

CHAPTER 8: ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to continue to answer the third research question. Specifically, the chapter discusses the range of organisational factors that respondents believed influenced their career development. The main factors include education, training and development; key challenges and work experience; organisational culture; politics; equal opportunity and the role of gender; and organisational career management.

8.2 Education, training and development

Human capital theory suggests that increasing one's skills and experience, such as through education, training and development, can contribute to career development (Kirchmeyer, 1998; Melamed, 1996; Tharenou, Latimer & Conroy, 1994). These factors were explored through the demographic questionnaire and through question 7 of the interview schedule to see if they had an influence on the career development of the men and women.

Given the professional nature of the accounting profession, all of the respondents in the study had completed some form of formal accounting qualifications. Four of the respondents had completed only a TAFE/Diploma course. These respondents were some of the oldest men in the research, so at the time they completed their studies a diploma course was considered a sufficient qualification. The remaining 55 respondents had all completed a bachelor's degree at university. A further 12 respondents (eight males and four females) were currently completing or had previously completed their Masters, one respondent (female) had completed a PhD, whilst another three were currently undertaking their PhD (three males). The 16 (11 males and five females) respondents who were undertaking further study, were doing so in order to broaden their career

options; update or further their knowledge and skills, which was considered particularly critical in the accounting profession; to remain marketable; and make themselves more competitive in the marketplace. The respondents therefore believed undertaking further education was an important factor that would influence their career development.

The majority of respondents (53) completed their accounting qualifications early on in their careers (typically after finishing high school). Six respondents (three males and three females) completed accounting degrees/diplomas later in life in order to embark on an accounting career. One female respondent even completed a Bachelor of Education in order to retrain as a primary school teacher.

As mentioned in previous chapters, individuals employed in the accounting profession are required to complete a minimum level of professional development each year in order to retain their professional certification. All of the respondents thus agreed that training and development was a necessary feature of their career development.

*Gone are the days where you do a degree and work for the next 50 years and don't have to do any training. **I need to keep up-to-date in my field with regard to the tax legislation. Also it benefits the clients. They would want to know that we are training and keeping ourselves up to date.*** (respondent 10f)

Many of the respondents who had been or were employed in the professional services firms indicated that they were excellent 'training grounds' and provided a 'good foundation' for their future career development. All of these respondents agreed that the professional services firms provided training from a technical, management and behavioural point of view. The training was typically offered as part of the graduate development program. The respondents agreed that this training and development helped provide them with the skills and experience needed to progress in their careers. Eighteen respondents viewed the professional services firms as a training ground that helped them to obtain other positions in the corporate sector or in other accounting firms.

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)

Two of the female respondents believed that self awareness training was important in aiding their personal and career development by helping them to have a greater understanding of what they wanted out of a career, and how they could achieve that in the organisation. Respondent 32 for example, explained that as part of a leadership program, she has undergone self awareness training, which has helped her to understand her attributes and some goals in life. She admitted that 'I wish someone in my mid thirties sat me down and said what do you want to do' (respondent 32). Garavan, Morley, Gunnigle and Collins (2001) and Hall (1996a) similarly argue that in order to increase one's career options, it is important for individuals to be effective in assessing their strengths and weaknesses, engage in self reflection and seek help where required.

A career development implication regarding the level of training offered by organisations (especially in smaller firms), is that many employees start their careers there, but choose to move to larger organisations in order to develop and further their skills and experience. Ten of the respondents (four males and six females) actually admitted that one of the reasons for their job change was to move to an organisation that offered more opportunities for training and development. This demonstrates that respondents felt that organisations were not providing the development they needed, so some had to assume the role themselves.

The importance that respondents placed on training and development was also highlighted in Chapter 6, which revealed that 11 respondents (six males and five females) listed continued learning and eight respondents (six males and two females) listed continued development when conceptualising career and success. Thus it is clear that both the men and women agreed that training and education played an important role in their career development. Without it, they believed that they would not have the skills or

abilities to perform their work, or pursue other career opportunities. Undertaking such learning also suggests a degree of career commitment on behalf of the respondents, as they are prepared to invest time and resources into such career development strategies. The question arising from these findings is whether the regulatory framework of the accounting profession which demands a certain level of educational qualifications and continued training and development, results in greater career implications compared to other professions.

8.3 Key challenges or work experience

Gaining work experience is another human capital attribute that can enhance career development (Kanter, 1977; Larwood and Gatticker, 1987; Melamed, 1996; Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Tharenou et al., 1994). Respondents were asked if they had any key challenges or particular work experiences which they felt had influenced their career development. Work experience refers to undertaking particular projects or tasks during their working life. Fifteen respondents (eight males and seven females) cited key challenges or particular work experience that they believed had an influence on their career development, including obtaining site or operational experience; an overseas secondment; or being given significant responsibilities, such as managing an office or business unit. Both the men and women agreed that such challenges provided them with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills to others, increase their knowledge and experience, increase their confidence, and open other career opportunities to them.

For example, the majority of respondents felt that obtaining operational experience was a key to career development within company C. 'I think it's mandatory. I don't think you can be a financial leader in the organisation otherwise' (respondent 13m). Company C was from the mining industry, so whilst it was not a formal requirement to obtain such experience, the respondents believed that management looked more favourably on employees who had obtained site or operational experience at either a domestic or overseas location. Three of the respondents had operational experience. Two of the other respondents felt that if they wanted to progress to senior positions, such as manager

of a business unit or major division, then they needed site or operational experience. This posed a problem for one of the female respondents at Company C who faced the dilemma of how to undertake site experience and plan for having a family. The problem was that many of the site locations were in remote or overseas areas where she thought it would be difficult to raise children.

Three of the women in the research all cited particular instances of work experience or key challenges that enabled them to demonstrate their skills to others in their organisation. Respondent 33 for example, believed that a critical turning point in her career had been the opportunity to manage the entire city office of the professional services firm where she worked.

The best opportunity I got was to run an office. That was an autonomous office so we were responsible for the top and bottom line and the people within it. I learned a tremendous amount. A huge amount. I think that was really useful for me. That was really the first time in my career when I started to flap my wings I think. I think it's really about having an opportunity to do something. I think if people spend their entire careers in these professional firms just as line partners as we call them, I'm surprised they haven't slashed their wrists. You need something to absolutely challenge you or what's the point. (respondent 33f)

An important theme to emerge from the research was that many respondents believed that undertaking a variety of work experience and challenging work were critical in maintaining an interest in their career and to keep them 'energised'.

It's a real reinvigorater for me in terms of wanting to stay and seeing how I can contribute. I would probably not be having the same energised conversation with you if I was only doing audit work. I learned long ago in reflecting on this that I thrive on doing different things, and the things I have learned the most from have not necessarily been the things I trained for. For what has been important is

being prepared to have a go at different things and that might be as small as different clients, and finding out through that process what I am not really suited for. Using that as part of a career. So rather than changing jobs and thinking oops wrong job for me, for my personality type I've done that by taking on different experiences. I sometimes wonder whether people take that time to reflect about their experiences when they move jobs. (respondent 34f)

After two or three years you need to move on to re-energise yourself because when you are first new in a job you are full of energy and can see so many things to be done. After that time you slow down and the issues start to look the same. So you need a fresh set of issues to get motivated again. Also even if it's a similar role, the fact that it's in another organisation, it's fresh and you are applying it in a different environment. (respondent 16f)

When respondents were not challenged, they reported feeling dissatisfied with their career and began to consider other career options. This was emphasised in Chapter 5 which discussed how a number of respondents re-evaluated and then re-directed their career paths to pursue more challenging and stimulating work. It is a danger that organisations need to acknowledge if they do not want to lose valuable employees.

A lot of people do accounting studies and then find they are not cut out to be an accountant, they go down one career path and find It is not for them. Some find it too tedious. You might do a different job and it has different aspects, but it is still doing the same thing. A lot want to get out there into the corporate sector and have a bit more of a challenging role. (respondent 2f)

I did think about teaching, the health profession. Just wanting a change. I guess sitting at a desk for the next 30 years came to reality in the last six months. I wouldn't encourage anyone to become an accountant. (respondent 5f)

The respondents also cited overseas secondments that contributed to their career development, however only the men reported undertaking such roles. The women only worked overseas when they were younger and single, and this was not directly accounting related work. Respondent 31 for example, pointed to his secondment to an African city as a turning point or critical incident in his career. It gave him a great deal of responsibility at a very young age.

*Most people when they look back no matter how old or young they are, or whatever they have done, and someone says what is your best moment, they usually pick a **moment where someone threw them in the deep end. There is nothing to get you out of your comfort zone like a secondment to a foreign country... The turning point for me is my secondment to Africa, which is ironic. It was so far out of the comfort zone.** In my case there were very few ex-patriots around and so that made me the international expert in an area that I was just learning. I was way out of my comfort zone, but **I learnt a lot very quickly in an environment that was conducive to all that. Funnily enough that was where my career propelled forward, even though that's not why I had gone to Africa.***
(respondent 31m)

In summary, both men and women believed that undertaking key challenges or particular work experience had a positive influence on their career development by increasing their confidence; knowledge and skills; exposure in the organisation; and more importantly, by broadening their career opportunities.

8.4 Organisational culture

The culture of an organisation has an influence on the work environment, performance, staff morale and satisfaction, and ultimately the career development of individuals (Kanter, 1977; Marshall, 1995; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Tharenou et al., 1994). An important theme to emerge from this research was that respondents conceptualised organisational culture in terms of the social fabric of their organisation and the nature of the work environment. This theme was highlighted in Chapter 6, which showed that 15 respondents (nine males and six females) conceptualised career in relation to a good work environment.

For example, the two country based firms (A and B) tended to have a more supportive, friendly, approachable and flexible culture according to respondents. The respondents conceptualised their organisational culture by referring to the positive social fabric which existed in the form of staff morning teas, social functions that included spouses, and the open door policy of staff. Clearly the respondents valued an organisational culture which recognised the importance of supporting them both personally and in their career development.

Similarly, five of the eight academic respondents (all males) agreed that the university environment had a very 'collegial' culture with staff getting on quite well both academically and socially. Respondent 30 for example, commented that the university had a less aggressive culture than the professional firms. The respondents believed that the culture in the university encouraged greater personal and career support.

*There is not a game of trying to outdo, **not as aggressive as in the accounting firm.** There is a much greater sense of helping each other.* (respondent 30m).

In contrast, the three female respondents felt that a university could be a male-dominated and sometimes isolating environment. As a consequence, they believed that the female employees received less career support.

Very strong male domination in our area. Very few females have been encouraged to take on management roles... Why? I think that the current management is very entrenched in their way of doing things. Probably haven't had much encouragement from senior management themselves. (respondent 28f)

The cultures of the professional services firms were described by respondents in both positive and negative terms. The positive aspects related to the young, supportive peer culture that characterised the top four firms. Respondents reported that this had a positive influence on their career development. The culture encouraged and promoted extensive training, experience, and career development, particularly among the younger employees.

In contrast however, the respondents also described the professional services firms as having an aggressive, high performance focused culture with long working hours. Respondent 36 for example, described the culture of Company D as being very 'competitive' and 'ruthless'.

A lot of time is spent trying to understand or deal with the politics. It is quite counter productive. (respondent 36f)

This engendered a culture of mistrust and low morale. According to five respondents (three males and two females), they decided to leave the organisation to pursue other career opportunities because of the negativity of their work environment.

I just wanted to get out. I was tired of the pressure, the culture, and I didn't want to spend the rest of my life with those people. They didn't understand why I felt a need to move. (respondent 30m)

With regard to the organisational culture in the professional services firms, the age of the respondents appeared to influence their willingness to tolerate such a work environment. Whilst they were young, the respondents found the culture supportive. Their age also meant it was easier to work the longer hours since they tended not to have family commitments. In contrast, as respondents got older, married and had children, the long working hours made it difficult for them to balance work and family, and thus their willingness to tolerate such a culture decreased.

8.4.1 Old boys' culture

Whilst organisational culture can influence both men's and women's career development, it typically has a greater impact on the latter (Kanter, 1977; Rutherford, 2001; Still, 1994; Tharenou et al., 1994). When respondents in this research were asked about organisational culture, ten of the female respondents referred to an 'old boys' club' existing within their organisations and they believed that this had a negative influence on their career development.

