Women and leadership working paper series: Paper no. 8: Career transitions of dual-career couples: An empirical study

Catherine R. Smith
Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

• Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.

• A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author’s moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).

• Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
Career Transitions of Dual-Career Couples: An Empirical Study

Catherine R. Smith

December, 1996
Paper No. 8

Career Transitions of Dual-Career Couples: An Empirical Study

Catherine R. Smith

December, 1996
INTRODUCTION

The dual-career couple, where both partners are pursuing simultaneous careers, is a relatively new but lasting phenomenon that reflects the increasing educational achievements and career aspirations of women worldwide (Sekaran, 1986, Davidson, 1987). 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 careers in tandem 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.

Latest available census figures show that 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 home-maker 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). Seminal studies focused primarily on the stresses and strains inherent in juggling multiple demands of work, career and family (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971, 1980; Sekaran, 1982, 1983). More recently, researchers have examined the way in which problems of role conflict and role overload impact upon personal satisfaction, job performance and career development (Hertz, 1986; Sekaran, 1989; Smith, 1994a). 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 interface between work and home (Adie & Carmody, 1991). It has long been established that, because families operate as social
systems, tensions are unavoidably transmitted from work to home and vice versa, with significant implications for job and life satisfaction, labour productivity and organisational effectiveness (Kanter, 1977). While prescriptions for change have been proffered (Sekaran & Hall, 1989; Smith, 1992a), organisations still appear reluctant to acknowledge demographic and social changes, and human resource policies and career planning programmes appear to be resistant to change (Smith, 1994b).

A career is defined here as a longer term developmental occupation or profession, with a sequence of connections and networks over time, which may include lateral or downward moves or temporary withdrawals. Careers have traditionally provided organising principles for structuring both private and professional lives, and notions of personal success or failure have been derived largely from work commitments (Nicholson & West, 1988). Career development constitutes a motivating tool to create and sustain competitive advantage (Von Glinow, Driver, Brousseau & Prince, 1983), which has become an integral feature of strategic human resource management and employment contracts (Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989).

**MANAGERIAL CAREERS**

Careers commonly begin within the salaried ranks of an organisation, providing paths for advancement to greater authority, responsibility and reward, often in a managerial capacity. Career paths have traditionally provided a sense of self-identity and growth, assisting organisations to obtain the motivation and commitment of their managerial staff (Goffee & Scase, 1992). However, the scope and eclectic nature of managerial responsibilities has been continually expanding, and any measured rationality in such work now has to be drawn from a hectic and apparent chaos of unscheduled demands, fragmented interactions and ad hoc decisions (Kanter, 1989; Ezzamel, Lilley & Wilmott, 1994).

The stresses of managerial positions are well documented. They derive from complex managerial roles and tasks, information overload, technological change, time pressures and deadlines, travel and mobility requirements, and pressures of managing people (Levinson, 1981; Gupta & Jenkins, 1985; Davidson, 1989;
Continual change has intensified work pressures, while delayering and downsizing also have the potential to increase stress for managers facing career plateaux crises (Hall & Richter, 1990). Effective managerial performance depends not only on individual competences and job demands, but also on the work environment (Boyatzis, 1982), although organisational support for managers is often perceived as inadequate (Nicholson & West, 1988).

The influence of organisational culture on attitudes to gender roles and competitiveness may be detected in human resource policies and practices (Schein, 1993). Traditionally there has been no such thing as a part-time manager, and research has revealed managerial perceptions that part-time working reflects low organisational commitment (Smith, 1994b). In many organisations, managerial careers are still premised upon continuous work patterns, which particularly disadvantage those taking breaks for family demands, who are predominantly women (Brannen & Moss, 1992; Lewis, 1992).

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), and little appears to have changed. While managers may enjoy discretion over their time, their working hours may be long and erratic. They may also face covert organisational demands for personal attachment and unlimited commitment, with career development premised upon unquestioned job mobility and flexibility (Hall & Richter, 1988). Conflicts between work and home are especially pronounced for dual-career couples, because there is double exposure to the demands and pressures of the two domains.

