



Making sense of careers through the lens of a path metaphor

Theresa Smith-Ruig

*School of Business, Economics & Public Policy, University of New England,
Armidale, Australia*

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to understand how participants make sense of career through the lens of a path metaphor. Inkson’s three types of career paths are used as a framework to determine whether the participants followed either a traditional and/or boundaryless career.

Design/methodology/approach – The research is based on interviews with 59 men and women employed in the accounting profession in Australia. The participants were asked to describe their career development to date.

Findings – During the interview the participants often used metaphoric language to describe their career development, especially “path”, “journey”, or “road” metaphors. Analysis of these career metaphors revealed that the participants experienced aspects of both a traditional and a boundaryless career. On the one hand, the professional structure of an accounting career required some participants to follow a more traditional career path, whilst, on the other hand, the increasing desire for a better work-life balance and for stimulating work meant that other participants followed a boundaryless career.

Research limitations/implications – The study has implications for organizations trying to recruit, retain, and develop accounting professionals. The dilemma for individuals appeared to be focused on whether to follow a traditional career path, or pursue their own individual goals and carve out their own unique or boundaryless career.

Originality/value – The benefit of using the journey or path metaphor is that it helps to explain and illustrate the various career options open to individuals. The journey metaphor was derived from the participants’ own explanation of their career trajectories, and thus was not a metaphor imposed by the researcher.

Keywords Organizational theory, Metaphors, Career development, Self development, Australia

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Much of careers research since the 1990s has focused on the so-called move away from traditional “organizational careers” to what Arthur (1994) coined the “boundaryless career”. In traditional career development individuals progressed through roles typically within one organization, achieving greater pay, power, position, and responsibility (Levinson *et al.*, 1978; Super, 1957). By the late 1980s and 1990s, Arthur and Rousseau (1996) believed a shift was occurring toward boundaryless careers. They argued that careers in the twenty-first century would no longer be automatic nor linear, they would be boundaryless. The career would be directed by the individual, not the organization, and driven by changes in the person and in the environment. The individual would need to be more flexible and adaptive (Hall, 1996a). Employment transitions would occur across multiple roles, organizations and occupations (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996a, 1996b). Baruch (2004, 2006) similarly explained that the multi-directional and transitional nature of careers is due to the flattening of organizations which has removed the usual linear pathways for progression and hence success. Hall (1996b) also argued



that careers would continue to develop throughout life as skills and knowledge are continuously sought in accordance with individual goals. As Adamson *et al.* (1998) stated, employees will want to ensure that even if they do not progress within their organization, they will want their jobs to provide them with professional challenge so that they remain engaged, skilful in their profession, and marketable.

Following Pringle and Mallon's (2003) suggestion to take a more critical approach to the boundaryless career theory and the context in which it is applied, this article discusses research that assesses the applicability of the boundaryless career concept. The results are based on semi-structured interviews held with 59 men and women employed in the accounting profession in Australia. The aim of the research was to explore how the participants made sense of, and conceptualized their career trajectories. Many of the participants used metaphoric language in the interview, describing career as a "journey", "path", and "road". Given that many researchers have long used metaphors to make sense of careers (Inkson, 2002, 2004a, b; Levinson *et al.*, 1978; Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Schein, 1978), this article draws on Inkson's (2002) three types of career paths as a framework to determine whether the participants followed either a traditional and/or boundaryless career. The benefit of using the journey or path metaphor is that it helps to explain and illustrate the various career options open to individuals.

The study showed that the participants experienced all three types of Inkson's (2002) career paths, demonstrating that they followed aspects of both a traditional and boundaryless career. The article raises the question of whether the highly skilled and structured nature of a professional accounting career, requires individuals only to follow a traditional career, especially with regard to pursuing partner in a firm. On the other hand however, the participants' growing desire for a greater work-life balance resulted in some pursuing aspects of a boundaryless career. The results have implications for organizations trying to recruit, retain, and develop accounting professionals. This is particularly relevant given the accounting skills shortage in Australia, coupled with an aging population (CPA Australia, 2007; Ramsey, 2006; Wilkinson, 2007).