Three of the four female employees employed at company C described it as having an old boys' culture and believed that this had an influence on how women were perceived in the organisation, the types of career opportunities made available to them, and the attitude towards working mothers. The women explained that the male-dominated culture made it particularly difficult for those who struggled to find female role models.

*There is a bit of a **club mentality** and a lot of the guys I know that are in the club go to the gym together, they bike ride together and they have lunch together... I've failed to enter that club, but I'm not sure whether gender had anything to do with that or it's purely my professional background or whatever. (respondent 16f)*

*In the old days it was very Australian and **male-dominated**. It was like the old boys' club. Then there was a period of turmoil. We lost the chairman and MD*

*and an American CEO and CFO were brought in... They were a lot more open, imbrasive [sic], a casual sort of culture. Then we had the merger so now there is a lot more South Africans and that's probably a bit **more aggressive, abrasive, not so open.** (respondent 15f)*

All of the female respondents who had or currently worked in the professional services firms agreed that they all had an old boys' culture.

*Look at the number of women that are partners. We have about 8 or 9 per cent. I don't think accounting firms will continue to get it right until they give women line positions... Running a bottom line, like I had the chance of running an office. I was the only female partner in this practice who had ever done that... **I think it's a cultural issue. I think its because men tend to trust men. Most of the leaders tend to be men.** It would have been interesting had I managed to get to the top of the firm. (respondent 33f)*

This issue of trust was also raised by other women.

*I was a bit cross. **I found it almost lonely. There is no one you can trust** who has your interests at heart enough to not divulge things that you would want to go talk to that person about. You often need someone to talk to about concerns, without having them aired in a public forum somewhere down the line. (respondent 36f)*

The female respondents believed that the 'old boys' culture' had negative implications for their career development, including decreased job satisfaction; inhibited progression within the organisation; decreased levels of career encouragement; and negative attitudes towards balancing work and family.

8.5 Politics

The issue of politics was included in question 8 of the interview schedule to determine if it represented one of the organisational factors influencing career development. The issue was perceived to be relevant for more females than males. Six of the respondents (one male and five females) discussed the theme of politics in their interviews.

The female respondents revealed that politics influenced their level of knowledge and power within the organisation, especially with regard to business decisions and the types of career opportunities made available. 'It's about who you know' (respondent 16).

*The fact that you have to **play games to get goals achieved**. You have to massage the boys' egos.* (respondent 28f)

Knowledge is power in all organisations. Actually knowing how the game is played is a useful thing for women to know, and we are not very good at it... I think it might be around the concept of mateship. Information is shared among men more openly than it is by women. Women are often not drawn into that circle. Because we are a smaller number always, we often tend not to be in that circle so we don't get the information as early as it gets sent to some of the males. If you look at the golf that's played or the sport that's played. A lot of this information sharing takes place. Often women are not present there. So we miss out on that. (respondent 33f)

In order to counteract the politics and lack of information sharing, respondent 33 believed it was important to belong to strong networks comprising both men and women who were influential in the organisation.

I still think we need 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... If people don't have a very effective network of both male and females then they let

themselves down badly... I've got a very strong network... I am actually quite diligent about keeping in touch with them. (respondent 33f)

The other strategies women adopted to counter the politics and old boys' culture are discussed in the next section.

The one male who raised the issue of politics, believed that politics characterised the professional services firm where he previously worked. It influenced the type of clients or projects he was given, and thus had flow-on implications for his career development within the firm.

*I disliked the chartered firms intensely. That's because of the **political crap** that goes on. So many espouse virtues. For example, ** espouse the seven signals. The fact that the partners don't live by that creates a very poor environment... Also being a new person in the organisation you don't have the **political network** so you get the crap jobs.* (respondent 19m).

8.6 Equal opportunity and the influence of gender

The question of equal opportunity in organisations was not initially included in the interview schedule, however, the third respondent raised it as a salient issue at the end of his interview believing it should be explored in the research. 'You know you haven't raised the issue of whether men and women have equal access to opportunities' (respondent 3m). A question was thus added to the interview schedule which asked respondents to make a personal judgement on whether they felt men and women have equal access to opportunities in their organisations. The question was asked of the remaining 56 respondents.

There was a mixed response regarding whether men and women had equal access to career opportunities, with some believing that there was equality; others feeling that women were disadvantaged; whilst others felt in theory there was equality, but not in practice. In general terms, the respondents in the smaller, regional based firms

(companies A & B) felt that there was equal opportunity in the workplace, whereas the respondents who had experience in the larger firms, such as the professional services firms, the universities and the corporate sector, believed that there was a greater level of inequity for females. This question on equal opportunity also prompted some of the female respondents to relate stories about how their gender influenced aspects of their careers. None of the men relayed stories of how their gender influenced their career experiences. These mixed responses call for more research on the topic.

In the smaller organisations of Company A and B, both male and female respondents agreed that men and women had equal access to career paths. Both firms had a number of female partners, and none of the female respondents reported experiencing negative treatment. However both genders recognised that due to family commitments, women were often faced with greater career barriers

*I tend to think men are more aggressive and driven to aspire to be a partner. I think women are more reluctant to take that final step due to their concern over balancing work and family commitments. I think women are certainly at least as equally talented as men. I know that here in the firm there are some women that are more talented than the men... It is just **much tougher** because society still seems to say that if you have given birth to the child then the prime responsibility for its care rests with you. **That's the battle.** (respondent 3m)*

There were mixed attitudes towards the issue of equal opportunity at company C. The male respondents felt that within their own areas, women had equal access to career opportunities, but they were not sure whether this persisted throughout the organisation. They recognised that the problem for women centred on their ability to balance work and family (as discussed in section 7.2). The four females believed that the organisation had problems with equal opportunity. They cited the concerns that few women were given senior positions in the organisation, and that the organisation grappled with working mothers and part-time roles. The respondents believed that the lack of equal opportunity within the organisation had a subsequent negative influence on their career development.

Both the male and female respondents agreed that equal opportunity was one of the most important issues confronting the professional services firms. They all agreed that the rhetoric proclaimed that women had equal opportunity, but in practice the evidence did not suggest that. Respondent 31 for example, noted that for those partners under 35, around 20 to 30 per cent were females, however the proportion decreased as they got older. The female respondents therefore believed that the inequity resulted in their unequal access to career opportunities within the organisation, including their progression to senior positions. The inequity was also manifest in the mixed attitudes on part-time work (as outlined in section 7.2).

*Over the years watching the number of women come into professional practice, it's been quite significant. There were very few of us that would. It's become a profession that women quite enjoy and excel at. **The disappointment is that they never seem to get to the top.*** (respondent 33f)

Respondent 33 believed that this place constraints on her career at times, but she explained that it did not prevent her from becoming one of the most senior women in the organisation.

The females employed in the professional services firms believed that one of the causes of inequity was the consolidation of the top firms, which led to a concentration of males.

*The first time I found it an issue when we merged with ** who had a reputation for being **hugely chauvinistic**. There were no female partners. I remember strategically thinking that if I am not careful **I will be marginalised** quite quickly. **So I developed a strategy for cross referring work.*** (respondent 34f)

Cross referring work meant referring work to other individuals in the respondent's work team.

8.6.1 The role of gender

When asked the above question on equal access to career opportunities, some of the respondents (only females) began discussing instances where their gender had played a role in their career development. Ten of the women strongly believed that their gender had an influence on the way they were treated or perceived, and hence their career development. None of the men however, cited instances when their gender had played a significant role in their careers.

The women recognised that the level of femininity they displayed, had an impact on their male colleagues. On one hand, the men expected the women not to be too 'emotional' or too 'feminine'. However on the other hand, the women felt that they were not given career opportunities because they were not attractive enough or masculine in their style.

*We have had a couple of cases where we have had women not get up because they are accused of not having an **executive presence**... So does personality and looks play a role? It does maybe because they are overweight. A male will get up despite it, a female will not. (respondent 32f)*

This comment raises issues about identity and whether women are prepared to maintain their own identity despite the male attitude. As respondent 32 explained:

*Its how **comfortable you feel in yourself**. Is work your own **identity**. (respondent 32f)*

The following comment by respondent 34 similarly highlights how she manages her identity/gender in reaction to the male attitudes.

*I have found myself being **shy, quiet or withdrawn** because the testosterone level is high, but I say that is my stuff and not theirs. I try to ignore that and have **learnt to express my femininity in a way that they don't find offensive, too cute,***

too frilly, too power play, or I just wouldn't have the relationship I do or have had the opportunities. (respondent 34f)

The women in the research believed that the male image of 'executive presence' or having the right 'style' had an influence on their career development. For example, it posed a problem for the women trying to become partners. Part of becoming partner in an accounting firm is that the individual is engaging in a business activity with other people. This means that the other partners are really looking at who they want to be in business with. So being promoted in a professional services firm rests on whether the other partners want to be in business with the person. The problem, as noted by respondent 14, is that people tend to promote based on their own likeness, thus it is difficult if the majority of partners are male because they will have a tendency to promote other males. Women are almost expected to 'manage like a man'. The following discussion by respondent 36 exemplifies this point.

I think essentially it is driven by the fact that to get promoted to director and then partner, you are looking at engaging in a business activity with other people in a partnership. So they are really looking at who they want to be in business with. So for instance I am an emotional person, someone who probably has a more female and nurturing side, they probably don't like seeing or they find that difficult dealing with. I work in a very male-dominated practice and that is something I have been told they don't want to see and they don't believe that it is appropriate to be demonstrated at work. It is by male colleagues and even females give me the advice because they have seen it in action. I know a female partner in Sydney and she said men just don't understand so don't cry at work. So really to be promoted within commerce you are being promoted on your merits and being able to do your work, whereas being promoted in a professional services firm really does rest on do the other partners want to be in business with you. (respondent 36f)

Respondent 36 found this attitude very confronting:

*It is very confronting if people make a personal judgement about your assets and ability to be in business rather than be very good at your job. You have to be good at your job, and they have never questioned that about me, but can we all cope with ** [respondent's name] if she cries or we are nasty. They are very confronting without thinking through the consequences of how other people feel.*
(respondent 36f)

The female respondents also highlighted a range of other instances when they believed their gender had a negative influence on their career development. First, not obtaining a position or having to leave an organisation because the respondent was married and the organisation feared she would leave to have children (four cases). Two of these cases occurred in the 1960s and 1970s when equal opportunity policies did not exist or were not widely promoted. Second, being excluded from functions due to being a female (two respondents). Third, not being employed or promoted because as a female they did not have the executive presence like males, or not being attractive enough (three respondents). Fourth, being ridiculed or dismissed because as a female they were either too emotional, or held too strong opinions (four respondents). Finally, being sexually harassed (one respondent).

These experiences often left the women disillusioned with the organisation. Most of the women chose not to complain to management about the behaviour. They either ignored it or left the organisation to find alternative employment. Their negative experiences also had an influence on the women's attitudes towards their career and what they wanted out of it. For example, respondent 52 commented that:

I have to say it changed my attitude toward working there. I had never really worked for the money before, but then I focused on that. I am taking home a pay packet. It really soured me toward that. I don't think he even realised what he said. We had a person in the firm who was like an EEO officer, and I actually considered reporting him to her, but I didn't. I thought it wasn't worth it and there may have been other factors. He actually became a partner so he was a

*good worker and a great fellow and he deserved it. Anyway ultimately I didn't want to become a partner and I was going to have children anyway. **They were right, but I don't think they had the right to use that as an excuse.** During every staff review that I had they would ask me if I was going to have children this year. They always asked me that. (respondent 52f)*

In summary, much of the gender inequity discussed can be understood with reference to many of the factors outlined so far in this and the previous chapter, including the paucity of women in senior positions; negative attitudes towards part-time work and flexible work practices; the availability of such practices; a male-dominated culture; a lack of female mentors; a lack of networks that assist women's interaction in the organisation; the political nature of the organisation; and limited opportunities for vital work experience. The findings resonate with the work of Kanter (1977) on homo sociability.

