

**Plateau and Transition:  
Career Dynamics in a Changing World of Work**

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**Donald Alfred James Cable  
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*“No man needs sympathy because he has to work. ....Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”*

(Theodore Roosevelt, 1903)

The value in work, whether it be paid work in an employment situation, or non-paid work in the pursuit of academic achievement, is derived mainly from the satisfaction that results from doing that work. For myself a large part of that satisfaction is in turn dependent on the fun that one has along the way. I was fortunate in that respect to have in Dr. Ross Flett a supervisor who allowed me the freedom to introduce that fun whilst ensuring that sight was not lost of the ultimate goal. Thank you Ross for your support, understanding, and encouragement, and above all for providing an environment in which I was able to enjoy the experience. This was an experience I would willingly repeat for to experience is to learn and surely, learning from our experiences is a major satisfaction in life.

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I also acknowledge the contribution and constructive comments of Dr Fiona Alpass in the design of the questionnaire, and the support of the staff from the office of the School of Psychology in many logistical matters.

So, why study work?

*“Ancient philosophers and contemporary psychologists remind us that, in work, we establish our identity, implement our self-referent fantasies, expiate our guilt, pay homage to our deities, reenact early family dramas, develop the capacity for intimacy, escape from unwanted intimacies, satisfy neurotic and healthy cravings, insulate ourselves from pain, and pursue our own demise.”*

(Myers & Cairo, 1992, p. 561)

I dedicate this work to my daughter Katrina and my son Greg, who as friends and fellow travellers in life, provided me with a special inspiration.

To those who offered me sympathy, and to those who provided support and encouragement, I say thanks. I have my prize.

## ABSTRACT

This research investigated a number of hypotheses relevant to employee attitudes towards career plateau and career transition. The impact of job satisfaction, education, and the life balance orientation of individuals on career plateau and career transition, and the relationship between the two, was explored. As well as demographics, data pertaining to occupation, education, career status, career intentions, job satisfaction and life interests were examined. A self-administered questionnaire was completed by 234 managerial and supervisory employees from four major organisations. Within the study a subjectively based measure of career plateau was found to have greater explanatory power than an objectively based measure in many of the hypotheses investigated. Multiple regression analysis was utilised to explore the relationship between career plateau and career transition. Subjective career plateau contributed significantly to variability in career transition with 18% of the variance being explained. Subjective career plateau and years since last promotion, an objective measure of career plateau, were found to contribute significantly to variability in overall job satisfaction. Altogether 25% of the variance in overall job satisfaction was explained by knowing scores on these variables. Subjective career plateau contributed significantly to variability in satisfaction with promotion opportunities explaining 51% of that variance. Whilst overall job satisfaction was significant in its relationship with career transition, satisfaction with promotion opportunities was not significant due to a suppression effect. In this relationship 58% of the variance in career transition was explained by overall job satisfaction. Overall job satisfaction was found to not moderate on the relationship between career plateau and career transition or on the relationship between life balance orientation and career transition. A significant moderating effect of satisfaction with promotion opportunities was found on the relationship between career plateau and career transition with 27% of the variance being explained. A *t* test analysis indicated that career plateaued individuals were not more likely to be involved in current education nor were they more likely to state an intention to pursue further education. Univariate analysis indicated that whilst lower levels of education were associated with longer job tenures this association was not strong. Multivariate analysis revealed a significant moderating effect of education attained on the relationship between career plateau and career transition with 31% of the variance being explained. The limitations of the study are discussed. Primary amongst these are the difficulties imposed by the cross-sectional design.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*“Career development ranks almost universally as a top employee concern.”*

(Nicholson, 1993)

Much of the career development theory that has been in vogue was based on a number of assumptions. Primary amongst these is the assumption that once an individual has been ‘fitted’ to a job then career development occurs over the life span of that individual and progresses through a predictable sequence of stages until the individual eventually retires. Choice of career was viewed as a once-in-a-lifetime decision (Hall & Mirvis, 1994; Myers & Cairo, 1992; Sterns & Miklos, 1995) and within this context was often termed the steady-state or linear career (Driver, 1994). As Myers and Cairo (1992, p. 559) claim “The notion that an occupation, once chosen, remains an occupation for life remains a part of our national folklore.” Developmental models have received particular attention in recent times (Zunker, 1994) mapping career stages against life stages. Within that framework these models do acknowledge a wider sphere of influence, although some would argue that linking life cycles to career cycles is somewhat contrived or unnatural (Kelly, 1985). The authors of such theories could not, however, have predicted the environmental, economic, organisational, and individual value changes that would occur during the later decades of the twentieth century, changes that would have a significant impact on the world of work.

The changing world of work provides the context for the present study within which significant key career dynamics are investigated. Following a discussion of the emerging work environment the phenomenon of career plateau is introduced. The influences that this phenomenon is subjected to, and which will be explored in later chapters, are identified. Career transition is proposed to be one resolution to career plateau and it is

within this framework that the topic of transition is introduced. A number of factors are believed to influence both career plateau and career transition. Of interest to this particular study are job satisfaction, the life balance orientation of the individual, and the educational achievements and intentions of the individual, all of which are previewed in turn. Within the chapter summary, the remaining introductory chapters are outlined, and the rationale and justification for conducting the present research are confirmed.

### **The Changing World of Work**

Work and careers are constantly being redefined as organisations themselves are compelled through the survival instinct to respond to the turbulent market forces that pervade the world economy (Bridges, 1994; De Meuse, 1990; Driver, 1994; Kanter, 1989; Waterman et al, 1994). In a recent article Cascio (1995) describes the resultant dynamic and ever-changing work environment that currently prevails in organisations. He contends, as others have, that we have witnessed more change than any generation before us and predicts that this change will continue at an accelerating rate well into the twenty-first century. The impact that this change will have on the institution we call work is the subject of much interest, speculation and debate.

Acceptance is readily forthcoming that the concept of a 'job-for-life' is very much an anachronism. Alongside this is the reality that jobs are not being lost temporarily because of economic realities such as recession, but are being wiped out permanently with the introduction of new technologies and new ways of organising work (Cascio, 1995; Miner & Robinson, 1994). Hall and Mirvis (1994) further suggest that the notion of a career as a series of upward moves in a long-term employment relationship is a concept of the past with people mourning the passing of the long-time covenant between employee and employer (Waterman et al, 1994). The current reality is that the relationship between employer and employee no longer promises lifelong employment (Sterns & Miklos 1995). The 'womb-to-tomb' mentality, as De Meuse (1990) labels it, is being replaced by a new psychological contract (Anderson & Schalk, 1998). This new contract is defined by Hall (1990) as the mutual set of expectations, often implicit, held between the individual and the employing organisation, in which employees assume a greater responsibility for their own destiny, including the management of their careers.

As Cascio (1995) alleges, in quoting an industry executive, “we’re moving from an economy where there are a lot of hard-working people to one where there are fewer, smarter-working people” (p. 929). No wonder then that, as Nicholson (1993) confirms, career development is a significant issue for many employees.

Whilst these evolutionary views are certainly worthy of acknowledgment, and indeed many may rue their fate if they choose not to heed them, the lament of the ‘job’ has also been recited by others. Handy (1989) suggests that we need to re-invent work and offers the term ‘portfolio’ to replace it, a term that describes how the various components of what we have historically called work may fit together to provide meaning to the activities we undertake within the new work environment. Bridges (1994) argues that it is not jobs per se that are disappearing, but that the very thing that is disappearing is the job itself. He contends that the job “is a social artefact that has outlived its usefulness” (p. 62), with many organisations well along the path to being ‘de-jobbed’. Whilst the concept of the job is decaying, the work remains and Bridges proffers the scenario in which “Today’s organization is rapidly being transformed from a structure built out of jobs into a field of work needing to be done” (p. 64).

Prior to introducing the concept of the protean career Hall and Mirvis (1994) proclaim in a by-line that “The career is dead! Long live the career!” (p. 323). Watts (1996) talks of the resurrection and transfiguration of careers which he proposes now need to be defined subjectively. Suggesting that the new definition of career describes an individual’s “lifetime of progression in learning and work” (p. 44) he proposes, as others have, that careers are now owned by the individual, not the organisation. Within this new career concept employees assume responsibility for the shaping of their careers and, as can be suggested from the views already presented, must be vigilant and resourceful in doing so. The protean career is defined by Hall (1976; cited in Mirvis & Hall, 1994) as a career based on self direction in the pursuit of psychological success and

“... a process which the person, not the organization, is managing. It consists of all the person’s varied experiences in education, training, work in several organizations, changes in occupational field, etc. The protean career is *not* what happens to the person in any one organisation...” (p. 369)

The ability to adapt to change, and to meet the challenges of the new work environment, will provide the individual with the career resilience that will facilitate progression and prevent the unplanned or possibly undesirable occurrence of career plateau.

Synonymous with the protean career is the boundaryless career (Mirvis & Hall, 1994) in which individuals will move seamlessly from company to company, through different kinds of jobs, and across functions and levels as they search for psychological success (Hall, 1990). The 'smarter' employees may well be the ones who willingly embrace the new psychological contract adopting an attitude of self-reliance and accepting the concept of the protean career (Hall & Mirvis, 1994). Alongside the boundaryless career is the emergence of the boundaryless organisation, an organisation in which membership, departmental identity, and job duty rules are ambiguous (Miner & Robinson, 1994). This creates an environment in which career development may be more cyclical and marked by more lateral, rather than vertical, movement (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). They confirm the shift in responsibility for career management from employer to employee suggesting that it will be difficult for workers to escape the inevitability of having to change jobs, companies, and even occupations over their life course in the decades ahead. Their prediction is that this will foster a situation in which these "boundaryless organisations will not be able to meaningfully plan an employee's career" (p. 369) thus shifting this responsibility to the individual who must accept it if career resilience is the goal.

The impact that these various changes is having, and will have, on employees, whilst they attempt to achieve or maintain an appropriate work/life balance, is the subject of much research. The need for on-going training and learning (Guthrie & Schwoerer, 1996; Hall & Mirvis, 1994), the acquisition of adaptation and adjustment skills (Hesketh, 1995), and the development of sound career decision making practices and approaches (Krumboltz et al, 1986; Watts, 1996) is well documented. However, despite adequate career planning, and embracing the concept of the protean or boundaryless career, employees will most likely, and almost inevitably, reach a stage in their career when they must confront the realisation that they have arrived at a career plateau.

## **Career Plateau**

The inevitability of career plateau has probably never been spelt out more clearly than it has been by Bardwick (1986). In proposing what she calls the Rule of 99% Bardwick suggests that only one percent of managers will make it to the top of an organisation. The corollary to that, as confirmed by the Rule of 99%, is that for ninety-nine percent of employees structural plateau is virtually inevitable. Structural plateau is, however, but one form of career plateau individuals must contend with. Bardwick also defines content plateau. Content plateau is, however, distinct from structural plateau, and is escapable and need never occur.

Compounding the Rule of 99% situation is the knowledge that organisational downsizing and restructuring is further reducing the potential for promotion (Chao, 1990) with upward mobility opportunities declining at a steady rate (Dewhirst, 1991). This results in many of today's managers plateauing much earlier than those of a generation ago (Ettington, 1998; Hall, 1990). The age of the employee is therefore no longer such an important factor when considering the subject of career plateau. No longer can younger workers dismiss or ignore thoughts of career plateau and attribute the phenomenon to those who have 'passed their peak', both in personal life and in work life.

The time in which one could view career plateau as synonymous with mid-career or a mid-life crisis has past. To view career plateau as a sign of failure is also no longer acceptable as to do so, by default, labels the individual a failure. If indeed the individual is a failure, that failure is a failure to embrace the new work environment and to take responsibility for the development, enhancement, and progression of their career, and not a failure because they have reached a career plateau. In addition to individual factors contributing to career plateau there are also both organisational and cultural factors, many of which will be outside the individual's sphere of influence (Myers & Cairo, 1992; Near, 1980).

## Career Transition

What may, however, be of more interest or concern is not so much the knowledge that an individual has reached a career plateau, but what action the plateaued individual then chooses to take to resolve that plateau, accepting that the individual believes that resolution is desirable. Career transition is proposed to be one option available to the individual. As Myers and Cairo (1992) argue, however, such a transition can not be a change *of* career, so much as a change *in* career. Adopting, as they imply we should, the “accepted convention that a career is a sequence of activities... during the course of one’s life” (p. 559) then we can have only one career. That career may, however, be composed of a number of jobs, roles, or positions, in a number of industries or professions. Providing support for Myers and Cairo Jepsen (1990, 1992) clarifies the distinction by defining career as the experiences a person has at work. Jepsen contrasts this to occupation, defined by him as the role shared by groups of individuals who hold similar jobs.

Early career development theory often viewed career as being synonymous with both job and life where both occupied the same time span and termed ‘maxi-cycle’ in Super’s terminology. The concept of career transition was therefore usually couched in terms of transition through the various stages of that career (life) and was associated with the developmental tasks associated with each. For example, in terms of Super’s theory, one transitioned through the normally sequential stages of growth, trial or exploration, stabilisation or establishment, maintenance, and finally into decline or disengagement (Super, 1990).

Accepting a more dynamic definition of career, and employing the concept of the protean career, the term transition, perhaps synonymous with career renewal (Bejian & Salomone, 1995), or more simply job change, has now taken on a broader definition. Career transition is now also descriptive of the process that people undertake as they move from one job, task, or role, to another, a process defined as a ‘mini-cycle’ in Super’s terminology. In defining these as ‘mini-cycles’ Super (1990) notes that “the term *transition* has come to denote these processes” (p. 237) of re-exploration and re-establishment associated with these transitional cycles.

Argument may be made that the inability to complete developmental tasks, associated with a stage-of-life transition, results in the pursuit of a job transition as an alternative means of accomplishment. Whilst within that framework one circumstance may be seen as an inherent component of the other, the two events will nevertheless be viewed, within the context of this discussion, as distinct. The latter definition of the term transition provides one of the foci for this particular research project.

This definition of the term transition is somewhat similar to Driver's (1994) use of the term transitory. Driver used 'transitory' to describe a career in which "career choice is almost continuous - fields, organisations, jobs change over 1 - 4 year intervals with variety the dominant force" (p. 239) and which is connected to a novelty motive. Although Driver's contention is that this particular career type is most prevalent among younger workers this paper argues that it is becoming increasingly accepted at all age levels for many reasons including some already mentioned. The term transitory may thus gain wider usage as further describing the protean career concept.

Many individuals will accept the onset of career plateau and may choose, for many reasons, to remain in that state. A proposition is, however, that many others will seek to resolve by transitioning into new careers, jobs, roles, or positions, what may be viewed by this group of people as a dilemma. Considering the aforementioned drive for psychological success these people may be motivated to search for career developmental opportunities that will provide higher order need satisfaction. Brett (1984) argues that job transitions do provide such opportunities as they not only disrupt routines but also frequently tear those routines loose from the environment.

Historically the concept of career transition has been linked to a mid-career crisis in which the individual is exposed to a multitude of influential forces culminating in a decision of great impact to, as Thomas (1980) describes it, opt out. Whilst the pressures and reasons to change jobs may be varied, one cannot dismiss the premise that transitions provide an escape from an undesirable, or psychologically unhealthy, employment trap and provide possible avenues for continuing personal development and career growth.

The current environmental dynamics may act to distance the individual from the organisational decision-making processes that surround career development. Corporate machinations underpin involuntary job loss and in this environment individuals are confronted with additional dimensions to career transition parameters. Without attempting in any way to dismiss the very real crisis with which these individuals must contend, the present investigation will limit itself to planned or voluntary career transition as an attempt to cover both would inevitably do a grave injustice to at least one or the other. In so doing there is also no intention to suggest that the psychological impact of either event is necessarily unique to one or the other. Indeed, the individual's response to the event defines the degree of positivity or negativity that is assigned to the ensuing process and the eventual outcome.

In the current environment, with the renegotiation of the psychological contract, the way in which occupational turnover is viewed will need to change. No longer can this be viewed primarily in negative light. Turnover will become the norm rather than the exception as individuals embrace the concept of the protean career and acceptance of this by organisations will legitimise transition as a means of attaining psychological success. The obligations of organisations to provide assistance to employees in the advent of work-life disruptions are being acknowledged in many areas including job loss (Leana & Feldman, 1992) but little evidence is available to suggest that equal importance is attributed to the management of employees experiencing the effects of career plateau. Acceptance of the benefits that may accrue to both employer and employee will provide for greater acceptance of the role of transition. As Rosenbaum (1979) notes, "Transitions are the major means of achieving success in the corporate structure" (cited in Brett, 1984, p. 178).

### **In the Pursuit of Job and Life Satisfaction**

The exploration of the relationship between job and life satisfaction and work-family conflict occupies a growing segment of research literature. Perhaps the difficulty of disentangling the various components has contributed to the recent shift in emphasis. The preoccupation with the historically prevalent single thread of job satisfaction has progressively given way to a wider focus (see for example: Adams et al, 1996; Caproni,

1997; Judge et al, 1994) with the realisation that people now seek a greater balance in their lives. With the re-writing of the psychological contract between employee and employer and as individuals accept greater responsibility for their own destiny, the role of work within the life context assumes an amended status. Employment trends amongst the so-called 'baby-boom' generation, entry into previously male dominated work domains by increasing numbers of females with the resultant impact on the family institution, higher levels of education, and the increasing differentiation of core, contractual, and temporary work groups (Handy, 1989), has initiated a re-evaluation of life values by many individuals. Wider acceptance is now found for differing and alternative attitudes to the role that work plays in peoples' lives.

The theory of life balance suggests that, if conflict exists between work and non-work activities, individuals will act to resolve that conflict. Conflict between the two domains of life may be resolved by balancing current activities through reassigning priorities according to the current life orientation. For example, if conflict exists, and the individual perceives that the conflict is caused by excessive demands from the work domain resulting in interference with family life, the individual may attempt to resolve that conflict. That attempt is likely to involve lowering the priority they have assigned to their work and raising the priority assigned to family activities. Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1987; cited in Adams et al, 1996) note, for example, that one of the antecedents to work-family conflict is the degree of importance that an individual assigns to the respective roles. This degree of importance, and its direction, may be considered an indicator of an individual's orientation. Life orientation is, however, unlikely to be constant over an individual's work history and possibly tracks parallel to developmental stages. For example, during a career establishment phase the orientation is likely to be towards work but during the early years of child-rearing it is likely to be oriented towards family. The focus of adjustment may be towards the area of life that the individual perceives as providing the more expedient source of resolution even though this may be perceived by significant others as dysfunctional. Rather than attempting to resolve family conflict an individual may, for example, choose to increase time commitment to work, thus avoiding, through extrication, the conflict in the family domain.

The present research interest is in the role that life balance orientation plays with respect to decisions to initiate a career transition and the impact that job satisfaction may have on the relationship between this and career transition. Given the previously mentioned concept of the protean career, and the re-writing of the employee-employer psychological contract, the contention is that individuals are freer to choose how they achieve a life balance and that they will be less inclined to accept a life situation in which conflict prevails. A strong orientation, be it toward work or to non-work, is argued to be a major determinant in the career decision making process.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned shift in focus, the subject of job satisfaction retains a high level of research interest resulting in an ever-increasing volume of information. The focus of this study's interest is not in the multitude of determinants of job satisfaction as such, but rather in the relationships that exist between job satisfaction and two of the current constructs of interest, namely career plateau and life balance orientation. Central to this interest is the satisfaction individuals have with their promotional prospects within the employing organisation, and whether or not this has a significant relationship to overall or global job satisfaction.

Viewing job satisfaction as a component of life satisfaction (Brown & Crace, 1996; Smith, 1992) lends weight to the argument that if an individual is dissatisfied with their job this dissatisfaction is likely to impact on life satisfaction (the spillover hypothesis, Myers & Cairo, 1992). The possible result is a motivation to address the situation. The directional strengths of the relationship are uncertain although reciprocity certainly exists (Cramer, 1995; Judge & Watanabe, 1993) and may depend to some extent on the life balance orientation of the individual and the centrality work has in that orientation. Job dissatisfaction may lead the career plateaued individual to consider the practicality of changing jobs as a means to increasing the level of satisfaction derived from one's work situation.

A basis for the argument that people who are dissatisfied with their jobs may seek to change is found in Brown (1995). Brown contends that "People who are unable to engage in work they deem important violate their standards of behavior and are likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs" (p. 4). The resultant conflict, depending on its strength,

may be sufficient, particularly if this dissatisfaction is related to career plateau, to initiate a career transition. Interest therefore is in whether or not this dissatisfaction shares a relationship with career plateau and ultimately, at the core of this research, whether the individual views career transition as an escape from this career dilemma.

### **Education - The Path to Career Resilience**

In the new environment career resilience will depend on the individual's ability to bring to the job market the knowledge, skills and abilities that the market demands. As the market changes, so must the individual. This scenario introduces the concept of careers being the catalyst for lifelong learning (Hall & Mirvis, 1994) who suggest that a transformation from "brawn" to "brain" industries is occurring. They argue that "the educational preparation of high school and college graduates is declining" (p. 327) and Kelly (1985) asserts that the 'half-life' of a graduate's useable technical information is now estimated to be between five to seven years. One might propose, based on these propositions that, as the requirement for "brain" is increasing, society may be approaching a predicament in which we are less able to meet that requirement. An extension to that proposition is that job market conditions may favour those individuals prepared to maintain currency in knowledge, skills and abilities, that is, to invest, through education and training, in their own future.

Complicating the possibility that older workers may be less mobile in their careers is the finding by Guthrie and Schwoerer (1996) that individuals in late career stage perceive less need for training in critical areas and also report lower levels of efficacy in training success. Further compounding the situation is the finding by Rosen and Jerdee (1976; cited in Kubeck et al, 1996) that employers often deprive older workers of training opportunities and Hall (1990) contends that "most learning in formal organizational career-development activities has a short-term focus" (p. 435). All of which suggests that perhaps individuals need to assume greater personal responsibility for their own on-going education and learning, a suggestion that is supported by Sterns and Miklos (1995), particularly with respect to older workers.

Whilst the responsibility for career development may have shifted to the employee the employer nevertheless retains a responsibility for ensuring that a climate prevails in which continuous learning is fostered as a norm for all employees regardless of age or career orientation. The employer responsibility must extend to the creation and delivery of training and education opportunities, and to the support of those employees who seek to avail themselves of those opportunities. Whilst this investment may be greater for older workers with respect to issues such as time to learn (Kubeck et al, 1996) performance itself should not be an issue as research generally fails to find any significant correlation between age and performance (McEvoy & Cascio, 1989).

Without a willingness or preparedness to maintain currency in knowledge, skills and abilities individuals will be less successful in competing in the emerging job market and employees reaching a career plateau will be less able to satisfactorily transition out of that plateau. Although Guthrie and Schwoerer (1996) assert that it is individuals in late career stages, and their employers, who “will suffer if they do not perceive the need to continue honing their skills.” (p. 69), the need for continuous honing, that is continuous learning, exists for all employees if they are to avoid premature career plateau.

## **Summary**

Nicholson and West (1989) propose three quite different ways that careers can and should be studied: through the “integrity and meaning of work histories”; as “psychological constructs that impart meaning to individual lives and shape their futures”; and “as elements of particular cultures and sub-cultures” (p. 182). As Nicholson and West have done, this study analyses the subject through the first perspective with the expectation that by doing so, not only will an appreciation of the second two approaches be supported, but also that the understanding of careers as they exist today will be enhanced. Justification for the adoption of careers as a research focus can readily be found in the significance they have in people’s lives. A more topical justification can perhaps be found in the organisational climate that currently prevails.

Today’s dynamic and turbulent organisational environment provides the stage for the research focus of the present study. Within this environment the concept of career is

undergoing radical change and redefinition with the prospect of career plateau being faced by an increasing number of workers of all ages. Career plateau has the potential to impact on both the individual and the organisation. Whilst this impact may be positive or neutral, the current research will focus on the negative impact as this is proposed to be greater. An attempt to identify the scope of this impact forms a significant component of the current research. By doing so it is hoped that understanding of the dynamics is enhanced with the resulting additional knowledge being pro-actively applied to a diminution in the negative symptoms of the phenomenon. Chapter Two offers further discussion of the concept of career plateau and expounds the current research interest which focuses on the proposition that career plateau is a recognisable precursor to career transition. Coverage is also given in this chapter to the possible impact that career plateau has on both job satisfaction and the perceived need for continuous learning.

Career transition results in the employee being subjected to unique influences as the individual exits an environment that has likely provided at least some form or degree of security, and enters a new environment that equally likely contains uncertainty and a large number of unknowns. As determinants of behaviour these many influences are worthy of study in their own right. An individual's desire or willingness to embark on the process of career transition will be influenced by a number of these factors of which three provide a focus for this study. In addition to career plateau both job satisfaction and life balance orientation are proposed to be significant influences. Career transition is therefore of central interest to the present study and whether or not, or to what extent, it is preceded by career plateau is also considered. A dedication to a deeper exploration of the subject of career transition is provided in Chapter Three in which the research interest that the influences of career plateau, job satisfaction and life balance orientation have is confirmed.

The pursuit of happiness and satisfaction has occupied peoples' attention and focused their activities for aeons. In today's economic and social climate the achievement of an individually acceptable balance in life's activities is proposed to be crucial and central to success in moving toward those desired states. Work is of course one major activity in life. Within that scenario Chapter Four expands upon the topic of life balance orientation and discusses how this orientation may impact on the individual's decision to initiate a

career transition. The particular orientation that an individual holds, and the balance that they are able to achieve within that orientation, is proposed to also be influenced by job satisfaction. Difficulty exists in drawing lines of demarcation between an individual's work and private life as one cannot help but pervade the other. An orientation toward either work or non-work will, however, impact differently on both job satisfaction and any decision to pursue a career transition. These possibilities provide the focus for the discussion of life balance orientation in which the research interest is the role this plays in career transition, and the relationship it has with job satisfaction.

In researching any aspect of the individual in the workplace it is almost impossible to ignore the centrality of job satisfaction (although what is often meant is job *dissatisfaction*) with this topic providing a wealth of published research. Job satisfaction continues to occupy research interest perhaps supported by the dubious notion that a satisfied worker is a productive worker. Whilst job satisfaction is the result of many intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and is implicated in many other processes, its relationship to the processes surrounding career transition is of current interest. As previously mentioned this study focuses on the proposition that career plateau has a detrimental impact on job satisfaction, that is that job satisfaction will be lower amongst plateaued employees. Additionally the study will investigate the proposition that if an individual is not in a state of life balance, and that imbalance is attributed to excessive work demands, then a similar detrimental impact on job satisfaction will result. These research propositions, and the subject of job satisfaction generally, are covered in more depth in Chapter Five.

The concept of continuous learning as a means to career resilience has already been introduced. To what extent this concept is accepted by employees does not appear to have been subjected to a great deal of research. Accepting a proposed bi-directional relationship between education and career plateau in which a low level of education may be at the root of plateau or, alternatively, that career plateau may initiate the pursuit of further education, provides a reasonable argument for conducting research in this area. The possibility also exists that education will moderate a career plateaued individual's decision to effect a career transition with, for example, those lacking in formal education exhibiting less confidence in effecting a career transition. These possibilities, and the

role that education, training, and learning play in them, are explored in Chapter Six, which also argues that a positive attitude toward continuous learning is a means to ensuring career resilience.

Chapter Seven provides an opportunity to expound the research goals of the study, and to restate the definitions of the constructs of interest that are further examined in the intervening chapters. Within this summary the various relationships surrounding these variables, the hypotheses resulting from those relationships, and that are at the core of the present research, are confirmed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CAREER PLATEAU

*“One of life’s maxims is that all careers reach a level after which no higher achievement can be expected.”*

(Tan & Salomone, 1994)

The prevalent belief and expectation is that, within any organisation, all individuals will eventually experience a career plateau with many plateauing more than once during their work history (Bardwick, 1986; Near, 1980). The career plateau, “That point where it becomes painfully evident that further job advancement is blocked for any or all of a variety of reasons....” (Kelly, 1985, p. 65), is a phenomenon that has become increasingly common. The parameters surrounding, and the factors leading to, career plateau will vary on an individual basis. For some it may occur early in their career at a stage where they may be considered as retaining a reasonable degree of career mobility. Plateau may, in these circumstances, be less traumatic or stressful for the individual who possibly accepts it as a temporary condition with a number of potential resolutions. For others a career plateau may occur later in their career at a time when both career and geographic mobility is limited and the opportunities to overcome the plateau are themselves restricted and limited. Particularly for the latter group the finality surrounding the occurrence may result in feelings of failure, frustration and low job satisfaction resulting in disruptions to work performance and normal life, and lowered feelings of self-worth. Suggesting that plateauing is a natural phenomenon which should be accepted as a phase and not a permanent state, Bardwick (1986) argues that, rather than being viewed as a failure it can be viewed as a challenge, prodding the individual into creating new goals and pursuing new directions.

#### A TYPOLOGY OF CAREER PLATEAU

**Structural.** The most widely used definition of career plateau, “the point in a career where the likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion is very low” (FERENCE, Stoner, & Warren, 1977; cited in Chao, 1990, p. 182), is very structurally oriented and rooted in the traditional view of a linear career. The popular perspective of career plateau has consequently defined it as a structural plateau, an event that occurs when promotion within a hierarchical organisation ends (Bardwick, 1986; Joseph, 1996). This form of plateau may be attributable to two possible causes; either the organisation does not have opportunities available at higher levels (organisational plateau), or the individual lacks the knowledge, skills, and abilities to advance any further in the organisation (individual or personal plateau). Such plateaued individuals may have taken the final step in their career, their climb is over, they are perched on the final rung of their career ladder, faced with the prospect of remaining perched, perhaps precariously, or of finding a new ladder. With the certainty that far fewer people will experience the success of continuing promotion, because of greatly reduced organisational opportunities, structural plateau will become an experience for greater numbers of employees.

A number of factors contribute to the increasing occurrence of structural plateau including the restructuring of organisations, the redefinition of jobs, and the ‘baby-boom’ wave of employees (those born between the mid-1940’s and the mid-1960’s) as they reach mid-career status. With the elimination of levels of middle management, and with the loss of jobs generally, the baby-boom generation have fewer opportunities to advance prompting Hall and Richter (1994) to warn that they face the likelihood of serious career plateauing. By remaining static and plateaued the baby-boomers continue to occupy job positions that are in turn denied younger workers seeking career advancement thus creating problems of plateau at earlier ages and earlier career stages for this younger group of workers (Chao, 1990). Hall (1990) confirms this noting, for example, that whereas the forties and fifties were the ages generally associated with plateau, many people now plateau in their thirties. The issues surrounding career plateau are therefore not restricted to any particular age group and will continue to affect increasing numbers and groups of workers.

Structural plateau, because of organisational dynamics and the inability of the individual to influence these, may be the most challenging form of plateau to resolve. Bardwick (1986) suggests that the solution is to redefine success. An employee's success is most often measured by the height to which they rise in an organisation through the vehicle of promotions (Joseph, 1996). If 'reaching the top' is defined as ultimate success then by default most employees will not achieve that success. Yet, by many other measures, they may well be defined as having, or as having lead, both successful careers and successful lives. The elimination of hierarchical advancement through promotion as a success criterion would permit a greater number of people to attract the label 'successful' which in turn may serve to diminish much of the negativism and stigmatism that surrounds career plateau. As Ettington (1998) argues success and career plateau are not necessarily mutually exclusive conditions.

*Content.* Since the differentiation of content plateau by Bardwick (1986), and its subsequent definition, this concept of plateau has gained greater recognition and acceptance in the literature. Content plateau is defined as an event which occurs when individuals know their jobs too well, there is nothing new to learn and, as it no longer offers a challenge, they consequently become bored (Bardwick, 1986). It results from the content of the job itself rather than an inability to move upward in the organisation. If an individual's job remains constant over time offering little opportunity for the learning of new skills the potential for content plateau is high.

Bardwick proposes that the solution to this particular strain of plateau is to instil more challenge into the role and to make change an inherent component. This can be achieved through interventions such as job enlargement, job rotation, job enrichment, and a program of work redesign (Joseph, 1996). The individual's ability to respond to the challenge and change which results from these interventions has the potential to contribute greatly to a diminution in the negative symptoms of content plateau. Such interventions may, however, only provide a temporary respite for the individual as the extent to which a job may be changed is limited by the nature of the job itself, and the jobs into which an employee may be rotated will be limited by the individual's knowledge, skills and abilities.

Difficulty obviously exists at times in differentiating the two types of plateaux and the possibility, and indeed probability, exists that employees may be simultaneously structurally and content plateaued. Sterns and Miklos (1995) suggest that workers who are structurally plateaued can avoid becoming content plateaued through involvement and challenge. However, from the opposite perspective, if the solution to content plateau is to move the employee to another position, but no position vacancies exist, then the content plateaued individual also faces a structural plateau, a double dilemma. As to how such career plateaux may be defined is not as critical as to how they may be resolved to the benefit of both the individual and the organisation.

Within the structural/content framework Joseph (1996) proposes a further analysis acknowledging the attitude of the individual. Much of the subject literature views career plateau as something happening *to* the individual. Also likely to occur is the situation in which career plateau is something that is initiated *by* the individual. Joseph suggests that voluntary career plateau occurs when the individual makes a personal choice to plateau for any of a variety of reasons including family and the desire to avoid stress or responsibility. An individual's life balance orientation may therefore be such that a career plateau is acceptable and desired because it allows, for example through increased availability of time, that individual to pursue other non-work interests without the pressure or stress of having to perform at ever-increasing levels in an organisation.

## **DETERMINANTS OF CAREER PLATEAU**

***Organisational.*** Accepting Bardwick's (1986) Rule of 99% the major organisational determinant of career plateau can be found in the hierarchical structure of those organisations, the organisation is just unable to offer jobs at higher levels to all aspirants. Near (1980) contends that while most organisations look like pyramids a funnel effect will operate on promotional opportunities with available opportunities decreasing the closer one gets to the neck of that funnel. However, as Hall (1985) discovered, not all hierarchical organisations conform to a symmetrical pyramidal topology with some having a distinct 'bulge' somewhere near the middle. Such organisations, by the nature of their shape, restrict advancement from entry-level positions prior to a period of reasonably rapid progression through the 'bulge' levels before aspirants are again

restricted as they attempt to ascend above the bulge. Despite the varying shape of hierarchical organisations this determinant is recognised as the most important source of intra-organisational plateau (Tan & Salomone, 1994) with organisational structure emerging in a study by Herriot et al (1993) as a major predictor of career outcome.

Added to the inherent influences of organisational hierarchy are the knock-on effects of restructuring, an activity pursued by organisations as they reposition themselves and fight for survival in the emerging market conditions. The organisations existing today have, through the processes of restructuring and downsizing (or 'right-sizing' as it is often called) reduced the levels of management that previously existed. As a by-product of restructuring, the out-sourcing of non-core activities has not only contributed to a further reduction in hierarchical levels but has also eliminated many career paths previously existing in those hierarchies. The end result of these activities is a greatly reduced number of levels and positions within those organisations to which career-oriented individuals may aspire.

The life stage of the organisation, and the marketing model or strategy it adopts, will also play a major role in determining the career opportunities and career paths of its employees. Slocum et al, (1985), in discussing the management of career plateaued individuals, compare the 'defender' organisation with the 'aggressor' organisation. The latter is more likely to be in a growth phase as it aggressively seeks out new marketing opportunities and responds to the increasing market share generated. That growth has the potential to offer employees greater career opportunities. A 'defender' organisation, named because of its passive defensive marketing strategy, is, however, likely to be able to offer fewer career opportunities as organisational growth will be restricted.

Given the above factors strong argument exists for the acceptance of organisational factors as being the more influential in determining career plateau. The career-oriented individual has little, if any, control over most, if not all, of these factors and is faced with the prospect of either accepting the organisational status quo, and the impact such a decision would have on their career, or seeking career opportunities outside the organisation. Whilst organisational forces may be present ultimately it is up to the

individual to respond because as Hall (1985) proposes even if the organisation does not take any action to prevent or remedy plateauing the individual must do so.

***Individual.*** In suggesting that organisational factors are the major determinants of career plateau one must acknowledge the power and right of the individual to make decisions that affect their own life. Paramount amongst these, in the present context, is the decision to not seek career advancement even though opportunities to do so may exist, a decision that effectively results in career plateau (Burke, 1989). Provided such an individual continues to contribute positively to the success of the organisation this decision should be accepted and respected by the organisation. When this decision is made through a lack of motivation, in which promotion may not be seen as a reward, or a lack of interest, and the positive contribution is not forthcoming, the organisation may conclude that the career plateau in question is negative. The organisation may in turn be justified in addressing it accordingly.

Individual plateau generally occurs when the individual lacks the attributes, generally defined as knowledge, skills and abilities, that the organisation is seeking. Additionally Tremblay and Roger (1993) identify the normal demographic variables of age and education as being major personal determinants. The general consensus appears to be, reinforced by the stereotype, that the older one is, and the lower one's level of education, the more likely one is to experience career plateau. Much has already been said about how archaic this stereotypical view of the career plateaued individual is in the current environment. In so far as sex may be a determinant, and despite the popularisation of the 'glass ceiling' concept, in which females' promotional prospects are believed to be constrained, Stroh et al (1992) found no significant difference in the rate at which females and males are promoted. If there is no difference, as Stroh et al contend, the implication is that gender does not operate as a determinant of career plateau and the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon is separate and distinct from plateau.