The use of metaphors

We often conceptualize phenomena around us using metaphors (Grant and Oswick, 1996; Inkson, 2004b; Tsoukas, 1993). As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stated, metaphor is pervasive in every day life, not just in language, but in thought and action. One of the earliest theorists to use metaphors in the organizational sense was Morgan (1983). He stated that metaphors are "a basic structural form of experience through which human beings engage, organize, and understand their world" (Morgan, 1983, p. 601). Morgan (1986) used metaphors as a means of describing and analyzing organizations. For example, he described the metaphor of an organization as a "machine", "organism", "political system", "brain", and as an "instrument of domination". Morgan (1983, 1986) believed that researchers should be encouraged to adopt the technique of reading social situations through the spectacles of a wide range of metaphors.

Over the years, several researchers have used metaphors to help explain career theory. For example, Schein (1978) used the metaphor of career anchors in his research. Rapoport and Rapoport (1980) proposed a triple helix model to represent women's career development. Powell and Mainiero (1992) are well known for their development of the "cross currents in the river of time" metaphor, where they conceptualized women's career development using language such as currents, river, and river banks.

More recently, Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) used the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to conceptualize women's career development. Inkson (2004b) also developed nine key metaphors to describe the varied nature of career development. The use of metaphors represent an alternative way in which to make meaning of, and to understand, the complexity of career development. As Inkson (2004b, p. 97) stated, "each of us has our personal lens through which to look at careers, our own image of what a career is".

One of the most common metaphors used to describe career development is as a "journey". Baruch (2004) for example, described career as a journey where people can take the beaten path or choose to navigate their own way. Inkson (2002) similarly explained that a journey metaphor conceptualizes career as movement which may occur geographically, between jobs, occupations, or organizations. He used three definitions of path to describe the types of career development that individuals may experience (Inkson, 2002, p. 26). In a type 1 career, each person creates their own unique path. In a type 2 career, paths are created through repetition or imitation. The path created by early travelers paves the way for those who come later (Inkson, 2002). In a type 3 career, someone makes the decision about where the path is and what it should be like, and has constructed it in advance to assist travelers (Inkson, 2002). Using these definitions, a traditional career relates to a type 2 or type 3 path, where as the more recent boundaryless career is more closely aligned to a type 1 path. As Inkson (2004b, p. 103) argued, the boundaryless career concept suggests that the boundaries restricting the career journey are becoming more permeable, that is the "career journey is perhaps evolving into the more open-ended notion of career travel".

This article will demonstrate how participants in the research used metaphoric language relating to "journey", "path", and "road" to make sense of, and conceptualize their career trajectories. These conceptualizations are analyzed in relation to Inkson's (2002) three types of career paths to assess whether the participants experienced a traditional and/or boundaryless career.

Research design

A qualitative methodology was used to conduct the research. It was felt that a qualitative method (through the use of semi-structured interviews) would provide a highly personalized and rich detailed exploration of the career development of participants. Previous researchers have successfully used interviews as an effective means of researching careers (Arthur *et al.*, 1999; Cochran, 1990; Cohen and Mallon, 2001; Levinson *et al.*, 1978, Levinson and Levinson, 1996; Marshall, 1989, 1995; Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007; White *et al.*, 1992). The use of interviews in the study allowed the researcher to explore and understand the range of feelings, attitudes, and motivations expressed by each participant, creating a very individualized account of their career development.

The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 90 minutes in duration, with 12 conducted face-to-face and 47 via the telephone. The interviews were conducted until saturation was reached, that is, no new themes emerged (Flick, 1998). The research had three broad objectives:

- (1) How do the men and women in the research make sense of and conceptualize their career trajectories?
- (2) How do men and women in the research articulate and conceptualize what career and career success means to them?

- (3) Based on the perceptions of the men and women in the research, how do the following factors act to constrain or enable career development: personal factors, such as gender, balancing career and family, and the importance of family and friends; inter-personal factors, such as mentors and networks; and organizational factors, such as opportunities for education, training and development, work experience, organizational culture, politics, equal opportunities within organizations, and organizational career management?

