

Careers in vocational education and training: What are they really like?—Literature review

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Introduction

In Australia and overseas, relationships between employers and the employed continue to be transformed. As a result, the concept of career can no longer be defined through a single life-stage, vocational choice or lifetime employer/organisation. Rather, labour market conditions created by various factors (impacts of globalisation, information technology growth and a diversification of the workforce coupled with regulation or deregulation, privatisation, competition and a shift in traditional work from manufacturing to service/technology) has brought into being changing understandings of career. Career is now understood as a concept going beyond an individual's employment status to reach into their engagement with social, environmental and educational factors to become part of their individual experience. Alongside this transformation for individuals, the field of human resource management and organisations are being challenged to think about how best to respond to these observed changes.

This review is organised into a number of sections. In the first section, various understandings of career are examined in a broad sense to identify what changes have occurred and what these may mean for both individuals and organisations. Reasons for these changes are examined alongside ideas of how 'career' may manifest in terms of an individual's engagement with the concept.

The second section examines the implications of these changing notions of career for individuals and for those parts of organisations with responsibility for workforce development.

In the final section, the literature relating to the overall VET workforce is examined with particular emphasis on the changing nature of work in the sector, career pathways and the ways in which various practices are organised to support both individual and organisational development.

Notions of 'career'

There is little dispute among authors that the concept of career has changed, and that the forces which affect organisations are, in turn, affecting the ways in which individual workers interact with structures of organisations. 'Career' can no longer be viewed as 'one job for life' and it is now necessary that workers constantly re-invent themselves. They are required to consistently take on new skills, adapt to changing environments, re-learn ways of working and move both sideways and upwards within their various industries (for example, see Arnold 1997; Herriot 1992; MacMahon, Patton & Tatham 2003; Opengart & Short 2002; Patton 2001; Peiperl & Baruch 1997; Storey 2000). These requirements become more important in an environment where long-term tenure is increasingly being replaced by shorter-term contracts.

Gender and diversity, in terms of the influence of more women participating in the workforce, and differences in ethnicity, age and background of the workforce are suggested by Hirsch and Jackson (2004) as reasons for changing career expectations in the 21st century. A wider range of routes taken through education, entry and re-entry into the labour market all affect how career might be conceptualised (Hirsch & Jackson 2004, p.8). The wide range of routes, chosen or experienced, effectively creates an environment where organisations may recruit employees with very varied, rather than highly specified, career experiences.

In seeking to explain these changes, two different ways of understanding career have become prevalent in the literature (Walton & Mallon 2004, p.76). One perspective views career as something that a person constructs - that is, an individual's own sense of their career (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom 2005, p.178). This reflects a *subjective* view of career. An alternative perspective emphasises a more *objective* understanding of career, where a career is 'followed' by people, shaped by organisational

structures and human resource management strategies and measured in terms of positions, titles and promotions (Arthur *et al.* 2005, p.179).

The subjective view of career emphasises what the individual does and downplays the role that social structures play in shaping it. Careers are built by 'individual agents' who are responsible for developing their one 'career capital' (Inkson & Arthur, cited in Pringle & Mallon 2003, p.487). Such thinking allows all individuals to have a career, rather than a career being only for those who are able to access and move up the ladder of larger organisations or bureaucracies (Arnold & Jackson 1997). By recognising the personal nature of the concept, there is a shift from organisational control to a focus on how each individual makes sense and takes control of their own career in terms of the personal histories, skills, attitudes and beliefs they have acquired (Arnold & Jackson 1997, p.2). This coincides with the observation that more people from a wide cross-section of occupational groups are showing a greater interest in their 'personal development through work experience over the course of their lifetime' (Arnold 1997, p.7).

Arnold suggests that the concept of career 'represents a key intersection of human biography with economic and social structure' and that a person's experiences contribute to an 'integrated personal identity' (Arnold 1997, p.9). Here career is understood not as a single partitioned event, but as an on-going, fluid and certainly incremental entity. Arnold also notes that the way in which the concept of careers has changed allows for a greater understanding of the type of labour force being created by practices and experiences. New kinds of demands are being made on human adaptability through the structures being created in institutions, professions and organisations.

Arthur (1994) uses the term 'boundaryless' as a means of emphasising the subjective understanding of career and the manner in which careers are understood to 'transcend organisational boundaries' – either by individuals who see no boundaries or by others who objectively observe the behaviour of others enacting their careers (Briscoe 2006, p. 1). The term is used as a way of emphasising the fluidity of the labour force as distinct from the 'traditional career' being generally bound within one organisation or industry. Other authors have used alternative terms to describe this new form of career. For example, Hall (1996) uses the term 'protean' (that is, changeable). This term is really 'another side' of the boundaryless career in that the term emphasises the adoption of self-directed career behaviour (Briscoe 2006, p.1) which would most typically be displayed by a person with a 'boundaryless career'.

The concept of the boundaryless career is not only restricted to the idea of mobility across jobs, occupations and locations, although this is often the case in much of the literature (Sullivan & Arthur 2006, p.21). Original conceptions of this notion also emphasised the idea of psychological mobility – that is, the 'capacity to move as seen through the mind of the career actor' (Sullivan & Arthur 2006, p.21). Put another way, a boundaryless career exists where a person may see an unlimited future 'regardless of structural constraints' (Arthur & Rousseau 1996, p.6).

The concept of a boundaryless career can afford more opportunities for access and flexibility by the worker as many of these apparent changes to careers are taking place on the periphery, or 'the outside of large organisations' (Peiperl & Baruch 1997, p.11). Here workers remain attached to the organisations in some form and, when becoming consultant workers to the organisation that let them go, a number of positive situations might arise. The workers become 'free agents' (Packer 2000) and acquire a degree of independence and flexibility previously lacking. They can then enjoy a better balance between home and work and begin to form an identity that is related more to the type of work they do than to the organisation to which they used to belong (Peiperl & Baruch 1997). Indeed, these situations encapsulate some of the ways in which the new career might well be described, although the extent to which these benefits are realised may be open for some debate.

A more realistic view suggests that individuals in the boundaryless career environment may operate in terms of a mixture of agency and communion:

At a very basic level agency is about control and communion is about co-operation. Agency is individualistic, characterised by autonomy, independence, initiative and adaptation... communion in contrast is concerned about connection, relationships, tolerance and trust (Littleton, Arthur & Rousseau 2000, p.110).

These authors add the aspect of reciprocity to the concept of the boundaryless career, although this does not necessarily mean the swapping of loyalty-based entitlements and promotions, as in traditional careers, for immediate (and often higher) financial rewards for the contract system. Rather, it is suggested, reciprocity lies in the genuine mutual aspect of the commitment for both parties. Citing project work, they suggest that benefits accrue to both partners beyond the conclusion of a project:

Individuals can take their learning from projects and project participants with them. Meanwhile, their influence on other participants can be retained in the sponsoring company or industry. Ultimately, other industries can also benefit as mobile workers transport best practices to new situations (Littleton *et al.* 2000, p.111).

However, the contract worker, sometimes referred to as a portfolio or freelance worker, might not always benefit from whatever reciprocity is expected to derive from their position. Platman (2003) in a study of older (50+) workers in the media industry identified those who, for various reasons, engage with their industry on a freelance rather than a fully-employed basis. While freelancing is shown to have many benefits at their life stage, for example boosting pension, freedom to choose projects, part-time work and ability to engage with family/other commitments, there are also many barriers. The barriers noted by the author (below) are directly related to age in this group of workers, but such barriers are also among factors identified by other authors for any age group involved in the boundaryless career (London 2002; Watts 1996).

- ✧ Insecurity of employment. They have little advance warning of assignments ending and find gaps in earning and changes in commissions.
- ✧ Meeting client needs. They face long hours during commissions with unpredictable work demands. Older workers' fear of failure is coupled with concern about future work.
- ✧ Lack of employment regulations. They lack protection and are vulnerable to exploitation as work practices under short contract are difficult to challenge. It becomes necessary to keep union or professional body membership, adding to expenses.
- ✧ Importance of networks and reputations. These are the best methods of securing further work, but when freelancers work from home, isolation creates difficulty in developing new ones. Older freelancers can hide their age this way, but don't develop necessary contacts for new work. They find that reputations are built on current work rather than their earlier experience.
- ✧ Rates of pay. Unless very high profile, workers in the study are unable to charge high fees and find it necessary to remain competitive with younger workers coming into industry.
- ✧ Training. These workers find it expensive to update skills without organisational backing, but know that keeping skills current is an imperative. Older workers are identified as being more ambivalent about undertaking training, but are aware they run the risk of being labelled 'out-of-touch' (Platman 2003, pp.290-5).

