social capital conditions in Oman: the existence of communication-rich weak ties across the segments and levels of Omani society. The presence of such bridging bonds ultimately builds a strong civil society and ultimately leads to a sustainable country. The university protests that it has the ability to communicate with the community it serves, but it is not successfully forming human capital for the mass communications students and graduates, and does not serve the community in this regard. The reluctance shown by the university in the face of opinion, and its lack of results in its external environment, point to a culture where an internal focus on the dynamics of the organisation overpowers its role in the community in the fast-changing environment of Oman.

6.2.3.2 ICT Skills as Human and Social Capital Factors From a human capital perspective, economists agree that information and communications technology (ICT or IT) and computer skills facilitate graduates' employability and career prospects. In Australia, Chiswick and Miller (1995) show that these skills are complementary in the generation of earnings. From a social perspective, computer and ICT skills assist the growth of social capital and make societies more cohesive (Davies 2003, Halpern 2005, Longworth 2003, Resnick 2002).

Employers, parents and graduates compared media industry-level ICT skills to languages in importance; however, policymakers and academics were dismissive of this argument, as MCD recently installed best-practice media equipment (Policymaker 1). This is an issue for the unemployed graduates, however, because the university representatives were tacitly removing themselves from responsibility for graduates, including, presumably, remedial training on the new equipment. This is not current practice for universities who actively seek to imbue their alumni with lifelong learning in their disciplines (Knapper & Cropley 2000).

The student/graduate categories were dismissive of the course's computer training. Unemployed graduates said only two introductory and generalised computer courses were provided and private sector employees commented on a scarcity of software courses; that only basic computer tutorials were available, such as Microsoft Word. None of these basic courses touched on the computer skills or the specialised software they would encounter in

media workplaces. Fourth-year students, who were using the new equipment, questioned the capability of lecturers to transfer knowledge on the new equipment (Student 2):

I think neither the technicians nor the lecturers can use the montage machine. Imagine, there was one person who got some sort of training on the same type of equipment in the Ministry of Agriculture and then he trained the lecturer and the students. So we need more specialised training on these machines.

Thus, computer skills are a prerequisite to employment, transferability and higher remuneration. Whilst this factor was generally understood, there appears little commitment from the university and the policymakers to take the matter further, that with an increase in physical capital, the matter was settled.

6.2.3.3 Job-seeking Skills to Grow Social Capital Social capital is a valuable resource when finding employment and better job opportunities (OECD 2001a). As discussed in s2.1.2, Granovetter (1973, 1995) found that weak ties across different social groupings provide better chances of employment than strong ties concentrated within local groups. Sharf (2006 p.39) stressed the need to have accurate and sufficient occupational information to achieve desired employment outcomes.

The greater majority of the 52 study participants expressed the opinion that MCD graduates did not possess a high level of job-hunting skills; they lacked competence in writing résumés, the ability to market themselves to employers, or to present themselves convincingly in competitive interviews. Unemployed graduates found their job-seeking skills inadequate to the task. Unemployed Graduate 6 observed:

I believe there are certain techniques and skills in the area of job hunting which we as mass communication graduates lack. . . The Careers Advisory Office at SQU provides some short workshops related to job interviews and job hunting but they often conflicted with our lecture times.

Unemployed Graduate 8 did not have the same access to assistance from the Careers Advisory Office (CAO), and reported that a then fourth-year undergraduate group proactively attended events, approached employers and learned CV and interviewing techniques. As a corollary to searching for possible vacancies, Parent 3 noted that graduates could not now approach public sector employers individually, that the new centralised recruitment system advertised graduate vacancies in the university and, presumably, in the wider community. Perhaps the matter of job-seeking can best be summarised by the attempts made by a fourth-year student interviewee (2):

The Careers Advisory Office organises a yearly job and training exhibition. . . I know that more than forty graduates were employed through these exhibitions.

Unfortunately, most of those employed were from the colleges of Engineering and Science. We asked the Careers Advisory Office for an exhibition especially for the mass communication graduates and students and to invite (media) employers. . . They could not get anybody simply because there aren't any vacancies. This was their excuse.

Professional job-seeking and job selection are to a large extent removed from the job-search process inasmuch as the Ministry of Manpower controls the process under Omanisation. Preparing graduates to apply for and successfully gain positions in the industry of their choice may appear to be little more than the realisation of human capital principles. In terms of gaining employment, trust within the weak ties of social capital is related to the capability of an applicant able to communicate professional competence.

6.2.3.4 Summary of Competencies The three competencies that were identified as deficiencies universally shared by MCD graduates were: languages, English as a second language and to some extent, Arabic; technological skills typified by information and communication technology; and job-seeking skills. Whilst all are human capital tools to be mastered for knowledge and skills acquisition, each also connects with social capital formation.

The College of Arts and Social Science, as an Arabic-speaking school, was less involved with industry than SQU's other, English-oriented colleges and departments. MCD is oriented to an innovative and dynamic industry, the skills for which were transferred, ironically, through a traditionalist program centred on the print media, despite Oman having a high television and radio penetration. Further, as a communications asset, English fluency is also a means for students to gain entry to a wider social circle and thus benefits growth in civil society.

Computer skills are similarly a means to greater contacts, knowledge and growth. Whilst English fluency is not necessarily a prerequisite for computer literacy, its ubiquity on the internet, computer software and peripherals certainly makes it difficult to avoid.. Yet the internet is also a path to English fluency, to immerse oneself and gain rapid proficiency. For media graduates, ICT commands attention both for its delivery of content, and the content itself: information and entertainment.

The job-seeking skills debate rests on the role of the university, strongly defended by the academic participants as that of instilling the process of knowledge acquisition into students to enable future workplace learning and further research accomplishments. Few at SQU, including the Careers Advisory Office, considered actively lobbying for work for

graduates, and indeed the infrequent job fairs appeared as university promotions rather than aimed at supplicating employers.

The Arabic-speaking Arts College arguably had a traditionalist approach to knowledge transfer and hired Omani or other Arab lecturers; thus the academic networks were stronger in Arts departments, including MCD. Bonded, culture-based groups tend to adopt change slowly, and this was detrimental to the pace of development in Omani society, including its media expectations. Partly due to the lack of skilled educators in the region (p.6), curricula reform was overdue. If the higher-order education argument is then compromised, the prevailing educator theory, particularly relevant for GCC countries, of providing specialised knowledge and skills to serve the graduate's future needs, can also apply to reduce human capital risk.

The role of the university in social capital growth, that is, to serve its society by engaging other groups and cultures and to promote acquisition of skills and knowledge for graduates to compete in an open market, was apparently not acceptable to the College administration, or not considered.

6.2.4 Private Sector Issues

Issues in graduate employment nominated by the private sector employer category centred on MCD graduates' deficiencies in the job application process, which was contraindicated in their journalistic profession; and that they have general media knowledge and training when specialisation is the key to employment. Other issues nominated were insufficient fluency in the English language (Fergany 2000, Ali 2002); and difficulty in retaining trained graduates when they were interested primarily in public sector employment (Al-Maskery 1992, Sajwani 1997, Yacoub 2003), and remain unaware of commercial conditions in private sector media:

Private sector establishments are profit-driven. Generally, the university graduates ask for very high salaries without experience or specialisation. We can employ an expatriate who is a well-known journalist with considerable experience for a lower salary (Private Sector Employer 2).

The situation for the private employers is that they may have one or two Omanis in any given work group. They also have other Arabs, southern Asians, Europeans, Americans, Canadians or Australians. The skilled, competitive expatriates are employed at reasonable rates for three years or so, including management. Corporate boards and owners direct management with a reasonably light hand, as the government welcomes

entrepreneurship (internal) and has few laws, infrequently enforced, and many decrees or regulations, even less well regarded. Thus management is relatively free to pursue profit. Omanisation, a decree, comprises quotas and fees on expatriates, and selected quotas and skills transfers for Omanis. Whilst the fees may be collected, little other controls eventuate and the skilled expatriates come and go, oblivious to any responsibility to the one or two Omani in the group. Management will not pursue Omanisation until the government supports salary packages for Omani at the level they wish to be hired, that reflect those of the public sector.

6.2.5 Summary of Graduate Characteristics

As this is a qualitative study, the correlations between these components and their variables cannot be assessed, but inferences can be drawn. The evidence is that graduates cannot get jobs through the dysfunctional relationships between government as decision maker, government resource allocations, and employers who are also influenced by government. Unemployment therefore appears to be an issue for government. Further evidence exists that MCD, an entirely funded government resource, is subject to a decree that all its graduates are to be leaders in the community and work-ready – this it interprets as that graduates know the process of learning and thus they embark on lifelong learning within the workforce, culminating in receiving leadership positions. Vocational training, it is claimed, does not belong in a university, nor does job-hunting, a vocational skill. The evidence is that unemployed MCD graduates, of which there are estimates of over 100 people, that is, over three years' full cohorts, have no route to the private sector.

Social capital development is associated with transparent competition (Brook, 2005). The unemployed graduates cannot compete, are therefore disillusioned and unwilling to try to find work against what they believe are insurmountable odds. Social capital growth does not occur and there is no contribution to the nation's civil society. The graduates require job placement to acquire lifelong learning. If the remainder of the study participants believe that graduates need relevant and quality media content of knowledge and skills *before* they apply for jobs, then they are correct, because the evidence of this research supports them.

Seen through the eyes of the participants in this research, the pathways by which the graduates of MCD courses will gain employment must move beyond trust in the close family and clan ties at the heart of *wasta*. Successful employment must be an outcome of

graduates' professional readiness, qualities which will be seen in their communicative competence in Arabic and English, their ICT expertise and their job hunting skills. These attributes, which have social capital significance, point to the demand on SQU to have closer and more complex relationships with employers, particularly those in the private sector.

6.3 Stakeholder Partnerships Build Strong Social Capital

Universities in general devote considerable resources to foster communications with their stakeholders for survival and growth. At a corporate and board level, these communications are strategic and focus on government policymakers and senior executives. The next, academic board/college level, communicates for intelligence on business trends, work placements and competing for research grants. SQU is different to those universities. It operates in a public-funded environment, and its University Council reflects this, being substantially staffed by senior public servants and chaired by the Minister of Education. At a strategic level, the Council primarily serves the university and the government; its communication channels to other stakeholders are fewer. At the university's professional and college level, communication channels must be initiated with the private sector and the community, as there are fewer strategic channels available. Finally, as Mass Communications is just one of ten departments of the College of Arts, it presents a small profile to an emerging industry.

An aim of this study is to establish the levels of communication between the university and the employers. At interview, questions 1, 4 and 5 (s6.1) drew responses relevant to this theme, stakeholder communications and level of communications and are presented at Table 14 below.

Table 14
Respondents' Views on Stakeholder Communications

Question	Respondents Category	Findings
Q1: Employment issues	Graduates, Parents	Deficiencies in government planning, i.e., lack of communication, in producing too many graduates for a small mass media market
Q4: Increasing graduates' employability	Faculty	<p>Conference between university, employers from both sectors and government planners; scope of faculty's views on outcomes included an observation that employers were not qualified to direct the MCD curriculum to improve graduates fit with available job specifications</p> <p>Centralised Omani employment office would facilitate job search; views expressed ranged from one which advocated no regulatory basis to employment and an open job market</p> <p>Faculty viewed pay and conditions in the private sector as insufficient to attract graduates; ideas to redress this situation extended to regulatory control of graduates' pay to forcing graduates to take up private sector jobs.</p>
	Government policymakers	<p>Reported insufficient communication between graduates' stakeholders, including the Omanisation committee, caused through the university status of mass communications as a department of Arts</p> <p>Developing partnerships is important: views ranged from high-level strategy committee including university, government employment agencies, and employer representatives to the notion of regular employer/university workshops</p>
	Employers private sector	<p>Regular interface meetings between media industry and university to discuss industry trends, define skills needs and discuss curricula matters to suit</p> <p>Ministry of Manpower (private sector) unaware of mass media industry trends in Oman</p> <p>University could liaise with training centres of large media corporations</p> <p>Quote to summarise the sentiment: <i>The university and the media industry do not have a shared vision</i></p>
	Employers public sector	Periodic meetings between ministries and university
	Graduate parents	Greater cooperation between employment ministries and the university required to plan graduate numbers and manage employment opportunities (continued)

Table 14
Respondents' Views on Stakeholder Communications (continued)

Question	Respondents Category	Findings
Q4: Increasing graduates' employability	All graduates and undergraduates	<p>The university's role is to know the mass media market and supply its labour; the university has the responsibility to communicate with others on job requirements</p> <p>There is no real communication between the various stakeholders, particularly employers, to provide graduates with jobs</p> <p>There is a need for a greater choice of workplaces for practical training to make employers aware of the MCD course and to assist with the curriculum</p> <p>MCD needs input from employers far earlier in the undergraduate course.</p>
Q5: Work readiness and future learning opportunities	Employers private sector	<p>Graduates have insufficient knowledge and skills, employers</p> <p>There is a need a partnership with the university to address these issues</p>
	Graduates' parents	<p>The university does not prepare its graduates for the media workplaces, has no life-long learning focus, one view was that training should extend to that which helps the community</p> <p>Workplace training leads to better employability</p>
	All graduates and undergraduates	<p>MCD does not offer learning opportunities after graduation, it depends on life skills from families, schools and society; however one respondent declared that the course provided a good grounding in life skills</p>

The research analysis found that a lack of communication between the university and the public and private sectors was a major obstacle confronting MCD graduates' employability. Deficiencies were perceived in two areas that participants considered affected the MCD employment process: an absence of employers' involvement in the MCD curriculum design, and little coordination was identified between the Career Advisory Office as SQU's representatives, and government as represented by the Ministries of Civil Services and Manpower (MMCS), the Ministry of Manpower (MM) and the Omanisation Committee, to create jobs for graduates by implementing effective policy strategies. There was broad agreement that better communications were necessary for the mass communications course to deliver educated and skilled individuals:

I believe (we should form partnerships) not only with employers but also facilitators such as the MMCS, the MM and the Committee of Omanisation. These

bodies should enter a policymaking partnership and discuss (workplace) issues such as salaries and working hours. I think these issues not only concern the MCD graduates but also unemployment in the whole country . . . We are unable to reach agreement so far. I think your study now encourages us to establish more connection and collaboration between us and the private sector employers (Academic 8)

Communication, arguably, is a key to the employability dilemma. Policymakers do not get the expected response from Omanisation-related regulations that they heavily resource, in particular, education. Using such resources, the university does not receive the recognition it expects from its stakeholders. The private sector employers quietly ignore the policies, citing unprofitability if Omanisation is pursued under existing, and notably non-binding, regulation. Communication is a key to determining the various goals of the different groups, and how those goals can be better aligned to address the dilemma.

To illustrate the extent of the communication gap, the faculty members asserted (against the opinions of the other categories' participants) that they knew the Omani mass communications industry, public and private, and were aware of professional public relations roles in private companies and government departments. There were, they claimed, communications between the university and business: contacts for MCD students' job experience, practical exercises for the students, and (infrequent) consultations on the mass communications course. However, from the employers' view, the university's efforts were not adequate to encourage regular recruitment of the graduates each year:

The Ministry of Information needs ten TV announcers and I'm sure we will not get what we want (from the new MCD graduate cohort). (Public Sector Employer 1)

Yet the faculty lecturers had their good reasons: the public sector should be replacing unqualified (but experienced) staff with MCD graduates; the private sector should be adopting a traineeship function to replace expatriates under Omanisation.

To summarise in structural terms: the social capital implications of the university/employer mutual lack of interest in, or at best grudging acceptance of, medium-term Omanisation are embedded in the bonding networks of the university, as the authority on knowledge; and the more flexible networks of the public and private sectors' decision makers, as providers of resources. The students and graduates in the university's social networks are *recipients* of knowledge or human capital from which they can later gain profit. For the public and private sector decision makers, employees are *sources* of skills and knowledge, that is, human capital, which can be exploited for organisational

objectives. However, the bridging communications attempted by the university are sporadic and one-sided. The lack of reciprocity from the decision makers identifies negativity, alluded to by Academic 5, who noted *excuses* for lack of jobs for the graduates and said the university needed to know *the real reasons*. Until the *real reasons* emerge to its satisfaction, it is certain that the university will not be able to fulfil its commitment to make graduates future leaders by instilling in them the means of learning; of acquiring knowledge. If the graduates are not work ready, they are unable to compete with the skills and knowledge – and experience – that expatriates display.

SQU is the key to this conundrum. It holds the mandate from the government, whichever interpretation of learning, higher order learning or content, is applied. Human capital is now in the negative, human risk capital makes it virtually impossible for professional media jobs in corporations to be won by MCD graduates. This risk possibility needs to be explained to all the key stakeholders who should come together in a concerted way to explore its significance. SQU can use its authority to establish board level and management level institutional links with government and private and public sector employers. Through those institutional links, students and graduates may be encouraged to create personal links bridging family, university and employers/employment. Once in a position, the new employees can undertake workplace and lifelong learning to extend their weak tie linkages further.

As stakeholder communications exemplify the issues raised in interview by the study participants, chapter 8 will draw out the theoretical constructs from this analysis.

6.4 Summary

This research studied the causes of the dislocation between the supply of skilled mass communication graduates and the demand for skilled mass media professionals. It establishes that, although the context for Omani media professionals is clear, the media job specifications and the qualities required of graduates to fill those positions is not clear. The study notes the views of the students and graduates of their tertiary education experiences to establish firmly the issues that these and the other study participants believe lead to unemployment.

In this analysis, the outcomes broadly reflect human capital theory: for employment, the students and alumni acquire knowledge and technical skills; and for life,

the higher-order attributes of thinking and reasoning, problem solving, decision-making and interpersonal competencies. It is the tension between education and vocational skills that the university is attempting to address - the academics reiterate that they do not provide employment; they provide the theory, that is, the education, by which the graduates can access the job market, find work and gain experience. Vocational skills relate to vocational training. The other participant categories had different views: the mass communications students were not prepared for their objective which was work in a professional mass media position, preferably in the public sector.

Given the resource and effort placed in education, human capital formation in the region, as measured by years of education, qualifications and skills base, was not achieved at an acceptable level. This finding is supported by Aamodt and Arnesen (1995) and ESCWA (2003). For graduates as individuals, human risk capital can be mitigated only by navigating the complex factors of social capital's networks (Kivinen & Silvennoinen 2002) and for this many turn to their dense ties of destabilising *wasta*. Barriers to media employment include the small Oman job market and employers' reluctance to employ local graduates. Omanisation and other government planning and decrees are unsuccessful when media firms are not investing at a rate to absorb the graduates SQU is producing (Teichler, 1996). The media industry is owned by Omani who do not choose to follow their government's decrees concerning Omanisation. This exacerbates the plight of the unemployed graduates, who are disillusioned and unwilling to try to find work against such barriers.

Turning to social capital theory, the analysis presented in this chapter undoubtedly confirms Putnam's bonding as Oman's primary social process that precludes open and transparent communication (ties, if not weak ties) between the stakeholders. If human capital for an individual is viewed as the process of first acquiring knowledge, and then employing this asset for the person and thus the country, social capital's processes accelerate or impede that process. This umbrella finding shares the belief with what Schuller, Baron and Field (2000) and Schuller and Field (1998) conclude, that both human and social capital complement each other and the absence of one affects the other.

The following chapter 7 returns to the context of this thesis, placing the processes, experiences and outcomes for the mass communication graduates and their stakeholders within a capital framework, and using this construct for a model sufficiently robust to be used to alleviate the existing discordant conditions experienced in developing countries.

Chapter 7 Implications of Primary Research – Graduate Outcomes

This thesis examines the antecedents of endemic unemployment among mass communications graduates from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). The research is concerned about the extent to which course graduates meet the expectations of public and private sector employers. In addition to specific course features, the research exposed complex cultural, social and economic factors which affect the employability of graduates.

An analytical framework comprising dimensions of capital theory - human, social and physical capital - describes the country's investment in education and the social networks needed to build human resources and aid community development. A naturalistic methodology enabled the research to examine the graduates' social environment and the manner by which this milieu and the relationships it generates interact with graduates' personal and educational characteristics. The university course experience is expanded by this research from its assumed role of a framework of selection or enrolment, curriculum and assessment for students. At SQU, the mass communication course is aligned to the cultural practices and social relationships in which the university is embedded and which it is helping to create. That is, the human capital investment represented by the university program and its resources does not account sufficiently for the unemployment of mass communication graduates from SQU. The research shows that the analysis needs to be inclusive also of the relationships associated with social capital.

The primary research objective of this study is to identify and promote factors that focus on an individual's successful transition from study to meaningful work within the policies and resources of a nation. A further objective is to examine and reflect on the Sultan Qaboos University's Mass Communication Department's program quality and course content, and its communications and coordination with Omani employers. The findings of this chapter show that the majority of MCD graduates face an undue risk in the transition from university to a career, as the application of human capital principles to higher education are inadequate to the task. As discussed in chapter 8, social capital dimensions can be employed by the university, the students, graduates and their stakeholders to achieve a desired level of social and economic development for the country's future leaders.

This chapter discusses findings which focus primarily on the university-based antecedents of the graduates' inability to pursue media careers. The issue of graduate employment is explored within the proposition of education as human capital acquisition; unemployment is therefore an inability for society and the individual to profit from the investment in education. The statement is discussed through many facets: the role of the university in maintaining a research stance at the expense of employability; the mass communications program itself, the curriculum to support the program, and the delivery of the curriculum.

7.1 Endowing Human Capital

The tenet of human capital theory is that a nation's investment in individuals through education and training strongly links to economic growth and individual success (s.2.1.1, Bils & Klenow 2000, Mulligan & Sala-i-Martin 1997, Ashworth & Harvey 1994). Human capital principles are widely developed into governments' policies, including Oman's, to satisfy individual, community and employers' needs to achieve sustained national economic development and wellbeing. The policies concern, inter alia, higher order skills to meet rapid knowledge and economic change; pursuit of equity and social cohesion; linking education policies to employment through the participation of the private sector and monitoring outcomes in education and training (OECD 2001a).

The principle of education and skills acquisition is accepted by Kivinen and Ahola (1999), although they argue that governments have an oversimplified approach where more and higher educational credentials equate with increased human capital. Kivinen and Ahola consider also the difference between human capital ideology and the everyday realities of the human risk capital faced by the graduates, including changing labour markets and the role of government. In this study, government's gradual retreat from employer of choice and the demise of traditional careers and permanent jobs are also important factors.

