13. Exploring career and personal outcomes and the meaning of career success among part-time professionals in organizations

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Over recent decades, the professional workforce and family structures have dramatically changed. For example, the dual-earner family is now the modal American family (Barnett, 2001). Only 17 per cent of families comprise a male breadwinner and a stay-at-home wife (US Department of Labor, 2004). According to the most recent National Survey of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) (Bond et al., 2002), the demographic occupational profile of the professional and managerial workforce in the US has also dramatically changed. In 2002 women held 39 per cent of professional and managerial jobs, compared with 24 per cent in 1977.

Work hours and demands are rising on the job and there is less time to devote to family or other personal life commitments. Over the 25 years between 1977 and 2002, the total work hours of all dual-earner couples with children under 18 years at home increased by an average of ten hours per week – from 81 to 91 hours (Bond et al., 2002). A recent national survey on overwork in America indicates that nearly half (44 per cent) of the US workforce experienced being overworked in their jobs in the past month (Galinsky et al., 2005). Another recent report based on the NSCW survey found that two-thirds (67 per cent) of employed parents believe they do not have enough time with their children (Galinsky et al., 2004). Over half of all employees participating in the NSCW survey said they do not have enough time for their spouses (63 per cent) or themselves (55 per cent).

Although these trends are important for all employee groups, professionals are a key labor market group that faces unique challenges in managing work and personal life demands. Many professionals encounter growing organizational pressures to increase workload and work hours

(Gerson and Jacobs, 2004). For most professionals, full-time work does not mean 40 hours a week. More typically, a full-time professional is expected to work 50, 60, or even 70 hours per week. For individuals who seek to advance in their careers, the hours they work can be seen as a symbol of career commitment. Some may fear that placing limits on work hours or workloads is likely to be negatively construed by customers, bosses or co-workers. Many professionals are also in dual-career households, where it is hard to be a parent or an elder caregiver or 'have a life' when work involves such long hours. Yet growing numbers of professionals are taking actions to create or adapt jobs in order to achieve the kind of work and family lives they want over their careers. They are negotiating to work less, to reduce their workloads with a proportionate reduction in pay.

In recent years there has been considerable attention given to examining this fairly new phenomenon among professionals, and it has been called reduced-load, part-time, 'new concept part-time' and customized work by different authors (Barnett and Gareis, 2000; Corwin et al., 2001; Epstein et al., 1998; Lee et al., 2000, 2002; Hill et al., 2004; MacDermid et al., 2001; Meiksins and Whalley, 2002). A body of research is developing that begins to explain why these new work forms are emerging, how they are working out and under what circumstances they result in positive outcomes for the individuals, work units and organizations concerned. However, little research has explicitly focused on how choosing to work less actually affects individuals, their careers and their lives over time. And there has been no attention paid to changing conceptions of career success which we would expect to accompany new ways of working among professionals wanting to work less for periods of time in their careers. The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to filling this gap by examining the personal, career and family outcomes of part-time professionals and by exploring their concep-tions of career success in the context of working on a part-time basis to accommodate personal or family commitments.

Of course there is a well-established stream of research on the inter-relationships between work and non-work life in general. However, empir-ical studies have tended to focus on one of the following issues: (1) determining the direction and type of influence of one domain on the other, for example, compensation, spillover, independence (Lee and Kanungo, 1984); (2) examination of predictors and outcomes of work–family conflict (for example, Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985); (3) identifying implications of participation in multiple roles based on a scarcity or expansionist perspec-tive (Marks, 1977; Rothbard, 2001). Although the theoretical literature has also suggested viable constructs for investigation such as work–life inte-gration (Kossek et al., 1999), work–family balance or facilitation (Frone, 2003), and a balanced life (Gallos, 1989), to date there has been little testing

of the validity of such formulations (Aryee et al., 2005). Furthermore, there has been little exploratory qualitative research to surface individuals' actual conceptions of career success (Greenhaus, 2003; Heslin, 2005).

