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**OLDER WORKERS & NEW CAREERS:**

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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2005



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## CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

This is to certify that the research carried out for my Doctoral thesis entitled "Older Workers and New Careers: An Exploratory Study" in the Department of Management and International Business, Massey University, Albany, New Zealand is my own work and that the thesis material has not been used in part or in whole for any other qualification.

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Signature *Kerr Inkson*

Date 10<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2004.

## ABSTRACT

The existing literature of older workers and careers focuses on the challenges for older workers in maintaining employment in the new environment, revealing increased demands to adapt to an environment of uncertainty and decreased job or career security, compounded by age and discriminatory factors. The current career management literature proposes so far under-researched models of sustaining careers in this uncertain environment, including ideas of career resilience, protean career behaviours and career competencies.

The findings of this study contributes to the literature a predominantly positive picture of employed older workers: despite exposure to restructuring, redundancies, organisational change and regional economic downturns in the 1990's, most exhibit career behaviours and on going learning in ways that foster their progress and sustain their employment and their careers. Undertaken in a regional setting, themes emerge of detachment from traditional career concepts and practices, flexible patterns of employment, multiple job holding and self-employment. The effective practices of career management suggested by existing models are affirmed and extended.

The study uses a qualitative research methodology based on in-depth interviews, using a life history approach. The data is gathered through the career stories of 32 participants in a range of occupations, all of whom are employed older workers.

The study reports differing views of career, and distinctive ways of working in a rural regional environment. Using the behaviours derived from the data, the study proposes a model of effective behaviours for the new careers environment. This (PAIL) model proposes proactivity, adaptability, identity awareness and learning as behaviours which most assist the goals and progress of individual career actors; a typology is offered to illustrate and support this model. This study contributes to our understanding of careers in diverse contexts, and contributes valuable empirical data regarding ways in which career actors have achieved work and personal success in the current environment.

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Inspiration also came from colleagues in the academic world who I looked to for advice and assistance, and most of all as role models of accomplishment.

Thank you also to the friends who encouraged me over the long haul, and to my children who seemed to understand. Especially to my husband Brett who lived with the development, the ideas, and the work, and who recognised that undertaking this work at a time of changing locations, and planting a vineyard was a necessary part of my own 'path with a heart.' Thank you for your love, encouragement and support.

*This thesis is dedicated to my 24 year old son, Kiet, who died in an accident on September 25, 2004, just as I was finishing this work. When he recently asked me about the thesis, I told him it was about career management, and he then asked me how much I had written. I said "about 250 pages." There was a pause, and he said, "That would be about all there is to say about the subject, wouldn't it?" Not quite, but it is certainly all I can say right now.*

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