7.1.1 Higher Education in GCC

The inability of Arab universities to endow their graduates with human capital for indigenous economic development is noted in several regional reports (UNESCO 1998, 2003). Like Oman's, Arab experience in the development of pedagogy is relatively new. Sultan Qaboos University's students first enrolled two decades ago (1986) and the institution's contribution to Omani society is still emerging from its testing and

development stage. In media, the Social Science College and its specialised mass communications department are yet to attain credence with non-GCC university peer groups, or with Oman's nascent media industry. Because of its newness, MCD's faculty are frequently expatriates or Omani with external qualifications. Thus, the department, a small part of the college, has not developed its own, media-oriented culture. It adopts the wider Islamic culture, characterised by the issues of restricted female participation (s5.3.1.1) and the Arabic Gulf countries' culture which has a degree of freedom from financial constraints for its citizens (Kirat 2002). MCD also appears to adopt the university-for-its-own-sake culture evinced by academic argument (s5.1.2). Further, academic belief systems give rise to divergent teaching beliefs among MCD's faculty and this divergence emphasises the absence of a coherent media-based culture (s7.2.2).

Enduring unemployment among MCD graduates at SQU suggests that the university is failing its human capital responsibility to Oman. The answer to the research question, does the Omani government acquire the human capital it procures? is found in the negative. Of interest is a minority opinion of a university policymaker that graduates must gain general skills to enable them to work anywhere, the study participant producing a university publication to that effect (s5.1.2). This view that education is its own justification, as it raises the general skills and knowledge of the generation for future social good, arguably contradicts the human capital principle that education leads directly to individual and national benefit. This disconnect is grounded in the debate regarding a university's role and the dichotomy of wider education and work skills development (s2.2.3). Without a contribution to human capital resulting from Oman's current and future policies, the establishment of SQU may come to be evaluated as a misdirected and expensive outcome.

7.1.2 Human Capital Policy in Oman

As a contributor to the OECD, Oman is advised through the organisation's recommendations (2001a,b) to incorporate human capital theory in government policy for national economic development and wellbeing. The suggested policies include an emphasis on employability and linking education policies to the private sector. Further, an early OECD (OECD, 1992) policy recommended restrictions on the proportion of graduate cohorts to enter the public sector.

Whilst acceding vigorously to the advice with finance and encouragement to both the public and private sectors, it is problematic whether the Omani government actually obtains the human capital it seeks. The United Nations' Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA, 2003) observes that the majority of graduates from higher education institutions in its member countries, including Oman, are not employable; however, these institutions appear ineffective in addressing graduates' chronically high rates of unemployment.

In the process of acquiring and employing human capital, a risk factor is introduced: the graduates' and other stakeholders' perception of the value of the qualification (Kivinen & Ahola 1999). As stakeholders, employers use credentials to measure a job applicant's knowledge and, increasingly, performance. Confirming previous GCC research (Kirat 2002), the MCD credential was not viewed by participants in this study as meeting the job specifications offered by employers, that deficiencies related to language and communication, current technology and media industry factors. The MCD graduate employment record is corroboration that the Oman media industry does not recognise value in its qualification. The traditional bond between graduate employment and extensive career opportunities is lost, Kivinen & Ahola suggest (*ibid.*), and this partially accounts for the failure of investment in education to support employment growth for nationals in the GCC countries.

Thus the government has two concerns. First, from a human capital perspective, its Omanisation policy outcomes must bridge the gulf between the higher education supply of graduate skills and knowledge, and employers' changing demands. However, as noted at s2.2.4, researchers consider this theory too restrictive to reflect the aims of higher education. As the second concern, therefore, there should be a move toward preparing Oman's university graduates to be lifelong learners and socially responsible citizens. A purely human capital direction may nevertheless lead to the integration of human and social capital interests, inclusive of economic and societal goals such as reforming gender imbalances in the workplace. Following its government's directives, SQU focuses on human capital in its education policy development, which raises the issue that the university expects the human capital principles promoted by the international community to be a universally applicable policy formulation. However, national characteristics and cultural commitments and practices are also important in the realisation of policy goals;

and SQU's practices, as analysed in chapters 5 and 6, do not reach its own policy ideals, however defined.

7.1.3 University Curricula

As content, a curriculum serves a program, in this case the mass communications program for SQU. The intent of higher education curricula is straightforward: to create conditions that foster deep learning (Toohey 1999). However, university curricula are often criticised for being overambitious in content and delivered in a less than cohesive manner, thus failing to meet a program's objectives (Ashworth and Harvey 1994). Given a satisfactory curriculum design that is challenging and has broad reach, these objectives can be met (Barnett 1992). A satisfactory curriculum design was not forthcoming at MCD, where the curriculum was not of a standard that instilled enthusiasm for learning into mass communications students or delivered human capital in the form of a career for graduates. Graduates left the university apparently unable to communicate effectively, a skill that is a mandate for a media career. After four years' study, the majority of unemployed graduates were deficient in their mother tongue, Arabic, and could not converse in English; notably, they were unable to report on Oman's business or technical matters (s5.2.4).

In higher education curricula design and implementation, graduate employment is now a major concern and a crucial educational aim. Employability in an individual is a set of characteristics that goes beyond attaining a credential through a given curriculum, gaining work experience and job acquisition (s2.2.4, Knight & Yorke 2003). This view extends the human capital principle past that of a sum of parts into the realms of social capital acquisition through interpersonal trust, norms of reciprocity, membership of civil organisations and the processes of a civil society. However, neither theory adequately addresses the risk factors inherent in economic capital theory from where the theories arise and to which, in this thesis, human risk capital is applied.

Relating theory to practice in mass communications curricula can deliver positive employment outcomes to graduates by using learner-centred, reflective approaches; and encouraging students to attend major events applies practical theory to evolving situations (Spurgeon & O'Donnell 2003, Burns 2003, Patching 2001). From a human capital perspective of acquisition (qualification) and application (job), mass communication courses in the GCC countries are considered too reliant on theory (Al-Jardi 1993 [Kuwait], Al Hamoud & Al-Asker 2003 [Saudi Arabia], Al-Rawas 2002 [Oman]) and dissatisfaction

regarding this point was manifest among participants in this study. With the exception of the providers, participants expressed negative views on the mass communications' curriculum and its focus on theory to the detriment of practice. Employed public sector graduate 1 explained:

...most of the courses are theoretical and we need more practical courses and even the theoretical courses are not related to the Omani labour market. . . they are curriculum of other countries such as Egypt or Jordan. . The result is that the mass communication graduates (are) not qualified to work in the Omani labour market.

These findings are crucial to the research question and relate to the extent to which the skills and knowledge of the SQU MCD graduates meet the standards of Omani workplaces.

Noting the inadequate theory/practical imbalance, graduate participants and employers also reported adversely on the practical aspects of the curriculum. Discussions on the literature at s3.3.1 include a description of two distinct formats for practical mass communications; on campus and at a workplace (Lowrey & Becker, 2001). For the on-campus format, MCD in 2002 acquired digital equipment equal to that of Oman's private sector, too late for the cohorts of unemployed graduates trained on SQU's obsolete analogue equipment. Yet possible amelioration of the deleterious effects on future skills of the obsolete technology through effective external practical training was variously described by graduates as informal or unhelpful (s5.2.2).

In summary, the findings of this study confirm Arab research that MCD's curriculum was inadequate to meet its program intentions and its role within civil society was therefore compromised. The Omani government adopted principles of human capital theory; described by one, and one only, study participant to the effect that SQU's responsibilities to its graduates were met. But the mere accumulation of years of study was not viewed by the other participants as of value in acquiring human capital as the qualification did not allow employment. Human risk capital for the fourth-year students was very high and their fears for the future showed vividly through the interviews. The risk factor was not mitigated for the majority of graduates – two or three only from each cohort of some 25 to 30 MCD graduates for at least three years were working, but not necessarily in media. This high unemployment rate is a symptom of the intersections between human and social capital in Omani society, including policies of SQU.

7.1.4 Course Delivery

Higher education should set the basic methods for self-directed learning and adapt to current demands, as well as strengthen and modernise adult education (Aspin & Chapman 2001). Faculty members, as deliverers of these aims, are considered a college's most important resource. Their research qualifications, vocational and professional experience have substantial consequences for program delivery success (Ashworth & Harvey 1994). However, there are well-documented deficiencies in higher education planning and delivery in Arab states, a situation exacerbated by high birth rates and the continual need to source qualified lecturers (refer s3.3.1, Abu-Arja 1984, Kirat 2002).

Further impacting course delivery and adding risk, the exponential growth of education delivery worldwide affects Oman's newer higher education sector through chronic university understaffing and thus short-term expatriate employment. With the globalisation of education and the access to information technology, the relationships of learning (individualised and collective) do not now rest on face-to-face contact. Students now learn through a range of methods, from tutor through to electronic delivery (Bowden & Marton 2004); although this methodology was firmly divided between theoretical subjects and practical training in the MCD course. Graduates made frequent mention of time constraints for educators, deficiencies in the lecturers' attention to detail such as marking reports and feedback, surface learning by rote instead of deep learning methodologies and especially, the absence of allocated learning experiences in practical training instances (s5.2.2).

Knowledge delivery should be adapted in such a manner that students are prepared for the research and employment demands they meet upon graduation. The impact on their learning experiences of MCD's lecturers' divergent styles was a constant refrain from student and graduate study participants. This style variability is typified by faculty imparting knowledge through a surface approach to learning, which involves an intention to reproduce, or a deep approach, involving the intention to understand and create meaning from that which is being learned (Bowden & Marton, 2004). For example, despite being well-qualified, expatriate academics who could not speak Arabic used interpreters in lectures and seminars, distorting communications and failing to convey subtlety in transferring information on constructs and reasoning, a process which weakens the quality of learning (Arden-Close 1999). There was some connection between lecturers' styles and

their antecedent experiences elsewhere – in a youth-oriented country like Oman, older expatriate lecturers brought with them unfamiliar or even irrelevant concepts, life examples and attitudes to education and this did not resonate with the young Omanis and their particular, if not unique, mass media job market. The students and graduates had greater appreciation for the new Omani lecturers, who themselves were products of the mass communications course and who understood the students' needs and views. However, it was argued that the expatriate educators' language and cultural barriers that impacted students' learning were balanced by wider perspectives than those of the younger Oman-trained lecturers.

The academic belief systems that give rise to the divergent teaching beliefs (that is, an intrinsic educational or research goal and an extrinsic goal of employment) are discussed in an unpublished doctoral thesis (Samuelowicz 1999). The researcher found a strong sense of thematic coherence in her study on higher education teaching practices, drawn from the academics' belief systems. Academics who set tasks requiring students to transform knowledge or to use knowledge to interpret the world believe that students *have to do the learning* and their role as teachers is to facilitate the learning process. Graduates reported that this style was characteristic of Omani lecturers and encouraged an interest in further learning. Conversely, academics who test the students' ability to recall information or to emulate a decision process believe that reproduction of knowledge and skill are worthwhile learning outcomes and that their task is to provide the knowledge and skill in an accessible form. This typified expatriate lecturer styles for the graduates. This inherent belief system progresses through to assessment practices, where the relationship between values and assessments also holds. The participants' views of academic behaviour in this study confirm the applicability of Samuelowicz's insights on diverging training systems to MCD's faculty. The research emphasises the absence of a coherent media-based culture for MCD.

7.1.5 Student Characteristics

Discussions on student selection and admission procedures for mass communications courses in universities across the Gulf countries (s5.3.1, Al Jardi 1993, Haddad 2002) revealed that lack of rigour in standards of entry for such students affected their employability. The human capital acquisition-application model was compromised. Of particular concern were applicants' standards in Arabic and English languages, general

knowledge of the media industry, and the commitment to a media career. SQU's Arts and Social Sciences College is no exception, especially SQU's practice of giving indifferent undergraduates from other faculties a chance to finish their studies in the Arabic-language college. The MCD staff members interviewed in this study were united in their condemnation of student allocation to MCD without entry assessment. The students interviewed ascribed this practice, which arguably accounted every year for half the 30 – strong final year cohort for mass communications, as a major barrier to acquiring a job.

Female participation in MCD's courses is notable in a contrary sense; rarely does it reach 25 per cent of the class numbers. All participant categories viewed the absence of women with concern, as overall, SQU's women graduates account for slightly more than half its numbers each year and non-Arab countries experience high female participation in their mass communication courses. To place this concern in context, the Omani public service, as the main employer (s.3.1.2), is male-dominated (63,000 men and 36,000 women), and virtually all its female public servants are employed by the Ministries of Education or Health. Despite their numbers, Omani women dominate the public service qualification holders up to and including the degree of bachelor. Omani men, on the other hand, hold their job positions with indifferent educational levels and surpass women's qualification strata only when Master's and PhD levels are reached. Employment of men at similar or higher grades on grounds other than superior qualifications is one of the weaknesses in the application of human capital theory. Wasta (nepotism, conclusions at s8.1.2) is a contributing factor (Arrow 1973, Caputo 2002, Lundberg & Startz 1983, Sunstein 1997).

For graduates of both genders, human capital principles characterise the education process as improving job prospects for individuals and thus the acquisition of human capital for themselves, wider society, and the state. Upon entering universities for a four year course, for example, new students are motivated to attain a degree, extending the example, in mass communication. Fazey and Fazey (2001) found that, at the beginning of their university life, students felt positive but were unsure of their abilities to meet the demands of higher education. Students arrive at university, the authors state, with the potential to learn and it is the responsibility of those who structure the learning environment to nurture undergraduate potential to realise successful outcomes for higher education. Miller (1970) earlier pursued this point to argue from an organisational perspective that universities' continued growth is enhanced by an effective selection

process for their courses that facilitates student retention and course completion. However, given the student motivation, university intake procedures affect the quantity or quality of acquisition and thus the ability to later employ human capital.

Contrary to the human capital principles to which it subscribes, however portrayed, MCD admission procedures reward non-performance for undergraduates from other SQU colleges and thus diminished the credential for all graduates. Gulf-based researchers (Abu-Arja 1984, Kirat 2002) criticise their countries' mass communication policies and procedures for the indifference of university qualifications in the field. Possible rationalisations for the intake practices by SQU include preference for certain social classes by awarding a somewhat automated degree on the basis of attendance; a determination to graduate as many as possible to assist in the country's development; or conversely, the individuals concerned may merely be pursuing human capital's self-interest objectives with the tacit assistance of the university. Human capital principles, as an unqualified accumulation of time and credentials may thus be served, but as Friedman (1962), Block (1990), Elster (1983) and Kivinen and Ahola (1999) observe, perhaps the theory itself is flawed in its dismissal of barriers, irrational behaviour and extraneous factors.

7.1.6 Summary

In human capital theory, education is an optimising investment decision (Becker, 1993). Individuals undertake education to the point where the present value of expected benefits from additional schooling is equal to that of its direct and indirect costs (i.e. tuition fees and foregone earnings). Education increases the productivity of individuals, and more skilled workers are therefore expected to command better jobs and higher salaries if labour markets are perfect and labour is paid at its marginal value.

Against this background, commentators often object that decisions regarding education depend on ability, attraction of a career, family pressure and other factors relating to an individual's environment. Further, choice of career and the quality of education itself impact outcomes. Lastly, the availability of work commensurate with training is a final variable. While in principle these factors may raise or lower the incentive of an individual to invest in education, their net total effect is bound to be an empirical question (Harmon, Oostrbeek & Walker 2003).

For a considerable proportion of each year's MCD undergraduate intake, pursuing a media career was arguably a compromise decision. The goal was a tertiary qualification, not a career, and the acceptance of the university's offer of a position in the mass communications program was the last chance for a degree. Graduates' deficiencies in knowledge and skills, in the opinion of most participants in the study, were in languages, information technology, workplace practices (practical training) and job seeking skills. The consequences of these deficiencies in measured (by years and numbers of graduates) or unmeasured (relevant career skills and knowledge) human capital acquisition were sufficient to impede the graduates' employability.

Without certainty in career choice and learning guidance, risk was endemic for students at SQU and for many, culminated in graduate unemployment. The issues of languages contributed greatly to risk accumulation. Notably, of the SQU Colleges, the Arts and Social Science College alone used Arabic for course delivery; however, despite this advantage, faculty respondents reported the majority of students had little initiative for learning. The effects of this malaise were compounded by the complexities and discord endemic in rapidly developing economies such as Oman's. ESCWA (2003) notes in its report that secondary and university students in its region need efficient and clear guidance and counselling systems. Given the high profile of unemployed graduates, contrary to the government's fiat for SQU, a reasonable expectation is that MCD addresses issues relating to employment: including work readiness in the curriculum, opening dialogue with the media industry and offering remedial training to graduates to upgrade their skills.

Further, there is the matter of the dominant Omani ownership of the private sector media industry, although the businesses are operated by expatriates. Ownership presumes that Omanisation principles would be widely accepted in these circumstances. This shift, however, has not yet occurred.

7.2 Risk

Whilst amorphous as a theory through literature, human capital formulations nevertheless have a common conceptual thread: that the higher the level of education and training provided to individuals, the more skills they acquire and as a result the stronger their relative positions are in the labour market (Becker 1965). Figure 2, as noted, presents the concept of human capital theory, showing that a nation's investment in individuals through education and training strongly links to economic growth and individual success.

Other factors attributed to human capital include an active focus on community health and wellbeing (Bloom & Canning 2003, Deaton 2004). Bouchard (1998) previously has argued that human capital relies heavily on future investment, and the assumption of a simple relationship between education and training and economic development weakens the theory. Bouchard further states that employers' demands for skills change and employability are improved by the degree of compatibility between available skills and employer demands. Of importance is the theory's exclusive concentration on earnings and income returns and its ignorance of the social and economic factors affecting employment. This is particularly relevant to the GCC countries' experience and this study. Human capital theory, arguably flawed, nevertheless is a means of defining and categorising peoples' skills and abilities as used in employment and as they otherwise contribute to the economy.

Human capital theory has its contending theorists. Kivinen and Ahola, (1999; s2.1.1) follow Bouchard (1998) by asserting that, as human capital is based on continuous progress, government policies rest on a simplified presumption that more and higher educational credentials equate to human capital growth. The presumption may rest on shaky ground. Its unqualified acceptance constitutes a risk for students, graduates, the University and its staff, and arguably for Oman.

7.2.1 Arab Education Systems

Structural change in education and the risks associated with it are no more evident than that in the GCC. The challenges facing Arab countries assume greater proportions in their emerging societies and are exacerbated by the state of their education systems. Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwajiri, Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2003) critically discusses the mounting issues confronting Arab societies, both GCC countries and other. The main challenges for the Arab nations (ibid. p.22) are

- ICT developments, and the lack of the material, technical and academic means in Arab countries to catch up with and adapt to this progress.
- inevitability of globalisation, and the means to absorb its impact on Arab culture
- relevance of the education output to the growing needs of the job market

- further freedom of education through the private sector to counter a system which paralyses potential, stifles ambition, and sows the seeds of despair over the usefulness of reform, which is completely at variance with the spirit of Arab Islamic civilization and heritage³.

The Director-General advocates education as the preeminent means of securing the future for Arab countries with the following recommendations, inter alia (ibid. pp.23-25):

- educational policies which address the various needs of Arab countries
- coordinating curricula across the Arab world using contemporary methodological and technological approaches to preserve the particularities of identity
- supporting educational and scientific research.

ESCWA (2003) confirms the standard of education in the Arab countries is deteriorating (p.23) and it stresses that effective curricula and sound education systems depend on skilled educators (p.6). As noted, evidence suggests that the majority of Arab graduates from higher education institutions are not employable and this contributes to higher rates of unemployment. Thus it may be argued that MCD is reducing human capital acquisition, because the curricula and teaching remain aligned to public sector employment which is no longer valid in the twenty-first century. This assessment follows a prior observation by Fergany (2000), that higher education plays a vital role not only in building human capital but also in gaining high levels of societal returns within a nation's development process (s.2.3). The author characterised higher education in the Arab world as having a poor quality of education; and investing relatively low levels of expenditure on higher education. Accordingly, Fergany recommended that Arab countries liberate their higher education systems, upgrade the quality of education to embrace lifelong and work-related learning principles and create a cooperative environment for their universities.

Structural risk is therefore a primary element of human risk capital. The challenge for Arab governments and their societies is to find the means to separate globalisation and localisation. The GCC countries can embrace competition and capital development, economic, human and social, whilst conceptualising and preserving their Arab identity, as Alwajri demands. This may only be possible through education.

³ Oman's private sector is active in establishing internationally affiliated universities throughout the country.

7.2.2 University Purpose

A factor of the MCD students and graduates' human risk capital is SQU's perception of its role as an institution: research or educator? Is a university's role education and research or does it have a labour market and a social responsibility? (s.3.2.1, McIntosh & Steedman 2002, Beckett & Hager 2002). Beckett and Hager (ibid.), however, argue that universities need not see their role definition as answering an either/or question. They define a concept of work-based learning that generates both skills formation and broader educational and intellectual outcomes. This role they perceive as a responsibility of universities which then dissolves the opposition between the two goals for higher education, market-readiness and comprehensive education. This point is critical for human capital acquisition for students. A curriculum and delivery balance between the two sets a path: work-readiness for graduates to enhance their employment prospects and a comprehensive education for lifelong learning to pursue that career.

The MCD faculty did not directly acknowledge a short term capability for graduates (s5.1.2) and stated with varying emphases that the university's role is that of a research and educational establishment, not a vocational institution whose role is to produce skilled technicians. Nevertheless, the mass communications course structure was changing to meet the private sector's preferred credentialism: journalism and electronic publishing, broadcasting media, public relations and advertising; and further strengthening course content in languages, technology, and work experience. This adjustment recalls the observation by ESCWA (2003) that previous curricula of the education systems were tailored to supply the countries' public services with graduates.

The debate on the universities' role questions human capital precedents: whether university graduates should possess specific employment-related skills, personal characteristics, and technological and linguistic skills to enter the workforce; or whether they should be provided with general education (ILO 2001). To what extent are policymakers, employers, employees and educational systems collectively and separately responsible for the creation of a highly skilled society (s2.2.3, Huggins & Harries 2004)? For governments, the employability of graduates, the application of human capital, is now a major concern and a crucial educational aim in higher education curriculum design and implementation (Yorke 2003a). In Oman, the government's plan for the economy (Ministry of Development 1995) depends on four main pillars: a sustainable development

approach, diversification of the economy, advancement of the country's human resources, and an invitation for private sector participation in the development process. The government is unquestioningly using higher education to advance human resources for sustainable development. A further research question is then valid: is human capital theory the best approach for the government to use for human resource development? The evidence from this study points to an unacceptably high level of risk throughout the process of acquisition of human capital in SQU's MCD.