Yet one of the weaknesses of career theory in general, according to Sturges (1999), is the lack of an adequate and holistic conceptualization of career success from the perspective of the individual. A deeper understanding and a more complete picture of career success can be provided by a qualitative exploration of what individuals themselves define as salient or prevalent in their own conceptions of career success. The literature suggests that personal conceptions of career success for some individuals may be simultaneously associated with both internal and external criteria (Poole et al., 1993).

There has long been a distinction in the career success literature between objective and subjective career success, dating back to the initial theoretical distinction provided by Hughes (1937, 1958). On the basis of Hughes' framework, objective career success has been defined by observable and measurable criteria, such as pay, promotion and status. Subjective career success, on the other hand, has been defined by an individual's reactions to unfolding career experiences.

In the literature, traditional conceptions of career success were premised on the notion of linear hierarchical career progression in a competitive environment. In more than two-thirds of career studies published in major journals between 1980 and 1994, career success was measured by objective measures such as salary, rank and promotion (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). On the other hand, a number of studies (Kofodimos, 1993; Powell, 1999; Sturges, 1999) have found that defining career success in terms of purely external and objective terms such as pay and position is not congruent with what many managers and professionals (especially women) feel about their own career success. Therefore, it is clear that there is a need for more holistic and multidimensional conceptions and definitions of career success, where the interplay between work, family, life, significant others and various life stages is acknowledged.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH STUDIES

The research findings reported here are based on two qualitative studies focused on the experiences of professionals and managers in reduced-load work arrangements conducted in 1996–98 and 2002–03. In Study 1 83 cases of reduced-load work were examined in a variety of kinds of jobs in 43 companies in the US and Canada. As four of these cases involved job sharing, there were actually 87 participants interviewed about their work arrangements and their careers, family and personal lives. Approximately six years

later, in Study 2, we were able to do a follow-up interview with 81 of the original 87 participants in order to find out how their careers and lives had evolved over time. In the original study participants were recruited using personal contacts with human resources and work–life managers, cold calls to employers and direct mail solicitations to members of professional organizations (such as the Association of Part-Time Professionals). As this was an exploratory study of a new phenomenon, we were seeking a heterogeneous sample to support theory generation as opposed to hypothesis testing. We did not pursue more than three cases in any one company, and we tried to include cases that represented individuals pursuing working less for a variety of different reasons and in many different industries. We also sought and achieved having men comprise at least 10 per cent of the sample, given estimates of their representing 10–20 per cent of all professionals/managers in organizations working voluntarily on a reduced-load basis (Catalyst, 1997). The aim was to include individuals in a wide range of types of jobs and family situations, as well as those with a variety of experiences negotiating and maintaining part-time arrangements. In Study 2, conducted in 2002–03, we contacted the original participants through our records of their personal coordinates collected for purposes of providing an Executive Feedback Report on findings after Study 1. Eighty-one agreed to be interviewed approximately six years after the original interview.

In Study 1 working on a reduced-load basis was defined as working less than full-time and being paid proportionately. The lowest percentage of full-time being worked in the sample was 50 per cent and the highest was 90 per cent. The most typical percentage was either 60 per cent or 80 per cent, the equivalent of three or four days a week. The sample consisted of 87 professionals and managers in a variety of different kinds of companies (for example, financial, manufacturing, natural resources and telecommunications) in 43 different corporations in the US and Canada. Forty-five per cent (45 per cent) worked in individual contributor roles and are referred to here as 'professionals'; and 55 per cent were managers with at least three direct reports. Professionals were most likely to work in the areas of Finance, Human Resources and Corporate Communications, or Research and Development. However, 25 per cent were in Information Systems, Production/Operations, and Marketing. Although some of them had the title of 'Manager' and might supervise a secretary or administrative assistant, they did not have responsibility for a group of direct reports. Some examples of job titles were:

Project Director	Product Development Chemist	Vice President, Finance
Principal Research Scientist	Organizational Effectiveness Manager	Director of Contracts

| Software Engineer | Manager, International Business Development | Vice President, Information Systems |