In summary, the concept of this 'new' or 'boundaryless' career allows the term to be applied to anyone at any level of an organisation and in any type of industry. Career is no longer tied to middle or higher management opportunities or seen as an option only for individuals who can access promotion through bureaucratic systems. Career is conceptualised as a personal, subjective entity that grows with each individual's work experiences and the learning they undertake. The new career recognises each individual as being responsible for their own learning and development, while being able to negotiate and adjust to factors both within and outside of the various organisations they are

likely to encounter. The concept of career in the 21st century accounts for family ties and other external commitments and does not leave control in the hands of an employer.

There are however, authors who dispute career transformation and the 'protean' (Hall & Mirvis 1996) or 'subjective' (Collin & Watts 1996) career as something new, and suggest there might be some exaggeration about its extent if a number of factors are considered (Storey 2000). Storey agrees that the 'fracture lines', those contextual factors frequently attributed to the transformation of careers (in the United Kingdom in this case), including 'globalisation, technological advance, labour market demands and changes in societal values, have altered careers significantly in some ways' (Storey 2000, p.33). She argues, however, that while a broadening of career conceptualisation has embraced the growing diversity of career patterns, this type of definition is not new, but has been largely ignored in the past because of its concentration in specific areas:

There is nothing new about diversity in career patterns. [But] much of the attention surrounding the transformation of careers has concentrated on the decline of traditional, bureaucratic careers ... this type of career has always been the preserve of a relatively select group, mainly managerial and professional employees. Concentration on these groups of workers for the study of career has meant considerable neglect for other groups including women and members of ethnic minorities ... neglect for substantial numbers of men: the experiences of self-employed, those in non-managerial positions (unskilled, self-employed and temporary employment) have always been outside any narrow definition of career. (Storey 2000, p.33)

Storey's argument is that there is less a transformation from one career to another than there is an evolution. This evolution is broadening access to the idea of career across a range of occupations and levels and which can have both positive and negative effects. 'Factors such as organisational de-layering might have a negative impact on the career of a manager who faces redundancy, but may have positive impact on the subordinate who is subsequently given greater responsibility and enhanced development opportunities' (Storey 2000, p.34).

In many respects, subjective views of career arose as a means of trying to find an understanding of career that would better encapsulate the changing market conditions for labour that were being observed in a number of developed countries – particularly the USA. The key point is an emphasis on a growing 'independence...from... traditional organisational career arrangements' (Arthur *et al.*, cited in Pringle & Mallon 2003, p.841). In contrast, an objective view of career emphasises the bounded nature of careers through the importance of career structures and occupational hierarchies. The role that human resource strategies play in patterning the ways in which individuals organise their working lives is also emphasised. Careers are pathways are to be 'followed'. The objective career represents institutionalised forms of participation (Barley 1989) where the role that social structures and power relations play in shaping careers is acknowledged.

Walton and Mallon have noted that viewing careers only as subjective entities only reveals one-half of the story. Tracing debates about the meanings of career back to the 1930s, they argue that careers are both constructed by individuals as well as patterned by institutions (Walton & Mallon 2004, p.77). Institutions that pattern career 'scripts' (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle 1999) can include employing institutions, professional associations, family and other kin, and social networks. Within this framework, careers are the product of a complex interplay of individual and institutional scripts:

... individual action will only account for so much of career making ... various occupational communities will have their own scripts, which will provide a kind of scaffolding (both ideological and material) with which individuals negotiate in enacting their careers (Walton & Mallon 2004, p.77).

Arguably, in a context characterised by increased changes in employment tenure, people are inclined to create career scripts that fit their circumstances. Weick (1996) uses the theoretical lens of 'enactment' to explain the process of the boundaryless career and the dynamics of interdependence

that it characterises. Weick argued that ‘the enactment view emphasised that action creates the environment’ (p.102) and that ‘there is less room for personal inputs, manoeuvring, or ‘enactment’ if there are clear salient rules and structures defining behaviour’ (p.103). In other words, workers in traditional and bounded organisations have careers subjected to, among other things, ‘structure, hierarchy, plans, detailed job descriptions, prescribed relationships and social clues to guide behaviour’ (Weick 1996, p.103). In the boundaryless career, the explicit guides collapse into ambiguity and consistent behaviour is neither expected nor given, and personal interpretations lead to improvisation – which is the enactment proffered by Weick’s theory. It remains a moot point as to whether such improvisation is a positive or negative factor. What is at issue here for the VET sector is the degree to which guides (such as fixed classifications for staff with accompanying salary scales and qualification requirements) have disappeared, or are likely to disappear, thereby reinforcing the importance of self-efficacy in shaping career trajectories.

Arguably, there is a synergistic relationship between individual and collective scripts which shapes and guides career behaviours and choices. As Walton and Mallon point out, while there is strong rhetoric in the literature about ‘new’ models of career, there is little empirical evidence to support this view. More data are required to increase understanding of how careers are being understood and constructed in a context where the world of work is undergoing rapid transformation and where both subjective and objective views of careers might co-exist (Walton & Mallon 2004, p.78).

Further, while we might focus on organisations as ‘boundaries’, other structures such as geographical context, gender and ethnicity can also act as ‘boundaries’. Pringle and Mallon (2003) examine careers within the New Zealand context and offer evidence to suggest that careers arise within a country’s ‘unique historical, economic and socio-political context’ and suggest that the concept of ‘boundaryless’ careers may have limited applicability beyond the USA context. There are also critiques that point to the fact ‘careers have not melted into thin air’ (Jacoby 1999, p.137) and many organisations are far removed from the ‘new’ structures on which ‘boundaryless’ careers are predicated (Pringle & Mallon 2003, p.842).

These varying conceptions of career have implications for those within organisations who are responsible for managing human resources and assisting employees to develop their knowledge and skills for their working lives.

Managing careers in changing contexts

Careers and learning

When Arnold (1997, p.16) defines a career as ‘the sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person’, he discusses, as do later authors (for example, McMahon & Tatham 2001) how competitive factors increase the frequency of new learning that must take place within as well as outside organisations. Without new learning, workers are unable to make and keep themselves employable, or fit into the changing focus of an organisation as it competes in the marketplace. Arnold cites an example of bank employees who, as former tellers, had little prior emphasis on customer-focused skills. New competitors, shareholder profits and changed banking conditions required staff to acquire skills in marketing and customer communication (Arnold 1997, p.24). These new skills are considered among the transitions to be made within each person’s career (Chen 1998) and are among the ‘shifting economic boundaries in Western society [which] yield drastic changes in the structure of, choice of and planning for one’s worklife’ (Chen 1998, p.442).

Hall and Mirvis (1996), citing Super’s (1992, p.33) work, argue that transitions or career stages are ‘a series of many shorter learning cycles over the span of a person’s work life’. They relate learning to new technology or product change, but note that these changes are often so rapid that in consequence individuals need to obtain mastery over a number of (not always related) skills, rather than mastery

over one major skill as had previously been the case. However, these authors suggest that such diversification is not always simple when organisations control training and new learning. Thus, individuals need to take charge of their own learning needs in order to increase career opportunities through a number of learning cycles that relate to the core competencies in the fields in which a person works (Hall & Mirvis 1996, p.33). Law, Meijers and Wijers 2002, p.432) agree, claiming that ‘developing a career identity is a learning process’. However, control over the learning process and developing a career identity is linked directly to motivation. White (1995, citing Bandura 1977) suggests that learning needs of staff in enterprises is often determined by their own behaviour and persistence at a task, rather than by exterior factors:

Therefore, career-related self-efficacy may be raised through the medium of mastery motivation. This in turn increases the probability of continued career motivation and investment in the career role. Whether the individual directs his/her mastery motivation towards career will, to a certain extent, be dictated by their aspirations (White 1995, p.8).

