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**Plateau and Transition:
Career Dynamics in a Changing World of Work**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University**

**Donald Alfred James Cable
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"No man needs sympathy because he has to work.Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

(Theodore Roosevelt, 1903)

The value in work, whether it be paid work in an employment situation, or non-paid work in the pursuit of academic achievement, is derived mainly from the satisfaction that results from doing that work. For myself a large part of that satisfaction is in turn dependent on the fun that one has along the way. I was fortunate in that respect to have in Dr. Ross Flett a supervisor who allowed me the freedom to introduce that fun whilst ensuring that sight was not lost of the ultimate goal. Thank you Ross for your support, understanding, and encouragement, and above all for providing an environment in which I was able to enjoy the experience. This was an experience I would willingly repeat for to experience is to learn and surely, learning from our experiences is a major satisfaction in life.

Without the cooperation of the organisations involved the scope of this research project would have been severely curtailed. I acknowledge my gratitude to Barbara McTagget of Caltex NZ Ltd, Keith Tempest of TrustPower, Chris Oaks of Manukau City Council, and John Fletcher of NZ Dairy Group, for allowing me to conduct my research within their organisations and for supporting me through that process. The enthusiasm with which these organisations accepted my proposal was in itself an inspiration.

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So, why study work?

"Ancient philosophers and contemporary psychologists remind us that, in work, we establish our identity, implement our self-referent fantasies, expiate our guilt, pay homage to our deities, reenact early family dramas, develop the capacity for intimacy, escape from unwanted intimacies, satisfy neurotic and healthy cravings, insulate ourselves from pain, and pursue our own demise."

(Myers & Cairo, 1992, p. 561)

I dedicate this work to my daughter Katrina and my son Greg, who as friends and fellow travellers in life, provided me with a special inspiration.

To those who offered me sympathy, and to those who provided support and encouragement, I say thanks. I have my prize.

ABSTRACT

This research investigated a number of hypotheses relevant to employee attitudes towards career plateau and career transition. The impact of job satisfaction, education, and the life balance orientation of individuals on career plateau and career transition, and the relationship between the two, was explored. As well as demographics, data pertaining to occupation, education, career status, career intentions, job satisfaction and life interests were examined. A self-administered questionnaire was completed by 234 managerial and supervisory employees from four major organisations. Within the study a subjectively based measure of career plateau was found to have greater explanatory power than an objectively based measure in many of the hypotheses investigated. Multiple regression analysis was utilised to explore the relationship between career plateau and career transition. Subjective career plateau contributed significantly to variability in career transition with 18% of the variance being explained. Subjective career plateau and years since last promotion, an objective measure of career plateau, were found to contribute significantly to variability in overall job satisfaction. Altogether 25% of the variance in overall job satisfaction was explained by knowing scores on these variables. Subjective career plateau contributed significantly to variability in satisfaction with promotion opportunities explaining 51% of that variance. Whilst overall job satisfaction was significant in its relationship with career transition, satisfaction with promotion opportunities was not significant due to a suppression effect. In this relationship 58% of the variance in career transition was explained by overall job satisfaction. Overall job satisfaction was found to not moderate on the relationship between career plateau and career transition or on the relationship between life balance orientation and career transition. A significant moderating effect of satisfaction with promotion opportunities was found on the relationship between career plateau and career transition with 27% of the variance being explained. A *t* test analysis indicated that career plateaued individuals were not more likely to be involved in current education nor were they more likely to state an intention to pursue further education. Univariate analysis indicated that whilst lower levels of education were associated with longer job tenures this association was not strong. Multivariate analysis revealed a significant moderating effect of education attained on the relationship between career plateau and career transition with 31% of the variance being explained. The limitations of the study are discussed. Primary amongst these are the difficulties imposed by the cross-sectional design.

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