In this government-fiat guise of human capital, skills and knowledge in languages, technology, practical training and job-seeking skills are required for the graduates to begin media careers. In conceptualising work-based learning, Beckett and Hager (2002) argue that universities have a responsibility for both skills formation and for general education. This role they perceive as a responsibility of universities, thus bridging the divide between the two goals for higher education, market-readiness and comprehensive education. Alternatively, a transition from university to work, similar to that seen in Australia's technical and further education sector courses is possible, but neither option is available yet to Omani graduates (MacNamara & Uren 2007).

7.2.3 Course Risk

The human risk capital reality identified by Kivinen and Ahola (1999) is grounded in the human capital resurgence of the 1990s. Governments were uncritical of educational outcomes for their citizens, concentrating on the competition encapsulated by the information society and the growing effects of globalisation. The authors concentrate on the gap between human capital ideology, represented by labour market rhetoric, and the everyday reality faced by graduates on the job market, where their human capital is a risk investment:

However, in the conditions of educational expansion and the changes taking place on the labour market and working life, there are intensifying problems of mismatch between demand and supply: on the educational market the courses of study for which places are available do not correspond to young people's aspirations; and on the labour market, both numerous skilled workers on the dole and a shortage of skilled labour in specific occupational fields can simultaneously coexist (ibid. p193).

In Oman, a wide gap continues between human capital ideology and the everyday realities of human risk capital faced by graduates (Kivinen and Ahola 1999). This is no

more apparent than the disconnect between the goal of SQU's staff to produce graduates who are prepared for future workplace learning; the university's students and families who expect a work-ready graduate; and employers' job specifications unmet by the MCD qualification. The graduates' human risk capital, comprising structural risk and conflicting purpose with the university, now assumes further dimensions. Curricula and delivery of the learning experience comprise both course and individual risks, course risk through the quality of the university's curricula and the standard of delivery, individual risk through the student's ability to digest and profit from the course.

The first of these course risks is a potential student's open (or restricted) choice of a qualification in mass communications, an emerging field undergoing rapid change. The evolution of job specifications during the four years of a graduate course, that is, the current and future labour markets is a consideration, and risk is exacerbated by the uncertain ability of the credential to meet future job specifications. This risk accords with the university's argument to grow human capital: given continuous structural and skills changes in all professions, the goal of work readiness is best served by preparing graduates to embrace workplace learning after employment. The university's stakeholders contend that there is insufficient course content or standard to permit graduate employment, and that is a dimension of human risk capital (s6.1.5).

For individuals experiencing the continuing change process of undergraduate courses, program evolution is an accumulation in their human risk capital. Whilst the participant categories responsible for delivering the MCD program displayed enthusiasm to manage program deficiencies and raise curriculum standards, research findings mitigate against such minor efforts resulting in a sustained solution to graduates' unemployment. Researchers (Abdel Gadir Ali 2002, Al-Shaksi 2004, Hume 2007) find gaps between the knowledge and skills of GCC media graduates and those required by potential employers. The media students' experience is no different from those of other tertiary students in Oman (Al-Rawas 2002), where graduates are dissatisfied with curricula and a focus on theory to the detriment of practice. This study confirms informed opinion, as the fourth-year student category and the cohorts of graduates, both employed and unemployed, could not benefit from the future course restructure designed to partially meet evolving industry characteristics. Previous MCD graduate cohorts cannot re-enrol to gain benefits from upgraded technology, new course streams or refocused subjects such as language literacy levels. These lost opportunities were high on the interviewees' discussion agenda (s5.4.5).

Course risk also extends to the ability for a student to access mentoring or at least advisory mechanisms. In higher education establishments, undergraduates may have access to formal and informal faculty guidance through the years of their course, and they trust these lecturers' advice. These elements at MCD are not evident in a formal sense as at other institutions. Further, MCD's current undergraduates are disillusioned by the course risk evinced by past cohorts of unemployed MCD graduates. This points to the final risk of human capital acquisition, that the value of an education, or associated occupational career, may shift over time in response to changes in technology, economic or policy demand patterns, or relative supply.

7.2.4 Individual Risk

Individual risk is inherent in the higher education experience. Factors recognised in the literature (McCormick 2005) as able to negatively affect a student's chances of graduation are: isolation (social and intellectual); lack of resources; 'absence' of, or poor, supervision; and personal and/or professional crises; and tensions arising from a mismatch between an individual's expectations for university life and an institution's concepts of its role to deliver knowledge. In a construct where scholars and society met in their views, all participants viewed education as contributing a greater return to individuals, institutions and a nation's economy (Rayan, 1998). Whilst the problems associated with completing and qualifying for a mass communications bachelor's degree did not rate highly amongst issues mentioned by the study's participants, employment prospects for graduates were another matter.

For the cohorts of graduates and students in this study, students' prior experiences of learning were those of a secondary school model of teaching and learning. Those successfully completing their secondary school education applied for entry into tertiary education and their preferred course at SQU through a competitive process of school achievement. Some successfully applied to the College of Arts and Social Sciences; many accepted a placement in their generic first year Arts course simply to gain a university education and thus a professional career. Other students did not reach a sufficient standard in other colleges of SQU and also accepted a position in Arts and were distributed among its ten departments. Altogether, by the second and third years, a greater number of mass communication students had not selected the course but were placed in MCD (s5.3.1). This

situation occurs in other universities, but arguably not at the level experienced in Gulf countries.

Wasta, the ingrained nepotism of Arabic-speaking countries, dictates that scions of interdependent social groups gain their degrees and thus jobs; and if not prosper with this assistance, they will lead comfortable lives (s8.1.2). Together with free education in Oman as well as other Gulf countries, the qualities of applicants necessary to gain entrance to mass communication courses are thus skewed from a competitive intake approach. The problematic status of human capital in countries like Oman is exemplified by the ways in which traditional culture interacts with modern educational and employment practices.

The relationship between university students' perceptions of their academic environment, their approaches to study, and academic outcomes was confirmed by Lizzio, Wilson and Simons (2002) as influencing both *hard* (academic achievement) and *soft* (satisfaction, development of key skills) learning outcomes, both directly and through their approaches to study. Positive perceptions of the teaching environment not only directly influence academic achievement but also qualitative learning outcomes. Generic academic and workplace skills are best developed in learning environments characterised by good teaching and independence. When confronted by a heavy workload and inappropriate assessment, some students tend toward a superficial approach to study; however, lecturer-led rote learning was negatively assessed by graduates. Whilst perceptions on learning outcomes extracted from the participants' responses were mixed, the negative views were aired on specific elements: course structure and content, lecturer styles, suitability of the graduates for employment. Lecturers, on the other hand, expressed strong views regarding the students' defensive attitudes to knowledge acquisition and their lack of initiative.

7.2.5 Summary

The graduates' learning outcomes were constrained by a series of human risk capital factors: their manner of entry into the MCD course, the nature of the course that they experienced (structure, content, resources, lecturer styles, balance of theory and practice), their inherent attitudes and those of their lecturers, and the small and changeable labour market. The university system was at that time in a state of change to accommodate its perceived deficiencies, which were unlikely to comprehensively address even course risk. The policymakers may well have to instigate life-long learning systems to address further deficiencies resulting in MCD's unemployed graduate cohorts.

As the definition of human capital (Figure 2) has sufficient elasticity to encompass the notion that any knowledge acquisition an individual may gain, however meagre, benefits the common good, the diminished or missing skills that may otherwise have been possessed by the graduates under another methodology now form a barrier to their employment. If graduates are perceived to lack competence and fail to obtain a position in the media, the university has demonstrably failed in its mission. If, on the other hand, the acquisition of skills and knowledge was available to the students through indirect means (texts, media, internet, further courses or external), the motivation of the students comes into discussion. They did not wish to pursue self-interest to use in employment or contribute to the economy. That is a deficiency in human capital formation for the country.

Thus an argument is emerging in Oman against the theory of human capital itself and its core tenet that all human behaviour is based on the economic self-interest of individuals operating within freely competitive markets. In the pure formulation of human capital theory, other forms of behaviour, including that of the stakeholders of this study, are excluded. Friedman (1962), for example, argues that all the benefits of a professional education are limited to the individual who is educated. However, a critic (Block 1990) suggests that the elevation of self-interest to a position of dominance on which much economic analysis rests, is itself a consequence of social arrangements. Further, Elster (1983) preceded the human risk capital theory of Kivinen and Ahola (1999) by stating that under conditions of complexity and uncertainty, the gap between rationality in action and perfect rationality can be substantial. The circumstances by which human capital can accumulate are not evident in Oman and this observation may be relevant for other countries in the GCC region.

The human capital constructs for this study do not provide a basis for improvement in the employment outcomes for graduates of the MCD course. Whilst the following chapter is devoted to the structural tenets of social capital to mitigate the effects of human risk capital, findings using social capital tenets may provide a way forward to address aspects of risk: characterised by interrelationships between the university and the business community. Selected applications are discussed below.

7.3 Countering Risk

A social capital analysis, commenced in this chapter and developed further in chapter 8, assists in considering factors to counter the human risk elements which form

barriers to employment. The foundations of social capital comprise networks, shared norms, trust and reciprocity. Discussed at s2.1.2, Woolcock (2000) demonstrates the interrelationships of these components through the dimensions of bonding, bridging and linking. Trusting behaviour and trustworthiness rise with social connection and thus create social capital for high status individuals (Francois & Zabochnik, 2005), in this case, graduates from MCD.

Growth in a country's social capital benefits civil society. Economic and social growth can only be achieved through the development of knowledge and skills (ILO 2002, s2.2.3). Nevertheless, education does more than just provide skills and knowledge. It builds students' social lives and sets relationships that contribute to their entry into society (Harris & Chapman 2002, Crosnoe 2004). Human capital is thus embedded in the wider dimensions of social capital through individuals' connectivity, enhanced trust and acquisition of skills, especially through weakly tied bridging capital. Embeddedness in a network of ties is an important source of social capital for MCD students, and possibly to the cohorts of disenfranchised graduates given sufficient initiative. In this section, an argument is made for the graduates and their stakeholders to build and maintain networks rich in bridging ties and in particular to sustain ties to decision makers who are well-positioned as sources of new information, ideas, and opportunities (Helliwell & Putnam 1999).

7.3.1 Government's Role

An effective media industry is an important contributor to the government's agenda to maintain its cultural roots whilst building a modern state. From the initial stages of development of its natural assets, the Omani government invested heavily in human capital to build its future social and economic infrastructure. This has not had the desired outcome expected from such investment. As noted by ESCWA (2003) and stated in the literature (Al-Yousef 1995, Ali 2002, El-Erian et al. 1998, Hume, 2007), the majority of graduates from higher institutions in the region are not readily employable. El-Erian et al. (1998) assert that this was a consequence of low quality education; and distortions in the labour market due to high levels of pay and beneficial working conditions in the public service relative to that acceptable to expatriates in the largely non-Omani private sector.

Omanisation was introduced to address the dual labour markets, first by transferring skills and replacing expatriates in the public service, then in the private sector. Joyce (1995) cites Oman's Minister of Civil Service:

. . . it is not intended through the Omanisation policy to convert the government into 'a social security system', that is, a means of supporting citizens to passively gain work knowledge, that the purpose of the policy is improved productivity.

The purpose of Omanisation for graduates is to form a class of professionals and managers to take up the mantle of future leaders of society. This social transformation is expected to begin at university as undergraduates form alliances and connections extending beyond the campus which will form the basis of future bridging and linkages that ultimately add to the richness and depth of Omani society. The intention of Omanisation is to build and maintain an indigenous, *third sector*, a civil society, within the wider Omani population (Kandil 1994).

To the study participants, Omanisation was simply labour policy that the government promulgated through its various decrees. However, whilst the policy was clear, the practices associated with Omanisation were not well understood, an example being a high level of trust by students, unemployed graduates and their families in government to intervene to place graduates in work: *if the government cannot provide mass media jobs for the graduates, then the Omanisation Committee/Ministry of Manpower should find jobs for them.* This trust is placed in strong familial-type ties, which in this case are unlikely to be reciprocated by the government, given that *wasta* is not drawn upon.

The government's role in social capital formation and growth is becoming critical. In this study policymakers saw their role as that of inducing an educational environment in which citizenship, Omani culture and, particularly in higher education establishments, leadership is instilled in students. These outcomes are not occurring. The university does not instil a love of learning, the graduates are disaffected and lack motivation and the initiative to engender capital growth is merely financial and it is offered effectively by transient expatriates. The excessive expenditures of government to build a nation resulted in physical capital through infrastructure growth but, for this study, the resources expended have not found roots in human or social capital growth.

7.3.2 MCD's Civil Role

Mass communications is an important element in the social capital lexicon. It describes the academic study of the means by which information is relayed to large segments of the population. In Oman's rapid development, change and dislocation for its population are mitigated through effective communications networks, through print and electronic media. Narayan (1999) identifies influences on building social capital that include mass communications, and also noted the importance of an indigenous middle class (s3.3.2). In conveying society-wide trust, the author continues, the extent of mass communication together with the membership of associations have a high correlation to the strength of social capital.

In its original mass communications curriculum, SQU recognised the power of media in civil society and its importance to the public interest and wellbeing. In a rapidly changing world, public broadcasting and print media convey the information that facilitate social and economic development, particularly in a youthful society that evinces a high regard for guidance. At its inception in the 1980s, the university's initial focus provided journalists for the public sector, and at that time the government was the sole provider of mass communications within the small country. SQU's curriculum for public sector journalism was oriented to formal aspects of literature and governance, with content influenced by regional and local events. Course delivery relied on traditional Arab learning systems. Thus knowledge of global media, English fluency and technological competency were considered useful but not essential to the policies of a government forging capital development on human, civil and economic grounds. However, the public sector's acceptance of all SQU media graduates peaked in the 1990s when the government's media infrastructure was in place and resourced, thus graduate unemployment emerged. Government policy at this time assigned further media growth to the private sector to develop communication channels for the diversity of information and opinion, setting up the possibility for the building-up of Oman's social capital stocks (Ali 2002).

Whilst the GCC's regional higher education policy presents an impediment to employment (ESCWA 2003 p.34), Gibbs (2000) envisages employability skills incorporated within a more general set of aims for higher education. Like accumulating human risk capital (Kivinen & Ahola 1999), Gibbs sees a danger in a narrow definition of educational goals that ultimately lead to a credential as a goal, not as a tool for

employment. In this study, credentialism has a different facet - that a curriculum designed for public policy employment produced a qualification too conservative for the private sector's job specifications of flexibility and initiative (s5.2.4). Once the scope of a general education has been defined, Gibbs views lifelong learning as an alternative and preferable educational aim where a university retains links with its alumni to offer upgrading in their skills. For SQU, retraining was not an option and MCD faculty's indifference resulted in low connectivity with its graduates. This is a crucial aspect of the analysis, where application of social capital principles, that is building linkages to its alumni, may have a decided impact on outcomes for MCD. It is a specific opportunity for a university to be an active contributor to social capital formation.

A nation's mass communications infrastructure, as noted (Nayaran 1999), reflects the nation's civil strength and trust relationships. In a pure human capital equation, the university initially fulfilled its role by providing the public sector employers with all its media graduates. However, the nexus was broken between human capital acquisition and application, with the university's responsibility to its stakeholders, civil society, severely strained. Graduates accumulated human risk capital and became unemployable in the emerging private sector media industry. The university nevertheless continued its curriculum of formal journalism, which study participants considered inappropriate to meet the challenge of jobs in the private sector.

The university's inadequate response to the media globalisation rapidly impacting upon Oman was assessed by study participant sectors, inter alia, as stemming from a lack of coordination with private industry (Al Hamoud & Al-Asker 2003, Arab States Broadcasting Union 2003, ESCWA 2003). Despite claims by a number of faculty participants that they were cognisant of all aspects of Oman's commercial media, it was evident that communication channels to facilitate graduate employment were not in place (s6.1.1). Establishment of a formal communication mechanism could form the basis for effective bridging ties to withstand changes of participants in both the university and employers, an outcome beneficial to future Omanisation of private sector media industry. The omission of social capital development at this point, that is, seeking bridging capital with the nascent media industry, is clouded by the university's own strong bonding culture, internally and with the narrowly defined social groups with which it is associated. Such omission is a deterrent to wider social capital formation through the university's role in building a strong mass media industry for Oman.

Further, the faculty's unwillingness to forge ties with the industry it serves was an outcome of a strong tenet of social capital theory; formal and informal ties encourage bridging and linking behaviours that build trust. There were findings from this study that pointed to such a deficiency of trust among the stakeholders. The purpose of the university was not clear; perceptions of its role differed between the participants. Participants also questioned the absence of relationships between the university, at policy and lecturer levels, and the executives and managers from the corporations. Although employer participants professed interest in offering input to the MC course, the academics demurred.

As topics for discussion, other points emerged from the analysis of perceptions from the study group. Staff turnover resulting in short term employment of non-Omani academics and private sector managers may impact longer term relationships necessary to forge trust. The emergence of a private sector media industry was perhaps viewed by decision makers at SQU from its globalisation aspects, and deemed anti-Islamic in its business models and content. Finally, the success of al-Jazeera, the pre-eminent media for Arab communications, may adversely impact business growth expectations for rivals in an over-crowded industry. In all, without a professional national workforce in a mass media industry who can focus the attention of Oman's high proportion of youth, and provide social input for Narayan's indigenous middle class, social capital growth is curtailed (Narayan, 1999).

7.3.3 Employers

Employers do not trust MCD graduates: *there was trust only if someone knew someone who could help or if someone was recommended by someone to be trained well and taken care of* (Student 1). Employers view graduates skills' and knowledge as insufficient to meet their job specifications, and whilst public sector employers are somewhat willing to hire and train graduates on a temporary basis, private employers do not. Private employers were adamant that the graduates' qualities did not meet the skill specifications for work they claimed was available and that the cohorts were deficient in initiative, dedication and communication skills. They believed that the university's MCD program did not adjust adequately to the private sector employers, its new stakeholders (s6.2). They noted that there was little evidence of MCD faculty entering into any formal relationships which could engender the diverse ties that that grow social capital and lead to action. The debate through this study centred, not on the inadequacy of skills or forging

information and planning linkages, but on the responsibility for further training of graduates if they were employed. Thus trust by the employer participants in the university's willingness to extend future training to upgrade graduate's skills was low. This lack of trust was reciprocated by the university members in their perception of improbability for employers to add quality content to the MCD program.

The social capital ties forged by an individual directly affect labour force status (Stone, Gray & Hughes 2003). Trust, bonding and linking relationships impact an individual's labour force status and successful job seeking, as discussed at s2.1.2. Significant to this study, Stone, Gray and Hughes (ibid.) found social networks more important than trust in predicting labour status and job hunting methods. Given the lack of trust evinced by both the university and the employer participants, individual initiative promised greater returns for graduates in securing jobs than belated assistance by their faculty members could achieve. The social networks of the graduates and the students extend beyond university through wider society, seeking those with knowledge or power that can identify employment opportunities, or with *wasta*, emplacement.

Employers are the crux of the many themes emerging from the analysis, a factor emphasised by Hume (2007) through university partnerships with media employers. Whilst some participants deliberated the role of the university, the expectations of the study majority were that students who chose a media career, studied for it and graduated should achieve work in the industry; that they are employable. However, the primary barrier was employer intransigence. The findings of this study are that expectations for advantageous employer behaviour did not come to fruition, and failure of both human and social capital elements were prime contributors.

7.3.4 Graduates' Employability

Perhaps the antithesis of unemployment is employability. Employability may be viewed as a characteristic of the transition between full education, or accreditation, and the workplace and includes a workplace training régime. Participants in this study agreed that the graduates lacked the skills and knowledge to make the transition; also that the size of the job market was a major barrier to employment and career progression through on-the-job training

Mass communication graduates experienced a watershed between the previous cohorts' public sector employment certainties and a reversal of their fortunes to meet the

job specifications of a nascent and fitful private sector media industry. Whilst the strong ties between the MCD faculty and the public sector facilitated a smooth transition for previous cohorts into employment, all sources of employment for the current cohorts were severely diminished. Communication ties were not in place, social capital growth was not occurring. Thus the research question continues to unfold. The graduates were unemployed because the labour market environment had significantly changed. Their skills and knowledge no longer fit the mass media job market and their employability was hampered. Industry expectations for value, that is, trust, from such employees are low, as the university's reputation precedes job applicants in Oman's media job market.

Unusually for an arts course, where women usually comprise the greater numbers, the MCD qualification attracted few female students. Arab women's unequal access to the media is a universal concern, according to Sakr (2002), as negative stereotyping and lack of promotion for female editorial staff not only reflect wider disadvantages facing women but also help to sustain and reproduce them (s3.3.4). This point was described by Portes (1998), who states that, while social capital benefits members of a group, it inevitably excludes others and to conform to the group norms, they can be excluded from benefits shared through the group. From the view of those individuals, Portes continues, obligations to family and friends can restrict individual freedom and entrepreneurship. In this case, women were reluctant to invoke societal disapproval by pursuing a media career and were thus denied the opportunity to contribute to social growth for Arab women.

Tied in with the negative effects of social capital, there is economic discrimination against women in the GCC countries (Gallagher 2004, Talhami 2004). Female equity matters are slow to gain momentum in the GCC countries' media education literature; hence there are few studies in this regard (Jasim & Al-Dabbous 2002, Al-Rawas & Nijim 2002, Kirat 2002). However, perceived job discrimination appears to be directed at GCC countries' female populations only, not to expatriate women in their workforces. Nevertheless, participants in this study reported that besides citing cultural constraints in some areas, females tended to avoid mass media because of the lack of work in the industry. In one instance only, a parent said his daughter had achieved an early ambition for television journalism, gained her mass communications degree and now worked in Omani television.