Promoting career guidance

Few authors writing about career management, and the involvement of human resource personnel and operations in that process, dispute the necessity for structured career development and guidance. In the new career concept, however, reciprocity (job security) is being exchanged for flexibility (Littleton *et al.* 2000), so career development is increasingly understood in terms of what the individual can be supported to do for themselves, rather than what organisational development can make of the individual through its own structures (Collin & Watts 1996, p.6). In the past, ‘career guidance [could] be seen as one of a range of social mechanisms which buttressed the bureaucratic version of career’ (Collin & Watts 1996, p.3). Individuals were coerced into a number of career forms through being packaged into various qualifications, identity, experience, socio-economic levels and so on.

At the same time authors posit that there are many ways in which career guidance can now be made relevant in order to sustain its accessibility to individuals throughout their working lives, rather than it being based wholly within organisations or early education and training areas. Career guidance can lay the foundations for lifelong learning or guide individuals into ‘self-organising’ their careers (Amundson, Parker & Arthur 2002), and develop greater flexibility within the workforce (Kelly, Brannick, Hulpke, Levine & To 2003). Career management through guidance and counselling can assist individuals to ‘develop their subjective career narrative ... and maintain dialectic between the subjective and objective careers’ (Collin & Watts 1996, p.7). Hirsch and Jackson (2004) argue that career development should be viewed as a matter of importance to both organisations and to individuals. Career development ‘is of direct benefit to organisations, and should not be seen in terms of ‘being nice’ to staff’ (Hirsch & Jackson 2004, p.6); rather, it becomes a tool for attracting and retaining good staff.

There is a similar perspective from Patton (2001) but is offered through a dual approach that discusses the necessity to ‘make’ the individual through their career formation, yet, when citing Herr (1992), emphasises that ‘careers need to be construed as the creations of individuals’ (Patton 2001, p.13). The author’s proposal is similar to that of McMahon and Tatham (2001) in that career education should begin in schools and unless young people form their ideas about what they want to do and become, and then focus their learning towards that particular goal, they may not succeed in life. However, the author acknowledges that not enough research has been conducted in Australia regarding the relation between ‘high school adolescents and career variables such as career maturity, career decision-making, self-efficacy and career decision status’ (Patton 2001, p.18).

In discussing related challenges to career formation for individuals under its changing conceptualisation, Collin and Watts (1996, p.1) propose that organisations are unlikely to remain as the central providers of career management. A number of career forms that previously necessitated

the use of guidance intervention from human resource management divisions in organisations are 'under threat'. These forms include bureaucratic careers, professional careers (based, they suggest, on crafts and skills) and entrepreneurial careers, which encompass the ownership, development and participation in small businesses. The authors argue that as a consequence of the threat, career guidance provision and its methodology should shift from within organisational structures to become a social institutional practice. However, they note a number of implications need to be considered if such an institutionalised career guidance basis is to perform its role in a relevant manner. In drawing attention to five main propositions seen to provide continuing relevance to individuals within the community, they too emphasise the importance of an early start to career guidance:

- ✧ Career guidance must be accessible to individuals throughout their lives
- ✧ The role of career education in schools should be strengthened to ensure lifelong learning
- ✧ Career guidance should assist individuals to develop their own 'subjective career narratives'
- ✧ Career guidance should assist individuals to record their achievements and action planning
- ✧ Career guidance should form links with financial guidance, relationship counselling and stress counselling (Collin & Watts 1996, p.7).

Such recommendations reflect the changed concept of career that places control in the hands of the individual, rather than being dependent upon organisational career development. Watts (1996, p.45) continues this argument for change, suggesting a number of new 'social ligatures' to be made accessible to individuals so they can take full advantage of the new concept of career throughout their lives, rather than be tied to organisational assistance. Watts suggests that if career counselling/guidance does not take heed of the entirety of the work context as being the social, political and economic, individuals will not be able to interact with the new world of work in the post-industrial era. Counselling, he argues 'is a deeply socio-political activity' that 'operates at the interface between personal and societal needs, individual aspirations and opportunity structures and between private and public identities' (Watts 1996, p.42). Putting aside the rhetoric that appears to suggest that individuals are unable to make their own decisions about learning, work and self-improvement, Watts argues for a career progression taking place both laterally and horizontally as well as with vertical movement. That is, unlike previous pyramidically structured careers, generally open only to members of the hierarchy, access to various forms of learning should allow for movement of any individual's career to occur within positions (Watts 1996, p.45). One challenge for career management and guidance, Watts suggests, is in making such opportunities available to everyone, and hence he re-affirms his proposed 'social ligatures' as:

- ✧ financial support for the unemployed,
- ✧ a responsive (to industry) learning system,
- ✧ a qualification and accreditation system, and finally,
- ✧ lifelong access to career counselling.

Such 'ligatures' imply systemised career counselling which the author suggests should sit within both education and employment structures and apply 'market and quasi-market principles to career counselling provision' (Watts 1996, p.49). However, he also proposes that, were career counselling companies fighting for their survival as are the individuals they counsel, they would have a more common understanding of the realities clients face in a competitive employment market. Interestingly, this list of 'social ligatures' largely excludes mention of the employee, and focuses instead on issues in a way that suggests a system looking to legitimate itself in a context where individuals are perhaps committed to organising their own career management.

Organisations, career development and human resource management

Because of current competition across many industries for skilled and reliable employees, (Opengart & Short 2002), human resources within organisations are seen to be in need of some re-invention. Human resource departments are exhorted to use rhetoric, such as ‘valuing their most important assets’, in order to keep their workforce motivated and cooperative (Jackson, Arnold, Nicholson & Watts 1996, p.13). Workforce policies also use new terminology to encompass the way in which performance management structures, performance-related pay structures and criteria for individual and/or organisational competencies are embedded into their organisational rhetoric. The authors see this discourse as shifting the individual worker towards being highly adaptable in the workplace and taking on new behaviours that may not align with the job descriptions used when they were originally hired. It does, however, help to explain the way in which the term ‘multi-skilling’ is being accepted as a concept alongside the discourse of the boundaryless career.

At the same time, it could be seen that the boundaryless or individually controlled career may be posing a threat to human resource management, particularly within organisations where its relevance may diminish as structured career pathways fade. In terms of the way in which organisations take on the management of the new career structures, Arnold (1997) suggests that such management should be thought of as being the ‘interventions that shape careers in organisations’, inferring that careers can be both formally and informally shaped by their managers through interactions with individuals.

Hirsch and Jackson (2004, p.11) agree, noting that such interactions are possible for organisations, and can offer positive career expectations to employees, even while employers acknowledge that their workforce is part of a fluid market. Calling it ‘supported self-development’, they argue that offering a range of challenging work experiences and sideways moves, and helping employees identify a range of career options within an organisation, can give a positive message while realistically acknowledging that workers do move. These authors describe a number of case study companies in the United Kingdom where career development is ongoing. Within the various outlines, key processes would seem to be:

- ✧ open support by making options known to staff,
- ✧ availability of both professional development and focused training programs within and outside the organisations,
- ✧ access to accreditation,
- ✧ opportunities for employees to discuss internal career change or alternative work experiences, and
- ✧ ‘career advice not devolved to external agencies’ (Hirsch & Jackson 2004, p.30).

From their research, the authors note a ‘lamentable lack’ (Hirsch & Jackson 2004, p.31) of understanding about career development among human resource professionals that affects their ability to give sound and trustworthy advice to employees.

However, there are large organisations using their human resource development units to offer learning and development opportunities to ‘high potential, high tech and younger’ (Opengart & Short 2002) employees as a means of retaining them. This type of organisation acknowledges that many of their employees have adopted a ‘free agent’ attitude, wherein they focus on ‘long-term employability security’ (Opengart & Short 2002, p.220) rather than any long-term relationship with an organisation. Organisations, suggests Packer (2000), need to recognise that they will lose their most competent workers if they do not ‘encourage, acknowledge and reward employees who acquire additional skills’ because ‘workers are no longer content to leave their career in the hands of their employers’ (Packer 2000, p.40). However, the question emerges as to whether this would still occur if the economic situation changed and there was a surfeit of workers with skills.

Similarly, Arnold and Davey (1994), in an examination of graduate experiences inside organisations, suggest that graduate workers will be unlikely to stay on with an organisation if they are not offered clear career structures. Such structures need to include 'explicit agreement about what graduates are expected to do for themselves' (Arnold & Davey 1994, p.18) and clarity about short-term and long-term career possibilities.

