CHAPTER 5: CONCEPTUALISING CAREER TRAJECTORIES

5.1 Introduction

The following four chapters discuss the key results of the research. The results have been broken up into multiple chapters due to the large volume of data collected during the interview process. This chapter provides a brief discussion about the interview process, followed by details about the men and women sampled from the accounting profession. The majority of the chapter then addresses the first research question. A series of age-related pathways are used to describe the stages men and women in the research progress through during their career. These pathways have been developed based on the career stories of the respondents.

The process of analysing the data has been both descriptive and interpretive. The literature review discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 identified a range of personal, inter-personal and organisational factors believed to influence career development and were explored in the interviews. During the inductive phase of analysis each of these factors were explored and highlighted to show how they manifested themselves in the career stories of the respondents. The concepts or key factors discussed have been derived from analysing each respondent interview transcript and then by comparing and contrasting them with the other respondents.

5.2 The interview process

Given that the research design was qualitative, respondents were encouraged to relate the story of their career experiences. Their stories were not entirely open-ended, but guided by 11 key questions which were asked in order to draw out a detailed narration of their career history. A large volume of rich and descriptive information was gleaned from the 59 interviews, so only the salient features have been presented here. These salient facts were identified based on their relevance to the three research questions.

Throughout the following four chapters an extensive number of verbatim quotes have been included to illustrate the critical factors discussed. These quotes have been used because they clearly encapsulate the views, opinions and experiences of the respondents. Patton (1990: 24) argues that direct quotations are an important source of data in qualitative research, 'revealing respondents' depth of emotion, the ways they have organised their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions'. Also, by reproducing direct quotations from the interview transcripts, the data is left in its original form and is thus not effected to a large extent by the researcher's own interpretation or summarised version of the information. However, it is recognised that it is the researcher who chooses the quotes to be used, thus inferring some bias on the analysis process.

For each point discussed, two or three quotes have been included to illustrate the majority and/or minority experience of respondents. In some sections, direct reference is made to companies A, B, C and D. These are the organisations where a number of respondents were employed in each. They are referred to as a means of providing a general comparison of organisational contexts. A ** has been used in many of the quotes in order to protect the identity of a person, location or company. Key words or phrases have been bolded within the quotes to highlight their significance to the discussion. The letter 'm' or 'f' has also been placed next to the respondent number in each quote to help the reader identify whether the respondent is male or female.

The interview enabled respondents to articulate their goals, concerns, and ideas about where they were at in their career life, and where it may go in the future. Some of the respondents admitted that discussing their career experiences was quite therapeutic or cathartic. As discussed later in the results, 11 of the respondents were at a stage in their lives where they wanted to 'leave a legacy' for others. Thus respondents were eager to tell their career stories in the hope that it may inspire or assist others at similar stages in their lives. Others felt the interview was an opportunity to voice frustrations they were having with their current jobs (respondents 50 and 55).

The interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to 90 minutes, with the majority taking around one hour. The few interviews that took around 20–35 minutes were for the youngest respondents in the study (5, 41, 53). These respondents were in the early stages of their career and therefore did not have lengthy experience to comment on. In contrast, there were six respondents who would have readily continued talking beyond the close of the interview. Once started on the journey of discussing their experiences, they were eager and enthusiastic to continue the story.

Whilst the majority of interviews (47) were conducted via the telephone, respondents still appeared free and comfortable to discuss their career story. This is evidenced by the fact that the data generated by both the telephone and face-to-face interview methods were similar. Both forms of interviewing resulted in respondents relating the details of their career experiences, including the factors influencing their career development, their level of satisfaction with their career, and their conceptualisation of a career and success. Only two of the respondents (15 and 49) appeared somewhat reticent in their responses. The interview with respondent 15 was conducted face-to-face, whilst 49 was interviewed via the telephone. Respondent 49's reticence could be attributed to the fact that she was extremely busy at the time the interview was conducted. In fact, the interview had to be rescheduled three times before the respondent was ready to participate. The interview with respondent 56 was the only interview where the respondent took over the process. It was very difficult to keep this respondent within the framework of the interview schedule as she wanted to tell her story in her own way. However, in telling her career story,

respondent 56 covered the majority of interview questions. The few she did not touch on during her personal narrative were asked at the end of the interview. Overall, the respondents appeared open and honest with their remarks and happy to relate their experiences no matter the medium of interview method.

5.3 The Sample

This section provides a description of the sample used in the research. The information was obtained from the demographic questionnaire completed by respondents. The purpose of the data is to provide a description of the contextual background of the respondents.

The common characteristic among the respondents was that they had all completed some form of accounting qualification, such as a TAFE or Diploma course (4), university degree (55), and some had also completed postgraduate studies (16). Not all respondents had completed their professional year with a professional accounting association. Of those respondents who had completed their professional year, it had been with either the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Certified Practising Accountants of Australia, or with the National Institute of Accountants.

The age range for men was 23–66 and 28–72 for women. The average age of the men was 41, compared to 43 for the women. Only one male and one female were over the age of 65. Respondents had been in their current position for an average of 4.6 years and been with their current organisation for an average of 9.5 years. These figures include those respondents who operated their own sole practice. Since the tenure of these respondents was quite lengthy, it probably skewed the figures for time in position and time in the organisation. The number of respondents who had worked for the one organisation for five years or longer was 29 or 49%. This figure is similar to that of the ABS who found that 43 per cent of full-time employees had worked for five years or more for their current employer (ABS, 2003e).

The majority of respondents (24) were employed in an accounting firm, followed by the corporate sector (17). Table 5.1 shows the split of respondents among the organisational types featured in the research.

Table 5.1 Respondents by Organisational Context and Gender

Organisation Type	Males	Females	Total
accounting firm	11	13	24
corporate sector	11	5	16
education	5	5	10
self employed	2	7	9
not-for-profit sector	1	0	1
total	30	30	

Note: Whilst there were only 29 females in the study, the column total above is slightly more because one respondent holds two positions in different sectors.

Tables 5.2–5.4 summarise the positions held by men and women in the three different organisational contexts: accounting firms; universities; and the corporate sector. The total number of respondents listed does not equal 59 as those employed in sole practice, or those who switch between teaching and accounting, are not included.

Table 5.2 Position by Gender In Accounting Firms

Position	Males	Females	Total
Partner	7	4	11
Director	0	1	1
Senior Manager/Accountant	2	4	6
Manager	1	2	3
Accountant	1	2	3

Table 5.3 Position by Gender In Universities

Position	Males	Females	Total
Associate Professor	0	1	1
Senior Lecturer	1	1	2
Lecturer	3	0	3
Associate Lecturer	1	1	2

Table 5.4 Position By Gender In Corporate Sector

Position	Males	Females	Total
CFO	1	1	2
Senior manager/consultant	4	2	6
Manager	4	2	6
Graduate accountant	1	0	1
Assistant accountant	1	0	1

5.4 Career stage framework

The definition of career outlined in Chapter 2 emphasised that career is the evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time, with the two principal themes of work and time intertwining to give a 'moving perspective' (Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989). The essence of career theory is therefore to understand or make sense of this sequence of behaviour. When making sense of their careers, many of the men and women in this research emphasised the notion of time, that is their career development was often linked to their age, stage in life and stage in career. At these various points in career and life, the respondents' conceptualisation of career shifted due to their changing personal and work circumstances, reflecting the idiosyncratic nature of careers. There was a common theme across the respondents that they passed through a series of career stages, 'rom exploration, to advancement, to maintenance, and then decline.

In Chapter 4, it was also highlighted how Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that it is the researcher's responsibility to present the subject's views in the manner in which they were expressed. The following quotes from respondents therefore demonstrate that when making sense of their careers, the respondents' discussion was often linked to their age or stage in life.

If I was younger a career would mean advancement through the ranks and that sort of things. At my stage in life a career to me is fulfilment on a day to day basis. (respondent 43m)

If you are 30 or 40 then probably you are not going to come here on a whim, if you have a family. Where as if you are younger then you can move a round a lot more and you are more mobile. (respondent 9m)

It's very different when you are single. You are on that path to being partner or whatever or managing director. It probably doesn't change much when you get married, but when you have children. You've got to make your decision whether you want to continue on that path and organise your life around that with a nanny or whatever. Or you choose that you want to have time with your family and time off, but still career-minded. Or you can choose to opt out altogether. That's definitely when it happened for me. (respondent 7f)

When you are younger and out of school, you just worry about having a job. Then you get married and you are more worried about getting that financial security as early as you can. Then the pressure is off so the enjoyment of the job and the satisfaction becomes more of a factor than in the past... It's also the point where you are in life. You want to earn a lot of money early to establish yourself and house. I've done that. I wanted to do that early because that leads to other choices. So financial security is part of it, but you are thinking of that in the longer term to take the pressure off and find more enjoyable choices. (respondent 58m)

At my age now career is just being able to continue on what I am doing now. I have got no career aspirations what so ever in the sense that I don't want to go any higher now than I am at ***. In the early days it was mainly to get a position in where you have some responsibility not only to the company but to yourself. (respondent 44m)

I feel that as you get older that you want to put a bit more back in. (respondent 32f)

Based on this analysis, it was felt that the career development of the men and women interviewed could be usefully conceptualised as following a series of age-related pathways. The results show that respondents pass through three stages: early adulthood (early 20s); middle adulthood (late 20s to late 40s); and pre-retirement (50s onwards). These stages are described in more detail in the following sections. The similarities and differences between the experiences of the men and women are also discussed.

It is recognised that previous researchers such as Levinson et al. (1978, 1996), Super (1957), and White. Cox and Cooper (1992) also use age and career stages to explain the career development of men and women. However the drawback of these theories (as outlined in Chapter 2) is that they reflect the times in which they were developed, that is they are outdated and based on overseas contexts. A conception of career development is therefore needed in order to reflect the contemporary context of the accounting profession in Australia.

5.5 Career stages for men

Analysis of the career histories of the male respondents shows that their careers are conceptualised as a series of age-related pathways. Given that all of the male respondents were employed in the same industry, a high proportion (26) made an early commitment to the profession. Respondents 38, 43, 53 and 59 were the only male respondents who did not immediately embark on a career in the profession. The majority of careers followed a linear progression with respondents slowly progressing up the organisational hierarchy, or were characterised by an upward progression through various roles across different organisations.

Two of the respondents (38 and 43) embarked on an accounting career after some exposure to the industry and the realisation that undertaking such study would assist their career development. Respondent 38 for example, began his career as a truck driver, followed by a sales clerk in the motor spare parts industry, before pursuing an accounting career with a professional services firm at the age of 22. Respondent 43 had a series of jobs as telephone and computer technician, bus driver, and bookkeeper before finally completing an accounting qualification and embarking on an accounting career in his 40s. He realised from his role as bookkeeper that his knowledge of accounting was not sufficient. Respondent 53 was born in the United Kingdom and initially educated and trained as a science teacher, however on his move to Australia in his late 20s he chose to study accounting and pursue such a career. He believed that it was the best career that would enable him to obtain a visa or permanent residency in Australia. Respondent 59 initially studied electrical engineering at university, but never completed the degree. He left university and undertook some clerical work before deciding to study accounting externally and pursue such a career. He thought that this work would be more interesting. The common theme is that through a cumulative sequence of skills and experience, the respondents facilitate their future career development. The respondents transferred learning developed in each organisation across its boundaries and into other organisations. The following comment by respondent 38 demonstrates how his

experience with one organisation led him to embark on a completely different career in accounting.

> *I started in the motor spare parts industry driving a truck during school holidays and continued that after school. There was nothing I really wanted to do at uni. That eventually led to managing the place until it went into liquidation. I worked with the liquidators for a couple of months and they offered me a job. That's when I started in the chartered accounting game and I started my degree.*
> (respondent 38m)

5.5.1 Early adulthood – exploratory phase (20s)

The early adulthood stage represented a period in which the male respondents entered the accounting profession at the bottom rung. Respondents either completed study before entering the workforce, or others combined work and study. Some were quite clear about their ambitions, whilst others progressed through a series of jobs before having a fixed direction. Nine male respondents entered an organisation following university and have remained with it to date.

A further 13 of the male respondents worked for one or more organisations before settling down to a particular firm for the longer term. Of these, eight respondents all worked in a professional services firm before moving on to the corporate sector (four males), to a smaller firm (1), to establish their own practice (1), or to pursue an academic career (2). Two respondents worked in other accounting firms before settling down with Company B. Respondents 41 and 57 were the youngest males in the study, in their early 20s. Both these respondents had already moved to a second organisation. Only one respondent changed his career path during this phase, leaving the aggressive culture of the professional services firm to pursue an academic career at the age of 24.

This exploratory phase of the respondents' careers provided a critical foundation to their career where they acquired the skills and experience to progress. The reasons for early

career changes were to have more job variety, more challenging and rewarding work or to seek out more concrete career opportunities. These reasons for job change demonstrate that the respondents' conceptualisation of career and success was measured in both objective terms (wanting other career opportunities or more senior positions), as well as subjective terms (rewarding and challenging work).

*My only career goals were to **get as much knowledge as I could** quickly and to pass my uni course.* (respondent 9m)

*Coming out of university the chartered firm was definitely the right move as it **rounded you out in the technical side of things**. I firmly believe doing the professional year and getting the charter qualification was very useful in **cementing and embedding the technical capabilities**.* (respondent 14m)

5.5.2 Middle adulthood – establishment and maintenance phases (late 20s to late 40s)

The majority of male respondents (23) were at this stage in their career. It comprised what Levinson et al. (1978) and Super (1957) refer to as the establishment and maintenance phases of career. The period was characterised by several themes or sub-categories of career. Some of the men in this age group were focused on upward progression, whilst others had stabilised their careers, had reached a plateau, were willing to coast along, or redirected their career to pursue other interests.

First, in the establishment phase, all of the men could be categorised as climbers. The emphasis was on cementing their career within the profession and pursuing senior positions. Fourteen of the respondents experienced a traditional linear career, slowly progressing through roles within one organisation and pursuing more senior positions. A further eight respondents had a series of roles in different organisations, all focused on upward progression. Ten respondents also indicated that during this and the previous phase they had worked overseas as a means of broadening their skills and experience.

As part of the *establishment* phase. some of the men focused on *settling down* in order to provide 'financial security' and 'stability' in their career and family.

> *I only moved on when I **started a family** when I started to think I **should better**
> **myself and provide a secure financial base**.* (respondent 44m)

Some of these men (3) reported not making job moves, such as an overseas assignment, because they did not want to disrupt the family. Some of the factors influencing the men's career moves included family commitments (8); wanting to follow their spouse's career moves (3); lifestyle reasons (6); or wanting to be closer to family (6). Many of these reasons reflect the collective focus of the men's careers. The collective focus refers to the desire to maintain relationships, whether with family, friends or colleagues. Collective versus individual focus is referred to in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The *establishment* phase was followed by a *maintenance* phase. Here the respondents focused on *stabilising* their position (typically within one organisation). As indicated above, nine respondents remained in the same organisation throughout their career, and a further 13 respondents stayed with the one organisation after some initial job changes. By this stage in their career, the respondents had reached senior positions in their organisation, such as partner or senior manager. Since there was no further upward progression possible in their own organisation, they tended to 'coast' along in their career. Respondent 31 for example, had reached partner in his firm so his career had 'stabilised'. He expected to be performing his current role for another three to five years, at which point he might consider other alternatives, however his emphasis was on remaining in the organisation.

> *You get to various **T-junctions** every now and then and you have to **work out**
> **what you want to do**. I could go out and put myself in the market and do
> something different or join a client or become a CFO. For me I've got my head
> down and the role I've got its **enough challenge** for me. In a few years time 3–5*

years time I'll be at another **T-junction** *and* **what is the next challenge.** *Naturally I'll look inside first.* (respondent 31m)

The last statement in the quote demonstrates the respondent's interest in remaining in the same organisation. The desire to remain employed in the one organisation is an important theme to arise from the research and will be discussed later in this chapter.