This paper focuses on addressing the first research objective. During the interviews the participants were asked to describe their career history to date, as well as what a career and career success meant to them. The questions were designed to be open-ended so that the participants felt free to express their thoughts and experiences in whatever form they wished. As a result, many participants tended to use metaphoric language in describing their career development.

There were several key steps in the data analysis phase. First, each interview was audio taped and then transcribed into Microsoft Word. Second, the career development of each participant was then summarized. From there, each interview was content analyzed and coded for emerging themes relating to the three key research objectives. The researcher was the sole person responsible for coding the data. The coding process revealed that many participants used metaphoric language to describe their career trajectories, with the most common metaphor relating to “journey”, “path”, or “road”. The results discussed in this article relate to the use of such a metaphor.

The sample comprised 30 men and 29 women employed in a range of organizations, including universities; chartered accounting firms; the corporate sector; the not-for-profit sector; and in sole practice. See Table I for a breakdown of participants by organizational type. They held a range of accounting related positions, from graduate right through to senior partner; and associate lecturer to associate professor. A range of sampling techniques were used during the study, including purposive sampling where a range of organizations were specifically chosen in an attempt to obtain a range of sizes and types (as listed above), as well as by targeting participants through a national accounting association; convenience sampling where some organizations were chosen based on close geographic location to the researcher; and snow ball sampling where participants were asked to help identify other potential people for the study. Where organizations agreed to participate in the study, the HR representative was responsible for nominating specific individuals to participate in the research. It is recognized that the latter issue does raise questions of bias, however the participants sampled appeared to express both positive and

Organization type	Males	Females	Total
Accounting firm	11	13	24
Corporate sector	11	5	16
Education	5	5	10
Self-employed	2	7	9
Not-for-profit sector	1	0	1
Total	30	30	

Table I.
Participants by organizational type

Note: The total for women is 30 as one participant was employed as both an accountant and teacher

negative attitudes about their career and organization, thereby minimizing some bias. The sample was limited only to the accounting profession so that realistic comparisons could be made between the career experiences of the participants. The diverse range of organizational types sampled helped to ensure that a variety of career paths could be explored.

The age range for men was 23–66 and 28–72 for women. The average age of the men was 41, compared to 43 for the women. Of the participants, 52 were aged 30 or older, whilst one male and one female were over the age of 65.

Results

Job and organizational tenure of participants

In contrast to the boundaryless career theory, which argues that careers in the twenty-first century will involve greater mobility, the majority of the participants in the research had long periods of stable employment with the one organization. A significant portion of participants ($n = 12$, – nine males and three females) had actually remained with the same organization during their career to date. There were also a further 29 participants (13 males and 16 females) who after one or two early job changes, had settled in the one organization, with intentions of remaining there. Participants indicated that they had been in their current position for an average of 4.6 years and been with their current organization for an average of 9.5 years. The number of participants who had worked for the one organization for five years or longer was $n = 29$.

The proportion of participants who did not experience a traditional career could be categorized into three groups. First, it included some of the younger participants whose careers had not yet developed enough to determine whether they were traditional or boundaryless (seven participants were aged 30 or younger at the time of interview). Second, it comprised some of the female employees who tended to change their employment situation to accommodate family commitments. For example, switching from full-time to part-time work, or from full-time to contract based work or self-employment. Third, it included participants who changed career paths within the accounting profession. For example, leaving a chartered firm or the corporate sector to become an accounting lecturer at a university ($n = 7$). Whilst the career development of this latter group could be viewed as boundaryless, such participants actually followed a traditional career path whilst they remained an accountant or a lecturer. That is, they still tended to follow an upwards trajectory within the one organization.

The career path metaphor

Many of the participants in the research used “journey”, “path”, or “road” metaphors to describe their career development. The participants were not asked to use metaphoric language, but it became a common means of how they conceptualized or made sense of their trajectories. As one participant stated, “career is not a destination, it is a journey” (participant 58M). Note: M or F is used to denote male or female. Other similar phrases included “parallel routes; crossroads; turning point; career path; propelled; plateau; travel; and bumpy road”.