This study's graduates and the fourth-year students acquired human capital that cannot be used in their education-to-work transition, thus career employability is not

available without further capital acquisition. Employability is a multifaceted characteristic, and Knight and Yorke (2003) warn against confusing employability with job acquisition, work experience or a particular curriculum. Employability is more than a set of instrumental skills, embodied in an employer's appraisal of whether an individual is appropriate for a given job. Graduates are employable only when trust and reciprocity between the educators and employers produce curricula aligned to a profession's labour market and when industry seeks to employ such graduates. Haddad (2002) typifies this with the statement that job opportunities for media graduates are the greatest threat to the success of mass communication and journalism courses offered by GCC's universities and colleges.

For the students and graduates, aspects of communication which impacted weak ties of social capital were English and ICT. English enables communications with non-nationals, ICT through the use of media, especially the internet, arguably achieves a greater audience than anything before it. These were the two aspects of the curricula cited by the study participants as lacking relevance and rigour for the graduates. At the time of writing, both were being addressed by the university, but without further training, unemployed graduates could not benefit. This became a disconnect between the university and its stakeholders, through insufficient dialogue and attention to outcomes, and thus led to an erosion of social capital.

7.3.5 Work-based Learning and Lifelong Learning

The primary differences among this study's participant categories were the allocation of responsibility for factors resulting in graduate unemployment. The graduates experienced recurring neglect from the university's policymakers and as there is now no recourse to the university for 'remedial education', the cohorts of unemployed graduates must seek options, preferably work-based and allied to their defunct careers. It is argued at s2.1.2 that inappropriate actions, strategies and policies may destroy social capital ties and negatively affect economic development and this occurred with the MCD graduates. Further, the size of a social network impacts directly on the level of its influence within a society, and the greater the social and community ties an individual commands, the greater the chance of employment (Grootaert 1998). These graduates, through inaction or misguided action, are subject to shrinking social networks as their contacts become disillusioned and move away.

Discussed at s2.2.2, work-based learning (WBL) is challenging the traditional roles of universities in less-developed countries in that it essentially partners universities and employers within a new context of learning (Boud & Solomon 2001). WBL's potential is to enhance graduate employability and bridge the gap between the skills and knowledge levels of recent graduates and community expectations and labour market standards. It offers an excellent source of bridging capital, moving the singular state of unemployed graduates across to a new social capital structure. Work-based learning is a strategy to address a perceived lack of discourse by universities and other institutions with the business and social communities of their societal environments. Cited in ESCWA (2003), UNESCO concludes that without more and better quality higher education, developing nations will find it increasingly difficult to benefit from the global knowledge-based economy. SQU is in a very good position to examine the potential for WBL and use its influence to develop higher learning streams through on-the-job skills transfer, an important part of Omanisation and human capital acquisition for future generations. The linkages with its alumni, employers and professional associations would be a considerable stimulus to social capital growth.

If WBL is a useful strategy for SQU's role in improving Oman's human capital provision, life-long learning represents economic progress (s2.2.1, Aspin & Chapman 2001). Life-long learning is a national strategy for upgrading educational and training systems to serve an era of high technological and structural progress, the media generation (Weert 2004). In this study, the policymaker group agreed that higher education builds leaders for Oman's social and economic development and thus represented a welcome adjunct to social capital. The unemployment aspect of graduates is new in Oman and they believed it pointed to the need for administrative adjustment, not necessarily structural adjustment. But employment, particularly in the desired private sector, is a highly competitive process and the policymaker group recognises that graduate Omanis are not replacing unqualified Omanis or qualified expatriates in the important field of mass media. This answers another research point – that Omanisation is not yet a successful strategy and requires adjustment, possibly through the public/private partnerships prized by ESCWA. However, as a government program, Omanisation has only weakly and indirectly acknowledged the potential of social capital formation in Oman's development.

While informed opinion (Abu-Arja 1984, Kirat 2002) raises the issue of quality learning delivery in the universities of the Gulf countries, other researchers (Wimshurst,

Wortley, Bates & Allard 2006) question the quality of teaching and learning in universities generally and thereby the ability to further contribute to alumni learning experiences. The authors identified pronounced differences in grading practices between different components (courses, programs, schools) in any given higher education organisation, and questioned policies and processes that are typically advocated as sufficient safeguards of academic quality. They conclude that the tendency of stakeholders to champion performance indicators and quality ‘outcomes’, such as successful graduate employment, will increasingly throw the strengths and weaknesses of institutional delivery and assessment practices into stark relief. In this study, unless issues are addressed within a social capital strategy, MCD’s assurances that the mass communications course ‘will be fixed’ may be reiterated many times over in the next few years.

7.4 Summary

If defined as number of years of education and qualifications obtained, human capital was acquired by MCD graduates. Yet this definition assumes employment, that careers are rewarded according to employees’ years of education and training. For nationals in the GCC countries, human capital is not a factor in a simple equation as employment cannot be assumed. The factors impeding acquisition of capital and the application of capital theory in career formation in Oman contribute research questions to this thesis.

The impediments to human capital accumulation are variables to the dimensions of human capital theory. Choice of career, of university, of curriculum subjects, of mentors and peers are all theoretically significant sources of risk in the acquiring of a qualification by graduates. The qualification itself can present risk through industry perceptions of its status and employers’ prior experience with graduate recruits. Finally, there remains risk derived from the size, complexity and rate of change in industry, and thus its particular and regional job market.

Whilst human capital theory has evolved quantitatively, through the introduction of measurement tools derived from accounting and economic theory (e.g., Cohen & Soto, 2007); and qualitatively, through dimensions of psychology and human interaction (e.g., Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007), the elements of human risk capital acquisition remain unexplored in the literature. Yet conceptualising risk is not necessarily applied research inasmuch as risk is a potent factor in all human endeavours and as such, deserves a higher profile akin to chaos theory. Risk, as noted, is endemic to capital theory. This thesis seeks

themes in its analysis that have the potential to counter a widespread and invidious trend of human risk capital accumulation that now affects the future maturation of GCC societies. Common issues of low status qualifications, expatriate and transient managers and professionals, and a near-complete focus on current economic development belie the longer-term growth requirements of a stable and mature society of three capital sectors: public, for-profit and non-profit, acting in harmony (Frank & Goulet 2002).

The seeds for an emerging civil society are part of the findings of this research. Given that human capital benefits individuals, organisations and their governments, the collective nature of social capital determines the interactions between these elements and, with risk, the pathways that lead to enhancing human capital benefits widely in civil society. Through their increasing involvement, citizens are emerging as moral subjects of responsible communities (Rose 2000). This theme is developed further by Bowles and Gintis (2002) in observations on community governance, the set of small group social interactions that, with market and state, greatly affect economic outcomes. Of consequence to GCC social environments, particularly the emergence of 'national' civil societies, the authors argue, *inter alia*, that community governance addresses some common market and state failures but typically relies on insider-outsider distinctions that may be morally repugnant and economically costly; and that communities, markets and states are complements, not substitutes. Researchers are thus documenting capital theory development, as some responsibilities attributed to formal organisations in mature economies are assumed by moral subjects of responsible communities. In this study, the model could be adapted for Oman, where national youth unemployment for graduates could form a cause célèbre for mass media, perhaps removing legislative barriers on ownership and censorship and widening the media's reach.

In summary, researchers in fields allied to capital theory are adding to knowledge. As a purist model removed from practical constraints, human capital theory remains somewhat stalled in twentieth century argument. However, researchers' interest in social capital's tenets and relationships in civil society ensures this aspect of capital theory remains robust and relevant as a construct from which empirical study conclusions may be drawn.

The following chapter, 8, moves from this focus on the unemployed graduates to explore the structural relationships between SQU and its environment. These relationships are drawn mainly from the remaining study themes to discuss the findings of this research within the principles of social capital. A theoretical construct is presented which illustrates

the relationships between the elements of this study, and leads to the conclusions and recommendations of the final chapter.

Chapter 8 Implications of Primary Research - Structural

In this thesis, both social capital theory and human capital theory are considered as contextual references to define and explain the factors leading to graduate unemployment in a mass communications course in Oman one of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) countries⁴. In chapter 7, deliberations on human capital principles concluded that, although the theory is widely accepted and adopted by governments to assist social and economic development, either it is too narrow to explain the antecedents of graduate unemployment at Sultan Qaboos University, or the barriers between the dimensions of capital acquisition (the mass communications qualification) and expected outcome (a media career) were too high for the theory to apply. Human risk capital accumulation is high and social capital dimensions can be viewed as offering pathways to reduce the burden of this risk. This final discussion chapter explores the structural implications of this study's findings, focusing on the social capital elements that both define and enrich the university's capability in fulfilling its charter.

Central to this chapter are the processes of social capital, defined as the advantage created by the location of an individual or an organisation in a framework of relationships, demonstrating that superior connections lead to greater success. The discussion infers also the role of civil society in the removal of structural barriers for future Omani graduates. As discussed at s2.1.2, there are a variety of inter-related definitions of this term, and the theory has been described as *something of a cure-all* (Portes, 1998) to explain community interactions. In particular, the works of Putnam (1997) and Narayan (1999) are used in their separate contexts to define and embed this study's findings regarding the unemployment of graduates of Sultan Qaboos University's Mass Communications Department (SQU MCD).

The contents of this chapter begin with a discussion of social capital connections with the findings of this study presented earlier, in chapter 6. The focus is on systemic capital, the social environment, the regulatory environment, and the varied responses of the stakeholders to events and stimuli. This theme is taken up in the following section, where the course work itself is explored within a new social capital paradigm. Next, the social

⁴ The Gulf Cooperative Council countries are: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman

capital dimensions inherent in future partnerships between the university, the private sector and the community that it serves are considered. Finally, a capital model to illustrate the interposition and processes of human and social capital is presented and discussed.

8.1 Applied Social Capital Principles

Human capital theory may be relegated to the twentieth century as a construct or a framework with diminishing utility (Blaug 1972, Bowles& Gintis 1975, Bouchard 1998,). The literature makes much of original economic theories of supply and demand in a perfect market that treads a tenuous path through the centuries. Supply and demand are measurable, even if they exist in an imperfect market. However, the components of the supply/demand formula were adapted by succeeding theorists to explain the processes they were observing. The concept of human capital was refined over the past half century to describe the process of accumulating immeasurable *capital* by an individual or society and supplying the economic (and social) demand, readily measured through statistics or through the monetary units each country expends (OECD 2001a, 2001b). In this study, the Omani government's expenditure on the education of mass communications students is unspecified, but the outcome is evident – the graduates in this study remain unemployed.

Social capital (s2.1.2) also has its critics. Problems exist with definitions and means of measurement (Woolcock 2001), and now there is a question regarding its ability to predict economic development. In a study across 274 Indonesian districts, Miguel, Gertler and Levine (2005) called into question claims regarding social capital and economic development. However, the theory presents a robust framework, and unlike the relatively static human capital concept, social capital is dynamic and displays processes that can be tracked in different situations, such as the characteristics of moral subjects in civil society. In this section, social capital concepts are employed to describe GCC countries' inability to produce work-ready graduates (ESCWA 2003).

8.1.1 Bridging, Linking and Work

The bonding, or close ties, dimension of social capital refers to the value assigned to social networks within homogeneous groups of people and bridging capital to that of networks between socially heterogeneous groups (Putnam 2000). Bridging is therefore a relationship external to the range of family and ethnic groups, whilst the linking dimension of social capital occurs when people seek knowledge from trusted and authoritative

sources. Beugelsdijk and Smulders (2003) show that an important mechanism that influences the degree to which people are willing to step out of their closed social circle with the associated advantages and build bridging social capital depends on a materialistic attitude. People who are more materialistic tend to the type of socialising that has a direct payoff, whereas less materialistic people are embedded in social structures that do not directly yield materialistic or worldly advantages. Bridging ties will therefore strengthen with the commercialisation of GCC societies such as UAE and Qatar, and to a lesser extent, Oman.

Bridging capital is discussed in this section before the bonding dimension (s8.1.2), as it provides a path forward for Oman to escape the negative influences of *wasta*. Further, bridging social capital is a useful stratagem in civil society's role in protecting individuals against the power of the state, discussed at s2.1.2.1 and s7.4. In the GCC countries, oil revenues and public sector influence increase the state's capabilities, and state financial and power structures remain strong and superior to resources available to their social, economic and political oppositions (Abootalebi 1998). Bridging ties are in evidence through Sakr's (2002) study of Arab women's cross-nationalism, where kinship ties extend across national borders and link into other families or tribes. Sakr refers to the role of technology in accelerating such communications and widening the networks. She includes Al-Jazeera as an example, and the increasing willingness of Arab women leaders to join panels to debate gender, health and political issues. If strong ties bind people of similar characteristics as they pursue their normative and identity-based goals, weak ties may be better at serving instrumental goals, as they can provide access to new types of resources but rely less on shared values (Field 2003). The ambitions of such individuals who wish to leave the group's support are facilitated through crosscutting ties that take the form of either bridging or linking social capital. In this case, bridging social capital involves membership of overlapping networks where an individual can gain access to the resources of another group, such as media connections or connections formed during international assignments. However, the prospect of Omanis leaving their country to pursue careers elsewhere in the GCC is not a suitable option for individuals. Whilst GCC nationals are accepted with less documentation in other GCC countries, they are still subject to competition with better qualified and more experienced professionals. Further, whilst GCC citizens, they remain subject to expatriate employment restrictions to promote the hosts' localisation goals. As noted, ventures between GCC corporations are subject to national

ownership restrictions in that external corporations require a local majority partner. Thus in GCC countries, consultants are used extensively for strategy and procedural advice.

The formation of weak ties for unemployed graduates, and at that time students as well, was adversely impacted by their lack of competency in English and ICT, and in formal Arabic for interviews. Whilst other colleges and departments at SQU require English fluency, particularly engineering and science, the College of Arts and Social Science, with its small mass communications department, does not. With English language as media's lingua franca (s7.1.5), this reflects both on MCD's curriculum and the employability of its graduates. Social capital formation is based on communication; restraints to sharing of information hinder its formation. This also applied to previous graduate cohorts whose coursework involved the use of obsolete equipment. A remedial short course by MCD was not offered to those who were thus affected, possibly because there appeared to be no pressure on MCD from the student group to provide this assistance.

For underemployed Omani, in particular the unemployed graduates, moving through their society and employing the risk-reducing strategies embodied by crosscutting ties is an immediate resolution of their respective status. In forming cohort groups and partnerships to promote their human capital resources of growing experiences and knowledge, bonding capital may be acquired and usefully deployed. Linking strategies, that is, approaching resourceful figures with a financial or social work-inducing proposal, such as a consultancy or a project, can lead to social and human capital benefits and perhaps an Omani 'assault' on commercialisation to match their GCC neighbours. The graduates need strategies and careful planning to fulfil their career ambitions, which for very, very few will be a lifetime job with a paternalistic employer.

8.1.2 Bonding and Wasta (Negative Social Capital)

For Woolcock (2000), social capital's bonding dimension occurs upon interactions between family members, and ethnic groups. Beugelsdijk and Smulders (2003) show that whilst bridging social capital has a positive effect on growth, bonding social capital has a negative effect on the degree of sociability outside the closed social circle. The authors find evidence for Fukuyama's claim that *the strength of the family bond implies a certain weakness in ties between individuals not related to one another* (Fukuyama 1995 p.56). The behaviours evidenced by closed networks may include lobbying and acting against the interests of other groups. Corruption often relies on strong personal connections and wastas

and mafias operate through personal connections. *Wasta* has an affinity with small community governance, which addresses some common market and state failures but typically relies on insider-outsider distinctions that may be morally repugnant and economically costly (Bowles & Gintis 2002).

Further evidence of the results of strong ties is given by Lee and Brinton (1996). The authors studied male university graduates in South Korea to explore the relationships among university prestige, human capital, social background, and students' access to social capital through their university (institutional social capital) and their families and friends (private social capital). The study found that the probability of being matched with a top employer is higher through direct application and is enhanced at prestigious universities through the schools' provision of introductions to employers. The close relationships among family background, human capital, and university prestige mean that a highly select group of South Korean men acquires the best jobs.

In this study, the Arabic *wasta* (s6.1.3) is used differently: intermediary *wasta* to resolve interpersonal or intergroup conflict; intercessory *wasta* involves a protagonist intervening to obtain an advantage for the client - a job, a government document, a tax reduction, admission to a prestigious university (Cunningham & Sarayrah 1994). *Wasta* also refers to either a person or an action. Because intercessory *wasta* is pervasive, it produces its own hierarchy. For example, in job interviews only applicants with the strongest *wasta* are successful. However, Putnam (1995) finds that, overall, social capital practices reduce corruption in policymaking and enhance governance.

Wasta was important to participants in this study and the greater majority considered that intercessory *wasta* was a major obstacle to employment for graduates. The faculty, graduates and others had knowledge of those less qualified than MCD graduates gaining scarce media positions in the public sector, citing many incidents of job applicants being aware of who was going to be chosen for a job prior to interview. However, public sector employers were emphatic that the Ministry of Civil Services' central employment policy process, including a selection panel and approval system, removed the past influence of intercessory *wasta*.

Wasta leads to negative social capital. In the Arab traditionalist and interlinking culture, as with the Chinese *guanxi*, shared norms and reciprocity turn inward, and the systems interlink with (and against) other patronage mechanisms (Hutchings & Weir 2006). Patronage systems may be ineffective or unfair because there is no way to force

collaboration among competing patronage systems. They also tend toward secrecy vis-à-vis outsiders. Working with (or in) them is highly dependent on tribal or family connections and hence their history. Higher forms of social capital create conditions where patronage, or *wasta*, does not thrive, through greater communication and perspective sharing between groups (Putnam 2000, Boisot 1995, Boland & Tensaki 1995). Putnam asserts that to create peaceful societies in a diverse country, bridging capital is necessary to create wider networks of similar interests and associations in the context of a civil society.

In Oman's rapid development, the increasing pace of change in society arguably evokes a response from sections of its society to retreat to the perceived comfort of prior certainties. In the space of three decades, Omanis have witnessed immense change and that change is not fairly applied. The use of a *wasta* to gain some certainty through coercion or extortion in a very tight job market is a predictable response and until recently has led to a successful conclusion for an individual. However, the Ministry of Civil Services introduced a centralised recruitment system that rewards performance over connections. If the system has control of all recruitment, standard appeal procedures, and publishes its findings, then public sector *wasta* affecting mass communications graduates will dissipate (s6.1.3).

A social perspective for the wider job market is that the bridging dimension induced by change will lead to increased complexity for communication networks, particularly among the young more exposed to non-Arabic culture, and especially in the media professions. GCC's widening embrace of globalisation, for example Al-Jazeera in Qatar and the commercialism of the United Arab Emirates in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, brings opportunities that are outside the scope of *wasta* influence. *Wasta* will diminish as its negative effects become apparent through obfuscation and inefficiency. Modernisation will lead to rising productivity as appropriate recruitment systems are engaged for young Arabs and job selection is based on skills and knowledge. Thus, as the weak bridging ties of social capital are enhanced graduate unemployment will be substantially reduced.

In the opinion of this researcher, the MCD graduates are in a position to use their collective influence to expose the negative effects of *wasta* through widening their networks to embrace other universities and other media sources, such as Al-Jazeera and similar independent organisations. Social capital reduces risk and, as discussed throughout the previous chapter, *wasta* has significantly contributed to their human risk capital.

8.1.3 Trust and Self-reliance

Following from the discussion on crosscutting ties acquiring high social capital at s.8.1.1 is the concept of trust, that is, individuals performing in accordance with promises, even if this does not maximise their payoffs. Trusting behaviour and trustworthiness rise with social connection and thus create social capital for high status individuals (Francois & Zabochnik, 2005). Coleman (1988) notes the importance of closure in tight networks, such as may be expected to arise as a cohort of undergraduates move through their four-year course. Closure refers to the existence of sufficient ties between members of a group to guarantee the observance of norms (s2.1.2). Due perhaps to their various paths in arriving in the MCD program, including transfers from other colleges of SQU, there was insufficient rapport among members of the unemployed graduates' cohorts to permit such trusting behaviour.

Bridging ties create the trust necessary for a country's social and business communications and transactions. However, the formation and maintenance of bridging ties through cross-membership of groups may be undermined by particularly high levels of bonding social capital (Portes 1998, Stone & Hughes 2000) and this is in evidence with the effect of wasta on the graduates' interviews. The differences between weak and strong ties are explained by Granovetter (1973) as the depth and type of the connections between members of a network, an individual's trust of others and their cooperation, and the identity the individual attains within the network. Hazleton and Kennan (2000) added a communication factor, necessary to access and use social capital through exchanging information, identifying problems and solutions, and managing conflict.

Trust is relevant also for admissions to MCD (s7.2.4). In this case, those who selected a media career and won a place in the course dedicated four years for a qualification to pursue their profession. Trust was implicit in their expectations that the cohort that progressed through the course would at each stage be cohesive, respond to the academic challenge and individually pursue a career in media. This did not occur. There were no entry barriers other than secondary school results. New entrants, failures from other courses, were accepted into the program at several points, including the last year. Trust in the standard of the course and the motivations of co-students dissipated. Social capital growth receded as individuals became isolated into smaller groups, either as

interlopers for whom credentialism, not a media career, was the goal; or the few who genuinely wanted a media career.

Other dimensions of social capital directly relate to the Omani environment and offer pathways for unemployed Omanis. Each graduate faces unenviable competition with the few jobs advertised in the media. Yet this study's policymaker category portrays a future for mass communications graduates as they move into careers and positions of leadership for the country's emerging media industry. However, based on this study's findings, graduates should possess a full range of skills – English fluency, IT skills, and commercial knowledge – otherwise there is little in the way of career opportunities for an individual graduate, given future opportunity in Oman industry (s3.4.4, s7.1.5).

Through building trust capital, graduate and student groups could form that identify work opportunities through bridging ties, or initiate projects and use linkages to gain resources through merchant banks or ministries. Initiating media proposals and forming 'multi-consultancies' of graduates from MCD and elsewhere may also serve to negate the suspected antagonism expatriates show Omanis who would take their jobs.

Entrepreneurship on the part of the graduates also avoids Omanisation issues with employers, and the onus they place on the provision of work-based learning, discussed at s7.3.5. Such Omani consultancies would be in a prime position to take up outsourced public sector work as it becomes available through technological change and fewer public employees as they retire. Trust capital used in this manner also avoids *wasta*. Further, using crosscutting ties and trust capital, cooperative groups of MCD stakeholders may approach media organisations to facilitate, for example, partnerships with the department to place future graduates or form linkages to obtain practical experience for students.