What is most likely to prevail, however, as the most critical individual determinant are the knowledge, skills and abilities of the individual. If an individual is deficient or lacking in these then opportunities to advance in any organisation will be severely curtailed. Further more, the situation will be compounded by the unwillingness of the

individual to address any such shortfall. As previously mentioned individuals must accept responsibility for their own career resilience and the area of education and training is one area that demands pro-activeness. Ultimately, as Near (1980) contends, it is the individual who contributes in large part to career plateau “because he or she lacks the aspiration, motivation, or ability to move up further” (p. 55), including the motivation to improve or enhance their knowledge, skills and abilities.

***Environmental.*** There are many environmental factors contributing to career plateau, including economics, which will in turn impact upon the growth of organisations. However, as these factors tend to exert their influence through the organisation itself they will not be reviewed separately.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF CAREER PLATEAU**

In the competitive environment of organisations a high degree of value is placed upon career success with that success being measured primarily through an individual’s promotion history, the responsibilities gained, and the remuneration and perquisites the job attracts (Kelly, 1985). As career plateau directly undermines these success criteria it is no wonder that, generally, and within much of the research literature, the phenomenon is viewed negatively (Bardwick 1986; Kelly, 1985; Nicholson, 1993) with the term often carrying a stigma of failure. This negative view helps explain why, if and when its presence is acknowledged, organisations view plateau as problematic. Whilst research evidence is mixed the potential for career plateau to impact on productivity, morale, and other organisational criteria, is such that its consequences cannot simply be glossed over.

With the increasing rate at which career plateau is likely to occur strong argument exists for the current negative view of the phenomenon to change. Promoting such a change in view Ettington (1998) defines successful career plateau as occurring when effective job performance and high job satisfaction prevail despite a low probability of the plateaued individual being promoted. Stoner, Ference, Warren and Christensen (1980; cited in Burke, 1989) also differentiated between successful and unsuccessful plateau based on job performance criteria introducing the labels ‘solid citizens’ and ‘deadwood’ (a

somewhat derogatory term that does nothing to dispel the negative connotations of plateau) to describe the two groups. The implication is that those who are successfully plateaued will be less traumatised by the event and will continue to perform satisfactorily thus gaining the status of solid citizens. However, the occurrence of plateau at much earlier ages will contribute to a situation in which plateaued individuals may be the norm rather than the exception possibly resulting in a higher incidence of so-called 'deadwood' with its inherent difficulties and negative connotations.

Interventions to counter the negativism surrounding career plateau must therefore be sought and understanding the consequences of career plateau will underpin the development of those interventions. Although, as Bardwick (1986) points out, there is a difference between *being* plateaued, a fact, versus *feeling* plateaued, a psychological state. The differences between the two conditions will obviously result in differing consequences, the most pronounced of which is likely to be, for the latter, withdrawal, both psychological and physical from the job itself. This possibility finds support in a study by Perosa and Perosa (1983) who reported that 49% of the individuals in their study of mid-career crisis indicated feelings of depression resulting in withdrawal from the job. However, Minor et al (1991), citing support from a longitudinal study by Howard and Bray (1980), contend that structural plateauing appears to be relatively well accepted by most individuals suggesting that individual perception may be one of the more influential moderators of the consequences of plateau.

***Performance.*** Those supporting the position that career plateau has no effect on performance include Near (1985) and Veiga (1981). However, a greater weight of evidence points toward lower levels of performance/productivity from plateaued individuals. Stoner et al (1980; cited in Burke, 1989) differentiated between successful and unsuccessful people at plateau with only the successful ones performing at a satisfactory level. This finding supports Ettington's (1998) contention that career plateau for some individuals may not necessarily be a negative event and if viewed positively need not adversely impact on performance. Ettington's own work found that a negative correlation existed between performance and plateau with performance ratings for plateaued managers being lower than for non-plateaued managers. Further support for

the view that performance/productivity is generally lower amongst plateaued individuals can be found in Elsass and Ralston (1989), and Bardwick (1986).

***Job Satisfaction.*** The literature reviewing the impact of career plateau on job satisfaction is less conclusive than for other areas of consequence. What does emerge, however, is an implied agreement that job satisfaction is certainly not improved by the advent of career plateau. The effect of career plateau on job satisfaction is included in the current research and the subject is afforded a more extensive coverage in Chapter Five.

***Motivation.*** Surprisingly, what research that has been conducted into career plateau and motivation appears to have identified little relationship between the two. The few studies that can be found investigating this (Near, 1985; Veiga, 1981) indicate that motivation remains at similar levels, or that if any relationship is detected, it is not significant. Tremblay and Roger (1993) do suggest, however, that early career plateau can lead to frustration and loss of motivation. But motivation is a complex construct and a decomposition of this may yield more interesting revelations. For example, Near (1985) also found that plateaued individuals showed less interest in career advancement, a perhaps not surprising finding. As the possibility of advancement diminishes less interest is likely to be shown in it suggesting that motivation may be confounded by time. Motivation has been linked to other criteria such as absenteeism and the broader construct of organisational commitment (see below) and it is possible that it is through these factors that the motivation of career plateaued individuals manifests itself. Additionally, boredom, which is often linked to motivation, does not appear to be a significant issue in career plateau (Near, 1985).

***Commitment/Absenteeism.*** Research findings confirm that organisational commitment is generally lower for plateaued individuals and continues to decrease as time goes on, a view supported by Stout et al (1988), with plateaued managers tending to withdraw (Near, 1980). Burke (1989) found that the intention to turn over, that is change jobs, was higher amongst plateaued individuals although Nicholson (1993) suggests that there is actually less desire to quit. Greenhaus and Callanan (1992) propose that career plateau is one of the trigger events leading to career indecision, a condition which is likely to

influence both commitment and absenteeism. A possible factor in this relationship is time with more exit barriers arising as time goes on, the most obvious being the likelihood of finding another job at a comparable or higher level, either within the organisation or in the job market generally. Weight to this argument is provided by Tremblay et al (1995) who found that the longer the plateau existed, the lower the intention to quit became. Higher turnover rates amongst the 'deadwood' was reported by Veiga (1981), a result that supports Near's (1985) finding that lower tenure rates were experienced by plateaued employees. Finally, in a direct measure, Near (1985) reported that non-plateaued managers recorded significantly less work absenteeism than did plateaued managers.

The degree of commitment embraced by individuals will depend greatly on their perception of the plateau experience. As Minor et al (1991) propose career plateau may be viewed as a unique type of transition in which the individual is required to reassess their role in the organisation. This reassessment occurs during the transition leading to the adoption of new expectations. A successful transition of this type, that is transition into a plateaued status, may well result in acceptance of that status with little impact on job factors such as motivation and performance, and with sustained commitment to the role and to the organisation.

A commonly held perception is that many plateaued employees adjust to their status over time and that any negative consequences are therefore temporal (Bray & Howard, 1980; cited in Driver, 1994). Arguing against this Scholl (1983) proposes that individuals do develop timetables for promotion and that if an individual passes the time of an expected promotion, without the promotion eventuating, changes in attitudes and behaviours do occur. Ettington (1998), who examined factors that might explain why some plateaued employees do not experience negative effects, also found that, contrary to this proposition, given the time to do so plateaued employees do not adjust to their status.

***Life Orientation.*** Little research is to be found in the area of life orientation with respect to careers, hence the current interest. Intuitively one might suspect that career plateaued individuals will seek to replace their work as a major source of psychological well-being, a suggestion supported to some extent by Burke (1989) who found that police officers at

career plateau developed a non-work orientation. The role of life balance orientation is included in the present study and as such is covered in greater detail in Chapter Four.

**Health.** In his sample of police officers Burke (1989) found that whilst stress was higher for those plateaued this did not translate into poorer health with no differences being reported on various measures of physical and emotional well-being. Elsass and Ralston (1987; cited in Elsass & Ralston 1989) propose that stress results when career plateau is perceived to be a threat to an outcome, for example advancement, that an individual considers to be both important and desired. A possible explanation for Burke's finding is that his sample may have been plateaued for a longer period of time. This longer period in the plateau condition may have contributed to two possible confounds. Firstly, given the duration of the plateau, individuals may have grown to accept the fact that advancement was less likely to occur and hence the current situation was less stressful, and secondly, any stress that was initially present may have dissipated along with any associated health symptoms.

On the negative side Near (1985) found that health was generally poorer amongst a plateaued group while Ettington (1998) and Bardwick (1986) allude to the possibility that psychological well-being may be reduced through the lower rates of social interaction open to the career plateaued individual in the work place. Ostracism of the career plateaued individual may result in not only lower rates of social interaction, but may also materially affect the quality of the remaining interactions. Of interest is the proposition of Minor et al (1991) that socialisation activities increase immediately before and after a career transition, which if correct, may trigger job seeking behaviour in a socially inclined career plateaued individual. Other health issues may arise if plateaued individuals resort to negative coping mechanisms such as alcohol and drugs. However, as no research into this particular area could be found any suggested association is purely speculative.

## **THE CAREER PLATEAUED INDIVIDUAL**

From much of the above the inclination in the past may have been to stereotype the plateaued individual. The characteristics of the stereotype included; being older; perhaps middle aged and at mid-career, married; having less education than their non-plateaued counterparts; suffering from poorer health; geographically immobile; and having been in their current role and with the same organisation for longer periods of time. This stereotype has led to the frequent use of terms such as ‘shelf-sitter’ and ‘spare wheel’ (Bardwick, 1986). As Bardwick suggests, the stereotype also led many to confuse career plateau with the Peter Principle, a principle that describes the unfortunate individuals who have climbed to the level of their own incompetence in a highly bureaucratic organisation. In the past this confusion in the description of the individual experiencing the phenomenon may have been excusable. Today, however, the career plateaued individual is equally likely to be; a university graduate; single; with perhaps five to ten years work experience; receiving above average remuneration; ambitious; willing to take risks and move to where the opportunities exist; and with much potential remaining to contribute positively to the success of an organisation.

Describing the counter-type Bridges (1994) defines that person as one being willing to change jobs as frequently as required to achieve career goals and to remain competitive in the job market. This, he contends, will be achieved by breaking the employment rules that have prevailed to date. According to Bridges, a career resilient individual must therefore be prepared to maintain mobility, even when times are not so good, be willing to change occupations at any age, and accept that whilst formal qualifications are important they do not replace desire, ability, and temperament. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the individual must assume the responsibility for the development and maintenance of their own career.

The management of these new, dynamic, and often disparate, forms of career will provide an ongoing challenge for both the individual and the organisation. Within this emerging environment the phenomenon of career plateau will continue to affect a very heterogeneous group of people who can no longer be aligned to the stereotypical character trapped within an archaic bureaucratic monolith.

## MEASURING CAREER PLATEAU

The two most popular methods of measuring career plateau are grounded in either objective or subjective criteria. Objective measures are generally based on predefined criteria such as job tenure whilst subjective measures are based on the perceptions of the individual.

*Objective.* Alongside the traditionally accepted view of career plateau as being structural researchers have tended to rely solely on objective criteria to measure career plateau. This measure has commonly been based on job tenure (Joseph, 1996), or years since last promotion, with a somewhat arbitrary figure used. The use of tenure as a measure receives some support in a study by Gregson (1990) who found that intention to turn over, that is to change jobs, was significantly related to tenure with longer tenures indicating less likelihood of turning over. Previous studies have used job tenure figures varying from five to ten years in current role (Chao, 1990), with some earlier studies extending this to twenty years (Near, 1985). Justification for the use of a shorter tenure period is provided by Stout et al (1988), whilst Nicholson (1993) raises the possibility that tenure itself may in fact be an unstable indicator of plateauing. The volatility of careers in the prevailing organisational and economic climate also argues for a shorter tenure period but increasingly a purely objective measure is being combined with a subjective measure to define the degree to which individuals are career plateaued. Supporting the adoption or inclusion of a tenure based measure or component is the premise that the likelihood of being considered for promotion declines the longer employees remains in their current role.

What tends to undermine the reliability of an objective measurement of career plateau is the changing nature of work. These changes include the increasing differentiation between the core, contracting and temporary groups of workers and the different career patterns each group adopts (Handy, 1989). A long tenure in a position within the core group would be viewed quite differently to a long tenure within the contracting group. Whilst both occurrences may be viewed objectively as a plateau, the individual's perceptions are probably likely to be very different. With the also increasing trend of

frequent career renewal (voluntary career transition) the contention is that a figure closer to five years tenure in current position is a more realistic objective measure.

An objective measure of tenure, and its subsequent extrapolation to career plateau, is usually gained through the use of a direct question, for example; “How many years have you been in your current role?” or “How many years since you last had a promotion?” Here the subject is not making a decision on whether or not they are on a career plateau, they are merely reporting a simple fact, and that is length of job tenure. The decision as to whether or not they are on a career plateau is left to the researcher. Tremblay and Roger (1993) suggest that the best predictors of objective plateau are factors such as; past success This includes, for example, the promotional history of the individual, age (they suggest that the older one gets the more likely one is to experience plateau), and education, with less education being indicative of a higher probability of plateau.

In considering tenure as a measure, consideration should also be given to the incidence of lateral movement. For example, an individual may have been in their current position for less than five years but their prior position may have been at the same hierarchical level. Whether such a lateral move indicates the absence of career plateau, and whether or not it could be defined as promotion, could be assessed by further exploring the magnitude of the move. Here the subjective assessment of the individual may be more critical to measurement than the objective nature of the movement.

A tenure based operationalisation of career plateau results in a dichotomous variable. The treatment of the construct as dichotomous results in the individual being described as either career plateaued or not, which possibly confounds results (Chao, 1990), and affords little opportunity to view career plateau as a condition which develops gradually over time. This raises the question as to whether individuals suddenly become plateaued at a given point in time, for example after five years in the same role, and under a prescribed set of conditions, or whether they gradually reach a plateau, by degrees, over a period of time (Elsass & Ralston, 1989). There appears to be little agreement on exactly when an individual has plateaued (Joseph, 1996) but the inclusion of a subjectively based component in the measure may overcome much of this restriction.

**Subjective.** A perceptual, or subjective, measure of career plateau provides for greater variability and, as Chao (1990) argues, it is the individual's perception that is more important than either reality or the assessment of other people. The possibility exists, for example, that an organisation may have defined an individual as plateaued, but the individual may not agree viewing themselves as, for instance, taking a career moratorium (Salomone & Mangicaro, 1991). A moratorium is defined as a psychological time-out offering a period of reflection and evaluation, whilst other life interests take current priority. In this situation the employee may not be seeking immediate advancement, may be quite content and satisfied with their current position, and may not be currently taking any pro-active steps towards ensuring career resilience or progression. A shift in life interest, perhaps when children reach a certain age, will reactivate career interest and those individuals will again seek ways of revitalising their careers. Alternatively, an ambitious individual may perceive themselves as having plateaued if advancement within an organisation is stalled after one to two years in a position. A less ambitious individual may, however, be content to remain for a longer period of time, say five years, in a position before the expectation of advancement or promotion manifests itself. In support of this argument Chao (1990) reports that in her study the explanatory power of a perceptually based measure of career plateau was significantly higher than a job-tenure based measure.

In seeking data upon which a subjective measurement of career plateau may be based the researcher relies upon the subject assessing from their own perspective whether or not, or to what extent, they believe they are experiencing a career plateau. What is being measured therefore is a perception and this has inherent difficulties. Given the previously mentioned possibility of negative connotation the subject may be reluctant to honestly answer, consciously or otherwise, a direct question such as "Do you feel that you have reached a plateau in your career?" as some actually on a career plateau may be inclined to deny the situation. Whilst an honest response to such a direct question would likely provide the researcher with the data being sought, a more indirect approach may be desirable in that such an approach may result in a higher frequency of frank responses.

Tremblay and Roger (1993) argue that for both objective and subjective measures individual factors emerge as being better predictors of career plateau. They suggest that

the components of a reliable subjective career plateau measure include perceptions of having been at one's level for too long and of having reached a dead end in one's career progress. Based upon the results of their own study they concluded that the desire for advancement provided the greatest discriminatory power followed by a personality characteristic, locus of control, with an external locus being positively related to plateau.

## **SUMMARY**

Career plateau is not a new concept although much of the research into it has been relatively recent occurring mainly within the past ten to fifteen years. The economic boom times of the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies, which offered greater opportunity for career advancement, have been displaced by periods of environmental, economic and organisational uncertainty. The result, through organisational reactions such as restructuring, is not only the elimination of many jobs, but also, in many ways, redefinition of the term 'job' itself.

In the past, career plateau was observed to occur within a conventional linear career, when an individual reached the pinnacle of their career, followed by a period of limbo awaiting retirement. The current environment results in a climate in which the prospect of experiencing career plateau must be faced by all individuals, and likely more than once during their careers. Whether an objective measure, or a more perceptually based subjective measure, is adopted does not alter the simple outlook that the experience will, sooner or later, be faced by most, if not all, employees.

Facing either a structural or content plateau the individual's reactions to that event will differ depending on organisational and individual factors. React the individual must for the responsibility for career management has shifted from the organisation to them. Organisations, however, cannot abdicate their own responsibilities including the requirement to be realistic when disseminating information relating to promotional opportunities or prospects.

Whilst many of the determinants of career plateau are organisationally based the individual has little opportunity to influence these and so must make a decision to either accept the organisational status quo, or to investigate and pursue career objectives across a much wider front. Theorists also have a responsibility for, as Zunker (1987) notes, criticism has been levelled at theorists for their assumptions of rational career decision making being based on an expanding economy with a multitude of available jobs and almost endless opportunities for career advancement. That criticism may be justified, and if so argument exists for new theory to be more cognisant of the prevailing job market conditions, many of which have been discussed.

The consequences of career plateau are such that neither the individual nor the organisation should consciously ignore them for both individual and organisational health is at stake. An organisation relies on its own economic well-being to reward those individuals contributing to that well-being. Conversely, individuals rely on their own well-being to enable them to make a positive contribution to the organisation so that they can in turn enjoy the benefits of its success. Research findings are such that it behoves both groups to acknowledge and address the identified consequences.

Finally, acceptance of the stereotypical view of the career plateaued individual is an anachronism that is well past its 'use by' date. Career plateau is a prospect that must now be faced by any employee, at any age, and at any stage of their career, with the additional prospect that it will likely occur much more than once during that career.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CAREER TRANSITION

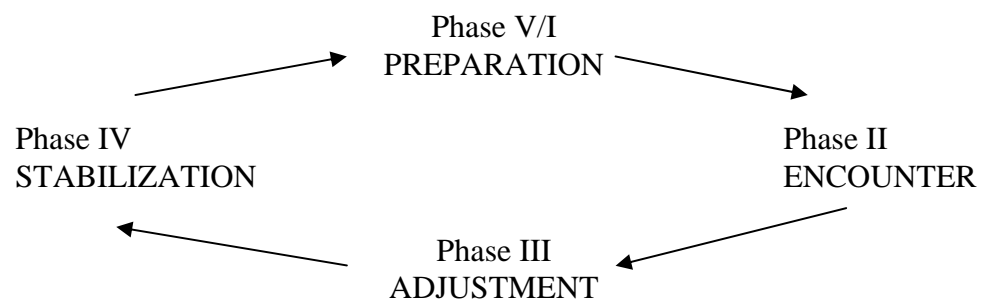
*“Employees seek maximum return for their effort, and pursue this goal through career transitions.”*

(Schwab, Rynes and Aldag, 1987)

The topic of career transition has attracted increasing research interest, particularly over the past decade or so as organisational change accelerates. However, there appears to be little agreement as to what exactly a career transition constitutes, exactly when one occurs, or how long one lasts (Latack, 1984; Louis, 1980; Thomas, 1980). The very term itself, ‘transition’, suggests that the occurrence of such is not instantaneous or discrete, a factor that perhaps contributes to the difficulty in reaching agreement on a definition. Levinson (1979) adopted a process view of transition describing a transition as a “bridge or a boundary zone, between two states of greater stability. It involves a *process* of change....” (p. 49, emphasis added). As Latack (1984) proposes, whether career transition is viewed as a process rather than as an event is a subject worthy of exploration in its own right. Louis (1980) also opts for the former defining a career transition as the period during which the individual is changing roles. A definitive ‘period’ is, however, somewhat elusive. Nicholson (1994) prefers to refer to the transition as a cycle (see Figure 3.1) suggesting that the cycle is in perpetual motion with everyone being at one of the stages and continually moving through the cycle.

For the purposes of this study, and whilst perhaps not capturing all the aforementioned dynamics, a career transition is defined to include the immediate period leading up to the event in which the individual is actively engaged in job-seeking behaviours, and the actual event itself, that is, the job change. Within that definition a career transition refers basically to a change in job, and may be expanded to include the immediately preceding

process in so far as that may be seen to be a significant component of the event. As such it is differentiated from a linear life-stage/career-stage transition in which the individual transitions from one developmental period to another. In this sense a career transition is synonymous with a work-role transition and may be defined as any major change in work role requirements or work context (Nicholson & West, 1989).



**Figure 3.1** The Transition Cycle (Nicholson, 1994)

Appearing to differentiate between ‘career’ and ‘job’ Brett (1984) describes a job transition as being a job change of any kind “including organizational entry, geographical relocation, promotion, demotion” (p. 155) entailing a change from the previous job in either content or context. From this one readily concludes that a job change can occur without a career change also occurring but the definition appears equally to be appropriate in describing the characteristics of a career change although a career change arguably has a greater impact on the individual. Oleski and Subich (1996), however, were more definite in their operationalisation defining career change as a change to a career for which more training was required, or for which previous training was largely non-transferable.

What has compounded the definition issue is the predominance in research of the mid-career, and mid-life, transition event (Bejian & Salomone, 1995; Davis & Rodela, 1990; Levinson, 1979; Perosa & Perosa, 1983). The result is a tendency for the term transition to be used as a synonym for the mid-life/mid-career transition. As Latack (1984) found, major career transitions are often associated with major transitions in personal life,

although which precedes the other is likely to vary on an individual basis, so perhaps this congruence in terms is not surprising. The term career renewal, introduced as a sixth stage to Super's career development model, is used by Beijan and Salomone (1995) to refer to a significant career change in mid-life, implying that this form of career transition is the preserve of a specific age group. Lending weight to this erroneous implication is Kelly's (1985) assertion that candidates for second career tend to be in their 40s. In making this assertion Kelly fails to acknowledge that employees in any age group are more likely these days to be initiating third, fourth, or even higher order careers and therefore mid-career may occur many times, not just at mid-life (Hall, 1986; Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Whilst the increasing acceptance of career change amongst older workers leads to it being one of the fastest growing populations in the career change market (Newman, 1995), a trend contributing to the research interest noted, the experience of career transition is not, and cannot be, restricted by age.

## **A TYPOLOGY OF CAREER TRANSITION**

Although transitions are often categorised as either inter-role or intra-role, intra-role career transitions represent a reorientation to an existing role (Louis, 1980) and as such do not involve a job change. Accepting the previously stated definition of career transition the focus of this study is on inter-role transitions, that is those involving a job change. Bruce and Scott (1994) describe five basic types of inter-role transitions that they adapted from Louis (1980): entry events, promotion events, lateral moves, resignation, and retirement. Accepting that resignation is the precursor to an inter-organisational transition this typology provides an acceptable framework for study. On the other side of a resignation is an entry event in that an individual is involved in exiting one organisation and entering another. Individuals entering the work force form the other pool of entry event candidates but because these events do not involve a job change they are not a current focus. Retirements are a unique exit event and as they do not necessarily involve an entry into another job they also will not be included.

As already alluded to career transitions may occur either intra-organisationally or inter-organisationally and both forms are included for study. Whilst in the past intra-

organisational moves may have predominated, for example Latack (1984) reported that in one sample upward moves accounted for over 90% of transitions, this is probably no longer the norm and indeed Latack does note the growing scarcity of such events. In considering the incidence of intra versus inter-organisational transitions note must also be made of the status of the individual. With respect to career plateau Veiga (1981) reported, for example, that ineffectively plateaued managers were more likely to transition inter-organisationally whilst Slocum et al (1985) found that effectively plateaued managers were least likely to change either jobs or companies. Additionally, career transitions are often viewed as only including positive events, for example promotion, but this upward movement is no longer guaranteed with West et al (1990) reporting downward moves accounting for between seven and ten percent of movements. The expectation is that, what have historically been viewed as negative events, that is lateral, downward or termination moves, will account for an increasing percentage of total career transitions.

Finally, there is value in considering the distinction between voluntary and involuntary career transitions as the impact that either has on the individual will be quite different. Voluntary transitions, because of their nature, are likely to be less stressful for the individual, will be initiated or accepted by them in addressing some aspect of their present life and will generally be perceived as more positive. Brown (1995) proposes that planned or pro-active (voluntary) transitions occur for two basic reasons: the present job does not satisfy the worker's values resulting in dissatisfaction, or inter-role conflict exists, that is conflict between the individual's work role and other life roles, again resulting in dissatisfaction. Whilst voluntary transition may have been the preserve of a privileged few, Thomas (1980) reports for example that career changes by middle-class workers were more apt to be voluntary, new trends are emerging with transitions becoming more acceptable across all occupational groups and levels.

A voluntary transition, because of its orderly and rational nature, affords the individual a greater degree of control over the ensuing process and places the individual in a strong position to exert influence on the outcome. The same cannot be said for the less fortunate individual faced with the crisis of an involuntary transition which by its nature is less orderly possibly resulting in behaviour that may be defined as irrational. Whilst

the eventual outcome may be positive, and indeed attempts will be made by various parties to 'sell' the positive aspects, the individual concerned is faced with a period of instability and uncertainty that will have an impact in many other areas of their life.

Supporting Thomas's (1980) view that involuntary transitions often result from health issues, Brown (1995) confirms the major reasons given for such unplanned or reactive transitions as being health, accidents, changes in personal status such as divorce, and organisational factors such as restructuring. As well as processing issues surrounding the transition, the indication is the individual is likely to be dealing with other significant life issues. The single most critical event underlying involuntary transition was reported by Eby and Buch (1995) to be organisational restructuring, an influence that is likely to prevail for the foreseeable future, and which is a process over which workers have virtually no control.

***Career Mobility.*** Career transitioning results in career mobility and the more often an employee transitions the higher their mobility is said to be. The two models of career mobility that prevail are termed the tournament model (Rosenbaum, 1979; cited in Veiga, 1981), and the Markov model (Scholl, 1983). The tournament model is described as a 'game' in which aspirants aggressively and competitively compete for available positions and which suggests that it is entry level and past mobility that influences future mobility. The Markov model assumes that each incumbent in a position has an equal and orderly chance of being promoted to the next position. The model adopted will influence the perspective one has on the degree of control an individual has over the transition process.

Mobility may be measured and as one would expect, individually it decreases with time (Veiga 1971, 1973; cited in Veiga 1983), but it is also influenced strongly by eras and industries (Dewhirst, 1991). Veiga found that the rate of decrease is highest in the age 30s after which the rate of decrease itself decreases. Supporting this in part Wegmann (1991b; cited in Jepsen, 1992) reported that between the ages of 25 and 64 the typical American adult works for an average of eight employers and changes occupations less than three times. Additionally Wegman suggested that once they reach the age of 45 rarely does a person change occupations voluntarily, a finding somewhat inconsistent

with Kelly (1985). Kelly, at odds with Veiga (1983), also reported that peak mobility existed in the 35 to 40 year old age bracket. Linking behaviour to personality Steffy et al (1989) suggest that higher rates of mobility are associated with Type A behaviour. Accepting the proposed relationship between ambition, power, and the striving for success which are characteristic of the Type A personality, the latter proposition does not appear unreasonable.

## **DETERMINANTS OF CAREER TRANSITION**

The two determinants of career transition that are of primary interest in the present study are career plateau, addressed in Chapter Two, and life balance orientation, to be addressed in Chapter Four. There are, however, many other factors that underlie the occurrence of career transition. Some of the more significant factors will be discussed as they, in turn, have the potential to contribute to, impact on, and influence both career plateau and life balance orientation. The dynamics of the organisational environment are such that many of the determinants of transition are also key influences in the occurrence of career plateau. The factors that determine both job and life satisfaction are also equally likely to exert an influence on career transition and the life balance orientation of the individual.

***Organisational.*** Davis and Rodela (1990) describe three principal categories of career transitional forces of which two are organisationally based: changes in the organisation, and changes in the way jobs are structured and designed. The former includes the impact of restructuring, internationalisation as world markets expand, deregulation/regulation, competition, out-sourcing, and productivity improvement. The latter results from the knock-on effects of organisational restructuring as jobs themselves are restructured, redesigned and created in response to organisational requirements. Nicholson and West (1988) report that, in their managerial sample, 26% of job changes were attributed to the restructuring of organisations or jobs, the second most predominant reason cited. These organisationally based forces have a comparable impact on career plateau and it may not always be possible to decide whether they impact on transition directly or whether their effect on transition is manifested through career plateau.

Miner and Robinson (1994) propose that, despite the current career dynamics of protean careers and boundaryless organisations, organisational factors, including responses to economic and governmental influences, will still drive individual career transitions. As economies, national and international, contract and expand, and as products and services follow normal market life cycles, the job market will also contract and expand as it changes in response to the organisation's adaptation practices. In this context, 'changes in the organisation' covers a plethora of possibilities, all of which will influence, to one degree or another, all employees with the degree of impact dependent on the employee's employment status.

Inevitably all organisational activities will impact on employees who, in order to ensure career resiliency and continuing employability, must be cognisant of those activities and respond accordingly. So whilst some of these factors have been singled out for particular attention because of their current significance the career minded individual will be monitoring activities across a wider front as understanding the organisational environment is a critical factor in career resiliency. Stumpf (1984; cited in Weick & Berlinger, 1989) raises a valid point, however, in querying how employees can establish career paths and undertake appropriate career planning in an organisation where the paths themselves will be continually changing if the organisation is at all responsive to changes in its own environment. This creates a challenge for the individual, not an excuse to abdicate their responsibility for self-management of career planning.

***Individual.*** The third transitional force described by Davis and Rodela (1990) involves changes in the individual's psycho-physiological make-up, that is, personal change. A major component of this force is career dissonance. As Davis and Gould (1981; cited in Davis & Rodela, 1990) and Levinson (1979) indicate, this occurs to one degree or another in every adult because of subtle but irrefutable personal change some of which can be linked to age related developmental influences. Clark (1997) refers to the phenomenon as 'career angst' suggesting that it undermines career satisfaction as individual's pursue options that are not in accord with their psychological needs, whilst Greenhaus and Callanan (1992), in describing what is essentially the same phenomenon, refer to it simply as career indecision. This, they suggest, centres in part around the feelings of uncertainty regarding a chosen career path, as well as the ruminations that

occur in deciding on one's initial or new career. Notwithstanding that Greenhaus and Callanan have been criticised because they lacked a developmental framework (Hall, 1992) within which their attempts to measure the dynamic processes involved in career decision making were made, career indecision or career angst is a critical influential force in that process.

Lack of career enhancement, that is the onset of career plateau, is likely to be at the root of much of this dissonance if the finding of Hill and Miller (1981; cited in Rhodes & Doering, 1993) is accepted. They found that 43% of the variance in managerial career change could be explained by lack of career enhancement with Nicholson and West (1988) reporting that the achievement of career objectives was the most predominant reason cited for transition in their managerial sample. Rhodes and Doering (1993), in their own study, found that both job and career satisfaction were significantly related to intention to change careers. Attempts by individuals to ease this dissonance, which may be implicitly found in many of the reasons cited by them for effecting a transition, will include career transition. Somewhat at odds with this proposition are the findings by Near (1985) and Veiga (1981) that managers at plateau reported less interest in career advancement with many able to effectively adjust to their current career status. This may, however, be a function of the length of time of the plateau, a suggestion supported by Chao (1990), as the longer the plateau lasts, the less likely opportunity for advancement becomes, with increasing acceptance of the situation by the individual. Additionally, Pearlin and Schooler (1978; cited in Elsass et al., 1989) reported that, although transition might appear to be the simplest response to plateau induced stress, it was the one least used, perhaps because of the inability, or unwillingness, of some individuals to identify the source of that distress.

The most common reasons cited by individuals for changing jobs, as recorded by Nicholson and West (1988), are to do something more challenging and fulfilling, to achieve career objectives, to change career direction, and to improve standard of living. Borgen, Weiss, Tinsley, Dawis, and Lofquist (1968; cited in Rhodes & Doering, 1993) cite similar reasons including inadequate pay, lack of advancement, and job insecurity. Setting aside for the moment the monetary motive, the other reasons cited relate to attempts by the individual to address issues of dissonance or angst. These reasons are

synonymous with the more encompassing and frequently referred to reason of 'seeking more meaningful work' (Heppner et al, 1994; Thomas, 1980).

Perhaps it is mankind's eternal search for meaning and the pursuit of happiness, and how that search and pursuit are conducted through one's work, that is at the core of all career change. Providing some acknowledgment and confirmation of this view is the proposition by Perosa and Perosa (1994) that the influence of non-work factors as determinants of career transition is real. They found, for example, that such patterns do include the active searching for more meaning in life, as well as life crises such as divorce or some other loss such as death of a family member, and the seeking of a lost dream. For some that meaning comes through greater attachment to others: "the lost aspect of self in need of expression was the ability to relate to people. They tended to give up careers in business, sales, or engineering for careers in teaching, psychology, and social work" (Perosa and Perosa, 1983, p. 76). Providing support for a developmental perspective Veiga (1983) found that individual reasons behind career mobility varied according to the career stage the individual was in.

The validity of the monetary motive cannot be easily dismissed as it is an important dimension of career plateau and is cited frequently amongst the reasons for pursuing a career transition. A career plateaued individual will most likely be facing static income and, if monetarily motivated, will pursue a career transition as a means to raising their level of income above the existing static level. Heppner et al (1994) found that economic reasons were second only to seeking more meaningful work in explaining why people sought a change in job. Confirming its status as a high priority determinant Skovholt and Morgan (1981) claim that "In the occupational success trinity of money, power, and status, money has the lead..." (p. 235). However, for those moving into self-employment, West et al (1987) recorded a decline in the need for material rewards at work. Kanter (1989) further suggested that promotion up a long ladder of jobs was no longer the most important factor in determining rewards for at least one group of workers. Those individuals who are motivated by money may have to reassess their priorities if the predictions of Mirvis and Hall (1994) prove correct. They argue that the protean and boundaryless careers, which are predicted to become the norm rather than

the exception, may well prove less remunerative than the stable career paths characteristic of the past.

A possible basis for the assessment of an individual's intention with respect to effecting a career transition is their level of commitment to their current organisation and job, the inference being that the more committed to an organisation the individual is, the less likely they are to leave. Not surprisingly, Bartol (1979; cited in Bedeian et al, 1991) found a significant inverse relationship between career commitment and actual turnover indicating that the less commitment an individual has to their career the more likely they are to pursue other opportunities. A lack of commitment is a likely precursor to job seeking behaviour with Kirjonen and Hanninen (1986) viewing voluntary change of employer as a coping strategy which aims at reducing the misfit between the job and the person. They concluded from their study that change of employment did indeed serve as a coping strategy in an unsatisfactory work situation, a situation that would include a lack of commitment.

In identifying the individual determinants of career transition one should be aware that the lines of demarcation between work and non-work may be difficult to draw. The factors that influence one sphere of life are equally likely to influence other spheres. Krumboltz and Nichols (1990) note, for example, that the fundamental determinants of career choice and career progression are the same as those that determine choice and development in other domains of human involvement. An individual's drive for satisfaction, balance, novelty and variety may therefore result in a change in non-work activities rather than a predicted work role transition.

***Intention to Turnover.*** An intention to quit, to vacate the current job, to resign, is accepted as the most immediate predictor of eventual turnover (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; cited in Bedeian et al, 1991). This confirms perhaps, at least in so far as careers are concerned, that people generally behave in a way consistent with cognitive processes, a proposition that was supported by Bedeian et al's study. Linking career development to life development Ornstein et al (1989) found that the intention to turnover was greater in earlier developmental stages perhaps reflecting the higher mobility retained by younger groups of workers. Consistent with this finding, Slocum and Cron (1985) report that it

was at its lowest in the mid-life careerists. Being at mid-life should not in itself detract from career planning or from considering the possibility of transition for as Super (1990) argues individuals who are dissatisfied with their careers in midlife should be encouraged to undergo systematic and extensive career exploration. This exploration may provide the means to overcoming that dissatisfaction.

Fundamental to any decision to quit will be the opportunities available to an individual within their current organisation. As one would expect the conclusion appears clear, that is the less opportunities available within the organisation the lower the commitment will be and the more likely the individual will be to quit (Scholl, 1983). Bedeian et al (1991, p. 340) summarise "... an organization that is unwilling or unable to provide career growth opportunities faces double jeopardy, in that turnover will be both higher for individuals who are highly committed to their careers and lower for those who are not as committed to their careers." An organisation that is unable to provide opportunities to its employees is therefore likely to lose its more skilled employees because they can readily find alternative employment opportunities whilst less mobile employees will be inclined to stay put. Scholl (1983) found support for this suggestion proposing that individuals who pass an expected promotion point have a decreased intent to remain, as did Nicholson (1993) who, from the other perspective, found that plateaued groups had less desire to quit than other groups. The two career motives that are central to a manager's desire for movement are fear of stagnation, that is career plateau, and career impatience, that is the desire for promotion (Veiga, 1983).

Nicholson (1993) raises the concept of exit barriers suggesting that for some groups, including those plateaued at later career stages, these will exist in the way of, for example, investments in superannuation schemes. The outcome of this situation is, he suggests, a heightened loyalty to the existing employer. Veiga (1983) also identified two major barriers to inter-organisational transition, one of these being the aforementioned attachment to retirement funds, the other being age. Investing one's self into the job such that one identifies with it to the exclusion of other parts of the self may also create a psychological exit barrier. Weick and Berlinger (1989) expounded this proposition concluding that when individuals intertwine their identities with their jobs they will be

reluctant to change jobs because change raises new questions about who they are, questions that some individuals would perhaps prefer not to address.