DUAL CAREERS: A NEW DIMENSION FOR CAREER RESEARCH

The career development literature is fragmented, with a myriad of potentially conflicting concepts and models. However, there is general agreement that career choices and decisions are part of a developmental process rather than specific and irrevocable events, and that career patterns exhibit many forms, with variations in continuity and discontinuity. Researchers are increasingly adopting a holistic
approach to career development, recognising that work and home lives are inextricably linked. As social values change, the research focus is gradually shifting from work as the central life role, towards a more balanced view of self-development, family development and career development.

A major shortcoming of the careers literature, due to its primary focus on the individual, has been a neglect of dual career development models. Dual-career couples now warrant attention as a special group because the career salience, strategies and transitions of one partner inevitably affect those of the other, which will also have repercussions for their employers. The work-family nexus is so pervasive that focusing on dual-career development without simultaneously considering the couple’s developmental needs fails to produce a complete understanding of career dynamics.

While much is known about dual-career couples, little is known about their parallel career histories, and the implications of job transitions for organisational career development strategies and programmes. With the exception of the embryonic work of Sekaran & Hall (1989), much of the contemporary career development literature remains inapplicable to dual-career dyads. Yet by exploring relationships between partners, family and both careers, we are better able to anticipate the life stages where conflict or compromise are most likely to occur.

Many theories are inappropriate for explaining gender differences in career development (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Gutek & Larwood, 1987), and women’s careers frequently fail to conform to the conventional male stereotype of targeted, continuous, upward achievement (White, Cox & Cooper, 1992). Although more recent theories of male and female adult development help explain how careers affect men and women differently (Marshall, 1989), more empirical research into gender differences is timely, because of the rapidity and magnitude of social change which challenges assumptions about careers, especially for women.

Career transitions are important events in people’s lives, and many constitute “‘high stake’ experiences because they affect economic, familial and psychological dimensions of the person” (O’Neil et al., 1987:67). Their outcomes may also be
significant for organisations. By exploring the way in which simultaneous careers are established, maintained or changed in the pursuit of this lifestyle, and the kinds of support and guidance employees need and receive, we can better understand potential conflicts associated with career development. Dual-career status therefore adds an important new dimension to the career development literature. For employers and policy makers, analysis of dyads’ work histories can aid explanation of variant career patterns in the context of changing labour force demographics. This may constitute a vital step in helping organisations to acknowledge, accommodate and facilitate employees pursuing the dual-career lifestyle, so that more effective job performance may result.

STUDY OF DUAL CAREER TRANSITIONS

The study reported here sought a deeper understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of career development within the dual-career dyad, through an analysis of career strategies and key decision points of both partners. It aimed to identify the discretion a dual-career spouse has over career development processes, the supports and resources necessary to facilitate career progression, and organisational practices which influence performance of dual-career employees. The research compared patterns of partners’ career transitions, and identified themes and patterns emerging from the interaction of dual-career status and the pursuit of a managerial career.

The key internal variables influencing dual-career development were considered to be life stage, sex, family responsibilities, educational level, career salience, and career plans and strategies. Key external variables were identified as stakeholders, managerial level, professional demands, support systems, networks, mentors, career development programmes, organisational culture and management conventions. The combined influences of these variables were perceived as impacting on career transitions and compromise, and, in turn, determining career outcomes of dual-career dyad members.

A transitions perspective was regarded as an appropriate model for recognising reciprocities between members of dual-career couples and their employing
organisations. It allowed career development to be analysed over time, enabling the identification of key decision points of both partners. This framework provided an integrated approach to the study of the stages and outcomes of career development within dual-career couples, and allowed comparison of both partners' work histories in the one family unit, replacing the more usual exclusive concentration on one couple member. Data was analysed by means of Nicholson's (1987) model of transitions, which encompasses the following nine dimensions for considering career moves:

Speed: The rapidity of transitions.
Amplitude: The novelty or radical nature of the demands of the transition.
Symmetry: The relative time spent in different transitions.
Continuity: The inter-linkages of transitions, and the extent to which they follow a logical sequence.
Discretion: The extent of autonomy the mover has over transitions.
Complexity: The clarity or ease of definition of the task of transitions.
Propulsion: The extent to which transitions are initiated by the person or by external events and forces.
Significance: The personal importance of the outcomes of transitions.
Facilitation: The supports and resources available to aid the person's passage through transitions.

