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Paper No. 9

**The Dual-Career Phenomenon: Employer
Awareness and Responses**

Catherine R. Smith

December, 1996



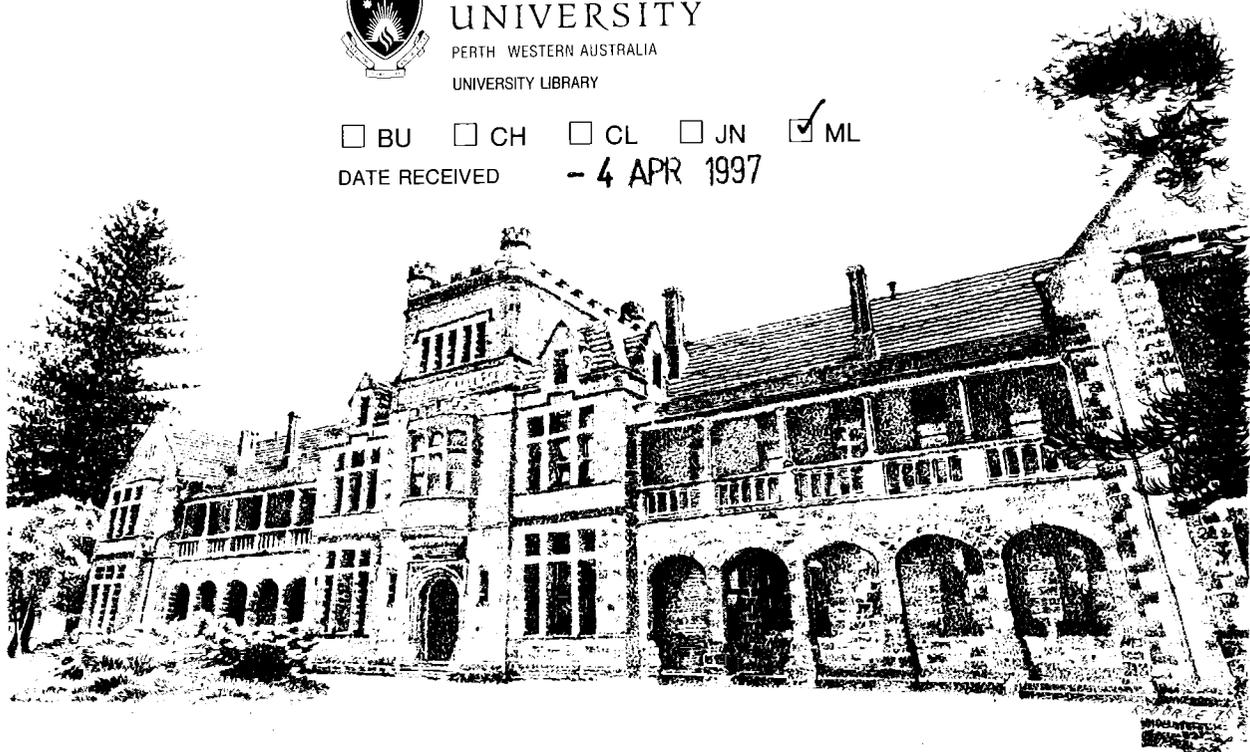
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INTRODUCTION

Over the past thirty years, Western industrialised nations have witnessed major changes in their labour force characteristics. Of particular significance has been the steady increase of women in the paid workforce. Equal employment opportunity legislation, higher educational achievements and increasing numbers of female role models have fuelled women's career possibilities and aspirations. Consequently, growing numbers of women are pursuing longer-term careers, often through the ranks of management. A career implies a longer term developmental occupation or profession, with a sequence of connections and networks over time, although this does not preclude lateral or downward moves or temporary withdrawals, in response to changed organisational and personal circumstances.