Baruch and Peirperl's (2000) study also suggests that knowing what career practices go on in organisations will put the new 'protean' or 'boundaryless' career into a contextual perspective. In asking questions around what different practices might suit different types of organisations, they investigated whether any useful and applied framework would emerge. However, within their survey results, they noted that 'many new organisations are reluctant to invest in education for their members, preferring to "buy in" fully qualified talent. Reasons stated were largely due to cost, high labor [sic] turnover (loss of investment), and fluctuating skill requirements that make long-term planning impossible' (Baruch & Peirperl 2000, p.356). Their findings reveal a number of choices available to human resource managers in setting up career systems in large organisations, but these depend on what it is that companies look to offer employees.

The authors found they could cluster five systems that move upwards from a 'basic' model that is relatively non-interactive with employees, through to a 'multi-directional' system that is highly supportive and takes a direct hand in employees' career management (Baruch & Peirperl 2000, p.361). They argue, however, that 'in light of the present debate on the end of organisational careers ... an organisation will need to decide how far it will be involved in the career planning of its managers and employees and how much will be left to the individual to manage' (Baruch & Peirperl 2000, p.363).

Career or professional development processes are presented as critical aspects of the way in which individuals might build their career options – whether through organisations (Baruch & Peirperl 2000; Fugate & Amey 2000; Packer 2000) or outside them (MacMahon *et al.* 2003; Watts, 1997). Importantly for the VET practitioner, Fugate and Amey's (2000) study of faculty in a US community college notes that professional development programs within the college are viewed as 'an important component of the ability to be effective teachers' (p.6). Such activities are seen by academics as both personal and institutional responsibilities, and range from reading and writing papers and attending conferences through to working part-time in their own areas in order to retain relevance for their students. In addition, workshops, orientations, discussion groups and faculty exchanges add to their overall concept of teaching and learning within their career structure. At the same time, the authors offer a cautionary note about how private industry skills shortages are luring teaching staff out of institutions. Consequently, the development of staff should not be seen as a luxury, rather its removal might encourage more rapid turnover of staff (Fugate & Amey 2000, p.9).

At the same time, unless individuals are motivated to undertake, and respond to, whatever forms of professional development or training are offered, either by their organisations or other outside facilities, human resource managed programs in organisations may be wasting valuable resources. London (2002) suggests that without career motivation, which he argues builds resilience, individuals are less likely to seek the necessary support that will provide development opportunities. The author also argues that career resilience assists individuals to confront job loss by being 'able to appraise the situation, determine possible actions and likely outcomes, evaluate resources and set goals' (London 2002, p.328). Career resilience can be developed by both large and small organisations if they view career development for their staff as a strategic advantage. The author proposes that, by taking on the mantle of a learning organisation, staff and their organisations should both benefit from the positive outcomes that are likely to ensue. While proposing a model that he argues would develop a company into a learning organisation, the author is nevertheless unable to show how the outcomes can be proven.

Other authors of the early 1990s (Waterman, Waterman & Collard 1994) also promote the idea of career resilience. They describe this as a means of enhancing employability for the individual at the

same time as creating improved productivity ‘and some degree of commitment to company purposes and community for as long as the employee works there’ (p.88). Career resilience in the USA, they propose, is about creating self-reliant workers ‘who stand ready to re-invent themselves to keep pace with change’ (p.88). Citing organisations in the information technology and manufacturing industries in that era, the authors outline what can be put into the development of programs as ways in which individuals might develop career resilience. These include:

- ✧ provision of in-house seminars,
- ✧ counselling,
- ✧ self-assessment of skills programs,
- ✧ focused and generic training,
- ✧ identification of market trends in terms of skills,
- ✧ frank discussions around the economic situation of their company and
- ✧ opportunities for workers to move around within their organisation (Waterman 1994).

While programs that enhance career resilience provide flexibility for organisations and their workers, the authors acknowledge that there are economic risks in providing such support, yet suggest that workers will leave a company sooner if there are few development opportunities available to them.

Doyle (2000) discusses the debate in the United Kingdom surrounding the subjective and objective nature of career and how, despite the debate, career management rather than learning support is still a key activity for human resource management. The author notes that there are issues surrounding whether the control of career management should lie with the individual or with the organisation, and whether there can still exist a common shared interest between personal strategic aims and business objectives. Such issues provided ‘the rationale and legitimacy for career management interventions in the past, and both remain influential in shaping current career management thinking and practice’ (Doyle 2000, p.229). It would seem however that concerns about its survival is still a factor for human resource management, as Doyle (2000) suggests that the ‘picture emerging is one of traditional career management structures and approaches struggling to balance and reconcile organisational and individual goals which themselves are changing in response to an increasingly self-centred instrumental climate’ (p.231).

However, Stevens (2001, p.3) suggests such an aspect could be overcome by adopting organisational succession planning as a bottom-up rather than a top-down process. Although the author looks at the situation from an organisational rather than individual point of view, his argument is that human resource management works better if employees have ownership of the processes. Their training and development can then focus on assisting staff to be ‘less apprehensive about future organisational change’. In the same vein, Hall and Moss (1998) posit that companies should be just as adaptable as the new ‘protean’ employee by promoting adaptability and providing new experiences through assignments and challenges. They are hence providing a re-conceptualisation of their management of employees. The authors suggest a ‘10 step’ management program (Hall & Moss 1998, p.33) that recognises communication, training, development and learner identity as key aspects of career that need to be promoted in order to keep and manage employees. The issue of keeping employees is also raised by Mallon (1998) who asks whether the ‘portfolio’ or ‘boundaryless’ career occurs through push factors or pull factors. Mallon suggests people might have become portfolio workers more because they were dissatisfied with their company than because they were made redundant. Her suggestion is that much depends upon the way human resource management and the organisation interact with workers, and argues from her research findings that ‘in most cases the organisation need not have lost them’ (Mallon 1998, p.375) but a lack of flexibility drove many into independent work.

Jackson *et al.* (1996) use the term ‘career defence’ to describe how workers protect themselves against redundancy in an industry by consistently undertaking skills’ enhancement. They argue, however, that

the rapidly changing nature of work offers both ‘an opportunity and a threat’ (Jackson & Arnold 1996, p.29) to workers who continually enhance their skill base, while being aware of the imminent obsolescence of those skills. Consequently, the youngest or fittest and/or smartest are likely to succeed where more disadvantaged/older workers find difficulty in conceptualising a career if they are unable to adapt quickly to changes in industry needs. Career defence (re-skilling) offers protection from redundancy or obsolescence but can result in a plateau being reached. Career defence has resulted in a growth of standards and the need for recognition of skill sets which works two ways. Both industry and workforce find they need to demonstrate clearly what skill levels are useful where. This has resulted in the rise of accreditation and ‘visible recognition of ability and attainment’ (Jackson *et al.* 1996, p.30) through human resource management.

However, the debate continues as to whether this push to redefine the concept of career and its management onto the individual is simply due to the organisational career (and by definition its management) being under threat. Kanter (1989) noted some years ago that in the US ‘between 1983 and 1987 ... nearly ten thousand companies changed hands and well over 2 million people saw their jobs disappear or deteriorate’ (p.300). If such figures are taken as a reflection of the current situation in terms of company buy-outs, mergers, close-downs, incorporations and moves offshore, then a similarly problematic situation has no doubt occurred in the Australian economy. One result might be that economic strictures would mean that organisational human resource management might welcome the idea of putting control of career management back into the hands of the individual, as it was prior to industrialisation and the rise of what became the ‘organisational career’ (Peiperl & Baruch 1997, p.13). However, the term ‘career management’ might suggest that key career competencies (the necessary meta-competencies) are learning how to learn and continuous learning. Hall and Mirvis (1996, p.24) add skills in self-assessment and identity exploration, which suggests that workers would need to manage their career growth through self-actualisation or self-fulfilment. It is therefore questionable whether career guidance and counselling would then be necessary. However, this type of self-management is suggested to require higher levels of cognitive development than most people currently possess because the majority still operate at the interpersonal (mutual reciprocity, relational career contract) rather than the institutional (self-identity, autonomous, personally directed) level (Kegan, cited in Hall & Mirvis 1996).

It would appear that current practices create somewhat of a double bind for human resource management. On the one hand, it is sometimes damned if it continues to be involved in an individual’s career, because it is seen to be interventionist. On the other, it is damned if it is seen not to assist and support learning and is then viewed as being unaware of or not accounting for the current employment climate. In addition, human resource management personnel are often positioned as self-seeking because they must answer to management requirements and policies to also keep their own career trajectory going. Such issues arise at the same time as the personnel are supposedly working for the benefit of the employee, who in turn might not be able to trust them because of their assumed allegiance to management. In a context where there are changing understandings attached to the notion of career, it is likely that questions will continue to be asked about the usefulness of career management systems and the way they contribute to organisational success (Doyle 2000, p.24).