Having made a decision to quit Hall and Richter (1994) argue that it is in the company's best interest to support the employee in that decision if that would result in the best outcome for that individual. They suggest that if an employee is coerced into staying performance and commitment will eventually decline after which they will leave anyway. Providing a framework within which an organisation could decide a course of action Jepsen (1990) proposes that there are three problems that impede career development; current behaviour is problematic and dysfunctional, current behaviour is likely to become dysfunctional, or current behaviour is less than optimal. Faced with an employee who has expressed an intention to quit, and who is confronted with one of the above problems, the organisation may indeed do that employee a favour by supporting them through the exit process.

***The Protean Career.*** The emergence of the protean, and boundaryless, career will result in an altered view of the phenomenon of transition. Rather than being viewed as a relatively infrequent event incurred by those climbing the organisational hierarchy its frequency is likely to increase as the 'climbing' is replaced by 'hopping' from one job to another with a greater reliance on self for career success (Kanter, 1989). The concept of self-management of careers is continually being reinforced with Sterns and Miklos (1995) also noting that, for employees of all ages, there needs to be an emphasis on updating and managing one's own career as this may be important in avoiding obsolescence and remaining employable. As they contend "the ultimate responsibility for being able to continue as a competitive worker rests with the individual employee and self-management of career." (p. 265). However, self-management requires more than just a desire to succeed. It will also require an understanding of the many other dynamics and influences that have emerged in recent times. There may just not be the number of opportunities available prompting Mirvis and Hall (1994) to propose that many more employees may have to reassess and re-examine their career aspirations and possibly look to other sources of meaning to avoid the experience of psychological failure.

## **JOB LOSS AS TRANSITION**

Increasingly involuntary causes are being cited as reasons for pursuing a career transition with the most common of these being job loss incurred through organisational restructuring. So whilst the opening quotation from Schwab et al (1987; cited in Miner & Robinson, 1994) might suggest a primarily monetary motivation for those pursuing career transition the actual determinants are much broader and diverse. Extracting a deeper meaning from what 'return' in that context means does, however, allow the identification of many of the individual determinants of transition as individuals are likely to attempt to maximise their return from any endeavour undertaken.

Although current interest is in voluntary career transition, the work environment that prevails is such that job loss has become an increasingly common occurrence with white-collar workers disproportionately affected (Cameron, Freeman & Mishra, 1991; cited in Eby & Buch, 1995). Job loss does of course have the potential to become either a new job entry, or to result in periods of unemployment. As job entry has been defined as a type of transition it will include individuals who have recently lost a job, or who have been unemployed. Encouraging individuals who have lost their job to engage in active job seeking behaviours may underpin future psychological success as Leana and Feldman (1992) concluded that the more extensive this activity is, and the more problem-focused it is, the more likely it is to result in a positive outcome. There are many negative symptoms attributable to lower levels of job seeking behaviour with Mallinckrodt and Fretz (1988) indicating, for example, that the result is in increased level of stress symptoms. Value can be found therefore in providing some discussion of the role that job loss has in the career transition process particularly with respect to whether or not an initially negative event can have a positive career development outcome.

As an involuntary initiator of transition job loss imposes a unique set of pressures on the individual that have great potential to undermine the psychological success cycle (Latack & Dozier, 1986). Not only does job loss itself present the individual with significant issues, attempts to re-enter the work force will also provide unique challenges, even though Latack and Dozier support the argument that career growth may be one positive outcome. In today's economic environment, with organisational restructuring resulting

not only in redundancies but also in permanent job losses, the individual so inflicted is likely to be faced with major life decisions as the skills, knowledge, and experience acquired up to that point may no longer be marketable. Such is the fate of older workers with Greller and Stroh (1995) reporting that 51.4% of workers between the ages of 55 and 64 who are displaced do not find other employment. Citing Rife and Belcher (1994) they suggest that workers who are forced out of employment are apt to be disoriented, confused, and alienated. Possible age discrimination is also suggested as a reason that such displaced older workers experience longer periods of unemployment (Hepworth, 1980 and War & Jackson, 1984; cited in Eby & Buch, 1995). The psychological affects of unemployment are well documented (West et al, 1990) with this situation unlikely to be conducive to rational career decision-making. However, Eby and Buch (1995) did find some support for Latack and Dozier's proposition that career growth can occur following job loss suggesting that a resourceful individual does have the potential to overcome the negative impact of that loss.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF CAREER TRANSITION**

The psychological effects on the individual are likely to be quite different depending on the type or magnitude of career transition that occurs. For example, changing jobs *and* changing organisations (inter-organisational) is likely to be more stressful for the individual, and have a greater impact on life generally, than just changing jobs (intra-organisational). Rosenbaum (1979) proposed that "Transitions are the major means of achieving success in the corporate structure" (cited in Brett, 1984, p. 178) with Nicholson and West (1988) claiming that "the experience is almost universally positive" (p. 210). Accepting the proposition that they are the routes to success a review of the consequences of transition will underpin an evaluation of the terrain of that route.

***Mental Well-being.*** Kirjonen and Hanninen (1986) suggest that problems relating to mental well-being are most common on the lowest levels of the occupational hierarchy. This might suggest that one of the consequences of career transition is a diminution in these problems, that is the further one progresses up the hierarchical structure the higher one's level of well-being is likely to be. In so far as a career transition is sought to

improve one's position in life, the outcome should be positive. Providing support for the 'spillover' hypothesis Perosa and Perosa (1983) suggest that one of the positive outcomes of transition is the influence it has on other parts of one's life. Without the potential for benefits to accrue individuals would of course be less likely to pursue transitions. However, where any transition is involuntary the suspicion may be that, initially at least, the event will have a negative impact on the individual.

***Personal Growth.*** A potential and perhaps obvious outcome is personal growth or development but as Nicholson (1984; 1994) notes there are many dimensions to personal change that fall under the influences brought to bear through career transition. West and Nicholson (1989) argue that the research evidence confirms that personal growth, satisfaction, and innovation are the more common outcomes of job change, and as Hall (1986) contends a change in jobs is more likely to promote growth than not changing. In so far as voluntary transitions are concerned one would readily argue that they are pursued for that very reason, that is the individual is dissatisfied with their current position, a plateaued career, and is actively seeking to change it thereby initiating an event resulting in personal growth. Perosa and Perosa (1983) explore the positive affect of career transition on some of these growth dimensions. In a subsequent paper (Perosa & Perosa, 1984) they confirm that individuals who changed careers scored highest on an identity achievement measure. Further support for the proposition comes from West and Nicholson (1989) who also argue that career transition offered greater perceived opportunities for growth for those pursuing this option over those electing to accept the status quo of a plateaued career.

***Career Growth.*** Closely linked to personal growth is the concept of career growth and the pursuit of this likely underpins the greater percentage of voluntary career transitions. If the sought after career growth occurs the event is most likely to be perceived as positive and beneficial. Kirjonen and Hanninen (1986) found that, on the average, career changers report that changing to a more challenging job had been beneficial with Eby and Buch (1995) contending that the opportunity to remove oneself from a dissatisfying job promoted career growth. There is of course a certain degree of risk in initiating a transition and careerists would most likely assess or weigh up those risks before embarking on a change pursuing it only if the perceived benefits outweighed the assessed

risks. Perosa and Perosa (1983) note, for example, that one of the more significant reasons for not changing is security with some not changing and opting to remain in their current role as they perceive considerably more risk in changing. As would be expected downward moves are generally viewed as having a negative impact on career growth with West et al (1990) confirming that these lead to reduced career opportunities and personal growth.

***Work Characteristics.*** Keller and Holland (1981) reported that the overall result of a job change appears to be better performance, more innovation and higher satisfaction with Thomas (1980) reporting that career changers expressed a much higher level of satisfaction with their new career direction. An interesting down-side to inter-organisational transition is proposed by Miner and Robinson (1994) and that is that more frequent transitions will lessen the employee's accountability for the longer term implications of their decisions, a proposition that suggests lower organisational commitment due to much shorter job tenures. The inference is that, as the individual has accepted the concept of the protean career, coupled with the knowledge that their tenure in any one position is not likely to be long, their commitment to the organisation will be such that they need be less concerned with the long term ramifications of actions taken whilst in that position.

***Stress.*** There appears to be little support for the generality of the stress model with a claim that people actively seek out the "stress" of desirable job changes (Nicholson & West, 1989; West & Nicholson, 1989). Whilst this claim may be arguable for voluntary transitions it would be difficult to support the same argument where involuntary transitions occur. The negative impact of job loss and unemployment has already been noted. Latack (1984) reported that, consistent with other studies, role ambiguity, often associated with plateau, and role overload were both strongly associated with job stress, suggesting that individuals adversely affected, and who changed jobs, would experience less. However, she found little support for the hypothesis that career transition is used as a stress-coping mechanism. Minor et al (1991) suggest that it is the transition itself that creates role ambiguity, whilst Bruce and Scott (1994) found that among voluntary transitions, one type was no more stressful than another. On the negative side Kirjonen and Hanninen (1986) note that in their sample of white-collar workers job stress actually

increased in workers who had been promoted. Whether or not this stress continued at initial levels, or at what rate it dissipated, is not reported. Change itself incurs a certain amount of stress and the expectation is that any transition will incur some stress but that the level of stress would reduce over time.

## **MEASURING CAREER TRANSITION**

Despite the advent of some transitions being obvious by their very nature, for example promotion or job loss, defining a measure for career transition has proven to be as elusive as deciding on a definition for the phenomenon. The two approaches commonly adopted are to measure either through the type of transition occurring, or through the magnitude of the event itself, with the latter probably more widely adopted. Accepting that a career transition involves the time during which job seeking behaviours are indulged in the dimension of time may also be a component of the measure. Kirschenbaum and Weisberg (1994), however, note that a conscious decision by an individual to change jobs is preceded by a passive job search. Not all individuals who engage in passive job searches will change jobs as the passive activity may actually result in a decision to opt for the status quo, confirming the acceptability of the current role. A career transition therefore cannot, by default, include any passive job search if that activity is not preceded by an active job search resulting in a job change.

As well as being interested in recent transitions this study is also interested in career transition intentions. The measure most often adopted in this regard is the individual's 'Intention to Turnover' (see discussion above) information on which can be solicited through direct questions. Within this measurement taxonomy recognition must also be given to the differences between planned transitions (voluntary), and unplanned transitions (involuntary).

**Magnitude.** The magnitude of a transition is a measurement of the amount of change an individual experiences as a result of that transition and assumes that a transition has actually occurred. There are obvious difficulties in this as change is something that the individual experiences and as such is subject to the perceptions of that individual. What

is perceived as a major change by one individual may only be perceived as a moderate change by another individual.

Noting the dearth of available measures relating specifically to transition Bruce and Scott (1994) developed a number of measures for their own study of which career event magnitude was a major component. Confirming the use of the degree of change as a measure of magnitude they adopted a five-point response scale ranging from “little or no change” to a “great deal of change” (p. 24), an approach that appears to have gained acceptance amongst researchers. Attempting to provide a more objective measure of magnitude Thomas (1980), citing Hiestand (1971), proposed that a career transition may be defined as either a 45 degree transition, in which current skills are relevant to the new role, or a 90 degree transition, in which new skills must be learned. Despite having some appeal in that such an approach provides a framework in which the educational or training intentions of the individual may be assessed it fails to acknowledge the many other factors that will be faced in a career transition situation. It does not, for example, acknowledge the dynamics of an inter-organisational transition. Providing what appears to be a sounder base for measurement of magnitude Latack (1984) also offers an objective method for measuring the magnitude of a career transition which operationalises Hall’s (1979; cited in Latack, 1984) classification scheme. Scaled from 0 to 12 the measure ranges from no change (0), to change in job, level, and occupation (mid-point), to change in job, level, function, occupation, and occupational field (12). This measure quantifies a change in type by assigning the magnitude of the change to a twelve-point scale and has proven to be applicable in a research context (Stout et al, 1987).

**Type.** A change in type may be measured across two dimensions. Holland’s theory of types (Sharf, 1992; Zunker, 1994) provides one dimension in which the extent of a transition may be assessed. Associated with each of Holland’s types (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, conventional) is an occupational environment. Movement between these types, or their associated occupational environments, is an effective measurement (Perosa & Perosa, 1983). Such an approach does, however, require both a pre and post-event measure. At its simplest level a change in type can be measured by the transition itself adopting, for example the typology proposed by Latack

(1984). Adopting a taxonomy similar to Latack (1984), Heppner et al (1994) propose three situations that may be used to operationally define a career transition: task change, position change, and occupation change. Support for this approach is found in West and Nicholson (1989) who used a change in function, a change in employer, or a change in status to define the type of transition.

## SUMMARY

As a path to achieving psychological success the pursuit of career transitions will remain a major means, particularly amongst the core group of workers who remain within the hierarchical structure of organisations. As such, an understanding of the phenomenon will underpin the career management activities of those involved in the process. The possibilities surrounding career transition can be mapped into a simple matrix (Figure 3.2) and it is these possibilities that are being investigated in this research. Of particular interest is the apparently contradictory ‘can not but will’ scenario, that is “I cannot, but I’m going to!”, in which the individual lacks the resources to effect a transition but has the desire or intent to do so. This reflects a positive attitude (high self-efficacy) to changing one’s current unsatisfactory career situation. If the individual perceives themselves as being on a career plateau, and further perceives themselves as not being able to effect a career transition, interest is in what steps they are likely to take to change the

	<b>WILL</b>	<b>WILL NOT</b>
<b>CAN</b>	Resources Positive/ Desire or Intent Positive	Resources Positive/ Desire or Intent Negative
<b>CAN NOT</b>	Resources Negative/ Desire or Intent Positive	Resources Negative/ Desire or Intent Negative

**Figure 3.2** Possibilities with respect to Career Transition.

current situation so that they move to the 'can and will' scenario. Within this matrix it is possible to substitute the 'can' scenario with a 'have' scenario to provide a similar perspective on individuals who have actually completed a career transition.

The career intentions of individuals provide one source of information on the phenomenon. Knowledge of the past occurrences and experiences of individuals who have actually been through a career transition provides another valuable source of information. The research interest is in the relationship between career plateau and career transition and whether or not those on a career plateau view career transition as an escape from that situation, or if indeed they wish to escape. Although not the only possibility as a coping response to career plateau, a transition into a new role, retirement, or a new job, is proposed to be a valid behavioural response (Elsass & Ralston, 1989).

Career plateau is not the only determinant of career transition. The possibility exists that the event may be initiated voluntarily as a proactive search for success, or involuntarily through the occurrence of job loss precipitated by events such as organisational restructuring. Whilst the outcome and consequences of voluntary transition are likely to include greater psychological success, argument also exists that the negative event of job loss may also, depending on the individual's resources, result in a positive outcome as the individual re-appraises life.

The organisational reactions to a constantly changing environment, and the dynamics of the labour pool, will almost certainly lead to a continuing reduction in opportunities for hierarchical advancement. How 'success' is measured may require a major re-think with Hall and Richter (1994), for example, arguing for a replacement of the 'promotion culture' with a 'psychological success' culture within which career growth is defined as the development and use of new skills and abilities. Career transition is about career consolidation and according to Williams and Savickas (1990) "career consolidation requires that an individual 1) evolve a specialised identity or role valued by self and society, and 2) achieve occupational satisfaction, commitment, and skill." (p. 174). These objectives will underpin most, if not all, voluntary transitions, and will provide those individuals experiencing involuntary transition with a focus for seeking a positive outcome from what will probably be viewed initially as a negative event.

Man's eternal search for meaning, and attempts to establish identity, may underlie all transitions for it is through this that opportunities for the modification of life structures (Salomone & Mangicaro, 1991) are presented, including the correction and adjustment of earlier career decisions (Simon & Osipow, 1996).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LIFE BALANCE ORIENTATION

*“Boundaries between what is work and what is not do exist in time and place, but the existence of such boundaries in the human experience does not seem likely.”*

(Myers & Cairo, 1992)

Current trends in employment suggest a reorientation, particularly outside of the so-called core group of workers <sup>(1)</sup>, toward a more ‘balanced’ lifestyle as individuals re-examine work commitment versus family involvement and other priorities placing a greater emphasis on employment flexibility and family and social life (Louis, 1980). Oft termed life balance orientation, or simply life balance (Ettington, 1998), (or alternatively, Central Life Interest; Dubin, 1956; cited in Cook et al, 1981) and often simply measured as work/non-work balance, the theory proposes that individuals are motivated to achieve a balance, a type of homeostasis, across their life activities which will afford them the life style to which they aspire. In referring to life-style preference Zunker (1987) lists a number of orientations including financial, community involvement, family, work achievement, educational, leisure, mobility, and outdoor-work-leisure. The proposition is that, across these various orientations, individuals will attempt to achieve a balance such that they maximise the satisfaction they derive from their lives. As Zunker proposes, these dimensions “provide opportunities for individuals to process, prioritize, and develop realistic alternatives and options for decision making” (p. 113).

Hall (1990) chooses to classify these work/non-work dimensions as sub-identities born out of the various social roles adopted by individuals and which incur behavioural

(1) Handy (1989) provides an in-depth view of emerging employment trends and of the concept of ‘core’ workers.

expectations from others. These in total form the individual's perception of who they are and will decide their orientation of the individual. Providing an example Hall describes how a career role is associated with a career sub-identity and how this may be more or less dominant in the composition with other roles and sub-identities, for example parent or spouse, in forming the total identity of the individual. The identification of the dominant sub-identity would indicate the life balance orientation of the individual.

Ultimately what is being sought from the pursuit of a balance is life satisfaction, the synergistic outcome resulting from various indices of satisfaction including work, family, and social life (Smith, 1992). Life satisfaction, which may be equated with happiness, is the sum of these indices and has been defined by Veenhoven (1991; cited in Judge et al, 1994) as the degree to which individuals judge the quality of their lives favourably. But, as Myers and Cairo (1992) imply, individuals are not likely to maintain separate indices as demarcations between the various components of life satisfaction do not exist in the human experience. Rather, people will be assessing the cumulative index reviewing the impact on that of activities that adversely affect it. Confirming the interdependencies of the various life satisfaction components Hesketh (1993; cited in Brown & Crace, 1996) raises a valid point in confirming a growing awareness that roles such as work and family cannot be studied independently. This view is supported by Smith (1992) who contends that satisfactions with home life, with personal life and with other aspects of the job are correlated, with reports of boredom being closely related to all three. Ultimately the goal is to eliminate conflict between work and non-work roles, with the resolution of any inter-role conflict leading to the desired balance, life satisfaction, and ultimately happiness.

## **WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT**

Argument exists that the work ethic does not prevail as strongly or as dominantly within the contractor and temporary worker groups as it does within the core worker group (Handy, 1989). There are therefore likely to be measurable group differences as well as individual differences in life balance orientation. The actions an individual takes to achieve a life balance will vary but what should be immediately evident is where their

life balance orientation is weighted, for example toward work or toward non-work. Central to the issue of life balance orientation is the resolution of inter-role conflict, primarily the conflict between work and non-work roles. The quality of life attainable is influenced by the degree of conflict that prevails in and between the two major domains of work life and family life. If the demands of participation arising in one domain are incompatible with the demands in the other domain, conflict will prevail resulting in a deterioration of the quality of life through, for example, increased stress and its subsequent psycho-physiological effects (Adams et al, 1996). This will result in an imbalance with the perception that one domain is imposing constraints beyond what the individual believes is equitable. Attempts to address this imbalance, the conflict that results, and its resulting role inequity, underpin the individual's motivation to achieve the desired balance, all of which are believed to influence the individual's attitude towards work.

Although the relationship between work and non-work is bi-directional (Adams et al, 1996), and the influences on individuals to change jobs may come from either direction depending on the orientation and focus of the individual, most employees report that family is more important than work (Andrews & Withey, 1976, cited in Judge et al 1994; Guteck, Repetti, & Silver, 1988; cited in Judge et al 1994; Nicholson & West, 1988). However, equally likely to the scenario of work demands interfering with family life is the scenario in which family demands interfere with work. Either situation is proposed to influence affected individuals such that they may consider pursuing a career transition in order to restore a greater degree of balance to their lives. Work/non-work conflict may, however, result in absorption in the work role, for even though conflict may result in lower levels of satisfaction, it was also found to result in increased levels of job involvement and organisational commitment (Wiley, 1987; cited in Myers & Cairo, 1992). If in this situation the individual does absorb themselves in their work as a way of coping with the conflict, the option of career transition would appear, at least initially, less likely.

The situation possibly, and indeed probably, exists in which particular individuals choose to maintain an orientation that would be perceived by others as being out of balance. The two extremes are the so-called workaholic, who defines themselves totally in terms of their

work and for whom work becomes the only area of passion (Bardwick, 1986), and the individual who does nothing more nor less than is necessary to retain their job. The latter may, however, be an extremely active and enthusiastic family and social person. The energy and drive possessed at either extreme is comparable. The difference is that it is channelled in different directions dependent on the importance the individual attaches to either domain.

With current demographic shifts in the work force the work/family conflict assumes a different perspective depending on the gender of the individual. Brett (1984) reports for example, that in research in which she has participated, the general finding is that husbands are significantly less interested in their wives' work than vice versa. Occupational success, and its relationship with self-esteem, has always been an integral part of a man's identity and this pursuit of success has generally seen a greater devotion of energy to his occupation. Women, on the other hand, have traditionally found their calling in the nurturing role and have thus tended to devote their energies to home and family. With the disintegration of the social barriers supporting the traditional gender roles, and as the frequency of dual career families increases, the work-family conflict requires innovative solutions across a wider range of dimensions (Skovholt & Morgan, 1981).

The ability to balance work with non-work activities has become a more significant issue as the sharing of duties and responsibilities in the current social environment demands greater flexibility. Men expect to be more active in the home as women grasp the opportunities that await them in the workplace. Indeed, as Smart and Peterson (1994) found, women in the work force become increasingly more involved with their work as age increases, perhaps suggesting a reorientation possibly permitted through reduced involvement in the home as children vacate. This reorientation of expectations has its own impact on the career aspirations of individuals as they attempt to achieve a balance in their lives. Bardwick (1986) interestingly suggests women who remain in the home where there is even less prospect of 'promotion' may equally experience the dissonance experienced by careerists at plateau.

## CAREERS

Adjustments to their career will be one activity that individuals pursue in the search for a balance in life and the proposition is that career transition will be one of those activities. Greller and Stroh (1995) contend that an imbalance or disequilibrium results when a worker wants to suspend or terminate their career but for various reasons cannot do so. Alternatively, they suggest such imbalance may also occur when the careerist who wants to continue their career is compelled to leave the work force, or is unable to re-enter it after an absence. When these attempts to transition are thwarted an imbalance will result and dissatisfaction will ensue. Salomone and Mangicaro (1991) liken what they refer to as the elusive search for success and self-fulfilment, to the struggles faced by individuals in moratorium as they strive for role clarification and definition. These searches and struggles will be at the centre of much career adjustment initiated in attempts to achieve a life balance.

*Dual Career Families.* The dual career situation provides for interesting dynamics as those involved are required to accept the demands of a significant other in attempting to achieve a life balance. Adjustments to these dynamics may be slow in coming for as Duxbury and Higgins (1991; cited in Jepsen, 1992) concluded, the redistribution of roles within the family to match increased role responsibilities outside the family has not yet occurred. This suggests that, to some extent at least traditional gender roles still prevail. Steil and Weltman (1991; cited in Jepsen, 1992) found, for example, that men generally still see their own careers as more important than their wives' careers. However, citing a number of studies (Hall & Hall, 1978; Kilpatrick, 1982; London, 1978; McConkey, 1979), Tremblay and Roger (1993) suggest that, because of the impact it would have on their spouse's career, an increasing number of employees refuse promotion opportunities.

*Career Commitment.* The question arises as to whether or not it is possible to achieve a life balance and still remain committed to one's career. Noting the distinction between commitment and involvement Blau (1988) contends that an individual could be highly committed to their career yet moderate their job involvement thus retaining a healthy balance. Based on Blau's finding it appears reasonable to propose that career commitment and an acceptable life balance are not mutually exclusive outcomes.

However, Judge et al (1994) found that male executives rated work more important over family, religion, leisure, and community, devoting a greater number of hours to work than the average. These executives stated that the satisfaction they derived from this commitment impacted significantly on their lives suggesting perhaps that, as a group, they live to work rather than work to live. Career status may also be a factor for as Burke (1989) found, in a sample of police officers, despite an early orientation and commitment to their career and similar mobility to non-plateaued officers, those at plateau eventually developed a non-work orientation. Assessing job involvement at various ages Ornstein et al (1989) found that this was significantly lower for those around the age of 30, perhaps reflecting a family orientation for those with a young family. Career commitment does not, however, imply organisational commitment for one may be committed to one's career yet not committed to the organisation. In identifying an individual who does not identify with the organisation as a 'non-institutionalist', Schein, McKelvey, Peters, and Thomas (1965; cited in Blau, 1988) suggest that such people do not see their career in terms of the organisation and as such are willing to leave.

***Career Transition.*** The proposition that career transition is at the core of activities relating to the achievement of an acceptable life balance is a prime consideration in this study (see Chapter Three). As individuals resort more frequently to transitioning to achieve this balance a number of possible scenarios arise within which transitions from say a core role to a contractor role is but one. The orientation that individuals have, be it to work, to family, or to social life, will influence their attitude toward career transition and the type of transition that they are likely to pursue. If individuals consider themselves to be out of balance, and believe that their work is depriving them of opportunities to participate in other activities, then they are likely to consider career transition as a means to achieving a balance, whether or not the individual is on a career plateau. The possibility also exists that in order to achieve the sought after life balance an individual who transitions will transition into a job below the level the individual currently holds. Additionally, if an individual's orientation is towards work then the individual is likely to place more importance on career transition as a means of maintaining that particular balance. The interest within this study is, however, in the former scenario with the

distinction of interest being between work and non-work rather than necessarily understanding what any non-work orientation may be.

Difficulty exists in separating transition from the underlying attempts to more closely align with one's personal values. In citing Dalton (1989) and Veiga (1983) Herriot et al (1993) propose a developmental framework for career transition arguing that it is changing life roles and personal values that lead to individuals changing career objectives. The implication is that as individuals progress developmentally they will be proactive in aligning career objectives. Strauss (1959; cited in Nicholson, 1984) suggests that adjustment to transition can itself be considered a kind of personal development. Within this adjustment the individual absorbs change resulting in an alteration to their frame of reference, values, or other identity-related attributes. These views confirm the aforementioned difficulty and pose the further question as to whether it is changing values that underlie transition, or whether it is the transition itself that results in the adoption of new values. The former seems to be the more likely proposition. But perhaps the answer lies elsewhere for as Latack (1984) indicates events are likely to occur simultaneously. She suggests that individuals undergoing more significant career transitions are also exposed to greater personal life changes indicating that life instability possibly co-occurs across a number of domains. Transitions are, however, concerned with achieving a life balance and as Oleski and Subich (1996) found, adults changing jobs do indeed move toward a position of greater congruence. Referencing Holland's (1973, 1985a, 1985b) theory Sharf (1992) defines congruence as "the relationship of the personality to the environment" (p. 53). Holland's theory implies that if incongruence exists, dissatisfaction with current career will exist. Within this context career congruence can be viewed as an inherent component of life balance.

***The Protean Career.*** Given the nature of the protean career the probability exists that it will become increasingly more difficult to draw lines of demarcation between that and other domains of personal life. Hall and Mirvis (1995) contend that, since the protean career is driven by the individual's search for self-fulfilment and meaning, which can occur in any or a number of domains, a protean career is almost by default connected to and influenced by personal life. This is not to say that personal roles and career roles cannot be distinguished, but that they are highly interrelated with both being influenced

strongly by the basic elements of personal choice and the search for self-fulfilment. Alongside the protean career Handy's (1989) concept of the work portfolio, which includes both paid and free work, reinforces the increasing difficulty in defining the boundaries between the various domains of life. Handy, implicitly confirming the value of achieving a balance in life, cautions against having only one activity in a portfolio and likens this to the risky investment strategy of putting all one's money into one asset.

## VALUES

Near the heart of life balance orientation is the issue of values which will influence activities relating to the pursuit of balance as values determine and influence the ways in which needs are met at work, and outside of work (Brown & Crace, 1996). But, as Caproni (1997) confirms, people may have a great many values and because of the interdependencies that exist among these values they cannot easily be traded off against each other and as such people often struggle in prioritising them. Nicholson and West (1988) decided that the best way to determine priorities with respect to values was by asking people (in this case managers) what matters to them. The managerial sample in the study responded with 62% confirming that family was more important while 28% said that their career was more important. None of the other activities, including leisure or religion, exceeded 5%. The authors did note, however, that family commitment was more important for married managers whilst career and leisure activities were more important to the single manager. Corroborating Nicholson and West, Galinsky and Friedman (1993; cited in Mirvis & Hall, 1994) report that 60% of American workers rate the effect that a job will have on their personal and family life as 'very important' in making career decisions, and more important than either remuneration, benefits, or job security.

Supporting the importance of values Heppner et al (1994, p. 56) argue that "an important new thrust may be in measuring and understanding the dynamic, psychological processes which occur when individuals have clarified their interests, values, or skills, but still have difficulty moving to a new career field." However, this difficulty must be overcome if balance in life is the goal for if, as Brown (1995) contends, individuals are not able to

engage in work that they deem worthwhile or of value, that work will fail to be satisfying and an imbalance will persist. Further exacerbating the career indecision being faced will be ambivalence about occupational choices that will result if an individual is unclear as to what their values are, or if they are unable to prioritise them. This ambivalence is likely to result in inappropriate career decisions so clarity of values is important. Perosa and Perosa (1983) believe that, among transitioners, every individual appears to have “experienced the period of self-examination... looked deeply at personal values and lifestyle” (p. 76) in an attempt to reduce the discrepancy between original goals and present work realities. Perhaps this experience is what awaits those individuals who have reached a career plateau and lack direction as to resolution.

Some more direct results have been reported by Korman (1976; cited in Greenhaus & Callanan, 1992) who found that individuals with low self-esteem tended to make career decisions to satisfy other’s expectations of them rather than as a means to satisfying their own needs. Galinsky and Friedman (1993; cited in Mirvis & Hall, 1994) meanwhile report that over half the nation’s (USA) workers were pining for more time with family and friends. For men, however, as Skovholt and Morgan (1981) confirm, occupational success and high self-esteem appear to go hand-in-hand so it is likely that issues such as this will continue to be integral. As individuals grow older though, Hall and Mirvis (1995) argue that there are more ways to obtaining psychological success than just those associated with paid employment. They believe that as the boundaries between work and non-work become more permeable a greater number of options will exist to combine paid work with work more closely related to personal interests.

As Lieberman (1956; cited in Nicholson & West, 1989) was able to demonstrate values change. Investigating the effects of transition amongst a group of workers moving between shop steward and management roles he found that shop-floor values were soon replaced by management values. In discussing mid-career renewal Bejian and Salomone (1995) suggest that a change in values can result in a disparity between employer expectations and individual aspirations. Overcoming this disparity may present a challenge for both, as a mismatch in expectations is likely to result in dissatisfaction across a number of domains. In such situations the mid-career renewal may have a healthier prognosis if it includes investigation of a wider number of options within which

a better match of expectations and values is found. As Hall (1992) proposes the pursuit of a new career in midlife can serve as an adaptive response to the new needs and goals that can arise with adult psychological development subsequent to initial career choices.

***The Baby-Boomers.*** As a group the so-called baby-boomers continue to receive individual attention and this is also true when values are investigated. Hall and Richter (1994) suggest that this group has a stronger focus on self, a greater sense of freedom to act out their values, a need for greater autonomy, and are more concerned with why they are seeking success and the personal meaning of that success. Older generations, they suggest, were more concerned with the actual trappings of success. Hall and Richter (1994) also suggest that the baby-boomers are clearer in their work-family balance and even though they may consider work important, they work to live, rather than live to work. Although as a group the age range for baby-boomers is quite pronounced, varying across 20 years, and significant differences are therefore likely to exist even within that group. In discussing changes caused by social and economic forces Simon and Osipow (1996, p. 152) contend that “no group will need to respond more fully, with less preparation, than the large cohort of white-collar professionals and managerial workers entering their late 40s and early 50s.” This group is the mature segment of the so-called baby-boomers. In proposing ways in which organisations can assist to resolve work-family conflict, particularly the intrusion of work into family life, Hall and Richter (1994) suggest that baby boom managers are less inclined to accept this intrusion.

## **LIFE SATISFACTION**

Judge and Watanabe (1994) propose that the correlation of .44 uncovered by Tait, Padgett and Baldwin, (1989) “suggests that the spillover hypothesis may be the most accurate means of characterizing the job-life satisfaction relationship” (p. 102), a proposal supported by their own study. They also found support for the proposition that all three models, ie spillover, compensation, and segmentation, may be true for subgroups of individuals. The spillover hypothesis (Cramer, 1995; Latack 1984) indicates that (dis)satisfaction in one domain of life will spill over into other domains of life. Whilst the relative impact between job satisfaction and life satisfaction varies by

study results generally support the finding that satisfaction in one area has a positive effect in the other with job and life satisfaction being positively and reciprocally related (Judge et al, 1994; Judge & Watanabe, 1993). Initially suggesting that support for the apparent link lacks consistency Myers and Cairo (1992) then cite Rice (1984), who concluded that when measures in each area are reliable a reasonably strong correlation emerges, before concluding that “There is little doubt that satisfaction with life is related to satisfaction with work....” (p. 563).

Acknowledging the multi-faceted structure of life satisfaction Super (1984; cited in Simon & Osipow, 1996) confirms that a shift in understanding life satisfaction has occurred. Whereas in the past there was a focus on work as the central life issue the view now is that work is but one central concern with the list including the domains of such activities as homemaking, citizenship, and leisure. The cumulative consideration of these many facets of life is what determines one’s satisfaction with life. A reasonable implication is that if one is satisfied with one’s life then psychological well-being should also be high. Rodin (1986; cited in Greller & Stroh, 1995) proposes that the influence of one’s sense of control and range of choices on psychological well-being is strong. The control that an individual has over choices amongst these activities will therefore be an important determinant of life satisfaction. Based on their interpretations West et al (1990) propose, for example, that the unemployed and those experiencing downward transitions might improve their lives generally and achieve improved overall life satisfaction by seeking opportunities for growth and development in non-work domains. A study by Fryer and Payne (1985; cited in West et al, 1990) indicates that such a re-positioning of activities does result in improved levels of general well-being.

Confirming the impact of an imbalance between work and non-work Adams et al (1996) found that work interfering with family adversely impacted on both job and life satisfaction, but that family interfering with work did not strongly impact on job satisfaction. This finding was supported by Judge et al (1994) who also found that individuals in situations where work was interfering with family were significantly less likely to be satisfied with their life and that work-family conflict resulted in higher levels of stress. They record that for their sample of male executives those who reported good health, were married, and devoted more time to leisure activities, reported higher levels

of life satisfaction. Committing time to leisure activities appears crucial to both general well-being and to life satisfaction, and also has the potential to compensate for meaningless work (Driver, 1994). As well as proposing this link in their own study Judge et al (1994) cite Diener (1984) who also found that leisure activities were a significant source of life satisfaction. Diener also proposed that life satisfaction increases with age perhaps reflecting a progressive shift in values and priorities resulting in less time commitment to work freeing up time for the pursuit of other interests thus achieving a greater life balance. The supporting role of non-work variables is further confirmed by Dubin, Hedley, and Taveggia (1976; cited in Nicholson, 1984). They suggest that these can be “a stabilizing influence on adjustment to transition, acting as a buffer against the pressures for personal or role development by providing an alternative focus for central life interests.” (p. 187).

***Job Satisfaction.*** A significant component of life satisfaction is job satisfaction with the relationship between the two long being of interest to researchers (Cramer, 1995). Much of this research confirms that the relationship is positive and reciprocal (Adams et al, 1996; Cramer, 1995; Judge et al, 1994; Judge & Watanabe, 1993) with job satisfaction emerging as a positive predictor of psychological health (Pearson, 1998). Providing a possible explanation for the positiveness of the relationship Bower (1981; cited in Judge & Watanabe, 1993) argues that individuals in positive affective states are more inclined toward recalling positive material. This suggests that individuals satisfied with their lives are also more likely to be satisfied with their jobs because their general state of satisfaction and disposition influences their encoding, recall, and evaluation of job conditions and past job events.

With many of the determinants of job satisfaction being organisationally dependent the influence of the organisation in the relationship provides an area of focus. In discussing the organisational environment as it emerges from the current period of restructuring and downsizing Smith (1992) argues that the employees of the future will need to be adaptable, cooperative, and more accepting of change. She contends that, within this environment, workers who adapt to the new organisational environment are likely to be satisfied with their jobs, and with their lives, but she does confirm the difficulty in determining the directionality of the relationship. However, the achievement of a

balance in life within this new environment is still believed to be important for psychological well-being. As Judge et al (1994) propose job satisfaction is negatively impacted by work-family conflict and unless this is resolved it is likely to spill over into general life satisfaction. They record for example, that male executives who were permitted more flexibility in accommodating life activities reported higher levels of job satisfaction. Flexibility may therefore be critical to the achievement of life balance and the movement of workers into the contractual and temporary groups of workers could be underpinning attempts to secure this flexibility.

### **MEASURING LIFE BALANCE ORIENTATION**

In measuring orientation the intention is to determine whether or not the individual has either a work or a non-work focus. Combining this with measures of job satisfaction a number of classifications emerge from which it is possible to assess the degree to which the individual has achieved a current state of balance. Balance is of course an individual assessment and the point is reiterated that what may be a more than acceptable balance for one person may be quite unacceptable for another. What is important is whether or not the individual is in balance and in which area their orientation lies.