8.7 Career management

As outlined in Chapter 3, theorists such as Allred, Snow and Miles (1996), Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and Hall (1996a) believe that careers in the twenty-first century will be characterised by individuals having greater responsibility for their career development, and the organisation being less involved in managing employees' careers. In order to investigate this claim, respondents were asked the following question:

Do you think the responsibility for managing a career rests with the individual, the organisation, or a combination of both?

This question relates to the third research question which asks whether respondents perceive organisational factors, such as organisational career management, have an influence on their career development.

8.7.1 Attitudes toward career management

One of the most significant findings to arise from this research is that an overwhelming majority of respondents (55 – 27 males and 28 females) believed that the responsibility for managing a career rests with both the individual and the organisation. The respondents strongly believed that the organisation still has a role to play in helping facilitate their career development.

Respondents believed that organisational career management had an important influence on their early career development when they are not always certain of their future career direction. For example, the organisation can help identify career paths for employees when their knowledge of the organisation's hierarchy is limited.

*I think for the very first couple of years you don't know what the next logical step is in your career all the time and where the opportunities are going to become available within a large company like **. **So early on the organisation can identify a role and identify a person suitable for that role.** Later on in your career you would actually be in a position to know where the jobs would come up.*
(respondent 41m)

This lack of concrete career planning was common among many of the respondents. As discussed in section 5.8, 53 respondents admitted having unplanned careers.

8.7.2 Extent of organisational career management

The following section discusses the types of career management offered by organisations and the influence it has on the career development of the respondents, thus addressing the third research question. Both men and women agreed that career management was important.

The experiences and comments of Respondents 12–19 employed at company C highlight their belief that the organisation should play a greater role in helping to facilitate their career development. The respondents revealed that the focus on managing careers at company C had changed over the years. It had moved from a situation where a lot of emphasis was placed on career management by the organisation, to the other extreme where the organisation believed it was up to the individual to manage their own career. None of the respondents liked this shift in career management back on the individual.

The respondents agreed that early on the organisation was ‘paternalistic in its approach’, which had positive outcomes for their career development.

They managed careers quite closely in those days. The finance group was very strong on managing the careers of good performers. It was almost paternalistic in its approach... That approach has changed quite dramatically in the last 4 or 5 years. Two things have happened. Back then there was a philosophy that good performers should rotate and move through various functions or fields. Where as now the focus is on specialist streams. All jobs are advertised now. (respondent 12m)

The respondents explained that in the past the organisation helped to match employees’ career goals or aspirations with vacancies in the company. There were also talent performance schemes that helped to identify the high performers in the organisation and assist in their career development.

However, the current feeling among the respondents at company C was that the organisation was not very active in career management, and this created problems for their career development. For example, four of the eight respondents were at a crossroads in their career and were feeling quite vulnerable and unsure of their future career direction. They believed that the organisation was not doing enough to support them in their career development. They suggested that management and HR needed to work together to help identify career opportunities for them. Respondent 17 for example, believed that:

HR need to get a little more involved and manage it at a higher level so you know where they see you going. I think your manager just above you wants you to do your job for the next year and doesn't have that long-term vision. Where as I like to know what he wants for the next five years so I can plan my life. HR could help facilitate that and bring the employee and the jobs together.
(respondent 17f)

The respondents from company C also believed that the organisation could better support their career development by providing guidance and support. For example, by ensuring that job vacancies are advertised internally and people are given access to that information. Second, by ensuring that there is a fair and equal selection process. Third ensuring that the appropriate people are aware who are the good performers, who are the people ready to move on, and what are their interests.

Twenty-six respondents (14 males and 12 females) believed that graduate development programs offered by the corporate sector and professional services firms were an example of where organisational career management had a positive influence on their career development. It provided them with the training, knowledge, skills and experience that was a foundation to their future career development. Respondent 52 made the following comment about the graduate program:

You got to understand the way the organisation worked. It developed my skills both technically, professionally, people skills, the communication type skills. It took you from a raw graduate and made you into a professional. The training was constant at all grades from the day you started. It wasn't a defined graduate program, just training appropriate to the grade. (respondent 52f)

Respondent 41 similarly explained that as part of the graduate program he discussed career goals with his manager and the graduate coordinator every 12 months, and he could approach the graduate coordinator at any point to discuss career issues. Respondent 41 also felt that the graduate program provided a formal structure to help facilitate his career development. It was useful in exposing him to various aspects of the business, providing the opportunity to meet senior staff, including the CFO, and gaining knowledge of the key structures of the organisation. Respondent 41 believed that this type of support was important in a large organisation.

The career management offered by respondents 44m and 58m's organisation is probably the best example of proactive career management in the research. Their organization was a large multi national IT firm. The respondents agreed it had a positive influence on their career development by providing them with a formal structure and support that fostered their career within the organisation. It was not necessarily focused on career progression, but encouraged them to consider what they wanted out of their career and how to go about achieving it. Respondents 44 and 58 indicated that such proactive career management boosted their job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation.

The two respondents explained that there was a lot of HR involvement in assisting employees to manage their careers. For example, employees are required to complete a personal development program, as well as an individual development plan. Employees are also encouraged to actively pursue goals that they state in their plans. A portion of their bonuses each year is based on how much employees actually try to develop those two programs. The personal development plan is developed each year, whilst the individual development plan is an ongoing process. The plan is reviewed by an

employee's manager. They report to a HR manager who is responsible for their development in the company. Employees also report to another manager who assigns them work. Both HR and the employee's manager are responsible for the personal and individual development program.

*** {the company} takes those things very seriously. It's your responsibility that your career is on line, but **there is guidance from HR** to ensure that it is documented and that there are positive moves in trying to help you achieve those goals... **That is really pounded into us... Personally I think they are important.** If ** {the company} is your career it is fairly important. (respondent 44m)*

Respondent 44m reported that the organisation also has a career guidance or training scheme. So if an employee wishes to change professions within the company, there are training sessions where they can discuss it with a professional career counsellor. The organisation also operates a range of personal development workshops, such as how to be a better motivator, communicator, get along with colleagues, and other forms of training. Both respondents 44 and 58 were strongly supportive of this proactive approach to career management by the organisation.

In contrast, as discussed in Chapter 5, three respondents (one male and two females) believed that there was a lack of organisational career management directed to older partners in the professional services firms. This had negative outcomes for their career development as they were feeling vulnerable and were lacking career direction. The respondents explained that the problem is that once an individual progresses to partner level, little focus is provided on helping them plan their future career path.

*You have a lot of partners that don't have an official mentor that kind of got 'here and are **left to work it out for themselves.** We are only starting to do formal succession planning in the partnership. Whether that is internal roles, such as CEO, and 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 as been saying how they are going.*** (respondent 34f)

This vulnerability led two respondents to seek coaching outside the organisation in order to help them 'crystallise' their future career goals. It further suggests that respondents want the organisation to play a greater role in their careers, even if they are more senior or older employees.

In summary, this section has shown that organisational career management can have positive influences on career development for both men and women. Career management strategies help to identify career opportunities for individuals, a means of providing career guidance, encouraging employees and managers to discuss their career goals and means of achieving them, and having programs that foster the high performing individuals. Where career management was not provided by the organisation, this had negative implications for the respondents' career development. It left them feeling vulnerable and unsure of their future career direction.

8.8 Conclusion

The purpose of Chapters 7 and 8 has been to address the second research question. Chapter 7 explored the influence of personal and inter-personal factors on career development. With regard to the personal factors, section 6.2 demonstrated that balancing career and family had a greater influence on the women's careers, compared to the men. Whilst the results showed that men are increasingly considering their family commitments in relation to career, it is the women that still tend to change their employment situation in order to accommodate the family. The other personal factor discussed is the importance of family and friends. Both men and women cited a friend or family member who had an influence on their career development by providing a source of advice, guidance, support and encouragement in their careers. One difference was that two of the women cited that an unsupportive spouse had influenced their careers. The lack of support made them more resilient and determined to be successful. None of the men mentioned having an unsupportive spouse.

With regard to the inter-personal factors, both men and women reported benefiting from access to mentors and networks. Both provided career support and encouragement and helped to identify career opportunities. The women also specifically identified the need for, and benefits of having access to female mentors and women's networks. These were seen as a source of role modelling, increasing their exposure within the organisation, and broadening their career opportunities.

This chapter has explored the range of organisational factors found to influence career development, including: education, training and development; key challenges and access to work experience; organisational culture; politics; equal opportunity and the role of gender; and the level of career management provided by the organisation. Both men and women agreed that education, training and work experience had a positive influence on their career development. It provided respondents with the knowledge, skills, abilities and professional certification needed to perform their jobs and to broaden their career opportunities.

Organisational culture and politics were also identified as factors influencing career development for both men and women. It influenced the types of work given to respondents, their knowledge and power within the organisation, and more importantly, the career opportunities made available to them. The positive influence of organisational culture on career development was the supportive peer environment found in the professional services firms, which respondents believed provided them with the vital training and experience needed in their early career stages. In contrast, a negative implication of organisational culture on career development was that three men and two women cited the aggressive culture of the professional services firms as a reason for changing jobs. The women in particular, also cited the old boys' culture and the politics of an organisation as having a negative influence on their career development.

The lack of equal opportunity in some organisations in the research had a negative influence on the women's career development. It influenced their access to career opportunities and resulted in unfavourable attitudes towards part-time work and working mothers. As a result, some women believed that their career development was inhibited, and this led some of them to leave the organisation to pursue other career paths. None of the men reported that equal opportunity was a relevant factor in their career development.

The final section of this chapter showed how organisational career management can have positive influences on the career development for both men and women. The overwhelming majority of respondents wanted organisations to play a proactive role in career management. They believed it helped to provide them with career encouragement, identify career opportunities, and crystallise their own career goals. Where career management was not provided, respondents were left feeling isolated from the organisation, vulnerable, and unsure of their future career path.

The following chapter presents the conclusions and implications of the research.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to enhance our understanding of how men and women in the accounting profession articulate and conceptualise their own sense of career and career success, and how this shapes their career development and behaviour in the organisation and in their personal lives. The literature review discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted that an important perspective to consider when examining the career patterns of men and women, are the factors influencing such career development. Three key categories of influence were identified: first, the influence of personal factors, such as family commitments and the importance of family and friends; second, the influence of inter-personal factors, with the most relevant factors being mentors and networks; and third, organisational factors, including education, training and development; key challenges and the opportunities for work experience; organisational culture; politics; equal opportunity and the role of gender; and organisational career management.

Following the review of the literature on career theory, it was decided that the best way to research the career development of both men and women, would be to confine the study to a particular context. For the purposes of this research, the accounting profession was selected as a context for examination. By choosing a specific context to base the research, it helps to control for variations that may occur due to occupational differentiation. The accounting profession was chosen for a number of reasons. First, there are a number of career paths open to individuals in the accounting profession, including in accounting firms; in the corporate sector; in government; in academic institutions; and through self-employment. Second, the accounting profession allows individuals to pursue a pathway into more senior positions, such as chief financial officer; chief executive officer; or as a director on the board of a company. It would therefore be useful to explore the reasons why men and women follow such varied career trajectories. Also, it would be useful to explore the role that the range of organisational contexts have

on career. Third, men and women are entering the accounting profession in relatively equal numbers, however the majority of senior positions are held by men (Morley, O'Neill, Jackson & Bellamy, 2001). Researching career patterns in this profession may provide a greater understanding of why women's representation is so low at the senior levels. Fourth, with increasing attention also being focused on achieving a work life balance by both men and women in the accounting profession (ICAA, 2001; Morley et al., 2001), organisations have been encouraged to design flexible work practices that accommodate the needs of their employees. This research will explore how men and women in the accounting profession thus conceptualise what career and success mean to them. Finally, men and women employed in the accounting profession are required to complete on-going professional development in order to keep their accreditation. It will be useful to explore how the regulatory nature of the profession may influence the career development of men and women.

Semi-structured interviews of 30 men and 29 women employed in the accounting profession were used to explore the role and significance of a range of personal, interpersonal and organisational factors on the career experiences of participants. From the analysis of this information, a set of age-related pathways were developed to describe the stages men and women from the research progressed through in their careers.