During the maintenance phase, five of the respondents appeared to arrive at the above mentioned *T-junction*, or *crossroads* or *career plateau* in their career. These *evaluators* began to assess their career to date and consider their future career path. These respondents were aged in their mid 30s to 40s. Three of the men were reevaluating their careers on the basis of work–family balance. These men were unhappy with the balance, but were unsure or unwilling to take any proactive steps to resolve the work–life conflict. Respondent 21's comment encapsulates the dilemma faced by these men:

> *Most of my peers don't think about another career until they reach the end of their* **career path**... *For me I'm only 35 and I've reached that point. What do I do,* **should I be poor but seek happiness.** *Or should I make us comfortable before I break off.* **What's the responsible thing to do.** *I don't know the answer... Where I am now is 75 per cent there, but in order to get the other 25 per cent I might have to go back to zero. Am I able to wriggle in my current position and get a* **better work life balance,** *or will I have to* **reassess** *and take on something else.* (respondent 21m)

Respondent 21's comment 'what is the responsible thing to do', highlights the dilemma faced by him (as well as others); should he focus on progressing his career, or should he pay more attention to his family. Similarly respondent 4 for example, was interested in working part-time, however was unsure how the organisation would view such an attitude. He felt that they would see him as being less career-committed. Respondent 4 believed that the pressure was on upward progression, however he was not interested because of the associated extra work load. Perhaps as a male, respondent 4 feels a greater

need to conform to that male model of careers which is based on a constant progression up the hierarchy.

> *I don't know whether you can just sit where you are and do what you are doing.* ***I'm unsure about how they would react.*** *It's probably something that **I am a little anxious about** I guess... Maybe if you got offered an associate and if you declined it, I don't think it would be viewed that positively.* (respondent 4m)

He felt that the organisation would be resentful of his unwillingness to progress upward given all the time and resources the firm had invested in him. He thought that 'in terms of training and their willingness to go the extra yard for you would diminish to some extent' because he lacked that drive.

The other two male respondents appeared to reach a *plateau* in their career. They were unsure where to progress next in the career. and even whether they should remain in the organisation. Both respondents had reached senior positions, but felt that there were limited, if any other, senior positions remaining in the organisation. Both admitted considering positions external to the organisation. but due to family commitments they were not prepared to take the risk and actually leave or step outside their 'comfort zone'.

Respondent 13 for example, revealed that he was 'struggling to see where to go next' in his career.

> ***I can't easily see the next step in the path***, *but I've never really worried about the next step in the past as I have gone through my career. It's been quite fast paced. I've successfully done a job and the next stage has taken care of itself. Whereas now I am **quite concerned** that I can't see where the opportunities are and **I can't see the organisation is doing too much about that**.* (respondent 13m)

He indicated an interest in obtaining further operational experience or an overseas posting. However he strongly believed that the organisation should be playing a greater

role in helping him to achieve his career goals. It was a common feeling among the respondents that they wanted their organisation to play a greater role in facilitating their career development. This theme is particularly important since it contrasts the notion of a boundaryless career and will be discussed later in the thesis.

The discontent and boredom of the maintenance phase led six respondents to *reassess* their careers. These men were aged in their mid 30s, however one male was aged 47. The men *redirected* their efforts to alternative career paths. This included establishing their own business (2), or pursuing an academic career (4).

The motivations behind such career changes were to seek greater flexibility, more control over the job, and to perform more fulfilling and stimulating work. The respondents had either reached a *plateau* in their career, were disillusioned with the aggressive culture of their organisation, or felt that sole practice would provide greater work–life balance. One respondent changed his career direction to pursue an academic career in order to accommodate his wife's career move. It was clear that some of the men began to question the importance of work in their lives and considered making career changes.

Two of the males were single, so they had greater flexibility to change careers midstream, without being concerned with the impact such a move would normally have on respondents with families. They both admitted being financially comfortable before they made the career change. They acknowledged that pursuing an academic career in early life would be difficult for young single or married individuals with a family to support because of the financial constraints. Respondent 30 for example, explained that he did not wish to remain in the competitive environment of the professional services firm.

> *Just the way the chartered firms operate, the partnerships. You are not privy to the partnerships and a lot of what's going on until you are close to the top. When I found out what was needed to become a partner, **I decided that I didn't want that. Financially I was quite secure so I wasn't income driven** so it enabled me to take a break. But I finished enjoying the work at the university and continued*

*on. I got involved in another travel business which provided me with considerably more income and operated for ten years. I was in partnership with another party. That's why **I was never career orientated** at the university because I had this going on.* (respondent 30m)

Respondent 59 likewise underwent a major career change during this stage of his life. At the age of 47 he left a senior management role in the government sector in order to pursue a more rewarding and stimulating role at university.

*This period is a **new life for me**. I **have satisfied my desire as far as achievement goes** in the area of senior management... **I got quite senior** in my previous roles... I wanted to **get away from working 70 hours a week**. **I had enough of that**. **I needed a little more family life**. Also **the desire to do a PhD**. I do enjoy teaching. Given my experience that I have got since my early days teaching at ** that helps with the teaching and I quite enjoy it. I also enjoy research. Really to extend my research capacity. **Also to enjoy something while I am doing it**.* (respondent 59)

Two of the males who had reached a *crossroads* in their career were seeing an external coach/mentor. They wanted help to 'crystallise' their career goals. One male found the process useful, however the other terminated the coaching as he did not have the time to devote to it. Women also discussed the need to see an external coach/mentor. This was another emerging theme to arise from the research and is discussed later in the thesis.

In the latter phase of middle adulthood, four of the respondents indicated that they were just treading water in their careers. They had achieved all they wanted and were now prepared to coast along until retirement.

***At my age now** career is just being able to continue on what I am doing now. I **have got no career aspirations** what so ever in the sense that I don't want to go any higher now than I am at ***.* (respondent 44m)

Unlike the women, none of the male respondents in this age group took a career break or significantly changed their career in order to accommodate having a family. However, some respondents did admit that they did take into consideration their family to some extent, when considering career moves, such as an overseas assignment or a domestic transfer.

This age of middle adulthood is the longest stage in the men's lives. To summarise, it is characterised by several types of career experiences. First, the *climbers*, who focus on progressing through roles and/or organisations, slowly moving up the career ladder. Second, the majority of respondents then focus on *settling down* in order to provide financial security and stability for their career and family. Third, this is followed by a phase of *maintenance*, where the respondents' career *stabilises* or *coasts* along. Fourth, during maintenance some respondents reach a *crossroads* or *plateau* in their careers. A common theme among these respondents was that they had become discontented or bored with their jobs. Fifth, this leads some respondents to *evaluate their careers to date* and thus *redirect* their career path.

The characteristics of the middle adulthood stage can be linked to how the men articulated and conceptualised career and success. Some of the male respondents were motivated by objective measures of success (climbers—wanting more senior positions). On the other hand, other respondents viewed careers in subjective terms, such as settling down and having family stability. The crossroads is another point at which the respondents' conceptualisation of career and success changed. For example, respondent 59 left a senior position with the government to pursue an academic career. He was wanting a career that was more fulfilling and stimulating (subjective).

5.5.3 Pre-retirement (50s)

Six of the male respondents were at this age in life. Four of these respondents appeared to be in the *decline* stage of their career, discussing the issue of retirement. In contrast, two respondents appeared to be still *coasting* along in their careers, with the prospect of retirement not an immediate goal in their life. Interestingly, these were the two respondents who had embarked on an accounting career later in life, so this may represent one reason for their unwillingness to consider retirement.

Two of the male respondents interested in retirement had taken active steps to gradually reduce their workload. One respondent (aged 65) had been working part-time for a few years in order to slowly step back from the business in which he was a principal. In theory he was meant to work about two days a week, but it often was more depending on the workload. He indicated he would remain on a consultancy basis for some clients following retirement. With regard to the transition from full-time to part-time work, respondent 3 enjoyed having more free time, but found leaving his clients difficult. The focus on maintaining client relationships emphasises the collective focus of his career.

> *Well I enjoy the time off and having some free time for the first time in my life. On the other hand, I guess my relations with clients are quite personal. For some I have acted for more than 40 years and for others a shorter period of time. Invariably my clients also become my friends. Stepping back and making myself less available to clients and to encourage them to see someone else in the firm, at first I didn't find that easy. I guess I still don't, but it is something in the interests of the clients and even in my own interest.* (respondent 3m)

Respondent 3 indicated that his decision to go part-time was his, and not a result of pressure from the firm. 'I am conscious of not staying too long as well. I want to go out on my own volition, not having my partners tapping me on the shoulder saying its time to go.' He also recognised that it was important to make room for other partners. 'I felt it was important to give others the best chance and so about 15 months ago I stepped back

from attending partner meetings to give others a greater freedom if they thought that was necessary.'

The other respondent had sold off most of his accounting practice, reducing his hours to around 25 per week. Both respondents indicated that one of the pressures in their late career was keeping up to date with legislative change. Respondent 42 explained that he wished to continue working for both financial and personal reasons. He commented that:

> *I don't see myself stopping work. I have no ambitions to sit at home and watch the grass grow.* (respondent 42m)

At the time of the interview, respondent 30 was 51. He admitted being financially comfortable. Respondent 30 felt that his career is going 'nowhere', 'I think **I am at the end of the road'**. Whilst respondent 30 discussed the possibility of retiring in three years, his decision was not definite because he enjoyed the mental stimulation o` the work.

Respondent 37 was 53 at the time of the interview and discussed the issue of his retirement. With regard to his future career, he commented that:

> *The normal retirement age of a partner is 58. So I would expect to be here for another five or six years. I'm not sure whether I will stay to the end. It will depend largely on whether I am successful at getting some directorships.* (respondent 37m)

Two of the respondents (38 and 43) admitted that they still wished to continue working for both financial reasons and for the stimulation. Respondent 43 was prepared to live out the rest of his career in his current organisation. However, respondent 38 admitted that he did not have a 'clear view of where I am going from here'. He was 50 at the time of the interview, and intended remaining in the workforce for several more years before retiring.

*I've probably got another three years in this role at which time I will probably be sick of it. **If you are not passionate** about what you are doing then you should move on and find something you are passionate about. Right now I'm thinking what I will do in three years. It will be either in or outside the firm. It might involve going overseas.* (respondent 38m)

Respondent 38 felt that he needed to discuss his career goals with others in order to clarify his options.

*I need to speak to some guys that have been through the same process **(at my age and stage)**, and how they went through it and how they felt about it.* (respondent 38m)

To resolve his career dilemma, respondent 38 revealed that he was discussing his goals with an external executive coach.

*I'm talking to someone outside the firm who can help me focus and work through that. **Part of that is really working out what you are, what your strengths are, what your passions are**. So I'm working through that with someone. That's been a process for about 3–4 months. We meet every 4–6 weeks. It provides the discipline and the focus. On the other hand I am speaking with people that have been where I have been and doing different things and getting an appreciation of the issues they faced and how they tackled them and how happy they are.* (respondent 38m)

Respondent 38 believed that whilst the organisation did a lot for younger partners and other employees, little attention was focused on partners once they reach their 40s and 50s. He felt that the latter were just left to 'stumble' or 'lope' along. 'We seem to ignore them when they are at the most influential stage of their life' (respondent 38m).

One of the legacies that respondent 38 wanted to leave was to establish a program or process that addressed the needs of older employees, specifically the partners. He believed that this could be achieved in two ways. First, the older partners could be encouraged to 're-energise' and 're-focus' their 'passion' in the organisation. Second, the organisation could help focus on what the partner will be doing once they leave the organisation.

We can send them out into the marketplace with a really good feeling about *** equipped to deal with the marketplace, rather than having someone out there who has the shits because they feel they have been pushed out. (respondent 38m)

He felt that the energy of the older partners should be harnessed and used to help mentor younger employees.

Where we are missing out is that the best people who can look after morale and the well-being of our people is our partners. If these partners aren't receiving the mentoring and the probing and the questioning about what they are doing, then they are not going to be energised to deliver that down to their people. (respondent 38m)

There were two significant themes raised by men in this age cohort. First, some respondents were keen to remain working and thus not interested in planning for retirement, despite being close to the traditional retirement age of 65. Second, respondent 38 raised a critical problem that organisations need to address, that is the career aspirations of older individuals. Respondents felt that they still had something to contribute to their organisation. Organisations therefore need to harness the skills and experience of this segment and use them to help educate younger employees. As the Australian population ages, more people may be interested in prolonging their careers beyond their 50s and 60s.

5.5.4 Illustrating the age-related pathways of the male respondents

The following examples illustrate how the career development of the male respondents can be conceptualised as progressing through a series of age-related pathways.

After completing an accounting degree at university, respondent 21 commenced employment as a graduate with one of the major professional services firms. In this early exploratory phase he remained there four years progressing through roles to senior supervisor. Respondent 21 then travelled and worked overseas. He then returned to Australia to join his present company. The following quote demonstrates this early career phase:

> *I think perhaps that the career path if you look at my state of mind through the career to date, I think you would find that whilst I was at ** I was very machiavellian in that I was taking experience and training and the opportunities that ** gave without any intention to give back, recognising it was a short term role and I would soon be on my way.* (respondent 21m)

During the establishment phase, respondent 21 started off in a middle management role within finance, but very quickly had an opportunity for promotion and became CFO. The following quote describes how he continued to advance during the establishment phase until he reached a crossroads in his career, where he began to re-evaluate his future career direction.

> *Fast forwarding to when I came back to Australia and started this job, it was all about this was pay off time, the big opportunity, the chance to really push myself and take on a position of responsibility and the conventional career thing. I did it quickly for my age. Then perhaps I did it too quickly because I became overworked and dropped all my outside interests and hobbies. I lost my health, fitness and got depressed. I've had a child it's now all of a sudden, well hang on having done this career thing it's not all that great. Perhaps I don't regret any of*

this because it all made sense at the time, the steps I have taken were the right steps. But having gone through it all, it's probably time to take new steps. (respondent 21m)

In contrast to the women, it should be noted that only a minority of male respondents reported altering or wanting to alter their career paths to accommodate their family. For example, the career history of respondent 20 highlights how he moved from being totally work devoted to having a career that was more family devoted. Respondent 20 worked in two different professional services firms for ten years, gradually progressing up the organisational hierarchy. Initially respondent 20 was interested in becoming partner, however due to the aggressive culture of the firm he chose to pursue partner in a second tier firm. However because of his seriously ill daughter, respondent 20 ultimately chose not to pursue the position of partner, but instead redirected his career in his early 30s to establish his own practice. He felt that a career should be one that allowed him to better balance work and family.

So a successful career is one that helps you support your family because that's what you are trying to do. Whichever avenues you take in your career that satisfy your own ambitions and what you are trying to achieve, but also for the purpose of assisting your family. (respondent 20m)

5.6 Career stages for women

The career development of the female respondents can also be conceptualised using a series of age-related pathways. Some of the women's careers were quite linear and stable, whilst others were characterised by a series of career transitions and interruptions. Given that all of the female respondents were employed in the same industry, a high proportion made an early commitment to the profession (26). Only respondents 23, 36 and 47 chose to enter the profession later in life compared to the other respondents. Due to the large level of educational investment required to become an accountant, it is understandable that the majority of respondents in this research did not embark on such a career late in life.

Respondent 23 embarked on an accounting career in her late 20s after a failed marriage. She chose accounting after noticing that there were many accounting jobs advertised in the newspaper. Respondent 36 originally enrolled in an Arts Law degree at university, but withdrew when her husband had a serious accident. For two years she was an aerobics instructor. At the age of 21 she joined the Department of Defence as a clerical officer. After three years most of the positions were militarised, so she joined the Australian Tax Office. She then undertook studies in the accounting area and her accounting career began. Respondent 47 started off as a receptionist for a reinsurance company, however after a number of years she developed a liking and skill for the work. She then progressed through a series of accounting related roles in the reinsurance industry before eventually undertaking an accounting degree. She spent many years in the industry before starting her own small accounting and consulting business in her late 30s. Like the men, these women made job changes in response to personal circumstances and through the acquisition of skills and experience that help to facilitate their career development.