There were three types of managerial jobs in the sample. Almost half (48 per cent) were managing professionals in a support function. Their direct reports were competent, seasoned professionals needing little direct supervision or coaching (for example, Director of Finance, or Vice President, Human Resources). Thirty-nine per cent of the managers were considered 'line' managers in that they were in functional areas linked directly to production and operations, or delivery of product/services to customers (for example, Manager, Export Operations; Sales Manager; Branch Manager). These managers described their jobs primarily as managing their direct reports, who were the ones actually doing the work. More than half and sometimes virtually all of their time was spent selecting, training, coaching, mentoring, monitoring and assessing those they were responsible for, as well as organizing and coordinating the work itself. They were also held accountable for financial or other deliverables on a monthly or quarterly basis, and they regularly operated under critical time deadlines. The final kind of management position involved project managers (13 per cent), who operated typically as matrix managers rather than traditional hierarchical managers (for example, Software Development). The members of their project teams were all professionals and needed minimal guidance and direction. Their work involved a great deal of lateral interface across different areas, seeking consultation and gaining cooperation on the basis of their expertise and interpersonal skills rather than their rank.

In Study 2, of the 81 participants interviewed, 47 per cent were still working on a reduced-load basis, although 13.5 per cent were self-employed; 38 per cent were working full-time; and 15 per cent were staying at home temporarily or retired. Of those employed in organizations, 65 per cent were with the same employers as in Study 1, and 55 per cent of them were in managerial roles with supervisory responsibilities. In Study 1 10 per cent of the sample were male, and in Study 2 11 per cent were male, because five of the six participants not willing to be interviewed the second time were female. Table 13.1 provides demographic information about the samples at the two different points in time.

In Study 1 confidential, semi-structured interviews, which were audio-taped and then transcribed verbatim, focused on learning about how reduced-load arrangements were negotiated and sustained and on what terms, as well as how they were working out from a personal, family and organizational perspective. For each case of reduced-load work, interviews were conducted not only with the target individual working less but

Table 13.1   Demographic information on sample of part-time professionals and managers, Times 1 and 2

	Time 1 mean	Time 2 mean
Age	39	45
Per cent female	89	89
Full-time equivalent salary	$80 454	$111 127
Spouse/partner salary	$86 982	$114 696
No. yrs. on reduced load	4.3	8.0
Per cent load reduction	72	66 (RL only)[a]
Hrs./wk. current		
Full-time		47.4
Part-time	31.8	29.9
Age of youngest child	4.9	8.4

Note: [a] Number of hours worked per week, on average, by those still working on a reduced load (RL) basis (not including the whole sample).

also with four other stakeholders (boss, co-worker, HR representative and spouse/partner), which enabled the interviewers to get a sense of the success of the arrangements from multiple perspectives. After reviewing all interviews completed in a case, the interviewers gave each case a 'global success' rating on a scale of 1 to 9, with 7–9 indicating a high level of success, 5–6 a moderate level of success and 1–4 a low level of success.

In Study 2 only target individuals who had worked on a reduced-load basis in the earlier study were interviewed. The focus was on what had happened in the intervening period of time and what changes and/or life events had occurred, as well as the current status of their careers and personal and family lives. In addition, each participant was asked to complete a Timeline on three dimensions (career, family and personal) from the time of the first interview to the time of the second, indicating 'how well things were working' with 7 indicating 'Things working very well' and 1 indicating 'Things not working well'. These charts yielded self-assessments of outcomes on each of the three dimensions at the time of Study 1 and Study 2: Career Self-assessment, Time 1 and Time 2; Family Self-assessment, Time 1 and Time 2; and Personal Life assessment, Time 1 and Time 2. Finally, in Study 2 each interviewer gave an overall Congruence rating of the individual he or she interviewed after an in-depth analysis of the interview data. This Congruence rating is meant to capture to what extent the participant was living the life he or she desired. So, on a scale of 1 to 7, those rated highest (7) were judged by the interviewers as having the greatest consistency between their dreams or ideals and their actual lives;

that is, how they orchestrated and calibrated their involvement in work, family and other domains.