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory research was conducted in Western Australia during 1994, as part of a larger study, and is believed to be the first Australian study of the management of dual careers. Middle and senior managers were selected for investigation, since the multiple demands of managerial careers are believed to pose particular difficulties for dual-career couples. Strategic sampling via professional organisations was used to identify fifteen dyads. While generalisations from the study are limited by the small sample size and reliance on subjects' retrospective details of and justification for career moves, the results shed some light on the management of careers in tandem, which are likely to become increasingly common.
The thirty individuals completed questionnaires covering their last four job transitions. In-depth semi-structured interviews were then conducted separately with each subject, to explore their career trajectories by means of retrospective autobiographical reports. Career salience, strategies, key career decision points and transitions were investigated to explain the dynamics and processes of career decision-making in the dual-career couple, and the influence of work and non-work factors. Analysis of parallel career histories was carried out for each dyad using Nicholson's (1987) dimensions of transitions outlined above. These constructs were used to test for asynchronism (Sekaran & Hall, 1989), whereby dual careers appear to be out of step with each other. The study documented the ways in which dilemmas are experienced, confronted and resolved by couples themselves, and identified the implications for employers.

SUBJECTS

All subjects worked full-time, except for two women who were in part-time management positions, which they had negotiated to accommodate parental responsibilities temporarily. All subjects were earning more than A$45,000. Only one couple worked in the same organisation, and the female partner held the more senior position. A third of subjects worked in medium-sized organisations of between 100-500 employees, while the remainder were employed in larger organisations. Spans of control varied from four to thirty-four subordinates. The public sector employed half of the subjects, including two-thirds of the women.

RESULTS

Dyad Profiles

Fourteen couples were married and one was in a de facto heterosexual relationship. Twenty subjects had been married only once, and ten were in their second marriage or relationship. Three were in their twenties, ten in their thirties, and seventeen over forty years of age. In seven couples, both partners were of similar age, but in eight the husband was older than the wife, usually by between
ten and fifteen years. Seven couples had no children, while eight had between one and four.

In five couples, both partners held educational qualifications of the same level, while in eight of the remaining couples the wife's qualifications were higher. However, no dissonance was apparent over this disparity. In only three instances where the wife was better qualified than her husband was this reflected in a higher salary. In five couples partners earned similar salaries, but in six the husband was the highest earner. However, in two of the latter couples, the wives had taken time out of the paid workforce for child care responsibilities, which had limited their salary progression. Eight couples expected that the wife would eventually command a considerably higher earning capacity than her husband, due to particular market opportunities, or individuals' special skills and experience.

Dyads appeared to be career-and-family oriented, rather than solely career-oriented (Schwartz, 1989), and career ranking was primarily influenced by educational qualifications, parental status and family support systems. In eight couples both partners equally ranked their career salience, but two husbands and five wives ranked their career salience higher than that of their partners. Childless couples ranked careers first or second, and two had deliberately delayed starting a family until their careers had been established. In two couples with dependent children, both partners ranked their career first, but conceded that this caused serious tensions at home. Career salience was strongly associated with age and life stage, and women reported that they intended to seek accelerated career progression once children were independent.

Career Histories

The majority of subjects had experienced three or four career transitions during their working lives, although one woman in her forties had witnessed eleven. Women generally experienced more job changes than men. The majority of career transitions, for men and for women, had been associated with promotion in a vertical direction, although several women had deliberately made lateral moves to more 'family friendly' organisations, to facilitate child care. Few dual-career
couples had experienced formal career counselling, and none jointly with both partners.

Although several transitions had been involuntary, due to redundancy or redeployment in both public and private sectors, extrinsic factors such as higher salaries and better fringe benefits were rarely mentioned as a cause of voluntary transitions. Most subjects attributed career moves to their desire for career advancement, citing intrinsic factors such as new challenges and broader experience. Personal well-being was mentioned by several men as a reason for changing jobs, either to improve the quality of life or reduce the stress levels associated with long managerial working hours. Women’s reasons for job change tended to differ, and dissatisfaction over the managerial culture and organisational politics, employer insensitivity during pregnancy and child-rearing years, and family well-being were commonly cited.

Most subjects had been in their current job for a relatively short time, a third for under two years and a third between two and four years. Shorter job tenure was particularly pronounced for women, almost half of whom had been in their jobs for less than two years, and in four instances for less than one year. Longer employment history in the current job was associated with higher age. Career breaks for the purpose of study had been taken by two men and one woman. Maternity leave had been used by five women, but short breaks were typical (minimum one month, maximum one year), so that career momentum would be maintained.