5.6.1 Early adulthood – exploratory phase (20s)

Like the men, the early adulthood stage for women represented a period in which the female respondents entered the profession at the bottom rung. Some were quite clear about their ambitions, whilst others progressed through a series of jobs before having a fixed direction. 'I think early on in my career you throw yourself into things. You don't know what you want' (respondent 17f).

In contrast to the men, only three female respondents remained in the one organisation throughout their career. These respondents entered their organisation immediately after university and progressed up the organisational hierarchy. Two of these respondents did not have children, so their career trajectories followed a linear pattern similar to that of the males. The other respondent took short breaks to have children, and the majority of her career was spent working part-time whilst the children were at school.

Many female respondents (16) worked for one or more organisations before settling down to a particular firm for the longer term. Nine of these respondents worked in a professional services firm before moving on to the corporate sector or to an accounting firm. This exploratory phase of their career provided a critical foundation to their career where they acquired the skills and experience to move on. A further six respondents had a number of roles before settling down to a particular organisation. Like the men, the reasons for their career changes were to have more job variety, more challenging and rewarding work, broaden their experience, or to seek out more secure career opportunities. Some women also reported experiencing negative treatment because of their gender, and this also prompted them to make career moves.

> *It was probably a good starting point coming straight out of uni to get a good grounding and then to come to this next step.* (respondent 10f)

Eleven of the female respondents began their careers in the professional services firms. They agreed that these firms provided an excellent foundation for their careers by

providing extensive training and the help to complete their professional year. The respondents tended to use this environment as a platform to pursue a career elsewhere, either in the corporate sector, academia, or establishing their own business. The pattern of career development appeared to be common across the respondents who had worked in these organisations. Respondent 34's comment highlights the typical experience of respondents:

*I would say my career progressed in a way that is **quite typical in the** **professional services firm** where you start as a graduate, you do your qualification, you become a senior accountant after a couple of years, then you become a manager. You continue to work in an audit practice. You continue to do client facing work, but start to take on some internal responsibilities.* (respondent 34f)

Six of the female respondents were quite ambitious early on in their careers, with aspirations of becoming partner or progressing to a senior role within the organisation. Respondents 6 and 7 admitted that early on in their careers they had goals of becoming partner. Respondent 6 clearly expressed this goal to her employers when she moved to Company B. Respondent 7 however, became less career-orientated after getting married.

It's very different when you are single. You are on that path to being partner or whatever or managing director. It probably doesn't change much when you get married, but when you have children. You've got to make your decision whether you want to continue on that path and organise your life around that with a nanny or whatever. Or you choose that you want to have time with your family and time off, but still career-minded. Or you can choose to opt out altogether. That's definitely when it happened for me. (respondent 7f)

It is interesting that this woman discusses choice, as many women in the research felt that their choices about balancing work and family were constrained. This led to feelings of fear, stress, conflict and compromise (as discussed in Chapter 7).

Similarly respondent 33 revealed that she was very determined that she wanted to become a partner from 'day one'. 'I wanted to join ** originally, but they said they didn't make women partners, so I said I'll go and find someone else to join' (respondent 33). When she joined Company D respondent 33 asked:

> *I specifically asked if women could be partners and they said they didn't mind.*
> *They said they made the most appropriate people partners. I joined them. I've*
> *always been pretty pushy about looking for the next steps in my career.*
> (respondent 33f)

Like the men, nine of the women also had some experience working overseas. However, three of these respondents were actually born overseas and moved to Australia permanently. Not all of these women worked in accounting related roles whilst overseas.

5.6.2 Middle adulthood – establishment and maintenance phases (Late 20s – late 40s)

Similar to the men, the middle adulthood stage for the women is sub divided into the establishment and maintenance phase. During the establishment phase the women's career trajectories were characterised by a series of transitions and interruptions. Their careers evolved over time whilst they balanced work and family. Nineteen respondents had time out from the organisation or worked part-time to have children or changed their type of employment in order to better balance work and family. This included moving into the education field (6); working as a consultant or contractor (3), establishing their own practice (6), or working for smaller firms (1). This career change was often temporary. It allowed the respondents flexibility over working hours and the type of work they undertook.

The six respondents who had not yet chosen to have children, found that this period represented the establishment phase of their career. They acquired senior positions within the organisation, such as partner, or assumed significant responsibility that helped to cement their position.

It was during this period that respondent 32 for example, became partner at the age of 30. She continued to work and cement her career before having a child at 36. Respondent 34 for example, was given a major project to manage at this time. She believed that this early challenge helped to establish and consolidate her career. She was appointed partner at the age of 34. Respondent 33 became partner at 33.

Similarly, respondent 6 became partner at the age of 28. Following that, respondent 6 entered a stage of establishment where she worked on cementing her position within Company B. Whilst she did not reveal any other career goals, she had not quite progressed to the maintenance stage of her career as she still wanted to continue learning, developing her skills and exploring other opportunities.

> *I'm not sure. I think personally I need to **continue to develop so I'm doing more** **training**. At this stage no. **I'm still growing** in the role that I'm in now, but I can't imagine staying in exactly the same role. We are fortunate to be in an industry that reinvents itself or changes quite rapidly, so that's quite how we all progress. **There are more opportunities to take on more responsibilities** within this firm itself and so that's probably something I'll consider in a few years when I'm firmly entrenched in the role that I'm playing now. (*respondent 6f)

There are some similarities and differences between the experiences of the females in this phase compared to the males. Both men and women in this phase are focused on establishing themselves in the profession and/or organisation, and slowly progressing through a series of roles, broadening their skills and experience (climbers). However, where the two genders diverge in their career trajectories, occurs when the women take career breaks or change their careers in order to accommodate a family (jugglers). Only a

minority of the men took a career break or changed their careers significantly to accommodate a family. However, they did admit that they recognised their career had to provide some form of financial security and stability because of their family commitments.

There were ten respondents that had been through, or were at the maintenance phase in their life. It was a mixed time for respondents. Six respondents for example, admitted having *renewed commitment* to their careers. Generally their children had gone to school and this enabled them to place greater focus on their careers again (double track). For example, two respondents wanted to move on from their current roles to pursue other senior positions. They were prepared to look externally for career opportunities. For example, respondent 22 progressed to a CFO role. Respondent 28 returned to full-time work at a university. Respondent 36 focused on becoming partner.

Like the men, some female respondents (5) in this phase reached a crossroads and re*evaluated* their careers and subsequently redirected their career paths. This included establishing their own business (3), undertaking a major career change and entering another profession (1), or moving to contract based work and teaching (1). The reasons for such redirection included: to pursue a more flexible career; achieve a better work–life balance, and to pursue a more fulfilling career.

Respondent 23 for example, reevaluated her career at this point in time. She gave up a highly successful career as a finance director to establish her own accounting practice. She felt that the sacrifices she had made to achieve such success were not worth it.

> *You expect when you get there that there will be this great rush of feeling or expectation and there wasn't. It wasn't what I wanted. I always thought that this is what I wanted. I wanted recognition, I wanted to be somebody that people would look up to and say look what she did against all odds, and that's the reality. When I actually sat there in that job and realised what I was giving away. If I had stayed in that job my health would have deteriorated and I reckon I would*

have been dead if I stayed there. Then I look at my family and I think what I gave away. During all this time the daughter that my husband and I had together had grown up virtually on her own because I was off chasing a career. (respondent 23f)

Three of the female respondents (aged from 38 to 43) admitted that they were at a crossroads in their career. Two of the women had become partner, which they saw as the pinnacle of their careers, however they were unsure of their future direction.

*Becoming a partner is the ultimate as what you might set as a goal. But once you get there **you realise it starts all over again.** You haven't necessarily made it and **you can feel quite vulnerable** in terms of where you go with your career. Its interesting watching all of the partners that aren't necessarily in power positions, see the youth coming in behind them as a threat.* (respondent 34f)

The vulnerability expressed by this respondent mirrors the feelings of some of the male respondents. Once they reach senior positions, such as partner, these respondents are uncertain of their future career direction.

Respondent 34 admitted that she was financially secure so there was no economic motivation to pursue other opportunities. She revealed that:

I find myself starting to think about whether to leave in a few years and give back more, either to the community or family and friends. So taking a far less time consuming job. Using still my basic skills, but for a lot less money and giving back time to a lot of people who don't get my time now. This career has given me that option that many in society don't have. Its something now I am chewing over. So it could be not for profit work. Paid work that draws on my existing skills in a way that is unstressful to me, and to give time to other people. (respondent 34f)

Respondent 32 also admitted that she was at a crossroads in her career and feeling uncertain.

> *I suppose that's where **I am struggling now**, in terms of **which direction do I go in**... I haven't really thought it out in any great detail, I have just glided along.* (respondent 32f)

Respondent 32 felt that the problem with her career going forward was that she may become bored with the job.

> *If you look at my career I have not stayed in one place. I actually went out and did e-business for a while. I can sense that if I don't do something, I will get bored. Fortunately in my area there is a lot of business development. How long I will stay I don't know. So that's why I am at a **crossroads**... I can't see that for the rest of my life I will want to do what I am doing now. One thing with the charitable boards I feel that as you get older that you want to put a bit more back in.* (respondent 32f)

Respondent 32 felt that she had two paths open to her, either take on more of a leadership role within the organisation, or pursue work externally. By leadership she meant a role that provided her with greater responsibility, such as Profit and Loss responsibility. The organisation was encouraging her to pursue this path through a leadership program. The alternative would be to take on a non executive director role for a charitable organisation. However before leaving the organisation, respondent 32 indicated that she would like to 'leave a legacy', such as acting as a role model for females within the firm. She felt these goals could be achieved by the time she was 50.

Respondent 40 similarly admitted that she had mixed views about her future career direction. She was one of the respondents who admitted not being totally satisfied with her career.

I don't know. I've been in two minds about what I am going to do career wise for a while now. I don't think I would go back to public practice, probably commerce. I think there is more autonomy there. In medium sized businesses there are usually only one or two accountants. You don't have people looking over your shoulder. I think there would be a great deal of innovation and job satisfaction from doing that. Probably that's why I enjoy teaching, because you are in charge of your own little area. I didn't like public practice as much because there was less individual input. (respondent 40f)

Respondent 40's contract at the university terminates in June 2005 so she will have to make decisions about her career at that point. Throughout the interview she see-sawed between wanting to remain at the university and returning to the corporate or chartered firm environment.

To summarise, females in the maintenance phase of their career either continued upward progression (climbers), maintained their existing career track (coasters), or changed their career trajectory (redirectors). Like the men, the women reached a *career plateau* and were at a *crossroads* as to where to go next. They also expressed discontentment and boredom at this stage in their careers. Furthermore, the women also expressed feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability.

5.6.3 Pre-retirement (50s)

There were seven respondents who had reached this phase in their life. They were in the decline stage of their career, discussing plans for retirement. Four respondents indicated that they did not want to have a 'big foot in the workplace' following retirement. They revealed that they would like to have more time for leisure activities, such as sailing or travel. However, they did not mind doing some form of paid or voluntary work. Two respondents indicated an interest in becoming directors of charitable or not-for-profit organisations, whilst a third was interested in other forms of charitable work. Two respondents intended to remain working part-time after retirement for financial reasons.

Respondent 1 for example, who was in her early 50s, indicated she was in the decline stage of her career. She did not have any specific plans of retirement, but admitted, 'probably as I get a bit older, which is rapidly happening, you might think of getting a job that is not quite so stressful'. However she recognised that this was not a serious wish 'because to get a job that is as satisfying as this one with the same kind of pay is probably not possible'. Respondent 1 was not interested in working part-time.

Similar to one of the male respondents (respondent 38), two female respondents highlighted a problem with the older partners in their organisations who felt quite vulnerable and unsure about their future, despite their obvious seniority, tenure and depth of experience. As respondent 34 explained:

> You have a lot of partners that don't have an official mentor and that got there and are left to work it out for themselves. We are only starting to do formal succession planning in the partnership. Whether that is planning for internal roles, such as CEO, or owners of major client accounts. We have just recently started a program for partners in their first three years called 'the foundation program'. They are given some more counselling and coaching, formal mentoring, more business development training, checking in how they are going. **Some are sailing and some have fear in their eyes because they feel vulnerable and nobody has been saying how they are going.** (respondent 34f)

As discussed by respondent 38, these two female respondents were interested in leaving a legacy that would focus greater attention on the role of older partners in the organisation.

At the age of 56, respondent 46 intended to remain working full-time for the next nine years, at which time her male colleague will be groomed and ready to take over her accounting business. By that time she hoped to be working no more than 15 hours a week and to be off for three months of the year. She wanted her pay out figure to be sufficient to finance the purchase of a caravan so she could 'join the grey nomads'. She

would like to travel around the country providing a locum service to other accounting franchises.

> *I am not going to stop working until I have to... Because I love it. I love working with people and I love doing what I do.* (respondent 46f)

Respondent 56 was the oldest person interviewed in the research, born in 1932 in Poland. At the age of 65 she sold most of her accounting practice in order to leave a capital city and move to the country to 'retire and grow roses'. However, her clients wanted her to remain in business. So at the age of 72 she was still running her small practice.

> *I will work as long as my brain works for me. My parents were the same. I would be absolutely unhappy because I found out that I don't like growing roses. I can now make $150 per hour with my brain.* (respondent 56f)

Many of the females were interested in leaving a legacy (6) or helping others progress through the organisation (7). This attitude was expressed mainly by the older respondents in the final stages of their career. At this point, they themselves had reached senior positions, so were keen to help others have successful and positive career experiences. In particular, they were interested in helping female employees in the organisation.

> *I want to **leave a legacy** so my daughter's generation can come through and the glass ceiling is still there, but she may not feel it so strongly.* (respondent 32f)

None of the women in this age group reported having any elder care responsibilities. Furthermore, none of the women reported experiencing negative treatment due to their age.

5.6.4 Illustrating the age-related pathways for women

The career history of respondent 45 illustrates the age-related stages that she has progressed through during her career. Whilst she was young and unmarried, respondent 45 worked as an accountant for a large multi-national IT company, where she experienced progression up the ladder. However she left the firm when she married. Respondent 45 initially undertook temporary work whilst she made plans for the wedding. Respondent 45 then worked for a manufacturing company until her first child was born. She then moved in an out of the workforce whilst she had three children. During this time, respondent 45 worked for her husband's business as the accountant. This enabled her to work flexible hours. Her longest break from the workforce was for three years after the birth of her third child. Respondent 45 then returned to the workforce part-time to work in a second tier accounting firm. Respondent 45 does not have any specific career plans for the future She enjoys the challenge of her current job, so is content to stay there for the time being. Respondent 45 structures her working hours around the children's school time. The following statement by respondent 45 illustrates how her career development changed as her personal motivations and circumstances in life changed:

> *I think I used to define it very differently. I think previously* **when I first started in commercial accounting it was to go and be a financial controller** *of an organisation and that was where you* **set your sights. But now its what makes you feel happy and fulfilled, and what works for you. Priorities change and your situation changes.** *Even* **getting married you rethink.** *I used to work long hours at ***, such as coming in at 7am and leaving for home at 9pm on a regular basis. Originally that was only month end but it grew to be nearly all the time.* **At that point in time** *I thought hang on, what's the point. I was earning good money for my age, and I had a car. You think what is the point if you are* **exhausted** *all the time. It was a very interesting and stimulating job.* **You just take stock.** (respondent 45)

5.7 Similarities and differences between the genders

There are some major similarities and differences between the male and female age-related models. Figure 5.1 illustrates the main characteristics of each age stage for the men and women in the accounting profession.

