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CAREER ATTITUDES AND VALUES  
OF PROFESSIONAL MEN AND WOMEN:  
A LIFE STAGE AND CAREER STAGE  
COMPARISON

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## ABSTRACT

The present study was designed to compare the work attitudes and values of professional men and women and to relate these to two theoretical models. The intention was to determine if Levinson's (1978) and Super's (1957) models of life and career stage could account for the experiences of a sample of New Zealand professional people.

Each model was tested by separate MANOVAs for any significant differences between the sexes as well as variance within respondent's work attitudes within each formulation of stages. The results indicated that there were no significant differences between the work attitudes of men and women in the research sample. Levinson's model accounted for some differences between stages on the work attitudes; "willingness to relocate", "intention to leave", and "desire for promotion". Super's model accounted for more differences between stages on the work attitudes; "intention to leave", "desire for promotion", "preferred timing for promotion", "organisational commitment", and "job involvement". There were some differences between men and women on the importance placed on certain work values across career and life stages. However, there were more similarities than differences. Across both sexes, and both life and career stages, the following work values were deemed to be important; "Intellectual Stimulation", "Achievement", "Way of Life", and "Supervisory Relations".

The implications of these results are discussed in relation to previous research as well as practical implications for organisations and human resource practitioners.

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

Career development is deemed to be an integral part of human resource management and organisational development. Within New Zealand, however, this area of study has been somewhat neglected over the past few years. Therefore, recent research conducted overseas (particularly within the United States of America) in this area needs to be applied to the New Zealand working population to take advantage of the benefits possible for employees and employers through the effective use of career planning and management. Through comparisons of the different populations involved, implications arising from the similarities and differences between such studies could be examined which may lead to applied solutions for practitioners dealing with human resource issues.

In addition, it would be appropriate to use a theoretical basis which can be utilised within an applied context for such career research, as is the case in the following study. This is similar to that of several studies recently conducted within the United States of America and seemed to be a logical point from which to approach research within New Zealand. In particular, the study of careers across Life and Career stages is most notable as organisations and employees are increasingly linked in a reciprocal relationship which may be mutually beneficial or detrimental

to both. With this in mind, effective utilisation of career development practices and policies may contribute to a win-win situation for both employees and the organisations they work for. Examining differences between male and female employees as well as employees at different life and career stages may also have implications for the effective application of career development strategies. It is therefore important to keep in mind that a career can be interpreted as a two-way matching process in which the organisation and the individual influence each other through survival needs, socialisation, and innovation (Shullman & Carder, 1983; Adams, 1991; Ford & Bhagat, 1991).

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Throughout the western world, the 1980's was an era of change in which the interests of both employees and organisations were forced to adapt to the economic and social trends present at the time. During the 1980's employees' values changed considerably. People began expressing greater interest in challenge, self-fulfilment, autonomy, flexibility, and opportunities for growth and skill development (Russell, 1991; London & Stumpf, 1970; Hall, 1986a). Preferences were also expressed for managing one's own career and being able to achieve a balance between work, family and leisure activities (Russell, 1991; Hall, 1986a; Adams, 1991). At the same time many organisations experienced slower growth with a significant number becoming smaller - evidenced in the move towards the "downsizing" of

organisations (Dewhirst, 1991). Opportunities for movement up the corporate hierarchy consequently declined quite markedly (Dewhirst, 1991).

According to Hall (1986c) the massive corporate restructuring, demographic changes, value and cultural changes, and turbulent external environments which have and are taking place will lead to the adaptability of organisations being increasingly dependent upon the capacity of their employees to change and adapt. Therefore, effective career planning and development of employees lies at the heart of effective organisational change and efficiency (Hall, 1986c).