Women are now less likely to subordinate their career aspirations to those of their male partners. Research also shows that that younger graduate women are now more likely to establish a career before marriage and/or child-rearing, to choose partners who will facilitate rather than block their careers, and to seek work environments where gender-based prejudices are less pronounced (Scase & Goffee, 1989). Thus the dual-career lifestyle exemplifies the complex interaction of career and gender roles in modern society (Hansen, 1984).

THE DUAL CAREER PHENOMENON

The dual-career relationship implies a psychological commitment of marital or 'de facto' partners to both family relations and their individual careers. This has been hailed the ideal middle-class marital relationship (Hertz, 1986), since it affords both partners an opportunity for maximising both personal fulfilment and financial rewards. Despite mutual compensations, however, the demands of two parallel careers can generate conflict and stress, which are compounded when couples have children or other family responsibilities. Thus dual careers can give rise to dual loyalties (Smith, 1992a), which may result in negative consequences for personal relationships and the work environment.

Double income earners constitute 42.8 per cent of the total Australian labour force (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1993), and few families now fit the traditional mould of the man as sole breadwinner and the woman as housekeeper and primary care-giver. The prevalence of dual-career families has been reflected in a growing research literature on the impact of this lifestyle (Smith, 1992b). Studies have focused primarily on the stresses and strains inherent in juggling multiple demands of work, career and family (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971, 1980; Sekaran, 1982, 1983, 1989). More recently, researchers have examined the way in which dilemmas of role conflict and role overload impact upon personal satisfaction, job performance and career development (Hertz, 1986; Smith, 1994a, 1994b).

The attitudes and behaviour of dual-career couples have been shown to deviate significantly from established societal norms in careers, marriage, family and gender roles, with important consequences for their employing organisations (O'Neil, Fishman & Kinsella-Shaw, 1987). In recent years the burgeoning literature on work and family has further emphasised the importance for organisational effectiveness of appropriate employer responses to the work/home interface.

ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF DUAL-CAREER STATUS

Human resource policies usually seek to obtain maximum employee flexibility and effectiveness, which have been linked with improved business efficiency and effectiveness (Schuler, Dowling, Smart & Huber, 1992). The success or failure of an organisation is largely attributable to the way it manages its workforce, and the key to competitive advantage lies in policy levers which maximise employee commitment and potential (Walton, 1985). Career development is becoming increasingly relevant for maximising employee commitment (Gutteridge, Leibowitz & Shore, 1993), and has thus become an integral element of human resource management. Effective career development programmes have the potential to encourage goal-directed behaviour, to maintain organisational continuity and to minimise turnover of key personnel, thereby contributing significantly to organisational efforts to maintain market position (Konrad & Cannings, 1994). For core workers such as managers, career development systems will increasingly need to be tailored to the needs and circumstances of individual employees.

Contemporary managerial careers demand both time and commitment, and pressures are compounded for dual-career partners. Management was described almost two decades ago as a 'greedy' occupation (Handy, 1978): while managers enjoy discretion over their time, their working hours may be long and erratic, and they may face covert organisational demands for personal attachment and a generalised, diffuse, unlimited commitment (Kanter, 1977a). Since Handy's and Kanter's observations, the pressures for managers have become more intense, and Hall and Richter (1988) suggest that the introduction of the working breakfast meeting has meant that the work day is spilling over into personal time, with work/home boundaries more blurred and less manageable for some employees.

Interest has recently grown in the nexus between work and home, and the organisational and career implications of stresses and strains imposed by conflicting demands (Kanter, 1977b; Green & Zenisek, 1983; Sekaran, 1986; Adie & Carmody, 1991). Because families operate as social systems, tensions are unavoidably transmitted from work to home and 'vice versa', with significant financial and social implications for job satisfaction and labour productivity. Stress from the work/home interface may be exacerbated by organisational attitudes towards traditional gender roles, which still assume that households include a full-time person at home looking after domestic responsibilities. Consequent policies and practices may expect unconditional employee acceptance of organisational requirements such as long working hours and geographical mobility (Lewis & Cooper, 1988; Schein, 1993). Stoner and Hartman (1990) find it ironic that corporations which work so hard to build an internal 'family' culture will accept and actively utilise a managerial system that obscures the significance of their employees' biological families.