Figure 5.1 Comparison of the age-related stages of men and women in the accounting profession in Australia

Age Stages For Men	Characteristics
early adulthood (early 20s)	• complete degree • combine work and study • complete professional year • acquire basic training and knowledge of the profession • obtain some overseas experience • progress through roles and organisations
middle adulthood (late 20s – late 40s)	• establishment—climbers continue to climb career ladder • maintenance—coasters settle down and stabilise their career path; some respondents progress to senior positions, including pinnacle of the career ladder; leads to career plateau; or crossroads; leads respondents to reevaluate their career; the outcome is for respondents to redirect their career.
pre-retirement (50s and older)	• coasters—respondents still interested in maintaining a career, no definite plans for retirement yet. • decline—respondents slowly begin to disengage from the workforce, still wish to perform some work

Age Stages For Women	Characteristics
early adulthood (early 20s)	• complete degree • combine work and study • complete professional year • acquire basic training and knowledge of the profession • obtain some overseas experience • progress through roles and organisations
establishment (late 20s – early 30s)	• climbers—respondents continue to pursue a linear career, progressing up the hierarchy. • jugglers—combine career and motherhood; characterised by career interruptions, transitions, and change of employment

maintenance (late 30s – late 40s)	• renewed commitment on career—respondents refocused on career after having children. • climbers—some respondents renewed career progression • double track—combine career and family • crossroads—some respondents reach the pinnacle of their career or a plateau, and are not sure where to go next. • reevaluaters—some respondents question their career in terms of achievement and work–life balance and choose to redirect their career paths
pre-retirement (50s and over)	• coasters—respondents still interested in maintaining a career, no definite plans for retirement yet. • Decline phase—respondents slowly begin to disengage from the workforce, still wish to perform some work

Firstly, the experiences of both men and women appeared to be similar in the early adulthood stage. During this phase both genders entered the profession early in life. There were only four men and three women who entered the profession later in life. Many of the male and female respondents worked for one or more organisations before settling down to a particular firm for the longer term. Nine of the males, compared to only three of the females remained employed with the one firm throughout their career. This exploratory phase of the respondents' careers provided a critical foundation to their career where they acquired the skills and experience to move on. The reasons for their career changes were to have more job variety, more challenging and rewarding work, to broaden their experience, or to seek out more secure career opportunities. Both the male and female respondents in this age cohort could be described as climbers. This similarity between the men and women continued for part of the establishment phase of career.

Where the career paths of the men and women diverged was during middle adulthood (late 20s to late 40s). Whilst the majority of men had linear career paths, most of the women's careers (19) were characterised by a series of transitions and interruptions. Despite this however, most of these women were still interested in career development, its just that they had to take alternative career paths to accommodate family commitments. Only the five women without children continued to follow a career path similar to men's, characterised by linear progression up the career hierarchy.

There were also seven females who were not interested in progressing to senior positions, such as partner. In contrast, only two males were not interested in progressing beyond manager level. Unlike the women, only one of the male respondents significantly altered his career path because of family commitments, and three male respondents did admit that they may refuse a career move due to family.

A major similarity between some of the career stages of the male and female respondents was that they tended to reach a *crossroads* in their career in their late 30s and 40s (five men and three women). These respondents began to question their role within the organisation and their future career paths. They reported feeling discontented and bored with their jobs. The significant theme to emerge from the research was that five of these respondents used external coaching to help resolve their career dilemmas.

A further similarity between the male and female respondents that emerged during middle adulthood related to those respondents who *reevaluated* their career direction. Some of the males either started their own accounting practice, switched to the academic sector, or pursued other career paths. The reasons were for lifestyle, to pursue a more stimulating and fulfilling career, or to obtain more control and autonomy in their careers. The women also made similar career moves, however their reasons were to enable a better balance of work and family commitments.

An interesting similarity to emerge from the interviews, was that some of the men and women felt that older partners in the professional services firms were a neglected segment of the workforce. These people had reached the heights of their profession, but were feeling vulnerable and were lacking career direction. Both men and women expressed a desire to leave a legacy that would resolve this problem for future senior employees. More importantly, the respondents believed that the organisation should play a greater role in helping facilitate their career development by providing support and encouragement.

Both the men and women discussed other reasons for wanting to leave a legacy. For the women, it was specifically about helping other women progress through the organisation by providing role models or trying to change the attitude of the organisation. For the men, it was about helping others with their career management.

With regard to respondents aged 50 and older, the men and women had similar career paths. For those respondents that were reaching the end of the road in their careers, both the men and women discussed progressively reducing their involvement in the workforce. Both the men and women shared the desire to have some part-time involvement in the workforce following retirement. This was for both financial reasons and because they wanted the stimulation of work. Both genders discussed carrying out charitable or volunteer work.

There were also some men and women in this age cohort who were keen to remain in the workforce and were thus *coasting* along in their careers. These respondents represent a social pattern that may characterise the demographics of the Australian workforce in the future. With the aging of the population, and the fact that men and women are living longer, some people are interested in prolonging their involvement in the workforce. Organisations will need to acknowledge this shift in workforce demographics by encouraging and utilising this segment of the population. Given their tenure in the workplace, older employees represent a wealth of experience that organisations can tap to develop younger employees. For example, this research emphasises the value of and need for mentoring, particularly of younger employees, and the willingness of older employees to do so. The experience of older employees could be harnessed to develop mentoring relationships with younger members of the organisation.

5.8 Other Aspects of Career Trajectories

The majority of respondents admitted that their careers had not been planned, they had just evolved in response to their personal and work circumstances. They stated that their careers were the result of both luck/fate, and partly controlled by them. There appeared to be two categories of respondents: those who had unplanned careers (53 – 27 males and 26 females); and those who planned their careers to a greater degree (6 – three males and three females). Consistent with existing literature, most respondents therefore did not plan their careers. In general, the respondents' career moves were the result of either actively applying for and seeking out positions themselves; having others identify the opportunity for them, such as managers, HR, family and friends, or mentors; or being recommended for the job. With most respondents, their job changes in early career resulted from other people identifying positions for them, and as they progressed in the organisation or became more experienced, they tended to actively seek out job moves themselves. Respondent 59's comment exemplifies this point well:

> *Mine has been an **evolutionary process**. We make both **implicit and explicit** plans. In general the direction of where I have gone has been more implicit than explicit. It's good to have a broad goal, but to define that in terms of what job, what I will be earning and time frames, is an unrealistic expectation.* (respondent 59m)

The following comments illustrate respondents who had unplanned careers or who had no definite goals:

> *I have never done the five-year plans. I grew up in a family where Mum said you have to work or go to Uni, or get married... I never really worked out what I wanted to do. One thing led to another.* (respondent 48f)

> *I know other people have goals that they want to be manager by the age of 25 or partner by the time they are 30, I never had goals like that. I just got on with the job.* (respondent 52f)

I don't think there has been any grand strategy in my career. It's been more a series of tactical responses I think. It was almost by accident that I ended up being a chartered accountant. (respondent 38m)

The following quotes demonstrate those respondents who expressed more definite career goals:

I suppose I'm quite ambitious. I see myself. I love the mining industry and the company and I want to move forward in the company. My long term goal would be to become a VP or a CFO in the finance area in one of the customer sector groups. My short term goal is to move up into that finance manager position where you are managing people as well as a division. Hopefully get some operational experience. (respondent 17f)

*I was very determined that I wanted to be a partner from day 1. I wanted to join ** originally, but they said they didn't make women partners, so I said I'll go and find someone else to join... I specifically asked if women could be partners and they said they didn't mind. They said they made the most appropriate people partners. I joined them. I've always been pretty pushy about looking for the next steps in my career.* (respondent 33f)

I decided at a perversely young age, something like 14. I was good at maths in school so I thought I should do something in that area. I decided that maths teaching didn't seem like a good idea. People said accounting was the way to go. So I then asked what do you shoot for. It was explained that there were these partners in big accounting firms. So from a very young age, I had a path to follow... I am someone who sees opportunities offered to me, as opposed to me targeting them and going at them dogmatically. So it's having enough confidence to aim for high things. It comes from a fear of failure. If I set my goals too specific about what I want, and I don't make it, I wouldn't like how I

would feel. So I set the goals wide apart so I know I will always achieve them.
(respondent 34f)

The above quotes demonstrate that those respondents with unplanned careers tend not to have detailed career plans or goals for their future development. Such respondents generally have a broad idea of where they see themselves going in their career, but do not have any time frames or specific roles that they are aiming towards. In contrast, respondents who articulated more definite career goals typically crystallised their career goals early in their career life and strove to achieve them. The latter group tended to be more ambitious and able to verbalise their career goals. They developed strategies and directed their career behaviour towards achieving those goals. Whilst the unplanned respondents did not necessarily have specific career ambitions, it did not preclude them from aspiring to senior roles, it is just that they did not report having any clear plans of how to achieve such positions. The lack of structured career planning may be a feature of the accounting profession, which has a very structured pattern for career progression.

5.9 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss how the men and women in the accounting profession made sense of their career stories. When articulating their career experiences, many of the respondents emphasised the notion of time, that is their career development was often linked to their age, stage in life and stage in career. For this reason the career development of the men and women has been conceptualised as a series of age-related pathways. There were three main stages that both the men and women progressed through: early adulthood (early 20s); middle adulthood (late 20s to late 40s); and pre-retirement (50s).

The results of this research clearly demonstrate that there are many similarities between the career paths of the men and women. Where the career trajectories do diverge is during middle adulthood when the careers of women are more complex as they detour to accommodate family commitments. However, before and after these age stages, the men

and women have similar career experiences. What is also clear from the career stories of respondents is the idiosyncratic nature of their careers. Whilst the respondents may pass through similar age-related stages, personal motivations and circumstances play an important role in influencing their careers.

This chapter has also highlighted a number of important themes that arose from the research. A full exploration of these themes will be discussed in the following chapters, however they have been identified here. First, a significant proportion of both men and women remained working in the one organisation throughout their careers. This questions the pervasiveness of the boundaryless career theory which argues that careers in the twenty-first century will be characterised by greater mobility, with individuals having careers across organisational and occupational boundaries (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996a).

The second significant theme of the research was the fact that both men and women reported feeling fear, stress, uncertainty, and vulnerability in their careers. For some, this related to the dilemma of how to balance work and family. For others, it related to their uncertainty about their future career direction. It was interesting to note that this was felt by some of the senior respondents. These respondents had reached the pinnacle of the organisation's hierarchy (such as partner), and were unsure where to go next in their careers. They had felt abandoned by their organisations because they were not given any career support.

This led to the third major outcome of the study, which was that many respondents wanted their organisation to play a greater role in facilitating their career development. This aspect of the accounting professionals also contrasts the notion of the boundaryless career which states that the responsibility of managing a career will rest with the individual, rather than the organisation.

As a result of the uncertainty and vulnerability expressed by some of the respondents, they consulted external mentors or coaches to help 'crystallise' their career goals. This

theme highlights an emerging trend that is occurring in Australia with regard to life coaching. How this relates to career development is an area that needs much more research.

Finally, the research showed that only a minority of respondents (6) had definite career goals. This is not to say that the remaining respondents did not have career goals, it was just that they did not proactively plan their careers. This was highlighted by the fact that of the 12 respondents who had achieved the position of partner, three had not planned or articulated this as a major career goal.

The following chapter explores how men and women in the research conceptualised what career and success meant to them.

CHAPTER 6: CONCEPTUALISING CAREER AND CAREER SUCCESS

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to address the second research question: *How do the men and women in the research articulate and conceptualise what career and career success means to them?*

As outlined in the literature review in Chapters 2 and 3, examining how an individual defines a career and career success helps to understand the motivations behind their career choices and development (Gutek & Larwood, 1987; O'Leary, 1997). The previous chapter also demonstrated that an individual's conceptualisation of career and success changed during their life, depending on their age and personal circumstances.

Success can be measured in both objective and subjective terms. Objective success refers to extrinsic measures, such as salary or position (Knabi, 1999; Melammed, 1996). In contrast, subjective success is measured in relation to intrinsic variables, such as job satisfaction, personal development or achievement (Knabi, 1999; Melammed, 1996). Success is derived from an individual's own perceptions of what they value as important. O'Leary (1997) and Powell and Maniero (1992), for example, argue that if an individual does not achieve a senior position in an organisation, such as CEO, it does not necessarily mean they are not successful. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and Hall (1996a) believe that careers in the twenty-first century will be characterised by a greater focus on achieving psychological success, such as job satisfaction or family stability, rather than objective success, such as vertical progression.

In the interview, respondents were thus asked to articulate what was a career and what constituted a successful career. The question required them to conceptualise their own meaning, rather than what they thought others perceived success to be.

It was highlighted in Chapter 4 that 'interpretive social science seeks to discover why people do what they do by uncovering the largely tacit, mutual knowledge, the symbolic

meanings, motives and rules, which provide the orientations for their actions' (Blaikie, 2000: 115). This statement emphasises the need to understand how people construct and bring meaning to phenomena and how this meaning provides the 'orientation' or context to their actions. By understanding how men and women articulate and conceptualise career success, we can obtain a greater understanding of the reasons behind the respondents' career development. The respondents' answers demonstrated a very individualised definition of success, emphasising the important role of personal motivations and circumstances in their career behaviour.

This chapter discusses the respondents' answer to the above question. Section 6.2 outlines the overall results in relation to the respondents' conceptualisation of career and success. Section 6.3 outlines the significant gender differences in the definitions of career and success and the possible reasons for such difference. Section 6.4 summarises how successful and satisfied the respondents felt with their careers to date.

6.2 Overall results

The following table lists the 29 factors that respondents used to articulate and conceptualise what career and success mean to them. The factors represent actual words voiced by respondents and were taken directly from the interview transcripts. Where respondents used similar words or phrases to articulate their definitions of career and success, these terms were grouped under one category. For example, some respondents listed terms such as 'control over the job', 'a flexible job', and 'flexible working hours'. These terms were subsumed under the one category and referred to as 'control and flexibility over the job'. The responses were then analysed to count the number of men and women who cited each particular term.

As discussed in Chapter 4, researchers can use categorisation techniques in order to present and describe data (Bailey, 1994; Dey, 1993; Kipnis, 1997). The objective and subjective categories were developed based on the existing literature's definition of objective and subjective success (as briefly discussed in 6.1). The classification was also based on analysing the textual content of the respondents' talk in order to help determine whether the terms were subjective or objective. It should be noted that the respondents

were not directly asked to classify the terms as either subjective or objective. The categorisation was based on the researcher's interpretation of the data, and is therefore subject to some bias.

Z Test calculations were also performed in order to determine whether there were any gender differences between the terms listed. If the Z value is greater than 1.645 it is considered a significant difference ($p < 0.05$). It should be emphasised that the purpose of conducting Z Tests is not to generalise the results to other men and women in the accounting profession, or to other demographic contexts, it is merely a way of making sense of the results of the research for this specific context.

Table 6.1 Terms used to define career and career success

	Factor	M	F	Z Value
Objective	being financially comfortable	23	14	2.25*
	completing and publishing research	0	1	1.03
	career mobility	1	0	0.99
	having the opportunity to remain in one organisation	1	0	0.99
	job variety	4	2	0.82
	career progression	11	8	0.75
	completing a PhD	2	1	0.56
	remuneration	5	5	0.06
	position	3	3	0.04
Subjective	mental stimulation	1	6	2.06*
	helping others progress through the organisation	2	7	1.87*
	control and flexibility over the job and work	5	11	1.84*
	receive personal encouragement and recognition from family, colleagues and superiors	8	14	1.72*
	rewarding and challenging work	7	12	1.48
	have a strong relationship with and provide a good service to clients	7	12	1.48
	continued development	6	2	1.47
	helping students gain skills and in their careers	0	2	1.46
	to set, achieve and exceed both personal and business goals	12	17	1.43
	work–life–family balance	30	28	1.03
	job satisfaction	16	19	0.95
	a good work environment	9	6	0.82
	creating new ideas	1	2	0.62
	working as part of a team	2	1	0.56
	ensuring employee satisfaction	2	3	0.51
	seeing and working with diverse cultures, races and sectors	3	2	0.43
	leaving a legacy	5	6	0.40
	enjoying the job	10	11	0.37
	continued learning	6	5	0.27
	happiness	16	16	0.14

Note: * indicates significant difference at $p < 0.05$.