The VET workforce

Having examined key concepts of career and implications for their management more generally, this review now considers literature on the Australian vocational education and training (VET) workforce, and how it has changed with the advent of the training reform agenda. This provides a picture of the landscape that gives rise to and shapes the career pathways that might be available for staff. Current approaches to workforce development have the potential to open up or close down careers and play a significant role in shaping individuals’ decisions about their working lives. In examining this literature, it needs to be noted that most of the available writing focuses almost exclusively on teachers and

trainers based in TAFE settings. While there is also a smaller body of work referring to managers (including those in both front-line and leadership positions) and staff employed in private registered training organisations, the literature is almost totally silent on the nature of the general staff workforce employed in VET. Unless specified the literature presented here largely addresses issues related to the teaching/training and management workforce in VET.

The changing VET workforce

While there is consensus that the workforce is changing (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005; NCVER 2004), estimates of the size of the VET workforce are difficult to make. Such difficulty is due to a number of limitations with existing statistical collections including the lack of standardised measures for employment levels and lack of clarity and consistency around key terms (Burke, 2003; NCVER 2004a; Schofield 2002; VTA 2001). Current estimates widely vary from 17,400 to 71,300 for VET professionals (staff employed directly in training and assessment as well as those staff who provide leadership, support and management within registered training organisations) and from 39,000 to 94,000 for the VET workforce as a whole (which includes those designated as VET professionals as well as those employed in generic roles within the sector) (Dickie, Eccles, FitzGerald, McDonald, Cully, Blythe, Stanwick & Brooks 2004, p.16).

What is not debated, however, is the growing influence of a number of key trends which are set to play an important part in shaping the future workforce in the sector and thus, by default, the nature of career pathways that may potentially be available. These trends include the casualised and ageing character of the workforce, a broadening of the type of employees considered part of the VET sector and changes to the nature of work in the sector.

A casualised and ageing workforce

Within the broader Australian workforce, the percentage of casual workers has doubled in the last 20 years. Twenty percent of the Australian workforce is employed on a casual basis and a further 20% are employed as 'contractors' (Buchanan 2004). Within the TAFE component of the VET sector, the Australian Education Union has estimated that in 1995 around 10% of the TAFE workforce was employed on a casual basis, and now estimates that up to 50% of the teaching workforce in some states is employed on a casual basis (Forward 2005, p.12). Recent estimates from the profiling of the VET workforce undertaken by NCVER (2004a) found that approximately three in every five TAFE teachers were employed on a casual basis and that this varied enormously across state/territory jurisdictions. The percentage of teachers employed on a non-permanent basis in NSW were estimated to be as high as 78% of all teachers and approximately 50% in another four jurisdictions – Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (Cully & Woods 2006, p.10). This level of casualisation is very high compared with the broader Australian workforce and is comparable with the rates of young people employed on a casual basis in the retail (63%) and hospitality sectors (68%) (Cully & Woods 2006, p.10). Across all states and territories, more men than women occupy permanent positions in TAFE (NCVER 2004a, p.18). These changes to the workforce profile have been occurring at a time (1997-2001) when expenditure on staffing in the TAFE sector was in decline (Burke 2003, p.35).

This trend towards employing non-permanent staff is also apparent in private training organisations (Auscorp Marketing & Strahan Research 2000). In a study of 330 private registered training organisations, Harris, Simons and McCarthy (2006) found that in 2003 these organisations employed approximately 12,800 full-time staff, 2,900 part-time staff and 5,200 casual staff with most being very small organisations, in terms of full-time staff, with 84% having ten or fewer full-time staff.

Like much of the Australian workforce, the VET sector, and TAFE in particular has a workforce profile that is ageing. A study of Victorian TAFE institutes in 1999 found that between 30% and 40% of all tenured teachers were aged 50 years or over (Malley, Hill, Putland, Shah & McKenzie 1999).

Kronemann (2001), in her study of Australian Education Union members in TAFE found that the average age of teachers was 47 years. However, as NCVER (2004a) notes, the age profile for VET professionals aged 45 years or older (that is, people employed to provide 'direct' activities such as teaching and assessment and those involved in 'indirect' activities such as providing administrative support and management) is almost identical to employed workers in Australia (NCVER 2004a, p. 8). What is significant is that teachers in TAFE in general are older than the broader population of VET professionals. There may be several factors contributing to this observation. For this group, work in the field of education is usually the result of a significant career change (Chappell & Melville 1995). Many come to VET teaching and training after a period of time in industry or they remain in industry but the focus of their work shifts. If they are employed part-time in the sector, they often continue to be employed in industry. They are usually older than beginning school-teachers and the training undertaken for their teaching role can vary widely (Lowrie, Smith & Hill 1999, p. 12). Opportunities to develop their teaching expertise often come after their employment as teachers or trainers, particularly for those who find employment within public training providers (Harris, Simons, Hill, Smith, Pearce, Blakeley, Choy, & Snewin 2000). Within TAFE, the ageing of the teaching workforce is of particular significance as it holds the potential for a loss of key knowledge and skills to institutions over relatively a few years. This could have a negative impact on the subsequent need to attract new recruits able to take on the roles left by their more experienced colleagues and the related issues of the transfer of institutional knowledge to these people (Clayton, Fisher & Hughes 2005, p.21).

Non-teaching staff in VET

One of the significant limitations of any analysis of the VET workforce is the almost non-existence of data relating to people employed in non-teaching/training roles in the sector. What data there is available reveal that more non-teaching staff are employed in full-time than part-time positions and more males than females are filling these positions (NCVER 2004a, p. 22). These staff are largely employed on a permanent basis and are younger than the teaching staff with whom they work (NCVER 2004a, pp. 23, 24). These characteristics stand in contrast to the profile of teachers in TAFE who are mostly employed in part-time and non-permanent roles.

Broadening scope of people who are considered to be part of the VET sector

One of the most significant features of the VET workforce is its diversity. In addition to those employed in government departments, Industry Skills Councils and other government instrumentalities supporting the VET system, there is a very diverse group of practitioners and managers whose roles can be directly linked to the function of service delivery. Many of these VET practitioners are people who have a range of qualifications (for example, specific trade, human resource development, management) and who are working under a variety of non-teaching awards and conditions (ACIRRT 1998, p.8). Across the VET workforce several groups of practitioners can be identified, differentiated primarily by three key factors – function, qualification and affiliation. Location also plays its part, though it is becoming increasingly less of a distinguishing feature, particularly with the rise in use of flexible modes of delivery and on-line technologies.

There are practitioners whose work roles lie totally within the VET sector, including teachers, trainers, support staff (including materials developers, IT specialists etc.) and managers. They are located in public and private institutions and the larger enterprises, though their work may take them outside their organisations. They have responsibility for managing delivery and assessment processes, as well as for developing materials and online learning, and taking the lead in entrepreneurial activity. This group of workers usually requires a more 'holistic' perspective of training and assessment systems (Mathers 1997, p.72). Some of these staff may be employed directly by VET institutions or they may be self-employed consultants, engaged by organisations on a contractual basis to work on a defined project or deliver a set of specified outcomes.

There is a growing cohort of practitioners with a part-time role in VET, or increasingly, several part-time roles across more than one provider (Dickie *et al.* 2004, p.75). They are found mainly in industry, schools and as part-time staff in both public and private providers. They are usually concerned with the primary role of teaching and assessing VET, although this may not be solely restricted to institutional settings.

A third definable group of VET practitioners comprises workers in industry who assist in a small way with vocational education and training in their organisation. They are involved primarily with the core business of their organisation, but help others learn in formalised programs such as apprenticeships and traineeships.

A fourth group of VET practitioners includes those in industry who are fulltime workers in the core business of their enterprise but who, in the course of their regular work, informally help others learn in the workplace. Their learners may be in formal programs such as apprenticeships and traineeships, but often are likely to be fellow workers who need assistance on the job. For this group of VET practitioners, work and learning are inextricably intertwined.