Conflicts between work and home are particularly pronounced for dual-career couples, because the double demands and pressures of the two domains inevitably result in career contradictions and compromise (Smith, 1994b). Career development becomes even more complex when couples have responsibilities for children or elder care. At a time when women are pursuing higher career goals and men are under greater social pressure to share domestic responsibilities, the dual-career

issue has become increasingly pertinent for human resource managers. Low employer awareness of, and responsiveness to, the dual-career phenomenon may indirectly and inadvertently jeopardise individual career development, and adversely affect work performance and productivity.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

Human resource managers have reported major concerns over their ability to understand and manage workforce diversity issues (Graddick, Bassman & Giordano, 1992). Sekaran (1986:1) has alleged that, because most organisations do not even know how many of their employees are from dual-career families, they are scarcely prepared to cope with the unique problems they face. Despite increasing research on the dual-career phenomenon, there is a dearth of empirical evidence on Australian organisational attitudes and practices, and their impact on dual career development.

To remedy this deficiency, as part of a larger research project, an exploratory investigation was undertaken to evaluate employer awareness of and responsiveness to dual-career status. Human resource managers and dual-career employees' perceptions of management development systems were also investigated, to identify organisational responses which can facilitate the effective work performance and career development of the growing number of dual-career couples.

Methodology

Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study took place in three stages between 1993 and 1994, and sought descriptive data concerning the current status of organisational responsiveness to dual-career employees. The first stage comprised a survey of human resource policies relevant to dual-career employee status. Questionnaires sought information on personnel policies and practices, including human resource planning and auditing, performance appraisal and career development. For a fuller understanding of organisational policies and practices, secondary data were sought in the form of

company literature, to discover references to dual-career status, and to enable an evaluation of the organisational culture associated with career development.

One hundred organisations, from both private and public sectors, were surveyed. The Top 100 Australian companies listed by the Australian Stock Exchange were selected as an easily identified, successful group of private sector organisations, representing a diverse range of industries. Top 100 companies based in Papua New Guinea and New Zealand were excluded, because their organisational cultures and practices were likely to differ from those found within Australia. Of the Top 100 companies, seventeen had earlier been labelled as 'family friendly' organisations (Adie & Carmody, 1991), which recognise the implications of the spill-over between work and family for labour productivity and adapt work practices to facilitate the effective management of multiple roles. To complement this sample of private sector companies, federal and Western Australian public sector departments and agencies were invited to participate, to ensure a wider cross-section of organisations locally and nationally and a greater diversity of industry sectors.

The second stage of the study involved semi-structured interviews with a non-random sample of ten human resource managers, chosen on the basis of questionnaire responses and interviewee availability. Interviews explored survey responses in greater detail, and attention focused on human resource policies and initiatives to facilitate managerial development, particularly for dual-career employees.

The third stage of the investigation involved semi-structured interviews with twenty dual-career managerial employees in respondent organisations, identified by the human resource managers as respondents who were known to meet the requisite criteria. Subjects included sixteen women and four men. The interviews served as a vehicle for gathering and exploring experiential material concerning the positive and negative consequences of employers' human resource policies, as perceived by employees from dual-career dyads. Managers were selected for study, since career development normally involves progression into management positions. Information was sought on career histories, managerial culture and role demands, and organisational norms regarding mobility and career progression.

Survey Responses

The survey response rate was 62 per cent. Nine organisations forwarded company documentation including annual reports to shareholders, induction booklets for employees, Affirmative Action Agency Reports, survey results, general policy statements, and details of individual human resource policies and practices pertaining to performance appraisal and career development.