Traditional career development

Type 3 career path. Inkson’s (2002) type 3 path is most in line with the definition of traditional career development. The research demonstrated that the professional

structure of accounting careers resulted in participants following a more traditional career path (type 3). It tended to be a “sequential path” (participant 29M). For those individuals interested in becoming partner, there was a particular career path they were required to follow, typically set out by the partners of the firm. Individuals tended to commence as a trainee or graduate and progress up the organizational hierarchy to senior accountant, associate, director and partner. If the individual did not commence as a graduate in the firm, they typically had to spend time in a senior role before being considered or admitted to the partnership. The number of hierarchical levels might have differed depending on the size of the firm, but there was a distinct path for participants to follow. Of the 24 participants who were employed in an accounting firm, 12 had reached partner position, while a further two participants were interested in becoming a partner:

In a chartered firm you tend to start out as a graduate or whatever and then the natural progression is just up up up until you become a partner (participant 4M).

I would say my career progressed in a way that is quite typical in the professional services firm where you start as a graduate, you do your qualification, you become a senior accountant after a couple of years, then you become a manager. You continue to work in an audit practice. You continue to do client facing work, but start to take on some internal responsibilities (participant 34, F).

It all seemed mapped out at **. I thought I'd be a partner there, and they probably did too. It seemed almost too easy and too planned (participant 8M).

For those participants employed in the corporate sector or in the education field, there was still a traditional structure to their career development. For example, seven out of the ten participants employed in the education sector experienced traditional career development; remaining at the same academic institution and slowly progressing through roles from lecturer, to senior lecturer, to associate professor. Similarly, the majority of participants in the corporate sector progressed through roles from graduate in the organization, to manager, and to senior manager. Whilst some participants had changed organizations early in their career, they tended to find an organization where they were interested in remaining there until retirement. Even when participants in the corporate sector were not interested in following a structured linear progression, there were other set paths they could follow:

When we recruit people we want to be able to offer them a choice of career paths. So when I go looking for young people to bring on board I will be able to say look come in at this level, this is the training we will give you, these are the directions you can take (participant 46F).

Type 2 career path. In Inkson's (2002) type 2 path, the path created by early travelers paves the way for those who come later. In the research, both male and female participants discussed creating such a path. One female participant for example, talked about establishing a women's network in her firm in order to improve the career development of other female employees. “I've tried to set one up for women because one of the things I would like to leave behind is a better road for women through the practice” (participant 33F).

Boundaryless careers

Type 1 career path. There were some participants in the research who discussed proactively seeking out their own career path in order to satisfy their own personal

motivations and circumstances. They were creating their own path (type 1), rather than following a structured or pre-designed career path:

I've stayed on a path with working for similar sized clients. I could have done a transfer overseas at another stage in my career that might have given me some kind of confidence that I don't have now. . . In our profession it is common to move. It's common to have them {overseas or domestic transfers} a few years into your career. . . I wanted to choose my own destiny. I wonder whether that has limited my opportunities or given me the confidence to go for other opportunities (participant 32F).

I've chosen a path in mining that is quite lucrative in that sense (participant 16F).

The above female participant for example, worked in a range of organizational types and sizes during her career. She started with a large accounting firm, then worked overseas, then returned to Australia to work for the previous accounting firm, before working with a school. She then moved interstate and worked first for a tertiary educational institution and then a professional services firm whilst her children were young. She then sought out a career in working in remote areas for mining companies due to the lucrative financial benefits.

There were other participants who indicated that they did not have traditional views of a career, that is to climb the ladder and achieve increasing power, position, or status. This is in line with the boundaryless career concept, which suggests individuals are more interested in achieving a work-life balance, rather than vertical progression (Hall, 1996b). The following quotes demonstrate the desire for greater work-life balance:

I don't have an end point where I've got to be a Vice President or I've got to be anything in particular (participant 16F).

I haven't tried to build an empire or climb a mountain (participant 31M).

It's very different when you are single. You are on that path to being partner or whatever or managing director. It probably doesn't change much when you get married, but when you have children. You've got to make your decision whether you want to continue on that path and organize your life around that with a nanny or whatever. Or you choose that you want to have time with your family and time off, but still career-minded. Or you can choose to opt out altogether. That's definitely when it happened for me (participant 7F).