Men had primarily determined their own career goals and directions while, for women, spouses had played an important role in shaping career histories, although other family members were also identified as key stakeholders. Eight women reported that mentors had been influential in determining their career trajectories. Mentoring had been undertaken by a few husbands, but work colleagues were perceived as more significant in this respect. Women tended to attribute their career outcomes to luck or fate, whereas men were more likely to report that theirs resulted from conscious career plans and targets.
In only six couples were both partners' careers at similar levels, and three of these couples had no children. In most dyads husbands' careers had progressed noticeably faster than those of their wives, although three middle-aged women felt their careers were now overtaking their husband's. Men identified no hindrances to career development, but women perceived organisational politics and nepotism as disadvantaging career progress. Six of the eight women with children expressed concern about employer insensitivity to balancing work and family demands, which had directly contributed to career moves. Care of elderly dependent relatives placed additional family responsibilities on four couples, and was perceived to have stalled career progression for two wives who were responsible for the majority of such care.

Perceived Demands On Couples

Couples with children considered their current family demands to be high, even when there was only one child. When children were at university, the associated financial commitments intensified pressure on parents to maintain reasonable salary levels and therefore career momentum. Ten couples shared the same perceptions of their time commitments: one considered their current time demands to be of medium level, but nine regarded them as high. Within the other five couples, all wives rated their time commitments higher than did their husbands.

Women were more likely than men to rate their current time demands as medium or high, with one third describing them as extremely high. Extremely high demands were reported by women to stem from their multiple roles of wives, mothers, daughters and managers, and five women used the analogy of juggling. Women frequently experienced conflict over career and child-rearing demands, and regretted having little time to devote to personal pursuits or interests.

Many subjects, male and female, described the travel commitments and long hours - usually in the order of ten or eleven hours per day - commonly associated with managerial jobs, and the necessity to take work home. Involvement in professional activities and networking multiplied work demands, but was recognised as vital for
building management careers, especially for women. High academic achievements were further seen as essential for reaching the most senior management levels, but study placed heavy demands on subjects’ time. As a result, women with children had taken longer than men to complete comparable studies.

Stress was a frequent consequence of excessive time demands, particularly for women with children. Two men experienced stress arising from social attitudes towards their sharing of domestic chores and parenting duties. Guilt was a common emotion experienced by mothers, due to the limited attention they felt able to devote to their families, particularly for school activities. All but one mother identified time constraints as a key factor influencing job choice, working hours and career transitions.

Impact Of Dual-Career Status

All but two couples planned their careers jointly, and provided mutual support for partners’ transitions. Sixteen subjects recalled key decision points which had called for difficult deliberation because of parallel careers, and career counselling by employers would have been welcome. Dyads confirmed that dual-career status required concessions, understanding and compromise on both sides. Seven women reported that their careers had been compromised as a result of dual-career status, because they had been unable to take up offers of promotion interstate or overseas, for fear of disrupting their partner’s career.

Benefits of dual-career status were perceived as emotional support, financial security, and networking contacts. Yet severe career disadvantages were also evident, especially in respect of geographical relocation, which usually nullified or restricted the career development of the ‘trailing spouse’. In four instances relocation had generated considerable marital discord, particularly when study programmes had been curtailed or deferred as a consequence. Couples expressed resentment at employer reliance on managerial mobility, and disappointment at the dearth of practical support for relocators and their families. Frequent inter- and intra-state travel also posed difficulties for dual-career couples with children.
Four dyads were actively working towards a better life balance, to achieve a more effective combination of work and family responsibilities. Two were considering establishing their own husband-and-wife businesses, which would afford them more personal choice over working hours and family time, away from the demands and politics of corporate management. Because part-time working and job sharing were regarded by employers as unacceptable for managers, two women were considering moving to establish business ventures, to afford more time flexibility when children were young. However, organisational politics was identified by women as a further cause of dissatisfaction with managerial careers.