8.1.4 Formal and Informal Networks

In this section, social capital is considered thus far under the prime directive – gaining employment for the graduates. For policymakers and researchers, however, a synergy view of social capital outlined by Woolcock and Narayan (2000) is germane. It has three parts:

- identify the nature and extent of the social relationships characterising a particular community, its formal institutions, and their interactions

- develop institutional strategies based on an understanding of these social relations, particularly the extent of bonding and bridging social capital in a society or community
- identify ways and means by which positive manifestations of social capital—widespread cooperation, trust, institutional efficiency—can offset, and/or be created from, its negative manifestations—sectarianism, isolationism, corruption.

The challenge, according to Woolcock and Narayan, is to transform situations where a community's social capital *substitutes* for weak, hostile or indifferent formal institutions into others in which both realms “complement” one another.

Woolcock and Narayan's plan of action opens social capital approaches to government policy. It succinctly fulfils the aim at s1.2: to explore replicable strategies for a developing country's higher education system to integrate national resources and focus on sustained national development and greater community acceptance. Nevertheless, characteristics of social relationships in the GCC countries, including Oman, differ from the informal structures in more stable communities around the world where population and economic growth are marginal rather than experiencing the extraordinary developments of the Gulf region. The GCC communities are governed by a formal Islamic religion, legal code and its traditions of everyday living and life events. Expatriates who are Arabs and others who are Islamic share Arabic traditionalism. Expatriate professionals also tend to be Islamic, (GCC nationals, Egyptians, Lebanese, and Pakistanis); others are non-Islamic, usually Europeans, Americans, Australians. Islam is paramount in community life, and given the high rate of economic growth and fast-growing populations in the region, a strongly bonded defence against social dislocation.

A further constraint to weak tie bridging in Oman relates to the recent emergence and maturing of an education system and the civil society that evolves of necessity in established economies to support learning. In Oman, and generally through the GCC region, all public education is funded entirely by the state; thus the recency of the system explains the lack of civil support of parents and friends for funding, or, unfortunately, for social support for students. This is a corollary to the situation that Fukuyama (1999) described as the outcome from a radius of trust formed by people who share cooperative norms. If the group can build social capital and positive outcomes, then the radius of trust

can extend to graduate stakeholder networks. However, without the informal *weak* networks offered by their children's activities, parents tend to remain in their strong intra- and inter-familial relationships. It is moot whether private pupils' needs require civil society's intervention. This study argues that the application of social capital principles will lead to productive inter-familial relationships in Oman's educational institutions. Parental intervention to support university education in GCC and elsewhere is not yet the norm. An example of the application of social capital concepts which is expected to emerge can be seen at SQU in the way in which university-sanctioned student groups allow young adults to socialise with their peers across many aspects of campus.

For the MCD faculty, linkages with private industry in the strongly Arabic environment are formalised and rare. Similarly, communications for the MCD faculty through the university structure to the government policymakers, the university's directors, or other colleges or departments are governed by formal submissions and procedures. Private overtures to graduate stakeholders and non-traditional sources of jobs are subject to the strong bonds of honour, including *wasta*. SQU and its MCD faculty could take on a more active role in enabling mass communication students to establish personal and knowledge-based links with private media organisations. The existing cross-campus study group idea could be extended to invite professionals in the media to meet on a regular basis with MCD students for the purpose of making contact, explaining their organisations' priorities and setting up workplace learning opportunities, thus enhancing a weakly tied knowledge-rich community.

The preferred employment for MC graduates if jobs are available is in the public sector, partly because of its lower recruitment conditions (English, MCD degree and experience). This aspiration is an outcome of the strong ties of Arabic culture, and in its nadir, *wasta*. Whilst this study is focused on private sector employment in the Omani media industry, a proportion of study participants reacted positively to a suggestion that mass communications graduates could gain employment in secondary schools to engender children's interest in the media through school subjects and activities, typified by

Employed Private Sector Graduate (1):

We do not have educational media in our schools and if the Ministry of Education implements this idea I think there will (then be a better) balance in (admissions) of males and females to the mass communication department.

New subjects in film- and video-making are an excellent source of communication and potential social capital growth. Using Omanisation decrees and job availability through the high population and economic growth, MC graduates could be retrained as teachers for both the public and private sector educational establishments. However, this was assessed as a defeatist and a stopgap measure by the study majority, including the policymakers, who preferred that human capital acquisition and application were directly linked. Nevertheless, as a form of work-based learning otherwise denied to graduates, if not to students, the school working environment was a legitimate step toward employment. The strong bonding ties of the Omanised public sector also offered an easier route to part time work for the graduates, thus reaching towards Woolcock and Narayan's synergies (2000).

Further research tracing social capital's formal and informal networks, institutions, and communication pathways such as the Internet, electronic and print media is highly desirable to identify strategies for Oman's five-year plans.

8.1.5 Applied Social Capital Summary

Through applied social capital principles, this section explored options to enhance graduate employment, especially the use of bridging mechanisms and examples that could be brought into play. With University support, unemployed graduates, through trust and bonding, can use their individual strengths to form groups or associations to use linkages and bridging ties to overcome the barriers that prevent further acquisition of human capital in the form of jobs and workplace training. They can identify opportunities, decide on strategies, formulate and produce proposals and sell their products. Thus, they overcome institutional barriers, perceived antagonism from expatriates, and importantly, *wasta*.

This section briefly discussed social principles depicted at national, organisational and individual levels. For SQU, the government and employers, the matter is complex. While Woolcock and Narayan (2000) propose a social capital pathway, for policymakers the simplicity of human capital's supply (graduates) and demand (media jobs) is absent. Understanding the regulatory and economic structures through constant examination and measurement is yet to be perfected by GCC countries; therefore tracing civil society's pathways and its linkages to formal organisations is problematic in the extreme. Nevertheless, the decision makers' dedication to a type of human capital based on simple quantity measures is not successful and a policy that contributes to the substandard performance of graduates in GCC universities must be addressed. Interpreting the

dynamics of society, as Woolcock and Naryan (ibid.) describe the process, is the first step Oman must take to identify characteristics which should be encouraged to achieve a mature and stable society. Introducing participation and collective action in the management of local resources usually requires fundamental shifts in government agencies' missions, roles, values and indicators of success. Instead of considering itself as a dispassionate provider of higher learning, SQU should consider becoming a supporter of local organisations, of the civil society in which it is embedded, and thus an enabler of human and social capital. The necessary shift in culture and the incentives facing SQU and the government are difficult to bring about, but essential if changes are sustainable over time (Narayan, 1999).

The findings of this study are that human capital's personal characteristics of skills and knowledge achieved through years of learning are subject to risk. The accumulation of human risk capital can rise to a level that eliminates acquired skills and knowledge – technology change is a prime example. What follows is a discussion of the possibilities of turning human capital risk to opportunity.

8.2 A Social Capital Curriculum

SQU's options in engaging with its stakeholders to address perceived and factual discrepancies in its mass communications course are explored in this section. The data in this research points to the need for SQU to reconsider its curriculum settings in the MCD program. While the University has taken steps to reform the internal course program, the links between the University and its external stakeholders appear not under consideration. A social capital curriculum can build the potential of social capital by developing weak ties across a matrix of current and future students and their families, SQU staff and existing and potential employers in both business sectors.

A social capital curriculum employs strategies such as work-based learning as a course principle because it requires the university to work closely with employers; an example of the weak ties of strong social capital that support the curriculum. A further example of these ties is that students who regularly attend workplaces with expatriates require fluent English and familiarity with industry-level technology. They are motivated to greater performance in coursework, and thus to be technologically proficient. As the Omani media industry is part of a globalised industry, of which Al-Jazeera is an obvious

example, a social capital mass media curriculum emphasises competency in work-related skills such as English and ICT use.

8.2.1 A New Paradigm for MCD

SQU's curriculum model is based on human capital formation, a model that this study determined is of high risk to the university itself and to those groups and individuals it professes to service; that is, students, employers and other stakeholders.

A conclusion of this study is that the mass communications course remained aligned to the public sector (s5.2). Nevertheless, modifications to curriculum content were continuing as a response to the very different environment of private sector employment, although little was in train to prepare graduates for job competition. For many unemployed graduates, the curriculum they experienced was historical and theoretical to meet public sector criteria for policy and program implementation; they could not benefit from the curriculum adapting towards information technology theory and, importantly, private sector practice.

The mass communications course as varied over the two decades since SQU's establishment was at each change a product of its planners, who comprised a high proportion of expatriate Arabs. The course was delivered by academic staff for whom person specifications focused on high moral standards, lecturer availability and arguably fluency in Arabic, before lecturer performance, that is, qualifications and experience. Further, course delivery was constrained as learning resources were insufficient, and frequently available only in English. These constraints were a substantial barrier to the alumni acquisition of human capital.

Planners and recruiters need to move beyond debates about curriculum and morality to consider the effects of social capital. In this study, the most common proposals to address MCD's issues accorded with those of Putnam (1993), who found that such proposals are deeply flawed by their profoundly individualistic concepts of education. The policymakers and academics in this study equated the human capital acquired by SQU graduates with a presumed leadership potential that would in future mitigate the effects of globalisation and strengthen Omani society. The true basis of engagement of the community and thus strengthening Oman's social capital is the inclusion of societal members at every level; in this case, through students and their families, and through

employers to meet the effects of globalisation. This constitutes a debate on policy redirection for Oman.

Whether deserved or not, the reputation of SQU's MCD qualification is that it is of no use to graduates or employers. Whilst a decade ago, when all graduates transferred to the public sector, the question of curriculum content or course standards did not arise; the human capital equation was resolved and qualification equated with a job and a comfortable lifestyle. Times are very different and the previous certainties are long gone. A new paradigm is required for the mass communications course. In this study, there is broad agreement that improvements include a focused curriculum, younger Omani faculty, appropriate and available technology, sufficient off-campus training – and well-prepared and committed students. Thus, a reinvigorated mass communications program is forged from interactions between the stakeholders and the university to rebuild the reputation of the qualification and, because of this interaction, Oman's social capital.

8.2.2 Civil Input to MCD Course

A central dimension of social capital in education is parental networks. Horvat, Weininger and Lareau (2003) explored the formation of such networks in school situations. There are some similarities with higher education in this study, inasmuch as Oman's society is relatively homogenous and thus meets the criterion of the researchers' middle-class parents, who tended to react collectively, and were able to draw on contacts with professionals to mobilise the information, expertise, or authority needed to contest the judgments of education officials. Importantly, the authors affirm the importance of a resourced concept of social capital that grants the issue of inequality a predominant place. In this research, that inequality was manifest at admission to the course, the differential treatment of Arts students including MCD by the university hierarchy, and the value of the qualification for job seekers.

The first application of social capital for the mass communications course concerns the nature of the course. All participants of this study, the stakeholders, agreed that theoretical subjects predominated and that the course was educational, not vocational. However, the wisdom of pursuing that policy was criticised by the majority of participants and at least one member of each study category. Given the outcomes: unemployed graduates, rejection of the qualification by private employers, and damage to SQU's reputation, the university's future rests on its ability to engage its stakeholders and

influence opinion. The mass communications course offers an excellent opportunity to trial a new social capital paradigm, given the nascence of the Omani media industry, government directives for media engagement, Omanisation and thus the potential for future graduates.

The next application relates to student selection processes (s5.3). For secondary school aspirants to a mass media career, admission to university is based on their final year results; they are placed in a SQU College corresponding to the first of three career choices. The first year in the College of Arts and Social Sciences is a common year and entry to a chosen discipline again depends on attainment, thus there are direct enrolments to the MCD course based solely on results. Other admissions come from unsuccessful first-year and mid-semester students from other SQU colleges who applied for an Arts course to remain at university, practices criticised by the Arab Human Development Report (UNDP 2003) that amount to differential treatment by the university from that accorded other colleges. Social capital principles require wider input to this arbitrary decisionmaking; at the very least, a debate with stakeholders regarding barriers to students' successful completion of the course. Transparency through human capital achievement, that is, years of study and passing grades, should be balanced by the creation of a student profile designed to engender engagement with the coursework and importantly, the workplace.

Parents influence their children's careers. MCD's damaged qualification was well known by the parents in this study. Whilst they acceded to the students' continuation of the MC course, the recent introduction of private universities in Oman allows freedom of choice to families of potential students. Although public education is free at SQU, the stigma of unemployment for their children may be unacceptable to parents who enjoy high net worth and who can pay for an adequate education, notably for their daughters. Whilst SQU remains the primary provider of a mass communications course, it is in a position to restore its reputation and build the social capital so desired by the study's government participants. If a credible alternative MC course appeared, there may be insufficient time for SQU to reach a standard that meets media job specifications, and the better students will be lost. Thus, it is opportune for SQU to engage with parents immediately, perhaps by invitations to careers nights designed for families as well as potential students or careers fairs where families can question employers. Further, an emphasis on female recruits to the course could be aided at such functions by industry assurances to families of probity in the media, and having on hand women journalists as models, especially from broadcast media.

At the time of this study, the university was changing its policy toward engagement with employers by inviting them for annual curriculum-based meetings. The employers considered these infrequent workshops to be less than required, given the magnitude of difference between the qualification and the recruitment standards. An opportunity exists for the university to approach the media owners, reminding them of their obligations under Omanisation, and commence WBL placements for students, and arguably, unemployed graduates, given that they receive remedial training.

8.2.3 Work Based Learning Initiatives

Omani, by law and frequently members of the ruling families, control ownership of media companies, although these companies are largely operated by expatriates. All parents, and the majority of employers of both sectors, commented on the unpreparedness of graduates for the expatriate-dominated workplace and the job seekers' lack of work-based skills. Practical training for the majority of the unemployed graduates comprised work experience over the summer break, largely voluntary and self-initiated. However, the university's indifference to practical training, and the brevity and unfortunate off-peak timing of the assignment did not impress the private sector participants in the research (s5.2.2). There was no obligation for the employer to comment on the progress of the student and no credit toward the student's qualification. Nevertheless, the opportunity for students to build social capital by this means is manifest. Simply a chance to meet others in the workplace creates weak ties through mutual interests or work association. Such contacts can connect students to authentic workplace issues, including international communication, the importance of English and the need for up-to-date competence in ICT use. Graduates frequently mentioned the equivalent of knocking on employers' doors (Private Sector Employee 2) but networking through work-based experiences or indeed social connectivity was not raised by the interviewees.

Work-based learning (WBL) is a powerful tool in bridging a disconnect between human capital and job specification (s2.2.2). WBL merges theory with practice and knowledge with experience; and in its strategy of bringing workers, students and academics together, it supports the community networks that develop social capital (Garrick 1999, Raelin 2000, Boud & Solomon 2001, Beckett & Hager 2002). WBL, unlike lifelong learning, is a practical transfer of skills and systems knowledge. Oman's high levels of expatriate media workers gives this on-the-job skills transfer a greater importance

in promoting Omanisation. A focus of this research determined whether there is sufficient knowledge acquired by SQU MCD students for them to win a private sector job, that is, Omanisation of the media industry. That is found in the negative. Work-based learning, organised to emphasise social capital principles, has the potential to reverse this disappointing trend.

8.2.4 Addressing Literacy Deficiencies

Acknowledged by study participants, media professionals should be confident and articulate, with acceptable standards of English to interview international visitors and Arabic for interviewing Gulf countries' officials and other persons of status. Oman has a dual-language media, thus an electronic or print journalist should be bilingual to a high degree. To achieve this bilingual standard, it was noted that one quarter or more of curriculum delivery should be in English (s5.2.3). It is self-evident that work experience and mentoring through social capital principles of weak and strong ties are powerful tools in achieving English fluency, given a basic knowledge of the language. The unemployed graduates were deficient in their mother tongue, Arabic, could not converse in English, lacked interviewing techniques and were unable to report on other disciplines, such as management or trade matters. Further, the term *fluency* or proficiency, can also apply to mastering technology. Students in the study recently received technological resources at industry standard, in this case digital equipment; however, graduates used superseded equipment during their studies and remedial training from MCD was not forthcoming. These issues continue a long debate typified by Hadad (2002), whose opinion was that lack of job opportunities for media graduates is the greatest threat to the success of mass communication and journalism courses offered by GCC universities and colleges.

Whilst all study participants agreed that confidence, fluency and proficiency were precursors to media work, the accumulation of human capital risk where jobs were not available was not acknowledged by the education authorities, including SQU. Yet the media industry in Oman accounts for 2,000 or less positions, with possibly 1,000 in the target classifications that the MCD services with its graduates (s3.4.1). This situation is exacerbated when private sector employers have negative experiences with GCC graduates and are reluctant to further employ new cohorts of nationals (Al-Maskery, 1992; Sajwani, 1997; Yacoub, 2003). The deteriorating situation depicted in this study is a result of inertia from stakeholders and student and graduate ranks; of fatalism; and of human capital that is

unrecognised and rapidly becoming lost. Social capital dimensions of trust, reciprocity and communication links must be built in order to solve the impasse.

There are several possibilities for social capital formation within this unfolding scenario. The aim of capital formation is Omanisation, which encompasses human and social capital. The government could provide remedial resources, and bring pressure to bear on the media owners to take up new licences. Media legislation to promote private broadcast utilisation was introduced in 2004 and the first private television station, together with three private radio stations, approved in October 2005. In April 2006, a second private television station was announced, focusing on youth, sport and social events (s3.4.1). There are opportunities here. Importantly, a post-graduate parental network formed from families of unemployed graduates' ranks, with assistance from employed graduates and possibly academics, can determine skills levels required and lobby the university for a bridging or remedial course for unemployed graduates to meet employers' specifications. To mitigate the human risk capital for current MCD students, English, Arabic and industry technology subjects should be intensified in the curriculum, directed by a university-employer partnership to determine work-ready skills that the next cohorts of graduates require. Then further lobbying by employers and the university can extend Omanisation benefits to media jobs, based on the social capital principles for the population of hearing and seeing Omanis imparting news and culturally sensitive information. Finally, as noted, the university could promote successful Omanis in the media, using them as role models, and thus raise the profile of media careers among aspiring secondary school leavers. The university can be an important stimulus for social capital formation by setting up opportunities for employers, employed Omani professionals, university and secondary school students to meet and discuss the media industry and its career potential.

8.2.5 Social Curriculum Summary

This section considered the inherent issues in the deteriorating situation for the out-of-work mass communications graduates. These issues were explored by means of a new paradigm of social capital dimensions applied to the MCD curriculum. The dimensions of trust, reciprocity, links and bridging concepts can alleviate the unemployment dilemma for graduates through networks of stakeholders lobbying for retraining and Omanisation of journalism. In a similar guise, the university can form networks of employers, role models, and government policy makers to manage the mass communications curriculum, promote

the course and raise its profile. As privatisation of the Omani public sector intensifies, SQU needs to mobilise its resources against the private universities and their global reach. These characteristics of an individual's close ties as used to mitigate human risk capital are determinants in a capital model presented later in this chapter. Close ties bring their own social risk capital, first in the form of *wasta*, by which close-knit families and clans accumulate resources to the detriment of wider society and the country itself. A further risk in close ties is the destructive mores of the group itself, such as gender discrimination and insufficient distribution of power.

8.3 Partnerships as Social Capital

Once the importance of social capital is recognised, SQU can design programs that creatively combine individual choice with collective engagement. There is little impediment to experimenting with modest subsidies for training programs that bring together firms, educational institutions, and community in innovative partnerships. The latent effects of such programs on social capital accumulation could prove even more powerful than the direct effects on technical productivity.

Of all social capital dimensions it could exhibit, bonding capital typifies SQU. Directors and faculty in this study were adamant that the university defines its own existence and any issues that arise are administrative, not structural. Criticism of this stance, or of other matters such as unemployed graduates, is responded to by the educators in their own good time and in a superficial manner. The university staff's attitude is that it is well-established (20 years), its stakeholders are the government and, indirectly through its graduates and the research it contributes, Omani society.

However, the responses from a majority of study participants (s5.2) belied this self-deception. They were adamant that the university resided in its society; a stakeholder dialogue and societal cooperation were missing from the mass communication course process. Improved communication channels, the participants claimed, between the MCD faculty and potential employers would substantially improve graduates' chances of employment. Thus the group were demanding social capital formation through bridging ties and formal linkages to achieve communication, build trust and use capital growth to establish a career path for graduates. This enrichment may have the benefit of achieving the equation in social capital growth: developing and benefiting from a more complex Omani media environment, and creating the necessary job opportunities.

This study's findings are enhanced by a report commissioned by Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA 2003) which states that Ministries of Education are the major providers of education and training in the region, and their systems are centralised and rigid. The private sector has a marginal role in the training process, and lack of statutory accreditation regulations hinders its participation in education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. Governments are advised to determine appropriate financial programs that best promote the interest of society whilst advancing the participation of the private sector (Hume,2007). Moreover, education systems that need to evolve rapidly cannot afford to be at the mercy of government machinery that can only effect change at a slow rate. There is a need for independence in higher education to implement changes that parallel recent developments in education, and to monitor these results.

The paradigm supported by this research is a network comprised of partnerships of strong ties. These partnerships are formal and enduring, originated by the university as the responsible entity. The network of weaker ties facilitates human and social capital formation from the partnerships or nodes. The network is informal, comprising individuals within the stakeholder categories, students, graduates and their various personal networks. These are described below.

8.3.1 Government

The Omani Ministry of Higher Education encourages the private sector to establish colleges and institutes of higher education. This diversification of education promotes capital accumulation. For individuals and their families, human capital acquisition is enhanced by the increasing ability to choose private colleges affiliated to universities in the UK, USA, Australia and India. Further opportunities arise with new universities that can form from the amalgamation of colleges (ibid. 2005). Due to insufficient capacity, however, a considerable number of Omanis continue to seek admission to other GCC universities or further afield to continue their education.

Greater capacity in education is a strong incentive for the Oman government to promote private higher education to achieve its definition of human capital – more Omanis gain further years of learning. It has another incentive as well, that of increasing social capital accumulation through retaining students in their own country to build a societal infrastructure throughout their lives. Whilst an international education has a broadening

influence on the individual, young Omanis are disconnected in the critical years studying outside their country and cannot contribute to the networks of their peers.