Survey respondents were predominantly from the public services (27 per cent), followed by financial institutions (16 per cent) and mining companies (15 per cent). A third of respondents were headquartered in New South Wales, with a quarter in Victoria and a quarter in Western Australia. Seventy per cent of respondent organisations had fewer than 10,000 employees, 21 per cent had 10,000-30,000 employees, and 9 per cent had more than 30,000 employees.

RESULTS

This section aggregates the results from the three stages of the study.

Impact Of Dual-Career Status On Employees

Dual-career employees reported that the benefits from their lifestyle were a well-rounded life and a sympathetic, knowledgeable partner to consult on difficult managerial decisions. When considering job transitions, salary tended not to be their major consideration, but rather the long-term prospects of both partners. Although a half of dual-career interviewees had been able to restructure their jobs to accommodate the career needs of both partners, employers were frequently castigated for intransigence in coming to terms with the dual-career lifestyle. Dual-career employees reported that, if employers could not cater for their special needs in building a career at the same time as their partner, they were likely to consider changing employers. Thus more sympathetic consideration was perceived as benefiting not only employees but also employers, through increased employee motivation, morale and commitment, which would improve retention rates

(particularly after maternity leave), reduce absenteeism, and utilise individual skills and experience more effectively.

Women with children emphasised the difficulties of maintaining and developing parallel careers, due to the conflicts, stresses and distractions of juggling family demands alongside demanding managerial commitments, which on occasions reduced the effectiveness of work performance. A quarter of women experienced exhaustion, guilt and alienation from family when working full-time during pre-school years, because managerial cultures were perceived as hostile to more flexible work patterns. Women frequently referred to their need for a better balance of work and home life and to their desire for more flexible working arrangements for managers, whose jobs had become notably more demanding in response to internal and external environmental pressures. Child care provision was perceived as neither a necessary nor sufficient solution to effective dual career development, since opening hours of creches rarely coincided with extended working hours commonly worked by managers. Flexible career paths and working conditions, matching employee and business needs as far as possible, were perceived as more appropriate.

Human Resource Planning And Auditing

Environmental analysis, by scanning and monitoring changes in socio-economic and labour market environments, tended to be undertaken predominantly by the largest organisations. Twelve per cent of organisations formally acknowledged the significance of human resources in their mission statement, and values espoused typically included recognition of workforce diversity and individualism, an emphasis on learning, and career flexibility. Ingredients for achieving a 'people-focused' culture were seen as strong links with business objectives, a proactive human resource department, and senior management commitment to bring about change.

Internal human resource analysis was undertaken by two-thirds of respondents, commonly through audits of biographical details, employment and training history, and qualifications and skills held. To assist with succession planning, 15 per cent

of respondents audited employees' family circumstances. Due to federal and state legislation outlawing discrimination on the grounds of parental status or family responsibilities, employee disclosure was voluntary. However, 20 per cent of companies were not prepared to seek information on family circumstances, believing this to be an unethical intrusion into personal privacy. Human resource managers reported that, contrary to expectations, employees were not reluctant to divulge details of individual circumstances, if disclosure encouraged the provision of more flexible working conditions, thereby assisting staff to manage multiple responsibilities and facilitate career progression.

Awareness Of Dual-Career Status

Very few survey respondents had attempted to estimate the proportion of their employees in dual-career families, but five specifically acknowledged such couples in their company literature in the context of relocation. Following an audit of factors critical for career development, which had highlighted the need for initiatives to help employees balance their career and family responsibilities, one organisation acknowledged that dual careers represented a business issue. More importantly, two public sector agencies had recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding, agreeing to employ career spouses in each other's organisation, whenever possible, in the event of employer-instigated relocation.