If individuals claim they are satisfied with their job then it is reasonable to assume that, in so far as work is concerned they have achieved a balance, and that if an imbalance does exist then the source of that imbalance is in the non-work domain. If, however, an individual states that they are not satisfied with their job then the assumption would be that they have not achieved a balance and their orientation then becomes important in determining possible reasons for that dissatisfaction. Overlaying a measure of job satisfaction permits a number of possible deductions. For example, a work orientation, with low job satisfaction may indicate the interference of non-work activities. Alternatively, a non-work orientation and low job satisfaction may indicate work interfering with non-work activities. The assessment of these permutations is at the core of the measurement of life balance orientation, and subsequently, the steps an individual is likely to take to restore balance to their life.

Some of the earliest work in this area is attributable to Dubin (1956; cited in Cook et al, 1981) who developed the Central Life Interests (CLI) measure. Defined as “the expressed preference for a given locale in carrying out an activity” (p. 154) the CLI determines into which of three discrete groups, ‘work-oriented’, ‘non-work oriented’, or ‘flexible focus’, an individual falls. Measurement in each area is justified as it would not be valid to assume for example, that because an individual was assessed low in work involvement they would necessarily be high in non-work involvement. An individual could possibly score low in each area indicating a possible general lack of interest in life. A flexible, or unfocused, classification would indicate a similar score on both other measures. Whilst the CLI is too large for use in the present study the taxonomy is sound and will be adopted.

**Work Orientation.** A work orientation can be determined by the extent to which individuals personally identify with their job. If their job is an important component of their life, and they devote much of their time and energy to it, it is likely that a work orientation prevails. The extreme orientation is the so-called workaholic who is so involved in their job that other facets of life may be virtually neglected or ignored. A popular measure, which will be adopted for the present study, is the Job Involvement scale of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Camman, Fichman, Jenkins & Klesh, 1979; cited in Cook et al, 1981) which comprises a three item measure.

**Non-Work Orientation.** As previously mentioned it would not be valid to assume that because an individual scored low on a work involvement measure that they necessarily had a non-work orientation. Hence the requirement to include a measure of non-work orientation. A number of possible non-work orientations exist, for example social, recreational, community involvement, family, educational, and leisure (Ettington, 1998; Zunker, 1987). Whilst these are interesting in their own right the scope will be restricted and these varieties will be combined into a single component as it is the work versus non-work distinction that is relevant to the present study. Jansen and Chandler (1989, 1991; cited in Ettington, 1998) have developed a number of career orientation measures and one of these, used by Ettington and comprising seven questions, will be used to determine the extent to which a non-work orientation exists.

## **IS BALANCE A DESIRABLE GOAL?**

Ruminating over the role of Prozac in solving life's problems Caproni (1997) questions whether or not the pursuit of a balance in life as a single goal is necessarily a realistic, healthy or ideal objective, or whether it is even achievable. Should one devote one's life to achieving a balance to arrive at the end with the realisation that whilst pursuing that goal one's life has quietly slipped by? Is one particular goal any better or worse than another? Between being without any goal and being obsessed with one specific goal there lies a balance, just as there does between the various domains that comprise a healthy life. As Skovholt and Morgan (1981, p. 232) suggest "the fuel of human renewal is a balance between work, loving relationships, and recreation."

Caproni's point is not so much the balance an individual seeks in life as to whether the pursuit of that elusive balance is desirable. Further complicating the pursuit is the assertion by Osherson (1980; cited in Hall, 1990) that life balance itself will not necessarily be stable with personal life changes also triggering important career changes. Perhaps the final word on this should be left to Caproni as she argues for the proposition that people should not settle or strive for a balanced life (1997, p. 50):

"... the emphasis on work/life balance may be another individualistic, achievement-oriented model based in modern bureaucratic organizational thought, setting us up to strive for one more thing that we cannot achieve and, in so doing, keeping us too focused, busy, and tired to explore the consequences of our thinking and actions."

## **SUMMARY**

In considering the subject of life balance orientation the intent is not to argue that any particular orientation is healthier than another. Rather the intent is to determine what orientation an individual has and to assess what possible impact that may have on the career decision making processes engaged in by individuals as they attempt to achieve a balanced life. The argument is that individuals will have an orientation and whilst this

may be toward any number of the domains of life these will be, for the purposes of this study, simply divided into the two domains of work and non-work.

Central to the exploration of the phenomenon is the subject of work-family conflict which can have an important effect on job and life satisfaction (Adams, 1996). As work occupies a significant part of life the resolution of any conflict is seen as central to the achievement of a balance. The orientation an individual has, be it to work or to family, will influence the strategy they adopt toward resolving this conflict. The source of conflict may be in either domain. As such the adoption of career transition as a resolution strategy will be to achieve either of two outcomes. The outcome will be either an increase in the dominance of work, through which an individual will derive greater satisfaction; or a decrease in work involvement, through which the individual will be able to devote greater time and energy to the non-work domain. An appreciation of the role of career transition in the achievement of a greater life balance is a focus of the present study.

Careers are changing as individuals assume a greater responsibility for the management of them. As the protean career becomes the norm other influences are impacting on the individual's attempts to manage those careers and to balance career activities with other spheres of their lives. The dual career family in which dyadic dynamics are at play creates its own unique situation as traditional gender roles are reshaped and new values assimilated. This shift in values, be they individual or societal, will impact on career commitment with the result that an individual will likely have a greater commitment to their career than they are to either their current job or to their existing employer. A shift in responsibility for career management, a greater self-reliance, and the acceptance of that by the individual underpin a greater willingness to pursue work opportunities across a much broader front. This shift in responsibility to the individual is also accompanied by a corresponding shift in loyalty that results in a weaker commitment to the organisation (De Meuse, 1990).

The desired outcome of a balance in life is life satisfaction and the happiness that accrues from that satisfaction. As Myers and Cairo (1992, p. 561) contend "The idea that one might have a good job, a nice home, a sympathetic spouse, and children with naturally

straight teeth and still not be happy is now common in our social discourse.” So how does one achieve a state of balance and its accompanying satisfaction? As Brown and Crace (1996) contend the satisfaction of values in any role contributes to overall life satisfaction. A number of hypotheses relating to the relationship between job and life satisfaction are proffered of which the spillover hypothesis appears to gain favour. This proposes that satisfaction in one domain of life spills over into the other. Accepting this, the pursuit of satisfaction will likely be a balancing act as individuals assess the source of any dissatisfaction and attempt to address that source. The argument is basically that if an individual is not satisfied with their life then an imbalance exists. If that imbalance, and hence the source of any dissatisfaction, is determined to be within the work domain, the question arises as to whether the individual will perceive career transition as a means to eliminating that source.

Questioning the value and benefit in pursuing a balance in life as a goal in itself Caproni (1997) suggests that this may divert energy from actual participation in life. This suggestion, although it does have some merit, will not be debated nor will it be argued that pursuit is a conscious activity engaged in by individuals. However, an imbalance, and its resulting dissatisfaction, will create a dissonance which individuals will attempt to ameliorate. The current research interest is in the role of career transition in those attempts.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### JOB SATISFACTION

*“People who are unable to engage in work that they deem important violate their standards of behavior and are likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs.”*

(Brown, 1995)

Job satisfaction, that state which results from “the appraisal of one’s job as attaining or allowing the attainment of one’s important job values, providing these values are congruent with or help to fulfil one’s basic needs” (Locke, 1983, p. 1319), has occupied the attention of researchers for decades. Locke reports that by 1972 well over 3300 studies on the subject had been published with no suggestion that the rate of publication was likely to abate. Given this level of interest it is not surprising that job satisfaction is frequently included as an additional topic of consideration in studies relating to individuals in organisational settings. Although overall job satisfaction is distinct from career satisfaction, for example one could easily be satisfied with their career but not satisfied with their current job, there exists a reasonably positive relationship between them (Rhodes & Doering, 1993). Given time the likelihood is that any dissatisfaction being experienced in one area will negatively impact on the other with satisfaction in that area declining to the point where the individual is motivated to address the issue.

An overall or general measure of job satisfaction comprises a number of job-related elements (Smith, 1992) of which one in particular, satisfaction with career or promotional prospects, is relevant to the present study. If an individual reports dissatisfaction with their job generally, and dissatisfaction with their career specifically, the proposition is that the individual will be motivated to effect a career change, a proposition that was borne out in a study by Rhodes and Doering (1993). They found a significant relationship between these particular measures of satisfaction and thoughts of changing career that is often expressed as an intention to quit. The exploration of this

relationship in a career plateau situation, and its impact on the career transition process, is pursued in the present study, with the proposition that career plateau results in job dissatisfaction which in turn influences any decision to effect a career transition.

In introducing job satisfaction as a phenomenon of interest its relationship to both career plateau and career transition provides a specific focus. Within this context the possibility that job satisfaction will moderate in the relationship between career plateau and career transition will be explored. To facilitate this exploration two measures will be considered, one concerned with general or overall job satisfaction whilst the other will focus specifically on the satisfaction individuals have with their current promotional opportunities and prospects. In isolating promotional prospects as a specific measure of job satisfaction it should be noted that there are many other factors/variables relating and contributing to job satisfaction, a reflection of the complexity of the phenomenon. Given that, the possibility cannot be discounted that, whilst an individual may express general satisfaction with their job, they may express dissatisfaction with one or more of the various components or facets of that job, or even that the corollary may exist. Considering aspects of the 'spillover' theory of job/life satisfaction (Cramer, 1995) the possibility also exists that factors external to the job and workplace are resulting in job dissatisfaction. Where such factors prevail attempts to restructure the job, to diminish the negative effects of career related dimensions such as career plateau, may have little if any overall impact on ratings of general job satisfaction.

## **CAREER PLATEAU AND JOB SATISFACTION**

Within the present research context the proposition that career plateau impacts adversely on job satisfaction is pursued. Although career plateau may have positive outcomes (Ettington, 1998) with continuing levels of acceptable job satisfaction, career plateau is generally perceived, both by the individual and the organisation, to be a negative event and to have negative consequences. Within this negative view an expectation is that one of the possible consequences of career plateau will be lower levels of job satisfaction resulting from the inability of the current role to meet the plateaued individual's needs or important job values. Additionally, the attitude of the organisation toward the career

plateaued individual, which at best is likely to be apathetic, is likely to impact on the individual's sense of self-worth further undermining levels of job satisfaction. However, investigations into the relationship have to date been inconclusive (Tremblay et al, 1995).

Support for the contention that career plateau does not impact on job satisfaction can be found in a number of studies. Reporting similar levels of job satisfaction amongst plateaued and non-plateaued subjects Veiga (1981) was unsuccessful in finding any relationship between the occurrence of plateau and a number of sources of job satisfaction and argues that plateaued managers adjust effectively to their status. Whilst similar results are reported by others (Evans & Gilbert, 1984; Near, 1985; Slocum et al, 1985), Evans and Gilbert did find some differences in various facets of job satisfaction particularly with aspects of remuneration where less satisfaction was recorded amongst older plateaued managers. They suggest that this finding may not be unrealistic given the probability that for this group remuneration is unlikely to change markedly. Veiga's (1981) contention that plateaued managers adjust to their status is difficult to support given Evans and Gilbert's finding, or perhaps one may become adjusted to a plateaued status yet still not be satisfied. In support of Veiga, Slocum et al (1985) found that the marketing strategy of the organisation was a source of influence with higher levels of satisfaction being recorded in plateaued individuals whose organisations had adopted a defensive strategy, whereas in more market competitive organisations there were no appreciable differences. This may, however, suggest that plateaued employees have lower expectations and that their attitudes toward their jobs are adjusted to meet those expectations, which in turn influence ratings of job satisfaction. Near (1985) also found that job satisfaction was slightly higher among plateaued managers although in this particular study the result was not significant. Arguing that the consequences of plateau are in fact unrelated to career satisfaction Nicholson (1993) reports that more mobile careerists, who because of their mobility are less likely to be plateaued, report higher levels of career satisfaction.

Whilst the results of much of the above research record little if any difference in the satisfaction levels of plateaued versus non-plateaued individuals it certainly does not conclude that career plateau improves job satisfaction. Research that does record an inverse relationship between the two appears to be more conclusive in its findings

(Bardwick 1986; Burke, 1989; Corzine et al, 1992; Tremblay et al, 1995). Chao (1990) found, for example, that lower levels of job satisfaction were reported by those who perceived themselves to be more plateaued. Perhaps some measures of the level of satisfaction in plateaued individuals are being confounded by objective versus subjective measures of that plateau. As mentioned previously some objectively plateaued individuals do not perceive themselves as plateaued and therefore possibly do not acknowledge this as an influence when assessing job satisfaction.

Based on Chao's (1990) finding the role of job tenure in the relationship between career plateau and job satisfaction appears to be a factor with longer tenure periods resulting in lower levels of job satisfaction, possibly through increasing acceptance by the individual that they have plateaued. The opposite effect, however, was reported in one study (Tremblay et al, 1995) with longer periods of career plateau being associated with higher reported levels of satisfaction with the organisation, although satisfaction with the organisation may not equate to satisfaction with the job. This relationship may be curvilinear and may vary depending on the acceptance by the individual of their plateaued status and the impact that has had on their ambition and the belief that they can progress further in their career. In a sample of plateaued male executives Judge et al (1994) found that those who had reached a plateau, who recorded high levels of job tenure, and who were considered to still be ambitious, were significantly less satisfied with their jobs. Further support for the role of tenure comes from Stout et al (1987). They found that in a sample of sales people greater tenure lead to less satisfaction with work and promotion, and less commitment to the organisation, the latter being another indicator that the individual is dissatisfied and may be considering a career change.

As alluded to job satisfaction may also moderate in the relationship between career plateau and career transition. The possibility exists, for example, that an individual may be plateaued, may be satisfied with their job, and may therefore decide to remain in their current role. Conversely, an individual may be plateaued, may be dissatisfied with their job, and may therefore decide to effect a career transition. The variability of this moderating relationship is of interest when one considers how the level or extent of job dissatisfaction may interact with the degree or level of career plateau to initiate a career transition by the individual. The question that arises is that if an individual is career

plateaued but still satisfied with their job, will they still effect a career transition, or if in the same situation when dissatisfaction results will they be more likely to effect a transition. A possible insight is provided by Ettington (1998) who found that plateaued managers with higher job satisfaction ratings were less likely to view themselves as being plateaued. The argument could prevail, based on Ettington's finding, that such managers would be less likely to pursue a career transition because firstly they are satisfied with their present job, and secondly they do not perceive themselves as being plateaued. These managers are therefore likely to consider themselves contenders for further hierarchical progression within their existing organisation. Ettington (1998) offers two possible explanations for this finding: a belief that a continuation of positive behaviour will be viewed positively by the organisation and may still lead to promotion, and that some people are just generally optimistic. In summary she concluded that the most significant determinant of greater job satisfaction for plateaued managers was perceived work challenge.

## **CAREER TRANSITION AND JOB SATISFACTION**

Considering that, as previously mentioned, job satisfaction is comprised of a number of specific satisfaction elements, it is also possible (and probable), that job dissatisfaction will occur regardless of whether or not the individual has plateaued. The question within this scenario is whether or not job dissatisfaction alone acts as a catalyst to career transition. A determination issue exists: if an individual is career plateaued *and* is dissatisfied with their job and effects a career transition, to which 'cause' can the transition be attributed. Whilst it will be argued that the likelihood of effecting a career transition increases as a function of both career plateau and job dissatisfaction the interest in this particular relationship is whether or not job dissatisfaction alone will prompt the individual to effect a career transition.

The proposition that job satisfaction is a factor in career transition finds support in a study by Heppner et al (1994) who found that dissatisfaction with current employment was indicated by approximately 50% of a sample who were in the process of effecting a career transition. Whilst this finding should be accepted with a degree of caution, for

example the dissatisfaction may have increased after the decision to transition had been made, other studies do provide support. Looking at subjects who had actually completed a career transition Kirjonen and Hanninen (1986) found that those who had changed employment had been less satisfied with their work than those who had not, indicating again that lower levels of job satisfaction may be a catalyst in career transition. Keller and Holland (1981) also found that a change in job preceded an increase in job satisfaction and given the longitudinal nature (twelve months) of their study it would appear that such increases are reasonably sustainable. Comparing those who had effected an inter-organisational transition with those who had transitioned intra-organisationally Kirjonen and Hanninen (1986) found that job dissatisfaction only decreased in those who had changed employers. This led them to the proposition that one of the most powerful determinants of a reduction in reported levels of job dissatisfaction was change in the content of the job. Exploring further the differences between intra and inter-organisational moves West and Nicholson (1989) report that the former are generally preceded by relative satisfaction whilst the latter are generally preceded by relative dissatisfaction. The conclusion that can be drawn from these studies is that a higher propensity to change jobs is associated with lower levels of job satisfaction, a proposition that will be pursued in the present study.

Smart and Peterson (1997) reviewed the voluntary versus involuntary career transition typology and suggest that a number of studies indicate that involuntary career transition results in lower job satisfaction. This is probably not surprising as the individual has probably been forcibly moved from a situation in which there may have been at least a modicum of satisfaction. Their own study found that voluntary career change resulted in higher overall job satisfaction but there was little difference in career satisfaction. Both these findings are consistent with Thomas (1980) although he did record some differences, particularly between blue and white-collar workers with blue-collar workers faring less well in either situation. In discussing the association between work and mental health Warr (1987; cited in Landy, 1989) suggests that workers who do change jobs frequently experience higher levels of job satisfaction which results in reduced levels of symptoms characteristic of emotional turmoil.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF JOB SATISFACTION**

Locke (1983) records a number of consequences of job satisfaction but suggests that the evidence supporting the findings should be interpreted with caution because in many cases the results are inconclusive. These consequences range from effects on physical and mental health and longevity, to impacts on organisational criteria such as productivity, absenteeism and turnover (Landy, 1989; Locke, 1983). Whilst these are obviously important in their own right, and may either directly or indirectly have an impact on various career processes, attention in the present study will be restricted to a focus on those consequences that are more likely to influence the individual's career decision making activities.

Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino (1979; cited in Bedeian et al, 1991) suggest that an individual may be dissatisfied with their present job but still be attracted to it because of its perceived relevance to their career. In this situation the individual may hold the perception that career objectives will still be achieved even though the current role does not provide immediate satisfaction. So even though job dissatisfaction may be present an individual may not immediately act to resolve that dissatisfaction in the belief that to do so could undermine broader career goals. Within this scenario the spillover hypothesis suggests that at some point this job dissatisfaction will impact on life satisfaction which will likely prompt the individual to either address the source of the dissatisfaction, or explore other ways of satisfying career objectives.

The intention to quit is generally accepted as a reliable predictor of job change. A relationship between job satisfaction and an intention to quit is indicated with earlier studies concluding that dissatisfied workers were more likely to quit (Landy, 1989). More recent studies, however, suggest that job dissatisfaction may be several steps removed from an intention to quit although it may still lead to this decision (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978; cited in Landy 1989). A high level of unemployment is often cited as an influence in any decision to quit with this being suppressed in such circumstances (Corzine et al, 1992). Supporting the proposition that dissatisfaction with promotional opportunities, and the accompanying potential for career plateau, will result in a decision to effect a career transition Gregson (1990) found that, although it was not the strongest, the promotions sub-scale of the Job Descriptive Index (see below) was

significantly related to intention to turnover. This confirms that where the potential to plateau exists, and where this contributes to dissatisfaction with an existing role, a career minded individual would assess opportunities to pursue career objectives outside of the immediate role.

A common coping mechanism in response to occupational stress is for the individual to extricate themselves from the situation perceived to be causing that stress. Confirming a possible causal relationship Bogg and Cooper (1995) suggest that, generally, those who are affected by occupational stress also report lower levels of job satisfaction. A proposition resulting from this suggested relationship is that the co-occurrence of occupational stress and low job satisfaction will underpin career transition activities. Whilst either in isolation is also likely to initiate career transition the co-occurrence of stress and job satisfaction will likely have a cumulative effect resulting in heightened career evaluation activities. Difficulty may exist, however, in determining the possible directionality of the relationship, that is whether it is the stress that is causing the job dissatisfaction or vice versa.

## **MEASURING JOB SATISFACTION**

Measures of overall or general job satisfaction, or satisfaction with any of the many dimensions that contribute to the overall measure, have generally been based on attitudes, that is feelings or beliefs (Landy, 1989), that the worker has about the job they fulfil. Reflecting the wealth of research that has occurred, and the many theories of job satisfaction that exist, the methods of capturing employee attitudes toward their jobs vary extensively. One instrument that has gained wide acceptance, because it provides measures of various components that can be summed into an overall measure, is the Job Descriptive Index (JDI). A sub-scale of the JDI will be adopted in the present study in which the focus is on satisfaction with promotional opportunities, and the relationship between that and overall job satisfaction.

The Job Descriptive Index was originally conceived by Smith, Kendall, Hulin and Locke (Smith, 1992) in 1959 with development continuing to date. It has gained wide

acceptance (Cook et al, 1981, report its application in over 70 studies over a five year period) with the reliability and validity of the measures being well established in the literature (Cook et al, 1981; Hanisch, 1992; Slocum, et al, 1985). Sub-scales within the JDI include satisfaction with supervisor, pay, promotion opportunities, co-workers, and type of work. Measured on a simple Yes/No/Cannot Decide basis, the sub-scales may be summed to provide an overall measure of job satisfaction, although the authors (Cook et al, 1981) do not favour this approach. Interest, however, is in the promotions sub-scale which will be adopted for the present study. Responses to this will be evaluated against a separate overall measure of job satisfaction to determine any possible relationship. For example, if a subject reports low overall job satisfaction and low satisfaction with opportunities for promotion, it may be reasonable to assume that the absence of promotional opportunities is contributing to a diminution in job satisfaction.

A measure of overall job satisfaction attempts to capture and summarise the dynamics of the many individual satisfactions of work. This approach to measuring such a dynamic phenomenon may be criticised on the basis that lower levels of satisfaction in particular dimensions of work may be obscured through their inclusion in an overall measure. The potential is for valuable information to be lost leading to an erroneous conclusion that the individual is satisfied with their job. The inclusion of an overall measure of job satisfaction is justified, however, as it will be used primarily to verify any possible relationship between that and the beliefs the individual has surrounding promotional opportunities. If an individual reports satisfaction with promotional opportunities, but dissatisfaction with the job generally, difficulty may result in attributing reasons for that individual seeking a career transition. The Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins and Klesh, 1979; cited in Cook et al, 1981) provides a three item scale of overall job satisfaction which, because of its brevity, will be utilised in the present study.

One possible influence in measuring job satisfaction is the age of the subject. There is a positive relationship between age and job satisfaction with older workers generally reporting higher levels of job satisfaction than younger workers. This effect was confirmed in a number of studies reviewed by Rhodes (1983; cited in Berry & Houston, 1993) but the reasons for it may be less easy to confirm with one possible attribution

being career stage. However, if there is also a positive relationship between age and career plateau, which appears likely, then the expectation may be that the older one gets the more satisfied one will be, but that also the more likely to career plateau one will be.

## **SUMMARY**

Job satisfaction is a complex phenomenon comprised of many work dimensions, some of which influence the career decision making process. The difficulty in isolating these interactions warrants the inclusion of job satisfaction as a separate measure within the present study. Of particular interest is the relationship between career plateau and job satisfaction where, despite previous research being inconclusive, the belief is that levels of job satisfaction will be lower amongst plateaued employees.

As well as considering a possible direct contribution to decisions to effect a career transition the proposition that job satisfaction also moderates in this relationship will be pursued. Career transition will be initiated for any of a number of reasons but the contention is that dissatisfaction with current job will be a major contributor to this decision.

The consequences of job satisfaction, or more appropriately job dissatisfaction, are varied although indicated relationships may be somewhat inconclusive. Difficulty may therefore exist in extricating actual reasons for effecting a career transition as these may be woven into underlying factors such as occupational stress. Additionally the possibility exists that satisfaction with a career itself may prevail even in situations in which job satisfaction is low. Career commitment may be stronger thus resulting in a decision to tolerate the present job as to do otherwise may undermine longer term career goals.

Finally, accepting a measure of overall job satisfaction may mask dissatisfaction with various work components hence the decision in the present study to include, in addition to an overall measure, a separate measure relating specifically to promotional prospects.

This measure will support more appropriately any inferences that may be explored in the career plateau - career transition relationship.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EDUCATION

*“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day;  
teach a man to fish and you feed him for life.”*

(Old Chinese proverb)

Despite Bridges’s (1994) contention that the qualifications of old, that is degrees and other certifications, are being replaced by new ‘qualifications’ that include desire, ability, temperament and assets or resources, the latter are most often reinforced by the former (Gatewood & Field, 1987; cited in Steffy et al, 1989; Markham, Harlan & Hackett, 1987; cited in Tremblay & Roger, 1993). De Meuse (1990) also confirms that formal education retains an important role noting the trend of increasing numbers of highly educated professionals working in organisations. Rather than a replacement of these qualifications occurring what may be happening is a harmonious blending with new criteria leading to an acceptance that formal qualifications alone are insufficient to ensure career resilience in today’s dynamic organisational environment. Acknowledging Sterns and Doverspike’s view (1989; cited in Kubeck et al, 1996) that the skills required to perform many jobs will become obsolete after five years because of technological changes, opportunities must exist to enable those workers to reskill and to subsequently confirm to a prospective employer that they possess those skills. The responsibility for creating those opportunities, and the willingness of the individual to pursue them, will be explored. Central to this exploration is the role that education and training have in the onset of career plateau and how they may influence the relationship between that and career transition.

A reasonable assumption is that individuals will pursue education for reasons other than improving career prospects. Judge et al (1994) report for example, an association between education and job satisfaction with highly educated male executives reporting significantly higher levels of job satisfaction. Current interest is, however, in its utility in

enhancing an individual's job-seeking activities and behaviour, and hence their career prospects, and will this be assessed. Given a scenario of two job candidates plying for the same position, the unsuccessful one may perceive their lack of success resulting from inadequate or inappropriate education or qualifications. The question arises as to whether this perception is likely to prompt the individual to consider the possibility that they have reached a plateau in their career and that they no longer possess the resources to progress beyond their current level. If the individual decides that they have indeed reached a career plateau will they attribute this to inadequate education or qualifications and will this attribution prompt the individual to further their education and seek additional qualifications. This leads to the issue of interest, which is whether the individual is likely to consider the furtherance of their education as a means to effecting a career transition.

Education has traditionally been viewed as something to be completed prior to entering the work force. However, what is increasingly being advocated is a life-long continuous commitment to learning. No longer can education or training merely precede employment. In the emerging occupational environment education and training must be an inherent component of employment and proceed with it as a means to ensuring employability and career resilience. Greller and Stroh (1995) note that organisational dynamics such as changes in technology and new strategies, including activities such as restructuring, have meant that new skills are required just to perform one's job as the job itself responds to those dynamics. Advocating such a life-long approach to learning Hall and Mirvis (1994) suggest that this should be an inherent component of a new strategy toward career development. They suggest that this new career, the protean career, includes the new qualifications suggested by Bridges (1994) but it also includes a large component of personal development, which in this context is synonymous with career development, and where development means "learning a living" (p. 333). Zunker (1987; cited in Hall & Mirvis, 1995) is supportive of this view suggesting that continuous learning is required for continued success where the emphasis is on continuous learning rather than on periodic retraining. Within this continuous learning environment the individual is the change agent. As the change agent the individual must acknowledge that pursuing a career requires a considerable commitment to learning and reshaping one's skills (Greller & Stroh, 1995). They comment further suggesting that those who

are not proactive in taking the necessary steps to stay skilled and knowledgeable may face the situation in which their career is stalled because their skills have become obsolete or irrelevant.

## **CAREER PLATEAU AND EDUCATION**

The argument may be that the higher one's level of education is the less likely one is to reach a career plateau, or, at the least, that it may delay the onset of plateau to the stage of an individual's career where it is not an issue for the individual. This proposition is supported by Near (1985) who argues that education does decrease the likelihood of becoming plateaued, an argument she bases on her finding that, in general, non-plateaued managers possessed higher education levels than did their plateaued counterparts. Support is also forthcoming from Tremblay and Roger (1993) who established a link between education and length of time on plateau with those possessing lower levels of education experiencing longer periods of plateau. Their conclusion was that education is an important factor in determining objective plateau. Underpinning this particular argument is the proposal that advancement, or promotion, is more likely to occur at more regular intervals the more 'qualified' one is, that is that career progression is somehow related to education. All other things being equal between two job candidates, the probability is that the more 'qualified' one is likely to get the promotion or advancement.

Compounding the prospects of career plateaued individuals is the finding of Stout et al (1988) that an attitude appears to prevail amongst them that further training was not necessary. Whilst Dewhirst (1991) is correct in asserting that education and training are important and necessary, but insufficient on their own to prevent plateau, this attitude will need to change if career prospects are to improve. From this discussion the role of education as both a preventive measure, and a curative measure, of career plateau and a route to career resilience may be asserted.

Contributing to the phenomenon of career plateau is the occurrence of technical obsolescence that Dewhirst (1991) contends will increasingly become an issue. Kelly (1985) argues, for example, that the 'half-life' of an engineering graduate's useable

technical knowledge is now estimated to fall between five and seven years. This term finds support in general areas with Hall and Mirvis (1995) suggesting that five years in any specialty may be the mid-life for that area. The half-life of a career stage would therefore be the half-life of the competency field of that career from which point on the individual would be faced with an accelerating prospect of either skill obsolescence, career plateau, or both.

## **CAREER TRANSITION AND EDUCATION**

One of the factors that contribute to career mobility is education with higher levels of education being related to greater mobility. If the individual considers education to be a constant, and they are not prepared to further their education, then their career mobility will be affected and opportunities to effect career transitions will be restricted. Limited career mobility will in turn result in career plateau. The issue of interest is whether or not education will influence the relationship between career plateau and career transition. Within this scenario the individual may decide that their level of education is insufficient to effect a career transition and they may therefore decide to remain in their current role. Conversely, they may decide that their career plateau is not a result of their level of education, which they perceive to be above the requirements for the current role, and they may therefore decide to effect a career transition on that basis. Interest is in whether, given either set of circumstances, or to what extent the individual is likely to pursue a career transition.

For those individuals who have made the decision to transition recognition of the benefit in pursuing further education and training appears to exist as Heppner et al (1994) found that 89.2% of a sample in career transition indicated such willingness. Whilst this finding is convincing it does not, however, acknowledge other possible influences including the career status of the sample prior to their decision to transition. This particular sample may have been more mobile and may already have accepted the requirement for continuous learning. However, the notion of returning to education to earn a degree, or new skills, or simply to self-improve, finds ready support (Mirvis and Hall, 1994) as this fits comfortably into the protean or boundaryless career concept.

Heistand (1977; cited in Perosa & Perosa, 1983) also supports the concept observing that “the return to school is a primary means by which a person may move into an entirely new profession” (p. 73). Perosa and Perosa (1983) found in their own study that of those who were in the process of transitioning 80% had returned to the education system, and of those who had actually effected a change 50% had done so by first furthering their education. Whether such willingness to pursue further education exists in individuals who have maximised their career progression based on existing levels of education will be explored in the present study.

## **ORGANISATIONAL VERSUS INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Much has already been discussed relating to the shift in responsibility for the management of one’s career with an increasing expectation that the individual will continue to assume a greater level of this responsibility. An inherent component of career management is the acquisition and retention of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the work role that the individual has or aspires to. Responsibilities in this area have also undergone reassignment, and whilst a shift away from the organisation and toward the individual has occurred, the respective roles that each are to play have also been more clearly defined.

*Organisational.* Acceptance can readily be found that the balance of responsibility for career management has shifted to the individual. This shift has, however, not removed all obligations from the organisation. The organisation must now accept the responsibility for the creation of an environment in which individual responsibility can be exercised and in which the norm is “to motivate and empower individuals to develop their skills and their knowledge throughout their working lives” (Confederation of British Industry, 1989; cited in Watts, 1996, p. 46). Crucial to this environment is the acceptance of the concept of continuous learning, something that may not be readily forthcoming for, as Hall (1990) argues, current performance provides the short-term focus of most organisational developmental activity. This short-term focus will need to shift to a longer-term focus if the organisation is committed to the career development of its employees. Compounding this situation is another assertion by Hall (1986) relating to

an assumption often held by management that the established person already is fully trained and thus needs no further assistance. Cascio (1995) argues that companies must make it easy for employees to learn and to become flexible.

Cascio (1995) notes that there are macro-level factors that provide strong incentives for organisations to not invest in training. These, he suggests, include a tendency for training budgets to be allocated to privileged groups, the poaching amongst employers of trained employees, and various tax accounting regulations. To this can be added the knowledge that of those individuals pursuing career transitions the more qualified were more likely to transition out of the organisation (Nicholson & West, 1988) providing further disincentive for organisations to invest in the development of their employees. Cost will always be a factor with Newman (1995) suggesting that the organisation will continually be questioning whether the investment in training is warranted. These costs need to be assessed against other options for as Connor and Fielden (1973; cited in Tan & Salomone, 1994) argue, it could well be less expensive for the organisation to subsidise educational options related to launching a second career than to continue underwriting the salary of large numbers of 'deadwood' employees.

The major responsibility facing the organisation is to keep its employees aware of business directions as without this awareness individuals will be unable to determine the actions they need to take in order to continue their contribution to the success of the organisation (Waterman et al, 1994). As Waterman et al argue, as does Cascio (1995), this responsibility must be supported by a willingness to help individuals explore opportunities, to facilitate life-long learning, and to encourage job movement as a means to avoiding career plateau. Within this environment the individual requires a heightened sensitivity to what the organisation is doing for without this awareness they will be less able to respond with the requisite skills (Davis & Rodela, 1990). This awareness can only be gained if the organisation accepts its responsibility to share this knowledge with its employees.

**Individual.** Regardless of the organisation's responsibilities the individual is ultimately responsible for their own career including the acquisition and maintenance of the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities. The individual's value, and their subsequent employability, will depend on whether or not these knowledge, skills and abilities are

maintained (Sterns & Miklos, 1995). As Sterns and Miklos contend employees will have to work at remaining competitive in the work force by consciously managing their own careers. The updating of existing knowledge, skills and abilities, and acquisition of new ones as jobs evolve, will be more necessary for workers at any age if they wish to remain competitive. As Kanter (1989) proposes, people will increasingly find their careers shaped by how they develop and market their skills, and not by the sequence of jobs provided by one organisation.

The demise of the job-for-life phenomenon, and the emergence of core, contractual and temporary groups of workers, will place a greater responsibility on workers as they seek out employment opportunities. Within this environment, as Waterman et al (1994) contend, as the individual seeks out employment opportunities they will need to have the competitive skills to match the work requirements and to find that work when and where ever it may be. This will require knowledge of the work environment, of the skills that are required within that environment, and the ability to meet that requirement when opportunities arise. Waterman et al add that for most companies supporting each employee's need for lifelong learning will entail a greater commitment of time and resources to education. Weick and Berlinger (1989) suggest, for example, that the emphasis on continuous learning means rather than spending 100% of every sixth year relearning some new position, people would spend 20% of their time in each of the preceding five years relearning a position that is then practiced during 80% of the sixth year. The amount of time devoted to education and training may be debated, Handy (1989) for example suggests 20% of a manager's time should be spent on education whilst Waterman et al (1994), quoting an industry executive, suggest 5% for employees generally. The point, however, is that learning should be incorporated into the job and form a continuous and inherent component of it.

Arguing that employees should have the right to obtain on-going training Cascio (1995) confirms that continuous learning is imperative and that to ensure any degree of career resilience workers must be dedicated to the concept. However, as previously discussed, the new work environment is one in which many individuals seek a greater balance. Supporting the concept of greater life balance De Meuse (1990) proposes that "in training and developing employees, the focus must shift to activities that favour life and

career planning, as well as continuing education and retraining” (p. 210). Watts (1996) also argues for more flexibility that would support individuals in developing a wider range of skills. This flexibility would result in a more responsive learning system that would mirror the more flexible work system resulting in a qualification and accreditation system that recognises individuals’ learning not only within the formal education system but also elsewhere.

Reflecting further the emergence of a new work environment Bridges (1995; cited in Watts 1996) proposes that all workers, be they employees or self-employed, should regard themselves as people in business for themselves and take the responsibility for their own life-long development. Whilst Minor and Robinson (1994) suggest that it is employees who leave the work force that face the risk of skills obsolescence, because of the rate of change in job content, this risk must surely face any employee unless that individual has made a commitment to continuous learning. For those facing transition, either voluntarily or involuntarily, the role of education as a selection criterion cannot be dismissed (Tremblay & Roger, 1993). However, as Bayton and Chapman (1977; cited in Sedge, 1985) found, most management training fails to meet the needs of those in transition reinforcing the need for individuals to be proactive.

## **THE AGE FACTOR**

Debate continues over the relationship between age and the ability to acquire new skills and knowledge. Whilst there is some suggestion that older workers lack this ability research generally fails to support this belief. There is some support though for the notion that older individuals take longer to learn and, during training, do indicate lower mastery of the training material (Guthrie & Schwoerer, 1996; Kubeck at al, 1996; Sterns & Miklos, 1995). What is important, however, are the changes in work behaviours that are sought through an educational or training intervention and Sterns and Miklos (1995) did find evidence, based on subsequent measures of performance, that the transfer of training objectives to the work environment was equally effective for older workers.