SQU, as the primary university in Oman, is an agent of the government. All finances associated with SQU are provided, and the government contributes the University Council's Chair and six of its ten Council members, with one private sector member. The ESCWA (2003) report questions this arrangement, citing inflexibility. However, whilst the government subscribes to the aim of privatisation, the pressure to provide sufficient educational resources for its young population and thus achieve Omanisation leads to government's medium term maintenance of control measures on the university. This situation does not enhance social capital formation to the same extent that the greater learning environments of the varied private universities can achieve. They provide the benefits of international exposure with the benefits of Omani social support for students.

Development of generic graduate attributes, or transferable skills, is motivated by the belief that there are skills which all graduates should possess, and are applicable to a wide range of tasks and contexts beyond the university setting (Gilbert, Balatti, Turner, Whitehouse 2004). Despite pressures on the government to resource and support rapid expansion in education, the finding of this study is that, unless university performance measures are instigated and quality standards raised, the outcomes for graduates will continue to be unemployment, disillusionment and demotivation; the antithesis of the positive future expected by decision makers. Further, as the university's administrative body consists of government appointees and its academic board is also government-aligned, a greater degree of autonomy in the form of a partnership between the university and the government should align Oman with international best practice in higher education provision.

8.3.2 Employers and Professionals

Oman's media (s3.5.1) consists of public sector broadcast facilities, private sector print media, and an emerging private broadcast sector. Private sector media legislation resulted in a television station and three radio stations approved in 2005, and in 2006, a further television station focusing on youth, sport and social events. The government is also investing heavily in technology, replacing and updating its television and radio infrastructure. In 2006, despite these initiatives, there were no more than 2000 mass media positions in Oman, generally occupied by experienced expatriates (s3.4.3).

This study's public sector employer categories were understandably affronted by any suggestion they did not employ mass communications graduates, as they remain the majority recruiters of graduates. MCD graduates compete for the few public sector jobs advertised by the Ministry of Civil Services. Wasta concerns determined that unofficial contacts between university staff and public sector employers were minimised; further, SQU's Career Advisory Office considered itself responsible for job information only and did not assist graduates in their job-hunting (s3.4.4), for example, by organising opportunities for graduating students to meet employers. Graduates are now awarded temporary or part time public sector jobs to gain experience, but, despite its infrastructure upgrades, the government did not intend to expand its media services and was prompting the private sector to expand and take up available bandwidth and other opportunities. This policy meets criteria from UNESCO and social theory (e.g. Woolcock & Narayan 2000) inasmuch as new mass media entrants open opportunities for societal interaction. This is particularly useful for the stakeholders of this study when such opportunities comprise a forum for community organisations including professional associations.

Professional media associations were not considered by the participants in this study as sources for potential student placement for workplace learning and English fluency acquisition. Although the university's view, that it is a place for higher learning, may preclude interaction with groups such as the Oman Journalists' Association and the Oman Journalists' Union, professional members of these organisations are in a position to assess and assist SQU's efforts to engage its wider community. Whilst employers of media graduates may not be media representatives, their associates and employees certainly communicate and network within Oman and at least other GCC countries. As a social capital initiative SQU may seek to initiate communications, that is, weak bridging ties with industry professionals as well as industry members and users, such as employers of public relations professionals including journalists. This must be a vexatious point when few academics are Omani, and associations are intrinsically stable with members who serve long terms. Perhaps the administrative nature of the public sector Career Advisory Office employees offers more stability than tenured academics for longer-term bridge building.

Issues in graduate employment nominated by the study's private sector employer category at s6.2.4 included perceived deficiencies in the job application process, of particular concern, as clear communication is a necessity for media professionals, especially journalists; and a generalist degree when specialisation is the key to

employment. Other issues confirmed in the literature were English fluency and graduates' preference for the lucrative public sector (Fergany 2000, Ali 2002, Yacoub 2003). Private sector establishments are profit-driven and graduates' expectations for reward and employment conditions were unrealistic.

A lack of engagement between provider and employer was a major study obstacle confronting MCD graduates' employability. Although private employers could advertise jobs directly, Omanisation principles dictated that they notify job vacancies to the Ministry of Manpower, who then (in this case) notify the Career Advisory Office. These formalities constrained the formation of bridging ties between the Omani and expatriate faculty, and the expatriate employers. Communication was sporadic. Deficiencies were perceived in two areas of possible cooperation that participants considered affected the MCD employment process: an absence of employers' involvement in the MCD curriculum design, and little policy coordination to create jobs for graduates between the Career Advisory Office as SQU's representatives, the Ministries of Civil Services and Manpower and the Omanisation Committee. There was broad agreement that the curriculum delivery was at variance with the specifications for the few jobs that came up in mass communications: *no one gets a job by learning a book by heart* (Unemployed Graduate 8 at s5.4.1).

Many universities are under pressure to adapt their educational styles to deliver quality outcomes to meet the expectations of employers, and broadly, contribute to a learning society (Dune 1999), whilst Harwood et al. (1999) found that employers select recruits on the basis of non-academic skills such as interpersonal skills and flexibility. In this vein, employers and students in this research emphasised the need to link the curricula to students' careers through external professional course input, greater emphasis on practical training, and English media fluency standards. This concurs with Hanushek and Kimko (2000), who, at s2.1, found that in individuals' development and growth process, quality of education is more important than quantity. A partnership node can thus be formed by a MCD representative being assigned to the Careers Advisory Office to monitor incoming job offers and communicate these more effectively to the final year students, whilst monitoring the job specifications and the manner by which they relate to the curriculum.

In research, the means by which universities strengthen graduates' employability lies with human capital initiatives (s2.1.2, Boyer & Atallah 2000) such as the inclusion of workplace learning programs in university courses; and the university's participation in

lifelong learning proposals in partnership with employer and professional groups, a source of the weak ties which characterise social capital. SQU claims that it is a centre of higher education: it instils a love of learning as a tool for human capital to enable graduates to profit from their university experience and to continue learning in a workplace environment (s5.2.2). Yet this study finds that human capital risk in the form of unemployment negates that aim (s7.2.4) and the university does not fulfil its self-imposed *raison d'être*. It is thus obliged, under its charter, to seek options to achieve human capital acquisition. These options are based on social capital formation and include opening permanent communication channels to all forms of media graduate users in any industry for information; assessing the media employment market in quantity and quality to determine its needs; undertaking course management in the form of inputs, student experience and comprehensive feedback; and continual quality improvement of curriculum and delivery. Through the Careers Advisory Office, further communication channels may be beneficial to link up strong family connections of media students for job placement. Through the MCD, public sector correlation and synchronisation of goals and targets, information releases and administrative practices typified by a change to a government-university partnership in preference to the existing direct control model can accelerate progress. This finding extends to a university-based assessment of MCD's role as a skills provider for Oman.

Reinforcing this finding, the employer categories, both public and private, challenged the curriculum and expressed the desire for input into future course planning by MCD, and greater coordination in placing students for their practical work (s5.1.2). A nodal partnership of strong ties can thus be formed from a representative media employer association aligned with MCD representation established as a curriculum advisory board to advise on and monitor the form and function of the mass communications qualification and assess future planned modifications (Hume, 2007). On an employer level, a less formal partnership can identify required work-based training needs and match them with opportunities as they arise. This may be facilitated through a university website. Further, employer representatives, notably MCD graduates, can be involved with students as mentors, guest lecturers, through workshop facilitators and as alumni. A nodal partnership of this nature is also of use as a means for the faculty to engage with its alumni for lifelong learning opportunities, updating graduates in their professional lives. Outcomes of this nature are harbingers of significant social capital growth where community pressure can

change public policy, which is the singular process by which faculty currently establishes the mass communications curriculum.

In a theoretical framework for the university's relationships, Schuller (2001) asserts that social capital is a useful tool in matters of educational and employment policies; it helps counterbalance reliance on policy concepts that are too narrow to deal effectively with the complexities and interrelatedness of delivering knowledgeable mass communications graduates to Omani workplaces. Technological innovation and human capital are both strong motivators and essential features of prosperity, but they cannot be taken out of their contexts of social relationships. Social capital demands a wider focus. In this sense, Schuller believes, it complements other instruments of policy analysis; it deals with the social infrastructure that enables other policies to be effective.

The clear finding of this study is that there is a lack of bridging ties between the university and its stakeholders. As a bridging factor, Hazleton and Kennan (2000) find that communication is necessary through the exchange of information, identification of problems and solutions necessary to facilitate desired outcomes. The university's faculty protested that it has the ability to communicate with stakeholders, but they now are coming around to believe that partnerships are necessary to improve bridging capital between the various stakeholders. Burt (2001) describes social capital as the brokerage of individuals who recognise weak links, or structural holes in a social structure. People on either side of a structural hole circulate in different flows of information. There is a structural hole that the Mass Communications Department of the university does not cross; that is not that the various parties are unaware of each other, but that they are focused on their own activities such that they have little time or interest in the activities of people in the other group (p.35). This is an opportunity for MCD to facilitate the flow of information and deflect this implied and arguably factually based criticism. Whilst the partnership nodes provide strong ties of social capital, the wider stakeholder inclusion can provide great benefits to the university through improved and renewed contact, and introductions to changing office holders. This can be achieved best by social events and internet communication.

This welcome focus on relationships, as Schuller (2001) seeks, allows the issue of social cohesion to be addressed. As this study demonstrates, merely increasing the stock of human capital in Oman will not ensure social or economic progress. It even impedes the country's development by isolating some groups who do not have access to this progress, and whose position is relatively further weakened by the fact that most others are gaining

marketable skills and qualifications. Their isolation in turn may have a long-term negative impact on the benefit of human capital growth even to the skilled and qualified. Social capital in policymaking, Schuller finds, brings such dynamics into a longer-term perspective. Social capital is not something that can be instantly, or even rapidly, created. Its accumulation and its erosion are processes that require several years at least. It therefore acts as an important counterweight to the tendency to look for quick-fix solutions. Social capital reintroduces a moral dimension into policy thinking. The economy is not simply a machine to be engineered, tuned and repaired at a technical level without reference to its social context. The quality of relationships in any given social unit will determine its sustainability. For Oman, this moral dimension is achievable through the synergy view of Woolcock and Narayan (2000), that to use a community's social capital substitutes for weak or indifferent formal institutions and allow both sectors to complement each other.

8.3.3 Graduates

As alumni, graduates have a role and a responsibility in the decision-making process that will form the future mass communications course. This serves both human and social capital acquisition. For human capital, the further the mass communication curriculum strays from a focus on emerging media industry initiatives, the less interest will be shown by the industry in recruiting future graduates, and the greater the devaluation of the graduates' own qualification to a credential. For social capital acquisition, the bonding capital of cohorts is strengthened by bridging ties between the cohorts – a weak ties network where employed graduates can mentor students, reducing misconceptions on workplace activity and supporting them in practical situations. A proactive approach similar to this will also improve the profile and thus the awareness of the mass communications qualification, an important step when new facilities and new opportunities are being established in the private sector.

In another weak ties network, as noted in s8.2.3, the graduates have an opportunity to service the emerging media field, whether mass media or offering their combined and augmented services through forming networks by bonding, then reaching out to the business sector by weak bridging and cross-cutting ties (s2.1.2). Whilst human capital is individualistic and inward-looking, social capital accumulation can only occur through communication, forging shared norms of reciprocity and trust in Omani social and economic structures. Edwards and Foley (1997) note that the contextual dependency of

social capital gives rise to at least two factors. First, social capital is not equally available to all, in much the same way that other forms of capital are differentially available. Geographic and social isolation limit access to this resource; the latter common to the unemployed graduates. Second, not all social capital that is created is equal; the value of a specific source of social capital depends in no small part on the socio-economic position of that source with society. In this guise, the human capital already gained by the graduates through their qualification places them in a very good position to *capitalise* their resources through relationships and communication. If successful, mentoring options further increase social capital for following MC cohorts.

8.3.4 MCD/stakeholder Partnership Potential

Apart from a strong partnership between government and university to replace the direct control government exerts on Oman's higher education sector, the initiation and maintenance of stakeholder and graduate partnerships are the responsibility of MCD. As noted, these partnerships are nodes for the trust and reciprocity of social capital; thus members' weak ties throughout the Omani community are open to MCD. Throughout this analysis, the necessity intensified for greater communications between MCD and its stakeholders; and between the stakeholder groups. The unemployed graduates have structural difficulties communicating with the public and private sector: the public sector has a centralised recruitment system that debars a direct approach by the graduates to individual employers who have the attractive employment conditions they seek; the private sector is largely indifferent, given few available jobs and the inability of graduates to meet job specifications. The MCD faculty are addressing job skills deficiencies for students but means to rectify inadequacies experienced by graduates are not available.

The university's staff is bound by an administrative system reaching directly to the university board, which, as noted, consists largely of government representatives. SQU's academic board is a separate formalised process, further constraining a flexible approach to curricula. Nevertheless, formal and informal communication channels exist that create synergies to overcome systemic difficulties. Table 15 MCD Potential Communication Pathways, sets out the informal weak ties relationships, and the formal strong nodal partnerships described in this section and throughout the chapter. The table nominates some formal links and available stakeholder groups that could be used to form a mass

communications network, lobbying for change and seeking wider input into a number of issues.

Table 15
MCD Potential Communication Pathways*

MCD Links with SQU	MCD Links with Omani Community	MCD Ties with Potential Employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>alumni groups for lifelong learning opportunities</i> • other arts college groups to cross-promote activities • other faculties, as above • support functions, such as library • careers office as a centre for social capital ties, both weak industry ties and strong formal and student family ties • <i>formal linkages to directors strengthened for lobbying purposes</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • families/clans • <i>secondary schools</i> • <i>industry associations</i> • <i>associations for promotional purposes</i> • local government • media-based community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>formal linkages to policy makers strengthened for lobbying purposes</i> • <i>public sector media and communication/public relations departments</i> • <i>private sector media and communication/public relations departments</i> • <i>industry associations</i> • <i>professional associations</i> • global media such as Al Jazeera, BBC

* Formal partnership opportunities are in italics.

Strengthened communication linkages through MCD’s formal channels offer means to address graduate issues. Successful resolution of such issues fulfils the human capital equation; assisting the university administration, opening up the membership of the university stakeholders to include the private sector, and raising the social capital the policymakers expect. Informal communications are useful pathways to extend the university’s stakeholder reach: clan and family connections, associations, groups, media connections in GCC and elsewhere, and local government agencies. The formal procedural channels are also useful for lobbying, improving awareness of media issues, and promoting project proposals. However, there are partnerships that should be established as formal organisations and these are discussed below.

Partnership 1 Alumni

Of greatest need are the unemployed graduates. As there is free access to education for all Omanis, an offer of an alumni partnership by the university, especially MCD, has the potential for successful outcomes for both parties. An alumni association could be used

to identify issues, and arrange conferences, seminars and workshops. This initiative raises issues and trends emerging in the media workplace for university attention for future curriculum changes. The workshops and lectures assist graduates and faculty to keep in touch with the latest developments thus contributing to workplace life-long learning and expanding human capital accumulation.

Partnership 2 Employers

The university, as a policymaker remarked, must make the first move toward partnerships with its stakeholders. Whilst all agreed that communication should be extended to employers, particularly in the private sector, this has not been formalised and remains in the realm of good intentions. A nodal partnership of representative academics, employers and professional associations can negate waste by opening up trust relationships outside families and clans. First, an executive partnership at a university/senior management level can initiate a flow of knowledge and resources from the university to support the business sectors, thus increasing the capacity of the private sector to expand, and it encourages new industry entrants, including, possibly, entrepreneurs from the graduate cohorts. Secondly, a management partnership of lecturers and employers acts as a two-way communicator, with the MC faculty using the channel as input to the industry to market the graduates and access practical training for students. The reverse flow of information is useful to monitor the mass communications curriculum, notably technological and cultural trends and thus job specification changes. The university gains status and therefore expansion of its mass communications intake rather than the threat of closure, as mentioned by a policymaker.

Partnership 3 Strategic Approach

Partnership 3 is a strategic approach, consisting of a forum at each level. It is designed to maintain a weak ties environment for partnerships. The university/alumni association and the university/industry group representatives could meet with senior members of Oman's government and business groups on a periodic basis to contribute information and initiatives through Oman's overarching five-year planning system, with the intent of making a valuable contribution to society, the economy and a continuing increase in social capital. As a coordinating committee which conforms to the manner by which the sultanate is governed, submissions are accepted from individuals, groups and organisations. As an aspect of social capital, this input gives a much-needed impetus to the status of the mass communications course and serves to guide resources efficiently. In this

instance, the question remains whether mass communications is best served within the College of Arts and Social Sciences.

8.3.5 Partnerships Summary

The partnership approach fulfils the stakeholders' view of the university's leadership role. For the university to remove itself from its idealised self-appointed role to produce the *educated person*, and recognise the consequences of its mass communications credential for its graduates, the university must recognise its place in Omani society, its human and social capital commitments. SQU's purpose as an educational institution for mass communications is obviously inclusive of the media labour market – it was serving the public sector exclusively for a decade or more – and its new graduate market is the emerging private sector. This point demonstrates that social capital has institutional significance (Lee and Brinton 1996) and is seen most clearly when graduates from prestigious universities are supported by their faculty by placements with equally prestigious firms. Without the cooperation of potential employers for its graduate output, the university's role as an educator loses relevance and MCD is purposeless.

This logic extends to a social capital matrix of weak ties accessed by MCD through formal and informal partnerships which extend through stakeholder groups, secondary education, journalists and other professional groups, the media culture of Omani society. Several initiatives are offered, with a table of communication pathways, followed by the priority partnerships, the drivers.

Bridging networks of weak ties are also useful in neutralising the negative effects of social risk capital, in this case, *wasta*, gender discrimination and centralised power. Nevertheless, the tenuousness of weak ties makes contacts irregular at best and they engender minimal trust. These concepts are discussed and illustrated in a model in the next section.

8.4 Capital Relationships Model

There are many models comparing and relating dimensions of human capital and social capital, however, an example from the OECD is germane to this study. It is shown below in Table 16.

Table 16
Human Capital and Social Capital Roles

Role	Human Capital	Social Capital
Focus	Individual agent	Relationships
Measures	Duration of schooling Qualifications	Attitudes/values Membership/participation Trust levels
Outcomes	Direct: productivity, income Indirect: health, civil activity	Social cohesion Economic achievement Accumulated social capital
Model	Linear	Interactive/circular

Reference: Schuller, 2001

As discussed throughout, the foci of human capital and social capital each reflect the underlying nature of the concept. For each individual, human capital theory is an embarkation on a journey through life, whereby the person continually acquires knowledge and skills, then delivers the acquisitions back to society in a unique and changing manner. This bundle of acquired and innate knowledge, skills and initiative responds to environmental conditions, social and economic opportunities; and to events, immediate and recurrent. Given differing capabilities and circumstances for each individual, there is a linear relationship of cause and effect. Human capital is thus formed from society's accumulated success for each individual, given the competitive nature of 'success', winners and losers.

Social capital is complex and circular. It transcends and embraces the accumulation of human capital and uses strong familial relationships and the weak bridging relationships of memberships. Social capital accumulates more conclusively in a stable expanding

society; one where implied trust approaches actual behaviour in day-to-day business transactions and social engagements and there are ready mechanisms and legal structures capable of resolving the disputes arising through acquisition of the various forms of capital. The payoff for acquired social capital is relatively modest: continued stability and expansion, but the relationship framework is stronger and issues, particularly structural issues, more easily resolved.

The dimensions of social capital theory are distilled from observances and defined by modelling. Stone and Hughes (2002) developed a summary of core measures of social capital and illustrative examples of its determinants and outcomes to explore findings of a survey they undertook to determine the meaning and relevance of social capital for understanding disadvantage in Australia. Whilst they tied their findings directly to a survey on poverty through social capital analysis, their methodology is consistent with the analysis undertaken in this study. Figure 5, Human Capital and Social Capital in Developing Countries: Determinants and Outcomes Measures, illustrates core measures of social capital which are adapted to include matters relevant to disadvantaged graduates in GCC countries, specifically, SQU MCD graduates. Stone and Hughes' figure was substantially adapted by the introduction of filters of human risk capital and social risk capital, and the nature of the illustrative determinants and outcome measures, which have emerged from this study.

		Social Capital			
Hypothesised Human Capital Determinants		Networks with Close Ties	Bridging Networks	Capital Outcomes Measures	
<i>Personal characteristics:</i> skills and abilities, knowledge and initiative →→→→→→→→ ↓	H u m a n r i s k c a p i t a l	<i>Characteristics of individual's ties:</i> .kinship .friends .colleagues →→→→→→→→	<i>Size and relevance</i> .friends .acquaintances .social contacts .professional / business contacts →→→→→→→→	S o c i a l r i s k c a p i t a l / w e a k t i e s	<i>Level of individual's wellbeing:</i> .capacity to win job ↓ .capacity to prosper
Position in family, society →→→→→→→→ ↓		<i>Family, clan characteristics:</i> .interfamily ties .interclan ties .locality ties →→→→→→→→	<i>Density and closure</i> Interactions between: .family with individual's friends .individual's friends .business contacts .professional colleagues →→→→→→→→		<i>Level of society's wellbeing:</i> .general education ↓ .viable institutions ↓ .economic indicators ↓ .community cooperation
Education level →→→→→→→→ ↓		<i>Institutional characteristics e.g. university:</i> .physical resources .human resources .strategic direction .ties to power . ties to community →→→→→→→→	→→→→→→→→		<i>Level of institutions' wellbeing e.g. university:</i> .labour market acceptance of graduates ↓ .status among other universities ↓ .research levels ↓ .community involvement
Career →→→→→→→→ ↓		→	→→→→→→→→		→
Vocational/ industry learning →→→→→→→→ ↓		→→→→→→→→	→→→→→→→→		→
Life learning Workplace learning →→→→→→→→		→→→→→→→→	→→→→→→→→		→
					↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑

Derived from Stone and Hughes, 2002

Figure 5
Human Capital and Social Capital in Developing Countries: Determinants and Outcomes Measures

Figure 5 illustrates the connections between the acquisition of capital by individuals and society. Stone and Hughes (2002) developed a table of four human capital and social capital dimensions in which they list illustrative determinants of individual and group characteristics (for example, human capital's individual and social capital's group connections) in a manner of identification for the purposes of measurement. The fourth column, outcome measures, identifies wellbeing measures that typify those consistent with individuals, politics and civil society. In this thesis' derivation, the determinants have been selected or adapted within the principles of theory dimensions and characteristics relevant to the GCC countries, and particularly to the matters discussed in this study.