6.2.1 Objective Versus subjective

The table shows that success was conceptualised by respondents in both objective and subjective terms. The most commonly cited objective terms included being financially comfortable (n=37), career progression (n=19), and remuneration (n=10). The main motivation behind these objective terms was the respondents' desire for financial security and prosperity for their family and themselves. It should be noted that many of the respondents in the research were on quite high incomes, compared to the average wage earner in Australia. Despite this wage differential, these higher paid respondents were still concerned about financial security.

The majority of respondents articulated career in subjective terms, such as job satisfaction (n=35), happiness (n=32), and to enjoy the job (n=21). The table shows that in fact, respondents chose more subjective terms to conceptualise career, rather than objective terms.

*I would rather be **happy** in a job and **be paid less** than be paid high and be very unhappy. I would rather **job satisfaction** any day.* (respondent 5f)

*One where you are **happy**. You actually get out of bed in the morning and don't grumble that 'oh God, I've got to go and face the day'. That's what it is about. If you think collecting your pay cheque is what's going to get you out of bed in the morning, it will do that for the first couple of months, but after that it's not what drives people. What **drives people** to be successful is not the pay cheque, but **enjoying what they do**, being **able to contribute** and having the **contribution valued and recognised**.* (respondent 22f)

Almost all of the men and women in the research conceptualised career and success in relation to balancing work–life–family (n=58). Respondents readily interchanged the terms work–life and work–family, with some using both terms when referring to only family balance. A number of respondents acknowledged that objective measures of

success, such as remuneration and position, were only important to a small degree or in the short term. They were necessary in order to achieve some form of financial security or prosperity, but respondents realised that they were not paramount.

> ***It's very different when you are single.*** *You are on that path to being partner or whatever or managing director.* ***It probably doesn't change much when you get married, but when you have children.*** *You've got to make your decision whether you want to continue on that path and organise your life around that with a nanny or whatever. Or you choose that you want to have time with your family and time off, but still career-minded. Or you can choose to opt out altogether. That's definitely when it happened for me.* (respondent 7f)

Among the men there appeared to be more rhetoric behind the work–life statement, that is whilst they voiced a desire to achieve a work–family balance, in reality the majority were not prepared to take any proactive steps to reduce the imbalance. Only a minority of men in the research altered their career path in order to have greater work–family balance. The following quote from a male respondent illustrates how he conceptualised success in terms of a work–family balance. This respondent altered his career path by choosing not to pursue a partner position in a major firm, but instead established his own business in order to have a greater work–family balance.

> *So a successful career is one that* ***helps you support your family*** *because that's what you are trying to do. Whichever avenues you take in your career that satisfy your own ambitions and what you are trying to achieve, but also for the* ***purpose of assisting your family.*** *(respondent 20m)*

The majority of men on the other hand, chose not to address the work–family conflict:

> *I'm not going to look at myself in the mirror and ask whether I could do it better* (respondent 58m).

6.2.2 Collective versus individual success

An emerging theme to arise from the research was that many respondents conceptualised success in both collective and individual terms. From a collective focus, respondents articulated success in terms of building connections or relationships with family, colleagues and clients. For example, respondents conceptualised career and success as knowing that they had served their clients (n=19); 'receiving recognition from colleagues and clients' (n=22). Respondent 23 for example, felt that career for her is about feeling appreciated by her clients and helping them to develop their business.

> The reality is that I found that I would never work for somebody who didn't **appreciate** the effort that somebody puts in. I would never do it again. I only work with micro businesses now because they **appreciate** it. It means that **I can affect their lives and make changes in their lives**, that no other accountant will do it. I probably waste a lot of hours because I don't charge, but at the end of the day when I charge I don't have any problem getting paid and I feel that I have given them value add. It's not about the money. If I wanted to make millions of dollars I would be back in the job I was in. It was always to be **respected, always to be able to feel I could look somebody in the eye and feel I was an equal.** (respondent 23f)

> **I tend to define it in terms of my relationships...** I feel I have the **respect of my colleagues. I have good relationships with my children and husband.** In terms of my relationships. Even in my role as a mother I look at the **relationship** I have with my children, their friends and their parents. For the most part I feel like I have a successful and blessed life. (respondent 51f)

Further illustrating the collective focus, a number of respondents (both male and female) conceptualised success in terms of the ability to have an influence, including leaving a legacy (n=11); helping others progress through the organisation (n=9); helping students in terms of their careers and gaining additional skills (n=2); and ensuring employee

happiness and satisfaction (n=5). This was exemplified by the fact that 26 respondents (15 males and 11 females) acted as a mentor

The men phrased their comments about helping people in general terms, and were not gender specific.

> *I don't think of it constantly, but I guess, I do enjoy working with people. So* **making sure people have career paths here, they are happy here, the clients are happy with our service.** *That does mean a lot to me.* (respondent 9m)

For the women however, their responses regarding leaving a legacy were about assisting other women to cope with the male-dominated environment and to help them progress through the organisation. The women specifically saw the need for more female role models, and hence volunteered to be a mentor.

> *Whether you develop some people, or you have had some great experiences with other people.* **I feel quite strongly about being a female role model.** *i am divorced, but I have a partner who has a successful career, I have children which is very unusual in our firm.* **I want to leave a legacy so my daughter's generation can come through and the glass ceiling is still there,** *but she may not feel it so strongly...* **It's also bringing other partners through.** (respondent 32f)

From an individual focus, respondents conceptualised career in terms of personal development and achievement, such as setting and achieving personal and business goals (n=29); career progression (n=19); continued learning (n=11); continued development (n=8); and mental stimulation (n=7).

6.2.3 Changing focus of success

As discussed in the previous chapter, a respondent's conceptualisation of a career and success did change over time. This highlights an important theme of this research, that is the career development of the men and women is strongly linked to their age, stage in life, or stage in their career. At these various points in career and life, their conceptualisation of career and success shifts due to their changing personal and work circumstances. It reinforces the idiosyncratic nature of careers and supports the need to develop a conceptualisation of career which recognises the fluidity of career pathways.

I always **got to a point** where I thought that this is far as I am going to go here, or this is **no longer satisfying my inner need**. So it was more that feeling **its time to make a change**. (respondent 22f)

> *If I was **younger a career would mean advancement through the ranks** and that sort of things. **At my stage in life** a career to me is **fulfilment on a day to day basis, the knowledge that I am doing the job to the best of my ability and assisting in the good stewardship of the money** that comes into the organisation.* (respondent 43m)

> ***Over time your ideas change*** *and you can take a sidestep to try and follow your heart. Or use your skills to your best advantage.* (respondent 53m)

To illustrate this point, respondent 4 for example, admitted that early on in his career (in his early twenties) he was quite 'career driven', however, after leaving one of the major accounting firms in the city, he moved to the country to raise his family and greater importance was placed on achieving a work life balance.

> *When I first went down there **I was single and I was fairly driven by the idea of making some money, advancing and learning a lot**. I still had it in the back of my mind that I didn't want to be there the whole time, but probably depending on what would have happen I wouldn't have ruled out staying in Sydney a bit longer in a different role, like in a different job.* (respondent 4m)

6.3 Gender differences in definitions of career and success

From Table 6.1 it can also be seen that there were some significant gender differences with five of the terms listed. 'Being financially comfortable' was the only objective term which showed a significant gender difference ($z = 2.25$, $p < 0.05$); with 23 men compared to only 14 women listing the term. An explanation for this difference could be that men see themselves more as the 'breadwinner' and having to provide for the family. The following quote demonstrates this point:

I only moved on when I started a family when I started to think I should better myself and provide a secure financial base and that's when I started thinking about the money. If I didn't have a family I would be on the north coast with one of those small councils earning $40,000 and enjoying myself. (respondent 44m)

The following two tables summarise the income earned by respondents and what proportion of total household income it represents.

The figures in Table 6.3 show that more men (n=20), compared to women (n=10) earn 100% of household income or greater income than their spouse. These figures may explain why more men define career in terms of being financially comfortable since they are the larger income earner in the household.

Table 6.2 Income break down by gender

Income Level	Male	Female
0-50k	2	5
50-100k	12	9
100-150k	4	7
150-200k	3	3
200-250k	2	1
250k +	6	4

Note: the total number of respondents does not equal 59 as some respondents declined to answer the question on income.

Table 6.3 Proportion of household income earned by respondent according to gender

Proportion of income	Male	Female
100% of income	5	1
Greater than spouse	15	9
Equal to spouse	2	6
Less than spouse	1	6

Note: the total of males and females does not meet the total of 59 as not all respondents had a partner to compare household income to.

Table 6.1 also highlights that there were four subjective terms which showed a significant gender difference (z greater than 1.645, p < 0.05). First, 'mental stimulation'; one male compared to six females (z = 2.06, p < 0.05). 'It is something that I have to enjoy, be stimulated by' (respondent 21m). Respondent 32 commented 'it is intellectual stimulation'.

Second, 'helping others progress through the organisation' was identified by only two men compared to seven women (z = 1.87, p < 0.05). Some women in the research felt it was important to act as female role models for other women, as well as help younger females progress through their male-dominated organisation. This reflects the collective focus of their success.

Third, 'control and flexibility over the job and work'; five men compared to 11 women (z = 1.84, p < 0.05). The reason for this difference was that the majority of the women in the research assumed the greater share of household and child care responsibilities, (as reflected in Australian statistics discussed in Chapter 3). Having a flexible workplace would therefore be more important to them to help them better balance work and family.

Finally, 'receiving encouragement and recognition from family, colleagues and superiors' showed a significant gender difference; eight men versus 14 women ($z = 1.72$, $p < 0.05$) listing the term. Once again, this shows that more women have emphasised the collective focus of conceptualising career.

6.4 Career satisfaction

In addition to exploring how respondents conceptualised career and success, the respondents also discussed whether they felt successful, and their level of career satisfaction. For example, the majority of respondents admitted that they felt successful in their careers to date. In contrast, some of the women (5) questioned their success. Despite achieving considerable success in objective terms, such as becoming partner, they did not necessarily feel successful. None of the men however, question their success. Three of these women did admit that they had struggled with balancing work and family, and this may have contributed to their feelings of not being successful. Respondent 34 for example, commented that:

> *I am someone who is very hard on myself. Where I look at life and career and where I might have expected to be as a little girl, its well and truly there. When I look at how others may view me I would be someone who looks like she has made it. That is probably one of the measures I look at. I often wonder how I will feel when I walk away from this. I would like to think that the stage I have reached in my career would be more than maybe 20 per cent of my ego. When I finally step away from this to do other things I do wonder some days whether I am kidding myself.* **I am successful. Could I be more successful?** *Absolutely. But am I chomping at the bit to move to some next major stage, not yet.* (respondent 34f)

The majority of respondents (n=51–24 males and 27 females) reported feeling satisfied with their careers to date. The following discussion once again reflects the individualised nature of career development. Analysis of the interview transcripts demonstrated that the personal circumstances of the respondents influenced their level of satisfaction. The

idiosyncratic nature of success poses problems for organisations in trying to design policies that address employee concerns and levels of satisfaction.

Respondent 3 for example, who has had the longest career and is on the point of retirement, appeared to be extremely satisfied with his career. He exuded an extremely positive attitude and outlook regarding his 48 year career with Company A.

> *I feel **extremely fulfilled and very fortunate** to have the type of client base I have. **I am proud** of the growth that the firm has had and I have played some role in that. The people that work in my immediate section are absolutely fantastic. I believe I have been able to play some part in their career development* (respondent 3m)

Respondent 2 has progressed through a series of roles and organisations in her career, reaching a senior accountant position. She is single, and is satisfied with her life and career.

> ***I am happy where I am.** What I have achieved in the time that I have and the way I have helped different people. I am happy. My specific goal at the moment is just to enjoy life and to be happy at the work and to go home saying you've done the job to the best of your ability and you are satisfied.* (respondent 2f)

The comments by respondents 2 and 3 emphasise their level of satisfaction is based on a collective conceptualisation of success, that is in terms of them helping others.

In contrast, there were eight respondents (six men and two women) who admitted not being totally satisfied with their careers. Six of these respondents cited lack of career advancement as reason for their dissatisfaction.

> *Sometimes I feel like the first three or four years of my career were **really dynamic and I achieved a lot** in a short space. **Since then I have only probably***

just gradually moved along. A lot of that is to do with my choices. (respondent 4m)

*It all **seemed mapped out** at **. I thought **I'd be a partner** there, and they probably did too. **It seemed almost too easy and too planned.** It was also **undefined.** It appeared to be a real carrot and getting bigger, **but always out of reach.** There were some excitement opportunities, such as the growth factor and doing some different things in the accounting field, **but they didn't present themselves.** I think if I had my time over again, I'd do it differently.* (respondent 8m)

Respondent 40's dissatisfaction was based on the unplanned nature of her career. Her career evolved into a role she did not initially see herself doing.

*I probably **never intended to go into academia.** I haven't disliked it. But if you asked me at 25 what I was going to do, **it wouldn't have been in my plans.*** (respondent 40f)

Respondent 50 admitted being discontented with his current position and organisation. This was one of the reasons that motivated him to participate in the research. His current dissatisfaction was the result of a lack of recognition from the organisation, the lack of advancement, and the lack of remuneration. He explained that:

*I do such a good job at what I do they do not want to move me into another role... We are going through a big cultural change at the moment with a growth period in our area and **I'm hoping that will give me the satisfaction I am looking for otherwise I will be rather annoyed.** I've gone for a number of interviews outside and I keep waiting for them to provide me with what I think I am worth.* (respondent 50m)

It seems that these eight respondents are not experiencing the careers they anticipated or expected, and this has resulted in career dissatisfaction.

The two females cited the unplanned nature of their careers, lack of career support, and the difficulties in balancing work and family as reasons for their dissatisfaction. In contrast, the men's dissatisfaction derived from their lack of career advancement.

6.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to address the second research question on how men and women articulate what career and success mean to them. It can be seen from this discussion that there are various individualised conceptualisations of career and success, reflecting the idiosyncratic nature of careers. The respondents' conceptualisation is influenced by the respondents' own personal circumstance at the time of the interview, as well as the needs which motivate them at any stage in life or career, including whether they have children; whether their children are young or no longer a financial burden; the age of the respondent; the type of employment they are in; or what they seek out of a career.

The research highlighted that there were five terms that showed a significant gender difference: being financially comfortable; mental stimulation; helping others progress through the organisation; control and flexibility over the job; and receiving recognition and encouragement from family, colleagues and superiors. The results also revealed that the majority of respondents, both male and female, defined career and success in subjective terms, such as achieving work–life–family balance, job satisfaction and happiness.

A significant finding of the research was that respondents conceptualised career and success in both collective and individual terms. In some cases, it was the women who focused on a collective conceptualisation, as highlighted in section 6.3.

The research revealed that many of the men are beginning to define career and success in subjective terms. For three of the men, this struggle over pursuing subjective success versus a more traditional objective successful career, created much anxiety for them. They still saw themselves as the 'breadwinner'. Only the women seemed prepared to trade in traditional views of success to pursue more flexible or rewarding careers. This concept is discussed further in the next chapter.

The chapter also highlighted that the majority of respondents felt successful in their careers, as well as satisfied. For the men, the dissatisfaction related to the lack of career advancement, whilst for the women the concern was the lack of control over their careers, the subsequent unplanned nature of their careers, and the conflict surrounding balancing work and family.

The following two chapters are designed to explore the third research question and discuss the range of personal, inter-personal and organisational factors found to influence career development for men and women.