This broadening profile of VET teaching/training staff also has flow-on effects for the work of non-teaching staff, who are increasingly becoming engaged with the business of teaching and learning (NCVER 2004, p.6). For example, the use of information and communications technology has given rise to work roles where non-teaching staff may work with teaching staff to develop online learning environments and resources. The lines between previously well-demarcated job roles become more blurred, resulting in a range of professional development and human resource management issues. These include the broadening of staff development activities to include non-teaching staff and the need to change human resource management practices. Strategies including job design, workforce planning, recruitment and performance management need to better reflect the mix of staff skills needed to meet the demands of VET clients and to better account for the actual work being undertaken by staff (McNickle & Cameron 2003; Palmieri 2003).

A changing profile of knowledge, skills and work practices

Shifts in policy that promote a greater role for industry in shaping outcomes from the VET sector via the implementation of training packages and a competency-based approach to skill development have combined to produce significantly different types of working lives for teachers and trainers (Harris *et al.* 2005). Increased calls for responsiveness to industry needs have led to the implementation of innovative and flexible approaches to facilitating learning (David Rumsey and Associates 2002; Kroneman 2001; NCVER 2002). Work roles have expanded and diversified; there has been a shift in the balance between the key functions of facilitating learning and assessment. There has also been an accompanying shift in the role of teachers and trainers as creators of curriculum to interpreters of industry needs (Harris *et al.* 2005, p.67). Managers and administrative staff roles have also shifted. Staff such as librarians are having greater interaction with learners (McNickle & Cameron 2003), and managers are now often also teachers having dual responsibilities to their organisation – the staff with whom they work, as well as the students and other clients they serve (Guthrie & Callan 2002; Mitchell & Young 2002)

Teachers and trainers have reported feeling increased tension around the differing expectations of their work roles and work intensification (Kronemann 2001; Lorrimar 2002; McNickle & Cameron 2003; Rice 2003). The scope and nature of these changes have not been simply a matter of substituting one set of work practices for another. These reforms have fundamentally challenged the habits, beliefs, values, skills and knowledge of those employed in the VET sector (Harris *et al.* 2005, p. 10). For teachers located in TAFE, the restructuring that has occurred in the sector has required them to be different as well as do different things (Chappell 1999).

Chappell suggests that technical teachers in their earliest manifestation operated in a domain where they were valued for their industry expertise. Many did not hold any formal qualifications in teaching. After the Kangan reforms of the 1970s, vocational expertise was still highly prized but teachers were also expected to develop expertise in facilitating learning and be able to respond to the mandate for the sector for personal and social as well as industry development (Simons 2001). This resulted in changed recruitment practices for the newly formed TAFE colleges who were initially staffed by generalist teachers and increasingly by people from industry who then also undertook studies in adult education. TAFE teachers were not only 'industry specialists, [they were also] liberal educators involved in the education and training of adults' (Forward 2004, p.2). Staff in TAFE were imbued with the ethos of the 'public service' and its culture of accountability (Chappell 1999, p.7).

Forces affecting the identity of TAFE teachers that had been place for many years were radically reshaped as a result of successive waves of training reform. Moves to create a training market and develop an industry-driven VET system have resulted in growth in the numbers and types of training providers operating in Australia. From a previously well-defined group of occupations mostly associated with TAFE colleges, the VET workforce broadened to include a wide range of staff working in a variety of settings including enterprises, industry organisations, commercial training organisations, adult/community-based organisations, schools, universities, and government departments as well as those employed in the TAFE sector. Alongside these government-driven changes, a more fundamental change has been occurring to the ways in which knowledge, learning and work are understood (Chappell 2000). These shifts have necessarily then altered the nature of those occupations that are concerned with preparing people for employment. The term 'new VET professional' has been coined, not as a new occupational title, but rather as a way of signalling a fundamental shift in the work undertaken by people employed in the VET sector (Chappell 2000, p.2).

The new VET professional is required to operate in an environment where understandings of vocational expertise have changed from being stable and discipline-based to being unstable, emergent, and often tacit and context-specific. Traditional VET teacher claims to exclusive mastery over a body of knowledge relating to vocational expertise within an industry are difficult to sustain. The 'stable, career trajectory' of a VET teacher is no longer a viable way of maintaining vocational expertise (Chappell 2000, p.8). New technologies have resulted in the potential for learning to occur without the direct input of a teacher or trainer, or in an environment where the teacher/trainer and learner relationship is mediated by technology. The activities of teachers and trainers can now extend beyond state/territory and national boundaries, heightening competition between providers and requiring responses to promote culturally inclusive practices for an increasingly diverse student body. Learning has also moved from the simulated environment of the classroom to the workplace. Workplaces are now highly valued as sites for authentic learning, where learning is shaped by and co-terminus with work (Harris, Simons and Bone 1999; Chappell 2000). Teachers, especially those who were previously confined in classrooms, are now being challenged to move into new learning spaces where they are expected to negotiate and facilitate learning in workplaces and manage all the changes that flow from this relocation of their work (Harris, Simons & Moore 2005). Put simply, the new VET professional represents a significant shift in thinking about the occupations designed to provide vocational education and training, the types of work they might undertake, the type of preparation needed for those work roles and the ways in which their work might be organised. Collectively, these changes in the context of VET, alongside the policy reforms of government, have provided a rationale for a reconceptualisation of the role of VET teachers. They have also been used to justify the observed reorganisation of the VET workforce in terms of the modes of employment for staff, the occupational groupings from which VET staff are drawn and the qualifications they are required to hold to support them in their work.

The new demands for staff who have the skills and knowledge that fit with the emerging knowledge and skills from workplaces have been used as a justification for the increased used of sessional staff (see for example, OPCETE 2000). They have also been used to explain the observed rise of the

core/peripheral model of workforce, largely divided along delivery/assessment/course development and the management of these and other business functions associated with the provision of VET (Chappell & Johnston 2003; Dickie *et al.* 2004, p.75). New work arrangements have paved the way for new qualifications, now represented in Training Packages. These can be used flexibly to reflect the work roles of various groups of people responsible for sub-sets of work associated with course development, delivery and assessment of training and the management of those employed to undertake these functions. While some argue that these processes are de-professionalising, others argue they signal the emergence of new work roles or a 're-professionalising' process (Harris *et al.* 2005, p.21) along with perhaps the potential for new career options other than those traditionally associated with teaching. Avis (1999) argues that the transformation of teaching and learning 'opens up new forms of practice and identities for practitioners' (p.245). Attwell (1997) suggests that the changes to VET teachers' work represent a convergence in the interests of human resource development professionals and VET practitioners. The function of developing vocational expertise (traditionally the domain of VET teachers) merges with interests in organisational and workforce development. Celerrio and Miguel (1996) similarly argue the emergence of a 'new polyfunctionality' for human resource development professionals. This new direction will require greater collaboration between networks of training consultants geared towards increasing the competitiveness of businesses through promoting learning and development and the workplace as a site for learning.

These changes to the work of VET professionals generally, and TAFE staff in particular, have not been allowed to proceed without challenge. The Australian Education Union has been particularly forthright in its criticism of the general acceptance of the rhetoric of the 'new VET professional'. The lack of acknowledgement of TAFE teachers as teachers first, the union argues, will have significant implications for succession planning (Forward 2004, p. 17). Questions related to the future workforce in TAFE are further compromised when the 'new VET professional' is also used to justify the acceptance of industry knowledge and experience, rather than teaching qualifications as the basis for teachers' work. The uncritical acceptance of the need for a highly casualised workforce as the only possible way to attain a workforce that holds current industry skills has also been challenged (Forward 2004, p. 17). How one might navigate a career pathway and what it might look like in this type of environment becomes a pressing issue for those persons passionate about their work and committed to their role as teachers.

Careers in VET

Building careers in changing cultures and contexts

Many teachers and trainers do not commence their working life in VET and for many employees it is not a long-term career (Dickie *et al.* 2004, p.84). In fact, this 'second career' status is often used to distinguish teachers in the sector from their counterparts in schools (Chappell & Johnston 2003, p.14). Traditionally, a career for teachers and trainers, particularly those in TAFE, has followed a path where 'progression' in one's career in the VET sector can be determined by changing modes of employment from hourly-paid and sessional or contract work to a permanent appointment (Harris *et al.* 2005). Initially, hourly-paid staff may be loosely coupled to a program/teaching area where there may be opportunities for increased hours and broadening scope of work over time. This progress may not be rapid and has often been accompanied by 'credential creep', with many hourly-paid staff being more highly qualified than their managers or permanent counterparts (Harris *et al.* 2005, pp.28-29).