Sixty per cent of survey respondents reported that dual-career employee status was now an organisational concern. During interviews, human resource managers identified the potential impact of the growing two-career lifestyle upon their organisations, and some were concerned that dual-career managerial employees were particularly prone to stress, due to an overload of work and home responsibilities. In some traditionally male-dominated organisations, however, senior managers were reported to be reluctant to acknowledge the prevalence or significance of dual-career couples, since many of them had wives who were not in paid employment.

Twelve per cent of organisations surveyed reported a growing awareness of the conflicts and stresses of relocation faced by dual-career families, although few had

attempted to ascertain employees' willingness or ability to be mobile. A half of survey respondents expected geographical mobility for managers, and 70 per cent of these had encountered employee unwillingness to relocate, usually for family reasons such as a partner's career or dependent relatives. While half of respondent organisations reported a growing consciousness of the needs of families when relocating, only five had developed relocation kits to assist family transfers. Two-thirds of companies provided counselling for the relocating employee but only 11 per cent also counselled the partner and children. Income supplementation was provided by 17 per cent of organisations to compensate for the loss of a second income, although dual-career employees reported that they did not regard this as a panacea for a partner's career disruption.

Six organisations reported that they provided special counselling for employees from dual-career couples, including two which invited spouses to accompany employees during career counselling programmes. In one of these, a public service agency, there had been a 50 per cent take-up rate, despite attendance being at the spouse's own cost. Counselling was usually confined to recommendations for the successful integration of work and family commitments, such as effective time management principles. These initiatives were mainly offered by financial institutions, where women employees predominate. Just over half of the organisations surveyed claimed to have introduced more flexible working arrangements which had obliquely assisted dual-career couples to achieve a better life balance and simultaneously pursue a management career, usually via child care provision, part-time working initiatives, and flexibility of leave patterns, career patterns and employment breaks.

While flexible starting and finishing times were formally available for managers in nearly a half of organisations surveyed, managerial job-sharing was rare, and most organisations were reluctant to sanction a part-time manager as a viable alternative to the conventional full-time position. However, three human resource managers were conducting trials with part-time management posts, in an attempt to reduce work/family conflicts and measure employee performance on a more rational basis than merely the number of hours spent at the office. However, they conceded that the operation of flexible policies depended largely on the

management style and job level of the supervisor concerned, and was more likely to be granted when there was obvious support from top management. However, dual-career employees stressed that there was a distinction between a policy being in place, and it being acceptable to take advantage of such a policy, since norms of managerial development assumed a full-time commitment, and part-time working was in practice likely to jeopardise career progression.

Seventy per cent of respondents conducted exit interviews to explore reasons for labour turnover, and in a third of these organisations conflicting careers of spouses or partners had been cited as the major reason.

Performance Appraisal

Employee performance was almost universally monitored via performance appraisal systems, but a half of respondent organisations supplemented these by monitoring absence and turnover rates. A third of respondents regularly surveyed the causes of absenteeism, and three organisations specifically invited comments on the effects of family responsibilities on job performance. Information relating to dual-career status had surfaced through performance appraisal, and one company found that almost 60 per cent of its female staff had working partners, compared with just over 40 per cent of males, suggesting that women's career development, particularly if it involved geographical mobility, was more likely to be circumscribed by partners' jobs than that of male employees.

Six organisations had informally discussed with employees the effects of dual-career status on job performance, which revealed that both couple partners experienced severe work pressure and stress at times. Half the survey respondents provided stress management programmes for employees, just over half of which specifically addressed the problems experienced by dual-career households.

Career Development

Despite continuous change and organisational restructuring, more effective career management was identified by survey respondents as a high priority. Larger

organisations were most likely to have career development systems in place, although mainly embryonic, which included regular reviews of individual career preferences. The majority of organisations reported having made special efforts to increase the number of women in management. However, in most industries women remained disproportionately represented on management development courses, particularly at more senior levels, and few organisations had devised or implemented strategies for increasing the uptake of places. Little flexibility in the scheduling of management development programmes was apparent, despite the fact that out-of-hours and residential attendance was particularly problematic for parents. Moreover, one organisation reported that it deliberately scheduled management courses at the weekend, supposedly 'to test employee commitment'.