CAREER AND PERSONAL LIFE OUTCOMES

Given that working less than full-time is a deviant pattern for professionals and managers in North America, we were curious about just how successful our sample would be in their careers and how satisfied they would be with the time gained and what they did with it. First we examine what we learned from our data in Study 1 about the career and personal life outcomes of these individuals, by using conventional measures of success and listening to bosses' assessments of 'potential'. Secondly, we look at participants' views of the outcomes, in terms of their own personal lives as well as their relationships with children and/or other family members. Finally, we look at interviewers' assessments of the 'global success' of the reduced-load arrangements, which are based on the views of all stakeholders interviewed in each case. At Time 2 we consider how participants' careers fared according to traditional objective criteria like salary and number of promotions received, as well as participants' self-assessments of how well things were going in their careers at Time 2, and in comparison with Time 1. We also examine their self-assessments of how things were going in their family and personal lives at Time 1 and Time 2. Finally we look at the Time 2 interviewers' assessments of the Congruence of participants' actual lives with their desired lives, in terms of their level of involvement in career, family and other life domains.

Time 1 Outcomes

Using conventional measures of career success, we were surprised to find in our interviews from 1996 to 1998 that 35 per cent of the sample had already been promoted while working on a reduced-load basis, even though the mean number of years working reduced load was 4.3. In addition, another third of the sample were expected by their bosses to be promoted within the next year. Reduced-load work arrangements were not necessarily a barrier to career advancement. Furthermore, an anonymous survey of the direct reports of the managerial participants (55 per cent of the sample) indicated that they rated their reduced-load managers' effectiveness on average at 7.2 on a scale from 1 to 9.

From a personal perspective participants reported gaining an average of 18 hours per week to spend on their family or other priorities as a result of working on a reduced-load basis. Ninety per cent reported positive effects of working less on their children – better relationships and more time to be

together. Ninety-one per cent said they were happier and more satisfied with the balance between home and work.

As for the interviewers' global rating of the success of the reduced-load arrangements, our criteria were multifaceted and stringent, given that we had data from five different stakeholders per case, as mentioned above. First and foremost we looked at how happy the participants were with working less from a personal point of view – how they felt about their careers and the price they were paying for the time gained and whether they felt they were getting the extra time they wanted for their personal and family lives. Second, we looked at the outcomes from an organizational perspective. Were there costs in performance or productivity in the work unit? Did others in the group have to 'pick up the slack', creating an unfair overload situation? Third, we looked at how the family was faring to see whether there were positive outcomes for the overall quality of family life, for children, or for the couple relationship. Then we looked for consistency across stakeholder interviews in reporting positive consequences of the reduced-load arrangements. Interviewers rated each case, taking into consideration all accumulated data from different sources. On a scale of 1 to 9, 1 indicated consistently negative outcomes reported across stakeholders, and 9 indicated consistently positive outcomes. Each success rating was checked for validity by another member of the research team. After the ratings were completed, three groups were created: high, moderate and low. Most of the cases (62 per cent) were in the high success group, 31 per cent in the moderate success group, and 7 per cent in the low success group.

Time 2 Outcomes

At Time 2 the 81 participants were no longer all in reduced-load positions. Forty-seven per cent were still working less than full-time, whereas 38 per cent had returned to full-time work. Fifteen per cent were staying home, mostly to spend time with their children, but two had retired and one was temporarily unemployed. Participants experienced many changes and challenges during the period between the two interviews; some were work-related and some had to do with family and personal life. Certain changes came about as a result of events totally out of their control, such as a company being acquired or going through downsizing, or an illness in the family. Others were self-initiated, or came about because of a spouse's decision, for example, to change jobs. Major life events experienced by at least a third of the sample included birth or adoption of a child, serious illness or death of a close friend or relative, organizational downsizing, and either a child with a serious illness or learning problem or personal serious illness. In examining how successful participants were in all aspects of their lives, we looked at their own subjective point
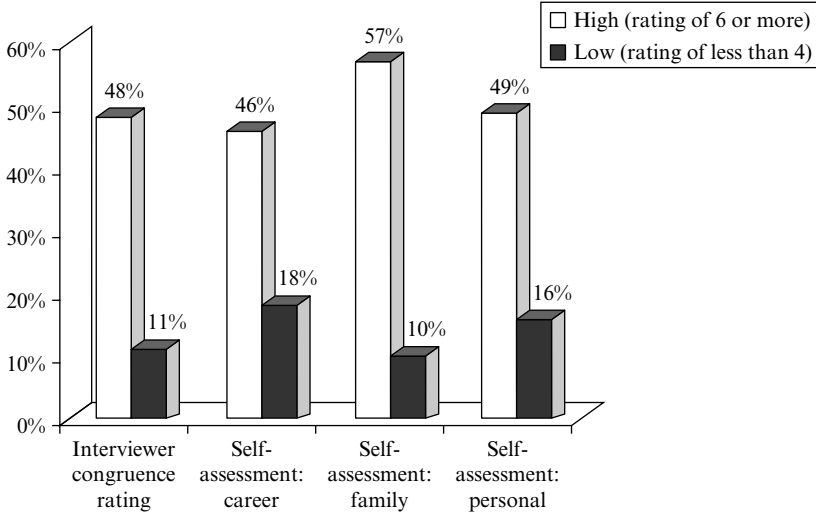
Figure 13.1   Percentages of sample with high and low ratings on subjective measures