Following from Hall's summary of the current business environment (above) it stands to reason that in the future organisations will need to be adaptable, they will need to employ a flexible work-force, and they will need to direct their energies towards retaining high performing employees in increasingly low opportunity organisations as career progression is no longer linear or predictable (London & Stumpf, 1970; Hall, 1986b; Stroh, Brett, and Reilly, 1992). As a result, the 1990s are projected to emphasise effective implementations of career development programs to an even greater extent than in the past to meet the needs of both employees and their respective organisations (Russell, 1991).

Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that career mobility and specialisation issues will continue to present challenges for organisational policy makers as well as making significant demands on the human resource research community (Dewhurst, 1991). Many organisations will need to focus on career development programmes which can be designed to meet their dynamic human resource needs for the future (Russell, 1991). One step towards this goal is to identify a sound theoretical base on which to develop such programmes as well as identifying the needs, values, and attitudes of employees at different life or career stages. However, very little research utilising New Zealand employees has been conducted in this area despite the fact that Steffy and Jones (1988) have suggested that organisations may benefit from career development programmes that help employees (particularly female employees) in planning their careers, and that this may, in turn, serve as a possible source of organisational commitment.

Furthermore, the proportion of women in the labour force has increased steadily over the last few decades, particularly from the 1961 to the 1991 Census within New Zealand (New Zealand Planning Council, 1989; Holdom, 1991; Department of Statistics (NZ), 1992; Osipow, 1991; McGregor, Thomson, & Dewe, 1993; Bingham, 1983; Department of Statistics (NZ), 1993). Presently 36.2% of the total full-time working population in paid employment are women (Department of Statistics (NZ), 1993). This represents over a third of

people in full-time paid employment, in addition, a great number of women are employed in paid part-time work or unpaid/voluntary work (Department of Statistics (NZ), 1993). As this influx of women into the labour market has been evident in all industrialised countries (Mannheim, 1993), it is surprising that very little research has focused on women's career development.

Women tend to face more choices when it comes to investments in work, family, and the timing of children (McKeen & Burke, 1992). As a result, it is generally assumed that the career paths of successful women differ from those of successful men. The career paths of successful women are often deemed to be less predictable than those of men for a variety of social, biological, and economic reasons. Consequently, one cannot simply assume, as has often been the case, that conclusions based on research using samples of men are necessarily true for women (Mannheim, 1993). For example, entering employment for the first time at mid-life or re-entering it after a long absence is almost exclusively a female phenomenon (Bingham, 1983). However, despite these facts and assumptions there has been very little research focused specifically on career path comparisons between men and women (Cox & Harquail, 1991; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983; Super, 1990; Savickas, Passen, & Jarjoura, 1988; Osipow, 1991; Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980; London & Greller, 1991; Jans, 1989).

It may also be more appropriate to begin to think about men's vocational behaviour in a different way (Fitzgerald & Cherpas, 1985). It is unlikely that the majority of male careers will continue to follow the traditional career model, especially in the current employment climate of downsizing, redundancies, technological change, increased mobility, and change in industrial relations caused by the Employment Contracts Act of 1991.

Therefore, organisations who wish to remain competitive in the 1990s, and the more distant future, will have to learn to incorporate the requirements of their changing workforce. One way of achieving this is through organisation and employee career planning. However, before an organisation invests time and money into such programmes it would be wise to identify accurate prerequisite information on which to base career planning programmes. Such prerequisite information would include the needs, values, and work attitudes of employees at different ages and/or career stages. This is the purpose of the present thesis.

## 1.2 PLAN OF CHAPTERS

Chapter two of this thesis, Developmental Theories, shall focus on explaining and describing the rationale behind developmental theories of career development. In particular, the work of two developmental theorists, Super and Levinson, shall be discussed. Their models of career development form the theoretical basis of the present study.

Chapter three will provide a review of the current literature in the area of career development relevant to the present research. This literature shall relate to the research questions for the present study presented at the end of this chapter.

Chapter four, shall outline and describe the methodology used in the present study. The results shall then be presented in chapter five and discussed in chapter six with reference to prior research, the context of the present research, and implications for future research and practice.