So a successful career is one that helps you support your family because that's what you are trying to do. Whichever avenues you take in your career that satisfy your own ambitions and what you are trying to achieve, but also for the purpose of assisting your family (participant 20M).

Crossroads

An emerging theme of the research was that a number of participants expressed that they had reached or had experienced a "crossroads" in their career journey. The question is does such a crossroads relate more to the traditional or boundaryless career theory?

The participants tended to reach a "crossroads" in their career journey during their late 30s or early 40s. For some of the participants it was because they had reached a plateau in their career development as they had progressed to senior positions within their organization. At this point, some participants were content to continue coasting along in their career, however many participants (six men and five women) had reached what they all called a "crossroads" or "turning point". The participants

admitted feeling, discontented, bored with their jobs, vulnerable and unsure over their future direction. As a result, the participants began to reevaluate their careers.

The female participants for example, redirected their career paths to either establish their own business ($n = 3$), moved to contract based work and business related teaching ($n = 1$), and became a primary school teacher. Such trajectories relate more to a boundaryless career, in which individuals move jobs or organizations in an attempt to find greater flexibility.

With regard to the men, two participants chose to establish their own business, and four pursued an academic career at a university. Such behaviour reflected a boundaryless career as the motivations for the men to pursue such career changes were to seek greater flexibility, more control over the job, and to perform more fulfilling and stimulating work. However, for these men that entered the academic profession, they then expressed some tendencies for wanting a traditional career as they were interested in vertical progression.

Further supporting the boundaryless career theory, one of the main reasons behind the “crossroads” was the participants’ dilemma of how to better balance work and family. They appeared to struggle over whether to follow the traditional type 3 career path, or follow a more flexible type 1 boundaryless career path which might offer better work-life balance. Three of the male participants admitted being unhappy with their work-family balance, but were unsure or unwilling to take any proactive steps to resolve the conflict. For example, the following participant was aged 35 at the time of the interview and was a chief financial officer in a large business. He indicated it was common to work long hours and was not sure where he saw his future, either inside or outside the organization. His comment encapsulates the dilemma faced by these men:

Most of my peers don’t think about another career until they reach the end of their career path. . . For me I’m only 35 and I’ve reached that point. What do I do, should I be poor but seek happiness. Or should I make us comfortable before I break off. What’s the responsible thing to do? I don’t know the answer. . . Where I am now is 75 per cent there, but in order to get the other 25 per cent I might have to go back to zero. Am I able to wriggle in my current position and get a better work life balance, or will I have to reassess and take on something else? It’s easy when you are on the career path because you can collapse the world down into very simple equations. Well this is me now, this is what I want to do and this is how I have to do it. A much more important issue would be the ability to see yourself in a wider society and run your career path on parallel routes, rather than just focused on work (participant 21M).

Similarly, a female participant (aged in her late 40s) gave up a highly successful career as a finance director to establish her own accounting practice. She felt that the sacrifices she had made to achieve such success were not worth it:

You expect when you get there that there will be this great rush of feeling or expectation and there wasn’t. It wasn’t what I wanted. I always thought that this is what I wanted. I wanted recognition, I wanted to be somebody that people would look up to and say look what she did against all odds, and that’s the reality. When I actually sat there in that job and realized what I was giving away. If I had stayed in that job my health would have deteriorated and I reckon I would have been dead if I stayed there. Then I look at my family and I think what I gave away. During all this time the daughter that my husband and I had together had grown up virtually on her own because I was off chasing a career (participant 23F).

As stated earlier, Hall (1996b) believed that in a boundaryless career, the need for on-going skills development and knowledge acquisition will influence career development. In the research, the participants similarly expressed concerns about

becoming bored in a job that would not offer any future career development, either through variety or challenging work. For example, participant 32 felt that the problem with her career going forward was that she may become bored with the job. She was aged 40 and a partner in one of the top four professional services firms:

If you look at my career I have not stayed in one place... I can sense that if I don't do something, I will get bored. Fortunately in my area there is a lot of business development. How long I will stay I don't know. So that's why I am at a crossroads... I can't see that for the rest of my life I will want to do what I am doing now... I suppose that's where I am struggling now, in terms of which direction do I go in? (Participant 32F).

