A ROAD MAP FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT – EXPLORING THE CAREER EXPERIENCES OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION IN AUSTRALIA

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CANDIDATE'S CERTIFICATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Signature

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PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS THESIS

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- Smith, T. 2005, Using metaphors in career theory: A road map for career development. Australian Centre for Research in Employment & Work Inaugural Conference, Melbourne, Australia, June 24–25.

- Smith, T. & Sheridan, A. 2005, More hands on please: Career development in the accounting profession, Australian New Zealand Academy of Management Conference, Canberra Australia, December 7-10.

ABSTRACT

The last few decades have witnessed many social, economic and political changes that have influenced the contemporary work environment in Australia. The question confronting both researchers and organisations is whether the traditional male model of career development is relevant for both men and women in this changing world. The aim of this research was therefore to explore how men and women in the accounting profession in Australia conceptualise what career and career success mean to them, and how this meaning shapes their career behaviour in the organisation and in their personal lives.

The research was conducted using an interpretive and grounded theory approach. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 59 men and women from the accounting profession in Australia. The Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1994) grounded theory approach was used in the data collection and analysis. A list of key themes or factors influencing career development was identified from the literature review and used to guide the research process. The strength of the grounded theory approach is that it can allow the researcher to discover a conceptual framework from the respondents interviewed and generate theory directly from this data (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

The research led to the development of a set of age-related pathways that described the stages men and women progressed through in their careers. Both the men and women progressed through three stages: early adulthood (early 20s); middle adulthood (late 20s to late 30s); and pre-retirement (50s+). The metaphor of a career journey was then proposed to illustrate this age-related framework.

The research revealed that there were many similarities between the men's and women's career development. The main area of divergence related to the issue of balancing career and family; with this being more complex for women. Whilst the findings of this research were similar to elements of the extant literature, the benefit of the research was that these elements were integrated into the one conceptual framework and relate to a contemporary context. The research also identified emerging themes which have important implications for organisations, and areas that need further research.