The attitude of the individual is a possible factor as Guthrie and Schwoerer (1996) found that those in more advanced career stages did not have a strong belief in their ability to succeed in training, and they also perceived less need for training. Including low self-efficacy other possible reasons for avoiding training are noted by Sterns (1986; cited in Kubeck et al, 1996). These include a fear of competition and a questioning as to the benefits of such training with many believing that the acquisition of further education at their stage of life would not be worthwhile (Leana & Feldman, 1992). Whilst Goldstein and Goldstein (1990; cited in Greller & Stroh, 1995) allege that older workers are often less inclined to invest time in their own training this is disputed by Guthrie and Schwoerer (1996). They suggest that despite one study which indicated that those over age 60 are less interested in training, there is little empirical evidence as to how age or career stage may affect reports of training needs.

The attitude of the organisation to the education and training of older workers is another possible factor interfering with the development of this group. Evidence exists to support the contention that older workers are often deprived of self-development opportunities (Rosen & Jerdee, 1976; cited in Kubeck et al, 1996; Sterns & Miklos, 1995) including a reluctance among managers to push such workers into training Guthrie and Schwoerer (1996). Further barriers to the education and training of older workers are referred to by Hall and Mirvis (1995) and include an organisational perception that it is too costly to continue to invest in developing older employees, and the belief that the older worker is too inflexible and difficult to train.

Despite these barriers Reisenberg (1987; cited in Marin & Splete, 1991) notes that there has been a tremendous growth in the adult learner's interest in returning to education, exploring career changes, and pursuing new options. This growth may be confirmation of the acceptance of the argument proffered by Davis and Rodela (1990) that "the mid-life adult has to confront and remove any reluctance to learning" (p. 214). A failure to embrace the concept of continuous learning will result in an employment disadvantage and it appears that acceptance of this concept is occurring in younger workers. As McEnrue (1989; cited in Sterns & Miklos, 1995) found younger employees and those with a high level of organisational commitment express a greater willingness to engage in self development as a career management strategy.

## **MEASURING EDUCATION**

The present study focuses on three dimensions of education and training with an interest in how these may relate to career plateau and how they may influence the relationship between career plateau and career transition. These three dimensions are; education and training that has been attained or accomplished up to the time of the study; education or training that was being pursued at the time of the study; and any education or training that subjects are able to confirm an intention to pursue. The possible variability between stated intentions and behavioural outcomes, with the resultant difficulty in measuring intentions as these may, for example, be situationally bound, is noted. However, in taking this measurement the argument is whether intentions are present, not whether they will materialise.

Within the latter two dimensions the purpose for which the education is, or will be, pursued will also be sought, as the intention is to differentiate between personal interest purposes and purposes more directly associated with career development issues. The likely time frame, and mode of study, that is part time versus full time, will also be sought, as these factors are important when assessing the influence that education has on both career plateau and career transition. Interest is in whether a career plateaued individual perceives education and training as a means to escaping that plateau, or whether such an individual will view career transition differently depending on their level of education relative to their current employment situation.

## **SUMMARY**

As confirmed by Krumboltz and Nichols (1990) the learning process is never over with an individual's first job being just the training ground from which learning experiences for the future may be accumulated. Establishing firmly the concept of life-long continuous learning, and through that the assurance of career resilience, they state that

the process of career development never ends for ultimately the responsibility for retaining value to the organisation rests with the individual.

The proposition that education may contribute to career plateau finds support in a number of studies and within a number of areas. The argument is that for many people to avoid career plateau they will need to acknowledge and accept the need for continuous learning. Career transition has been proposed as one path through which individuals may avoid career plateau. The suggestion is that the individual will be more equipped to pursue this path if they possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities demanded by the employment environment. Not only must the individual possess the knowledge, skills and abilities currently in demand but must also retain an ongoing commitment to ensuring that these are continuously updated such that they will continue to meet the changing demands of the organisation.

A shift in responsibility has occurred with an expectation that the individual will now assume a greater share of the responsibility for career management and development. Whilst the organisation has some responsibility to create an environment conducive to continuous learning, and perhaps to make opportunities available, the individual must assume a proactive stance in pursuing these opportunities such that the skills and knowledge they bring to the job market will ensure ongoing career resilience. Building continuous learning into the job is being advocated. Hall (1986), for example, suggests that if training and development were an ongoing activity associated with any job the potential for career renewal would automatically be built into the job. Confirming the shift in responsibility Mirvis and Hall (1994) agree that working people will be expected to do more in the way of their own personal development. Beyond the immediate concept of continuous learning is the additional concept of employability, something that may not rely fully on education and learning. Within this additional concept Waterman et al (1994) suggest a new agreement under which the employer and the employee share the responsibility for maintaining and enhancing the individual's employability.

Whilst some argument over the effects of aging on the learning process prevails, this generally fails to support the notion that older workers are less able to transfer training to the workplace. The reluctance, for various reasons, of organisations to offer

opportunities to older workers, or for older workers to pursue available opportunities, must be overcome if this particular group of workers is to avoid or escape the premature conclusion to career progression.

To meet the objectives of the present study education will be assessed across three dimensions; education and training attained, education and training currently being pursued, and education and training individuals are intending to pursue.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUMMARY & RESEARCH GOALS

#### CAREER PLATEAU AND CAREER TRANSITION

*Career Plateau.* Career plateau has been defined by Ference, Stoner, and Warren (1977; cited in Chao, 1990) as the condition that arises in an individual's career when the prospects of any further hierarchical advancement are very low. A number of organisational and individual factors contribute to the occurrence of career plateau resulting in a typology that includes objective, subjective, structural, and content views of the phenomenon. Whilst arguments exist that individuals may satisfactorily adjust to a plateaued status the phenomenon is generally viewed negatively with one of the consequences being that individuals withdraw, psychologically and physically, from the job.

*Career Transition.* Nicholson and West (1989) define career transition as any major change in work role requirements or work content. This definition includes vertical, lateral, and downward movement within one's existing organisation and occupational type, and also includes inter-organisational movement and movement between occupational types. The nature of the transition, whether it is voluntary or involuntary, will effect the individual's attitude to the event, and the eventual outcome. Whilst either type of event incurs a degree of stress, voluntary transitions are generally seen to result in more positive outcomes including both career and personal growth. The search for psychological success is believed to be a major determinant underlying career transition.

*Research Goals.* The interest in the present study is in whether or not an individual experiencing a career plateau will accept career transition as a means to overcoming the condition. A plateaued individual has two basic choices. They either accept the status quo continuing with the present role, thereby remaining constrained by the prevailing parameters, or they pursue alternatives that would effectively eliminate the plateau. The

extent to which the individual accepts one of these alternatives, career transition, is central to this study. If an individual is not experiencing a career plateau the expectation is that they are sustaining acceptable career progression and are otherwise content with their current role secure in the knowledge that as career opportunities present themselves they are ready and prepared to pursue them. So whilst non-plateaued individuals will pursue career transitions they will have less urgency in doing so as a self-awareness exists that their careers have not stalled. Plateaued individuals on the other hand will be aware that their careers have stalled and may consequently be seeking ways of gaining further career progression. The belief therefore is that career plateaued individuals will be more likely to pursue a career transition than non-plateaued individuals.

### **Hypothesis 1:**

*Career plateaued individuals will indicate greater intentions toward pursuing a career transition.*

## **CAREER PLATEAU AND JOB SATISFACTION**

***Job Satisfaction.*** Job satisfaction is a complex phenomenon that has attracted the interest of researchers for decades resulting in voluminous publications with the topic often appearing as an additional subject of interest in studies relating to the functioning of the individual in the work place. Defined by Locke (1983) as the state that results from an appraisal of one's job as to its ability to meet one's important values and needs, it is comprised of a number of intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Whilst difficulty exists in establishing a relationship between overall job satisfaction and many of its proposed consequences more definitive results are obtained when specific elements or components of job satisfaction are isolated. There are a number of dysfunctional consequences of job dissatisfaction including behavioural patterns such as absenteeism and turnover. The latter is of interest as a relationship is proposed to exist between job dissatisfaction and an intention to quit and this intention is considered to be a reliable predictor of actual turnover.

Adoption of the prevailing negative view of career plateau may result in the expectation that one of the possible consequences of plateau will be job dissatisfaction in that the current role would not be meeting the individual's needs, especially higher-order personal growth needs. Additionally, the attitude of the organisation towards the individual is likely to impact on the individual's sense of self-worth with a consequential negative impact on job satisfaction. Interest lies in whether career plateau is a phenomenon that contributes to job dissatisfaction, that is, whether being career plateaued results in, or contributes to, the individual being dissatisfied with their job. Whilst some research fails to detect any relationship between career plateau and job satisfaction more conclusive research does indicate an inverse relationship but with some results possibly being confounded by measures of objective plateau versus subjective plateau, and job tenure. When particular components of job satisfaction, for example promotional prospects, are isolated more definite results are detectable.

**Research Goals.** The generally held negative view of career plateau is believed to prevail with the phenomenon impacting on a number of components of job satisfaction. Interest is in whether or not this impact results in lower levels of overall or general job satisfaction. Even if this particular relationship fails to prove significant a stronger relationship between one specific component of job satisfaction, that is promotional opportunities, and career plateau is believed to exist.

**Hypothesis 2a:**

*Career plateaued individuals will report lower levels of overall job satisfaction.*

**Hypothesis 2b:**

*Career plateaued individuals will report lower levels of satisfaction with promotional opportunities.*

## **JOB SATISFACTION, CAREER PLATEAU AND CAREER TRANSITION**

**Research Goals.** Whilst it is proposed that career plateau will contribute to lower levels of job satisfaction the complexity of job satisfaction is such that dissatisfaction will exist for many reasons other than for those associated with lack of career progression. It will also likely occur regardless of whether or not career plateau is experienced. An individual may therefore decide to effect a career transition to escape from an unsatisfactory work situation for reasons other than career plateau and this is the relationship being investigated, that is whether being dissatisfied with one's job causes one to effect a career transition.

### **Hypothesis 3a:**

*Career transition is more likely to be pursued by individuals reporting lower levels of job satisfaction.*

If an individual is both dissatisfied with their job, and experiencing a career plateau, it may be difficult to attribute any decision to pursue a career transition to one factor or the other. The possibility exists, for example, that an individual may be plateaued, may be satisfied with their job, and may therefore decide to remain in their current role. Conversely, an individual may be plateaued, may be dissatisfied with their job, and may therefore decide to effect a career transition. The variability of this moderating relationship is of interest when one considers how the level or extent of job dissatisfaction may interact with the degree or level of career plateau to initiate a career transition by the individual. The relationship between career plateau and career transition may therefore have a degree of dependency on job satisfaction and this possibility leads to the current research interest.

### **Hypothesis 3b:**

*Career plateaued individuals will be more likely to pursue a career transition if those individuals also report low levels of job satisfaction.*

## **LIFE BALANCE ORIENTATION, JOB SATISFACTION AND CAREER TRANSITION**

*Life Balance Orientation.* Whilst current trends in employment suggest a general reorientation amongst many workers toward a more balanced lifestyle, with a greater emphasis being placed on employment flexibility so that more attention may be devoted to family and social life, the so-called core group of workers retain a strong work orientation. The belief within this new work environment is that, within the non-core group of workers, that is the contractual and temporary groups, the work ethic has lost much of its appeal. For these groups work is only one of life's dimensions across which attempts to achieve a balance are made. Individuals will, however, have a specific orientation with one of life's dimensions being of higher priority at any one time. Viewed dichotomously this orientation will be toward either work or to non-work and depending on the direction or strength will result in different attitudes toward the job and the impact it is having on one's life. The resolution of conflict between work and family is believed to be central to the achievement of life balance and will be a major pursuit of individuals desiring that balance. The existence of many new social influences, for example dual-career families, add complexity to the activities pursued by individuals as they attempt to achieve the desired balance.

With respect to life balance, if an individual is out of balance, and that imbalance is attributable to one's work situation, the potential exists for this to impact on job satisfaction resulting in lower levels being reported. Job dissatisfaction may result from either excess work demands which interfere with non-work interests, or from insufficient content or challenge in the work with this failing to meet the demands of the work oriented individual. The result of either situation is proposed to be an imbalance that the individual will be motivated to address.

Of the many options available to individuals career transition is proposed to be a significant action adopted in the pursuit of a life balance. Depending on the orientation of the individual a career transition may be pursued to either increase or decrease involvement in work. Whilst values, and both career stage and life stage, will influence an individual's attitude toward their work interest is in the degree to which career

transition is viewed as a means to the achievement of a more personally acceptable life balance. The actions an individual takes to achieve a life balance will vary but what should be immediately evident is whether their orientation is towards work or non-work.

**Research Goals.** The basic proposition is that individuals are motivated to address, and to resolve, aspects of their lives perceived by them to be contributing to dissonance or dissatisfaction both of which are likely to result from an imbalance. If an individual is dissatisfied with their job the possibility exists that this results either from their job placing greater demands on other dimensions of their life than what they consider acceptable, or the job is failing to satisfy the needs and expectations of the work oriented individual. In such situations the research interest is in whether or not such individuals will consider pursuing a career transition. The individual may do so as a means to addressing the perceived imbalance, where such imbalance occurs through either the excess demands of the work role, indicating a possible non-work focus, or the inability of the work role to meet achievement needs, indicating a possible work focus. The belief is that strongly oriented individuals, who are also dissatisfied with their jobs, will be more motivated to resolve a perceived imbalance than either unfocused or weakly focused individuals, the implication being that job dissatisfaction is an expression of an imbalance in life. The current research proposition is that strongly oriented individuals, whether that orientation be toward work or toward any non-work aspect of their life, and who express dissatisfaction with their job, will be more likely to view career transition as a means to resolving any perceived imbalance in their life.

#### **Hypothesis 4:**

*Individuals with a strong orientation, to either work or to non-work, and who report lower levels of job satisfaction, are more likely to pursue a career transition.*

### **EDUCATION, CAREER PLATEAU AND CAREER TRANSITION**

**Education.** Support for the suggestion that education will play an ever increasing critical role in employment can readily be found. The argument prevails that as the employment

environment evolves its complexity and sophistication will increase demanding a commensurate increase in the knowledge, skills and abilities that employees bring to that environment. In order to avoid premature career plateau through knowledge, skill and ability obsolescence individuals will need to accept a greater degree of responsibility for their own employment marketability. Central to this responsibility is the acceptance of the requirement to continually enhance, through educational and training activities, the knowledge, skills and abilities demanded in the employment market thus ensuring career resilience. That requirement provides the definition of education accepted within this study, that is it includes those activities undertaken by individuals to enhance their knowledge, skills and abilities, and the level of attainment within those activities, such that their employment opportunities are maximised. Whilst these activities have traditionally been acknowledged through the attainment of degrees and diplomas they must now be supported by other attributes including desire and temperament (Bridges, 1994).

***Research Goals.*** Given a scenario in which two candidates are vying for the same position, the unsuccessful one may perceive that their lack of success in securing the position results from a lower level of educational attainment, all other things being perceived as reasonably equal. The question arises as to whether this perception is likely to prompt the individual to consider the possibility that they have reached a career plateau. If the individual decides that they have reached a career plateau interest is in whether they will attribute this to a lack of education or qualifications and, further, whether this attribution will prompt the individual to seek further education or qualification. This leads to the issue of interest, that is whether the career plateaued individual is likely to consider the furtherance of their education as a means to ensuring greater future career potential.

**Hypothesis 5a:**

***Career plateaued individuals will be more likely to consider pursuing further educational opportunities.***

The argument may be that the higher one's level of education is the less likely one is to reach a career plateau, or, at the least, that it may delay the onset of plateau to the stage of an individual's career where it is not an issue for the individual. For example, the individual may be approaching retirement and may see the transition to retirement as a successful resolution to the career plateau. Underpinning this particular argument is the proposal that advancement, or promotion, is more likely to occur at more regular intervals the more 'qualified' one is, that is that career progression is somehow related to education.

**Hypothesis 5b:**

*Lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to be recorded amongst individuals experiencing career plateau.*

If an individual accepts that their current level of education is a constant, and they are not prepared to further their education, they may decide they lack the resources to effect a career transition. Conversely, the individual may decide that their career plateau is not a result of their level of education and they may therefore decide to effect a career transition on that basis. In this situation the career plateau may be the result of other factors. The interest within this particular relationship is whether or not education is a factor in a career plateaued individual's decision to pursue a career transition. For example, would a career plateaued individual who considers their level of education to be above the requirements of their current role be more likely to effect a career transition than if the same individual considered their current level of education to be appropriate, or less, to their current role.

**Hypothesis 5c:**

*Career plateaued individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to pursue a career transition.*

## SUMMARY

Hypothesis 1 considers the relationship between career plateau and career transition and investigates the proposition that career plateaued individuals are more likely than non-plateaued individuals to view career transition as a means to escaping from the plateau situation. The relationship between career plateau and job satisfaction provides the focus in Hypothesis 2a in which the belief that career plateau results in lower levels of overall job satisfaction will be tested. This relationship is further explored in Hypothesis 2b but the focus is now on a specific dimension of job satisfaction. Career plateaued individuals are also believed to express dissatisfaction with promotional opportunities as these are seen to be a potential cause of career plateau. The influence of job satisfaction in deliberations of whether or not to pursue a career transition is explored in Hypotheses 3a and 3b. The former proposes a direct relationship in which job dissatisfaction is believed to contribute to decisions to transition whilst the latter considers the same relationship but focuses specifically on career plateaued individuals. The influence of a strong life orientation is considered in Hypothesis 4. The belief is that individuals who have a strong focus, on either work or non-work, and who express general job dissatisfaction, which has the potential to impact adversely on life satisfaction, will be more inclined to pursue a career transition to correct the perceived imbalance in their lives. Finally, the role of education in a number of relationships is assessed. As a means to escaping from a career plateau situation individuals so affected are believed to more positively view the prospect of furthering their education in order to enhance their career progression possibilities (Hypothesis 5a). Hypothesis 5b explores the proposition that lower levels of education contribute to career plateau whilst Hypothesis 5c extends Hypothesis 5a by attempting to confirm that higher levels of education do underpin career transitions amongst career plateaued individuals.

The various relationships being researched are depicted in Figure 7.1 with their corresponding hypotheses, which are restated below, numbered accordingly.

**Hypothesis 1:** Career plateaued individuals will indicate greater intentions toward pursuing a career transition.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Career plateaued individuals will report lower levels of overall job satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Career plateaued individuals will report lower levels of satisfaction with promotional opportunities.

**Hypothesis 3a:** Career transition is more likely to be pursued by individuals reporting lower levels of job satisfaction.

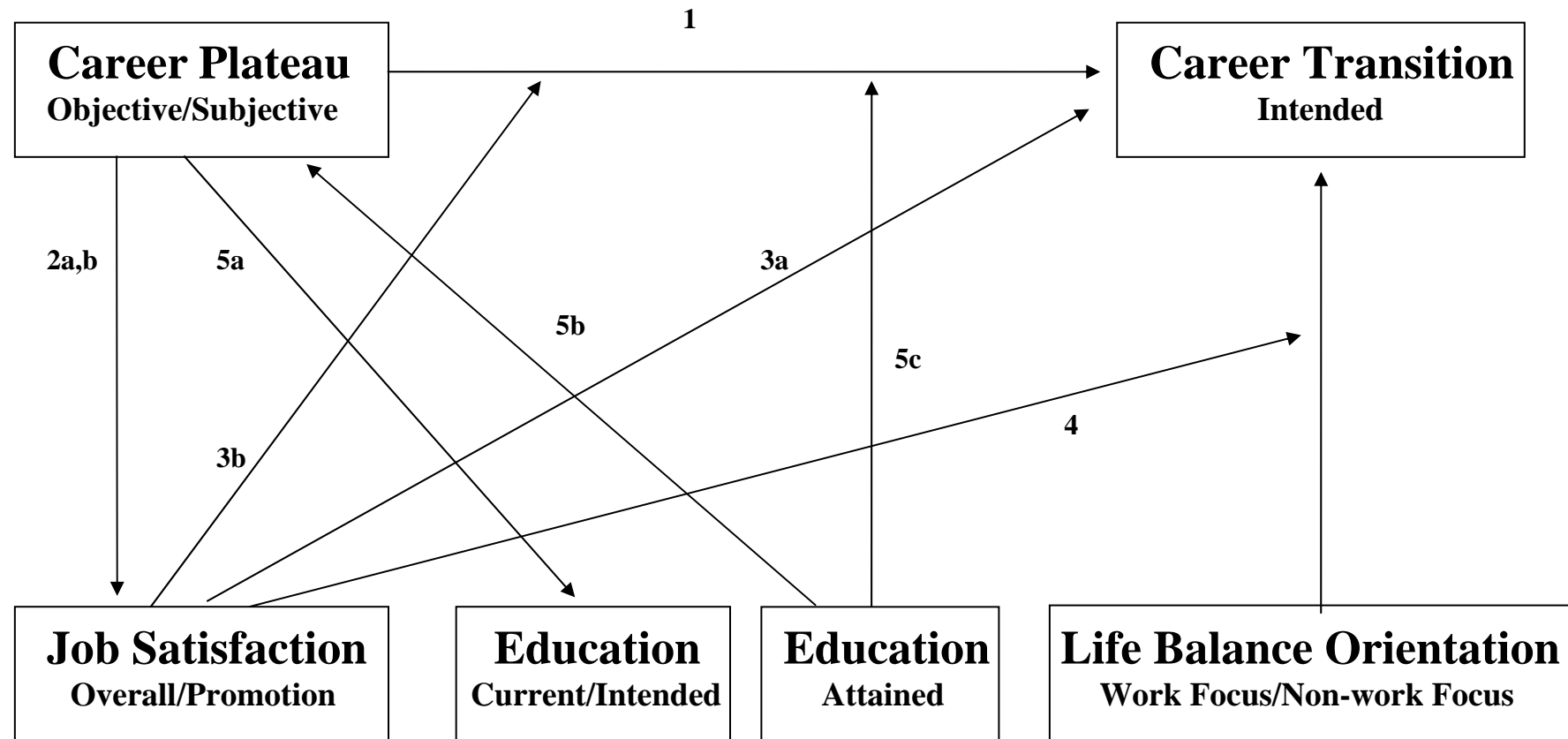
**Hypothesis 3b:** Career plateaued individuals will be more likely to pursue a career transition if those individuals also report low levels of job satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 4:** Individuals with a strong orientation, to either work or to non-work, and who report lower levels of job satisfaction, are more likely to pursue a career transition.

**Hypothesis 5a:** Career plateaued individuals will be more likely to consider pursuing further educational opportunities.

**Hypothesis 5b:** Lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to be recorded amongst individuals experiencing career plateau.

**Hypothesis 5c:** Career plateaued individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to pursue a career transition.



**Figure 7.1.** Diagrammatic representation of the hypothesised research relationships numbered accordingly.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### METHOD

#### PARTICIPANTS

The participants for this study were drawn from the managerial and supervisory ranks of four large organisations each representing separate industries: petroleum ( $n = 62$ , 26.5% of sample), electricity ( $n = 62$ , 26.5% of sample), city administration ( $n = 50$ , 21.4% of sample), and dairy products ( $n = 60$ , 25.6% of sample). A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, 100 into each organisation, and the final  $N$  of 234 represents a 58.5% response rate. This sample size provides a power level of .80 ( $r = .20$ ) at the .05 probability level (Friedman, 1982).

A demographic analysis of the sample revealed that, of the participants who responded to the questions, 70.3% ( $n = 163$ ) were male and 78.5% ( $n = 179$ ) were defined as living in a marriage situation. Their ages ranged from 23 to 64 years with a mean age of 43 years and a SD of 9.1 ( $n = 230$ ). 84.8% of the sample were New Zealanders of European descent and 3.5% were New Zealanders of Maori descent ( $n = 231$ ). Of the remainder 'Other' accounted for 10.4% with New Zealanders of Asian descent and Pacific Islanders making up the balance. All responses to the question on income received from current position were annualised resulting in a mean annual income of \$62,780 (SD = 35.72, minimum = \$20,000, maximum = \$350,000,  $n = 223$ ). On average the participants had spent 10.54 years with their employing organisations (SD = 8.46, minimum less than 1, maximum = 36,  $n = 232$ ).

Further analysis of the composition of the sample based on occupational and educational data was performed and this information is provided in Appendix 4 as Tables A4.1, A4.2 and A4.3.

#### PROCEDURE

The self-administered questionnaire was pre-tested in a similar sample, but outside the participating organisations (N = 10). In addition to completing the questionnaire participants were requested to provide feedback on all aspects of the questionnaire packet including instructions, content and face validity of the questionnaire, its length and time to complete, interest and attention level, and motivation to complete. The final form of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire packets were distributed and returns collected through the internal mail distribution systems of all participating organisations. Distribution occurred on three separate dates over a period of three and a half months. Personnel from each organisation's Human Resource Management group selected participants from within those organisations based on the agreed criteria being those participants holding managerial or supervisory positions. Internal address labels were provided by the organisations for all participants and these were affixed to the sealed distribution envelopes that included the questionnaire and the reply envelope. Three of the organisations chose to include in the distribution envelope a letter to participants further explaining the rationale of the study, its applicability, and confirming their support for the research. The opportunity was afforded the researcher to ensure that the voluntary nature of participation, and other rights of the participants, as confirmed in the questionnaire information sheet were not contradicted or compromised by these letters. Completed questionnaires were returned in the reply envelopes provided which were addressed to the researcher by name care of an internal mail collection point.

An information sheet accompanying the questionnaire advised participants of their rights and provided background information on what the research was about and what it was attempting to accomplish. The information sheet (Appendix 2) did not specifically mention either career plateau or career transition but did advise that the research was interested in how people felt about their jobs, their career prospects and intentions, and how these may be related to job satisfaction and work attitudes. Within this information sheet contact details for the researcher and the research supervisor were provided and the expectations of both the researcher and the participants were clearly explained. The rights of the participants included the right to complete confidentiality and anonymity, to

decline to participate or to not answer any particular questions, and the right to contact the researchers.

All participants were offered the opportunity to receive a summary of the research results and a results request form (Appendix 3) was issued with the questionnaire providing a mechanism through which this could be requested. Participants were assured that this request form would be separated from the questionnaire at the earliest opportunity and would not be used in anyway to identify either the individuals or the responses of any individual. Organisations participated on the understanding and acceptance that participants' rights were not to be compromised in any way.

Following a communication from one participant from the first distribution expressing a concern relating to the use of an internal mail collection point for completed questionnaires all subsequent reply envelopes were stamped confidential. No further comment or communication was received from any participant with respect to this method of completed questionnaire collection.

## **MEASURES**

The survey questionnaire contained a number of questions assessing general demographic characteristics including age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, and so forth (Section A, Appendix 1). Where ever possible previously utilised measures that have received reasonable analysis and coverage in the psychological research literature were adopted for use in this study. For some measures, where such review was not available, specific instruments were developed based on general research findings.

### ***Career Plateau***

***Objective plateaued status.*** Participants responded to three questions relating to the number of years they had been in their current position (job tenure), at their current salary grade level, or since they had received a promotion. If the response to any of these questions was five or more years the subject was classified as objectively plateaued. The

use of the five year criterion has been established in previous research (Stout et al., 1988; Tremblay et al., 1995). The general format of the questions adopted (*How many years have you .....?*) conforms to that used frequently in other research and these are provided for reference in Appendix 1 (Questions A8, C1 - C2). The validity of these measures is supported by their significant correlation with age, another popular indicator of objective plateaued status (tenure:  $r = .39$ ; salary grade level:  $r = .19$ ; promotion:  $r = .36$ ) which were all significant at the  $p = .01$  level.

***Subjective plateaued status.*** Adopting items from Chao (1990) and Ettington (1998), and converting to a common scale, a bank of five questions was constructed to assess the degree to which individuals could be perceived as being subjectively career plateaued. These questions (C3 - C7, Appendix 1) addressed the likelihood of the participant being promoted or getting ahead in the organisation and were rated on a seven-point scale with responses anchored from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). The word '(org)' in the questions was in each case replaced with the participating organisation's name. The scale items were re-coded as necessary, prior to summation, such that the higher the score on the composite variable (Cronbach's alpha = .83) the more subjectively plateaued the subject was considered to be.

### ***Career Transition***

***Previous career transition.*** Whether or not a subject had experienced a career transition within the past three years was recorded through the use of a direct question (*Have you experienced a career, job or position change within the past 3 years?*) constructed to specifically obtain that information. If the subject responded in the affirmative further questions supported an assessment of the magnitude of that transition and the reason(s) behind it. The magnitude component (Questions C9 - C11, Appendix 1) was based, in part, on questions and definitions adapted from Latack (1984; Question C11) and Heppner et al (1994; Question C9), with question C10 being developed specifically for the study. These questions were descriptively analysed to provide insight to the magnitude of career transitions. Participants were able to specify any number of reasons for effecting a transition, either by selecting from those offered (for example, *to do something more challenging and fulfilling, to change career directions*) or by recording

themselves any other reason not included with the question. Only the first four reasons cited were captured for descriptive analysis and these were not re-ordered or prioritised. The range of reasons available to the respondents was adapted from Nicholson and West (1988).

***Intended career transition.*** The participants' intentions with respect to the possibility of pursuing a career transition were assessed through a set of five questions. Three questions (C13 - C15, Appendix 1) were based on the Propensity to Leave measure developed by Lyons (1971; cited in Cook et al, 1981) with responses developed to conform to a five-point scale. Cook et al report a Spearman-Brown internal reliability coefficient of 0.81. and in one study cited (Rousseau, 1978b) they record a coefficient alpha of 0.71 with a test-retest reliability coefficient over three months of 0.63. The first question in the set, question C13 (*how long would you like to stay in the organisation?*), provided five options ranging from less than six months to more than five years. The remaining two questions, questions C14 and C15, provided response options ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*).

The set included two items (Questions C18 and E3, Appendix 1) from the Intention to Turn Over scale of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins & Klesh, 1979; cited in Cook et al, 1981) with the responses modified to a five-point scale to conform to the format adopted for the Propensity to Leave measure. A coefficient alpha of 0.83 (N>400) is cited for the total measure with a correlation of -.58 with the measure of overall job satisfaction from the same study. The questions adopted related to how likely the subject was to actively look for a new job, and whether or not they often think about quitting. A further item (Question C17), developed specifically for the study and scored on the same five-point scale as for the Propensity to Leave measure, was added to the set to assess the participants' willingness to accept a promotion, either internally or externally, if one was offered. In forming a composite variable (Cronbach's alpha = .82) the questions in the final bank were re-coded as required such that higher scores on the variable indicated a greater intention to pursue a career transition.

In the same format as for previous transition participants were able to specify any number of reasons for considering a career transition (Question C16), either by selecting from those offered or by recording any not offered, but only the first four reasons cited were captured for descriptive analysis, without re-ordering or prioritising. The range of reasons available to the respondents was adapted from Nicholson and West (1988) and conformed to the format of question C12. Four items developed specifically for the present study were included in the questionnaire (Questions C19 - C22, Appendix 1) relating to the perceived magnitude of any proposed career transition. These items questioned whether the proposed transition would result in a similar job to that already held or whether it would be at a higher level, whether existing skills would be required to perform the new job, or whether the subject was prepared to further their education or training in order to enhance their job seeking prospects. These questions were descriptively analysed to provide insight to the magnitude of proposed career transitions.

Throughout the Career section of the questionnaire (Section C, Appendix 1) the word '(org)' was replaced where it appeared in questions with the actual name of the participating organisation.

### ***Life Balance Orientation***

Life balance may be measured across a number of orientations, for example work, social, family, recreational, religious, and so forth, but for the purposes of this study the variable was dichotomised into a work orientation or focus, versus a non-work orientation or focus.

***Work Focus.*** The Job Involvement measure of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Camman, Fichman, Jenkins & Klesh, 1979; cited in Cook et al, 1981) comprises a three item measure to assess "the extent to which individual's personally identify with their work" (p. 120). The authors cite a coefficient alpha of 0.62 (N>400) and a correlation of 0.35 with Overall Job Satisfaction and -0.27 with Intention to Turnover. This measure (Questions E1, E2, E4, Appendix 1) was adopted in its original form for use in the present study (Cronbach's alpha = .78). The questions in the Job Involvement measure (for example, *I am very much personally involved in my work; I*

*live, eat, and breathe my job*) can be found in identical wording in other job involvement measures including Kanungo (1982; cited in Blau, 1988). Based on a seven-point scale, in which '1' indicated strong disagreement with the item and '7' indicated strong agreement with the item, a high score on the composite variable indicated a stronger work orientation.

***Non-Work Focus.*** A non-work orientation or focus was established through the use of six items developed by Jansen and Chandler (1989, 1991; cited in Ettington, 1998) and were verified and used with the authors' permission (Jansen, personal communication, 13 July 1998). All items (E5 - E10, Appendix 1) were scored on a seven-point scale anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) with higher scores indicating a stronger non-work orientation. Sample items included: "*It is extremely important for me to... develop and maintain personal relationships, ... participate frequently in social activities, and ... pursue my hobbies.*" In her own study Ettington reported an alpha of .81 using seven questions two of which were merged for the present study (Cronbach's alpha = .70) because of their similarity. The items include a range of non-work activities and whilst these do not capture all possible options the bank will permit the identification of, and determination of the strength of, a non-work orientation or focus.

As previously discussed the possibility exists that individuals may score similarly on both work focus and non-work focus measures indicating a possible flexible, or unfocused, orientation. This possibility will be explored during data analysis.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

In addition to an interest in overall or general job satisfaction interest was also in the satisfaction individuals had with regards to opportunities for promotion due to the likely connection between this and career plateau. Measures of both were therefore included in the present study.

***Overall job satisfaction.*** Following its use elsewhere in the present study the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins and Klesh, 1979; cited in Cook et al, 1981) was relied on for a measure of overall job satisfaction.

Consisting of a three-item bank (Questions D10 - D12, Appendix 1) the measure of overall job satisfaction from this instrument provides for seven-point responses anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) with lower scores indicated less overall satisfaction with the current job. Cook et al note that means are not cited in the source publication but they do cite a coefficient alpha of 0.77 (N>400). Citing Moch (1980a) the authors also record an average intercorrelation between the three scale items of 0.50. Correlations of -0.58 with Intention to Turnover and 0.35 with Job Involvement were also reported. These three items were recoded as necessary and summed to provide a measure of overall job satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha = .80). The general format and content of the questions (*In general I don't like my job, In general I like working here*) may be found in other similar instruments.

***Satisfaction with promotion opportunities.*** A widely used measure of job satisfaction is based on the summation of scales drawn from the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) developed by Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969) for which the reliability and validity is well established in the literature (Cook, et al, 1981; Hanisch, 1992; Slocum, et al, 1985). Items often included relate to the individuals' assessment of their satisfaction with supervisor, pay, promotion, co-workers, and work. Measured on a simple 'Yes/No/Cannot Decide' basis, and scored 3, 0, and 1, respectively, responses to these items can be compared to an overall measure of job satisfaction thus providing an opportunity to verify the responses.

The Opportunities for Promotion sub-scale of the Job Descriptive Index (Questions D1 - D9, Appendix 1) includes questions such as "*dead-end job?*" and "*good chance for promotion?*" As this provides the potential to verify responses to questions relating to career plateau this sub-scale of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) was adopted for use in the present study. Studies cited by Cook et al (1981) report internal reliability alpha coefficients for the promotion sub-scale ranging from 0.72 to 0.90 with one management sample reporting 0.86. Cook et al tables means and standard deviations (in brackets) from a number of studies on the same sub-scale. These range from 8.90 (7.90) (female employees) to 31.00 (8.86) (sales people). Test-retest stability coefficients are reported at between 0.64 and 0.73 for managers. The scores on this particular sub-scale (9 items) are normally doubled to make them comparable to other sub-scales in the JDI which have

18 items. Whilst the promotion sub-scale is not the sub-scale that most closely relates to overall job satisfaction (it is the work sub-scale that does), its compatibility with the concept of lack of promotion being associated with job satisfaction and career plateau makes it appealing for use in this study. Cronbach's alpha for the present study was .87.

### ***Education***

Education was measured across three dimensions, that already attained, that currently being attained, and any intention to attain. All questions in this section were developed specifically for the present study but were based on similar questions appearing in the research literature.

***Education Attained.*** Two questions (B1 - B2, Appendix 1) gave participants the opportunity to indicate their highest level of educational attainment and to record any other training that may have been accomplished. Education attainment (Question B1) response options were numerically scaled from less than three years secondary schooling (coded "1") to postgraduate qualification (coded "5") whilst "other qualifications/training" (Question B2) provided participants with a free-format response option. The responses to this question (B2) were numerically coded such that analysis undertaken could provide percentage figures on respondents holding, for example, accountancy qualifications and trade certificate qualifications.

***Current Education/Training.*** In two items (Questions B3 - B4, Appendix 1) participants were asked whether or not they were currently pursuing any formal education or training. If the response was affirmative they were requested to provide details and to record the reason(s) they were pursuing this. For the first question (B3) responses were numerically coded such that a "1" indicated "yes" and a "2" indicated "no" with additional responses coded from three through eight indicating the qualification being sought, for example accountancy, trade certificate, and so forth. Analysis involved determining percentage figures for those pursuing further education and the qualification being sought. In a free-format response to question B4, for which examples were given (personal interest, job requirement, further your career, etcetera), participants stated the reason they were pursuing this education. Up to three reasons

were captured for analysis in the order in which they were cited. Responses were numerically coded to facilitate analysis which involved determining the percentage of respondents citing each reason.

***Intended Education/Training.*** Four questions were developed (B5 - B8, Appendix 1) to determine whether or not participants were intending to pursue any education or training (B5) and if so when this was intended (B6), whether it would be pursued full time or part time whilst still working (B7), and reasons for pursuing it (B8). An affirmative response to question B5 (coded 1 = yes, 2 = no) was followed by a request to complete the remaining questions in the set. As for current education the free-format response of the remaining questions allowed participants to choose from those reasons offered, or to record their own reason(s) if this differed from examples provided. Up to three reasons (Question B8) for pursuing the qualification were captured for analysis in the order in which they were cited. As for current education the questions were numerically coded such that analysis was able to determine the percentage of respondents falling into each category.