Twelve per cent of organisations reported that career continuity was particularly problematic for women in dual-career couples, especially during child-bearing and child-rearing years. This view was echoed by several female dual-career employees, who found management development schedules increasingly difficult to meet when their careers had been interrupted by maternity leave. Since careers remained predicated on uninterrupted career paths, those who took such leave perceived that they were no longer regarded as serious contenders in the managerial race. Eighteen per cent of survey respondents conceded that maternity breaks did retard women's careers, although several had introduced formal guarantees of work resumption after maternity leave at the same level, although not necessarily in the same position. Refamiliarisation periods, career workshops, and intermittent, short work periods were regarded by employers as well as employees as crucial, if women were to perform satisfactorily at their previous levels of competence and confidence after maternity leave.

Eighty per cent of organisations permitted career breaks. While some allowed up to five years, others regarded three or six months as the maximum, because of the impact of organisational or technological changes on job content. In 80 per cent of organisations, women managers had utilised career breaks more than men, primarily to meet family responsibilities. Men were more likely than women to take breaks for the purpose of study, although most companies reported that women's requests for study leave were mounting, as academic qualifications became

increasingly necessary in the competitive managerial environment. However, several women employees had encountered employer reluctance to sanction their study breaks and, even when company policies existed to the contrary, most employers were reluctant to sanction breaks for managerial staff.

Eighty per cent of companies offered flexible career paths in response to individual employees' preferences, provided these could be accommodated within the needs of the business. Ninety per cent of organisations had provisions for managerial career development in a lateral direction, which commonly took the form of secondments or project work. Most organisations positively encouraged such moves to broaden functional experience, deepen skills development and maintain employee motivation, particularly where flat organisation structures limited vertical progression.

An increase in self-directed careers was emerging, and four dual-career employees had initiated temporary career plateaux for themselves, in some cases rejecting promotions. Others had adopted more flexible strategies to overcome career barriers and ambiguity, as they encountered less certain career paths. More flexible timing and direction of organisational career timetables were considered by dual-career employees to be essential for career development, accompanied by the provision of career counselling and mentoring by the employing organisation.

Despite increasing flexibility of employment practices and career paths, however, more subtle obstacles to career development were perceived to remain, which were of concern to dual-career employees. Both male and female interviewees resented the managerial culture of working long hours, which reduced the time available for leisure, family and study pursuits, with deleterious consequences for job and personal satisfaction. Several women perceived there to be an indirect culture of exclusion for parents, since important work meetings were frequently scheduled over breakfast or after normal working hours. Most dual-career interviewees perceived the male partner's career to be more significant, usually because it enjoyed the higher salary. As a result, career commitments of partners frequently precluded women socialising after work, when essential networking

and politicking took place, and they perceived that their absence was interpreted as low organisational commitment.

Because travel and mobility were perceived as essential for a managerial career, many dual-career employees had felt strong pressures to accept secondment and transfer offers, despite difficulties accommodating them with their partners' careers. Geographical relocation was predominantly experienced by men but, as more women reached management positions, survey respondents acknowledged that the 'trailing spouse' was increasingly likely to be the male partner, and 25 per cent of organisations expected dual-career status to generate greater employee hostility to geographical mobility. To encourage and facilitate geographical transfers, a third of organisations sought jobs for the accompanying partner via contacts with business associates, clients, suppliers, and personal networks. However, the majority of dual-career employees, both male and female, felt that it was now important to reassess organisational relocation norms, since many of today's managers have career-oriented partners.