In Figure 5, the human capital determinants nominated in Figure 2 and hypothesised in the literature record the individual's acquisition of capital: skills, knowledge and, importantly in this study, initiative. The status of the individual, shown as *Hypothesised Human Capital Determinants* in the figure, assists in accruing human capital, as status must be acquired through inherited characteristics, such as social status and cognitive ability, and through family influences and social contacts (Crebert et al. 2004). The level of education *acquired* by time and circumstances is arguably the prime determinant of an individual's human capital and is intended to lead directly to a career, workplace learning and life skills. Thus, the human capital equation is continually fulfilled, in that the habitual acquisition of human capital maintains the level of status and economic reward throughout an individual's economic life

Human risk capital (s2.1.1.1), shown in Figure 5 as a barrier between human capital determinants and social capital's networking, is the result of the impact of life conditions during both the acquisition and reward phases. As described in this chapter, a stated quantity of education does not translate unimpeded into a career. Early acquisition risks for human capital in this study include the results of curriculum, educators, resources, perceived quality of a qualification and the appropriate transition skills to gain employment. The risks continue at entry to employment, that is, recruitment; they include job availability and suitability, employability of the individual, and working conditions acceptable to the individual. To surmount the level of human capital risk encountered, the individual may require a heightened learning ability, together with reduced reward expectations.

Social bonding capital, or close ties, is measured through family, close friends and work colleagues. This is described in the figure as *Networks with close ties*. The distinguishing features of family include internal and other clan ties, and ties relating to others in the neighbourhood or village. Resources, goals and links to power, characteristics of the network members, act upon close ties to impact on group stability; or, as a positive effect; they can be used for growth. These qualities are not confined to family but are frequently used by corporations and strong organisations such as military, police and emergency services. Whilst loyalty, trust and reciprocity are the bedrocks of society, the risks inherent in bonded societies include imbalances such as discrimination, acute gender differences, inability to adapt; and, through loyalty or fear, these societies are prone to *wasta*. Traditional societies exhibit strong bonding capital, indeed the GCC itself is an excellent example of the interconnectedness of family and tribal close ties. In this case, the barrier of social risk capital for close ties is described in the figure as *wasta*, but in other cultures this determinant could be power sharing or discrimination.

Bridging networks, the second part of the social capital dynamic for individuals, are the gateways from families and groups exhibiting close ties and are the pathways beyond a familiar environment to an individual's rewards. The networks consist of casual friends and acquaintances from social and business sources. They are also acted upon through crossover contacts, that is, communications and interactions through nodes of family, close friends and acquaintances. Bridging networks in this study could be established through a graduate network, graduate business-oriented groups, and graduate employees; through university and employers; and through ministries and business or employer associations. The partnerships proffered in this study are manifestations of bridging networks which, although intended as a safeguard against graduate unemployment, also enhance Oman's social structure by forging new contacts between its varied social nodes. The final barrier to capital outcomes measures in the figure is the social risk capital of weak ties; that by their very nature they are tenuous and ill formed. Thus they are impermanent and unreliable unless further strengthening ties are made.

Apart from this brief mention, social risk capital, or interference in the networks' pathways, is deemed outside the scope of this thesis. Further research is necessary to determine the characteristics of these interference factors, how they act at the nodes of family, professional organisations and university, and the effects on the pathways and the actors. An example of social risk capital in this study is the *wastas'* various powers, that an

individual who can wield the greatest *wasta* determines the outcome for a petitioner. Indeed, it is an example of Putnam's (1995) negative social capital. A further example of social risk capital is that weak ties in this study are not a proven vehicle for the graduates to use. There is therefore significant risk in the unemployed graduates' inexperience in the private sector.

Capital outcomes measures, the last column in the figure, identify the consequences for possible measurement of human and social capital acquisition through the varying capital processes. In this study, an individual's wellbeing is measurable as a capacity to gain employment and enjoy a successful career, a human capital objective. Society's wellbeing combines human capital acquisition as citizens' general level of education and the state's economic indicators; and as social capital in the number and quality of its institutions, and groups and associations of its civil society. The universities in the region also have a functional wellbeing: their status in research; the preparedness of their graduates for employment and support for the alumni. These elements are identifiable, countable, and subject to statistical and economic analysis and comparison. Success can indeed be tracked from this model.

The examples in Stone and Hughes' table, or more appropriately, linkable selections show their model is a most useful tool for extracting specific human and social capital determinants applicable to a given environment and then having the means to track the effects of, for example, close ties and weak ties to illustrative outcomes. Identifying inputs, processes and outcomes in this way is a step toward measurement, long a barrier to further research in capital theory. In this thesis, the addition to Stone and Hughes' work is the concept of risk, an important element factored into all economic capital theory and recognised earlier in social and human capital theory but rarely pursued by theorists. The outcomes for the graduates in this study are examples of human risk capital (unemployment) and social risk capital (*wasta*).

8.5 Summary

In chapter 7 human capital dimensions were considered for the research questions. The research question remaining for social capital analysis is:

Can SQU form partnerships with its stakeholders?

Sultan Qaboos University, in concert with other GCC universities, is swiftly developing its internal structures and its citizens' educational capacities. Its resources are allocated through the government's five-year plans and the outcomes sought are a steadily growing number of graduates to take up the social and economic leadership for Oman.

The university, as noted at s6.4, has its own agenda and its own issues. There are continual issues with sourcing faculty, with planning and financial matters because of a heavily bureaucratic public structure; the gathering changes in Omani society and the economy well removed from the relatively new halls of SQU's academia. The communication links with society and sector representatives are not yet in place for the mass communications department, partly because the mass media industry is small and partly because of the existence of a powerful public sector.

However, at the government level, policy changes debated in the last few years have emerged as decrees and new radio and television stations are appearing, staffed by expatriates. Yet MCD in 2004 was following an academic and somewhat diversionary curriculum suited more to public policymakers than the nascent private sector of media companies oriented toward Omani youth. In this study, this inflexibility is embedded in the bonding and self-serving networks of the university. The mass communications faculty is serving an employer group that is now not relevant, and the new 'relevant' employers demand skills and knowledge that are well beyond the faculty's experience. Thus the future of the faculty themselves reflects the future they have imposed on the mass communications graduates, an outcome perhaps of the human risk capital if academics do not undertake lifelong learning.

Further, the pedagogical methodology for the mass communications qualification, or in this case, the academic direction for the mass communications course, is not clear. Whilst the subjects comprising the course are beyond the scope of this study, the various academic staff members appear to have considerable control over the content and mode of delivery of their subjects and this adds to the detrimental effect on the students' attitudes for the overall course (s7.1.4). Capital acquisition for the university and the students is best served if the course input and its delivery are coordinated and follow good practice, academic standards and industry input. An example is the university's assumption that its language studies, both English and Arabic, were adequate for fluency. The department's plans were to follow Arabic university leaders such as Misr International University in Egypt which, inter alia, devotes a preparatory year to English fluency and

continued training in aspects of language communication to a specialisation (Misr International University, 2008). A full list of procedural recommendations is attached at Appendix 4.

The question, *can SQU form partnerships with its stakeholders*, is rapidly becoming the reverse – do the stakeholders consider SQU a factor in the human capital acquisition, or will another media college emerge that renders SQU's MCD irrelevant? That is the capital risk facing MCD's faculty if they do not find the means to engage with society and the private sector, modernise the curriculum, and vigorously promote their graduates. Once communications are engaged and linkages forged with the new organisations, the faculty can then redirect the students' learning. With some determined lobbying on MCD's part, a partnership with an international company such as Al-Jazeera, and later the new Omani organisations, would effect these changes and raise the status of the university in the Arab media environment – if that is the objective of SQU, that is its contribution to social capital formation in the society it is pledged to serve.

The responsibility for change lies not only with SQU and its Mass Communications Department. Business also needs to play a role when it comes to the realisation of education. It supports the development of skills of employees and others, through cooperation with education establishments, for example by fully cooperating in workplace learning programs for SQU students. In Oman, it should improve investment in human resources and provide motivation for life-long learning, through Omanisation, flexible working schedules and possible career breaks for retraining, and by offering a wide range of working conditions. Further, industry should engage with existing education providers and lobby government for the providers' independence.

Thus, the discussion is ending. Chapter 7 examines the university's role in human capital acquisition and this chapter follows human and social theories' dimensions to investigate the issues raised by the study's participants and seek pathways to resolution. With due credit to Stone and Hughes, a model of capital dimensions, inputs, processes and outcomes was formulated that identified the inherent risks to the theory. This study shows evidence that social capital theory is well documented and largely accepted for international government policymaking. However, for the university and the Oman government, the attractive simplicity of human capital policy is sufficient, that acquisition by an individual of skills and knowledge leads to a rewarding career and thus strengthens the economy. Further skills acquisition for unemployed graduates, ironically through

workplace learning, is publicly encouraged as the means for individuals to qualify for jobs, albeit with reduced employment expectations. For policymakers, applying social capital policy is difficult, offers no immediate reward, but diligence in application of social principles strengthens the community and leads to stability and prosperity. The risk inherent in social capital acquisition in Oman is the lack of a fertile environment for a civil society to flourish.

Chapter 9 Conclusions and Recommendations

Within a capital theory framework, this thesis considers the antecedents for unemployed cohorts of graduates at Sultan Qaboos University's Mass Communication Department (SQU MCD). Graduate unemployment is a recent phenomenon because all MCD's cohorts were previously employed in the public sector. As the Omani economy develops, the government is encouraging the private sector to take a wider role and thus, if not privatisation, further employment expansion is planned through market forces, not public sector growth. To engage Omani youth, both as a generalisation and as a source of skilled workers, media's role in this expansion is especially important. However, this study concludes that there are substantial barriers to human capital growth, that is, acquisition of skills and knowledge for individuals in Oman and this is reflected widely throughout the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The unhappy experiences of many mass communication graduates in their education and employability standards are symptomatic of an inherent problem: the regional barriers to human and social capital acquisition that lead to the failure of human capital strategies. This thesis proposes the need for assertive social capital innovations to complement conventional labour market approaches for the enhancement of graduate employability

9.1 Thesis Summary

This thesis presents its research statement in Chapter 1, together with the study's aims and objectives, its significance and the structure of its sections. Capital theory is introduced as the conceptual framework for the research. The use of a framework based on human and social capital supports strategies on emerging issues of education and employment applicable to countries of the GCC and similar economies. Thus, this thesis has both theoretical and empirical components.

Chapters 2 and 3 are literature surveys, identifying the human and social dimensions and the study environment and elements to define and determine the parameters of the study. Chapter 2, through reference to research and theoretical frameworks applied in developed economies, notably human capital and its associated concepts and practices - lifelong learning, work-based learning, skills and knowledge development and building a flexible workforce – establishes that a purely economic basis

for graduate employability is not a convincing proposition. Extending the debate to human capital theory, strategies emerging from the literature are found to be only one component in the foundation of a successful economy, and by extension for a university seeking to contribute strongly to national economic and societal capital by graduating employable professionals.

This thesis encapsulates the human capital theorists, led by the 1979 Economics Nobel Prize co-winner Theodore W. Schultz, who defined human capital as *an investment in individuals through education and training, leading to growth and which benefits individuals, society and the nation* (Figure 2). Since the mid-century debate, however, criticism has been levelled at the concepts, inasmuch as capital theory, by its nature, should be quantified, qualified and its outcomes monitored (Bouchard 1998, DiVanna & Rogers 2005). This conflict between theory and empirical evidence from an individual's level of education is not sufficient for competency in the labour market, nor is the human capital acquired by the holder in the education process necessarily relevant to gain satisfactory employment (Kivinen & Ahola 1999, p196). These last authors term this disconnect human risk capital.

Socioeconomic inequality, including educational achievement, Bourdieu (1986) argues, results from the interactions of three dimensions of capital – economic, cultural and social. Others concur, widening the notion of social capital to include the interrelationships between family, community, education and society (Coleman 1988, Putnam 1995).

Chapter 3 describes the environment of the study, the Sultanate of Oman, its economy and education systems. The literature suggests that the policy of Omanisation leads to outcomes which are acceptable for the public sector; however policy directives, reinforced by quotas, licences and permits for foreign workers have had limited success over the years in increasing the proportions of Omani employees in the private sector. The stock of human capital built by universities in the GCC does not translate into employment for these graduates, challenging the view that investment in education enhances employment and economic growth (Al-Farsi 1994, Al-Harthy 2000, Sajwani 1997, Valeri 2005). SQU MCD, as the subject of the case study, was selected to explore inter alia aspects of Omanisation relating to GCC educational institutions' charters for delivering professionals for localisation.

Chapter 4 outlines the research, its methodology and its study participants. To identify the primary causes of obstacles to GCC graduate unemployment, particularly SQU

mass communication graduates, the research applied a qualitative methodology with data collected through in-depth interviews. The perceptions and experiences of 52 participants in stakeholder categories were recorded, transcribed, translated from Arabic to English, themed and analysed. The categories' participants were directly or indirectly interested in the graduates' prospects, and comprised education providers:

- five senior bureaucrats (policymakers)
- eight academics from SQU
- fifteen unemployed graduates from four years' cohorts who remained unemployed or under-employed in media (each cohort comprised some 30 graduates, of whom on average 90 per cent were unemployed)
- four fourth-year students
- four each of employed graduates from the public and private sectors
- four each of employers from the public and private sectors
- four parents of graduates

The research objectives concerned capital formation in SQU MCD and, as such, the relevance of its alumni to the marketplace. The capital theory dimensions were applied to the following statements:

- MCD's human and social capital applications achieve their expected outcomes
- MCD's curriculum imparts skills and knowledge for work-ready graduates to comply with Omanisation decrees
- study findings are symptomatic of a general condition in the GCC countries
- consideration of SQU partnerships with its stakeholders to improve communication flows and remove barriers to capital acquisition.

Chapters 5 and 6 comprise the analysis of the perceptions and experiences of the interviewee categories. From the supply side in a theoretical capital equation, the analysis in chapter 5 exposes a near unanimous opinion that mass communications graduates cannot obtain work in Oman in their profession, the media industry. From that finding, views diverge along an interface between the supplier of services (academics and policymakers) and the consumer stakeholders. The service providers maintain the higher responsibility of the university is to impart *a love of learning* and to give graduates the foundation to understand and pursue knowledge. However, there was no evidence to support successful outcomes from this stance. On the other hand, the opinions of the consumer groups who

were affected by the outcomes of these services were uniform: the mass communications qualification did not allow graduates to pursue a media career, as the standards of skills and knowledge at graduation were inadequate for media recruitment.

Issues identified by analysis in chapter 5 were:

- uncontrolled student intake to the mass communications course contributed to an unmotivated course environment; the lack of female student numbers was attributed to Omani cultural values
- the greatest impact for the majority of study participants was course design and curriculum content, reflecting a slow evolution of structure and content previously associated with public sector employment to align the qualification with the small private media industry
- lecturer quality was acceptable to graduates and students, conflicting with reports in the literature of media courses in the GCC. However, traditional lecturing styles, little practical course component and dated material exacerbated a lack of communication in the mass communication course
- the faculty did not countenance vocational topics in the course that could improve graduate acceptance to employers, such as resume writing and job seeking skills.

These issues contributed to the human risk capital depicted at 5 (Human Capital and Social Capital in Developing Countries: Determinants and Outcomes Measures).

Chapter 6 moves to the demand side of capital theory, establishing that barriers to media employment include the small Omani media job market and employers' reluctance to accept MCD graduates. Whilst there is a clear demand for Omani media professionals, the graduates cannot meet the job specifications for the very few positions available. As the prevailing educator theory in GCC countries, which education equates with employment, is compromised by this study's analysis, the deficiencies inherent in the MCD education process contribute to the widespread failure of localisation (or Omanisation) in the region. Further, human capital formation, as measured by years of education, qualifications and skills base, is not acceptable given the resources and effort expended (Aamodt & Arnesen 1995, ESCWA 2003). For graduates as individuals, human risk capital can be mitigated only by navigating the complex factors of social capital's networks and for this they turn to their dense ties of destabilising *wasta*. *Wasta*, or

nepotism, refers to both the act and the person who mediates or intercedes (Cunningham & Sarayrah 1993, p.1). Wasta in the employment process occurs when a candidate calls on connections with high social position or influence to effect the employment of the candidate. Wasta is used when an unskilled person is accepted in a particular position while those better qualified are rejected.

Dysfunctional relationships between components of government that affect the mass communications course are reported in chapters 7 and 8. Further, government regulation of the media industry and policies such as Omanisation mean that there are insufficient channels of communication between the two sectors to achieve the desired outcomes of a robust media industry ready to absorb mass communication graduates. The study finds that unemployed MCD graduates have no route at all to the private sector and that they are therefore disillusioned and unwilling to try to find work against what they believe are insurmountable odds. The way forward for MCD is to realise its mission for Oman through bridging social capital with its stakeholders: forming networks with government and private employers, its alumni and their families, and relevant professional associations.

Positive Omanisation outcomes can emerge from the bonding networks of the university, as the authority on knowledge; and the more flexible networks of the public and private sectors' decision makers, as providers of resources. These are the seeds for an emerging civic society. Given that human capital benefits individuals, organisations and their governments, the collective nature of social capital determines the interactions between these elements and, with risk, the enhancement of human capital benefits in civic society. However, the graduates' acquisition of human capital is not proving transferable; there are no social capital processes of weak bridging ties being formed to fully connect and sustain generalised reciprocity in the form of value capital for the country. The bridging communications attempted by the university are sporadic and there is evidence in the literature that this is to a degree systemic through GCC educational institutions, certainly with media courses. SQU is a key to this Omanisation conundrum. It holds the mandate from the government, whichever interpretation of learning, higher order process or content, is applied. SQU can use its authority to establish board level and management level institutional links with government, private and public sector employers and the community it serves. Through these links, students and graduates may be encouraged to create personal links bridging family, university and media employers to reduce human

risk capital. Once in positions, the new employees can undertake workplace and lifelong learning to extend their weak tie linkages.

This thesis contributes to the capital literature through original research that in itself supports strategies that can be used by emerging economies to address issues regarding education and employment. Thus, this thesis comprises both knowledge-building and empirical components. An outcome of the study is a critical appraisal of capital theory, providing evidence of its applicability to allocate resources efficiently to improve a nation's skills and knowledge base (employability) within the wider setting of sustainable social capital for its citizens.

9.2 Conclusions

The conclusions reached by this research reflect the findings from the literature and the high human risk element emerging from the study evidence. This study determines that MCD did not meet the expectations of graduates, employers, university executives/government policymakers or parents. There was a greater investment by the university in physical capital than in human or social capital and this focus is fundamental to graduates' employment difficulties. The conclusions are set out below.

9.2.1 Conflicting Stakeholder Goals

The university's MCD program did not adjust adequately to its new stakeholders, private sector employers, and thus did not provide for the human capital acquisition defined by its charter (s7.3.3).

Unemployment was an outcome of the MCD course; in the graduates' view, an indictment of the course itself (s.5.1.2).

Graduates and parents frequently had unrealistic expectations of public sector employment and these assumptions exposed them to human capital risk (s.5.1.2).

Conflicting stakeholder goals are evidence of insufficient or absence of communication channels, an inherent acknowledgement that networking strategies are not in place. For the media industry, Omanisation constraints on employing expatriates were not sufficiently onerous for employers to be compelled to accept graduates and thus initiate communication links with the university to satisfy their job specifications. Whilst the university claimed knowledge of Oman's media industry, including parity or superiority

with its technology, formal strong networks between these sectors were not in evidence. The annual university and employer course reviews provided insufficient opportunity to build reciprocal trust through the creation of weak ties, given the tenures of the individuals involved. Thus, the connectors to student work experience opportunities and eventual employment were sporadic and ill defined. The little work experience available was frequently in public sector workplaces, thus denying an opportunity for students to build trust with emerging private media employers for a future career.

Graduate unemployment was an unacceptable outcome for the fourth-year students and their families, who were demoralised by the experiences of previous cohorts to gain jobs. Anecdotal evidence was proffered that *wasta*, the negative use of dense social ties, was rising from levels experienced by the past generation of graduates. These cohorts were automatically employed by the public sector where their training continued. *Wasta* destabilised trust building from meritorious recruitment practices and reinforced the perceived deficiencies of the mass communications qualification.

The academics and policymakers saw the university's role to instil higher-order learning abilities for lifelong learning to raise the general skills and knowledge of the population for the social (capital) wellbeing. The human capital view held by the remainder of the participants was that education leads to individual and national benefit through the accumulation of wealth. For Oman, the distinction, and the route decided upon, could result in misdirected resources and expensive, adverse capital outcomes.

9.2.2 MCD Program

The graduates' skills deficiencies form a barrier to their employment. If further competency acquisition is not available to the students, they have insufficient human capital to embark on a media career and the university is therefore a contributor to higher unemployment (s7.3.2).

If, on the other hand, the acquisition of skills and knowledge was available to the students at SQU through other means than MCD, the motivation of the students is in question. They did not pursue self-interested human capital to use in employment and contribute to the economy. That is a deficiency in capital formation for the country.

Whilst educational providers in this study contemplate program deficiencies and raising curriculum standards, research findings mitigate against such minor efforts resulting in a sustained solution to graduates' unemployment. The media students' experiences are no different to study participants for Al-Rawwas (2002), where graduates

were dissatisfied with curricula and a focus on theory to the detriment of practice. This study confirms informed opinion, that MCD did not meet stakeholder expectations. An example of this is the policymakers' expectations of the lead roles that Oman's university graduates take in future society and, as a corollary to its final year curriculum, the way in which the university prepares its students for the transition. When it became obvious public sector media careers were no longer available, the conundrum is that the unemployment situation proliferated for several cohorts of graduates without SQU MCD reacting, or at least offering remedial training.

Ongoing and robust alumni communications are perceived as good practice for universities, and feedback from graduates is useful for program development. Industry-level input by employers is necessarily restricted to foreseen organisational resource requirements. A university's strong ties with its alumni allow career-focused graduates with their need for flexibility to impart a perspective on the general program and curricula different from that of their existing or prospective employers. Both graduates and students can therefore profit from the university's criterion of higher-order learning. Further, technological change, workplace development and industry practices require continually updated training material – an opportunity for the university to engage with alumni and employers with a view to future funding if there is a decline in the university's future funding in the case of falling oil revenues. This networking across the users and providers of capital theory dimensions encourages innovation and commitment, provides transparency and promotes a unified approach to capital accrual for Oman.