## CHAPTER NINE

### RESULTS

For the total sample ( $N = 234$ ) the means, standard deviations, alpha reliabilities (where appropriate) and intercorrelations of the research variables are presented in Table 9.1. To eliminate the moderate positive skewness in the distribution of the three measures of objective career plateau (Tenure, Salary Level and Promotion), these variables were transformed by taking the square root of the original variable in accordance with the recommended transformation provided by Tabachnick and Fidell (1989). The transformed variables were used to compute the intercorrelations recorded in Table 9.1. To eliminate the moderate negative skewness in the distribution of overall job satisfaction (Job Satisfaction - Overall) this variable was transformed by firstly reflecting it (totally reversing the scale) to achieve a positive skewness before it also was transformed in the manner described above. This transformation results in overall job satisfaction having the reverse polarity for beta coefficients in multiple regression analysis. To aid in interpretation the original untransformed overall job satisfaction variable was used in the intercorrelational analysis (Table 9.1). All subsequent analysis (SPSS/PC) was performed using the transformed variables.

**Career Plateau.** The three measures of objective career plateau, being length of tenure in current job (Objective - Tenure), years at current salary grade level (Objective - Salary Level), and years since last promotion (Objective - Promotion), were all positively correlated,  $p < .001$ . The measure of Subjective Career Plateau, which was based on the individual's perception of their career status, was positively correlated with the three objective measures of plateau,  $p \leq .001$ .

In summary, the nature of these relationships was such that individuals who: had been in their current job, had remained at the same salary level, or had gone without a promotion, for greater periods of time; were also more likely to have reported a greater perception of being plateaued in their career.

**Objective Career Plateau.** None of the relationships between the three measures of objective career plateau and an individual's intention to effect a career transition (Career Transition - Intended) were found to be statistically significant. The tenure measure of objective plateau was significant and positive in its relationship with the work focus measure of life balance orientation (LBO - Work Focus),  $r = .16$ ,  $p = .016$ . This confirmed, albeit weakly, that as the length of time an individual had spent in their current job increased so did their focus on work. Two of the measures of objective plateau, Salary Level,  $r = -.15$ ,  $p = .03$ , and Promotion,  $r = -.16$ ,  $p = .025$ , were negatively correlated with the non-work focus measure of life balance orientation (LBO - Non-work Focus) suggesting that the longer an individual had been without receiving either a salary increase or a promotion, the lower their non-work focus became. The relationships between the measures of objective plateau and overall job satisfaction (Job Satisfaction - Overall) were not significant. The relationship between the promotion measure of objective plateau and satisfaction with promotion opportunities (Job Satisfaction - Promotion Opportunities) was significant,  $r = -.18$ ,  $p = .013$ , suggesting that the longer an individual had existed without receiving a promotion the more dissatisfied they became with promotion opportunities. The tenure measure of objective plateau was negatively correlated with the level of education attained by the individual (Education - Attained),  $r = -.15$ ,  $p = .021$ . Those individuals who had spent longer periods of time (Tenure) in their current jobs tended to report lower levels of education. Two of the measures of objective plateau, salary level,  $r = .16$ ,  $p = .023$ , and promotion,  $r = .19$ ,  $p = .007$ , were correlated with the individual's stated intention to pursue further education (Education - Intended). The more objectively career plateaued individuals were, based on these two criteria, the more likely they were to not state any intention to pursue further education.

In summary, the nature of these relationships was such that: increased work focus; and decreased non-work focus, dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities, lower levels of attained education, and no intention of pursuing further education, were all significantly associated with aspects of career plateau as it was objectively defined.

**Subjective Career Plateau.** Whilst none of the objective career plateau measures were significantly correlated with career transition, the measure of subjective career plateau

(Career Plateau - Subjective) was,  $r = .40, p < .001$ . This relationship suggested that the individual's perception of their own career status increased their intention to effect a career transition. The measure of subjective career plateau was also negatively correlated to the work focus dimension of life balance orientation (LBO - Work Focus),  $r = -.19, p = .003$ . Those individuals who perceived themselves to be career plateaued reported lower levels of work focus. Subjective career plateau was significantly correlated with the two measures of job satisfaction, overall job satisfaction (Job Satisfaction - Overall),  $r = -.47, p < .001$ , and satisfaction with promotion opportunities (Job Satisfaction - Promotion Opportunities),  $r = -.71, p < .001$ , suggesting that as the individual's perception of their career plateau status increased, their overall job satisfaction, and their satisfaction with promotion opportunities, decreased. Individuals subjectively career plateaued were also less likely to have been involved in current education activities (Education - Current),  $r = .18, p = .008$ .

In summary, the nature of these relationships was such that: increased intention to pursue a career transition; and decreased work focus, overall job dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities, and not being involved in current education, were all significantly associated with subjective career plateau.

**Career Transition.** Intention to effect or pursue a career transition (Career Transition - Intended) was significantly correlated with the work focus measure of life balance orientation,  $r = -.27, p < .001$ , suggesting that increased intention to pursue a career transition was associated with a decrease in work focus. The positive relationship between career transition and the non-work focus measure of life balance orientation,  $r = .17, p = .01$ , suggested that increased intentions to pursue a career transition were associated with an increased focus on non-work activities, for example family, social, recreational activities and so forth. Intention to pursue a career transition was significantly correlated with both measures of job satisfaction, overall job satisfaction,  $r = -.75, p < .001$ , and satisfaction with promotion opportunities,  $r = -.33, p < .001$ , indicating that job dissatisfaction was associated with greater intention to pursue a career transition. Career transition was correlated with the level of education attained,  $r = .26, p < .001$ , which suggested that higher levels of education were associated with increased intentions to pursue a career transition, and with the individual's stated intention to

pursue further education,  $r = -.20$ ,  $p = .003$ . The latter result suggested that individuals who recorded a greater intention to effect a career transition were also more likely to have recorded an intention to pursue further education.

In summary, the nature of these relationships was such that: lower levels of work focus, overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with promotion opportunities; and higher levels of attained education and non-work focus, and an intention to pursue further education, were significantly associated with an intention to pursue a career transition,

**Life Balance Orientation.** As expected, the two measures of life balance orientation, LBO - Work Focus, being an orientation toward one's work, and LBO - Non-work Focus, being an orientation toward the non-work activities in one's life, including family, social and recreational activities, were negatively correlated with each other, albeit weakly,  $r = -.15$ ,  $p = .021$ . This confirmed that as an individual's focus in one area increased, their focus in the other area decreased. The significant and positive intercorrelations between the work focus dimension of life balance orientation and the two measures of job satisfaction, overall,  $r = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ , and promotion opportunities,  $r = .22$ ,  $p = .001$ , suggested an association between a stronger work focus and higher levels of satisfaction with both job and promotion opportunities. The relationship between work focus and education attained,  $r = .13$ ,  $p = .048$ , suggests, albeit weakly, that a stronger work focus is associated with higher levels of attained education.

In summary, the nature of these relationships was such that increased satisfaction with both job and promotion opportunities and higher levels of education were significantly associated with the work focus dimension of life balance orientation, whilst an increase in work focus was associated with a decrease in non-work focus.

**Job Satisfaction.** The relationship between overall job satisfaction (Job Satisfaction - Overall) and satisfaction with promotion opportunities (Job Satisfaction - Promotion Opportunities), which is considered to be a component of overall job satisfaction, was significant,  $r = .41$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that as one measure increased so did the other. Overall job satisfaction was correlated with the attained educational level of the individual,  $r = -.14$ ,  $p = .033$ , and with the individual's stated intention to pursue further

education,  $r = .16$ ,  $p = .019$ . These two results indicated, albeit modestly, that greater overall job satisfaction was associated with lower levels of educational achievement, whilst greater overall job satisfaction was associated with decreased intention to pursue further education. The promotion opportunities measure of job satisfaction was correlated with the individual's current pursuit of further education,  $r = -.21$ ,  $p = .002$ , suggesting that increased satisfaction with opportunities for promotion was associated with higher levels of involvement in current education activities.

In summary, the nature of these relationships was such that lower levels of attained education and no intention to pursue further education were significantly associated with higher levels of overall job satisfaction. An involvement in current education was significantly associated with higher levels of satisfaction with promotion opportunities. The two measures of job satisfaction were significantly associated with each other.

**Education.** The final correlations of interest were between the three measures of education adopted for the present study, that is the level of education attained by the individual (Education - Attained), the intention to pursue further education (Education - Intended), and the participation in current educational activities (Education - Current)<sup>1</sup>. Significant correlations were found between education attained and education intended,  $r = -.22$ ,  $p = .001$ , which suggested that higher levels of attained education were associated with an intention to pursue further education, and between education intended and education current,  $r = .31$ ,  $p < .001$ , which suggested that those individuals who were involved in current education were also likely to have stated an intention to pursue further education. No association was found between the level of education attained by an individual and involvement in current education.

<sup>(1)</sup> Note: Current Education and Intended Education were dichotomous variables coded with 1 for 'yes' and 2 for 'no'.

**TABLE 9.1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Reliabilities and Intercorrelations of the Research Variables**

Variable	N	M	SD	<i>a</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Career Plateau:-														
1 Objective <sup>a</sup> - Tenure	231	1.64	.94											
2 Objective <sup>a</sup> - Salary Level	221	1.31	.86		.46***									
3 Objective <sup>a</sup> - Promotion	203	1.67	.98		.70***	.59***								
4 Subjective	228	21.54	7.16	.83	.22**	.23**	.33***							
5 Career Transition - Intended	229	16.72	5.91	.82	-.05	-.04	-.05	.40***						
6 LBO <sup>b</sup> - Work Focus	233	12.00	3.79	.78	.16*	.08	.01	-.19**	-.27***					
7 LBO - Non-work Focus	232	31.97	4.52	.70	-.12	-.15*	-.16*	-.01	.17*	-.15*				
8 Job Satisfaction - Overall <sup>c</sup>	233	7.62	3.38	.80	-.04	-.01	-.02	-.46***	-.75***	.29***	-.09			
9 Job Satisfaction - Prom. Opps. <sup>d</sup>	220	11.90	8.34	.87	-.09	-.05	-.18*	-.71***	-.33***	.22**	-.04	.41***		
10 Education - Attained	230	3.08	1.23		-.15*	-.04	-.10	-.06	.26***	.13*	.04	-.14*	.03	
11 Education - Current <sup>e</sup>	230	1.79	.41		.04	.03	.13	.18**	-.01	-.02	-.09	-.03	-.21**	-.07
12 Education - Intended <sup>e</sup>	227	1.54	.50		.13	.16*	.19**	.03	-.20**	.03	-.05	.16*	.00	-.22**

Notes. <sup>a</sup> Variable subjected to Square Root transformation.

<sup>b</sup> LBO = Life Balance Orientation.

<sup>c</sup> The original untransformed variable.

<sup>d</sup> Prom. Opps. = Promotion Opportunities.

<sup>e</sup> Dichotomous variables - coded 1 = yes, 2 = no.

\*. Correlation is significant at the  $p < .05$  level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the  $p < .01$  level (2-tailed).

\*\*\*. Correlation is significant at the  $p < .001$  level (2-tailed).

### **Hypothesis 1 - Career Plateau and Career Transition.**

Hypothesis one related to the relationship between career plateau and career transition and proposed that career plateaued individuals would indicate greater intentions toward pursuing a career transition. The intercorrelations presented in Table 9.1 confirmed that the three measures of objective career plateau; Tenure (number of years in current position); Salary Level (number of years at current salary grade level); and Promotion (number of years since last promotion), were uncorrelated with career transition, the participant's intention to effect a career transition. The measures of objective plateau were, however, positively and significantly intercorrelated, and were also positively and significantly correlated with the measure of subjective career plateau being the individual's perception of their own career status. Subjective plateau was positively and significantly correlated with career transition suggesting that individuals who had a stronger perception of being career plateaued were also more likely to have been considering pursuing a career transition. The expectation, derived from the univariate analysis, was that the criteria for objective plateau would not emerge as significant variables when determining, through multiple regression analysis, the relationship between career plateau and a participant's intention to pursue a career transition, but that subjective career plateau would.

Multiple regression analysis ( $N = 191$ ) was conducted to test the hypothesis that career plateaued individuals would record greater intentions toward pursuing a career transition. The measures of career plateau, objective and subjective, were entered in a standard all-in analysis with career transition as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are provided in Table 9.2 and indicate that the  $R$  for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(1, 186) = 10.081, p < .001$ . Subjective career plateau was the only independent variable that accounted for significant variability in career transition,  $\beta = .44, p < .001$ . Altogether 18% (16% adjusted) of the variance in career transition was explained by these career plateau variables. Partial support for hypothesis one was found. Subjective career plateau was significant in accounting for variability in a participant's intention to effect a career transition.

**TABLE 9.2**  
**Standard Multiple Regression Analysis of Career Plateau Variables on**  
**Career Transition and Job Satisfaction showing Standardised Regression**  
**Coefficients, R, R<sup>2</sup>, and Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> for All Available Respondents**

Variable	Career Transition - Intended (N = 191)  Beta	Job Satisfaction - Overall <sup>(2)</sup> (N = 195)  Beta	Job Satisfaction Promotion (N = 185)  Beta
Objective Plateau			
- Tenure	.04	.15	.04
- Salary Level	-.08	-.07	.11
- Promotion	-.17	-.21 *	-.01
Subjective Plateau	.44 ***	.52 ***	-.73 ***
R	.422	.502	.717
R Square	.178 ***	.252 ***	.514 ***
Adj R Square	.160 ***	.237 ***	.503 ***
F	10.081 ***	16.032 ***	47.580 ***

Note: <sup>(2)</sup>. See note over page.

\*. Significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

\*\*\*. Significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

### **Hypothesis 2a - Career Plateau and Overall Job Satisfaction**

Hypothesis 2a investigated the relationship between career plateau and overall job satisfaction proposing that career plateaued individuals would report lower levels of overall job satisfaction. The intercorrelations between the three measures of objective career plateau and overall job satisfaction (Table 9.1) were not significant. However, the correlation between subjective plateau and overall job satisfaction was highly significant indicating that, as the participant's assessment of their own career plateau status increased, their overall job satisfaction decreased. The expectation, derived from the univariate analysis, was that the criteria for objective plateau would not emerge as significant variables when determining, through multiple regression analysis, the

relationship between career plateau and overall job satisfaction, but that subjective career plateau would.

Multiple regression analysis ( $N = 195$ ) was conducted to test the hypothesis that career plateaued individuals would report lower levels of overall job satisfaction. The career plateau variables, objective and subjective, were entered in a standard all-in analysis with overall job satisfaction as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are provided in Table 9.2 and indicate that the  $R$  for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(190) = 16.032$ ,  $p < .001$ . Subjective career plateau accounted for significant variability in overall job satisfaction<sup>(2)</sup>,  $\beta = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ . Although it was not significant at univariate level (Table 9.1), the years since last promotion criterion of objective plateau was significant at multivariate level,  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p = .036$ . This result indicated the possibility that the promotions criterion acted as a suppressor variable in this analysis (Smith, Ager & Williams, 1992) suppressing error variance in subjective career plateau. Altogether 25% (24% adjusted) of the variance in overall job satisfaction was explained by these career plateau variables. This result provided partial support for hypothesis 2a. Subjective career plateau and years since last promotion were significant in accounting for variability in a participant's level of overall job satisfaction.

### **Hypotheses 2b - Career Plateau and Satisfaction With Promotion Opportunities**

Hypothesis 2b investigated the relationship between career plateau and satisfaction with promotion opportunities and proposed that career plateaued individuals would report lower levels of satisfaction with promotional opportunities. The intercorrelations between the tenure and salary grade level measures of objective career plateau and satisfaction with promotion opportunities (Table 9.1) were not significant. However, the correlation between the promotions and subjective measures of career plateau and overall job satisfaction were significant and indicated that, as the participant's time

<sup>(2)</sup> Note The variable Overall Job Satisfaction was reflected during transformation. Beta coefficient signs will therefore be opposite to the intercorrelations for this variable as presented in Table 9.1.

without a promotion, or their assessment of their own career plateau status, increased, their satisfaction with promotion opportunities decreased. The expectation, derived from the univariate analysis, was that the tenure and salary grade level criteria for objective plateau would not emerge as significant variables when determining, through multiple regression analysis, the relationship between career plateau and satisfaction with promotion opportunities. The promotions criterion of objective career plateau and subjective career plateau were expected to emerge as significant in this relationship.

Multiple regression analysis ( $N = 185$ ) was conducted to test the hypothesis that career plateaued individuals would report lower levels of satisfaction with promotion opportunities. The measures of career plateau, objective and subjective, were entered in a standard all-in analysis with satisfaction with promotion opportunities as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are provided in Table 9.2 and indicate that the  $R$  for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(180) = 47.580, p < .001$ . Subjective career plateau accounted for significant variability in satisfaction with promotion opportunities,  $\beta = -.73, p < .001$ . The promotion criterion of objective career plateau did not emerge as significant indicating the possible occurrence of confounding between that and subjective career plateau. Altogether 51% (50% adjusted) of the variance in satisfaction with promotion opportunities was explained by these career plateau variables. Hypothesis 2b was therefore partially supported. Subjective career plateau was significant in accounting for variability in a participant's level of satisfaction with promotion opportunities.

### **Hypothesis 3a - Job Satisfaction and Career Transition**

Hypotheses 3a considered the relationship between job satisfaction and career transition and proposed that career transition was more likely to be pursued by individuals reporting lower levels of job satisfaction. The correlations presented in Table 9.1 confirmed that both measures of job satisfaction, overall and satisfaction with promotion opportunities, were highly correlated with the individual's stated intention to pursue a career transition. These correlations indicated that as job satisfaction decreased the individual's stated intention to effect a career transition increased. The expectation,

derived from the univariate analysis, was that both job satisfaction variables would emerge as significant when determining, through multiple regression analysis, the relationship between job satisfaction and a participant's intention to pursue a career transition.

Multiple regression analysis ( $N = 216$ ) was conducted to test the hypothesis that job dissatisfaction would result in greater intentions to pursue a career transition. The two measures of job satisfaction, overall and promotion opportunities, were entered in a standard all-in analysis with career transition as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are provided in Table 9.3 and indicate that the  $R$  for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(213) = 146.194$ ,  $p < .001$ . Overall job satisfaction accounted for significant variability in career transition,  $\beta = .76$ ,  $p < .001$ . Although satisfaction with promotion opportunities was significant at univariate level it was not significant at the multivariate level indicating the possible occurrence of confounding

**TABLE 9.3**  
**Standard Multiple Regression Analysis of Job Satisfaction Variables on Career Transition showing Standardised Regression Coefficients,  $R$ ,  $R^2$ , and Adjusted  $R^2$  for All Available Respondents**

<b>Career Transition - Intended (N = 216)</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Beta</b>
<hr/>	
Job Satisfaction -	
Overall	.76 ***
Promotion Opportunities	-.01
R	.761
R Square	.579 ***
Adj R Square	.575 ***
F	146.194 ***

Note: \*\*\*. Significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

between that and overall job satisfaction. Altogether 58% of the variance in a participant's intention to pursue a career transition was explained by these job satisfaction variables. Hypothesis 3a was therefore partially supported. Overall job satisfaction was significant in accounting for variability in a participant's intention to pursue a career transition.

### **Hypothesis 3b - Job Satisfaction, Career Plateau and Career Transition**

Hypothesis 3b investigated the moderating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between career plateau and career transition and proposed that career plateaued individuals would be more likely to pursue a career transition if those individuals also reported low levels of job satisfaction. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the moderating effect of the two measures of job satisfaction, overall and promotion opportunities, on the relationship between career plateau and career transition. Adopting the approach advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986) product variables were created by multiplying the deviation scores of the various measures of career plateau and the two measures of job satisfaction. These product variables were entered as the second block of independent variables in each analysis.

**The Moderating Effect of Overall Job Satisfaction on the Relationship Between Career Plateau and Career Transition.** At the univariate level (Table 9.1) subjective career plateau was the only career plateau variable to be significantly correlated with the participant's intention to pursue a career transition. Significant correlations existed between overall job satisfaction and subjective career plateau, and between overall job satisfaction and an individual's intention to effect a career transition. At the multivariate level both subjective career plateau (Table 9.2) and overall job satisfaction (Table 9.3) were significant in accounting for variability in career transition.

After Step 1 of this hierarchical analysis (Table 9.4), the R for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(185) = 46.570, p < .001$ . Overall job satisfaction,  $\beta = .71, p < .001$ , accounted for significant variability in career transition and at this stage of the analysis 56% (55% adjusted) of the variance in career transition was explained by

these variables. Subjective career plateau, which was significant at the univariate level was found to be not significant in this analysis at the multivariate level indicating the possible occurrence of confounding between that and overall job satisfaction.

After Step 2 of the analysis (Table 9.4), with the addition of the overall job satisfaction times career plateau interaction terms, the R for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(181) = 25.804, p < .001$ . The addition of the interaction terms resulted in a non-significant increment in  $R^2$  ( $R^2$  change = .005,  $p = .743$ ). Hypothesis 3b, in so far as overall job satisfaction was concerned, was therefore not supported. The moderating effect of overall job satisfaction on the relationship between career plateau and career transition was not significant in accounting for variability in a participant's intention to pursue a career transition.

**The Moderating Effect of Satisfaction With Promotion Opportunities on the Relationship Between Career Plateau and Career Transition.** At the univariate level (Table 9.1) subjective career plateau was the only career plateau variable to be significantly correlated with the participant's intention to pursue a career transition. Satisfaction with promotion opportunities was significantly correlated to the promotion criterion of objective career plateau, subjective career plateau, and career transition. At the multivariate level satisfaction with promotion opportunities was not significant in accounting for variability in career transition (see hypothesis 3a, Table 9.3).

After Step 1 of this hierarchical analysis (Table 9.4), the R for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(175) = 9.051, p < .001$ . Subjective career plateau,  $\beta = .43, p < .001$ , accounted for significant variability in career transition. The promotions criterion of career plateau,  $\beta = -.22, p = .049$ , whilst not significant at univariate level, also accounted for variability in career transition, albeit weakly. This result indicated the possibility that the promotions criterion acted as a suppressor variable in this analysis (Smith, Ager & Williams, 1992) suppressing error variance in subjective career plateau (see also Hypothesis 2a). At this stage of the analysis 21% (18% adjusted) of the variance in career transition was explained by knowing scores on these variables.

**TABLE 9.4**  
**Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis - The Moderating Effect of Job Satisfaction Variables on the Relationship Between Career Plateau and Career Transition showing Standardised Regression Coefficients, R, R<sup>2</sup>, and Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> for All Available Respondents**

Variable	Career Transition - Intended			
	Job Satisfaction - Overall (N = 191)		Job Satisfaction - Promotion (N = 181)	
	Step 1 Beta	Step 2 Beta	Step 1 Beta	Step 2 Beta
Objective Plateau				
- Tenure	-.05	-.11	.05	.11
- Salary Level	-.04	-.02	-.09	-.08
- Promotion	-.03	.01	-.22 *	-.26 *
Subjective Plateau	.08	.06	.43 ***	.39 ***
Job Satisfaction				
- Overall	.71 ***	.69 ***		
- Promotion Opps			-.06	-.16
Interactions - Job Satisfaction x Career Plateau				
Tenure		.08		.16
Salary Level		-.04		-.11
Promotion		-.03		-.02
Subjective		.05		-.22 **
R	.746	.750	.453	.518
R Square	.557 ***	.562 ***	.205 ***	.268 ***
Adj R Square	.545 ***	.540 ***	.183 ***	.230 ***
Change in R Square	.557 ***	.005	.205 ***	.063 **
F	46.570 ***	25.804 ***	9.051 ***	6.971 ***

Note: \*. Significant at the  $p < .05$  level.  
 \*\*. Significant at the  $p < .01$  level.  
 \*\*\*. Significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

After Step 2 of the analysis, with the addition of the satisfaction with promotion opportunities times career plateau interaction terms, the  $R$  for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(171) = 6.971, p < .001$ . The addition of the interaction terms resulted in a significant increment in  $R^2$  ( $R^2$  change = .063,  $p = .007$ ). The interaction term of satisfaction with promotion opportunities and subjective career plateau,  $\beta = -.22, p = .003$ , accounted for significant variability in an individual's intention to effect a career transition. The interaction terms contributed an additional 6% so that altogether 27% (23% adjusted) of the variance in career transition was explained by these variables.

The results indicated that, in this relationship, as subjective career plateau increased so did the intention to pursue a career transition (Figure A7.1, Appendix 7). When subjective career plateau was low the intention to pursue a career transition was higher for individuals with higher levels of satisfaction with promotion opportunities. When subjective career plateau was high the intention to pursue a career transition was lower for individuals with higher levels of satisfaction with promotion opportunities. Partial support for hypothesis 3b was found. Satisfaction with promotion opportunities did moderate on the relationship between career plateau and career transition but only through the subjective measure of career plateau. Subjectively career plateaued participants with low levels of satisfaction with promotion opportunities recorded higher intentions to pursue a career transition.

#### **Hypothesis 4 - Job Satisfaction, Life Balance Orientation and Career Transition**

Hypothesis four investigated the moderating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between life balance orientation and career transition. The proposal was that individuals with a strong orientation, to either work or to non-work, and who reported lower levels of job satisfaction, would be more likely to be considering pursuing a career transition. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to explore the hypothesised relationship adopting again the approach advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986) with the interaction terms being created with the independent variables of job satisfaction and life balance orientation.

**The Moderating Effect of Overall Job Satisfaction on the Relationship Between Life Balance Orientation and Career Transition.** At the univariate level (Table 9.1) overall job satisfaction was significantly correlated with career transition and the work focus dimension of life balance orientation. The work focus dimension was significantly correlated with career transition as was the non-work focus dimension, albeit weakly. At the multivariate level overall job satisfaction was significant in accounting for variability in career transition (see hypothesis 3a, Table 9.3).

After Step 1 of this hierarchical analysis (N = 228, Table 9.5) the R for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(224) = 101.685, p < .001$ . Overall job satisfaction accounted for significantly variability in career transition,  $\beta = .73, p < .001$ . The non-work focus of dimension of life balance orientation also accounted for variability albeit not strongly,  $\beta = .10, p = .029$ . The work focus dimension, whilst significantly correlated with career transition at univariate level, did not emerge as significant in this multivariate analysis indicating the possible occurrence of confounding between that and overall job satisfaction. At this stage of the analysis 58% (57% adjusted) of the variance in career transition was explained by these variables.

After Step 2 of the analysis (Table 9.5), with the addition of the overall job satisfaction times life balance orientation interaction terms, the R for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(222) = 61.132, p < .001$ . The addition of the interaction terms resulted in a non-significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $R^2$  change = .003,  $p = .496$ ). Hypothesis 4, in so far as overall job satisfaction was concerned, was therefore not supported with the proposed moderating effect of overall job satisfaction not being found. The interaction terms did not account for significant variability in a participant's intention to pursue a career transition.

**The Moderating Effect of Satisfaction With Promotion Opportunities on the Relationship Between Life Balance Orientation and Career Transition.** At the univariate level (Table 9.1) satisfaction with promotion opportunities was significantly correlated with career transition and the work focus dimension of life balance orientation. The work focus dimension was significantly correlated with career transition

**TABLE 9.5**  
**Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis - The Moderating Effect of Job Satisfaction Variables on the Relationship Between Life Balance Orientation and Career Transition showing Standardised Regression Coefficients, R, R<sup>2</sup>, and Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> for All Available Respondents**

Variable	Career Transition - Intended			
	Job Satisfaction - Overall (N = 228)		Job Satisfaction - Promotion (N = 216)	
	Step 1 Beta	Step 2 Beta	Step 1 Beta	Step 2 Beta
Life Balance Orientation				
- Work Focus	-.04	-.04	-.20 **	-.18 **
- Non-work Focus	.10 *	.10 *	.14 *	.14 *
Job Satisfaction				
- Overall	.73 ***	.73 ***		
- Promotion Opps			-.28 ***	-.29 ***
Interactions - Job Satisfaction x Life Balance Orientation				
Work Focus		-.05		.22 ***
Non-work Focus		.00		.01
R	.759	.761	.412	.468
R Square	.577 ***	.579 ***	.170 ***	.219 ***
Adj R Square	.571 ***	.570 ***	.158 ***	.200 ***
Change in R Square	.577 ***	.003	.170 ***	.049 **
F	101.685 ***	61.132 ***	14.487 ***	11.779 ***

Note: \*. Significant at the  $p < .05$  level.  
 \*\*. Significant at the  $p < .01$  level.  
 \*\*\*. Significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

as was the non-work focus dimension, albeit weakly. At the multivariate level satisfaction with promotion opportunities did not account for significant variability in career transition (see hypothesis 3a, Table 9.3). As overall job satisfaction was not included as an independent variable in this analysis, satisfaction with promotion opportunities was expected to emerge as significant.

After Step 1 of this hierarchical analysis (Table 9.5) the R for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(212) = 14.487, p < .001$ . All variables entered in this step accounted for significant variability in career transition. Satisfaction with promotion opportunities was the highest contributor to the explained variance,  $\beta = -.28, p < .001$ , followed by the work focus dimension of life balance orientation,  $\beta = -.20, p = .003$ , and lastly the non-work focus dimension,  $\beta = .14, p = .023$ . At this stage of the analysis 17% (16% adjusted) of the variation in career transition was explained by these variables.

After Step 2 of the analysis (Table 9.5), with the addition of the satisfaction with promotion opportunities times life balance orientation interaction terms, the R for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(210) = 11.779, p < .001$ . The addition of the interaction terms resulted in a significant increment in  $R^2$  ( $R^2$  change = .049,  $p = .002$ ). The interaction term of satisfaction with promotion opportunities and the work focus dimension of life balance orientation,  $\beta = .22, p < .001$ , was significant in accounting for variability in an individual's intention to pursue a career transition. The interaction terms contributed an additional 5% so that altogether 22% (20% adjusted) of the variance in career transition was explained by these variables.

The result indicated that, within this relationship, the intention to pursue a career transition was higher for those individuals less satisfied with promotion opportunities (Figure A7.2, Appendix 7). The intention to pursue a career transition was lower when work focus was high. The difference in intention to pursue a career transition, between individuals reporting low satisfaction with promotion opportunities and high satisfaction with promotion opportunities, was greater when work focus was low than what is was when work focus was high. Partial support for hypothesis four was found. Satisfaction with promotion opportunities did moderate on the relationship between life balance orientation and career transition but only through the work focus dimension. Participants

with a strong work focus, and who were less satisfied with promotion opportunities, did record higher intentions to pursue a career transition.

### **Hypothesis 5a - Career Plateau and Education**

Hypothesis 5a considered the relationship between career plateau and education and proposed that career plateaued individuals would be more likely to be involved in, or to be considering, pursuing further educational opportunities. A series of *t* tests was conducted to test the relationship between the various measures of career plateau, objective and subjective, and two measures of education. Current education measured whether or not an individual was currently involved in the pursuit of education, whilst intended education measured whether or not the individual had stated an intention to pursue further education. The variables were measured dichotomously with '1' equal to 'yes' and '2' equal to 'no'. The groups so formed comprised those who were involved in current education or who were not, and those who had stated an intention to pursue further education or who had not. The results of the *t* test analysis are presented in Table 9.6.

**Career Plateau and Current Education.** At the univariate level the only significant correlation was between the subjective measure of career plateau and current education which suggested that as subjective plateau increased so did the likelihood that the individual was not involved in current education. None of the objective measures of career plateau were significant. In this analysis the group mean difference for participants subjectively career plateaued, between those involved in current education versus those not involved in current education, was significant,  $t = -2.695$ ,  $p .008$ . The mean for the group involved in current education was lower indicating that participants who perceived themselves as less career plateaued were more likely to be involved in current education. The group mean differences for those participants objectively career plateaued were not significant. In so far as current education was concerned support for hypothesis 5a was not found. Career plateaued individuals were not more likely to have

**TABLE 9.6**  
**T Test Analysis on the Relationship Between Career Plateau and Education Variables**  
**Showing Group Means, Standard Deviations and t Values for All Available Respondents**

Variable	Education - Current							Education - Intended						
	Involved			Not Involved			t	Intending			Not Intending			t
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	
Career Plateau Objective														
- Tenure	47	1.566	.7488	180	1.665	.9888	-.642	103	1.512	.8655	121	1.754	1.0035	-1.910
- Salary Level	45	1.266	.6204	172	1.330	.9131	-.450	102	1.174	.7408	114	1.440	.9395	-2.289 *
- Promotion	41	1.431	.7757	159	1.740	1.0146	-1.818	94	1.479	.8387	103	1.857	1.0707	-2.739 **
Career Plateau - Subjective	48	19.020	7.1600	176	22.130	7.0700	-2.695 **	103	21.450	7.1700	118	21.900	7.0800	-.470

Note. \*. Significant at the  $p < .05$  level (2-tailed).  
 \*\*. Significant at the  $p < .01$  level (2-tailed).

been involved in current educational activities.

**Career Plateau and Intended Education.** At the univariate level both the years at current salary grade level and years since last promotion measures of objective career plateau were significantly correlated with the stated intention to pursue further education. The nature of these correlations suggested that as individuals became more career plateaued, based on these particular criteria, they were less likely to have stated an intention to pursue further education. In this analysis the group mean differences were significant for those objectively plateaued on both the salary grade level,  $t = -2.289$ ,  $p = .023$ , and the promotions criteria,  $t = -2.739$ ,  $p = .007$ . The means for the groups who stated an intention to pursue further education were lower indicating that participants who were less career plateaued, on both the salary grade level and years since last promotion measures, were more likely to have stated an intention to pursue further education. In so far as intended education was concerned support for hypothesis 5a was not found. Career plateaued individuals were not more likely to have stated an intention to pursue educational activities.

### **Hypothesis 5b - Education Attained and Career Plateau**

Hypothesis 5b investigated the relationship between education attained and career plateau and proposed that lower levels of educational attainment were more likely to be recorded amongst career plateaued individuals. Based on analysis at the univariate level (Table 9.1) in which it was found that the level of education attained was significantly correlated, albeit weakly, with the tenure criterion of objective career plateau,  $r = -.15$ ,  $p = .021$ , partial support for hypothesis 5b was found. Lower levels of education were associated with longer periods of tenure in the same job, although not strongly so. Participants who reported longer periods of time in the same job also reported lower levels of attained education. Education attained was not significantly correlated with any of the remaining measure of career plateau.

### **Hypothesis 5c - Education Attained, Career Plateau and Career Transition**

Hypothesis 5c considered the moderating effect of the level of education attained by participants on the relationship between career plateau and career transition and proposed that career plateaued individuals with higher levels of education would be more likely to pursue a career transition. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the moderating effect of the level of education attained on the relationship between career plateau and career transition adopting again the approach advocated by Barron and Kenny (1986). Multiplying the deviation scores of the career plateau measures and education attained derived the product variables entered in the second step of the analysis.

At the univariate level significant correlations existed between education attained and the tenure criterion of objective career plateau and between education attained and career transition. The only significant correlation between career plateau and career transition was with the subjective measure of career plateau. Previous analysis at the multivariate level (see hypothesis 1, Table 9.2) confirmed that subjective career plateau was significant in accounting for variability in a participant's intention to effect a career transition.

After Step 1 of this hierarchical analysis ( $N = 188$ , Table 9.7) the  $R$  for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(182) = 11.835$ ,  $p < .001$ . Both subjective career plateau,  $\beta = .45$ ,  $p < .001$ , and education attained,  $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ , accounted for significant variability in a participant's intention to pursue a career transition. At this stage of the analysis 25% (23% adjusted) of the variance in a participant's intention to pursue a career transition was explained by these variables.

After Step 2 of the analysis (Table 9.7), with the addition of the education attained times career plateau interaction terms, the  $R$  for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(178) = 8.931$ ,  $p < .001$ . The promotions criterion of objective career plateau,  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p = .049$ , whilst not significant at univariate level, was significant in Step 2 of this analysis. This result indicated the possibility that the promotions criterion acted as a suppressor variable in this analysis (Smith, Ager & Williams, 1992). Further analysis

**TABLE 9.7**  
**Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis - Moderating Effect of Education**  
**Attained on the Relationship Between Career Plateau and Career Transition**  
**showing Standardised Regression Coefficients, R, R<sup>2</sup>, and Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>**  
**for All Available Respondents**

Variable	Career Transition - Intended (N = 188)	
	Step 1 Beta	Step 2 Beta
Career Plateau Objective		
- Tenure	.07	.15
- Salary Level	-.10	-.10
- Promotion	-.16	-.21 *
Career Plateau - Subjective	.45 ***	.45 ***
Education - Attained	.26 ***	.26 ***
Interactions -		
Education Attained x		
Career Plateau		
Tenure		.17
Salary Level		-.16 *
Promotion		-.05
Subjective		-.19 **
R	.495	.558
R Square	.245 ***	.311 ***
Adj R Square	.225 ***	.276 ***
Change in R Square	.245 ***	.066 **
F	11.835 ***	8.931 ***

Note: \*. Significant at the  $p < .05$  level.  
 \*\*. Significant at the  $p < .01$  level.  
 \*\*\*. Significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

(Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989) indicated that the promotions criterion of objective career plateau was suppressing error variance in the interaction term of subjective career plateau and education attained (see also Hypotheses 2a & 3b). The addition of the interaction terms resulted in a significant increment in  $R^2$  ( $R^2$  change = .066,  $p = .003$ ). The interaction terms of education attained times the salary grade level criterion of objective career plateau,  $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p = .05$ , and subjective career plateau,  $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p = .005$ , accounted for significant variability in an individual's intention to pursue a career transition. The interaction terms contributed an additional 7% so that altogether 31% (28% adjusted) of the variance in career transition was explained by these variables.