CHAPTER 7: PERSONAL AND INTER-PERSONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of the following two chapters is to address the third research question:

Based on the perceptions of the men and women in the research, how do the following factors act to constrain or enable their career development: personal factors, such as gender, balancing career and family, and the importance of family and friends; inter-personal factors, such as mentors and networks; and organisational factors, such as opportunities for education, training and development, work experience, organisational culture, politics, equal opportunities within organisations, and organisational career management, influence the career development of men and women differently?

These factors were identified as salient issues from the literature review (as outlined in Chapter 3) and therefore guided the questions asked in the interview. Respondents were also asked if there were any additional factors that influenced their career development.

Given the large volume of results relating to this research question, only the personal and inter-personal factors are discussed in this chapter. The organisational factors are discussed in Chapter 8. Specifically, sections 6.2 and 6.3 outline the two key personal factors found to influence career development, that is balancing career and family and the importance of family and friends. Sections 6.5 and 6.6 discuss the two key inter-personal factors of mentors and networks.

7.2 Balancing career and family

The discussion in Chapter 5 emphasised that the main factor differentiating the men's and women's career development was the issue of balancing work and family. This issue was further highlighted in Chapter 6, where it was shown that the overwhelming majority of respondents cited the ability to balance work and family as critical in their conceptualisation of career and success. Whilst the issue of balancing work and family was discussed by both genders, typically it was the women who changed their career development in order to accommodate both commitments. This will be demonstrated in the following sections. Only a minority of men admitted that they changed their careers to better accommodate family commitments.

7.2.1 Demographic details of respondents regarding family commitments

The purpose of this section is to discuss the demographic details describing the respondents' family background. The information was collected from the demographic questionnaire (as shown in Appendix B). From Table 7.1 it can be seen that 22 of the male respondents and 19 of the females had children, however, for eight of these respondents their children were no longer living at home. For the five women that did not have children, they stated that they consciously chose not to have them. The reasons included feeling as though they were not maternal; the timing of relationships prevented having children; and actively choosing not to have a child. In terms of their careers, these women had progressed to senior positions, including Associate Professor, Senior Partner, Vice President of a business unit, chief financial officer, and one woman was self-employed. They were all over 38 years of age. The remaining five women without children were planning to have a family at some stage in the future. Of the eight men that did not have children, six were single and the other two were planning to have a family.

Table 7.1 Family Background Characteristics of Respondents

	Males	Females
age range	23–66	28–72
average age	41	43
single	6	3
married	23	21
living with a partner	1	1
divorced	0	1
divorced and living with partner	0	3
with children	22	19

7.2.2 Categorisation of respondents by how they balanced work and family

Chapter 4 highlighted the value of using categories to present and describe data in qualitative research (Bailey, 1994; Dey, 1993; Kipnis, 1997). Thus in order to make sense of how the 22 men and 19 women in the research balanced work and family, they have been classified into four key groups.

The discussion in Chapter 5 highlighted that there were two key categories of men: work devoted males (WM); and work/family devoted males (WFM). The work devoted males were those men who did not take any break from the workforce, or changed their career development, due to family commitments. The majority of men in the research were work devoted.

Respondents in the research were asked who assumed the major portion of household responsibilities. For the men, 20 of the 24 males in a relationship reported that they

assumed fewer household responsibilities than their spouse, with only four sharing equal responsibility. Most of these males had spouses who did not work, or their spouses were prepared to give up work to have children, or to accommodate their career. It meant that when the husbands went home all the household duties were done for them. As a consequence, some of the men could not empathise with or understand the issues faced by working mothers.

> **Unless you have lived through something it is difficult to understand it.** *If you are 45 above and predominately white, male and have a non working spouse,* **you won't understand.** *(respondent 35m)*

These work devoted men did not alter their career development in order to accommodate family commitments.

In contrast, there were a minority of men who reported altering their career development in order to better balance work and family (WFM). For example, the career history of respondent 20 highlights how he moved from being totally work devoted to having a career that was more family devoted. Respondent 20 worked in two different professional services firms for ten years, gradually progressing up the organisational hierarchy. Initially respondent 20 was interested in becoming partner, however due to the aggressive culture of the firm he chose to pursue partner in a second tier firm. However because of his seriously ill daughter, respondent 20 ultimately chose not to pursue the position of partner, but instead redirected his career in his early 30s to establish his own practice. He felt that a career should be one that allowed him to better balance work and family.

> **So a successful career is one that helps you support your family** *because that's what you are trying to do. Whichever avenues you take in your career that satisfy your own ambitions and what you are trying to achieve, but also* **for the purpose of assisting your family.** *(respondent 20m)*

Respondent 4 also represented a WFM. He began his career in one of the major professional services firms in a capital city, where he progressed vertically through a series of roles in the organisation. However after getting married he chose to leave the city to work in the country for lifestyle reasons and to raise a family.

> *We got married and my wife didn't like Sydney that much. I knew I wasn't down there for any great length of time, and we were **thinking of having a family**. So that was pretty much our move back to the country.* (respondent 4m)

Respondent 4 indicated that he was not overly interested in becoming partner at his current firm in the country because of the workload and the pressures it would place on him trying to balance work and family. However the interesting fact was that he was concerned over how the organisation would view his unwillingness to pursue a partner position.

> *I don't know whether you can just sit where you are and do what you are doing. **I'm unsure about how they would react.** It's probably something that I am a little **anxious about** I guess... Maybe if you got offered an associate and if you declined it, **I don't think it would be viewed that positively.** (respondent 4m)*

Respondent 4 felt that the organisation would be resentful of his unwillingness to progress upward given all the time and resources the firm had invested in him. He thought that 'in terms of training and their willingness to go the extra yard for you would diminish to some extent' because he lacked that drive.

There was a feeling among some respondents that more males wanted to work part-time, but were not keen to break the traditional stereotype of the 'breadwinner'.

> *I think what is holding them back is it **takes a great person to break a taboo.** A man goes out and works five days a week and the wife stays at home. We had one guy that took paternity leave and **he got a negative report from the partners. They thought it would damage his career and he wasn't focused.** (respondent 32f)*

There are two main categories to describe how the 19 women in the research balanced work and family: non-traditional women (NTW); and work/family women (WFW). It should be noted that since all of the women in my research were employed at the time of the interview, there were no examples of women who had chosen to opt out of the workforce altogether to raise children. The majority of women took minimum maternity leave from the workforce before returning to part or full-time work. Minimum maternity leave refers to a break from the workforce for no longer than 12 months. There was only one woman (respondent 52) who did have a break from the workforce for an extended period of time (several years), but she had returned to part-time work at the time of the interview.

The first category comprised a minority of working mothers who represented the opposite of the traditional home-maker role. Four of the women in the research reported assuming fewer household responsibilities than their spouse. These non-traditional women (NTW) experienced less tension over balancing work and family commitments. For three of these women, their spouses were self-employed, which meant that the latter were able to assume a greater share of household duties. For example, respondent 16 represented the opposite of the traditional working family. In her case, her career took precedence over her husband's. Her situation is particularly interesting because much of her career was spent working in remote locations in Australia. When respondent 16 was working in the remote areas and whilst the children were young, her husband assumed the major household and family responsibilities. Once the children started school, he developed his own business, which allowed him to continue assuming the major share of responsibilities. It was only during the time when respondent 16 was off work having her children, that her husband worked full-time.

> *With my partner being a very outdoors and practical person and a great parent, it* **hasn't been a problem, it's been ideal.** *He has been very happy to stay home with the kids and has gone to play group etc. He worked his hours around to suit the kids. Also there is no problem of sharing the chores at home, such as cooking. He does more cooking then me.* (respondent 16f)

As a result, the NTW reported having more energy and time to devote to their careers. They also reported experiencing less tension over trying to balance work and family.

The second category of working mothers included those that balanced both work and family commitments (work/family women – WFW). Section 5.6.2 described how the career development of many women in their late 20s to late 40s was influenced by their need to balance work and family. All of the female respondents with children indicated that they worked part-time at various stages during their career. Of the 19 women with children, eight were working part-time at the time of the interview. A common feature among the careers of the working mothers (5) was to structure their part-time hours around children's school times. The women agreed that part-time work offered greater flexibility.

Respondent 7 for example, stated that she made a 'conscious decision' that when having her children her career would not be on that 'upward path' and that she would work part-time. She indicated that whilst her career goals had changed following having children, she has always been able to balance them with a career. Respondent 7 had always intended to place her family first, rather than pursuing the goal of becoming a partner. She felt it was her 'choice' and the organisations where she has worked have always been supportive of her decisions.

> **It's very different when you are single.** You are on that path to being partner or whatever or managing director. **It probably doesn't change much when you get married, but when you have children.** You've got to make your decision whether you want to continue on that path and organise your life around that with a nanny or whatever. Or you choose that you want to have time with your family and time off, but still career-minded. Or you can choose to opt out altogether. That's definitely when it happened for me. (respondent 7f)

In order to better balance work and family commitments, a number of the WFW changed their type of employment. This included moving into the education field (5 respondents),

working as a consultant or contractor (4), or establishing their own practice (6). Some women made multiple changes. This job change was often temporary. It allowed the WFW flexibility over working hours and the type of work they undertook. One respondent (respondent 24) even left the accounting profession altogether and retrained as a primary school teacher because the latter job would offer greater flexibility and career mobility. She floated between the two industries depending on the availability of work.

The most common reason cited by women for establishing their own business was to have greater flexibility to balance work and family. The women told stories of being able to breastfeed children at the computer, rocking a sick child whilst talking to clients on the phone, or working late at night when the children were asleep. The common theme that emerged from their stories was that the women needed to be multi-skilled. However the arrangement still resulted in both time and strain based conflict for some of the respondents. Respondent 51's comment exemplifies the experience of sole practice:

> *It's extremely stressful. It's really difficult. Time and space. My work is really hard or intensive. It is very brain draining. Kids drive you mad anyway. You really have to make some compromises... You don't spring clean, the floors get washed once a month. There is a lot to fit in. My children are 12, 9 and 7 and they do a lot for themselves. I still need to make sure the lunches are made, that it is a school excursion etc... It's really good when they are little because you can breastfeed them at the computer. I used to work a lot at nights in those days. When the babies went to sleep I worked then and into the night. It played havoc on my health. It was just bedlam. The nappies, the house was a disaster.* (respondent 51f)

7.2.3 Features of the accounting profession relevant to balancing work and family

As highlighted in Chapter 3, extensive research has been conducted in the area of balancing work and family. The benefit of this research has been to contribute further to the field by exploring how particular characteristics of the accounting profession may have implications for how men and women in the profession balance work and family.

The first characteristic of the profession is that men and women are required to undertake ongoing professional development in order to keep up to date with changes in accounting standards, as well as to maintain their professional qualifications. The research showed that this characteristic meant it was difficult for both men and women to leave the workforce for extended periods of time to care for children. However it was only the women in the research that discussed this issue. The women feared taking career breaks because they felt they would become out of touch with the organisation, not remain up-to-date professionally, and thus limit their career progression. Most of the female respondents made conscious decisions to perform some work from home and had some contact with the organisation during their leave. Respondent 7 for example, explained that she remained in contact with her organisation and performed some work whilst on maternity leave in order to maintain her knowledge.

> *Yes that's purposely why I kept working and could do it part-time. It was a conscious decision that if you were out of the workforce too long, then things change too quickly... Not if you want to maintain a certain level.* (respondent 7)

> *First when people look at your CV they see that break as an enormous gap So they say everything that happened in taxes in the last five years you don't have a clue about. There is a perception that because you haven't had that employment over a period of time, you haven't been able to keep up with developments.* (respondent 22f)

Second, the type and size of organisation in which the respondents worked, and the type of work that he or she undertook, acted to constrain or enable their career development. As outlined in Chapter 5, there were a range of organisational types featured in the study, including professional services firms; corporate sector organisations; chartered accounting firms; sole practices; and educational institutions. These diverse organisational types had varying approaches to helping employees balance work and family.

Respondents identified both advantages and disadvantages of the client focus of the professional services firms. Client refers to the individual or company that the employee would be assigned to working with on either accounting or auditing issues. On one hand, the client focus meant that there is a culture that the client comes first, 'drop everything, work around the clock, the client's right, sacrifice all for your clients' (respondent 34f). This makes it difficult for working parents to balance the demands of their clients with that of their family. Others argued that the client focus of the firm made it easier for working parents as they could manage their time by only working with a certain number of clients.

> *Because of our business expecting to be flexible about clients and travel, it makes people consider what they want and why they want a career and **how they want to split their time up**. There are certain attitudes in the male partnership that **there is no appointing female partners because they will go off and have a baby and disrupt business**. You find that in all organisations. There is this attitude toward flexibility. In my business we have had success in this area. **Because we work on clients you just work on less clients. Others say you have to work six days a week**.* (respondent 34f)

In the corporate sector there were mixed attitudes towards part-time work. It varied depending on the organisational context. For example, some respondents felt that smaller firms did not have the resources, either human or financial, to effectively support a work–life balance. If respondents were part of a larger team, than it was easier to share work

load for those wanting to work part-time. Whilst respondents in the corporate sector did not have clients that they were responsible for, such as in the accounting firms, some indicated that they were the sole person responsible for particular tasks. This meant it would be difficult to accommodate part-time work.

There was a general view among responderts who had worked in both city and country firms that the latter allowed for a much better balance of work and family life. Five of the respondents chose to leave a capital city and move to the country in order to raise a family and to have a better work family balance. All of the employees at Company A and B (the regional firms) felt that their workplaces were very family friendly. They felt that they could have time off to watch children in school events or if they were sick. This flexibility was important to their job satisfaction. As respondent 4 commented, 'without policies like that I think you would be more resentful to your employer. You do appreciate when they are a bit flexible'. However the respondents reported that the disadvantage of smaller firms was the limited staff and resources that were available to enable employees to balance work and family.

There were also mixed attitudes to how family friendly an academic career was for females. Two of the three females employed at a university had children and they believed that it was not family friendly due to the extra work load of combining study, class preparation, and family.

> *It is a problem because I am not only working, but I am trying to study as well... I think there is a perception that if you are not in front of a classroom having to teach, you are not having to work. So I am expected to do shopping and all the household stuff when I should be preparing for classes. So I tend to go to bed very late because I have to do all my preparation late at night. I don't get a lot of sleep... I do most of the preparation that would have been ideally done mid afternoon, I do it after the kids are in bed. I don't know if that is a strategy or just desperation.* (respondent 40f)

The positives of working in the university sector identified by the female respondents included the flexibility in working hours and the ability to work from home.

The third major feature of the accounting profession which respondents highlighted as influencing their ability to balance work and family was the conflicting attitudes towards whether a working parent could be a partner in an accounting firm. The attitudes toward partners being able to work part-time were split evenly among both males and females. Half of the males and females believed it was possible, whilst the other half believed it was not.

> *Its difficult having part-time partners because a partner by definition is responsible for a group of clients. I would tend to say if you want to work three days a week then it will be difficult to be a partner, but if you want to be a partner and you want to finish at 3 in the afternoon, but put in five days a week. I don't see problems.* (respondent 3m)

Other respondents, including some females, questioned whether part-time roles were possible.

> *I think there is a thought process that all roles should be able to be made part-time. But I question whether there are some roles that just need a full-time person in it.* (respondent 36f)

The major barrier to career development for respondents, typically females, was therefore due to the assumption that partnership in the accounting firms required full-time work. However, like respondent 36's comment above, there were other females who believed that there were some career boundaries for working mothers.

7.2.4 Working part-time

There were a number of issues associated with part-time work. First, the female respondents feared that organisations did not think they were serious or 'committed' to their career until they returned to full-time work.

> *I think often these people might be seen as either not fully committed or bits of 9 to 5 and they don't give them the chance to try a line position because* **they say they won't be able to commit the time** *to it... I've been seeing some* **unhappy incidents** *recently that have been happening, or when they do come back part-time they are* **treated as less than fully committed** *and* **I find that really irritating in the extreme.** (respondent 33f)

Second, the problem is that the age at which women choose to have children is at a crucial stage (during their twenties and thirties) when many people are trying to become partner or pursue senior positions. 'So if they go off to have children they are sidelined' (respondent 35m).