One of the significant challenges in recruiting staff to the sector (and particularly to public providers) is the salary gap between what people can earn in industry and what they can earn as a teachers. Large disparities in salaries, combined with other working conditions (such as the expectation that teachers have to fund their own professional development) can impact on the number and quality of people applying for positions. Further, salary scales are highly contracted (Dickie *et al.* 2004, p.87). A study of

Victorian TAFE institutes found less than a \$5,000 difference between the salaries of entry level TAFE teachers and those who had been employed for more than 15 years (OPCETE 2000, p.55). Industry continues to be a key source for new staff, particularly where programs have an on-job component. In contrast, private training providers face a different challenge when recruiting staff, particularly when existing or previous TAFE staff are applicants, as they are often perceived to be ill-equipped to cope with the demands of training and assessing in the workplace (Harris et al. 2005, p.28).

Once within the sector career pathways may also include movement into various management roles and positions that acknowledge an 'advanced' level of skills for teachers or the 'opportunities' to take up acting positions. However, these positions are often short-term and can leave staff feeling 'displaced' when they return to their substantive positions (Harris et al. 2005, p. 29). There is some evidence to suggest that this discourse of 'opportunities' rather than defined career pathways is increasingly being adopted by VET staff as a way of rationalising the ways in which different phases of their working life have unfolded in the sector (Harris et al. 2005, p.28).

While there is some form of defined pattern of employment that has served teachers well within the sector, particularly staff employed in TAFE, there are signs that this pathway is under pressure. A study examining changes to the work of VET practitioners identified changing recruitment practices which favour employment of sessional and contract staff over permanent appointments as having both positive and negative impacts (Harris et al. 2005, p.28). On the one hand, such employment arrangements offered some flexibility for organisations and individuals. On the other, the lack of full-time positions was 'frustrating' because of the lack of security for incumbents. Factors such as the decline in the number of staff undertaking degree level qualifications in adult and vocational education, increased use of certificate level vocational qualifications as minimum requirements for entry, increased casualisation and the rise of the 'new vocationalism' have been suggested as signs of a 'professional crisis in the standing of VET practitioners' (Chappell 2000a, p.1).

Historically, the term 'teacher' or 'lecturer' has been used to describe the work of those engaged in facilitating learning within the VET sector. Unlike their school-based counterparts, the term teacher has been based on the specialist industry knowledge attached to a particular occupation held by VET teachers rather than their specialist educational knowledge. They were teachers because their work was located away from the workplace in institutions such as TAFE colleges (Chappell 2000a). As noted above, the boundaries that once distinguished VET teachers from their colleagues in schools are being reworked to the extent that the term 'teacher' is increasingly being replaced by a variety of terms including 'facilitator' and 'trainer'. Chappell (2000a) argues that professional identity is no longer linked to that of a teacher. These changes effectively signal the end of an era of an 'undifferentiated teaching and training workforce all with degree level qualifications' (Chappell 2000, p.7). With these changes has come increasing complexity and confusion about the exact nature of the VET workforce, with various terms including particular groups of job roles. This opens the possibilities for new career trajectories that include working in cross-sectoral roles in schools and VET, preparation for new roles for practitioners to manage the casualised workforce and the blending of human resource and vocational education and training roles in businesses.

It has been argued that career progression from teaching to management roles, particularly in TAFE institutes, has been disrupted by the rise of managerial discourses that act to separate teachers and managers (Black 2005; Rice 2003). This is particularly so for head teachers who are both at once teachers and front-line managers (Mulcahy 2003). In a small-scale study of head teachers, Black found that respondents saw a considerable divide between teaching and management. A rise to management positions was viewed as a step that often resulted in teachers 'forget[ing] who they were' and a cost that was almost universally shunned in this study (Black 2005, p. 7). This lack of support for a career pathway from teaching to management has also been noted by Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005, p.29). While there may be a number of reasons for this observation, including the age of respondents, it is also perhaps because the primary motivation that drives people into the VET sector in the first

place is a passion for teaching and students (Black 2005, p.8; Chappell & Johnston 2003, p.22; Harris *et al.* 2005). One of the unique features of teaching generally is that it combines specific occupational knowledge and general knowledge of learning and teaching into a holistic approach to working with students (Krejsler 2005, p. 336). Other factors such as the stress of management roles may also play a part, but it would appear that the clash of ideologies identified by Chappell (2000a) may also be influencing perceptions of potential career pathways from teaching into management roles in TAFE institutes.

The casualisation of the VET workforce has been particularly noted as having a significant impact on the potential for career pathways in the sector. In a search forum held to examine human resource issues likely to impact on TAFE institutes, it was acknowledged that changes in employment patterns have impacted on staff morale and loyalty. It has been asserted that this strategy has also negatively affected investment in the workforce resulting in insufficient workforce development and planning (VTA 2001, p.6). The impact of casualisation is not only confined to areas related to the initial recruitment and the career pathway taken into the VET sector. Increased numbers of part-time staff have altered the work of existing staff who are required to manage and support new sessional staff and integrate them into the activities of the workplace (OPCETE 2000, p.13).

Two competing explanations have been offered for the observed high rates of casualisation. On the one hand, casualisation is explained by resorting to 'rational economic discourses' which highlight the flexibility that such work arrangements afford both organisations and individuals (Cully & Woods 2006; Junor 2005). In other words, high rates of casualisation are attributed to deliberate human resource and industrial relations policies in response to a range of factors. These factors include reduced public funding and the need to contain labour costs, as a means of meeting the requirement for teachers and trainers to hold current industrial expertise (this is best achieved by persons holding jobs outside the VET sector in addition to their teaching appointments) and as a response to worker demands for greater flexibility in their working arrangements. These explanations are epitomised in the 'core-periphery' model of employment identified by a number of authors (Chappell & Johnston 2003; Harris *et al.* 2005). This model is often justified uncritically in terms of the 'different levels of skills required' and casual work being associated with either less or narrowly skilled workers or, by way of contradiction, to the rise of 'non-standard' highly paid consultancy work (Chappell & Johnston 2003). This latter explanation does not receive support as some studies show that, for many casual staff, teaching in TAFE is their main source of income (Junor, cited in Mouhtouris 2005) and that a majority of teachers employed casually in TAFE would prefer permanent employment (Kronemann 2005).

On the other hand, casualisation and its associated flexibility can be framed as precarious employment (Burchall, Lapido & Wilkinson 2002; Heery & Salmon 2000) which is viewed as offering disadvantage, inequity and insecurity in the VET workforce and seemingly to fly in the face of rhetoric on the 'highly skilled workforce (Junor 2005). Insecurity in the workforce involves lack of attachment to an employer, fear of loss of employment and income, lack of control over job requirements and limited access to training and skill recognition (Junor 2005, p.268). This framing links casualisation to the discourse of 'disadvantage' but is open to critique from those who view this as 'deficit stereotyping'. One advantage of this discourse, however, is that it avoids the notion of individual deficit and opens spaces for equity considerations (Junor 2005, p.269). Recent work by Pocock, Buchanan and Campbell (2004) attempts to create a new space to examine this phenomenon by introducing the concept of 'quality work' which places arguments for job security as equitable, just and fair, and as Junor (2005) notes,

... [it has] a strong experiential appeal, and is also translatable into the frames of individual, organisational and social risk-avoidance, thereby providing a possible 'metacultural' link to new rhetorics of sustainability (p.269).

A survey of 510 responses from four participating TAFE institutes tested these two explanations of casualisation of the TAFE workforce (Junor 2005, pp.269-270). The study found that, while factors such as economic considerations, family commitments and the freedom that came from being employed on a casual basis were important, passion for teaching was a strong driving force in being attracted to teaching. More than half the survey respondents were hoping to find a permanent position; with only 30% of respondents listing their career aspiration to be to continue their casual teaching position. However, neither choices available for casual work nor the flexibility that comes from this mode of employment implied a preference for casual work – 80% of survey respondents reported that they desired either permanent work (60%) or a fixed-term contract (20%); and about half reported that they would like to be employed for more hours (Junor 2005, p.270). There also seemed to be an absence of the positive framing of casual work in terms of being a ‘self-made’ career – this was particularly so for those respondents whose ‘main job’ was in TAFE. In drawing conclusions from the findings, Junor argues that ‘flexibility’ is being experienced as labour market insecurity and that casual staff work on the margins and often without recognition of the professional responsibilities they undertake, usually in their own time. Junor concluded that discontent with their casual status was highest for those respondents who have ‘chosen a teaching career and saw themselves as skilled professionals’ (Junor 2005, p. 272). Based on these findings, the quest for ‘decent’ and ‘quality’ work seems pressing as well as the need to understand more fully the psychological contract that people in VET have with their employing organisations in terms of job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation and expectations related to career opportunities and development (Dickie *et al.* 2004, p.39).