The following sections outline the main findings with regard to the three key research questions outlined in Chapter 3. Some of the research findings confirm expectations from the extant literature, however the main purpose of the research was to explore the relevance of these factors in an Australian context. Limited research has been conducted in Australia exploring the career development of men and women, and given the recent changes to the work environment (as outlined in section 1.4), it was considered necessary to undertake further study in the area. The research was also useful in highlighting a number of emerging themes.

As previously stated, the three research questions are:

1. How do the men and women in the research make sense of and conceptualise their career trajectories?
2. How do men and women in the research articulate and conceptualise what career and career success means to them?
3. Based on the perceptions of the men and women in the research, how do the following factors act to constrain or enable 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?

9.2 Conceptualising career

The first question of this research asked how do the men and women in the research conceptualise and make sense of their career trajectories. Based on the career stories of the respondents, an age-related set of pathways was developed in order to conceptualise the stages men and women from the accounting profession progress through in their career. One of the respondents in the research stated that ‘career is not a destination it is a journey’ (respondent 58). The use of the metaphor of a journey to describe career development was a common feature among the respondents. Thus in order to supplement the age-related pathways, the metaphor of a career journey or road map will be used to conceptualise the career stages men and women progress through during their career. The respondents used many phrases that suggest a road map metaphor, including ‘parallel routes’; ‘crossroads’; ‘turning point’; ‘career path’; ‘propelled’; ‘plateau’; and ‘travel’. The following quotes further illustrate the relevance of using a road map metaphor.

*That is where I am **heading** to.* (respondent 32f)

*It all seemed **mapped** out at ***.* (respondent 8m)

One of the things I would like to leave is a better **road** for women through the practice. (respondent 33f).

*You get to various **T-junctions** every now and then and you have to work out what you want to do... In a few years time 3–5 years time I'll be at another **T-junction** and what is the next challenge.* (respondent 31m)

*I am at the **end of the road**.* (respondent 30m)

In Chapter 4 it was discussed how Blakie (2000: 116) emphasises that ‘social reality is the symbolic world of meanings and interpretations’, and thus the purpose of interpretive social science is to discover and describe those ‘symbolic meanings’. The symbolic meanings represent the metaphoric language respondents use to make sense of their careers and thus provide the foundation for the road map metaphor. As Grant and Oswick (1996) argue, metaphors involve using a combination of language and thought to construct a non-literal meaning and apply it to reality in order to enhance our understanding of that reality.

It is recognised that metaphors are not a scientific means of generating theory; they are merely a way of thinking or conceptualising phenomena (Tsoukas, 1993). It is a means of illustrating the concept of career development in order to make it more understandable to the reader. As Czarniawska comments:

The usefulness of metaphors, however, lies not in proving their identity with the phenomena in question but in creating an alternative image of what is taken for granted. (Czarniawska, 1997: 127)

A number of researchers argue that one way to better understand the contrasting perspectives of careers is through the use of metaphors (Inkson, 2004; Inkson & Amundson, 2002). As Inkson comments:

Contrasting metaphors summarise existing theories, provide new perspectives and enable us to extend our understanding. Careers may thus be viewed as inheritances, constructions, cycles, matching processes, journeys, encounters and relationships, roles, resources, or stories. (Inkson, 2004: 2)

Many researchers adopt the technique of using a metaphor to conceptualise career development. For example, Schein (1978) uses the metaphor of career anchors in his research. Rapoport and Rapoport (1980) describe a triple helix model to represent women's career development. Powell and Mainiero (1992) propose the 'cross currents in the river of time' metaphor, to conceptualise women's career development using language such as currents, river, and river banks. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) propose a kaleidoscope metaphor to describe women's career development. The metaphors represent an alternative way in which to make meaning of, and to understand, the complexity of career development.

Oswick and Montgomery (1999) for example, argue that metaphors enable perceptions, attitudes and feelings to be uncovered and articulated. Ortony (1975: 45) believes that metaphors help to enhance learning due to their 'vividness and compactness'. Whilst Tsoukas (1993: 336) states that 'the imagery of a metaphor can be powerfully used to bring the reader into contact with the (real or imaginary) experiences that the author is narrating'.

One of the first theorists to use metaphors was Morgan (1983). He states that metaphors are 'a basic structural form of experience through which human beings engage, organize, and understand their world' (Morgan, 1983: 601). Morgan (1986, 1998) uses metaphors as a means of describing and analysing organisations. For example, he describes the metaphor of an organisation as a 'machine', 'organism', 'political system', 'brain', and as an 'instrument of domination'. Morgan (1983, 1986) believes that researchers should be encouraged to adopt the technique of reading social situations through the spectacles of a wide range of metaphors. He argues that:

Using multiple metaphors to understand organization and management gives us a capacity to tap different dimensions of a situation, showing how different qualities of organizations can co-exist, supporting, reinforcing or contradicting one another. (Morgan, 1998: 6)

Inkson (2002: 18) believes that the 'colorfulness of metaphors, and their resonance with the thinking of ordinary people, may give them the potential to engage all of us in more creative thinking about careers'. Similarly, Tsoukas (1993) argues that metaphors are helpful in providing comprehension about a phenomenon and can be used to guide research that is designed to test the metaphor's relevance in describing that phenomenon. The following metaphor of a road map is therefore used to conceptualise the concept of career development and illustrates the age-related pathways discussed in Chapter 5. The career histories of four respondents are used to illustrate its application. It is recognised that this metaphor may not be applicable to all men and women, however it may be used in future research to test its applicability to other demographic or occupational contexts. There are also other limitations of the metaphor that are described in section 9.2.3. Morgan similarly acknowledges that there are strengths and weaknesses in using metaphors:

The strengths rest in the insights created through the metaphor. The limitations rest in the fact that no metaphor ever captures the totality of experience to which it is applied. In creating one set of insights it excludes others. (Morgan, 1996: 232)

As will be outlined later, the limitation of the road map metaphor is that it is only two-dimensional, and does not capture the personal motivations of the respondents. Furthermore, it cannot fully reflect the idiosyncratic nature of the respondents' careers. Since a metaphor cannot 'capture the totality of experience' it is acknowledged that this metaphor is not generalisable to other accounting professionals or individuals in the broader community, but merely reflects the men and women interviewed in this research. The purpose is to provide a rich metaphor that can help the reader to gain insight into the key stages in career development.

The attached fold out diagrams illustrate the road map metaphor.

9.2.1 Mapping the career journey of the men

The early career stage of men is characterised by the men progressing through a series of roles in one or multiple organisations, slowly progressing up the organisational hierarchy. The stage can be conceptualised as a linear highway on which the men travel along at speed. When they change roles or move between organisations, they are switching lanes on the highway. A speed sign of 110km/h characterises the energy and enthusiasm of the men in their early career. The men may encounter one roundabout during this phase. This is where they might step off the career highway to work overseas in order to broaden their skills and experience. However, they soon rejoin the highway.

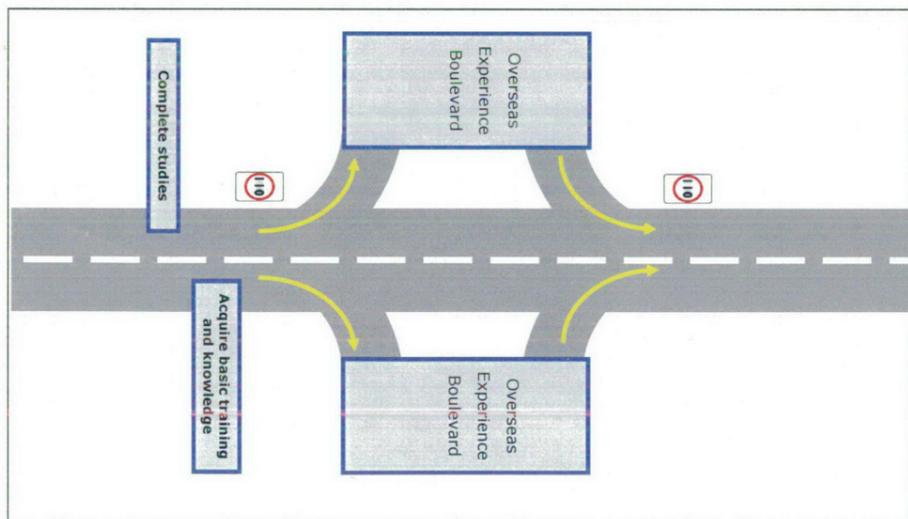
*When I first went down there I was **single and I was fairly driven** by the idea of **making some money, advancing and learning a lot.** (respondent 4m)*

The second stage of middle adulthood is characterised by establishment and maintenance. During the establishment phase, there are two '**parallel routes**' that the men can travel along. The first is a continuation of the highway mentioned above, on which the men are still travelling along at the same speed as above. Some of the men believed that they had to be more committed to their journey as they were now responsible for providing for their family.

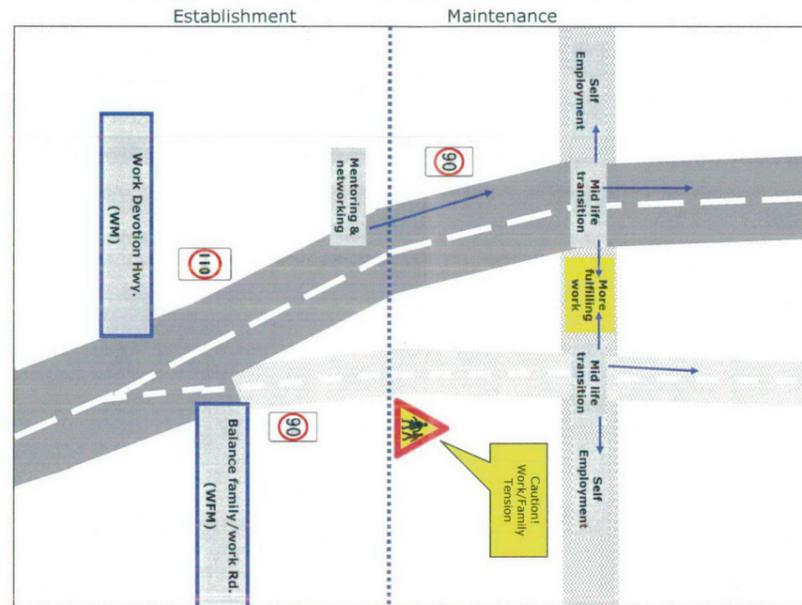
*I only **moved on when I started a family** when I started to think I should better myself and **provide a secure financial base.** (respondent 44m)*

Second, during this phase there is also a parallel road. Rather than a highway, it is a two lane road. This is signposted as lifestyle and/or work–family balance. The speed on this road is reduced to 90 km/h. Only a minority of men (WFM) take this parallel road that is slower and less focused on pursuing that senior position. It represents those men who choose not to pursue a senior position because of lifestyle reasons or to enable a greater work–family balance. These men can return to the faster lane once they feel the pressures of work-family have lessened. The categories proposed in section 7.2.2 of work devoted men (WM) and work/family men (WFM) are used as labels in this diagram to indicate the competing devotions of respondents. It should be noted that the men's

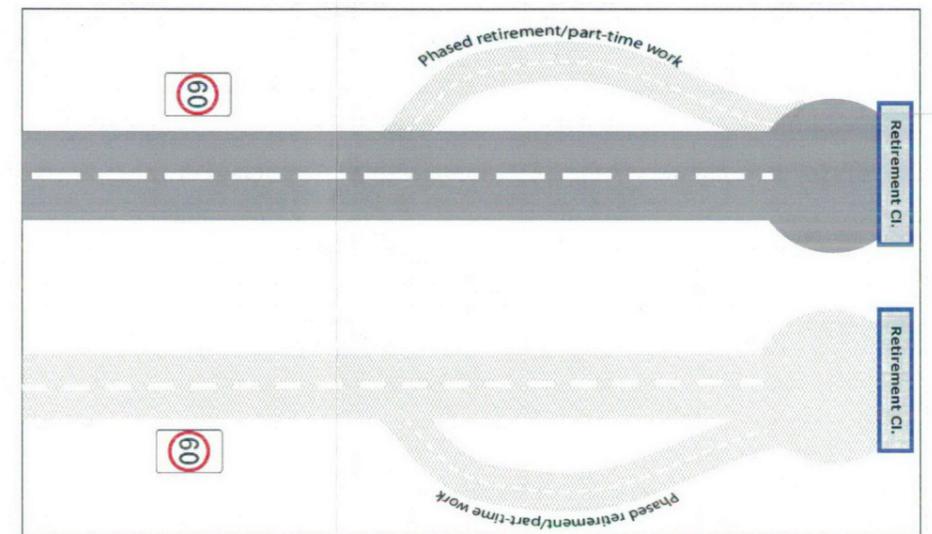
Stage 1 – Exploratory - Men



Stage 2 – Middle Adulthood - Men



Stage 3 – Pre-retirement Men



career development on both the highway and parallel road may not always be focused on vertical progression.