Third, some women identified problems with working part-time, such as still having to be contactable outside normal working hours. All of the respondents who worked part-time were contactable after hours. Respondent 45 who works part-time for example, explained one instance when her organisation was having a meeting on her scheduled day off. She could not make the meeting because she had her child's sports event to attend.

> *From a career perspective it was* **inconvenient** *there were things I wanted to talk about during the meeting, so I had to tell those issues to another staff member to pass on.* (respondent 45f)

By missing meetings, the respondents then felt as though they were isolated from the functioning of the business and feared that this would have detrimental outcomes for their career.

The other problems were that women had to be contactable in non-working hours and had to manage their workload in a shortened week. This resulted in *time based conflict*. The

women felt the pressure of work whilst they were at home dealing with those household pressures. Many of the women in the research stated that this became a source of stress, trying to balance the two. Respondent 1 for example, admitted that working part-time did have some frustrations:

> *If you are only working two days a week it is **quite frustrating** because you just don't get the things done that you would like to get done. **But when the kids were little that probably wasn't very important to me.** (respondent 1f)*

Finally, a common theme voiced by the working mothers was the need to set boundaries around their part-time work in order to better balance work and family commitments.

> *If I can't talk **I make that clear.** I don't feel its intrusive on my life. I feel I need to put these **boundaries in place** to work around it... I feel that I would need to push a **few boundaries** to make things work for me due to the part-time factor. (respondent 18f)*

Similarly, respondent 45 explained how she put boundaries around the amount of travel she had to do for her employer because it was becoming too stressful and difficult to manage work and family.

> *This year for example, I had to go to Melbourne, but I wouldn't go until Wednesday because I had the kids dance class on Tuesday... I think it was **quite stressful** for a part of last year. I did a lot of travel up until August September... I **have put a travel moratorium** on the fourth term because there is so much on with the kids and trying to get people to finish off their jobs before Christmas. (respondent 45f)*

7.2.5 Fear, compromise, conflict and dilemmas

The major theme which ran throughout the course of the interviews was the level of fear, compromise, conflict and dilemmas voiced by both men and women over their wish to balance work and family. The discussion in Chapter 3 outlined the fact that for a long time, women have faced the dilemma of how to balance work and family life (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Gallos, 1989; Gutek and Larwood, 1987; Marshall, 1995; Wajcman, 1998). However this research has discovered that an increasing number of men are also expressing fears and concerns over work–family conflict.

The dilemma of how to balance work and family appeared to be quite a concern for some of the women. Their concerns included how to combine work and motherhood; having to consider their husband's career; fears that they would be seen as less career committed; and fears that their career progression would be impeded. The following comment by respondent 17 illustrates the fears and dilemmas voiced by the women in the research:

> *It's been **playing on my mind**. **I think women need to plan out a lot further then men do**. Ultimately I want a child. When do I have a child? Do I have it before I go out and have operational experience or afterward? Would my husband look after the child? I don't want to be too old to have a child. I also don't want to be too old in my career to have one. I think you are better off starting a family a bit earlier and then coming back and trying to accelerate your career... **I know it's sad I'm trying to plan a pregnancy. Men don't have this issue**. To some extent **organisations don't recognise that women like to plan out five years in advance**. We have to in a way. That's why I would like to know where my manager would like to see me in five years so I can plan my life... My biggest fear is that in the organisation there are no senior women with children. I don't want to be seen if I have a child and miss out on opportunities. I don't want to fall into a silo. I want to progress.* (respondent 17f)

The focus on planning by respondent 17 was a common theme voiced by some of the women who felt that they needed to plan for balancing work and family in order to

pursue a successful career. They felt it could not be left to work itself out, but they needed to take proactive steps or at least actively consider what implications family commitments would have on their careers. For example, respondent 7 stated that she made a 'conscious decision' that when having her children her career would not be on that 'upward path' and that she would work part-time. Respondent 6 similarly explained how she and her husband had 'planned' how they would manage having a family.

> *For me its not an issue as my husband does not work full-time. He does free lance work.* ***That's something we have planned*** *in our lives that he is more than happy to help with the family. So its not such an issue. So he would assume more of the responsibilities... If you can structure it well and have the support at home and I've got family here as well, so I think that's the key to having it work.*
> (respondent 6f)

Both men and women talked about the compromises that were involved in having to balance work and family. For example, nine of the respondents (six males and three females) who were in a dual career couple, discussed how they had to tailor their career development based on the needs of their working spouse. First, refusing an overseas transfer because children were young and both spouses were working (one male). Second, changing jobs due to the spouse relocating (one male and one female). Third, having difficulty managing an overseas assignment or transfer because the spouse could not find work (two males and one female). Finally, having difficulty in balancing work and family because both spouses were working (two males and one female). Respondent 35 is part of a dual career couple and admitted that balancing work and family was difficult.

> ***I think the issue around family is a timing issue*** *in some ways. People can time these things. One of the practical issues is* ***how do you balance it all.*** *My wife has a career so we have had to balance her career.* ***It's not easy.*** *In our case having children* ***there has to be some compromise.*** ***She has compromised*** *for this period of time. She works three days a week. She works as a contractor so she can pick and choose what she does.* (respondent 35m)

Most organisations still appeared to 'grapple' with part-time roles and career advancement. Most organisations in theory supported part-time work and flexible work practices (through the provision of such formal policies), however in reality there were varying levels of support among staff. Respondents thus felt that they had to compromise or be flexible with the type of work they received, given their demand for part-time roles:

> *I think I feel a little **constrained** in managing my career because I do want it to be a part-time role... I guess since I want a part-time role my ideas about where I am going are quite **open and flexible** (respondent 18f).*

> *It's **extremely stressful**. It's **really difficult**... You really have to make some **compromises**. (respondent 51f)*

When respondent 7 first began working for a large regional accounting firm, they wanted her full-time, but she wanted only to work three days a week. They compromised on three and a half days. Respondent 7 explained that 'it's a matter of compromise and negotiation.

The problem is that if individuals are forced to compromise then they may experience greater role conflict, dissatisfaction and stress. For example, there were six respondents (two males and four females) who clearly felt that they did not effectively balance work and family and this represented a major concern to them. Respondent 21, who was a Chief Financial Officer, expressed his anxiety, commenting that:

> *I've got these **external conflicts**. On one hand, I want to stay in the job to make my family well off. But on the other hand, I want to be with my family, I want to participate in the bringing up of my family and seeing my son grow up and all those special things. (respondent 21m)*

Even though respondent 23 had had quite a successful career in objective terms, (that is she had trained as an accountant in her early thirties and had become an extremely well paid finance director in a major company), she questioned whether the success was all worthwhile. During her career her daughter was often left on her own because she worked long hours, and she felt that she was not there 'emotionally' for her.

> *You expect when you get there that there will be this great rush of feeling or expectation and there wasn't.* **It wasn't what I wanted.** *I always thought that this is what I wanted. I wanted recognition, I wanted to be somebody that people would look up to and say look what she did against all odds, and that's the reality. When I actually sat there in that job and realised what I was giving away. If I had stayed in that job my health would have deteriorated and I reckon I would have been dead if I stayed there. Then I look at my family and I think what I gave away. During all this time the daughter that my husband and I had together had grown up virtually on her own because I was off chasing a career.* (respondent 23f)

The females discussed the conflict in relation to choosing a challenging career versus spending time with the family. For the men, it was the conflict between their role as 'breadwinner' versus spending time with the family. The conflict discussed by respondents centred on time based and strain based conflict. Examples of time based conflict identified by respondents included not enough time to accomplish household tasks; or conflict between business commitments and children's events. The strain based conflict highlighted by respondents related to the physical and psychological pressures they faced in attempting to balance work and family. The following two quotes illustrate the work–life conflict experienced by respondents.

> *Sometimes I feel like I am doing it successfully, then other weeks everyone is complaining. Everyone at work is saying have you done this... and at home they are saying have you bought the toothpaste etc...* **Sometimes its ok and other**

times I spit the dummy. I guess I try and be rational. Eliminate the things that aren't important. (respondent 45f)

A lot of the time I do. Sometimes I don't. I can be like a bear with a sore head with all this housework to do at the end of the day and everyone else is just sitting around doing nothing. Or when you hang washing out at 10 at night when everyone is in bed. **You do think why am I doing this. I didn't think I would be working this hard...** *I thought I would be working maybe a few days a week, having a bit more free time.* **I feel like I don't have any free time.** (respondent 52f)

Three of the respondents (one male and two females) felt that the stress and conflict over trying to balance work and family caused them to develop health problems from over working, including heart disease, diabetes, depression, stroke and burnout.

I've been through stages where I have been **absolutely worn out** *and practically useless as a result of working too much. I've gone through* **periods of depression.** *Its* **directly linked to the job and pressures...** *Its now all of a sudden, well hang on having done this career thing, its not all that great. Perhaps I don't regret any of this because it all made sense at the time, the steps I have taken were the right steps. But having gone through it all its probably time to take new steps. I suspect it's a fairly chronic problem.* (respondent 21m)

As a result of the conflict, stress and dilemmas experienced by respondents in trying to balance work and family, 10 respondents began to evaluate their careers and current life circumstances. This was highlighted in Chapter 5 where it was revealed that many men and women reached a crossroads in their life. It was interesting to note that it was not just the women questioning their work–family balance, but the men too. Whilst many of the respondents were discontented with their ability to balance work and family, not all were willing to address the problem. Only the women altered their careers to accommodate family demands. In contrast, it appears as if there was more rhetoric

behind the men's discussion of this issue, rather than any true commitment on their behalf to change it. Only a minority of men actually changed their career development in order to achieve a better balance of work and family. Perhaps the men in the research made positive and encouraging statements about work–family balance, knowing that they were the socially acceptable responses.

> *I feel differently about it now than when I was doing it. I guess that's another way of saying* **I didn't know how dumb I was being**. *When you sit back and analyse some of the things you did and the effort you put in,* **you ask was it really worth it**. *I don't know. Was it fun at the time—yes and no.* **I think a more balanced approach to work life balance would have been much more sensible**. *Mostly I didn't be grudge it at the time, but* **in hindsight I'd play it differently**. *Just learn to say no. Just don't put the same amount of time constantly into work or extra work activities.* (respondent 38m)

7.3 Importance of family and friends

The other major personal factor that respondents perceived to have an influence on career development was the importance of family and friends. The relevance of this factor was explored through question 4 of the interview schedule. A number of respondents (12) revealed that there was a significant person who had influenced their career. The significant person tended to be a family member (one male and five females). spouse (three males and four females), or close friend (one male and one female). (Note: these figures add up to more than 12 as some respondents cited more than one signif cant person). The significant person was different to a mentor as the latter was often an individual from their organisation or someone they saw as a sponsor in their career. The significant other provided emotional support. advice and guidance in making career decisions, suggested potential career paths or opportunities, helped to make a decision, and helped to provide an objective perspective. Seven of the respondents (three males and four females) revealed that one of the reasons for their career change was to follow or accommodate their spouse's career.

Two of the female respondents commented that the lack of support offered by their husbands encouraged them to further their careers in spite of the negative attitude. Respondent 28 for example, revealed that her husband's lack of support influenced her career development.

> **The attitude of my spouse.** *Fairly early on he said he didn't want me competing with him. He was a third generation accountant and* **didn't want me to be a chartered accountant. So that influenced me,** *so if he had a different attitude we might have developed a career together. So I tended to develop my own career.* (respondent 28f)

Respondent 23 for example, believed that the adversity of being an abused child, growing up in a dysfunctional family, and having an abusive husband, taught her to be resilient and gave her the determination to be successful in her career.

> *Although I had a lot of* **adversities trying to stop me from achieving my goals, I dug my heels in and kept going until I achieved it.** *That's why I was so successful in my career because I had this* **ability to just get in and hold on and do it and push for change to allow for change to happen.** *I was just* **dog determined. I never considered that I would fail.** (respondent 23f)

The previous two sections outline the influence that the personal factors of family commitments and the importance of family and friends had on the career development of men and women. The following two sections focus on the relevance of two key inter-personal factors on career development, that of mentors and networks.

7.4 Mentors

Research discussed in Chapter 3 outlined the importance of inter-personal factors, such as mentoring, in influencing career development (Mattis, 2001; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Tharenou & Zambruno, 2001). Accounting firms in recent years have also shown increased interest in encouraging mentoring relationships within their ranks (Barker, Monks, Buckley, 1999; Clarke & Howard, 2001; Kaplan, 2001; Stallworth, 2003; Victor, 1999). Through question five of the interview schedule, this research sought to explore the role of mentoring in the respondents' careers.

The research revealed that the majority of the respondents (n=48, 25 males and 23 females) had experiences with some form of mentor or sponsor throughout their career, both on a formal and informal basis. Only 11 respondents (five males and six females) indicated that they did not receive any form of mentoring during their careers. In general, the respondents believed that both formal and informal mentoring programs were useful in providing career encouragement; exposing them to a variety of situations; providing career advice; providing role models; explaining organisational rules, practices, appropriate conduct, and culture; providing performance feedback; and providing a variety of viewpoints. Twenty-six of the respondents (15 males and 11 females) also reported acting as a mentor whether formally or informally.

Formal mentoring refers to programs or initiatives established by organizations and associations as a formal arrangement. Informal mentoring were relationships that were initiated by individuals and were not the result of any formal policy, program or workplace initiative.

There were two major emerging themes to arise from this research with regard to mentoring. The first of these related to the link between age and the use and purpose of mentoring. Second, the research highlighted that external mentors or coaches were being used by respondents to help in their career planning and development. These two themes

will be discussed first, followed by a broader discussion on the types of mentoring used by respondents and its benefits.

7.4.1 The links between age and mentoring

It has already been highlighted in Chapter 5 that the career experiences of respondents were linked to their age, stage in life and s.age in career. An intriguing finding of the research was that the age of respondents influenced their need for and benefit from mentoring. In general though, both younger and older respondents viewed mentoring to be important in their careers.

For example, in the early stages of career, respondents found mentors useful in providing career advice and guidance and eased their induction into the organisation.

> *In my younger days it's been people who have been willing to share how they see the bigger picture of what you are doing. People who are willing to spend their time to explain to you how the organisation works are useful and gives a better understanding for the whole business.* (respondent 22f)

At later stages in their careers, respondents used mentors to help their admission into the senior ranks of the organisation or to deal with organisational dynamics. Three of the respondents (all females) for example, relayed stories of how their mentor was crucial in pushing them out of their 'comfort zone' and helping them to move into senior positions.

> *As I've gotten older it's more about organisational dynamics, what are the politics and how do you find your way through that.* (respondent 22f)

> *There was a male partner who gave me a lot of opportunities and opened a lot of doors for me. It was the partner in charge of my group when I moved here as a 24 year old. I remember it being quite significant that he would have been the partner that sponsored me and positioned me for partnership... I look at Noel as being highly influential in me staying beyond 18 months and secondly to me being a partner today.* (respondent 34f)

Twelve respondents (seven males and five females) revealed that they approached their mentor at crucial stages in their careers in order to seek advice and direction.

I have approached them because I know them, feel comfortable and respect their opinions. **I only approach them at a turning point or if something is about to change, or if I feel something should change.** (respondent 18f)

Among the more senior or older respondents there was also a common theme that they all wanted to 'leave a legacy'. Eleven of the respondents (five males and six females) identified that 'leaving a legacy' or influencing the careers of others were important measures of success for them. For this reason, they were interested in being a mentor. For example, as reported in chapter 5, many of the females were interested in leaving a legacy (6) or helping others progress through the organisation (7). This attitude was expressed mainly by the older respondents in the final stages of their career. At this point, they themselves had reached senior positions, so were keen to help others have successful and positive career experiences. In particular, they were interested in helping female employees in the organisation.