Current and future pathways within VET have the potential to be shaped by the various strategies adopted by organisations to deal with the problem of sustaining the skills base, particularly in TAFE institutes where the ageing of the workforce is perhaps most acute. Training and recruitment strategies selected to deal with this issue (for example, recruiting people to teaching roles with recent industry experience, providing options for people to extend their working lives beyond retirement age) have the potential to both open up and close off potential career options. Victoria offers an interesting case study of this issue. A detailed analysis of the TAFE workforce in Victoria noted that sessional (casual) teachers represented a way of rejuvenating the workforce in TAFE institutes (OPCETE 2000). However, this has been concentrated in only a few fields of study such as health and community services, social and employment services, science and performing arts. A lack of younger staff in the traditional trades such as construction and engineering was noted (OPCETE 2000, p.13). These findings reinforce earlier data gathered in 1999-2000 as part of a study on professional development in VET (Harris *et al.* 2001) which found some patterns in appointments of VET staff across different program areas/fields of study. In the case of the teachers/trainers appointed in the last two years, appointments were most numerous in business/administration (20% of new appointments), health/community services (16%), multi-field education (14%), computing (13%), service/hospitality (11%) and agriculture/horticulture (7%). Very small percentages of staff being appointed in the more ‘traditional’ areas such as architecture/building (4%) and surveying/engineering (3%). Supporting this observation were data illustrating that staff employed for long periods of time (21 years or more) were heavily concentrated in areas such as surveying/engineering (25%) and architecture/building (10%) compared with areas such as computing (4%), service/hospitality (4%) and agriculture/horticulture (2%). These data point to the complexities of conceptualising careers in a sector where relationships between VET institutions such as TAFE and the industries they serve are not straightforward. Career pathways are arguably mediated by a range of factors including skill requirements of the industry and ability of VET providers to respond to these requirements within their allocated resources. It is also further complicated by the image of the VET sector which is still seen as a ‘poor cousin’ within the broader teaching profession.

Relationships with industry

The identity of the VET practitioner is also complicated by the notion of ‘dual allegiances’ to students and learning on the one hand, and, on the other, the role that practitioners play in facilitating learning and loyalty to a discipline or industry (Blom & Clayton 2002). ‘Best practice’ in industry, rather than professional standards, forms the benchmark for VET teachers’ and trainers’ work (Mulcahy & Jasman 2004). This privileging of industry experience over teaching skills is reflected in the need for teachers and trainers to maintain vocational competency as expressed in the Australian Quality Training Framework standards under which registered training organisations must operate. This vocational competency requires expertise in a body of knowledge that is neither explicit nor generalisable. This knowledge, unlike that of teachers in the school sector, is only partially codified in competency standards for a particular industry; it is mostly embedded in workplace practice (Blom & Clayton 2002). The multiple contexts in which teachers and trainers operate shape the ways in which their teaching is portrayed and their role as teachers is valued (Palmieri 2004, p.3).

Maintenance of vocational competency rests upon a continuing relationship with an industry through a variety of mechanisms such as formal partnerships with industry, working with industry in the delivery of training and assessment in the workplace, networking (both formal and informal) and membership of professional associations (Clayton, Fisher & Hughes 2005, p.26). In other words, a career in teaching and learning is in part comprised of maintaining credibility and linkages with an industry which the teacher or trainer is perceived to have ‘left’ in order to take up a new role. This is particularly the case for teachers and trainers who move into a position within an educational institution. For others who remain within an industry and take up a training role as part of their broader work role, their career may not lie in VET but rather in the industry of which they are a part. Affiliation with VET as a career pathway may not even be recognised or desired. The uptake of roles related to education and training may be a pathway to a career in another occupation.

Qualifications, professional development and careers in VET

Educational qualifications play a significant role in the working lives of VET teachers and trainers. While the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (and its predecessor qualifications) has established a base-line qualification for teachers and trainers in the sector, teaching and training staff can hold a wide range of qualifications (Harris *et al.* 2001). These qualifications are more likely to be in their area of industry specialisation (Dickie *et al.* 2004, p.97). In the TAFE sector, staff involved in teaching and training are more likely than other groups of VET staff to hold post-school qualifications (NCVER 2004a, p.34). VET professionals working outside of TAFE are more likely to hold bachelor or postgraduate qualifications (NCVER 2004a, p.34). Most VET staff, however, do not hold specific qualifications in the field of education or training (NCVER 2004a, p.34).

Educational qualifications held by staff are patterned by various factors including age, gender, mode and length of employment. For example, in a survey of Victorian TAFE teachers, younger sessional staff (under 40 years of age) and staff employed for less than six years were less likely to have educational qualifications (Seddon, Pena & Dart 2004). In this study, women were found to be more likely than men to hold qualifications at bachelor level or higher; this trend was also apparent for on-going staff (Seddon *et al.* 2004). This study also confirmed a link between qualifications and careers in TAFE. The findings indicated that, while a Certificate IV was considered to be a suitable entry-level qualification by just over one-third of teacher respondents, a post-graduate level qualification was considered to be a suitable career-level qualification that TAFE teachers should aspire to achieve (Seddon *et al.* 2004).

The acquisition of qualifications, particularly teaching qualifications, is often acquired on the job and sometimes after securing employment in the sector (Mulcahy & Jasman 2003). This is particularly the case for staff commencing employment in public sector organisations such as TAFE (Bierbaum &

Karthigesu 2003). Maintenance of employment in the sector can usually be linked to the attainment of qualifications, often at an individual's own expense and outside of their work commitments (Harris *et al.* 2001).

Workforce development or professional development has been a particular focus for the VET sector for a number of years, particularly through national initiatives such *Reframing the Future* and the *Australian Flexible Learning Framework* (Dickie *et al.* 2004, p. 25). These programs have often focused on meeting systemic and organisational demands for compliance rather than the needs of individuals as professionals (Harris *et al.* 2001, pp.59-60). These levels of activity are not considered to be adequate (Schofield 2002, p.32) and have been largely directed to teaching staff – usually those in full-time roles – and leaders and managers. Staff from public RTOs have been more heavily involved than staff in the private VET sector (Henry, Smith & Ayre 2002, p.10; Young 2002, p.10). Reed and Reed (2003), in a study of non-teaching staff in Victorian TAFE institutes, also noted that these staff have less access to professional development; what was available was often difficult to access and not linked to obvious career pathways (unless staff desired to move into teaching).

From a careers perspective, one of the significant issues for VET teaching/training staff is the lack of portability and transferability of VET specific qualifications to other sectors of education – particularly schools. Given the ageing profile of staff within the sector, and the likelihood of increased competition for staff, these qualification barriers may serve to limit career pathways for people within the education sector (Dickie *et al.* 2004, p.100).

Conclusion

The VET sector offers an interesting context for the study of careers and career pathways. The proportions of the VET workforce engaged in sessional or casual work is significantly higher than is found in the Australian workforce generally (NCVER 2004a, p.25). This rise in contingent forms of employment has coincided with dramatic changes to the nature of VET teachers' and trainers' work (Harris *et al.* 2005) and when segments of the workforce (the permanent TAFE teachers in particular) are nearing retirement at a rate higher than that of the overall workforce (NCVER 2004a, p. 25). Furthermore, these changes are occurring in a context where access to professional development is declining in the face of barriers such as increased work intensification and lack of funds and time to attend such activities (Harris *et al.* 2001).

In many respects, VET staff, particularly teachers recruited from industry, are living the 'boundaryless' career in that they have already physically moved from one occupation to another. Once in the VET sector career pathways appear to be highly structured by modes of employment and a range of other structural factors. While there has been significant attention paid to the capacity of the sector (that is, the numbers of staff needed in the future) and the capability of VET staff (the skill mix required), little attention has been paid to the quality of working life for VET staff. Gaining information on how individuals make sense of careers in this context can be an important step in thinking through how the skill base of VET organisations might be sustained.

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