DISCUSSION

This research reveals that, while organisations are becoming more aware of the dual-career issue, they show limited responsiveness in the form of human resource policies and practices. While some acknowledge the need to be more amenable to dual-career considerations, few exhibit a holistic approach to career development. Even in those organisations which claim to favour more innovative policies, there is often a marked reluctance to introduce or sanction such practices for managerial staff. The literature on dual careers and the work/family nexus therefore appears to be more advanced than actual organisational practices. However, in those organisations which have taken positive steps to fuse career development with employee preferences, dual careers appear to be facilitated, apparently contributing to lower absenteeism, higher retention rates, and reduced employee unwillingness to transfer geographically.

Due to the small sample size, the results of this survey should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, they are believed to provide the first snapshot of Australian

organisational responsiveness to the dual-career phenomenon. While the growing organisational interest in changing labour force demographics might be expected to have increased employer awareness of dual-careers, it appears that few organisations capture data on individual employees' circumstances, or maintain a meaningful dialogue on dual career needs. Such apparent disinterest could well contribute to higher attrition rates, if employees leave for organisations more empathetic towards individual development, as confirmed in recent Australian research (Smith, 1994a).

Workforce audits are appropriate vehicles for revealing dual-career employee status, and the effect of this lifestyle on work performance. If organisations are unwilling to seek information on dual-career status or domestic circumstances for fear of intruding on personal privacy, they should recognise that they already encroach on employees' family and personal lives through career demands which can give rise to role conflict. For managers, the convention of long working hours can place heavy strains on partners and families. Dual-career couples may find that, if they do not participate in essential networking after hours, their commitment may be called into question and career development inhibited. They are therefore faced with a choice of either maintaining the stability of their networks to meet the needs of task and career path demands, or eschewing contacts to maintain harmonious relationships with their family.

Research shows that within Australia women still bear the prime responsibility for child and elder care, and commonly suffer from work overload (Vanden Heuvel, 1993). This study confirmed that, as a result, conflicts between simultaneous careers and family responsibilities make it particularly difficult for dual-career women to sustain a dual-career lifestyle. Because employees cannot compartmentalise home and work, stress arising from conflicting demands may be manifested in the workplace, through absenteeism, attrition or reduced performance. Consequently, increasing number of women are challenging managerial career norms by seeking part-time work, career breaks or job-sharing, although with limited success to date.

In most organisations management is still regarded as a full-time, continuous occupation, although part-time working may well be viable for many management jobs, and part-time managers may be equally productive as their full-time counterparts. Those organisations tentatively trialing part-time work for managers, are doing so on the basis that very few jobs consist entirely of management work, and routine tasks such as data gathering can be carried out by more junior staff. Such an approach can not only lower costs to the company, but also play a vital role in career development of subordinate staff.

The study found that most initiatives on part-time working and job share for managers are being piloted within human resource departments. This bodes well for their adoption by other functions. Success stories may even challenge the conventional wisdom surrounding management progression, which is premised upon a continuous, escalating model of career progression. Even when company policies permit career breaks, some organisations remain reluctant to sanction them for managers, although a break from work may allow a fresh, more creative approach to one's job.

A proactive approach to career development and succession planning relies on comprehensive demographic and employee data, which are not readily available within human resource departments. Mutual career planning between employers and employees is therefore appropriate. However, because no organisation can guarantee well-ordered career paths or fully manage careers on behalf of its employees, the individual must also assume greater personal responsibility for choice in career decisions.

Residential and weekend management development programmes present particular difficulties for dual-career couples, and especially for parents, due to conflicts between work and family time. The structure and timing of many such programmes may indirectly, even if unintentionally, convey the message that parents are not welcome, which may go some way to explain women's low uptake of such places, especially for more senior management training, as confirmed by this study. It is therefore appropriate for employers to carefully consider the timing

of courses, so that all employees may have equal access to, and benefit from, these increasingly vital elements of career development.

It must be noted that, since the study was undertaken, 'best practice' work and family case studies have become more widely available in Australia. Drawing on these role models, organisations may well have made progress in this area, further encouraged by the International Year of the Family focus in 1994, and practical advice from the federal Work and Family Unit. Yet it is possible that some organisations still regard work and family initiatives as concerns of women employees only, rather than issues relevant to the total workforce.