DISCUSSION

This study suggests that dual career dyads' careers are likely to be out of step in relation to each other, thus displaying asynchronism of career level (Sekaran & Hall, 1989), although dissonance does not necessarily result. Career patterns of dual-career managerial couples exhibit many forms, and women's career choices and influences tend to be quite different from those of men, as reported elsewhere (Bardwick, 1980; White et al., 1992; Marshall, 1989). For couples without family responsibilities, imbalance is likely to be much less pronounced, since partners have greater discretion in career decision making, with fewer stakeholders to consider. Thus their transitions are relatively orderly, following the traditional age patterns found in the career development literature, with career exploration taking place in the early twenties, advancement and maintenance in the thirties and forties, and decline in the late forties and fifties. However, for dual-career couples with family responsibilities, the most significant career development phase of the female partner tends to be at a much later life stage than their partner's, due not only to age differences, but also to differing assumption of non-work obligations.

Gender differences in career aspirations and directions of dual-career partners are common, confirming earlier research findings (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Nicholson & West, 1989). Men's careers tend to be the product of strong internal forces such as clear career goals and purposeful strategies, often with age parameters firmly enunciated at an early career stage. In contrast, women's career objectives are
likely to be less specific and determined later, with personal career outcomes attributed to accident rather than design. Men’s career goals are likely to be predicated on continuous employment with regular promotions, whereas women are more likely to plan breaks for maternity, even though this may prove dysfunctional in career terms. Supporting earlier research (Nadelson & Nadelson, 1980; Sekaran, 1982, 1986), domestic considerations are likely to override women’s personal preferences in career transitions, since women still tend to undertake the major share of child care and domestic duties, even when their career responsibilities are comparable with, or greater than, those of their partner. Thus women’s career transitions are particularly facilitated by job convenience, such as proximity to home or flexibility of working arrangements.

For dual-career couples, ad hoc career decision-making is more common than a long-term joint strategy, due to the complexity of managing simultaneous careers and the volatility of job opportunities in changing organisations. When both partners seek to maximise personal career advantage, serious tensions can result, and therefore career choice depends upon compromise, which is more usually made by women. While this may be a legacy from the traditional precedence of husbands’ jobs, differences in earning potential are also relevant.

Dual-career partners exhibit similar frequencies of career changes, but women experience shorter tenure and more frequent job changes, as reported elsewhere (Nicholson & West, 1988). Job changes for both partners commonly involve vertical moves, although quality of life considerations may precipitate lateral transitions, especially on the part of women. Women’s transitions are more likely to be involuntary and random, often unfolding in response to personal events such as childbirth. Dyads frequently face ‘career crossroads’, which require negotiation of long- and short-term goals and preferences, and conflicts are particularly acute when geographical relocation is required.

Dual-career status currently presents employers with a serious challenge to traditional expectations of managerial mobility. A recent Australian Task Force 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 managers in Australia. However, current research by this author on the management of expatriates reveals that the dual-career issue is proving to be an obstacle for organisations operating in the global arena. The most common reason for refusal of expatriate appointments, by men and by women, has been found to be family commitments, closely followed by dual-careers of spouses or partners.

While dual-career managers derive vicarious gratification from each other’s achievements, and benefit from sharing similar work problems, their careers are especially demanding, due to the erratic and complex nature of work problems. Long working hours and travel requirements can generate conflicts over partners’ careers, especially in dyads with children, and ultimately influence women’s decisions to change jobs. When senior managers are expected to socialise, this usually involves extra duties for the partner - normally the wife, thereby reducing time for personal and family activities. Pressures result in women dual-career partners being particularly prone to feeling stressed, tired and frustrated at having insufficient family time. Yet, despite the changing workforce profile, continuous full-time working is still considered necessary for managerial career progression, and few organisations consider part-time management to be a viable proposition.

For progress into senior management, networking, professional involvement, and participation in management education and training are vital. However, the dual-career lifestyle makes these activities especially difficult for women to sustain, particularly when they have young children. As a result, some women are delaying or not having children, because of the difficulties of accommodating conflicting demands. Progression to senior management level is also perceived by women to be particularly elusive, because of the informal ‘masculine’ organisational culture which still prevails (Smith & Hutchinson, 1995). This encourages women to actively seek out organisations which are perceived to have a more supportive organisational culture for women’s careers, most noticeably in the public sector.

Because dual-career status inevitably complicates individual career paths, especially for younger couples contemplating starting a family, optimal career
progression is facilitated by employer support. Women especially seek 'family friendly' work environments and, if unavailable, may consider establishing a small business, to reconcile work and family needs. In contrast, men in dual-career relationships are more likely to set up their own business to gratify needs for independence and self-fulfilment.