of view, according to their personal goals, as well as at conventional objective measures of career success, such as upward mobility and salary increases.

Overall we found that, despite experiencing many changes and challenges over six years, most of the participants were doing quite well, as assessed by both subjective and objective measures of outcomes. Employed participants as a whole had an average rate of increase in full-time equivalent salary of 38 per cent over six years, and the mean salaries of the full-time versus part-time participants were virtually the same (US\$111 725 and 111 927 respectively) after adjusting the latter for the degree of reduced load. Over six years the group overall had received 65 promotions or clear increases in responsibility or status through a career move outside their former organ-ization, with 44 individuals receiving at least one and 17 receiving two or more. These gains were made in spite of the fact that the average number of years the participants had spent working on a reduced-load basis was eight.

Subjective measures of success provided by the interviewer and self-assessment ratings were also quite positive, as shown in Figure 13.1. The inter-viewers rated participants on the basis of how congruent their current lives were with their desired lives, on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 indicating the greatest congruence or consistency. Overall, the average rating was 5.3, with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 7. Half of the sample received a rating greater than 6, and only 11 per cent received a rating less than 4. The self-assessment ratings were calculated on the basis of a timeline exercise on three
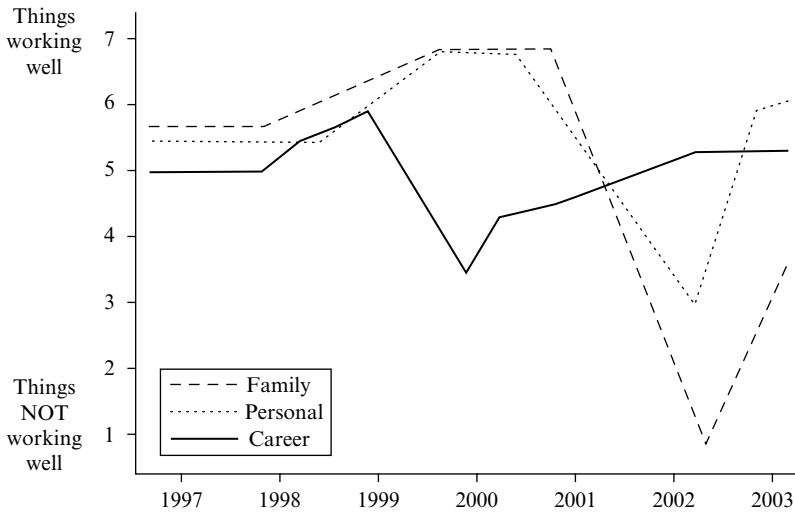
Figure 13.2   Example of timeline

dimensions (career, family, personal) covering the time from the first interview to the second.

Participants were asked to draw a line to indicate how their career, personal and family lives were working out, as shown in Figure 13.2. The horizontal axis was time, and the vertical axis was how well things were working. The point where each line (career, family or personal) ended at the time of the second interview was interpreted as the individual's assessment of how things were going on a scale of 1 to 7. Close to 50 per cent of the sample indicated things were going very well (>6) in each of the three domains, and less than 20 per cent of the sample indicated things were not going well (< 4) in each of the domains.

