CAREERS

THE FUTURE OF WORK

The future of work is a vital contemporary area of debate both in business and management research, and in wider social, political and economic discourse. Globally relevant issues, including the ageing workforce, rise of the gig economy, workplace automation and changing forms of business ownership, are all regularly the subject of discussion in both academic research and the mainstream media, having wider professional and public policy implications.

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Offering future research agendas and suggesting practical outcomes for today's and tomorrow's businesses and workforce, the books in this series a present powerful, challenging and polemical analysis of a diverse range of subjects in their potential to address future challenges and possible new trajectories.

The series highlights what changes still need to be made to core areas of business practice and theory in order for them to be forward facing, more representative and able to fulfil the industrial challenges of the future.

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CAREERS: THINKING, STRATEGISING AND PROTOTYPING

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Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2020

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83867-210-2 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83867-207-2 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83867-209-6 (Epub)

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To my son, remembering the places we went …

Navigating and nurturing a career is one of the most critical personal and organisational challenges of our time. Here Professor Brewer tackles the issues with insight, intellect and integrity recognising the evolving context of work, skills and fulfilment. *Careers* provides valuable tools and frameworks for the workforce planner, policy maker and business leader. Significantly, it highlights the imperative for a human centric approach, drawing a distinct and positive parallel between successful career making and city shaping.

Katherine O'Regan
Executive Director
Sydney Business Chamber

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PART I

THINKING CAREERS

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1

WHAT IS A CAREER IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

INTRODUCTION

Careers single out lives and shape them in profound ways. The notion of a career is not a straightforward concept and, increasingly, it has become more complicated. Many young people today will have multiple careers in diverse industries.

The aim, in writing this book, is to delve into the concept of career to understand how people consider their careers to understand the totality of what is at stake. As we think about the next 50 years of career making, we are only too aware of how unpredictable work and careers are becoming as new industries and divisions of labour are rapidly spawned. One must consider the possibility of different career trajectories in the face of globalisation's tendency to homogenise; and recognise the multiple coexisting meanings that embody career.

The mutable nature of work means it is time to take a fresh look at what is meant by the term career and career pathway. An increasing number of people are working in jobs that do not require either their skills or credentials. Like Robert

Frost[1], people ponder which road to take – the one more often chosen, the one less travelled or the one yet to be discovered.

Careers contain meaning, processes, collections of diverse stories and practices that are neither stagnant nor do they have fixed boundaries. The meanings, emotions and bonds that individuals and groups acquire are important in the diverse operationalisation of career.

Careers are 'spaces' becoming meaningful over time. People establish strong bonds and emotions within their careers leading to a sense of attachment, identity and dependence. A career attachment is either strong or weak. In many cases, people become career dependent and rely on a particular role to suit their individual needs and desires, which is often unrecognised or acknowledged until the point of a career transition such as redundancy or retirement.

A career signifies a particular, bounded function with skills, knowledge and attributes attached. It is a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world; hence, careers mean different things to different people. For example, a career is considered as a meaningful pursuit entailing goals and outcomes rather than defined by fixed role specifications. This process allows people with careers to develop social relationships as well as the emotional and subjective bonds with others; opportunities often denied to those who are unemployed.

Generally speaking, people searching for a career are looking for a long-term commitment and identity – that is, continuity of engagement and benefits. For people with careers in the past and now, they offer people a purpose for their life as well as a chance for becoming something beyond themselves as well as membership in a select group. This membership leads to a heightened sense of identity and meaning for the incumbent.

Career Stakeholders

As shown in Fig. 1, embarking on, developing and sustaining a career is more often than not, dependent on various stakeholders and their level of investment and commitment, directly or indirectly, in a person's pathway. The extent and nature of the stakeholders' engagement with a specific career incumbent is considerable from supervision through to a vested interest in the outcome.

The period of stakeholder engagement varies for each type of connection as does the degree of engagement with the incumbent or their overall investment in the career stakeholding. Fig. 1 also depicts the career incumbent's family as a crucial and highly engaged stakeholder, although despite goodwill is not always guiding in the best interests of the incumbent. Any specific stakeholder's influence is multidimensional, and the degree of their influence varies over time. As the career incumbent establishes their independent status,