Finally, whilst many respondents relayed stories of how mentors had influenced their lives throughout their early and mid career, some respondents noted the paucity of effective mentoring once they had reached senior positions, or during the latter stages of their careers. For example, three respondents who had all reached partner in two of the top four professional services firms in Australia, believed that whilst their organisations did a lot for younger partners and other employees, little attention was focused on partners once they reached their forties and fifties.

We seem to ignore them when they are at the most influential stage of their life... *Where we are missing out is that the best people who can look after morale and the well being of our people is our partners.* **If these partners aren't receiving the mentoring and the probing and the questioning about what they are doing, then they are not going to be energised to deliver that down to their people.** (respondent 38m)

These three respondents all wanted to leave a legacy in their firms by establishing a program or process that addressed the needs of senior employees, such as the partners. There were two suggestions. First, the three respondents believed that the energy and wisdom of the older partners should be harnessed so that they were encouraged to act as mentors for younger employees. It was felt that this would help to maintain their interest in the organisation and enable them to contribute to the career development of others. Second, in order to address the vulnerability and uncertainty of the partners, the organisation needed to develop mentoring programs that fostered the career development of such partners. As one female respondent explained:

> You have a lot of partners that don't have an official mentor and that got there and are left to work it out for themselves. We are only starting to do formal succession planning in the partnership. Whether that is planning for internal roles, such as CEO, or owners of major client accounts. We have just recently started a program for partners in their first three years called the foundation program. They are given some more counselling and coaching, formal mentoring, more business development training, checking in how they are going. **Some are sailing and some have fear in their eyes because they feel vulnerable and nobody has been saying how they are going.** (respondent 34f)

Whilst these suggestions were made by only a minority of respondents, it highlights an important issue that needs to be addressed. If organisations wish to retain these valued and experienced senior employees, then they need to recognise that such groups may also need some form of mentoring that provides both career ('business development training') and psychosocial support ('morale and well being': 'vulnerable').

Given that many of the respondents in this research reached partner by their early thirties, and some even by 28, the comments of the three respondents show that such senior employees are still interested in receiving career support, such as that provided by mentoring. These senior people have many years left in their careers, and are still interested in pursuing rewarding and challenging roles. Mentors may help such

respondents to crystallise their career options and may encourage them to act as mentors for others.

7.4.2 External mentoring/coaching

The second major emerging theme to arise from the research was that some of the more senior or older respondents wanted access to mentors so they approached external coaching programs. It should be noted that when referring to these programs, the respondents interchanged the terms mentors and coaches. Technically the word coach or coaching should be used, as the programs used by respondents involved a fee for service. In contrast, typically mentors, whether formal or informal, do not get paid for this service. This is an important distinction to make since five of the respondents (two men and three women) reported using external coaching, as opposed to the remainder of respondents who simply used the mentoring relationships developed in their organisations. The fact that coaches are paid for their service and mentors are not, may create a different type of relationship, however this was not explored in the research.

The five respondents explained that their organisations had encouraged them as senior members of staff to participate in external coaching programs. One other male respondent admitted seeking out external coaching without the organisation's encouragement, while one female respondent who was self-employed, also saw a business coach. The mentoring or coaching helped respondents learn more about themselves, their career goals and concerns, helped to identify their 'strengths and weaknesses' and their 'passions'. It was an important means by which respondents sought career and business guidance. Whilst the males used external mentors to crystallize career goals, the women sought external mentors to act as role models in their career.

For example, respondent 50 commented that he used the external coaching to:

> *Crystallise what I feel I am capable of, getting some assistance in that. I'm not getting that at work. Believing more about what I want to be and how I will get there.* (respondent 50m)

The above quote emphasises the need for career support, while the following focuses on the need for psychosocial support.

> *I'm talking to someone outside the firm who can help me focus and work through that. Part of that is really **working out what you are, what your strengths are, what your passions are**. So I'm working through that with someone. That's been a process for about 3–4 months. We meet every 4–6 weeks. **It provides the discipline and the focus**.* (respondent 38m)

> *Respondent 38 believed that employees should not have to consult with external coaches, but that the organisation should provide such a service.*

> *Part of doing this is once I'm through the process, **one of the legacies I'd like to leave** with the firm is to institute such a process. It needs to be done by people like me who have been there and done it, rather than consultants. To have the conversations we are talking about **you need absolute trust**. People don't want to advertise that they are not happy or they want to change in case it impacts negatively on their careers. You need a way that allows the process to happen so that people **don't feel threatened by it or don't feel they can't be completely honest**.* (respondent 38m)

Respondent 50 similarly explained that his bank is currently experimenting with internal coaching, however he feels that the exercise is too much of a token gesture. He believes that the coaches do not have a long term commitment to the bank or its employees.

7.4.3 Types of mentoring programs

Twenty-five of the respondents (16 males and nine females) had all been part of some form of graduate program during their careers. A graduate program is a specific employee development program offered by many large companies in Australia. It is offered to individuals who have recently graduated from university. The development program allows employees or the graduate to obtain an overall understanding of the organisation and allows them to participate in various training and development. The number of respondents who started on a graduate program is so high because the majority of these respondents began their careers in the professional services firms or in large corporate sector organisations, where graduate recruitment is quite common. Also as part of the program, the graduate would be appointed a series of mentors, typically a partner, a manager and a 'buddy'. The latter was usually an older graduate. The respondents agreed that the mentoring helped provide career encouragement, guidance and development, particularly in the crucial stages of their early career.

Three out of the four universities featured in the research had a formal mentor program established in the school/department where the respondents were employed. In the programs, senior members of the academic staff (senior lecturers, associate professors and professors) acted as mentors for the more junior staff, providing advice and assistance on conducting research, career and other professional development. The respondents believed that such mentoring had positive benefits for their career development including, the access and opportunity to mix with senior staff; a source of career advice and guidance; helping induct new employees into the university; acting as a safety net for younger employees; and a mechanism through which to monitor and receive performance feedback.

One of the respondents also raised the existence of a mentoring program that was offered by one of the professional accounting associations. he Respondent 53 explained that the CPA program (run by Certified Practicing Accountants) required him to have a mentor for three years, whom he had to meet regularly. He could nominate a mentor for himself,

or the CPA could nominate a person. Respondent 53 found it useful in seeking advice about career direction. The program demonstrates that the profession recognises and values the importance of mentoring programs with regard to career development.

Eight of the female respondents viewed access to female mentors as useful in their career development because they could look to them as role models as examples of working mothers, or as women who had achieved senior positions within the organisation. 'It gives you some sort of inspiration because you are a minority, that yes you can make it' (respondent 17). The women in the research also explained that such female mentors provided career support and guidance.

Two women explained that it was difficult having male mentors, particularly if their spouse did not work because the male mentor would not be able to understand the issues faced by working mothers. In contrast, two other female respondents believed that male mentors might actually be useful as a means of extending their network within the organisation, and thus their access to potential career opportunities. Respondent 32 for example, believed it was important to have supportive and influential males as part of the mentoring process. Such men could help foster career development by identifying career opportunities. None of the men reported having a female mentor.

7.5 Networks

The other major inter-personal factor identified in the literature review as influencing career development is that of networking (Burke, Rothstein, & Bristor, 1995; Marshall, 1995; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Travers & Pemberton, 2000). This theme was explored through question six of the interview schedule and was designed to answer the third research question. The research showed that most respondents believed that access to formal and informal networks could have an influence on an individual's career, but not all reported using them. Forty-four respondents (22 males and 22 females) reported using networks, including both internal and external networks. Fifteen of the respondents (eight males and seven females) reported that networks were not a relevant feature of their careers. Eleven of these respondents were employed in smaller organisations in the

country where the opportunities for networking internally were limited due to the smaller number of employees. However some of these employees indicated they mixed socially with their colleagues outside of the workplace.

Of those respondents who had been or were employed in the larger firms, they agreed that networking with other peers, management and especially partners was an important feature of their careers. The respondents stated that networking was useful in identifying and creating career opportunities; gaining knowledge; attracting business or clients; and fostering a group for mutual support and encouragement both personally and professionally.

> *In our type of organisation it is about two things.* **Internal networking is exposing yourself for further promotion and opportunity so you have to do it to keep moving and growing.** *If you stay in the same patch you won't stay here 25 years.* **On the outside there is the networking for clients.** *You turn from being an accountant to being a salesperson.* **It's developing business relationships.** (respondent 34f)

> *People have always approached me for a job and that had been people I had dealt with or they know of me* **because of their network** *within* **. A lot of the positions within** *are about* **who you know**, *not what you know.* (respondent 15f)

The above two quotes are examples of instrumental networks as they are used by respondents for career development reasons. The following three quotes demonstrate the benefits of expressive networks that provide personal support and encouragement. Respondent 36 for example, explained that she belonged to a network of women that attended social gatherings together. The focus was not necessarily work orientated, but on developing supportive and social relationships.

> *I've got a saying that I* **actively promote a network of female clients.** *We will attend sporting events or functions and that sort of thing... I think the motivation*

was that a number of female clients had been invited to functions that they really wanted to go to, and often when they were invited along the talk was about boys from the old network and they felt somewhat precluded from discussions. So we felt if we provided a comfortable environment where women could ask stupid questions of other women on the table that would not be thought to be silly... **You feel more comfortable in that environment and less threatened.** *You don't have to put on the work persona, you can let your hair down.* **A little bit more relaxed, a bit more social.** (respondent 36f)

The girls tended to stick together. We use to have regular nights out. There was the female partner, her secretary and the female managers in the office. We used to go out once every two months for dinner and drinks. That was good. It might have built a few relationships with the girls. The guys didn't really like it. They thought why do you need to go out on your own, why can't you come out with us? (respondent 52f)

The men also identified the value of social networks:

Rotary was good, not necessarily specific to work. **It was good to get older people's experiences,** *as well as what people see as important.* (respondent 29m)

Six of the eight respondents employed at a university agreed that networking had a significant influence on career development. Respondent 26 for example, believed that being part of academic networks had been useful in her career by attending conferences, undertaking joint research, being published, joining editorial boards were all interrelated in terms of creating and strengthening networking opportunities. Similarly, respondent 28 commented that:

At the university **it is important to people's survival that they have good networks.** *I've always had a network of colleagues that I have gathered around myself in my role.* **Some people seem not to need interaction. For others networks are important. I see people suffering because they don't have a network.** (respondent 28f)

External networks used by respondents included social (three respondents), business (4), professional (12), industry (3) and community organisations (1). These networks existed outside the respondents' organisation. The business, industry and professional networks for example, acted as instrumental networks, enabling respondents to meet other colleagues, learn about career opportunities, learn about industry practices and developments, and a means by which respondents could become known.

Twelve of the respondents for example, recognised the importance of attending and being part of the professional bodies, such as Certified Practicing Accountants (CPA), Institute of chartered Accountants (ICAA) or the National Institute of Accountants (NIA). The following comment raises the question whether networking is more prevalent for the accounting profession as opposed to other professions.

> *In our line of work **membership in a professional association helps you get jobs. It gives you access to a lot of important information.** Within work that's different. Networking at work is much more for help than the professional associations. I think because these days long term in an organisation is not the norm and so people tend to move and if you have this networking going on **you tend to move with that network to get a job... It is very active in this profession.***
> (respondent 44m)

Four of the female respondents who operated their own accounting practice indicated that belonging to local business and professional networks were important facets of their career and business development. Both respondents 47 and 54 for example, joined a local Business Enterprise Center (BEC), who have referred work to them. Respondent 54 also belonged to a local branch of Business Network International that comprised a range of professionals. She found it helpful in obtaining clients and seeking career advice. Three women also belonged to an informal women's network established through their membership of the CPA. The network provided personal, business and career support.

While none of the men mentioned joining specific men's networks, ten of the women discussed formal and informal women's networks. They viewed these as important in

counteracting their male-dominated workplaces, in identifying career opportunities, a means of networking with women in similar situations as themselves, a source of role modelling and mutual support, and a means of attracting business.

> *I often get asked by women whether they should join any women's business networks. The women to some extent, especially the senior ones, feel at some disadvantage because you start to see that* **the men have natural networks by being the majority.** *Even this being a very* **collegial place,** *I didn't feel like I was hitting a glass ceiling, but going up to the partner's bar on a Friday night and I know what the testosterone level is like. If I had to go I would, but I would not naturally go there. The younger women pick that up.* **So for senior women there is that added element that since you are the minority you just need it that much more.** (respondent 34f)

It was interesting to note that a minority of women questioned the value of women's networks.

> **Women with women are the worst in the world.** *Women don't support women. Its terrible... They are matching you against themselves.* **Its this hierarchy rather than us all banding together and be as one.** *Guys have got it together because that's the way they network. They are very casual about it. Us women, I don't know whether its because we've got families or I've got 10 minutes so I've got to network as much in this 10 minutes and get out, rather than in the casual way men network. I just found that* **women with women is just too confronting, too competitive, and they are their own worst enemies.** *I am a feminist through and through and believe in women's rights, but* **I don't like some of the aggressiveness women have used to get where they have got. They show their aggressiveness on their sleeve.** (respondent 23f)

Respondent 32 for example, similarly believed that some women did not make good role models. She felt that some of the older females in her firm had never helped a female progress through the organisation to be partner, were not positive of the idea, nor of

women having children or working part-time. Respondents 32, 33 and 34 all agreed that you needed a diverse group of people in a network, including influential males. Respondent 33 even felt that women were not as good networkers as males,

> *I think it doesn't seem to work as well for us.* **There are some effective women's networks around** *and I'm in a couple of them, such as Chief Executive Women.* **I think we need still to have contact with male colleagues because at the moment they have got the power on their side.** *I think we can't ignore that fact.* (respondent 33f)

More research is needed to explore whether these negative attitudes about the women's networks are common among many females.

7.5.1 Summary

Networks can involve both formal and informal relationships inside and outside the organisation. This research has showed that respondents have used networks for both career development reasons and as a means of social support and encouragement. Travers and Pemberton (2000) refer to the former as instrumental networks and the latter as expressive networks. Similar to the findings of Travers and Pemberton (2000) the respondents in the research used instrumental networks for the exchange of advice and expertise regarding career, business and professional issues. The networks helped to identify career opportunities, provide induction to an organisation, access to senior members of the organisation, or access to clients or other projects/business. On the other hand, the expressive networks were used by respondents for social and personal support, such as the informal women's networks, or social networks within an organisation. Whilst these networks did not necessarily provide any direct career benefits, they were considered critical in providing the emotional support and role modelling needed by respondents.

Both men and women believed that networking had an influence on their career development. The men did not indicate that they proactively sought access to men's networks, but the women highly valued women's networks.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on addressing part of the third research question, that is an exploration of the influence that personal and inter-personal factors have on career development. Sections 7.2 and 7.3 discuss the personal factors of balancing career and family and the importance of family and friends. Balancing career and family appeared to be the most significant factor that had an influence on the career development of men and women. Whilst men recognised the difficulties of balancing work and family, generally only the women were prepared to make significant changes in their careers to accommodate family responsibilities. However, some men did admit that they did not pursue senior positions due to wanting a greater work–family balance.

Both the men and women cited significant people who influenced decisions they made about their career. It typically involved family members, a spouse, or a close friend. Respondents approached them at critical stages in their career to seek advice and encouragement.

Sections 7.4 and 7.5 examine the influence of the two inter-personal factors of mentors and networks. Both the men and women used mentors and networks to provide career advice, encouragement, guidance and as a means of personal support. Both were considered important in broadening their career opportunities and knowledge of the business and organisation. The women specifically identified the value of access to female mentors and women's networks. The common benefits suggested by the females were that they viewed access to other women, especially senior women, as a source of role modelling and to provide assistance to counter the male-dominated culture of their organisations. These benefits were considered critical factors in influencing their careers.

The following chapter addresses the remainder of the second research question, that is, exploring the influence of organisational factors on the career development of men and women.