CONCEPTIONS OF CAREER SUCCESS

In order to study participants' conceptions of career success, we asked specific questions about what career success meant to them and what they saw ahead in their future, at both Time 1 and Time 2. We then used a content analysis approach to the transcribed interview material and through an iterative process identified recurrent themes that captured the predominant meanings associated with career success in the sample. As most participants mentioned several ideas or definitions of career success, all were recorded and included in the analysis.

Time 1 Meanings of Career Success

Table 13.2 shows the eight recurrent themes in respondent conceptions of career success. The most frequently occurring themes, with over half of respondents mentioning them, were: (1) being able to have a life outside work (74 per cent); (2) performing well (63 per cent); and (3) doing challenging work and continuing to grow professionally (62 per cent). The eight conceptions of career success fell into three categories: (a) those related to organizational perceptions, judgments and actions; (b) those involving individual respondents' perceptions and personal experiences, more or less independent of the objective work context; and (c) those involving individuals' perceptions of outcomes rooted in objective organizational reality. Those related to organizational perceptions and judgments included peer respect, upward mobility and recognition/appreciation and were labeled 'organization-based'. Although these themes appeared to be 'objective', 'external' criteria of success, only upward mobility was clearly observable. Themes which represented more subjective criteria of success, in that they were based on the individual's reactions, were labeled 'personal' themes and included: able to have a life outside work, being challenged at work and continuing to learn and grow professionally, and enjoying work. The final category of emergent themes, labeled 'personal and organizational inter-linked', included performing well and having an impact. These themes represented conceptualizations of career

Table 13.2   Meaning of career success, Times 1 and 2 (percentages)

Career success theme	Interview 1	Interview 2			
	Total sample	Total sample	Reduced-load	Full-time	Staying at home
Organization-based themes					
Peer respect	47	28	24	29	42
Upward mobility	37	14	b13	16	8
Appreciation/recognition	14	28	32	29	17
Personal themes					
Having a life outside work	74	75	66	84	75
Learning, growing and being challenged	62	53	61	58	17
Fun and enjoyment/doing interesting work	12	31	24	48	8
Personal and organizational inter-linked					
Performing well	63	32	37	26	33
Having an impact/making a contribution	44	62	58	68	58

success that suggest individuals evaluate their effectiveness at work using feed-back generated through actually doing their jobs, as well as through informal feedback from clients, co-workers and other stakeholders.

Organization-based themes

Respondents talked about career success having to do with three distinct organization-dependent outcomes: peer respect, upward mobility and recognition/appreciation. Although less than half the sample mentioned each of these conceptions of career success, 76 per cent of respondents mentioned at least one of them. So clearly some kind of external confirmation of value added is important to these part-time professionals.

Peer respect   The most frequently mentioned theme was peer respect, or being perceived as adding value to the organization. Forty-one of the 87 individuals (47 per cent) talked about the importance of how others view them or having a good reputation, being seen as responsible, dedicated and successful. This theme was more frequently mentioned by professionals (54 per cent) than managers (40 per cent). Perhaps those who are in managerial positions receive affirmation of their value by virtue of their positions of authority, so that they are less concerned about how others view them.

> I don't ever want my reputation to be tarnished. I want my colleagues to think of me as someone who is responsible and has a lot of integrity about my job and getting things done.

> I give importance to the issue of how I am perceived at work . . . I value high quality relationships and networking at work. Sometimes I care too much about what people think of me; and this causes peer pressure.

Upward mobility   The second most frequently occurring meaning of career success that was organization-based was upward mobility or career advancement through promotions and increased salary and other financial enhancements. Thirty-three of the 87 participants (34 per cent) mentioned these more traditional and objective aspects of career success, which are clearly observable and measurable. More managers (46 per cent) than professionals (28 per cent) indicated this was an important aspect of career success for them. They valued tangible monetary rewards and visible increases in status.

> Visible criteria for success are still important for me. I sometimes feel angry why I cannot move upward to executive positions working part-time . . . I made concessions on my career working reduced-load. It is difficult for career, real career advancement.