*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)*

By the maintenance phase the men have reached the pinnacle of their career development. The highway plateaus out and is replaced by a slower route which the men coast along during their middle adulthood. This is conceptualised as a two lane road where the speed is now 90km/h for all men. Some of the men during this part of the journey reach what they referred to as a **crossroads**'. These men are halted at the midlife transition junction '**t-junction**', where they reevaluate their careers to date and decide their future direction. As a result of the evaluation, some men redirect their journey and take a turn off to pursue other career paths, including self employment or other work that is more fulfilling. The remaining men continue to coast along the career route.

*You get to various **T-junctions** every now and then and you have to work out what you want to do... In a few years time 3-5 years time I'll be at another **T-junction** and what is the next challenge. (respondent 31m)*

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. (respondent 59m)

By the third stage of the journey (pre-retirement), the men follow one of two roads. Either they coast along on their current road, with no fixed direction or estimated time of

arrival at an end point, or they begin the decline journey. The road is no longer characterised by a straight line, but a broken one. The men slowly reduce their speed (60km/h) and time on the road, representing a move towards part-time work or phased retirement. Some of the men have an estimate of how long the journey will be before reaching the final destination of retirement. Once at this destination however, some men take the less used and slow road of unpaid work for a short time, before completing the journey.

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

9.2.2 Mapping the career journey of the women

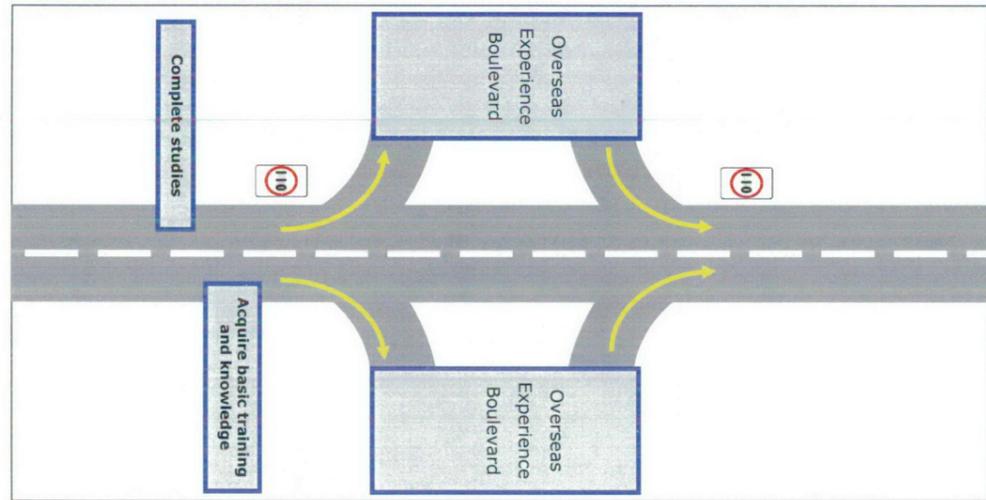
The early career stage for the women is similar to that previously described for the men. The women travel along the highway at speed (110km/h). As in the case of the men, the only roundabout that may be encountered is to detour off the highway for overseas experience, however they soon rejoin the highway. During this early stage respondents got used to the road and some started planning their future journey.

*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)*

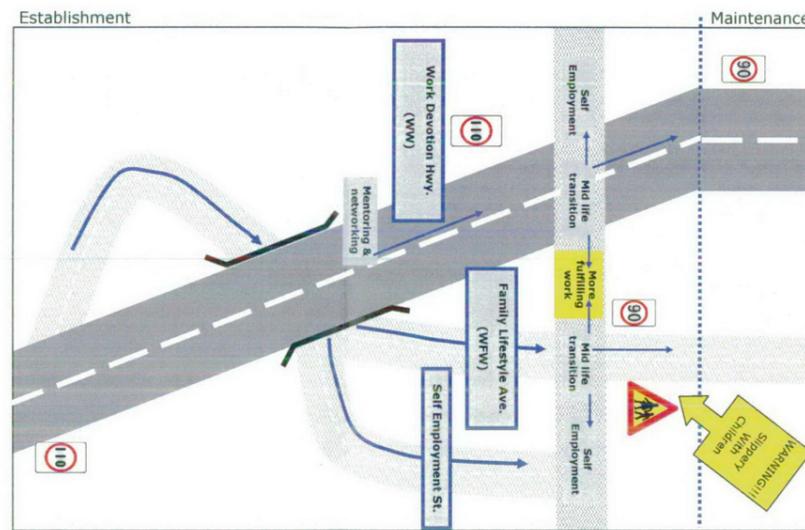
***When you first start off** in a corporation it is very easy to get caught up in the corporation life and the **fast track**. (respondent 47f)*

The second stage for the women comprises middle adulthood. This is characterised by two sub phases of establishment and maintenance. In the establishment phase (late 20s or early 30s), the journey is characterised by two alternatives. First, some women (only a minority) continue along the highway at 110km/h. This represents those women who choose not to have children and continue a rapid journey progressing through roles (though they may not necessarily be focused on vertical progression). 'I've always

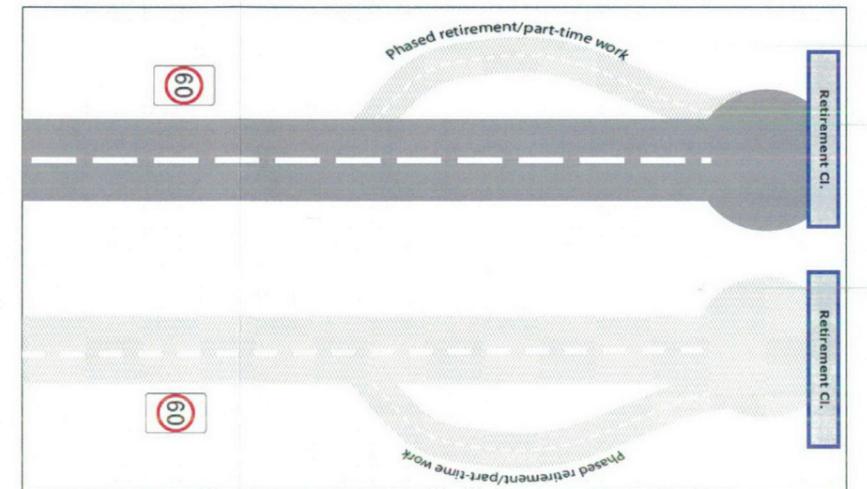
Stage 1 – Exploratory - Women



Stage 2 – Middle Adulthood - Women



Stage 3 – Pre-retirement Women



described myself as having blinders on as I come up. I just kept going' (respondent 34f). They bypass the family roundabout. Whilst these women do not have children, their journey may not necessarily be uninterrupted. Their development may be constrained by assumptions that they still may have children, by a male-dominated culture, a lack of equal access to career paths, or simply because they are a woman. Respondent 48 for example, who did not have any children, spoke of incidents in her career when she was not given a position or promotion because of the fear that she may go off and have children.

The majority of women however, take the family roundabout. Here the women exit off the highway and stop in a parking bay to have a family. The overwhelming majority of these professional women take a brief rest stop to have children before returning to the career journey. A minority of the women (non-traditional women – NTW) rejoin the highway as their husbands assume the major share of child care and household responsibilities, leaving them plenty of time and energy to race along the highway.

From that point of view its been quite easy... So if the kids are sick he goes and picks them up. Its flexible. If he was employed it would have been a lot more difficult. But that's the way we've done it purposefully. So that I could come back to work. (respondent 7f)

The majority of working mothers (work/family women – WFW) however, rejoin the career journey, but on a slower and bumpier road. This two lane road runs parallel to the career highway, but has broken lines, representing their part-time work. It is also characterised by many potholes and speed bumps that slow their career progress. These road barriers represent the organisational factors that restrain their career development, such as negative attitudes towards part-time work, lack of flexible work practices, an old boys' culture, organisational politics, and negative attitudes about women. Due to the bumpy road, some women change direction and take an alternative road in order to pursue a different career path. This represents the women who change their employment

situation in order to better balance work and family, such as establishing their own business or moving into the education field.

*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)*

By their late 30s (maintenance phase) all of the women have reached a plateau in their career journeys. This includes those women who have reached senior positions within their organisations, or those who do not wish to progress any further in their careers. Here the highway and parallel road plateau out and are now flat. They merge into one flat two lane road. The speed is now 90km/h for all women. At this point in the journey, the women begin to coast along the career road; however, some of the women reach a midlife transition or crossroads (similar to the men). These women begin to evaluate their career journey to date. Once again, some women may change direction and take a different career path to pursue more fulfilling work.

By the third stage of pre-retirement, the women follow the same career journey as the men. Some women continue coasting along on their career journey, with no fixed direction or estimated time of arrival. The other women drop back a gear, and slow down on the career road, reducing their speed to 60km/h and their time on the road. When the journey does come to a stop, some women are still interested in the occasional outing that allows them to pursue short trips. As with the men, this represents their desire to undertake unpaid or charitable work.

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)

9.2.3 Additional features of the road map metaphor

From the above description it can be seen that a range of career experiences can be conceptualised by mapping career development as a journey. Using the metaphor, a highway can be used to depict rapid career development. A road running parallel to this highway represents those individuals whose career development occurs at a less frantic pace. Roundabouts illustrate critical turning points in an individual's career, such as working overseas, getting married, or having children. An intersection or junction delineate when an individual comes to a crossroads in their career and may change direction. This may be to pursue self employment, a more fulfilling career, or for lifestyle reasons. Speed bumps and potholes are used to encapsulate the constraining factors on an individual's career.

The metaphor acknowledges the influence of a range of factors that constrain and enable career development. These factors were discussed in Chapters 7 & 8. Adopting the road map metaphor again, these factors can be conceptualised as the level of investment made in the road infrastructure that either improves the quality of the roads, or causes them to deteriorate. For example, the following factors act to improve the career journey for respondents: positive attitudes towards the provision and availability of flexible work practices; a supportive spouse; the existence of mentors and networks; opportunities for education, training and development, and work experience; a supportive organisational culture; equal opportunities for both genders; and proactive career management strategies offered by organisations. Where these factors failed to be provided, it led respondents to experience a bumpy journey along the career road. Fortunately however, such negative factors did not cause any respondents in this research to crash along the journey and leave the road altogether. It should be noted that due to the sampling procedures, all of the sample were employed, there were no examples of men or women who had crashed in their careers.

A limitation of this metaphor is that it is only two-dimensional. It does not capture a respondent's individual personal experience of career, such as their level of satisfaction. Furthermore, the metaphor does not allow for the individualised definitions of career and success to be represented. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that there is an additional layer to this metaphor that needs to be drawn out. The discussion in Chapter 6 highlighted how the majority of men and women conceptualised career in subjective terms, rather than overt objective terms such as *position*. Analysis of the career histories of respondents however, reveals that many of the men and women did experience career progression. Some respondents (6) had definite career goals that involved progression up the organisational hierarchy. The remaining majority of respondents did not have specific career goals. Whilst they did not aspire to senior positions, their career journey actually led them to achieve such positions. Finally, it should be noted that the metaphor does not assume that all individuals experience career development. For example, some individuals do not have the ambition, attitude or ability to experience career development.

The diversity of career paths further reaffirms the need for a metaphor that recognises the range of career options open to individuals, even in the same profession. The road map metaphor accommodates this need by conceptualising such diversity through alternative roads, routes or side roads. As Bailyn (1982: 87) states: 'We need multiple models so that career paths can have sufficient flexibility to accommodate the much greater variety of life styles now emerging'.