The result indicated that, within this relationship, the intention to pursue a career transition was greater for those individuals with a higher level of attained education. For those individuals with a high level of education the intention to transition was higher when they recorded less time spent on the same salary grade level (Objective Plateau - Salary; Figure A7.3, Appendix 7). For those individuals with a low level of education the intention to transition was lower when they recorded less time on the same salary grade level. For subjective career plateau, the difference in intention to pursue a career transition, between individuals recording high or low levels of education, was greater when subjective career plateau was low (Figure A7.4, Appendix 7). This difference in intention was less when subjective career plateau was high. Partial support for hypothesis 5c was found. The level of education attained did moderate on the relationship between career plateau and career transition through both the salary grade level criterion of objective plateau, and through subjective career plateau.

## **SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES**

**Hypothesis 1:** Career plateaued individuals will indicate greater intentions toward pursuing a career transition.

Objective career plateau was found to be not significant in accounting for variability in the intentions of individuals to pursue a career transition. Subjective career plateau was

significant and altogether 18% (16% adjusted) of the variance in career transition was explained by these career plateau variables. Partial support for the hypothesis was found.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Career plateaued individuals will report lower levels of overall job satisfaction.

Subjective career plateau and the promotion criterion of objective career plateau accounted for significant variability in an individual's intention to pursue a career transition providing partial support for the hypothesis. The tenure and salary grade level criteria of objective plateau were found to be not significant. Altogether 25% (24% adjusted) of the variance in overall job satisfaction was explained by these career plateau variables.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Career plateaued individuals will report lower levels of satisfaction with promotional opportunities.

Objective career plateau was found to be not significant in accounting for variability in the satisfaction individuals had with promotion opportunities. Subjective career plateau was significant and altogether 51% (50% adjusted) of the variance in satisfaction with promotion opportunities was explained by these career plateau variables. Partial support for hypothesis 2b was found.

**Hypothesis 3a:** Career transition is more likely to be pursued by individuals reporting lower levels of job satisfaction.

Satisfaction with promotion opportunities was found to be not significant in accounting for variability in an individual's intention to pursue a career transition. This result indicated the possible presence of a confounding effect. Providing partial support for the hypothesis overall job satisfaction was found to be significant and altogether 58% of the variance in career transition was explained by these job satisfaction variables.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Career plateaued individuals will be more likely to pursue a career transition if those individuals also report low levels of job satisfaction.

In so far as overall job satisfaction was concerned hypothesis 3b was not supported as this was found to have no moderating effect on the relationship between career plateau and an individual's intention to pursue a career transition. Satisfaction with promotion opportunities was found to have a significant moderating effect through subjective career plateau with this result providing partial support for the hypothesis. The interaction terms contributed 6% to the overall 27% (23% adjusted) of the variance in career transition explained by these variables.

**Hypothesis 4:** Individuals with a strong orientation, to either work or to non-work, and who report lower levels of job satisfaction, are more likely to pursue a career transition.

In so far as overall job satisfaction was concerned hypothesis 4 was not supported. Overall job satisfaction did not moderate on the relationship between life balance orientation and career transition. Satisfaction with promotion opportunities was found to have a significant moderating effect through the work focus dimension of life balance orientation. The interaction terms contributed 5% to the overall 22% (20% adjusted) of the variance in career transition explained by these variables. Partial support for the hypothesis was found.

**Hypothesis 5a:** Career plateaued individuals will be more likely to consider pursuing further educational opportunities.

In so far as current education was concerned the only significant difference in the means for the groups was for those participants subjectively plateaued with less plateaued participants indicating involvement in current education. Significant differences were found in the group means for both the salary grade level and years since last promotion criteria of objective plateau for individuals who had stated an intention to pursue further education. However, in both cases it was the less career plateaued groups who were more likely to have stated an intention to pursue further education. Support for hypothesis 5a was not found.

**Hypothesis 5b:** Lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to be recorded amongst individuals experiencing career plateau.

On the basis of univariate analysis partial support was found for hypothesis 5b. Lower levels of education were associated with longer periods of time in the same job (objective plateau - tenure), albeit not strongly so. None of the remaining measures of career plateau were correlated with education attained.

**Hypothesis 5c:** Career plateaued individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to pursue a career transition.

Partial support for hypothesis 5c was found in that education attained had a significant moderating effect through the salary grade level criterion of objective career plateau and through subjective career plateau. The interaction terms contributed 7% to the overall 31% (28% adjusted) of the variance in career transition explained by these variables.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSES

**Career Transition.** Additional information was collated on factors relating to career transition including; previous transition, the magnitude of that transition and the reasons for pursuing it, the reasons for considering a possible transition or for intending to effect a transition, and the magnitude of that intended transition. The analysis of this information is provided in Appendix 5 (see Tables A5.1 to A5.3). Of those who responded to the question (N = 233), 145 (61.8%) indicated that they had experienced a career transition within the previous three years.

Those individuals who had either recently experienced a career transition, or who stated they were considering or would consider a career transition were analysed on reason for changing or considering changing jobs. The analysis of this data is provided in Table A5.1. The most common reason cited in all groups was “to do something more challenging and fulfilling” with the ‘previous transition’ group citing this 67 times (29.5% of responses), the ‘would consider a transition’ group citing this 113 times (31.3%), and the ‘intending a transition’ group citing it 85 times (34.1%). The second most common reason varied by group with the ‘previous transition’ group citing “to

achieve career objectives”, the ‘would consider a transition’ citing “to change career direction”, and the ‘intending a transition’ group citing “to improve standard of living.”

The scope and magnitude of previous transitions were assessed (Table A5.2). A greater scope was reflected by a change in career, which was indicated by 26.9% of respondents, an inter-organisational transition which was indicated by 29% of respondents, whilst magnitude was assessed by whether or not it felt like a big change with 72.9% of respondents agreeing that it was. So whilst, based on these results, the average career transition may not have been great in scope, those who had undergone a career transition considered the change they had made to be of a reasonable magnitude.

An analysis of the four questions assessing the magnitude of intended career transitions is provided in Table A5.3. In what was considered to reflect a higher magnitude, 28.6% of respondents indicated that they would not look for a similar job, 4.8% indicated that they would not look for a job that would allow them to make use of existing skills, 83.7% indicated that they were prepared to further their education/training to improve their chances of getting a new job, and 66.7% indicated that they believed they could get a job in another organisation at a higher level than their present job. Indicating a greater magnitude to the possible career transition the majority of respondents were prepared to further their education to achieve that and believed that they could get another job at a higher level.

In summary, nearly 62% of respondents indicated that they had experienced a career transition within the previous three years with the most common reason cited for making a transition, or for considering one, being “to do something more challenging and fulfilling.” For those participants who had transitioned 26.9% had changed careers and 29% had changed employer. Of those individuals considering a career transition nearly 84% indicated they were prepared to further their education/training to improve their chances.

**Reasons for Pursuing Education.** An analysis of the stated purposes or reasons given by respondents in an open question format for currently pursuing education, and for

stating any intention to pursue future education, was performed and the results of this are provided in Table A6.1 (Appendix 6).

***Currently Pursuing Education.*** Career enhancement proved to be the highest priority purpose being cited by 52.2% of participants (N = 46) as their first purpose, and it was cited in 50.8% of responses overall (N = 65). This was followed by ‘personal interest’ which was cited fifteen times overall or 23.1%

***Intending to Pursue Further Education.*** Career enhancement also proved to be the most common purpose cited amongst those individuals intending to pursue education/training (N = 104) with 63.1% of participants citing this as their first purpose. This purpose was cited in 56.5% of the overall total responses. Personal interest was again second being cited 33 times or 23.9% of total responses. This group was analysed further (not included in table) and this revealed that 62.5% (65) indicated they would commence this education within the next one to two years, 34.6% (36) within the next three to five years, and 2.9% (3) not within the next five years. Of those indicating how this would be done (N = 102) 93.1% indicated that it would be undertaken part time whilst still working whilst 6.9% indicated they would undertake this full time.

**Education and Age.** The possible influence of age in the pursuit or acquisition of further education was discussed in Chapter Six. Analysis at univariate level indicated that as age increased, the level of education attained,  $r = -.20$ ,  $p = .002$ , involvement in current education activities,  $r = .18$ ,  $p = .008$ , and stated intentions to pursue further education,  $r = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ , all decreased.

In summary, career enhancement proved to be the most common reason for pursuing current education (cited by 52.2% of respondents), and for intending to pursue further education (cited by 63.1% of respondents). In both cases personal interest was the second most common purpose cited. Of those intending to pursue further education 62.5% indicated they would commence this within the next one to two years and 93.1% indicated they would do this part-time whilst still working. Finally, as age increased, the level of education attained, involvement in current education, and intentions to pursue further education all decreased.

## CHAPTER TEN

### DISCUSSION

The major objective of the present study was to explore the dynamics of career plateau and career transition, and the possible impact on these phenomena of other career factors, in an attempt to gain greater understanding of the career processes involved. Whilst career plateau was measured across a variable topology, including objective and subjective criteria, the basic contention within the research was that career plateaued individuals, no matter how defined or measured, would be more likely to express an intention to effect a career transition. Other research variables, including job satisfaction, life balance orientation and education, were also proposed to influence attitudes toward career transition.

*Career Plateau and Career Transition:* Individuals experiencing a career plateau were expected to record greater intention toward pursuing a career transition. The proposition was that plateaued individuals would be unlikely to accept their career status and would pursue a career transition as a way of escaping from the dilemma. The three objective measures of career plateau (length of time spent: in current job, at the same salary grade level, or without a promotion) were found to have no significant association with career transition intentions. Subjective plateau, a measure of the individual's perception of their own career status, was found to be the only significant variable in this relationship in which 16% (adjusted) of the variance in career transition was explained. Subjectively career plateaued participants, that is those who perceived themselves to be career plateaued, did express a greater intention toward pursuing a career transition.

What an individual perceives or believes may therefore be much more critical in career decision making than the arbitrary definition and assignment of objective measures based on, for example, elapsed time since a previous career event. Although Tremblay et al (1995) and Nicholson (1993) found that, on an objective measure of career plateau, the longer the plateau existed the lower the individual's intention was to transition these

particular findings were not replicated in the present study. Nicholson, however, reported that as *perceptions* of career plateau increased so did the individual's intention to pursue a career transition. The latter finding is in line with the present study which also found that individuals who perceived themselves as career plateaued, that is those subjectively plateaued, were significantly more inclined to express an intention to effect a career transition. Participants defined as objectively plateaued did not express this same intention to pursue a career transition. Perhaps objectively career plateaued individuals do become more accepting of their status the longer they exist without career progression and are therefore less inclined to pursue a career transition to escape that status.

***Career Plateau and Overall Job Satisfaction:*** Career plateau was proposed to be associated with lower levels of overall job satisfaction. The expectation was that career plateaued individuals would express higher levels of overall job dissatisfaction, that is that they would be dissatisfied with their job. Both the promotions criterion of objective plateau and subjective plateau were found to be significantly associated with overall job satisfaction with 24% (adjusted) of the variance in overall job satisfaction being explained. Those participants who had spent longer periods of time without a promotion, or who had greater perceptions of being career plateaued, did report higher levels of overall job dissatisfaction.

Whether it was being career plateaued that lead to job dissatisfaction cannot be answered by this study. However, the significant association does provide justification for further research in this area. The negative consequences of job dissatisfaction were discussed in Chapter Five and include impacts on productivity, absenteeism and turnover. The possible link with employee turnover is interesting as turnover is a natural consequence of career transition. If it was determined that being career plateaued did contribute to lower levels of job satisfaction interventions such as job rotation and job enrichment could be instigated to reduce perceptions of plateau which could in turn lead to improved levels of job satisfaction.

***Career Plateau and Satisfaction With Promotion Opportunities:*** Career plateau was proposed to be associated with lower levels of satisfaction with promotion opportunities,

the outcome being higher levels of dissatisfaction amongst plateaued individuals. In this relationship subjective career plateau was found to be the only significant variable with 50% (adjusted) of the variance in satisfaction with promotion opportunities being explained. Those individuals who perceived themselves to be career plateaued did record higher levels of dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities. The expected association between the promotions criterion of objective plateau and satisfaction with promotion opportunities was not found. Intuitively the expectation was that individuals who had experienced long periods of time without a promotion would be dissatisfied with opportunities for promotion.

Lack of promotion or advancement is at the core of career plateau. If an individual's career is not progressing then by default this can be explained by the absence, for whatever reason, of advancement or promotion. The reporting of lower levels of satisfaction with promotion opportunities, by participants who perceived that such opportunities were missing, was perhaps not surprising. However, satisfaction with promotion opportunities is but one component or dimension of total or overall job satisfaction. The possibility exists that individuals dissatisfied with opportunities for promotion may in many other respects be satisfied with their jobs. Whether satisfaction in other areas is sufficient to compensate for dissatisfaction in this one area is in itself a research topic. Of interest in the present study was whether dissatisfaction would in turn influence an individual's intention toward pursuing a career transition.

***Job Satisfaction and Career Transition:*** The proposition was that individuals dissatisfied with their jobs would be more inclined to pursue a career transition. Career transition was proposed to be a means through which dissatisfied individuals could escape from the perceived source of that dissatisfaction. Overall job satisfaction was found to be the only significant variable in this relationship in which 58% of the variance in career transition was explained. Participants who reported lower levels of overall job satisfaction did record greater intention toward pursuing a career transition.

The complexity of overall job satisfaction makes it difficult to draw any conclusions from this result. For example, the Job Descriptive Index (Smith, 1992) alone comprises five sub-scales of job satisfaction. What is relevant is the significant amount of variance

in career transition that was captured by the phenomenon and the highly significant correlation at univariate level. Whilst it cannot be concluded that overall job satisfaction is at the root of career transition it is likely to be influential in career decision making processes engaged in by the individual. Overall job satisfaction, as a possible precursor to transition, may provide an insight into the likely outcome of those decision making processes. Note must also be made that, as a way of ameliorating job dissatisfaction, transition may be but one of many possible courses pursued by the individual. In future research a decomposition of overall job satisfaction into its various components would be warranted as that would assist in identifying what job components underpin any decision to pursue a career transition.

Intuitively the expectation was that individuals dissatisfied with opportunities for promotion in their current organisation would seek opportunities elsewhere. Due to the possible confounding effect of overall job satisfaction, satisfaction with promotion opportunities did not emerge as having a significant association with career transition. However, when overall job satisfaction was isolated from the analysis, dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities was found to be highly significant. The variance in career transition that would otherwise have been attributable to satisfaction with promotion opportunities was possibly accounted for by overall job satisfaction. This analysis provided some support for the notion that individuals dissatisfied with opportunities for promotion are likely to pursue a career transition was found. In what may be seen as the obvious response to dissatisfaction participants did indicate an intention to find another job. Other dimensions of job satisfaction not included in this study may also be subjected to confounding effects through the inclusion of a measure of overall job satisfaction in analyses. As previously mentioned this argues for the inclusion of the various dimensions of job satisfaction as separate indices in research to the exclusion of an overall measure.

***Career Plateau, Career Transition and Job Satisfaction:*** In another dimension to the career plateau and career transition scenario it was proposed that both overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with promotion opportunities would moderate on this relationship. Career plateau associated with low levels of satisfaction, on either of these two measures utilised, was proposed to underpin a greater intention to pursue a career

transition. An association with high levels of satisfaction was proposed to underpin a lesser intention to pursue a career transition. Overall job satisfaction was found to not have a moderating effect on this relationship. Given that significant associations were found at multivariate level between subjective career plateau and both overall job satisfaction and career transition, this result was unexpected. So whilst both subjective career plateau and overall job satisfaction were found to be associated with intention to pursue a career no moderating effect was found.

With respect to satisfaction with promotion opportunities the interaction term of satisfaction with promotion opportunities and subjective career plateau was found to be significant. This added 6% to the total of 23% (adjusted) explained variance in career transition. When a participant's perception of being career plateaued was low their intention to pursue a career transition was higher when their satisfaction with promotion opportunities was also high. However, when their perception of being career plateaued was high, their intention to pursue a career transition was greater when their satisfaction with promotion opportunities was low (Figure A7.1). Individuals who perceived themselves to be career plateaued, and who reported low levels of satisfaction with promotion opportunities, did record greater intention toward pursuing a career transition.

Perhaps not unexpectedly the results confirm that dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities and high perceptions of being career plateaued are associated with an increased intention to pursue a career transition. The univariate correlation between satisfaction with promotion opportunities and subjective career plateau was highly significant and the possibility of some confounding occurring cannot be ignored. Dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities could lead to a heightened perception of being career plateaued. If an individual was not being presented with opportunities for promotion either outcome is possible of which either in turn could influence a decision to pursue a career transition. Improving opportunities for promotion may be the most effective action open to organisations as this may achieve a dual outcome, that is a diminution in both dissatisfaction and perception of plateau. An organisation unable to offer those opportunities could possibly be faced with a higher employee turnover.

***Career Transition, Job Satisfaction and Life Balance Orientation:*** An additional perspective was added to job satisfaction with the inclusion of the life balance orientation of the individual which was measured across two dimensions, work focus and non-work focus. The proposition was that individuals who held a strong focus in either area, and who were dissatisfied with their jobs, would indicate a greater intention to pursue career transition in an attempt to restore balance to their lives. Overall job satisfaction did not emerge as significant and was not found to moderate on the relationship between life balance orientation and career transition. The level of satisfaction with their current job did not influence a strongly focussed individual in their intention toward pursuing a career transition. The expectation was for this relationship to prove significant. Intuitively the anticipation was for an individual who was dissatisfied with their job, but who had a strong focus, to seek through career transition, an opportunity to rectify the perceived imbalance and through that action to improve the level of satisfaction with their work. This proposition was supported to some extent by Adams et al (1996) who found that the relationship between job satisfaction and work focus was positive and significant, and in the corollary, that the relationship between life satisfaction and non-work focus was also positive and significant.

Satisfaction with promotion opportunities did emerge as significant in this relationship. The interaction term of satisfaction with promotion opportunities and work focus added 5% to the total 20% (adjusted) explained variance in career transition. Participants recording a low level of satisfaction with promotion opportunities reported greater intention toward pursuing a career transition than did participants recording a high level of satisfaction. However, participants reporting low satisfaction with promotion opportunities actually recorded a lower intention toward pursuing a career transition when work focus was high (Figure A7.2). So whilst participants with low levels of satisfaction with promotion did record greater intention to pursue a career transition, this intention was lower when work focus was high than what it was when work focus was low.

The role of career transition was expected to emerge as a strong influence in attempts to achieve a balance in life. In the only significant association it was individuals recording low satisfaction with promotion opportunities that recorded higher intentions to pursue a

career transition. Why this intention was lower when work focus was higher is not apparent. Perhaps an absorption in work or a commitment to the job was sufficient to achieve a reduction in intention. Interventions to increase work focus may be sufficient to control the transition intentions of individuals dissatisfied with promotion opportunities. Whether that can be achieved by improving opportunities for promotion alone provides a topic for further research.

***Career Plateau and Education:*** The proposition was that career plateaued individuals would be more likely to be involved in furthering their education in the belief that this would provide them with a means through which they could escape their current career status. Whilst the complete range of knowledge, skills and abilities the individual possesses are relevant in a career enhancement scenario, the present study limited itself to an exploration of a formal view of education. The research found that career plateaued participants were not more likely to be involved in furthering their education. Participants who did not perceive themselves to be career plateaued were more likely to be involved in current educational activities. Participants who had spent less time on the same salary grade level, or who had incurred shorter periods of time without a promotion, were more likely to have stated an intention to pursue further education.

The research findings oppose those originally proposed by the study. Participants who were less plateaued were more likely to be involved in furthering their education. One possible implication, in so far as subjective career plateaued is concerned, is that these particular participants somehow avoided perceptions of career plateau through being involved in education. These individuals may have been more career oriented and part of that orientation may include acceptance of the concept of continuous development. Whether or not acceptance of the concept of continuous development is sufficient in itself to moderate perceptions of being career plateaued poses an interesting topic for further research. Participants less objectively career plateaued who stated an intention to pursue further education may also have exhibited some acceptance of the continuous development concept. Whether or not that acceptance, if indeed it existed, was sufficient for the stated intention to materialise cannot be answered.

***Career Plateau and Attained Education:*** The level of education attained or possessed by the individual was proposed to contribute to career plateau with those having attained higher levels of education being less likely to experience plateau. Only one measure of career plateau was found to have a significant association with attained education and this was the tenure criterion of objective career plateau. This indicated, albeit weakly, that participants who recorded longer periods of time in the same job or position also reported lower levels of education. Whilst the inference may be that the lack of education contributes to longer periods of job or position tenure this is difficult to argue on two counts. Firstly, no causal effect can be claimed due to the nature of this study and secondly, the association that was found between attained education and job tenure was not particularly strong.

The non-emergence of attained education as being significantly associated with many of the dimensions of career plateau was unexpected. This suggests that education may not be a contributory factor in individuals experiencing career plateau. What was being measured here, however, was formal education and this is only one element within the knowledge component of the knowledge, skills and abilities triumvirate considered to be a major individual determinant in career plateau. Broadening the measurement of education to encompass more widely the knowledge, skills and abilities of the individual would assist, in future research, in determining the influence of education in career decision making processes.

***Career Plateau, Career Transition and Attained Education:*** The level of education attained by a career plateaued individual was proposed to be an influence in career transition decisions. Higher levels of education amongst career plateaued individuals were believed to underpin greater intentions toward pursuing career transition through an acceptance of education as a factor in securing career advancement. The study found that the level of education attained influenced an individual's intention to pursue a career transition through two measures of career plateau, time spent at current salary grade level and the individual's perception of their career status (subjective career plateau). The interaction terms of career plateau and attained education added 7% to the total 28% (adjusted) of the explained variance in career transition. Participants with high levels of education recorded greater intention toward pursuing a career transition.

When time spent on current salary grade level was low the intention to pursue a career transition was greater when attained education was high. Whilst this intention was lower when time spent on current salary grade level was high, it was still greater than when education attained was low (Figure A7.3). Given that this measure is a time measure it may suggest an increasing acceptance of career status by higher educated participants reinforced by the knowledge that future salary increases may not be forthcoming. What may be confounding the picture is the trend in organisations toward remuneration systems based on individual contribution and potential rather than the position held (Cascio, 1995). Such a trend results in individuals enjoying career 'progression' without any 'commensurate' increase in salary. A slightly different pattern emerged with subjective career plateau (individual's perception). Participants with high levels of education recorded greater intention to pursue a career transition. This intention was higher when perceptions of being plateaued were also high (Figure A7.4). This may indicate an acceptance by these participants that their education would be a favourable factor in their pursuit of another career move. Whilst the intention to transition was also higher for individuals with low levels of education when the perception of being career plateaued was high it did not exceed that of the higher educated participants.

### **Career Plateau**

The results of the present study provided little support for the use of objective measures of career plateau (position tenure, time since last promotion or time at the same salary grade level) in exploring the proposed research relationships. This was unexpected given the prevalence and wide acceptance of the use of objective measures in career research to date. What may be compromising the reliability of objective measures is the increasing career mobility prevalent in recent times and characteristic of the protean and boundaryless careers (Hall & Mirvis, 1994; Mirvis & Hall, 1994). For example, the means for the measures of objective career plateau in the present study were as follows: position tenure 3.58 years; time since last promotion 2.46 years; and time at the same salary grade level 3.75 (untransformed variables). These were all below the 5 year criterion adopted for this study as the definition for objective career plateau and may be compared to means from other studies, for example Chao (1990) 5.24 years (tenure),

Tremblay and Roger (1993) 6.9 years (tenure), Ettington (1998) 5 years (salary grade level) and Burke (1989) who reported 50.8% of sample with a tenure greater than 5 years. If position tenures are becoming shorter, as is argued, then objective measures of career plateau, based on those tenures, will become increasingly less relevant in research into career plateau.

Whilst the correlations between the objective measures of career plateau and the subjective measure were all positive and highly significant, it was subjective plateau alone that emerged as a significant variable in many of the hypothesised relationships. The present findings were in line with Chao's (1990) general finding that a perceptually based measure, that is a subjective measure of career plateau, offered greater explanatory power than objectively based measures. Chao reported that the subjective measure in her study accounted for significantly more variance than a tenure based measure in both job satisfaction and various dimensions of an individual's career. In the present study subjective career plateau was significantly associated at the univariate level with career transition, the work focus dimension of life balance orientation, both measures of job satisfaction, and involvement in current education. At the multivariate level subjective career plateau was significant in accounting for variability in career transition and both measures of job satisfaction. It was also significant in the moderating effects of satisfaction with promotion opportunities and education attained on the relationship between career plateau and career transition.

Difficulty exists in determining the rate of occurrence of career plateau in a sample in that respondents who may be defined through objective criteria as plateaued may not perceive themselves as plateaued. Despite the moderate positive skewness in the distribution of the objective measures of plateau, which indicated a low incidence of plateau because of shorter tenure periods (as discussed above), 36% of the participants may be defined as plateaued based on the criteria adopted for the study (see Chapter Eight). Based on scores at the higher end of the scale a further 20% may be defined as subjectively plateaued (individual perception) who were not also defined as objectively plateaued. The implication is that over 50% of employees may be defined as being career plateaued at any given point in time. This figure could possibly increase as organisations become smaller and flatter through continued restructuring. The

widespread occurrence of the phenomenon confirms the value and relevance of its place in continuing research.

The significance of the subjective measure of plateau suggests that the individual's perception of their own career status may be the more influential factor in attempting to determine the actions that a career plateaued individual is likely to take. Likewise, the outcomes or consequences of career plateau are likely to be markedly different depending on whether or not the individual perceives themselves to be plateaued. This will in turn influence how the career plateau is defined. Career plateaux may be defined as successful if the individual so affected continues to make a positive contribution to the success of the organisation, and retains high levels of job satisfaction (Ettington, 1998). Those individuals, classified arbitrarily as career plateaued based on criteria established by the researcher, may in fact not incur the negative consequences of plateau unless they also perceive themselves to be plateaued. Acknowledging the relationship between subjective career plateau and over-all job satisfaction, which indicates that subjectively plateaued individuals are dissatisfied with their jobs, the likelihood is that so-called successful career plateau will only be found amongst those individuals classified as objectively plateaued.

Suggesting that a subjectively career plateaued individual may be experiencing a successful plateau appears to be at odds with the results of the study. The implication is that such individuals are unlikely to accept their career status. Whilst Minor et al (1991) contend that structural plateauing, which is similar in definition to objective plateau, appears to be relatively well accepted by most individuals, this study supports the contention that subjectively plateaued individuals are much less accepting of their status. Minor et al further suggest that individual perception may be one of the more influential moderators of the consequences of plateau thus providing further support for the explanatory power of a subjective measure of career plateau. As such the expectation is that the negative consequences of plateau, including physical and psychological withdrawal from the job, will be more pronounced amongst subjectively plateaued individuals. Objectively plateaued individuals are more likely to accept their career status, or to not perceive themselves as plateaued.

Age is frequently cited as a possible confound in objectively based criteria of career plateau and is often linked to the stereotypical view of the 'mid-life mid-career' plateaued individual. Within this study age was found to be a factor in objective measures of career plateau with these increasing as age increased suggesting that the rate of career plateau would be higher amongst older workers. Accepting Bardwick's (1986) Rule of 99% (see Chapter Two) provides support for the contention that sooner or later most individuals in an organisation will experience a career plateau with less opportunities for advancement available to older workers. Put simply, there is just not enough 'room at the top' for career advancement to continue and, at least in so far as structural plateau is concerned, the age of the individual and the structure of the organisation may well be the most critical determinants of objective career plateau.

The stereotypical view of the career plateaued individual as being mid-career and mid-life therefore finds some support within objectively based criteria. Age was not, however, significantly associated with the individual's subjective perception of career plateau. The characteristics of the subjectively career plateaued individual are therefore likely to be quite different from the age-related stereotype. Further analysis of the characteristics of the subjectively plateaued individual provides a topic for future investigation.

In summary, objective measures of career plateau failed to gain the significance in this study that was expected. This may be due in part to shorter job and position tenure periods that are argued to be characteristic of the emerging protean and boundaryless careers. Subjective measures of career plateau, based on the individual's perception, appeared as the only significant measure of plateau in many of the hypothesised relationships, and as such this may be the more influential factor in determining career outcomes. Despite shortening tenure periods age is probably still a factor in objective career plateau with this increasing as age increases. Given that age was not significantly associated with the individual's perception of career plateau the stereotypical view of the mid-career mid-life career plateaued individual is unlikely to be applicable. Whilst determining the rate of career plateau in a sample has inherent difficulties the implication, based on this study, is that over 50% of employees may be defined as career plateaued at any given point in time.

## Career Transition

In so far as being able to predict the likelihood of an individual transitioning, or to subsequently predict employee mobility, a number of precursors identified in this study warrant further research. Overall job satisfaction may be one of the stronger precursors to career transition although the perception the individual has regarding their own career status also appears influential. Accepting that career mobility is on the increase such indications of an individual's intentions may provide some benefit in human resource management and planning. Another possible indicator centres on the job-withdrawal scenario. A possible association exists between an individual withdrawing from their current job, increasing their focus on non-work activities, and an increase in intention to pursue a career transition. What cannot be answered by this study is whether the job-withdrawal preceded the intention to change jobs or vice versa. However, the consequences of job-withdrawal are such that its occurrence should not be ignored.

Although 62% of participants in this study had experienced a career transition within the past three years the incidence of voluntary versus involuntary transitions must be assessed before a conclusion may be reached as to the acceptance of transition as a career management strategy. Job loss, a major factor in involuntary transitions (see Chapter Three), did not figure prominently and was only cited in 11.9% of transitions. Job loss was therefore not a major reason for respondents effecting a career transition. This finding is reasonably consistent with Nicholson and West (1988) who reported job loss being cited in 13% of transitions. Based on these results it appears that the majority of career transitions, close to 90%, are initiated voluntarily by the individual as they search for job, career, or life satisfaction. The degree of autonomy in career decision making displayed by these voluntary career changers supports the proposition that transition is an accepted career management strategy.

In addition to those indicating that they had recently experienced a career transition an equal number (62%) indicated that they were intending to pursue a career transition, although such intentions may not necessarily be implemented. Based on the rate of inter-organisational transitions, which in this study only accounted for 29% of transitions, such transitions, if they occur, are more likely to happen within the current organisation. The

figure for inter-organisational transitions recorded in this study is considerably lower than the 57% of employer changes through transition reported by Nicholson and West (1988). This difference may be explained by the composition of the sample. Nicholson and West focussed primarily on executive management, a group likely to be highly work focused and career oriented.

Despite the organisational dynamics associated with restructuring and downsizing these phenomena accounted for only a small percentage of transitions. When combined with redundancy, the down-side of restructuring, the number of transitions attributable to those activities almost doubles to 11.5% (compared to 26% reported by Nicholson & West, 1988) but is still only the third most common reason cited. This is, however, still ahead of the monetary reason although this particular reason may be disguised in factors such as career objectives as one dimension of career change may in fact be the pursuit of a more highly remunerated position.

In summary, career transition appears to be an accepted career management strategy with 90% of such transitions being initiated voluntarily. Based on the findings of this study the current employer is likely to be considered favourably for future career opportunities as only 29% of previous transitions in this study involved a change in employer. The organisational dynamics associated with restructuring accounted for less than 12% of transitions reported and was only the third most common reason cited coming behind 'seeking more challenge' and 'pursuing career objectives'. Job satisfaction and job withdrawal, evidenced by an increase in non-work focus, may be important determinants of career transition.

### **Job Satisfaction**

The role of job satisfaction in predicting the behaviour of individuals has been the subject of much speculation and research. A proposition, based on the assumption that dissatisfied individuals will be motivated to ameliorate that dissatisfaction, is that individuals dissatisfied with their current job will seek to change. This contention was supported strongly by the present research. Individuals who had expressed low levels of overall job satisfaction also expressed a strong intention or desire to change jobs.

Rhodes and Doering (1993) also found that the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to change careers was negative and significant. General job dissatisfaction may therefore be described as a powerful motive for people seeking to quit their existing job in search of something more satisfying. Greater insight would, however, be gained by determining the dimensions of the job that led to the dissatisfaction and which were associated with the intention to pursue a career transition. Whilst satisfaction with promotion opportunities was included in this study as one of those dimensions there are likely to be others that could contribute to a desire to change jobs if they also were a source of dissatisfaction.

Intuitively the expectation was for career plateaued individuals to be dissatisfied with their jobs. Whilst previous studies report significant relationships between objective criteria of career plateau and job satisfaction the results are somewhat mixed. Stout et al (1987) found, for example, that job tenure had a negative effect on certain dimensions of job satisfaction. Judge and Watanabe (1993) reported no significant relationship in one study but Judge et al (1994), in a separate study, reported a positive relationship between job tenure and job satisfaction and a negative relationship between years since last promotion and job satisfaction. One possible insight to the nature of the relationship between objective career plateau and job satisfaction is provided by Evans and Gilbert (1984). They found no significant difference in job satisfaction between career plateaued and non plateaued individuals, although their criteria for defining plateaued versus non plateaued were not clear. They also suggested that what differences did exist were due to age, a possibility that must also be considered in this study as age was found to be significantly related to job satisfaction with older individuals reporting higher levels.

Accepting that work occupies a significant portion of a person's life, if people were not getting various needs met through their work the expectation would be for dissatisfaction to result. This assumption fails, however, to acknowledge that experiences of career plateau may not always be negative with some individuals choosing to remain in a plateaued position. Certainly, in so far as objective measures of career plateau are concerned, little emerged from this study to support the contention that plateau results in dissatisfaction. In an anticipated result the only exception was with the promotion

criterion of objective plateau which appeared significant when satisfaction with promotion opportunities was considered.

A different picture emerges once a subjective measure of career plateau is considered. The subjective measure of career plateau emerged as highly significant providing support for the contention that what individuals perceive has the greater effect on their attitudes. The present study confirmed a significant and negative relationship between both measures of job satisfaction (overall and promotion opportunities) and subjective plateau, a result in line with a number of studies (Chao, 1990; Ettington, 1998; Tremblay et al, 1995). Corzine et al (1992) also reported that, on a self-report measure of likelihood of promotion, a male sample who were defined as not career plateaued reported higher levels of job satisfaction. The present results confirm the notion that if an individual considers themselves to be career plateaued they are also likely to be dissatisfied with their job and with their opportunities for promotion. Again, however, it is not possible to determine the direction of this relationship due to the cross-sectional nature of the present study. The extent to which job dissatisfaction is a cause or consequence of subjective career plateau remains uncertain.

In summary, individuals expressing overall job dissatisfaction report greater intentions to pursue a career transition. Little was found from this research to support the notion that career plateau, as objectively defined, results in job dissatisfaction. More research will be required before the nature of this particular relationship can be confirmed. In line with previous research the level of satisfaction an individual expressed, in the overall job and with promotion opportunities, was found to be negatively associated with the individual's perception of their career status. Participants who recorded greater perceptions of being career plateaued also recorded lower levels of satisfaction.

### **Life Balance Orientation**

Individuals are believed to pursue a balance in life in the belief that the achievement of that balance will result in higher levels of both job and general life satisfaction (Caproni, 1997; Smith, 1992). Strongly oriented individuals were proposed to view career

transition as a pro-active career intervention supporting their pursuit of general satisfaction. Based on the spillover hypothesis the assumption could be that individuals expressing job satisfaction are also likely to be satisfied with their lives (Judge & Watanabe, 1993). Accepting that assumption, and given that most survey participants were satisfied with their jobs, they were likely to also be satisfied with their lives. Whether or not this actually indicates the achievement of a balance in life is speculative. However, the acceptance of career transition as a career strategy perhaps indicates that these individuals view this as a valid balancing action.

The possibility that an individual may maintain a similar strength of focus in both work and non-work areas cannot be discounted but, as was expected, the results of the present study indicated, although not strongly so, that generally either a work or a non-work focus will prevail. Those individuals who recorded a strong work focus also recorded high levels of job satisfaction. This association was not evident for those individuals who recorded a strong non-work focus. The interesting point raised by the results is whether it was the strong work focus that resulted in job satisfaction or whether it was a satisfying job that underpinned the strong work focus.

A somewhat counterintuitive finding arose from the association between objective career plateau and the non-work focus dimension of life balance orientation. The indication was that as individuals became more plateaued on either the salary grade level or promotions criteria of objective plateau their non-work focus decreased without any significant compensatory change in work focus. The intuitive expectation would be for such individuals to increase their focus on non-work activities, and to consequently withdraw from the job, in an attempt to compensate for not getting career enhancement needs met in their working lives. One possible explanation is that acceptance of their current career status was accompanied by a lowering of general expectations which resulted in a reduced focus on all activity. As anticipated individuals who perceived themselves to be career plateaued reported lower levels of work focus indicating a possible withdrawal from the job.

Bedeian et al (1991) found that the relationship between career commitment and intention to pursue a career transition was negative and significant. The same

relationship was found in this study between work focus and intention to transition. Whilst career commitment may not be exactly the same as work focus it may follow that a reduction in intention to transition could be achieved by offering an individual dissatisfied with their career greater opportunities for promotion. However, given the trend toward smaller flatter organisations this intervention may not be practical and further pressure may be exerted on the career-oriented individual to transition inter-organisationally in their search for career goals.

In summary, whilst either a work or a non-work focus prevailed the association was not strong. Individuals with a strong work focus recorded higher levels of satisfaction with their jobs and less intention to pursue a career transition. In a counterintuitive finding individuals objectively career plateaued on some criteria were found to decrease their focus on non-work activities. Indicating a possible withdrawal from work subjectively career plateaued individuals reported a lower work focus.