9.2.3 MCD Curriculum

MCD's curriculum did not meet its program intentions and its role within civic society could be compromised (s7.1.3).

As the GCC countries have large public sector media organisations and small emerging private sector media industries, their public universities developed mass communications curricula to meet the societal and educational roles of the public sector. Current media curricula are not fully responding to a maturing civic society including rapid changes within the business and professional communities.

Directed by the Omani government as advised in OECD's (2000) human capital report, the university provides higher education for the proportionally young population; however, as employment was not forthcoming, the mere accumulation of years of student

study was not of value in a human capital sense. Human risk capital for the fourth-year MCD students, as an example, was very high.

The MCD curriculum was not of a standard to instil enthusiasm for learning; graduates were deficient in their mother tongue, Arabic, could not converse in English, lacked job-seeking skills and were unable to report on matters such as management or trade. Graduates may have been proficient in theory but had little practical experience. Arguably, the purpose of the university was not to instil a vocational curriculum, but to contribute to the higher learning functions for future knowledge acquisition. If this argument is extended, then sufficient *tool* skills, such as languages and IT, are necessary for a graduate to gain a job to access informal experiential learning that the academics of this study expect. Thus, the university must stand for both: instil in students a love for learning and the insight to continue to learn, in graduates the ability to pursue their professions and continue with lifelong learning. This finding is supported by the work of Beckett and Hager (2002, pp124-124), who posed three *problems* of learning: the inferior status of vocational learning, the formal learning and informal learning dualism with only the former being within the scope of the university, and the failure to provide an educational framework for workplace learning and performance. The authors propose a contiguous model of vocational preparation using various formal and informal admixtures based on judgement for a particular curriculum which includes both human and social capital principles (ibid. p76).

The human capital equation of acquisition and deployment of knowledge and skills, if successful, forms the core for social capital growth. The university's responsibility to Oman society and its stakeholders is therefore to initiate and maintain those aspects of social capital: linkages, networks, connections, for its welfare and that of its charges. Students can become familiar with the university network connectors, and as part of a new curriculum, begin to make their own links to the world they are about to enter.

The curriculum's content and purpose extended beyond the mass communication qualification into skills acquisition, the tools for learning. The enabling skills of English fluency and ICT are fundamental in establishing weak ties through Oman's large expatriate English-speaking workforce, and ICT is the technology of choice. However, MCD is part of the Arts and Social Sciences College where Arabic is the prevailing language, unlike the science colleges which are generally English-based. Arabic, for which the graduates also professed fluency deficiencies, suited a public sector media curriculum, but English is

required for private sector workplaces and the increased number of English-speaking jobs available. English is also a vehicle for establishing influential stakeholder relationships.

Recent graduates in the study were deficient in ICT technology; however, there was no provision at the university for alumni to upgrade their skills, thus compromising employment prospects. Further, these particular skills are also fundamental in forging social capital ties with professional associations, employers and other stakeholders who may be willing to offer unemployed graduates training and work placements.

9.2.4 Pathways to the Course

Contrary to human capital principles, *MCD admission procedures reward non-performance for undergraduates from other SQU colleges and thus discount the credential for all its graduates* (s7.1.5). Possible rationalisations for SQU MCD's intake practices include preferential treatment for some individuals by awarding any degree (wasta); a determination to graduate as many as possible to assist in the country's development; or conversely, the individuals concerned may merely be pursuing human capital's self-interest objectives with the tacit assistance of the university. There is a high degree of inefficiency in these practices, compounded by human risk capital for the individuals. Human capital principles are not served because of a high probability of wastage and unemployment; nor is there a direct benefit attributable to the strong relationships of wasta.

Media role models for youth are highly desirable in civil society. *The very few women mass communications graduates is of concern, given they form half the student body at SQU*. Reasons include the cultural values of some parents, who do not wish their daughters to mix with men in a media workplace, preferring a women-oriented career (Talhami 2004); or more prosaically, the fear of unemployment in the media job market; and finally, the value many women place on home and their wish not to undertake extended travel for work. Whilst women were prevalent on campus, their social networks were constrained by a cultural reluctance to debate with men. In the MCD course, women and men shared a common deficiency in communication externally with limitations to English fluency and ICT skills. Thus, those who were culturally constrained were bound by the strong familial and group ties and unable to participate fully in practical workplace experience, or to use ICT to interact with English speakers and access stakeholder networks.

These constraints experienced by MCD graduates foreshadow an emerging argument in the literature (e.g. Ahola, Kivinen & Rinne 1992) and in this study against the tenets of human capital theory that all human behaviour is based on the economic self-interest of individuals operating within freely competitive markets; and that other forms of behaviour, including those exhibited by this study's stakeholders, are excluded. Under conditions of complexity and uncertainty, the gap between rationality in action and perfect rationality can be substantial.

9.2.5 SQU MCD Graduate Standards

The graduates' learning outcomes were constrained by characteristics of human risk capital: their manner of entry into the MCD course, the nature of the course that they experienced (structure, content, resources, lecturer styles, balance of theory and practice), their inherent attitudes and those of their lecturers; and the changing labour market (s7.2.5)

The university system was adapting to accommodate its perceived deficiencies; life-long learning systems and performance criteria are viewed as good practice elsewhere for individuals to reach their human capital potential. Good practice also includes the stakeholder networks described at s9.2.3.

As a part of the principal higher education institution in Oman, MCD is not meeting its charter to deliver mass communication graduates. A major national human capital measurement, that of rising numbers in higher education (Bils & Klenow 2000), has not been met, evidenced by static enrolments in MCD; it may be in decline. Recent Oman legislation supports the nascent private sector media industry; however, MCD's graduates cannot meet the industry's job specifications. MCD also lacks capability to attract women students, thus compromising future journalism with a chronic future shortage of Omani women as media commentators and journalists.

SQU at the time of writing did not engage sufficiently with its stakeholders to understand their needs. Understanding those who control the university's resources is important; understanding the media industry of international firms and local media is another factor altogether. As an agent of the government and its clear decrees of Omanisation, private media industry development and future Omani professional leadership, SQU did not show evidence of structural change to meet these challenges. Thus, the ability for mass communications graduates to gain jobs in the Omani media industry is unlikely to improve.

Lagging its GCC neighbours, Oman was slow to modernise, and it is more sedate in joining the frenetic economic and social pace being set for the region. Nevertheless, join it must, as it has to develop a robust economy that can withstand the possible future loss of oil incomes as natural resources run down. This, too, impacts SQU, which must continue to expand and achieve international parity in research and graduate employment despite the prospect of constricted funds flow. Lifelong learning initiatives with its stakeholders, and funded training in its research strengths, can partly address that consideration.

Whilst it is importing its knowledge and skills on temporary work visas, the nation is also facing the loss of human capital reserves as its *corporate knowledge* is lost when expatriates, including SQU's lecturers, are forced to leave. This eventual loss of human and social capital may be redressed if future Omani professionals, whilst also travelling and learning, return with greater knowledge and wider social networks and thus enrich their society.

9.2.6 Graduates' Employability

Job availability for graduates is a function of the size of the Omani mass media industry and employers' evaluation of the MCD credential. Employers admit to (previously) discriminatory practices, but also refer to misaligned curricula and low standards for graduates. Further factors impacting employability include skills discrepancy between training and available jobs, lack of cooperation or communication between the university and employers, and graduates' attitudes inasmuch as they preferred to work in the public sector (s6.1.1).

General labour policies, such as Omanisation, are unsuccessful when media firms are not investing at a rate to absorb the graduates SQU is producing; a problematic outcome for human capital, given the graduates' competency issues. With the country's narrow mass media private sector, ill-defined public relations work in commerce, and a history of public service employment subject to *wasta* and public pressure, mass media graduates may consider years of unemployment as yet more human risk capital, banking on a government rescue package and a life of satisfactory public sector employment.

Although an outcome from dense capital (Putnam 2000), *wasta* is considered a major obstacle to employment for graduates and it is widely acknowledged that those without credentials can gain scarce public sector media positions. However, the Ministry of Civil Services' central employment policy process was put in place to remove the influence of *wasta*.

Despite pressures on the government to resource and support rapid expansion in education, the finding of this study is that, unless university performance measures are instigated and quality standards raised, the outcomes for graduates will continue to be unemployment, disillusionment and demotivation; the antithesis of the positive future expected by decision makers (s8.3.1).

Unemployed graduates, through trust and bonding, can use their individual strengths to form groups or associations to use linkages and bridging ties to overcome the barriers that prevent further acquisition of human capital in the form of jobs and workplace training. They can identify opportunities, decide on strategies, formulate and produce proposals and sell their services. Thus, they can overcome institutional barriers, perceived antagonism from expatriates, and importantly, *wasta*.

9.2.7 Stakeholder Partnerships

The social capital implications of the mutual university/employer lack of interest in Omanisation are embedded in the bonding networks of the university, as the authority on knowledge; and the more flexible networks of the public and private sectors' employers, as potential providers of resources for the university.

For the public and private sector decision makers, employees are sources of human capital to be exploited for organisational objectives. But for the mass communications graduates, acquisition of human capital is not proving transferable; there are no social capital processes of weak bridging ties being formed to fully connect and sustain generalised reciprocity in the form of value capital for the country. The bridging communications attempted by the university are sporadic and one-sided. The lack of reciprocity from the decision makers identifies negativity toward the university (s6.3).

There is a substantial capital risk facing SQU in remaining relevant as a provider of human capital. The faculty must find the means to engage with society and the private sector, modernise its curriculum, and vigorously promote its graduates. If the department can gain greater independence from government and forge partnerships with the new Omani media organisations, these changes can occur. Evidence of achievements such as these would raise the status of the university in the Arab media – if that is the objective of SQU, that is its contribution to social capital formation in the society it is pledged to serve.

The private sector also has a role to play in providing employment, improved training and working conditions and adjusting to the goals of Omanisation. Private organisations support the development of skills of employees and others through cooperation with education establishments. In Oman, the media organisations should

improve investment in human resources and provide motivation for life-long learning, flexible working schedules and possible career breaks for retraining, and should offer a wide range of working conditions. Further, industry should engage with existing education providers and lobby government for the providers' independence.

Formal engagement of the faculty with its alumni, including perhaps past faculty members, is considered mandatory both for future curriculum development and to promote lifelong learning for its graduates (s9.2.5). An SQU graduate association administered through the Career Guidance Centre may be a useful channel for communication, but requires refining into separate colleges, and in this case, departments, to gain feedback from graduates regarding their professions.

9.2.8 Summary of Capital Theory in this Thesis

There are dimensions of two capital theories, human and social, in evidence in this thesis. As noted throughout, capital theory necessarily encompasses risk. This is illustrated in the model at Figure 5 Human Capital and Social Capital in Developing Countries: Determinants and Outcome Measures.

In this thesis, human capital acquisition relates to the MCD course content and procedures: enrolment, curriculum, teaching styles and standards, career advice, and work experience. The next step for the unemployed graduates, a career in media, was forestalled by human capital risk factors that were accumulating throughout the MCD course; mainly of university origin, but the lack of initiative of students and graduates also contributed to this outcome of non-employability. This in turn may be mitigated by the university's engagement with society, particularly the business community and the government, by lobbying for acceleration in the growth of Oman's media industry. However, there were course content barriers still in place that denied the acquisition of appropriate human capital.

Social capital, on the other hand, relates to relationships that the university encourages its staff and students to build internally and externally. Internally, the members of the university use the characteristics of family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances to construct networks for trust and reciprocity. Trust was a victim in this study, with the dense familial ties of *wasta* interfering at the course intake with a transparent process, and at graduation, where any available jobs were taken with other criteria besides ability. Nevertheless, social capital risk was also present externally in the inability of unemployed

and under-skilled graduates to accumulate sufficient status to influence the networks of weak ties and thus locate job opportunities; and the external risk to the university of losing status in producing unemployable graduates. Social capital risk was also high, as the university has to navigate its way through to uninterested private sector employers. Nevertheless, there were routes for this process to take place, as government ministers often were also majority owners of corporations in Oman's tightly held private sector, including media.

9.3 Recommendations

The statutory and structural recommendations derived from this research are set out in this section. The literature points to a general malaise in GCC education and the core findings from this body of evidence are confirmed in this study and extended by a range of factors derived from analysis of mass communications students' endemic unemployment in their profession. The conclusions from this study point to remedial initiatives from capital theory dimensions for further research, for example, networking (Coleman 1988, Field 2003) and engagement (Putnam 1993, Tittensor 2007). These initiatives are presented as an integrated framework constructed to minimise future human risk capital through a wide network of graduates' stakeholders. Whilst MCD is a necessary focus of this study, in similar situations in fast developing economies, the educational framework can arguably be used to mitigate graduate unemployment or under-employment. Procedural recommendations are attached at Appendix 4.

Functional recommendations:

1. That GCC universities form a consultative committee to investigate the roles of their universities in terms of program outcomes and standardise credentials, including mass media, from an international benchmark. This is a means of civic engagement, a consultation with the public and private sectors and the societies the universities serve (Burt 2001, Hazleton & Kennan 2000). Using the strong ties of the academics beyond the confines of their countries to tap into dense familial and clan ties through Arab culture, a common model for regional higher education can emerge (Granovetter 1973, Field 2003). The committee can draw on the resources of its universities and international consultants to effect strategic plans to give the universities a larger role in their own decisionmaking, secure their resources, ensure relevance of standardised

credentials with the job markets, and set universities the performance targets and outcome measures that are the tenets of capital theory.

2. That in Oman, a group comprising representatives of SQU, the Ministries, consultants and private and civic representatives is formed as a social capital response within the country to foreshadow outcomes from Recommendation 1 above. This group comprises a bridging network fostering trust and reciprocity to administer the universities' resource allocations through capital theory, that is social and human capital tenets (Portes 1998, Putnam 2000, Stone & Hughes 2001). The group could also explore the means by which SQU can become independent of government administration, using a financial allocation to improve its human capital outcomes and its autonomy for flexibility in responding to its social responsibility and the market's needs.
3. That SQU enhances its program initiatives through adopting a business sector advisory committee, a broad network engaging external stakeholder expertise from employers, graduates and students, and puts in place a pilot study for the university in the College of Arts and Social Sciences to introduce capital-based performance measures, consistent with the building of social capital (Helliwell & Putnam 1999, Narayan 1999, Woolcock 2001). This committee can then act as an advisor to the College management to facilitate change.
4. That private media employers be encouraged to regularly update the university on their requirements to achieve Omanisation (Serageldin & Grootaert 2000, Field 2003).

Continuing this account, further suggestions to improve SQU's responses include various partnership propositions at s8.3 which, when implemented, begin the communication networks that lead to greater acceptance of SQU's mass communication credential by the private sector.

Recommendations relating to the capital theory model portrayed at Figure 5 Human Capital and Social Capital in Developing Countries: Determinants and Outcome Measures follow:

5. Due to GCC countries' energy assets, financial capital theory factors relating to an entity's limited income on one side and unlimited needs on the other with an inherent risk of poverty are not explored in this study. Education is free in

Oman and other GCC establishments and students are supported to the extent of their learning capacity so that the financial risk of education is not a concern for aspiring Omani professionals. In future, however, energy asset incomes are expected to subside and both government and citizens therefore prepare for this, through government policies on industry diversification, and for individuals, flexibility in skills and knowledge (Becker 1962, Harris & Chapman 2002, Crosnoe 2004). In this study, a benign fiscal environment supports the academics' focus on a formal education to promote lifelong learning; however, globalisation, especially if combined with a reversal of fortunes from energy assets, mitigates this approach with an immediate need for work-ready skills to earn a living (Candy & Crebert 1991, Resnick 1987). Prudent financial theory therefore seeks a balance for Omani professionals between a formal education and work-ready skills to reduce risk.

6. Human capital comprises the input of personal assets, that is, individual and family attributes enhanced by education and training, which are resolved by the output of work as a career and thus the level of an individual's wellbeing (Mincer 1961, Schultz 1961, Becker 1962). This situation is impacted by risk to the extent that the equation itself is dissolved; the individual's assets do not equate to a career. Human risk capital describes the probability that this outcome can occur, and in this study the level of risk experienced by the graduates resulted in certainty, that is the dissolution of the equation (Ahola et al. 1992). Human risk capital may therefore be used as a predictor to a career. The probability can be calculated that the determinants of individual inputs on the one side, and the existing and future industry job environment on the other, will result in the desired career outcome (Kivinen & Ahola 1999).
7. Social capital dimensions in this study relate to networks, that is, the dense ties of family and clan, and the weak ties of the risk-based relationships of regional and global (or themed) networks (Field 2003, Narayan 1999). Social risk capital relates to a society's norms regarding 'safe' dense ties where relationships are known, and the 'unsafe' extension to attain weak ties where the other party's reactions are unknown (Candy 2000, Woolcock 2001, Marginson 2003, Feast & Bretag 2005). Social risk capital for a nation is thus the probability that its society prefers dense inward seeking networks, or that outward seeking

behaviours are preferred from its citizens (Putnam 2000). With Oman's high expatriate population, social risk capital should be mitigated by a balanced approach between the country's traditional mores and the manner by which it embraces globalisation and competition for jobs. Social risk capital is therefore an important contributor for decision makers when assessing the impact of Omanisation policies and the trust and reciprocity it engenders with the expatriates and the nations they represent.

8. Manifestations of civil society, associations, groups and organisations, are viewed as a buffer between state power and the citizenry, as discussed at s.2.1.2.1 (Abootalebi 1998, 2001; Fukuyama 1999). Thus, in the absence of such associations, the state dominates socioeconomic and citizens' affairs. In the GCC countries, oil revenues and the growing group of state bureaucrats, technocrats and professionals increased the state's capabilities, and state financial and power structures remained strong and superior to resources available to their social, economic and political opposition (Abootalebi 1998). Further, the civil society debate in the Middle East focused on changes in formal governance procedures rather than substantive change in state-society relations (Joyce 1995, Al-khaburi 1998; Rassekh 2003). Embryonic associations, though they exist, are poorly organised and remain dependent on patrons within the state (Al-Maskery 1992, Al-Lamki 2000, Valeri 2005).

9.4 Limitations of this Research

The scope of this study is limited to SQU graduates with a focus on the causes leading to MCD graduates' unemployment at that time (s1.1). The experiences of graduates through a specific course with unique features cannot be applied generally; nevertheless extant research shows the curriculum and delivery commensurate with other GCC educational outcomes.

The research does not include long-term statistical data or educational information, as Oman is an emerging economy and common statistical methodology and records which can be used for comparison matters are under consideration across the GCC countries. SQU, due to its short history, has not yet developed communications with its alumni or stakeholders, and has a low level of autonomy from government decrees. Its purpose and

agenda are largely defined by the government. Informing government has a minor role for this study.

The sample of stakeholders, and the unemployed graduates themselves, are subject to constraints including relevance of those not part of the study, whose voice was not heard. The roles of participant government representatives and university policymakers merge, as individuals fulfil both responsibilities. Academic participants may (Omani) or may not (expatriates) have tenure, and thus their views are constrained if they do not have the university's 'corporate knowledge' if it could be thus described. Graduates employed in media had individual life experiences since leaving the university and their responses were thus informed. Parents' views were constrained by perhaps limited knowledge of the role of the university, as their generation lacked the opportunity for higher education. The greater numbers of participants, that is, the graduates unemployed in the media, were at various levels of disillusionment and frustration, depending on their circumstances. Undergraduates were apprehensive and perhaps defensive or hopeful. Few participants were confident for the future for the graduates.

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were the preferred vehicle to collect data to strengthen the quality of response from the 52 survey participants - their experiences, perceptions and attitudes. Thus, this research depends on inductive data analysis, specifically concentrating on methodology requiring constant cross comparison, an appropriate approach for this type of research (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Whilst every effort was made to capture the participants' responses, the research data are qualified by the identities of the participants and nonparticipants, and the intent and accuracy of the responses received. Nevertheless, as noted, this research is supported by informed opinion and findings are broadly in line with the literature for Oman and GCC countries for researchers using other disciplines.

The results of this study are intended for comparison with other university mass communications courses and, indeed, similar journalist-based courses throughout the GCC. Whilst the media industry in Oman differs, for example from Qatar (Al-Jazeera) on the one hand, and the GCC countries with less-developed media on the other, the employment acceptance rate of graduates may differ from that of Oman, thus the recommendations herein may not be relevant. However, the GCC private sectors generally eschew their countries' graduates, preferring experienced and undemanding expatriates despite

localisation-inspired quotas and financial disincentives implemented by the various governments.

9.5 Further Research

The major contribution to capital theory presented by this thesis is the capital model for emerging economies depicted at Figure 5 Human Capital and Social Capital in Developing Countries: Determinants and Outcome Measures, which illustrates the connections for the acquisition of capital by individuals and society.

Further research flowing from this model might include the following:

- establish the relevance of the model in other GCC mass communications environments
- validate the model in other GCC undergraduate environments
- through the application of risk to human capital theory, undertake research to establish if human risk capital can restore cogency to the theory, as it is of value to public and private sector decision makers
- study the concept of risk applied to social capital: whilst dimensions similar to weak bridging ties strengthen social capital, there is a significant risk factor in the trust and reciprocity that signify the high social capital accumulation of a developed economy
- social capital tenets in this model, including social risk capital, have declared outcomes that can be measured and tested, thus addressing a long-standing criticism of social capital. Measured outcomes include surveys of civil organisations and their membership, especially professional organisations. With a high expatriate population, national and expatriate social organisation membership may also be considered.

9.6 Finale

This work, with its original research, analyses, discussions, assertions and applied theoretical model is intended to add significantly to Arabic research in the field. It has the means within its observations and recommendations to add to future research arguments regarding capital theory, particularly in the reintroduction of aspects of risk. Further,

because of human capital's contributions to civil society through an educated population, identified risk elements may be used to reinvigorate research interest in both human and social capital theory.

Social capital literature contains several criticisms centred on definition and measurement. This thesis, considering capital risk, uses a bridging factor to open discussions on dimensions of social capital that may lead to more robust applications of theory to define and ultimately benefit human endeavour.

The opus ends on a very human note of closure and completeness, and belief in the strength of society and its individuals to rise to the challenge of equality to pursue a fulfilling life. I wish the unemployed graduates every success in their careers and that they live safe and long. I commend this thesis to my supervisors and my examiners, and to all readers.

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Appendix