The Report of the Australian Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills (1995), known as the Karpin Committee after its chairperson, recently identified the management of diversity at all levels of business as a critical imperative in achieving global competitiveness. Diversity management also includes the management of dual careers, as distinguishing characteristics of employees. This study suggests that Australian employers are slow in addressing the effective management of workforce diversity, and developing systematic, flexible career development programmes which accommodate individual employee circumstances and aspirations. Changes in social values also suggest that employees now want more opportunities for self-development and a better work/life balance, which call for more flexible career paths.

Dual-career status presents employers with a serious challenge to traditional expectations of managerial mobility. The Karpin Report (Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, 1995) contends that the manager of the future will need to have international experience. This implies that international relocation will become an integral feature of career development for many Australian managers. However, research on expatriate management currently being undertaken by the author for the Australian Research Council, confirms that the dual-career issue is proving to be a major stumbling block for organisations in the global arena. The most common reason for refusal of expatriate appointments, by men and women, has been found to be family commitments, closely followed by dual-careers of spouses.

The study described here suggests that Australian organisations are becoming more aware of the conflicts and stresses of relocation faced by dual-career families, and their associated reluctance to transfer, which has been identified elsewhere (Coyle, 1993, 1995). More responsive organisations are revising transfer policies to accommodate flexibility for dual-career employees, and developing a culture of greater tolerance and support. In those organisations which already employ both dual-career partners, consideration of double transfers is essential, focusing on career development of the couple as a unit. Negotiating geographical transfers jointly with another employer may be a further option to satisfy career needs of dual-career couple members working in different organisations.

CONCLUSIONS

The interaction of career processes with marriage, family and gender roles is a complex, dynamic process, which needs to be understood and acted upon by employers, if the flexible, empowering, learning organisation is to become a reality. Careers are shaped not only by individuals themselves, their partners and families, but are frequently redirected at the behest of employers. Yet employers can no longer expect automatic compliance with requests for employee relocation, since partners' careers are now a major consideration for many working couples. Human resource solutions for each organisation must therefore reflect workforce structure, demographics and location.

A decade ago corporate employers were described as "the silent (and relatively intransigent) partners in the dual-career marriage" (Hertz, 1986:211), and it appears that little has changed, with the potential for dysfunctional consequences. If employing organisations are not empathetic to and do not cater for individual employee needs, adverse personal and career consequences may result. For dual-career couples, positive career outcomes are dependent upon the successful integration of work and family domains, which is contingent upon flexible employment practices and a revision of traditional managerial cultures. By minimising employee tensions and thereby improving performance, more flexible,

innovative work practices are likely to produce benefits for the organisation, as well as for dual-career dyads.

Managing dual-career employees requires awareness, sensitivity and flexibility. But if organisations do not know how many of their staff are from such families, they are ill-prepared to cope with the unique problems they face. As the dual-career phenomenon continues apace, employers need to minimise the organisational and career contradictions which arise when both partners are building careers, for they can ill afford to ignore the costs associated with high stress, job dissatisfaction and low commitment.

For core workers such as managers, career development will increasingly need to be tailored to individual employee needs, and innovative practices will be especially critical over the next few years, when projected skill shortages may increase labour mobility. In response to total quality management concerns, and in the light of changing workforce demographics, human resource managers need effective systems which obtain and retain the desired workforce.

Responsiveness to the dual-career phenomenon therefore represents a key challenge for human resource managers. If they cannot adapt, they are unlikely to be able to adapt to the larger pressures generated by the turbulent contemporary business environment. Greater career flexibility might even mean that paid work no longer concerns merely the four Ps of profit, performance, pay and productivity, but allows time and energy for the four Fs of family, friends, festivals and fun (Handy, 1994:11).

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