## **Education**

Acceptance of the concept of continuous learning and development as a means to ensuring career resilience has been argued for in this study as it has in others (Hall & Mirvis, 1994; Watts, 1996; Weick & Berlinger, 1989). Whilst the number of respondents in this study actually engaged in current education may not be great ( $n = 46$ ), of interest is the number (50%) who cite career enhancement as the reason for pursuing this education. This may, at least for this group of individuals, indicate some acceptance of the concept of continuous learning. A greater number indicated an intention to pursue further education ( $n = 104$ ) although such intentions may not be fulfilled. Rather than looking at the absolute numbers greater insight may be gained by again looking at the reasons why these individuals were considering pursuing further development. In this situation career enhancement accounted for 56.5% of the reasons cited. As a pro-active intervention education appears to be an accepted means to enhancing opportunities for career enhancement and for ensuring career resilience.

The basic contention within the study was that career plateaued individuals would pursue self development through education as a way of extricating themselves from what may be viewed as an undesirable career situation. This contention failed to acknowledge, however, that unless an individual has some perception of being plateaued they would not be likely to recognise that such an action was either necessary or desirable. That objective measures of career plateau did not emerge as significant with respect to the pursuit of current education was therefore perhaps not surprising. In so far as intention to pursue further education was concerned it was those individuals less plateaued who were more likely to have indicated an intention. Whilst this finding is in line with Stout et al (1988), who reported that objectively plateaued people felt that further training was not necessary, whether the stated intention eventually results in the individual undertaking further education remains unknown,.

What was surprising, and against the research proposition, is that subjectively plateaued individuals also did not indicate involvement in current educational activities and stated no significant intention to pursue future education. Those individuals who did not perceive themselves as plateaued were more likely to have been involved in pursuing current education indicating a possible association between continuing education and career resilience. Perhaps providing some support for this notion Tremblay and Roger (1993) found that, although the level of education attained was associated with objective career plateau, it did not figure significantly in subjective plateau. This may suggest that subjectively plateaued individuals, that is those who perceive themselves to be plateaued, attribute their career status to factors other than education. Interestingly, higher intentions to transition were reported amongst those individuals also recording high levels of education. The expected outcome of this association would be increased career mobility amongst higher educated individuals with the implication that education was one factor enabling them to maintain that mobility. Further extending the point one could argue that these individuals would be less likely to experience a career plateau because of their mobility.

Whilst the basic finding of this study supported Tremblay and Roger (1993), the amount of variance explained by the level of education attained in a tenure based measurement of objective career plateau was not great. Near (1985) also reported that, on an objective

measure of career plateau, it was those managers defined as not plateaued who recorded higher levels of education. Based on this finding Near argued that education contributed to a decrease in the likelihood of career plateau. However, the weak association found in this study, and the 3% variance in career plateau reported by Tremblay and Roger (1993), weakens the argument that lack of education contributes greatly to career plateau. If acceptance is forthcoming that education is a major source of knowledge then this finding casts some doubt on the importance of the knowledge component of the much lauded knowledge, skills and abilities determinant of career plateau.

The point was raised in Chapter Six that in today's job market new entrants are generally more qualified than older workers evidenced by the increasing number of highly educated professionals in organisations (De Meuse, 1990). The current study reflected this with age being negatively associated with attained education. Older workers also indicated less involvement in current education and less intention to pursue further education. Whether in this scenario the lack of education or the individual's age is the greater contributor to career plateau is unclear. The probability exists that lower levels of education combine with advancing age to increase the likelihood of career plateau occurring. The association between attained education and overall job satisfaction provided an interesting aside. This significant relationship indicated, albeit weakly, that individuals with lower levels of education actually recorded higher levels of overall job satisfaction.

In summary, some support for the concept of continuous learning and development was found in this study with career enhancement often being cited as the reason behind this activity. Contrary to the research proposition it was individuals less career plateaued who were more likely to be involved in furthering their education. Whilst this outcome does provide support for the notion that continuing development underpins career resilience it also indicates that career plateaued individuals do not view self-development as an escape route. What confuses the situation somewhat is the rather tenuous association between attained education and the experience of career plateau, an association that undermines somewhat the strength of the much lauded knowledge component as a determinant of career plateau. Lower levels of education were reported by older workers who also indicated less involvement in continuing education.

### **Limitations Of The Present Study**

The inherent difficulties in determining causal relationships, imposed by the cross-sectional nature of the study, must be acknowledged with many of the relationships likely to involve reciprocal feedback loops. Whilst longitudinal research may have overcome some of the disadvantages of the cross-sectional design, including possible cohort and transitory effects (Coolican, 1994; Meyers & Grossen, 1974), time constraints did not permit its use. An awareness of the potential for the possible suppression and confounding effects that were subsequently found to be present in this study would have lead to a clearer research statement. A clearer definition of some of the research variables, particularly in the area of job satisfaction, and greater control over suppression and confounding effects, would have facilitated more intensive analysis of the affected relationships.

The composition of the sample was primarily managerial and supervisory and thus represented a narrow segment of the employment market. People who choose to enter a managerial or supervisory career may do so because of the opportunities for advancement such a career path has historically offered. These individuals would likely therefore have a greater focus on career development and may be more conscious of career progression than say a blue-collar sample. As the sample was skewed with 78.5% being male conclusions must remain tentative when attempting to analyse the career dynamics of female employees within the management/supervisory sector as the male model of work and career may not be entirely relevant to women (Stroh et al, 1992).

Some of the variables researched in this study may also have been subject to cohort effects (Coolican, 1994). The values and expectations of the so-called baby-boom generation versus younger age groups have been discussed. The career aspirations of older workers have traditionally embraced the steady-state, linear career and job-for-life phenomena whereas younger workers more willingly embrace an approach that accepts transition as an inherent component of career management (Dewhirst, 1991; Driver, 1994; Sterns & Miklos, 1995; Waterman et al, 1994). The mean age of the present sample was 43 indicating the presence of a reasonable number of individuals likely to subscribe to the more traditional view of career. As workers experience more acutely the

effects of recurring career plateau, and continuing organisational restructuring, the career management approaches they adopt are likely to embrace more comprehensively the concepts of the protean and boundaryless careers. Cohort differences may, however, be more marked in areas such as the life balance orientation of the individual and the unique demands on life that the various developmental stages exert. Controlling for such effects in future research would provide greater understanding as to how career patterns may emerge within the evolving organisational environment.

Finally, there is value in noting that a limitation is imposed through the self-report nature of the variables relating to career prospects and opportunities. Whilst some individuals may have reported satisfaction with promotion opportunities whether or not these opportunities actually existed, or the potential for them to be realised, was not determined. The expectations the individual had with respect to career progression may therefore not be met by the organisation. Additionally the organisation's determination of the career status of participants, or their intent with respect to the careers of those participants, remains unknown. There was no attempt within the study to verify with the organisation the career status or career prospects of the participants due to the confidentiality in response afforded them.

### **Future Research**

Echoing the sentiments of Chao (1990) this research argues for a move away from objective operationalisations of career plateau toward subjective measures based on the perceptions of the individual. Accepting that individual career mobility is increasing, measurements of career plateau based on time since a previous career event will become less meaningful as time spent in defined career stages becomes shorter. Whilst objective measures may still identify the chronically career plateaued, and the use of such measures may be argued on this basis, they fail to acknowledge the occurrence of successful career plateau. Future research may provide more relevant information if the perceptions of the individual receive greater recognition.

The mid-life mid-career stereotypical view of the career plateaued individual, and the myths surrounding this character, are firmly based in objective criteria. This research goes some way toward discounting these detrimental and negative attributes. Further support for the argument that perceptually based criteria of career plateau offer greater explanatory power has been found throughout the study. As such gaining greater understanding of the characteristics of the subjectively plateaued individual would provide further insight into the phenomenon and may help to erode the negative view of career plateau that has prevailed.

The research strategy adopted precluded input from the participating organisations on the influences they may exert on the career processes investigated. Verification of the organisational perspective may provide some validation of the research outcomes. Much has also been discussed relating to the shift in responsibility for career management from the organisation to the individual. Determining the extent to which this shift has been embraced by both the organisation and the individual would provide some indication as to how the psychological contract between employee and employer is likely to evolve.

To study the impact of various facets of work on the processes involved in career transition is but one side of the issue. Equally relevant is the outcome of career transition and the impact it has on both the individual and the organisation. No attempt was made in the present study to understand the impact of career transition on either the individual or the organisation, other than to assess the possible magnitude of such transitions. Research indicates that the outcome for the individual is generally favourable with many studies providing support for the benefits accruing from career transition (Keller & Holland, 1981; Perosa & Perosa, 1984; West & Nicholson, 1989). Whilst such studies have addressed some aspects of the individual's total life the identification and assessment of wider life implications, particularly within the scope of achieving a life balance, provides a fertile field for future research. The increased mobility of employees will also have an impact on the organisation.

How organisations will manage the prophesied increased mobility of employees, and how extensive the impact will be, raises interesting questions. Predicting which employees will leave, and when, may be the most perplexing question facing

organisations as they manoeuvre to retain a viable and competitive human resource. Strategies to retain successful employees, including the creation of acceptable career opportunities in smaller and flatter structures, will need to be developed and implemented by organisations if the knowledge, skills and abilities required to ensure organisational success are not to be lost. The development of a predictive model upon which those strategies may be based provides a challenge for researchers and practitioners alike.

### **Summary**

Objectively based criteria of career plateau offered little insight into predicting the career strategies of individuals, or the possible outcomes of interventions. The individual's perception (subjective measure) of their career status emerged in a number of the hypothesised relationships as the only significant measure of career plateau. In so far as career transition, job satisfaction, and to a reasonable extent education, were concerned the individual's perception emerged as being much more critical. The results indicate an acceptance of career transition as a career development strategy with, despite the prevailing organisational dynamics, the majority being initiated voluntarily. Whilst the results relating to job satisfaction were mixed it was evident that dissatisfied workers do view career transition positively with job satisfaction moderating significantly in some of the research relationships. Individuals with a strong work focus were found to have higher levels of job satisfaction but overall job satisfaction was found to not have an influence in the relationship between life balance orientation and career transition. In this relationship it was satisfaction with promotion opportunities that emerged as significant. Education was determined to be an influential factor with some indication that this may contribute to objective plateau whilst subjectively career plateaued individuals with higher levels of education expressed greater intentions to transition.

Limitations were imposed by the cross-sectional nature of the study. Additionally the composition of the sample, possible cohort and age effects, and the self-report nature that did not provide for organisational verification of information collected, restricts the generalisability of the results. A number of possibilities with respect to future research

were identified including investigating the characteristics of the subjectively plateaued individual, assessing the individual and organisational impact of career transition, and assessing the wider life implications for the individual of prevailing career dynamics. Central to this research was the argument that such studies may provide more relevant information if subjectively based perceptual measures of career plateau were adopted.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX 1

### CAREER RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

#### INSTRUCTIONS

*Please read the following instructions carefully before proceeding.*

- a) Please do not write your name on the questionnaire.
- b) Remember that all information provided by yourself is confidential to the researcher.
- c) The questionnaire will take you approximately 25 - 30 minutes to complete.
- d) Please answer the questionnaire yourself giving your answers only.
- e) The questions are in three general formats. One format requires you to indicate on a scale the number that most closely fits your choice, for example,

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

if you agree with the accompanying statement you would circle the number **2**.  
The second format requires you to circle a choice, for example,

**YES** NO

if you agree with the question you would circle **YES**. The other format requires you to indicate with an X what your choice is. These questions are identified by boxes like this [ ] to the right of the questions. To indicate your choice put an X in the box thus [ **X** ]. A small number of questions require you to write an answer in the space provided. These are readily identifiable.

- f) Please complete all sections taking care not to skip any pages.
- g) Please complete the questionnaire as soon as possible.
- h) It is recommended that you complete the questionnaire in one sitting.
- i) Remember to complete the final page if you wish to receive a summary of the results.
- j) Please return the questionnaire as soon as you have completed it using the envelope provided.
- k) If you have any questions about the questionnaire, or the study itself, please contact either the researcher or his supervisor.
- l) Please read the Information Sheet before proceeding with the questionnaire.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### A. Demographic Data

Please record your response to the following questions by circling the appropriate choice, or by completing the question as indicated.

1. **In what Year were you born?** 19[    ]
  
2. **What Sex are you?** Male | Female
  
3. **What is your Marital Status?**  
Single | Married | Defacto | Separated | Divorced | Widowed
  
4. **What is your Ethnic Origin?**

New Zealander of European descent	[    ]
New Zealander of Maori descent	[    ]
New Zealander of Asian descent	[    ]
Pacific Islander	[    ]
Other	[    ]
  
5. **How many years have you worked for (org)?** [    ]
  
6. **What is your Current Occupation?** \_\_\_\_\_  
(for example: accountancy, sales, administration, management, etc)
  
7. **What is your Current Position ?** \_\_\_\_\_  
(for example: Chief Accountant, Sales Manager, Office Manager, etc)
  
8. **How many years have you been in your current position?** [    ]
  
9. **What is your gross income from this position?** \$\_\_\_\_\_  
per Week / Month / Year (circle one)

## B. Education

### 1. Education Attained

Please indicate your highest level of educational attainment by placing an **X** in the appropriate box.

<3 years secondary school	[ ]
3 - 4 years secondary	[ ]
5 years secondary	[ ]
Undergraduate degree/diploma (eg BCom, BA, BSc, etc)	[ ]
Postgraduate degree/diploma (eg MBA, MA, PhD, etc)	[ ]

### 2. Training Accomplished

Please record any other formal qualifications you hold:

(eg Chartered Accountancy, NZIM, NZCE, Trade Certificate, etc.)

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### Current Education/Training

3. Are you currently pursuing or completing any formal qualification/education/training not already acknowledged or recorded above?

**YES | NO**

If **YES** please provide details:

---



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4. If you answered **YES** to question 3, please indicate the purpose for which you are pursuing the qualification (for example, personal interest, job requirement, to further your career, etc):

---

## Intended Education/Training

5. Are you intending to pursue any formal qualification/education/training? **YES|NO**

**If you answered YES to question 5 please answer the next three questions, otherwise please go forward to the next page.**

6. Please indicate when you intend to pursue this by placing an X in the appropriate box:

within the next 1 - 2 years	[ ]
within the next 3 - 5 years	[ ]
not within the next 5 years	[ ]

7. How will you pursue this qualification?

Part time whilst still working	[ ]
Full time	[ ]

8. Please indicate the purpose for which you are intending to pursue the qualification (for example, personal interest, job requirement, to further your career, etc):

---

*Please continue on the next page.*

## C. Career

### Current Career Status

Please respond to the following questions by recording your response in the appropriate box.

1. How many years have you been at your current salary grade level? [    ]
2. How many years has it been since you had a promotion? [    ]

Please respond to the following questions by circling your response on the scale provided.

3. I believe my opportunities for promotion have been limited in (org).

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. I am not getting ahead in (org).

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. I am likely to be promoted above my current level during my career at (org).

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. I have reached a point where I do not expect to move much higher at (org).

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7. I expect to advance to a higher level in the near future at (org).

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. Have you experienced a career, job or position change within the past 3 years?

**YES | NO**

**If you answered YES to question 8 please answer the next four questions, otherwise please go forward to the next page.**

9. Considering my job change I would describe it as a change in (please circle the choice that most fully describes your change).

Role (same title) | Position (new title) | Career (new occupational field)

10. My previous job was with a different organisation.

**YES | NO**

11. When I moved to my new job it felt like a big change.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

12. The reason(s) I changed jobs is/are:

- to do something more challenging and fulfilling [ ]
- to achieve career objectives [ ]
- to change career direction [ ]
- to improve standard of living [ ]
- I was made redundant from my previous job [ ]
- I was forced for other reasons (ie involuntary) [ ]
- other (please specify) [ ]

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*Please continue on the next page.*

## Career Intentions

Please respond to the following questions by circling your response on the scale provided.

13. How long would you like to stay in (org)?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<6 mths	6 - 12 mths	1-2 years	3 - 5 years	>5 years

14. If you were completely free to choose, would you continue working in (org)?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not At All Likely		Somewhat Likely		Extremely Likely

15. If you had to quit work for a while would you return to (org)?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not At All Likely		Somewhat Likely		Extremely Likely

16. The reason(s) I would consider changing jobs is/are:

to do something more challenging and fulfilling	[ ]
to achieve career objectives	[ ]
to change career direction	[ ]
to improve standard of living	[ ]
other (please specify)	[ ]

---

17. If you were offered a promotion in (org), or a higher position in another organisation, how likely is it that you would accept it?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not At All Likely		Somewhat Likely		Extremely Likely

18. How likely is it that you will actively look for a new job in the next year?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not At All Likely		Somewhat Likely		Extremely Likely

**Considering Question 18. If you are at all likely to actively look for a new job in the next year please answer the next four questions, otherwise please go forward to the next page.**

**19. The job that I will look for will be similar to my present job.**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**20. The job that I will look for will allow me to make use of my present skills.**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**21. In order to improve my chances of getting a new job I am prepared to further my education/training.**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**22. I believe that I could get a job at a higher level than my present one, in another organisation.**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

***Please continue on the next page.***

## D. Job Satisfaction

### Opportunities for Promotion

Please answer the following questions by considering whether or not the features described apply to your employment at (org). Respond by recording a 'Y' in the box beside each item if it describes your employment at (org), 'N' if the item does not describe your employment at (org), or '?' if you cannot decide or are uncertain.

1. Good opportunity for promotion [ ]
2. Opportunity somewhat limited [ ]
3. Promotion on ability [ ]
4. Dead-end job [ ]
5. Good chance for promotion [ ]
6. Unfair promotion policy [ ]
7. Infrequent promotions [ ]
8. Regular promotions [ ]
9. Fairly good chance for promotion [ ]

### Overall Job Satisfaction

Please respond to the following questions by circling your response on the scale provided.

10. All in all, I am satisfied with my job.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

11. In general, I don't like my job.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

12. In general, I like working here.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

## E. Life Interests and Orientation

Please respond to the following questions by circling your response on the scale provided.

1. I am very much personally involved in my work.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I live, eat, and breathe my job.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I often think about quitting.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. The most important things which happen to me involve my job.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. It is extremely important for me to develop and maintain personal relationships (such as family or friends) outside of work.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. It is extremely important for me to participate frequently in social activities.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. It is extremely important for me to spend time and energy on volunteer activities outside of work.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. It is extremely important for me to take time to pursue my hobbies.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. It is extremely important for me to participate frequently in recreational activities.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

10. It is extremely important for me to spend time and energy on my personal growth and self development.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

*That is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation.*

## APPENDIX 2

### INFORMATION SHEET

*Please read this Information Sheet before proceeding with the questionnaire.*

#### **1. What is this study about and who is doing it?**

This study is being undertaken as part of my Master of Arts degree in psychology. The research looks at how people feel about their jobs, their career prospects and intentions, and how these may be related to job satisfaction and work attitudes.

My name is Donald Cable and I am a postgraduate student at Massey University. This research is of particular interest to myself due to my previous work experience in the corporate environment prior to my return to university as an older student. My supervisor is Dr Ross Flett, Senior Lecturer at Massey University. We may be contacted through the School of Psychology, Massey University, Telephone (06) 350 4127, or on Email at Donald.Cable@xtra.co.nz or at R.A.Flett@massey.ac.nz

#### **2. What will I be asked to do?**

It will take you approximately 25 - 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. You will be asked for your views on your career and attitudes towards your job. No one who knows you will ever see your answers, or be able in any way to link your name to your completed questionnaire.

#### **3. What are my rights as a participant in this study?**

- You have the right to contact the researchers at any time during the study to discuss any aspect of it.
- You have the right to decline to participate, to refuse to answer any question(s), or to withdraw from the study at any time.
- You provide information on the understanding that it is completely in confidence to the researchers, to be used only for the purposes of the research.
- You have the right to receive a summary of the results of the study upon its completion.

#### **4. What can I expect from the researchers?**

We will treat your responses with total confidentiality and assure you of complete anonymity. If we decide to publish any results these will only be in summary form. If any results are supplied to your employer these will also only be in summary form. The questionnaires will be destroyed upon the completion of the study.

**APPENDIX 3****REQUEST FOR SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

If you wish to receive a summary of the results of this study please complete the following details. Detach the sheet from the questionnaire and include it with the questionnaire in the envelope provided. The sheet will be separated from the questionnaire when the envelope is opened and will be held separately until the study has been completed at which stage it will be used to forward the results to you. Confidentiality is assured. This sheet will not be used by the researcher to identify any individual response.

The summary results are planned to be available in May/June 1999 and should be distributed about that time.

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**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 4****OCCUPATIONAL ANALYSIS OF SAMPLE**

**TABLE A4.1**  
**Functional Group Membership**

<b>Function</b>	<b>Percentage of sample</b>
Accounting	6.4
Sales/Marketing	21.8
Administration	21.8
Human Resources	0.4
Information Technology	2.1
Other Corporate Services	15.4
Manufacturing/Production	25.2
Other	6.0
No response	0.9
Total	100.0

**TABLE A4.2**  
**Employment Position/Level Membership**

Level	Percentage of sample
Director	1.7
Senior Management	12.4
Middle Management	24.8
Entry Level Management	19.2
Technical/Consultant	17.1
Temporary/Contractor	0.4
Clerical	17.9
Other	4.7
No response	1.7
Total	100.0

**TABLE A4.3**  
**Education Attainment Analysis**

Attainment	Percentage of sample
Less than 3 years secondary	11.1
3 - 4 years secondary	25.6
5 years secondary	17.1
Undergraduate degree/diploma	32.9
Postgraduate degree/diploma	11.5
No response	1.7
Total	100.0
Percentage of sample citing other achievements (including accountancy qualifications)	62.4

## APPENDIX 5

## CAREER TRANSITION INFORMATION

**TABLE A5.1**  
**Reasons for Career Transitions**

Reason	Previous Career Transition (N = 146 <sup>a</sup> )		Would Consider a Career Transition (N = 224)		Intending a Career Transition (N = 147)	
	No. of Times Cited	% of Times Cited	No. of Times Cited	% of Times Cited	No. of Times Cited	% of Times Cited
Challenge	67	29.5	113	31.3	85	34.1
Career Objectives	53	23.4	61	16.9	43	17.3
Career Direction	25	11.0	74	20.5	46	18.5
Standard of Living	18	7.9	70	19.4	49	19.7
Redundancy	14	6.2				
Involuntary/Termination	13	5.7	7	1.8	3	1.2
Restructuring	12	5.3				
Life Style			2	0.6	1	0.4
Relocation			2	0.6	2	0.8
Other	25	11.0	32	8.9	20	8.0
Total	227	100.0	361	100.0	249	100.0

Note. Respondents were able to cite up to four reasons which were not ranked or prioritised. The above analyses all reasons cited.

<sup>a</sup>. One subject who indicated they had not experienced a career transition in the previous three years continued to complete the bank of questions directed to those who had.

**TABLE A5.2**  
**Scope and Magnitude of Previous Career Transition**

Variable	Percentage of sample
Change in	
Role	20.0
Position	53.1
Career	26.9
Total	100.0
Inter-organisational	29.0
Intra-organisational	71.0
Total	100.0
Magnitude (It felt like a big change)	
Agree	72.9
Neither Agree/Disagree	4.9
Disagree	22.2
Total	100.0

**TABLE A5.3**  
**Magnitude of Intended Career Transition**

Variable/Question	Percentage of Sample		
	Disagree	Neither	Agree
Similar Job	28.6	19.0	52.4
Use Existing Skills	4.8	8.1	87.1
Further Education	9.5	6.8	83.7
Higher Level	9.5	23.8	66.7

Note. These questions relate to questions C19, C20, C21, C22. Refer Appendix 1.

**APPENDIX 6**  
**EDUCATION INFORMATION**

**TABLE A6.1**  
**Purpose for Pursuing Education**

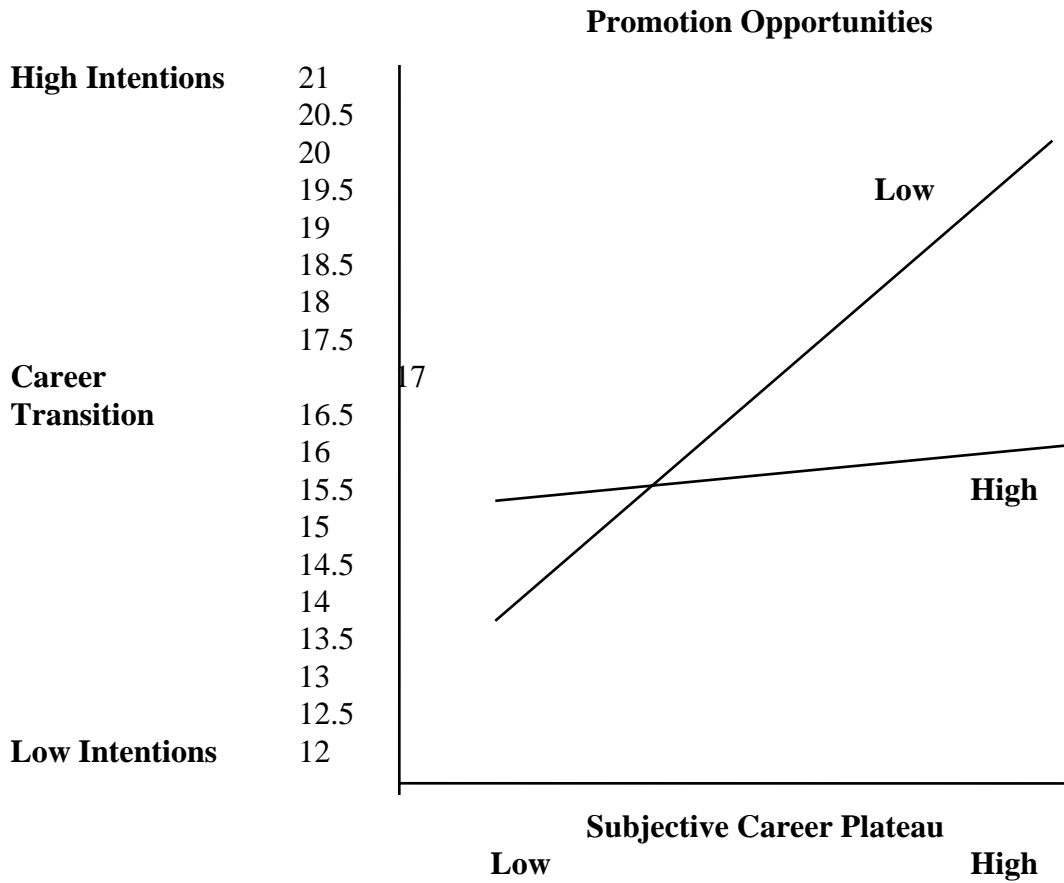
Purpose	Current Education/Training (N = 46)								Intended (Future) Education/Training (N = 104 <sup>a</sup> )							
	1st Purpose		2nd Purpose		3rd Purpose		Total		1st Purpose		2nd Purpose		3rd Purpose		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Personal Interest	11	23.9	4	22.2	0		15	23.1	22	21.4	10	31.2	1	33.3	33	23.9
Job Requirement	7	15.2	2	11.1	1	100.0	10	15.4	6	5.8	5	15.6	1	33.3	12	8.7
Career Enhancement	24	52.2	9	50.0	0		33	50.8	65	63.1	12	37.5	1	33.3	78	56.5
Personal Development	3	6.5	3	16.7	0		6	9.2	3	2.9	2	6.2	0		5	3.6
Effect Transition									4	3.9	0		0		4	2.9
Other	1	2.2	0		0		1	1.5	3	2.9	3	9.4	0		6	4.4
Total	46	100.0	18	100.0	1	100.0	65	100.0	103	100.0	32	100.0	3	100.0	138	100.0

Note. Respondents were able to cite up to three purposes and these were ranked and prioritised. Eg., for Current, 23.9% of respondents cited “Personal Interest” as their first purpose, 22.2% of respondents cited this as their second purpose. “Personal Interest” was cited 15 times, or 23.1% of the total number of purposes cited.

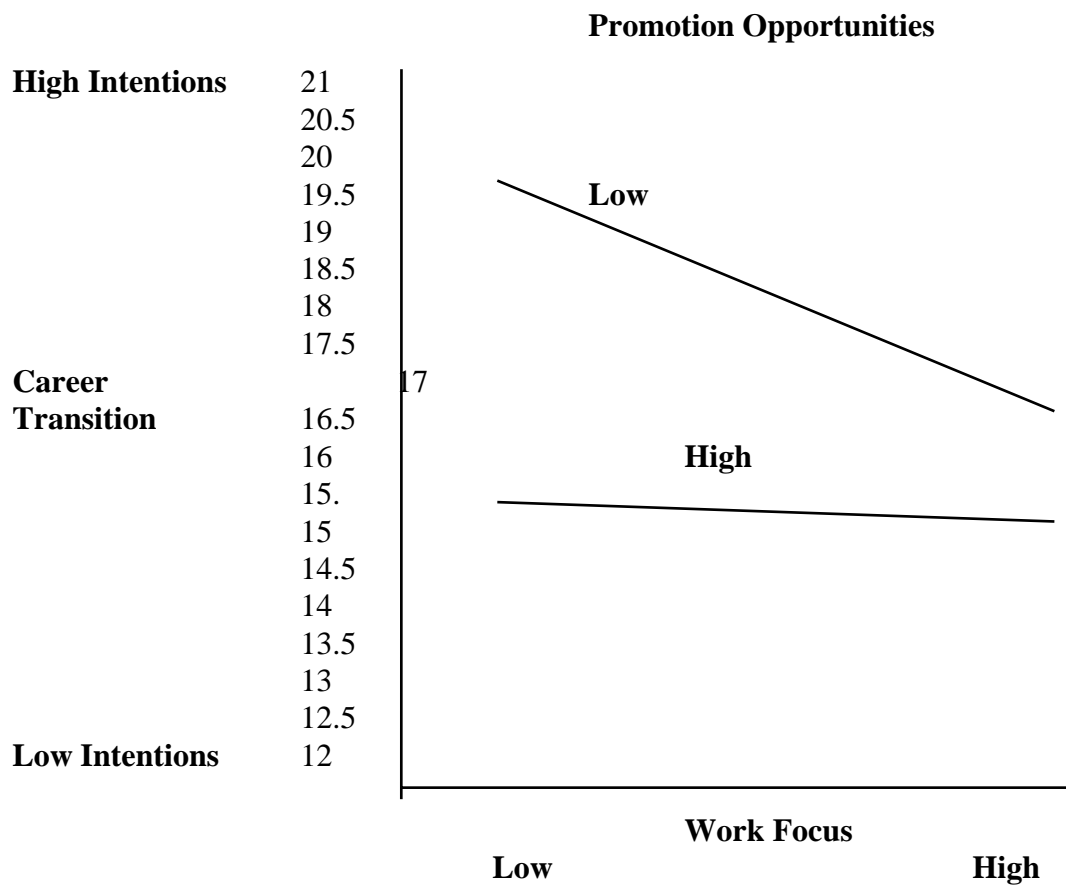
<sup>a</sup> One non-response.

APPENDIX 7

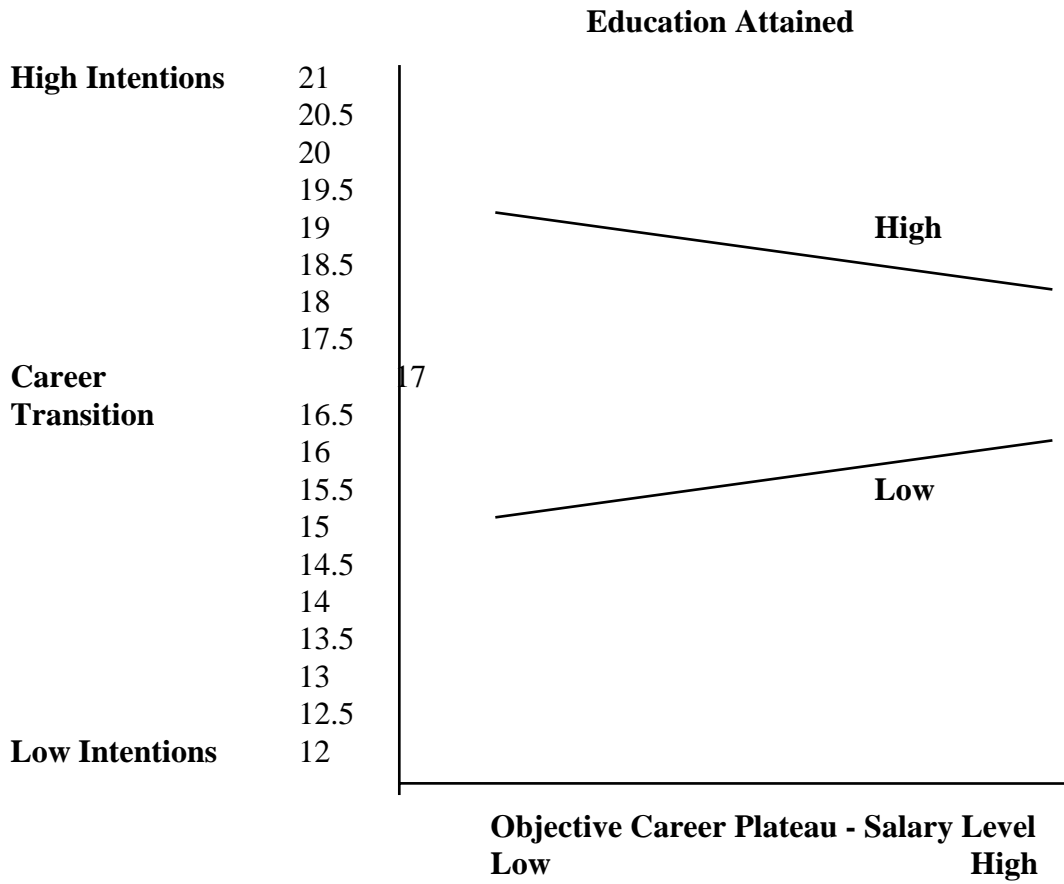
INTERACTION EFFECTS



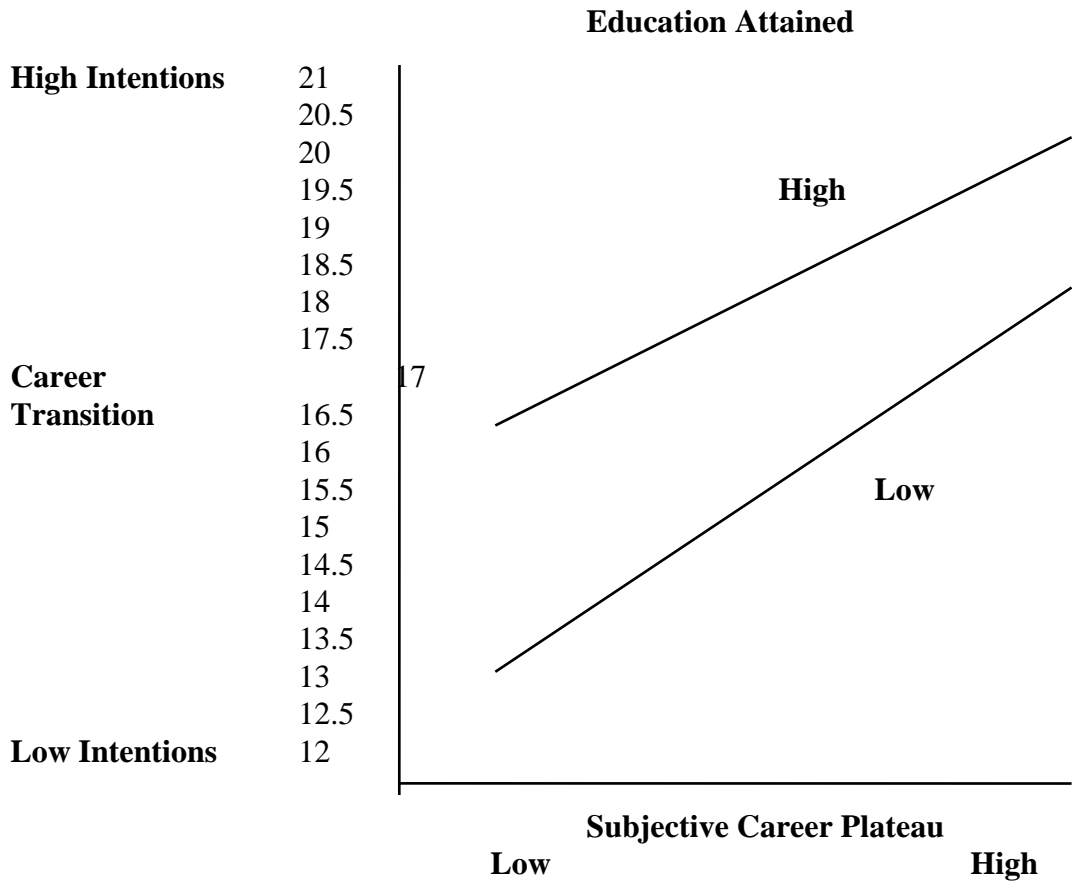
**Figure A7.1.** The interaction effect of satisfaction with promotion opportunities on the relationship between subjective career plateau and career transition.



**Figure A7.2.** The interaction effect of satisfaction with promotion opportunities on the relationship between work focus and career transition.



**Figure A7.3.** The interaction effect of education attained on the relationship between objective career plateau (salary grade level) and career transition.



**Figure A7.4.** The interaction effect of education attained on the relationship between subjective career plateau and career transition.