9.2.4 Comparing this career journey metaphor to existing theories

It is recognised that this metaphor is similar to the stage theories of Super (1957) and Levinson et al. (1978, 1996) because it is based on age-related stages. However, these previous models do not capture the complexity of women's careers. The road map metaphor is based on a contemporary understanding of men's and women's career development. Furthermore, the road map metaphor recognises that there are multiple factors influencing the career development of men and women, which often mean that their career paths are neither linear nor stable.

Felice Schwartz (1989) in her well known work on the “mommy track” also suggested that the path of women’s careers can be influenced by having a family. The value of my research is that it extends the work of Schwartz (1989) by showing that men may also choose to take a path that focuses on family. Thus whilst much theory has discussed the differences between men’s and women’s career development, my research shows that there are similarities when it comes to balancing work and family.

It should also be acknowledged that the metaphor of a career highway has been proposed by other researchers. Hewlett and Buck Luce (2005) adopt the image of a career highway to depict the push and pull factors that influence professional women to leave organisations or the workforce, and then to re-enter it. They use language such as ‘off-ramps’ and ‘on-ramps’ to describe the range of factors influencing women’s career choices. However the purpose of their model is not to conceptualise the complete process or journey of career development, which my metaphor seeks to do.

The foundation of this metaphor differs from previous research in several distinct ways. First, only limited research to date has compared the career development of a similar group of males and females. If any comparisons are to be meaningfully made between the genders, then the sample needs to comprise men and women from similar backgrounds and professions. For example, as mentioned previously, Arthur, Inkson and Pringle (1999) compare the career development of men and women in New Zealand, but a limitation of their research is that the participants belong to diverse occupational backgrounds. Employing such a diverse sample makes it difficult to compare the career experiences of individuals due to their occupational differentiation. Arthur et al. (1999) use a sample comprising both low skilled and highly skilled individuals. The nature of low skilled careers is that individuals may not be as focused on upward career progression, or invest as much in their career development as more highly skilled and educated individuals.

To overcome this limitation, the accounting profession was chosen as a contextual basis for this research. Unlike previous research, this sample was based on highly qualified professionals, who by the very nature of their occupation invest a high degree of human capital in their careers. As shown in this research, the respondents all undertook some form of post-secondary qualification, with the majority undertaking a bachelors degree or higher. This suggests a certain degree of career commitment by the respondents. This research has shown that the majority of male and female respondents entered the accounting profession early in their career (immediately after high school) and have remained in the profession for life. Only a minority embarked on an accounting career later in life. Three of the respondents admitted considering careers outside the profession, however refrained from making such a change because of the level of education and training they had invested in their careers. Only one respondent actually left the profession altogether and retrained as a primary school teacher.

Second, much of the existing careers research was conducted between the 1950s and the 1980s, and mainly conducted overseas. During this period, the typical working pattern for women was to work until they were married, and then leave the workforce for motherhood. For example, whilst Levinson et al. (1978 & 1996) base their theories of men's and women's career development on white collar professionals, the problem is that their research was conducted over a lengthy time frame (from the 1970s to 1980s). Similarly, Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) examine the career development of men and women in Australia, but this was from 1973 to 1990. There have been many changes to the Australian work environment since the period in which this study was conducted.

As highlighted throughout this research, it was considered important to develop a model of careers based on the current Australian context to determine if there are any similarities and differences with the existing theories. There are several differences that emerged from the research. First, the results revealed that all of the women in the sample rejoined the workforce following having children, with the overwhelming majority only taking minimum maternity leave. However it should be noted that this was the result of the sampling procedures, not how they managed their leave. Second, the women in this

research continued to balance career and motherhood, and did not see the two roles as mutually exclusive (as suggested by Farmer (1985)). Third, in contrast to previous research, male respondents did recognise the importance of careers that enabled a greater work–family balance. This is evidenced by those men who chose not to pursue senior positions because of lifestyle reasons or to have a greater work–life balance. Finally, there were some men and women in the pre-retirement 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.

Finally, the nature of the road map metaphor recognises the individual nature of career development. Previous models have focused on predicting or being deterministic of the career development of individuals, failing to reflect the complex interaction between an individual, the organisation, society and their career development. The metaphor of a career journey allows for the notion that careers may be characterised by unique aspects that influence the experience of individuals as they travel along the career road. Whilst the overall journey of individuals may be similar, the personal nature of their careers is reflected in the bumps and potholes they experience along the way. For example, if a group of people all set out on a trip with a similar destination in mind, their journey may differ slightly due to several reasons. These may include the extent of traffic, the time of day at which they travel, or problems they experience with the car. These factors are similar to those factors outlined in Chapters 6–8 that influence the career development of the men and women interviewed.

9.2.5 Applying the career journey metaphor to respondents from the study

The following section will demonstrate how the career journey metaphor can be applied to the career histories of respondents in order to conceptualise their career development. Four examples will be provided to reflect the different career journeys that men and women may undertake based on their differing personal circumstances. The examples comprise a woman who combines career and motherhood (respondent 28), a married woman who chooses not to have children (respondent 34), a male who follows the traditional linear career (3), and a male who makes career changes to accommodate his family (20). A more detailed description of the career histories of these respondents, and the remainder of the sample is provided in Appendix E.

Respondent 28's career journey began in the corporate sector after completing an accounting degree at university. She travelled along the career highway until reaching the family roundabout (after about four years). At this point she detoured off the career path to have a child. Instead of resuming her original journey along the highway, she altered her journey and took a road that led her to embark on a career in the education field (lasting approximately two years). This journey was punctuated by a series of broken lines and mini rest stops, representing the times when she worked part-time or stopped to have more children.

The career journey switched direction again when she followed the self employment route. She believed that the flexibility of this road would better enable her to balance work and family. She travelled along this road for some time (approximately five years).

*I actually **didn't find it all that easy** because I found the difficulty with being a tutor was that you had to be in a certain place at a certain time, so that **wasn't good for children**. So that's why after I had my second child I didn't return to teaching until he returned to school. That's when I did private practice work*

because it was more flexible. I could work at night and I could put off a client much more easily than a class of students. (respondent 28f)

Respondent 28 then changed career direction again, resuming the education route. She coasted along this road for some time, slowly progressing up the university hierarchy. However she encountered some bumps and potholes along the way.

Very strong male domination in our area. Very few females have been encouraged to take on management roles. (respondent 28f)

The fact that you have to play games to get goals achieved. You have to massage the boys egos. (respondent 28)

The respondent then reached the pinnacle of her university career (senior lecturer), where the road plateaued out and she travelled along it during her middle adulthood, working full-time. The respondent predicts that her career journey will continue along unchanged for the next four to five years, at which point she will retire. However, the full-time journey will be replaced by short trips that enable her to undertake some paid and unpaid work in retirement.

I intend to stay in this role until I retire in four or five years time. Although I intend to do something in retirement. It will be some paid work... Its because my superannuation is not sufficient, so its financial. Also I would like to have some involvement in the profession. (respondent 28f)

Whilst respondent 34 was born overseas, the overwhelming majority of her career journey has been carried out in Australia. She began the journey in a professional services firm in Canada, travelling along the career highway for a short time (one year). She then reached the first roundabout in her career, where she detoured off the highway to obtain overseas experience. This turning led her to rejoin the career highway in Australia, where she has remained working to date. She raced along this highway progressing through roles in her career.

Respondent 34 reached manager by the age of 28. She viewed this as a turning point in her journey. At this point, respondent 34 undertook a major project that promoted her profile within the organisation and highlighted her skills to senior management. This point in the journey accelerated the speed at which she travelled along the highway, enabling her to reach partner by 34.

*A highlight or **turning point** in my career was for me whilst I was a manager around 28. For a couple of years about 25% of my workload involved running at a national level our learning and education department... I obviously had to **stop and grow up and consolidate**, and I did that by being a manager for a number of years. I was admitted to the partnership at age 34. (respondent 34f)*

From there respondent 34's career journey did not completely plateau out, as she assumed senior positions within the organisation, such as the board of partners. However, at this point in the journey at the age of 40, she has reached a crossroads. This midlife transition junction has led her to reevaluate her current position, and consider where her journey will take her in the future. She wishes to continue travelling along the career journey, but is not so interested in driving on the highway. She is more interested in taking a road that will enable a less hectic pace to her journey, and provide a more fulfilling and enjoyable trip. This is manifest in her interest in pursuing charitable work or non executive director positions. Respondent 34 is in the financial position that the purpose of her future journey is now for intrinsic reasons, such as self fulfilment, rather than extrinsic reasons, like providing for a family or her own financial survival.

In contrast to respondent 28, respondent 34 bypassed the family roundabout, resulting in her speedy arrival at the pinnacle of her career journey (partner). This represented the achievement of objective career success. She admitted encountering only one road hazard in her journey. This was the male-dominated culture of her organisation. Whilst this did not slow her career progression, it was a hazard she had to navigate carefully. She admitted developing strategies to counter the culture.

*The first time I found it an issue when we merged with ** who had a reputation for being **hugely chauvinistic**. There were no female partners. I remember strategically thinking that if I am not careful **I will be marginalised** quite quickly. **So I developed a strategy for cross referring work...** I have found myself being **shy, quiet or withdrawn** because the testosterone level is high, but I say that is my stuff and not theirs. I try to ignore that and have **learnt to express my femininity in a way that they don't find offensive, too cute, too frilly, too power play, or I just wouldn't have the relationship I do or have had the opportunities.***
(respondent 34f)

Respondent 3 was the oldest male interviewed in the research, born in 1938. His career journey was with the one organisation. After completing his diploma course in accounting, he commenced the career journey along the highway in 1955. During this time, no barriers or roundabouts existed to impede his travel. Respondent 3 was married with a family, but he believed that these did not act as a constraining factor in his career. He reached partner within ten years, experiencing no deviations off the highway. He then travelled along the career highway, progressing to managing director, where he coasted along on the same path for the majority of his career. The journey only began its decline stage as he approached retirement. He dropped back several gears in his travels, and the road was characterised by broken lines as he worked part-time in pre-retirement. Respondent 3 was on the brink of completing his journey at the time of the interview, but was interested in the occasional outing allowing him to conduct some consulting work in retirement.

After university, respondent 20 commenced employment with a professional services firm. He travelled along the career highway for three years, remaining in the one lane with the one organisation, until he reached the marriage roundabout. At this point, he changed lanes, transferring to another office location of the firm in order to be with his wife. He remained in this lane for a year, before switching lanes to another location and organisation. He continued to travel along this highway for five years, slowly progressing through the organisation. Along the trip, he experienced some difficulties

with a seriously ill child. By his early 30s, respondent 20 had reached a junction in his career where he decided to change from the busy highway to a less demanding road. Respondent 20 had decided he did not want to pursue partner in the professional services firm, so he moved to a second tier firm. He was looking for a friendlier type of organisation than just the 'big five' at that time. He remained on this road, but came to another junction in his mid 30s. Once again he changed direction, and his journey followed the self employment route. He thought that this journey would be more flexible, and enable a greater work–life balance. He has been coasting along this road now for approximately three years. He predicts the journey to last another ten years, by which time he will be in a financial position (his mid 40s) to pursue other interests.

*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)*

9.3 Conceptualising career and success

The literature review in Chapter 2 highlighted the importance of exploring how men and women define career and career success (Alban Metcalfe, 1989; O'Leary, 1997). Limited research has been conducted in Australia to investigate this issue for both women and men. The results of this research (as discussed in Chapter 6) reveal that the majority of men and women conceptualised career and success in subjective terms, as many of the respondents identified terms such as achieving a work–life–family balance, job satisfaction or happiness. These findings support the work of Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and Hall (1996a) who propose that careers in the twenty-first century will be characterised by a greater focus on achieving psychological success, such as family stability and job satisfaction, rather than objective success, such as vertical progression.

However, the findings of this research contrast the Australian work of Poole and Langan-Fox (1997), who report that men tend to define career and success more in objective terms. Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) also report that men in their research tend to define career in more objective terms. My research revealed that many of the men in the accounting profession 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. Poole and Langan-Fox's (1997) research was conducted during the 1970s and 1980s. The findings of my research start to question whether men's conceptualisation of career and success has thus changed over time. More research is needed to explore whether these findings reflect the contemporary context of careers in Australia.