> . . . promotion will be the ultimate test of my career performance.

Appreciation/recognition The other organization-based meaning of career success that emerged was recognition or appreciation, not necessarily linked to promotions and financial incentives. About 14 per cent of managers and professionals brought up this aspect of career success. The focus here was on getting approval and support from the organization or from specific leaders in the organization.

> I mean, career success is doing the best job that I feel I can do and then having it appreciated and valued by the organization.

> Selling issues and convincing top management is always a prevalent issue, in my view of success. Because you like to have a sense of being important, you want your results to be recognized and appreciated.

Personal themes

Although 76 per cent of participants made clear that their conceptions of career success included having the organization or its members as a key point of reference, recurrent themes in definitions or conceptions of career success that were most popular and found in virtually all respondent comments (99 per cent) were those related to individuals' reactions to their work experiences. The personal themes most frequently found included: being able to have a life outside work, opportunities for professional growth and development, and doing interesting, enjoyable work.

Having a life outside work By far the most frequently mentioned criterion of career success was being able to have a life outside work. For 74 per cent of the sample the concept of career success overlapped with their overall life goals and dreams. They insisted that feeling successful in their careers meant being able to devote time and energy to the other important things in their lives, whether family or other personal pursuits. These individuals valued having enough personal space, flexibility and freedom in their careers. Balance and well-being were the prevalent and crucial issues for these people.

> To me success has changed over the course of my career. But I would say at this point in my life, it is achieving a certain amount of flexibility . . . I have a great life. I have taken up horseback riding lessons. I have more friends. I have excellent relationships with my children and their teachers. The balance is because what you give up there you take on the other side. Because I focused my energy and rechanneled energy. But the success piece of it, I do not need the prestige and the power.

> I am actually religious about keeping part-time – 3 days. I almost do not care what I do, as long as it is part-time and I can make a contribution. The arrangement

is wildly successful. The balance issue is really important for me, and my life is in the direction I want . . . And this is what allows me to keep that balance. So that is definitely the positive piece. I still get the money and professional interaction, but I get four days with my kids, which is great.

Challenge/learning/growth   A second common personal aspect of career success was feeling challenged and intellectually stimulated in their work and feeling that they were continuing to grow and develop professionally, mentioned by 63 per cent of the managers and professionals. These individuals valued developing their skills, expanding their knowledge, and enlarging their visions. Many respondents indicated that they felt this was the most important criterion of career success for them, now that they had chosen to work less and were likely to receive fewer promotional opportunities. They often expressed the sentiment that they had come to terms with watching peers move beyond them on the company ladder. They felt good about their choice to be able to spend the time they wanted at home, and they felt they had not had to sacrifice continuing to be challenged and stimulated at work.

> As long as I am learning something new, I really do not care all that much what I am doing . . . I have a job that I like, I am learning something, I feel challenged – that is what I need out of a job.

> I just realized that it is just me, that I have to continue to take on new challenges. Status quo is not the way I operate. So as long as I am feeling that I am continuing to grow and learn things, you know, in my profession and am pleased with that.

> I can get the intellectual stimulation I need by working . . . And I want to continue to do some new, innovative, exciting things outside of my company and yet still have my involvement with my company.

Fun/enjoyment   The final self-referent meaning of career success found was having fun, enjoying work. Twelve per cent of the managers and professionals said that they felt successful in their careers only if they were truly enjoying their work, getting a kick out of what they did on a regular basis. These individuals gave importance to personal satisfaction, excitement and creativity.

> I'd like to do some work just for personal satisfaction . . . The person's satisfaction is what it is all about. There is a need to earn income, obviously, but what attracts me to this business and kept me in this business is working with a variety of clients and professional colleagues over the years . . . I certainly enjoyed every aspect of my career here. I think I was certainly given great freedom to manage the group. Our partners . . . gave me a wonderful opportunity and if I had to

describe what my job was I would say I was a general manager. I was involved in marketing, sales, direct client service, administration, personnel . . . And not all that many people get that opportunity, to do all those things. So I found it extremely rewarding and fun.