As another example, a male participant who was a senior manager in a large multi-national corporation, revealed that he was "struggling to see where to go next" in his career:

I can't easily see the next step in the path, but I've never really worried about the next step in the past as I have gone through my career. It's been quite fast paced. I've successfully done a job and the next stage has taken care of itself. Whereas now I am quite concerned that I can't see where the opportunities are and I can't see the organization is doing too much about that (participant 13M).

The following quote further emphasizes the focus on challenging work:

You get to various t-junctions every now and then and you have to work out what you want to do. I could go out and put myself in the market and do something different or join a client or become a CFO. For me I've got my head down and the role I've got its enough challenge for me. In a few years time 3-5 years time, I'll be at another t-junction and what is the next challenge (participant 31M).

In contrast to some of these negative "crossroads", some participants experienced a positive "turning point" in their career path. For them, the metaphor referred to a significant milestone in their career which they believed help to accelerate their future career development. The turning point related to acquiring new skills or being exposed to a particular challenge. Of the three participants who referred to a positive "turning point", they all went on to achieve partner in what was typically a traditional career:

The turning point for me was my secondment to Africa... I was way out of my comfort zone... I learnt a lot very quickly... That is where my career propelled forward (participant 31M).

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

Conclusion and implications

The purpose of this article has been to understand how participants make sense of career through the lens of a journey or path metaphor. Inkson's (2002) three types of career paths was then used as a framework to determine whether the participants followed either a traditional and/or boundaryless career. The benefit of using the journey or path metaphor is that it helps to explain and illustrate the various career

options open to individuals. The journey metaphor was derived from the participants' own explanation of their career trajectories, and thus not a metaphor imposed by the researcher.

The results revealed that participants discussed experiencing all three types of Inkson's (2002) career paths. The three path types demonstrate that the participants experienced aspects of both a traditional and boundaryless career. Supporting the traditional theory of career development, many participants talked of following a type 3 career path in which they entered an organization and slowly progressed through roles, achieving increasing position and responsibility. Such a career journey was necessary if they wished to become partner. Given that pursuing partner requires considerable career and financial commitment on behalf of participants, it may mean that the accounting profession requires individuals to only follow a structured or pre-designed path (type 3). This raises the question that in "professional careers", is a type 3 or traditional career path the only option for individuals?

On the other hand however, there were some participants in the research who experienced a type 1 or boundaryless career. These participants did not follow the traditional path as they were interested in achieving a better work-life balance, or wanted to pursue more stimulating types of work. The conflict surrounding balancing work and family resulted in considerable stress for some participants as it caused them to question whether they should follow the more traditional type 3 path, or carve out their own type 1 career path. If both men and women are increasingly defining career success in terms of a greater work-life balance as suggested by this research, then organizations need to ensure that the workplace is more accommodating of this issue. Otherwise, they risk losing valuable staff (who will be expensive to replace), and may risk recruiting fewer of the younger generation into the accounting profession.

The study also revealed that many participants were interested in pursuing on-going skills development and seeking out challenging or stimulating work. This often occurred after they had reached senior positions in their organization. The participants tended to reach what they referred to as a "crossroads" or "t-junction" in their career development. At this point they began to re-evaluate their future career direction. This is in line with the boundaryless career concept in which individuals are interested in pursuing such work to satisfy individual goals (Hall, 1996b). The implication is that achieving a senior position is no longer enough satisfaction or a sign of success, but continued mental stimulation is increasingly important to individuals. This supports the work of recent theorists (Arthur *et al.*, 2005; Gunz and Heslin, 2005; Heslin, 2005) who have begun to recognize the importance of understanding both objective and subjective measures when exploring definitions of career and success, including the attitudes of individuals about their career. Wise and Millward (2005) similarly argued that this desire for continued growth and learning is a feature of contemporary careers, and not just associated with traditional or linear models of career development.