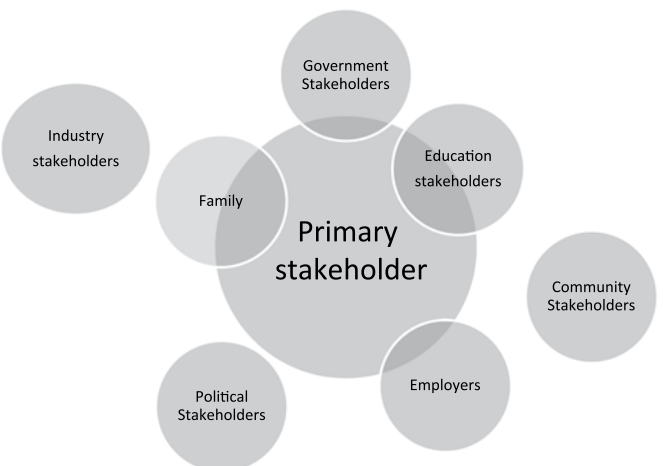

Fig. 1. Career Stakeholders.

their family's influence on their career weakens unless they are the employer.

The understanding of the term career is much wider than in the past to embrace a more comprehensive and multilateral view. As the relationship between employer and employee expands (Rousseau, 1995), conventional employment changes from full-time, casual, contingent or contract-based. These changes are employer driven and adopted eventually by industry and government industries. Employers as invested stakeholders determine the nature and duration of the employment contract. They also control career tracks within their organisations, for example, resources and remuneration. A supervisor as another stakeholder controls the work to be performed. Government, community and political stakeholders influence and are influenced by career outcomes and changes. In some cases, this array of stakeholders has a generalised responsibility for sustaining the work that the primary stakeholder conducts. Other stakeholders shaping careers include customers, clients, students, community members and patients.

Work is purposive for all stakeholders, and career is particularly purposive for the incumbent stakeholder.

Careers and Work

Work, as distinct from career, relates to a specific set of tasks. It depicts the relationship between individual effort and performance in executing these tasks. While work is embedded in the notion of career, the latter takes a wide angle view to include a vocational focus as well as a continuation in maintaining and progressing through particular career track overtime.

Increasing labour market competition and rapid technological change are shaping expectations about careers and work

employment. Technological change leads to new opportunities and outcomes for all career stakeholders, while it closes down options for others due to its entry barriers and requirements to maintain membership. Employers require greater mobility and flexibility from employees (Gubler, Arnold, & Coombs, 2014; McMahon, Watson, & Lee, 2019) as business needs change, which impacts on careers and so career change is less remarkable than it once was. At any given point, a person is either in a career, in the midst of a career transition, for example, embarking on a career for the first time, or transitioning to retirement.

The backdrop in this book is the changing nature of industrially developed societies in which having a career is celebrated and equated with success. In many societies, careers remain protected through upholding entry requirements and quotas. Investment in a career is based on a credentialed qualification, which, in the past, was relatively cost-effective as it usually guaranteed employment compared to today. In the past, employment security was relatively assured, as was the prospective return on investment or ROI being comparatively high. Careers were professionally specified by educational, professional or industrial associations, each with their norms and customs that changed overtime progressively. Hyper-specialisation shaped careers in the twentieth century. Hence, there was an aura or 'halo-effect' encircling the notion of a career that transmogrifies it from the mundane to something beyond the ordinary (Gell, 1992). These aspects of careers are changing today.

Career Perspectives, Context and Structures

In this section, careers and career thinking are considered from various, interrelated perspectives: sociological, vocational and psychological. The sociological literature is

focussed on labour market trends and participation and how work is organised. Questions such as how do labour markets and organisations change over time, why and what will this mean for the future, thrive throughout the decades.

Career paths are based on regulatory processes as well as culture, values and stories (Moore, Gunz, & Hall, 2007; Patton & McIlveen, 2009). These stories are told and retold to new recruits by others and provide both meaning and support to help people make sense of their world of work. A vocational approach focusses on the notions of a 'calling', apprenticeships and occupational skills whereas career paths and mentorship, an age-old tradition, is making a comeback in the twenty-first century. Although career meanings vary, there are several factors common to most definitions such as the arrangement of positions, attitudes, actions that a person experiences in employment (Arnold & Jackson, 1997; Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godschalk, 2010; Hall, 2002; Khapova & Arthur 2011). Other definitions focus on career pathways and passages.

A career is an undertaking within a specific context. The context is differentiated by social, economic and quantifiable resources, organised for an array of careers, a scope of work activities of designated requirements, within limits to attain value for primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders (based on Turner, 2014).

The reality of the world of work as people enter it, often means that what a career provides for and requires of them is very different from their expectations. Most people who have been in the workforce for a long time will observe how this pattern has changed from the time of their first job to their current one.

Acquiring a career is a complex process, whether starting up a business, helping others or contributing to nation-building. What contributes to this complexity are the career