With regard to conceptualisations of career and success, this research showed 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. Being financially comfortable was listed by more men than women, whilst the four remaining terms were listed by more women than men. An explanation for these gender differences may relate to the male model of career development versus women's career theories. In traditional male models of career development, emphasis is on 'climbing the ladder' to achieve increasing power, position and responsibility. For women however, emphasis is on achieving subjective success (Gallos, 1989; Gutek & Larwood, 1987). Whilst women may aspire to senior positions, the pressures of combining family and career, may mean that greater priority is placed on obtaining fulfilling and mentally stimulating work, rather than progression (Powell & Mainiero, 1992; White, Cox & Cooper, 1997). White et al. (1997) for example, report that the women in their study have a stronger demand for challenging and interesting work, rather than a desire for promotion.

The results of my research are similar to the findings of Tharenou, Latimer and Conroy (1994), who report that career encouragement from colleagues and senior management is more important for women as it increases their awareness of the initial and continued training and development needed to progress. They also report that it helps boost women's confidence and reaffirms their position in the organisation.

An emerging theme of my research is that men and women are conceptualising career in both collective and individual terms. From a collective focus, respondents conceptualised career and success in terms of their connections with family, colleagues and clients. From an individual focus, emphasis was on personal development and achievement. However, in the case of the gender differences listed above, the research demonstrates that more women than men are conceptualising career in collective terms. McColl-Kennedy and Dann (2000) also explain that in their research, the women tend to place importance on recognition, such as colleagues recognising their achievements and role in the organisation. Marshall (1989), Powell and Mainiero (1992) and Pringle and McCulloch-Dixon (2003) also recognise that women focus on relationships with regard to their careers and success.

The findings of my research regarding the women is similar to the research of Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) who report that subjective factors, such as work satisfaction are more important in women's perceptions of career success than objective factors, such as salary and status. Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) therefore conclude that women choose and value careers based on more intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards. McColl-Kennedy and Dann (2000) also report that women in their research view success in subjective terms, such as enjoyment, fulfilment, recognition and control.

In general, the majority of respondents in my research 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. These reasons for dissatisfaction emphasise that women's careers are more complex due to family considerations.

In summary, the results revealed a very individualised conceptualisation of success, emphasising the important role of personal motivations and circumstances. The conceptualisations were influenced by the respondent's own personal circumstance at the time of the interview, as well as the needs which motivate them at any stage in life, including whether they had children; whether these children were young or no longer a financial burden; the age of the respondent; their type of employment; or their expectations of a career. Similarly in their research, Nash and Stevenson (2004) recognise how important it is for each person to understand and develop their unique definition of success over time. The significance of my results is the emphasis on the idiosyncratic nature of careers, which supports the need for conceptualising career as a fluid set of pathways that can be classified into age-related stages.

From an HR perspective, the idiosyncratic nature of success also poses problems for organisations attempting to address the career needs and satisfaction of their employees. Perhaps more research is needed to explore how organisations can help their employees achieve success and satisfaction in their career.

9.4 Factors influencing career development

Exploring the third research question represented a major component of this study. Chapter 3 was devoted entirely to discussing the literature relating to the role and significance of personal, inter-personal and organisational factors on the career development of men and women. Limited research has been conducted to investigate the relevance of these factors for both men and women. This study therefore sought to contribute further to the field by ensuring that both genders were included in the research design. Furthermore, the research sought to unpack what influence the factors had on the nuances of the accounting context, and thus the implications for the profession specifically.

9.4.1 Personal factors

The two main personal factors found to have an influence on career development were that of balancing career and family, and the importance of family and friends (as discussed in sections 7.2 and 7.3). The research showed that balancing career and family was the most significant factor cited by respondents in discussing their career development. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) similarly argue that the major contrast between men's and women's careers centres on the conflict between family commitments and work.

Four categories were proposed in order to describe how the men and women in the research balanced work and family commitments: work devoted men (WM); work/family men (WFM); non-traditional women (NTW); and work/family women (WFW). Developing these categories has helped to identify the key career-related issues faced by each group. The categorisation will also assist organisations in trying to develop human resource policies to target each group by understanding what their needs are, their fears, dilemmas, conflict and expectations. Other researchers, such as Tharenou (1999) also categorised men and women on how they balanced work and family. The majority of men in the research were WM and they did not alter their career development to accommodate family commitments. On the other hand, there was a minority of men (WFM) who admitted changing their careers in order to achieve a better balance of work and family.

The majority of working mothers were classified as WFW as they either worked part-time, or changed their employment situation in order to accommodate their family commitments. Many of these women reported having to make compromises and set boundaries around their involvement in the workforce. In contrast, the minority of women who were NTW did not need to make accommodations as their husbands assumed the major share of household and family responsibilities. As a result, these women believed that they had more time and energy to devote to their careers. They also reported experiencing less work–family conflict.

These categories are similar to that of Blair-Loy (2003) who distinguishes between the work devoted female and the family devoted female. Bailyn (1982) also distinguishes between work devoted and family devoted individuals.

Gender roles can be used to explain the experiences of men and women with regard to balancing career and family. In line with gender role theory, the majority of men in the research perceived themselves as the 'breadwinner' and therefore placed greater focus on career, as opposed to addressing any concerns of work–family conflict. There were only a small proportion of male respondents who actively changed their career path due to family considerations. The women on the other hand, tended to take proactive steps to manage the work–family conflict by changing their employment situation.

An emerging theme to arise from the research was the level of fears, dilemmas, conflict and stress voiced by both men and women in the research. Many of these respondents had experienced very successful careers in objective terms, such as achieving senior positions, but were feeling depressed, disappointed or they simply questioned their success because they felt that they had failed the work–family balance. This was supported by the results discussed in Chapter 6 which showed how a number of respondents felt dissatisfied with their careers because they had failed the work–family balance.

It was typically the women in the research who raised concerns over the dilemma of how to balance work and family. 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. They wanted more reassurance and guidance from the organisation on how they could best 'plan' for having a family so that it would not negatively influence their careers.

Unlike the research of Farmer (1985) and White et al. (1997), the women in this study appeared to value career as equally important as family life. This was evidenced by the

fact that only one woman took a break from the workforce for a few years to have children. However, it should be noted that my sample did not include any women who had left the workforce altogether, or for an extended period of time, and therefore not choosing family over career. Most women indicated a desire to have a career as well as being a mother. In their minds, the two were not mutually exclusive. However, the subsequent collision between the two worlds of work and family caused much time-based and strain-based conflict for the respondents.

The research also highlighted a number of characteristics of the accounting profession which had implications for how men and women balanced career and family. First, women feared taking a break from the workforce to have children because they felt that they would not remain up to date with accounting standards. The regulatory framework of the accounting profession requires that individuals need to complete ongoing professional development in order to maintain their professional certification. Organisations and the professional associations need to develop ways that enable women to maintain their professional qualifications whilst on maternity leave so that they do not feel isolated or lose touch. Burke and McKeen (1995), Jackson and Hayday (1997) and Morely, O'Neill, Jackson and Bellamy (2001) also report similar findings in their research in the accounting professions in their countries.

The second major issue was the mixed attitudes on whether working parents could be a partner. The research showed that some felt that being a partner was a full-time role, whilst others believed it could be part-time. The major problem centred on the assumption that partnership in the accounting firms requires full-time work. These findings support the research of Morely et al. (2001) and ICAA (2001), which report that one of the barriers to career development for women is the attitudes towards part-time work and flexible work practices. Morely et al. (2001) report that part-time work was not valued, not available, and that no flexibility existed to enable respondents to work from home.

Third, from an organisational context, the research explored the availability and structure of part-time work; the attitude of individuals and organisations toward flexible work practices and part-time careers; and the influence of career breaks on career progression. Despite this area receiving considerable attention in the media, women in the research still reported encountering difficulties in the organisation when they tried to combine career with family. This is also despite some of the organisations in the research being applauded for their equal opportunity policies. As with previous research, there is still a vast divide between the rhetoric and reality of family friendly organisations.

The other personal factor found to influence career development was the importance of family and friends. Both male and female respondents cited a significant family or friend who had a positive influence on their career development by providing a source of advice, guidance, support and encouragement in their careers. In addition, two of the women stated that an unsupportive spouse had influenced their careers. However, this lack of support made them more resilient and determined to be successful. None of the men mentioned having an unsupportive spouse.

9.4.2 Inter-personal factors

The two key inter-personal factors found to have an influence on career development were that of mentors and networks. Sections 7.4 and 7.5 examined the influence of these two factors.

Mentoring is becoming increasingly important in people's career experiences. The explosion in mentoring literature emphasises its growing importance in organisational behaviour. This research has shown that mentoring is still perceived to have an important influence on career development by both men and women.

The fact that 48 out of the 59 respondents had access to a mentor at some stage in their career contrasts with the findings of Morley et al. (2001) who report that a large majority of participants in their research of the accounting profession in Australia (77 per cent) do not have a formal mentoring scheme available in their organisation. Only 22 per cent of participants report having a mentor available to them in their organisation (Morley et al., 2001).

There were two key emerging themes to arise from the research with regard to mentoring. First, the research showed that mentoring was linked to the age of the respondents. Whilst many researchers have shown that mentoring is useful for younger people or when they are in early career, this research has also shown it is highly valued by more senior or older respondents. On one hand, the older respondents were interested in 'leaving a legacy' by acting as mentors for younger employees. It emphasised the collective focus of what they wanted out of a career and what success meant to them. Specifically the older female respondents were keen to act as a mentor in order to provide a role model for younger women and to help them progress through the organisation.

Other respondents noted the paucity of effective mentoring provided to more senior or older employees. These respondents reported feeling vulnerable and uncertain about their future career direction. They wanted the organisation to play a greater role in

supporting their careers by providing access to mentors or counselling. Given that many of the respondents in this research reached partner by their early thirties, and some even by 28, they have too many years left in the workplace for organisations not to address their career concerns. The research showed that they 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.

The lack of mentoring provided for senior respondents led some of them to seek out external coaches. This represented the other major emerging theme of the research. As outlined by Powell and Mainiero (1992), Tharenou and Zambruno (2001) and White et al. (1997), mentoring can provide both career and psychosocial support. The research showed that the respondents used the coaching for both career and psychosocial reasons: to learn more about themselves; to crystallise their career goals and concerns; and to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and their passions. It was an important means by which respondents sought career and business guidance. Whilst the males used external coaches to crystallise career goals, the women used them to act as role models in their career. The research clearly showed that both the men and women were using external coaches to talk about work and life issues. The issue of external coaching is an area that requires further research to explore whether it is encouraged by many organisations, or pursued by individuals directly.

Parsloe and Rolph (2004) report that coaching is a growing phenomena in American organisations. They reviewed the findings of the training and development survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management. They report that 78 per cent of the survey's respondents use coaching as part of their learning and development activities. In the United Kingdom Bluckert (2004) also states that there has been a rapid expansion in the field of coaching. He suggests that the coaches come from a broad range of backgrounds and possess varying levels of relevant qualifications. The focus of coaching is also quite broad, including sports, life, executive and career coaching (Bluckert, 2004). Unfortunately, there is a lack of detailed research about the phenomena of coaching in Australia.

The results of the research also revealed that there were different types of mentoring programs operating in the various organisational context, including: the mentoring offered as part of graduate development programs; mentoring programs within the universities; and the mentoring programs offered by the professional association CPA Australia. The fact that the latter exists demonstrates that the professional associations recognise the need for and value of mentoring. According to Clarke and Howard (2001), the aims of the CPA mentoring program are to provide members with more structured practical experience, where they do not have the benefit of direct supervision by a professional accountant; and accelerate progress to full CPA designation. Since 2001, in order to progress to CPA status, new enrollees are required to complete the CPA mentoring program and have three years supervised or mentored work experience. Unsupervised work experience is no longer accepted by CPA.

A further finding of this research showed that the women highly valued access to female mentors and networks and believed that these strongly influenced their career development. The career-related benefits of female mentors and women's networks were a source of role modelling and provided assistance to counter the male-dominated culture of their organisations. Some of the women in the research viewed the value of mentors and networks so highly that they wished to act as mentors themselves.

