

# Chapter 1

## Building Strong Adult Education Partnerships for the Wellbeing of the Aviation Workforce During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter presents a case study of how an air service provider (Evergreen, pseudonym) in Singapore builds an adult education ecosystem with strong partnerships to promote the wellbeing of its badly hit aviation workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic. It illustrates how Evergreen envisions changes and pushes the boundaries by actively establishing partnerships with the institutes of high learning, the government agencies, industry associations, and training partners, and at the same time building a learning culture for a resilient workforce. Everygreen turns Covid-19 from a risk into opportunities to strengthen partnerships with high levels of trust, commitment, and open participation. This is accomplished in part by co-creation of learning materials, experiences, and environments with partners with a focus on resilience and sustainability. The findings identify important qualities that can be established as best practices for organisations and policy makers to further improve their adult education provision and promote the wellbeing of their workforce.*

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## **INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL APPROACH**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, millions of individuals in direct aviation jobs (at airlines, airports, aircraft manufacturing, and air traffic management) and aviation-supported jobs (e.g., tourism jobs impacted by the lack of air travel, catering supplies, professional services required to run a global transport system) stood at risk of losing their livelihoods (IATA, 2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and rapid technological developments have seen air service providers rethink their business operations and training models. They have been pushed to innovate faster, invest in the skills of their workforce, products, and services and to work with greater speed and flexibility. Combined with policy, social and economic changes, for some providers the opportunity to diversify has been revolutionary, sparking new collaborative partnerships and smart ways of working that are likely to continue into the long-term horizon.

In the context of Singapore, government plays a critical role in pushing adult education and lifelong learning, as best exemplified by the national SkillsFuture movement since 2015. The SkillsFuture movement, which aims to foster a skilled, diverse and future-ready workforce through training and adult education, has been lauded as potential solutions to global economic pressures and inequality (Ong, 2018; Watermeyer et al., 2022). SkillsFuture has introduced a comprehensive range of programs and initiatives targeted at different stakeholders, including initiatives for individuals, such as education and career guidance, a one-stop online portal that informs Singaporeans of their learning and career choices, enhanced internships for youth; and SkillsFuture Credit to all Singaporeans aged 25 years old and above and mid-career subsidies to all Singapore Citizens aged 40 and above. Enterprises were provided with resources such as the new Skills Frameworks for 34 industry sectors, and SkillsFuture Enterprise Credits to build deep skills for a lean workforce and enhance business competitiveness. During the pandemic, the Singapore government allocated generous funding for adult education and spent about \$2 billion in supporting skills development and keeping jobs of its people in 2021 (Singapore Budget n.d.). In addition to relevant government agencies that fund adult education, there are a diverse range of other stakeholders integrated at different layers and levels (Chen et al., 2021). These include private adult education providers, in-house training providers within enterprises, EdTech companies that offer training and technology solutions, the institutes for higher learning (universities and polytechnics) that offer professional learning and lifelong learning to their alumni and workforce, licencing boards, unions and professional bodies and of course the adult educators and learners themselves. Together, they create a complex environment in which the adult education providers operate. The ecosystems that adult education providers engage in and with are embedded in specific economic and social arrangements (Desjardins &

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