More specifically, Morley *et al.* (2001) also conducted a survey: "Gender issues in Australian accounting", which explored a range of issues including work satisfaction and career goals. The survey revealed that some of the most important determinates of job satisfaction for both genders were a good balance between work and personal life, variety and challenge at work, and opportunities for professional development (Morley *et al.*, 2001). In a similar study on the work and lifestyle choices of its members, the

Institute of Chartered Accountants of Australia (ICAA) also found that job satisfaction and a good work-life balance ranked highly for their members, compared to factors such as mobility or power and status (ICAA, 2001).

Implications for further research

Given the study was limited only to individuals employed in the accounting profession, there are a number of avenues for further research. First, further research is needed on a much broader occupational base in order to determine whether a traditional career is preferred by other individuals or groups. Are the circumstances of the accounting profession unique, or would other professions also challenge the boundaryless career concept? For example, the legal profession enables individuals to rise through the organization to become partner. Does such financial and career commitment among lawyers also require that they follow a structured organizational career? Conversely, is the boundaryless career concept more applicable for non-professional careers?

Second, the majority of participants in this research were employed in large organizations where there were numerous paths or opportunities for growth and progression. Does this influence whether individuals choose to follow a traditional or boundaryless career?

Third, this research emphasized that career development was often influenced by how the participants viewed career and success. More in-depth research is needed which explores how men and women of various ages, backgrounds and family situations define career and success. As this research suggests, is there a shift towards a more subjective conceptualization of "career"? Do the majority of individuals still aspire to a traditional notion of career, or are younger employees changing their career expectations in line with the boundaryless career concept? What are the similarities and differences between how various age cohorts conceptualize career and success? Also, does the hierarchical nature of an accounting career (graduate to senior, to partner) influence the meaning of career and success?

Finally, given a number of participants discussed reaching a "crossroads", future research could examine this issue in more detail. Why are individuals reaching a crossroads? Is it different for men and women? What leads them to choose different paths or roads? Can organizations play a greater role in helping individuals navigate such a crossroads?

References

- Adamson, S., Doherty, N. and Viney, C. (1998), "The meaning of career revisited: implications for theory and practice", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 251-9.
- Arthur, M. (1994), "The boundaryless career", *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 7-22.
- Arthur, M. and Rousseau, D. (1996), *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Arthur, M., Inkson, K. and Pringle, J. (1999), *The New Careers: Individual Action and Economic Change*, Sage Publications, London.
- Arthur, M., Khapova, S. and Wilderom, C. (2005), "Career success in a boundaryless career world", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 26, pp. 177-202.

- Baruch, Y. (2004), "Transforming careers: from linear to multidirectional career paths. organisational and individual perspectives", *Career Development International*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 58-73.
- Baruch, Y. (2006), "Career development in organizations and beyond: balancing traditional and contemporary viewpoints", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 125-38.
- Cochran, L. (1990), "Narrative as a paradigm for careers research", in Young, R, and Borgen, W. (Eds), *Methodological Approaches to the Study of Careers*, Praeger Publishers, New York, NY.
- Cohen, L. and Mallon, M. (2001), "My brilliant career? Using stories as a methodological tool in careers research", *International Studies of Management & Organization*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 48-68.
- CPA Australia (2007), "CFOs find graduates demanding", *Intheblack*, Vol. 77 No. 6, p. 14.
- Flick, U. (1998), *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Grant, D. and Osrick, C. (Eds) (1996), *Metaphor and Organisations*, Sage, London.
- Gunz, H. and Heslin, P. (2005), "Reconceptualising career success", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 105-11.
- Hall, D. (1996a), *Career Development*, Boston University Press, Boston, MA.
- Hall, D. (1996b), "Protean careers of the twenty-first century", *The Academy of Management Executive*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 8-16.
- Heslin, P. (2005), "Conceptualising and evaluating career success", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 113-36.
- Inkson, K. (2002), "Thinking creatively about careers: the use of metaphor", in Peiperl, M., Arthur, M., Goffee, R. and Anand, N. (Eds), *Career Creativity: Explorations in the Re-Making of Work*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 15-34.
- Inkson, K. (2004a), "Careers and organisations: a figure-ground problem", *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 1-13.
- Inkson, K. (2004b), "Images of career: nine key metaphors", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 65 No. 1, pp. 96-111.
- Institute of Chartered Accountants of Australia (2001), *ICAA: Balanced Lifestyle Rates Higher than Cash for Many CAs*, media release, available at: www.icaa.org.au/news/index/cfm?id=A1035842466 (accessed 15 December 2003).
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980), *Metaphors We Live by*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Levinson, D. and Levinson, J. (1996), *The Seasons of a Woman's Life*, Alfred Knopf, New York, NY.
- Levinson, D., Darrow, C., Klein, E., Levinson, M. and McKee, B. (1978), *The Seasons in a Man's Life*, Alfred Knopf, New York, NY.
- Mainiero, L. and Sullivan, S. (2005), "Kaleidoscope careers: an alternative explanation for the 'opt-out' revolution", *Academy of Management Executive*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 106-23.
- Marshall, J. (1989), "Re-visioning career concepts: a feminist invitation", in Arthur, M., Hall, D. and Lawrence, B. (Eds), *Handbook of Career Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Marshall, J. (1995), *Women Managers Moving on: Exploring Career and Life Choices*, Routledge, London.