Finally, the research revealed that many of the respondents recognised the value of internal networks, so much so that they wished to establish their own within their organisation. In particular, many of the women felt that their career and personal development would be enhanced by participation in women's networks. Other respondents, such as those in company C, felt that formal internal networks comprising similarly qualified professionals would better enable the flow of information throughout the organisation. The research also showed that by encouraging membership in industry or professional networks, organisations can help employees to garner career-related information and clients for the business.

9.4.3 Organisational factors

There were a range of organisational factors that were found to constrain or enable career development. In line with previous research, this study revealed that there were several factors that had an influence on career development, both positively and negatively: undertaking further education, training and development; opportunities for work experience; organisational culture; politics; equal opportunity and the role of gender; and organisational career management. Both men and women agreed that undertaking education, training and work experience had a positive influence on their career development. It provided respondents with the knowledge, skills, abilities and professional certification needed to perform their jobs and to broaden their career opportunities.

An important theme to emerge from the research was that many respondents believed that undertaking a variety of work experience and challenging work were critical in maintaining their levels of job satisfaction, energy and enthusiasm. Respondents also conceptualised career in terms of undertaking continued learning and development. When respondents were not challenged, they reported feeling dissatisfied with their career and began to consider other career options. The important implication for organisations is that if they do not wish to lose valued employees, then they need to provide them with continued learning and development, whether that be through challenging roles or the opportunity to undertake varied work experience.

The results are similar to research conducted by Walton and Mallon (2004) who report that almost all the participants in their research view career as fundamentally linked to learning. It also supports Hall's (1996a) belief that careers in the twenty-first century will be characterised by continuous learning and emphasis on individuals with know-how.

Organisational culture and politics were also identified as factors influencing career development for both men and women. The positive influence of organisational culture on career development was the supportive peer environment found in some organisations.

which the male and female respondents believed provided them with the vital training and experience needed in their early career stages. In contrast, the aggressive culture of some firms had negative implications for both men and women, including increased dissatisfaction with the job and work environment, and impeded career development, and these resulted in some people leaving the organisation. In particular, the women also cited the old boys' culture and the politics of an organisation as having a negative influence on their career development. Such factors influenced their level of knowledge and power within the organisation, and more importantly, the career opportunities made available to them.

Mann (1995) concludes that if women are to use organisational politics to their advantage, they need to acquire power and have political competence. She believes that awareness or understanding of the organisation, and awareness of one's predisposition to behave in certain ways, are both important elements of political competence. The male-dominated culture of the organisations in the research meant it was difficult for women to acquire this power. Due to the culture, the women in the research also admitted having to manage their gender in terms of their appearance and behaviour, so that sex-role stereotypes were maintained. This gender management has been discussed by Deborah Sheppard (as highlighted by Morgan, 1986).

There were mixed attitudes among the respondents as to whether equal opportunity existed in their organisations, and any influence that this had on their career development. Both male and female respondents agreed that the smaller firms were good at promoting equal opportunity and gender equity. This was due to the fact that in the smaller firms the employees tended to know one another and there was greater informality. Some respondents indicated that they mixed with their colleagues socially outside the workplace which helped to ensure a culture of informality. In contrast, there were mixed attitudes in the larger organisations. The research highlighted that whilst some organisations are applauded publicly for their equal opportunity, there is much discrepancy between the rhetoric and the reality. The women believed that the level of inequity influenced their access to career opportunities and resulted in unfavourable

attitudes towards part-time work and working mothers. As a result, some women believed that their career development was inhibited, and which led to some women leaving the organisation to pursue other career paths. None of the men reported that they perceived there to be unequal opportunities in their organisation, or that it was a relevant factor in their career development.

Some of the women also cited instances where they believed that their gender had negative implications for their career. For example, a number of women reported that they were not given a promotion or particular position because the organisation feared that they would leave to have children.

The essence of the results highlights the gendered culture of organisations and how these cultures reinforce stereotypes about the roles of men and women in the workplace, and subsequently affect their experience of organisational life. The majority of women in this research are employed in organisations with a male-dominated workforce and hence strong male culture. These women told of difficulties they experienced when they came up against the male culture.

One of the most significant findings to emerge from the research was that in contrast to theorists such as Allred, Snow and Miles (1996), Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and Hall (1996a), the overwhelming majority of respondents wanted organisations to play a proactive role in career management. They believed it helped to provide them with career encouragement, identify career opportunities, and crystallise their own career goals. Where it was not provided, respondents were left feeling isolated from the organisation, vulnerable, and unsure of their future career path.

The real concern for organisations is that many of these respondents in the research who indicated anxiety and dissatisfaction, are some of the most valued, highly skilled and senior employees in the organisation. The organisation risks losing them if they fail to acknowledge this need for proactive career management.

9.5 Limitations of the research

Whilst this study has been based on a sound foundation for conducting research and analysing data, there are some limitations of the findings. First, the main limitation of this research is the value or validity of the qualitative approach. It is argued that qualitative research does not allow the researcher to test hypotheses statistically, and the sampling method often means that qualitative research is not generalisable. In answer to this argument a number of researchers however, note that since career is increasingly more likely to be seen as a subjective phenomenon, research which recognises the value of individual sense-making in careers is necessary (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Collin & Watts, 1996; Walton & Mallon, 2004). Qualitative or interpretive research methods are thus the methods most likely to shed light on the sense-making process individuals undergo during their career development.

Second, it is acknowledged that the results of this study are restricted to careers within the accounting profession. However the research may be a catalyst for other researchers to test its relevance in other demographic or occupational contexts.

The third limitation of this research was the use of telephone interviews for the majority of the data collection, rather than face-to-face interviews. Given that the researcher is vision impaired, telephone interviews were considered the most practical means of collecting the data. It is felt that telephone interviews cause the respondent to be less comfortable and less willing to reveal information. However this did not appear to be a problem in the research as the telephone and face-to-face interviews yielded the same information from respondents.

The final limitation of the study related to the data collection process. As outlined in section 4.8, the initial focus of the research was to sample a range of accounting firms from different tiers in the industry, however this process was not effective. Only one company agreed to participate in the research (company A). As a result, the sampling process had to be altered. An advantage of the grounded theory approach however, is

that it recognises the researcher's ability to change the nature of the phenomenon under study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It means that additional changes can be made to the data collection process. Thus in order to overcome initial response difficulties, the sample was widened to include professionals in the broader accounting profession. This led to respondents being drawn from the corporate sector, not-for-profit sector and from academic institutions. As a result, a much broader sample of respondents was obtained, and this improved the richness of the data gathered. It should be recognised that the sample was not designed to be representative of the accounting profession.

9.6 Implications for further research

The major outcome of this research has been the development of the career journey metaphor to map the career development of the men and women sampled. The metaphor may be used in future research to map the career experiences of individuals from a range of occupational, organisational and demographic contexts. This may help both organisations and researchers to highlight, unpack or illuminate the richness of the career experiences of individuals. For example, Australia is in the midst of a skills shortage. If greater research is conducted in understanding or mapping the career journeys of various individuals, it may shed some light on the problem.

There are also a number of themes that this study highlighted as needing further research. First, a more critical examination is needed of the notion of career and success. Research could explore how men and women of various ages, backgrounds and family situations define career and success. As this research suggests, is there a shift towards a more subjective conceptualisation of 'career'?

Second, this leads to the question of what individuals expect from a career. Do the majority of individuals still aspire to a traditional notion of career, or are younger employees changing their career expectations in line with the boundaryless career concept? What are the similarities and differences between how various age cohorts conceptualise career and success?

Third, why do men and women conceptualise career and success in both collective and individual terms? What implications does this have for organisations? Is this linked to their age or stage in life? Can the organisation play a role in helping employees feel successful in their careers?

Fourth, several respondents in the research discussed the issue of external coaching. This is an area that has received little attention in the field of human resource management, and would therefore represent a key area for future research into career development. Research could explore: does coaching work; how well does it work; who does it work best with; what methods and approaches work best; who are the people using coaching; why and how are organisations showing an interest in coaching; what are the qualifications and background of the coaches; what requirements are there for licensing of coaches; and are there any professional associations overseeing practitioners in the field.

Fifth, the research revealed that some of the more senior or older employees in the organisation are feeling vulnerable and unsure about their future career development. More research is needed to explore the feelings and concerns of this cohort. For example, what are their fears and concerns?; what support, if any, do they need from the organisation; and is this age-related, or is it occurring among younger respondents as well?

Finally, the above theme highlights the need for more in-depth research to examine what individuals perceive the role of organisations to be in their career development. Furthermore, if organisations are to play a greater role in career management, then what specifically are individuals expecting from their employer?

9.7 Implications for organisations

Chapters 7 and 8 highlighted a range of factors found to constrain and enable the career development of the men and women interviewed. As discussed in section 9.2.3, these constraining factors act as road barriers in the career journey of the men and women in the sample. If organisations place greater investment in improving the road infrastructure, some of these potholes may be reduced or eliminated.

The research identified that external coaching is becoming a popular tool to help individuals manage their careers. Organisations may wish to provide coaching (whether internally or outsourced externally) to provide career counselling for their employees. Organisations cannot afford to lose the loyalty and commitment of some of its most senior and highly valued employees.

The research also showed that many respondents valued job variety and undertaking challenging work. When these were not present in their careers, they soon became disillusioned, dissatisfied or bored with the job. This was supported by the age-related pathways discussed in Chapter 5, which highlighted that many respondents reached a crossroads or plateau in their careers where they re-evaluated their future career direction. As a result, some respondents changed career direction. This is similar to the research of Gordon and Whelan (1998) who interviewed 36 highly successful women in the United States. Their research showed that a low challenge and few opportunities to contribute may create dissatisfaction and frustration, which often leads to a job change. This is an important finding for organisations to consider. They need to be aware that such employees may need help and support at this critical stage if they wish to retain them.

An interesting issue raised by older respondents was that they wanted to prolong their careers and pursue challenging roles. These respondents felt that they still had something to contribute to their organisation. Organisations may consider harnessing the skills and experience of this segment and use them to help educate younger employees. For example, this research emphasises the value of and need for mentoring, particularly of

younger employees. The experience of older employees could be harnessed to develop mentoring relationships with younger members of the organisation. As the Australian population ages, more people may be interested in prolonging their careers beyond their 50s and 60s, thus organisations may need to consider this in workforce planning.

The overall message from the research was that both men and women wanted the organisation to play a greater role in facilitating their career development. Organisations can make the career journey more satisfying for employees by providing appropriate support and encouragement. Organisations cannot assume that the boundaryless career concept in which responsibility for managing a career rests with the individual, is relevant for all employees.

The research for example, showed that the majority of respondents did not actively make detailed plans or goals about their career. Proactive organisational career management may therefore be more beneficial for respondents with unplanned careers as the organisation can work with them to help foster their career development. This can be achieved by identifying career opportunities or providing them with the training and development they need to progress to roles that meet their needs. Respondents who plan their careers tend to know what positions they are striving for, but need the organisation's help in facilitating their progression. Career management strategies such as talent programs or high performer fast tracks, may therefore assist the latter in achieving their goals. Given the focus and determination of those with planned careers, their goals need to be acknowledged and accommodated by the organisation, or they may be quick to leave the organisation in order to fulfil their career plans elsewhere.

A number of women in the research discussed the fears and dilemmas they faced with having to combine career and family. If organisations do not wish to lose valued female employees, then they need to continue to develop ways to reorganise work, or providing greater support for those employees using telecommuting.

The other major dilemma facing women related to the regulatory framework of the accounting profession which requires individuals to undergo ongoing professional development in order to maintain their certification in the industry. Organisations and the professional associations need to develop ways that enable women to maintain their professional qualifications whilst on maternity leave so that they do not become isolated or lose touch with the industry.

In summary, the success of a journey depends a lot on the external factors influencing the trip. Similarly, a career also is subject to the influences of a range of personal, social and organisational factors, and therefore does not occur in isolation. Individuals and organisations need to recognise this fact and therefore view career as a journey that occurs in a dynamic and constantly changing environment.