In summary, for dual-career dyads career 'propulsion' rests not solely on personal and organisational motives and influences, but also on those of the spouse, and the demands of his or her career. The intensity of spouse and family role considerations constitute an important constraint on dual-career 'discretion', because work and home lives are inextricably linked. Thus 'facilitation' of career transitions, encompassing domestic and organisational supports influencing career development, is greatly assisted by flexibility of work practices and career development. The 'speed' and 'symmetry' of career transitions appear to be similar within and between dual-career dyads, and the 'significance' of career outcomes appears comparable for both dyad partners. However, the study reveals gender variations of dyad partners in respect of 'continuity' of careers, largely due to differences in career salience, which is likely to be influenced by family responsibilities. Regarding 'amplitude', women make more radical job switches than men, for example to become the first female job incumbent, or to place family before career by way of resignation. In respect of the 'complexity' of transitions, job moves occur more readily for the male partners in dual-career couples.

CONCLUSIONS

From dual-career managers' descriptions of their own careers, career transitions appear to be complex processes, resting upon mixed motives and uncertain environmental forces and constraints. Career development is influenced by biographical factors such as gender, age, parental status, career salience, and clarity of career goals. However, situational characteristics such as the culture of the employing organisation and its managerial environment, appear to be further explanatory variables of career transitions.
Because dual-career couples function as social systems, their career strategies and transitions are inevitably determined by the interests of both partners, with family inputs critical to such decisions. Thus the dual-career employee has less discretion over career development than members of traditional families in which only one partner is in the paid workforce. As a result, their career decisions are likely to exhibit compromise, balancing individual preferences with those of the partner as stakeholder. Organisational culture is both a cause and an effect of the way the internal and external transitions of employees are managed, and the strategies used by employers to manage career transitions can significantly affect individuals' experiences and career outcomes, particularly when geographical relocation is required.

Career transitions emerging from the interaction of dual-career status and the pursuit of a managerial career, reveal important differences between partners, especially when couples have children. The consequences for individuals are that multiple career demands frequently generate role conflict, and women with children are especially prone to tensions between career demands and family responsibilities, which may adversely affect their work performance and career progression. Forced career transitions may result, if stress is exacerbated by employers unsympathetic to the diversity of individual needs and circumstances.

Therefore, dual-career employee status requires greater employer sensitivity and awareness of the demands of simultaneous careers, if employees are to become more effective. Support mechanisms to sustain manageable career progression, and at the same time minimise career- and family-related conflicts, include a recognition of individual circumstances and needs, particularly in respect of career and family responsibilities. Creative career management systems which encourage flexible career paths may achieve a better balance of organisational and individual requirements, particularly when they are accompanied by more flexible working conditions. More flexible managerial mobility policies can further facilitate career transitions of dual-career couples.

More importantly, however, organisations need to reconsider managerial work processes, and the accompanying norms and expectations, to obviate work
demands which are 'corporate convenient' (Schein, 1993) rather than job-related. The revision of organisational cultures to legitimise part-time managerial positions is likely to be of particular benefit to women's career development, and is therefore an important element of affirmative action programmes. By adapting work systems and developing programmes to accommodate people's talents and circumstances more effectively, employers can achieve career transitions which are beneficial to managers, employees, and employees' families. Work practices which provide choices will assist all employees to forge more effective combinations of work and family, which best suit their individual needs and life stages.

REFERENCES


## Previous Publications in This Series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication Date</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Still LV and Chia W</td>
<td>Self Employed Women: Four Years On</td>
<td>February 1995</td>
<td>0-7298-0190-X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Still LV and Mortimer D</td>
<td>Managerial Women and Enterprise Bargaining</td>
<td>April 1995</td>
<td>0-7298-0191-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Still LV</td>
<td>Merit or Obligation</td>
<td>August 1995</td>
<td>0-7298-0213-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Still LV</td>
<td>Women as Leaders</td>
<td>April 1996</td>
<td>0-7298-0252-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Smith CR and Still CV</td>
<td>Women in International Assignments: The Australian Experience</td>
<td>November 1996</td>
<td>0-7298-0322-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Smith CR and Vitoria B</td>
<td>Gender Issues in Management Education: Redressing the Imbalance</td>
<td>November 1996</td>
<td>0-7298-0330-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>