- Morgan, G. (1983), "More on metaphor: why we cannot control tropes science", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 601-7.
- Morgan, G. (1986), *Images of Organization*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Morley, C., O'Neill, M., Jackson, M. and Bellamy, S. (2001), *Gender Issues in Australian Accounting. A Survey of Women and Men Accountants in the Profession*, CPA Australia, Melbourne.
- Powell, G. and Mainiero, L. (1992), "Cross-currents in the river of time: conceptualizing the complexities of women's careers", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 215-38.
- Pringle, J. and Mallon, M. (2003), "Challenges for the boundaryless career odyssey", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 14 No. 5, pp. 839-54.
- Ramsey, K. (2006), "Solving the skills shortage", *Charter*, Vol. 10 No. 10, pp. 28-30.
- Rapoport, R. and Rapoport, R. (1980), "Balancing work, family and leisure: a triple helix model", in Derr, C. (Ed.), *Work, Family and the Career*, Praeger Publishing, New York, NY.
- Schein, E. (1978), *Career Dynamics: Matching Individual and Organizational Needs*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Sullivan, S. and Mainiero, L. (2007), "The changing nature of gender roles, alpha/beta careers and work-life issues, theory-driven implications for human resource management", *Career Development International*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 238-63.
- Super, D. (1957), *The Psychology of Careers*, Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Tsoukas, H. (1993), "Analogical reasoning and knowledge generation in organisation theory", *Organisation Studies*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 323-46.
- White, B., Cox, C. and Cooper, C. (1992), *Women's Career Development: A Study of High Flyers*, Blackwell Business, Oxford.
- Wilkinson, M. (2007), "It's not about the money", *Charter*, Vol. 78 No. 1, pp. 32-5.
- Wise, A. and Millward, L. (2005), "The experiences of voluntary career change in 30-somethings and implications for guidance", *Career Development International*, Vol. 10 No. 5, pp. 400-17.

Further reading

- Hall, D. (2004), "The protean career: a quarter-century journey", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 65 No. 1, pp. 1-13.
- Herriot, P. (1992), *The Career Management Challenge*, Sage Publications, London.
- Hewlett, S. and Buck Luce, C. (2005), "Off-ramps and on-ramps: keeping talented women on the road to success", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 83 No. 3, pp. 43-54.
- Inkson, K. and Amundson, N. (2002), "Career metaphors and their application in theory and counseling practice", *Journal of Employment Counseling*, Vol. 98, p. 108.

About the author

Theresa Smith-Ruig is a lecturer in the School of Business, Economics and Public Policy at the University of New England. She teaches in the areas of HRM at a undergraduate and post-graduate level. Her research interests are in the field of career development, and disability and employment. Theresa Smith-Ruig can be contacted at: tsmith24@une.edu.au