Personal and organizational inter-linked themes

The final two emergent themes in respondent characterizations of what career success meant to them involved a mix of self-perceptions and organizational feedback. Those mentioning these two themes clearly saw career success as not just being an objective phenomenon, indicated by specific measurable achievements, nor as just a subjective experience that can be determined by individuals' reactions to personal experiences. Rather, career success to them meant a combination of objective evidence and subjective perception, or the intersection of the two.

Performing well   Sixty-three per cent of respondents talked about the importance of doing a good job and fulfilling their commitments. To these individuals career success meant maintaining high quality work and having a strong sense of responsibility and discipline at work. They talked about being able to focus, concentrate, work intensely and prioritize to get things done. This theme involved individuals essentially evaluating their own effectiveness from an organizational perspective. It was a subjective judgment, but based on objective information and communication received as they went about their work.

> And then there is a personal element of it too, which is that I do it in a way that is really very honorable. That I keep my word, that I am a person of commitment, you know what I mean. That I fulfill my commitments.

> I define myself successful, because they don't have to worry about me. I'm a real independent operator. I'm a real good communicator. They don't have to wonder about me . . . I don't feel like I've created a problem. I think I know if I'm not cutting with somebody's expectations . . .I feel like I have satisfied customers.

Impact/contribution   The final theme emerging in respondents' conceptions of career success was having an impact and making a contribution. This theme was often found in formulations by those respondents who contrasted this kind of outcome with the outcome of upward mobility, climbing the corporate ladder. They often expressed the sentiment that they were very comfortable with not progressing in the traditional manner and gaining that kind of recognition, as long as they felt they were still able to make a contribution to or have some tangible influence on organizational outcomes. Forty-four per cent of respondents discussed this aspect

of career success. One of the sub-themes noted here was the importance of helping or mentoring others, and even opening doors for others by being successful at pursuing reduced-load work arrangements. This conception of career success was also a mix of individual perceptions mediated by organizational realities. The respondents talked about 'feeling they were making a contribution' as being critical to their being successful in their careers. Clearly, it is possible for someone to 'feel' they are making a contribution when there is no objective evidence of impact. But the ways these professionals and managers talked about this theme made it evident that what they meant was *actually* having an influence and seeing the ways they added value.

> I define career success as making a contribution to my organization. Having the freedom to move and to make change and to make progress. Changing the way we do business, whatever, in my own way, making some sort of change.

> It has got to do with making a contribution to the organization that I am in and the company at large, really having an impact, feeling that something I'm doing isn't just pushing a pencil but that I contributed towards making them what they are.

> I, I love doing this, the work, I love contributing, I love seeing the effort, the results of my efforts.

Conceptions of Career Success – Time 2

At Time 2 we found the same eight emergent themes in participants' commentary about what career success meant to them, and there were similarities in the predominance of certain themes. At Time 1 and Time 2 three-quarters of the sample talked about career success meaning having a life outside work. Secondly, at both times over half of the participants said that career success to them meant learning, growing and being challenged. These are both personal themes, and they are clearly very important to this particular group of professionals and managers, as shown by the fact that they were among the most frequently mentioned aspects of career success at two different points in time.

Although the similarities in articulated conceptions of career success were striking, there were also some notable shifts in frequency of themes mentioned. Most notable was that the 'performing well' theme, which was about doing a good job and fulfilling commitments, was mentioned by only 32 per cent of the sample at Time 2, compared with 63 per cent at Time 1. At the same time, there was an increase in participants' mention of career success being about 'having an impact, making a contribution', from 44 per

cent to 62 per cent. Both of these themes involve a mix of self-perceptions and organizational feedback. One possible explanation for these changes is that at Time 1 these professionals and managers, when interviewed about their reduced-load work arrangements, were still relatively new in their positions and understandably concerned about their ability to perform well and deliver results as well as any other professional or manager. Six years later, with more experience in their organizations and in many cases having received promotions and/or salary increases, presumably the 'performing well' dimension of career success was less salient. Perhaps the increase in participants mentioning wanting to have an impact represents their 'raising the bar' as a result of success and thus wanting not just to fulfill commitments and perform well but to actually make a contribution, to see results or evidence of their value added.

As for the organization-based themes, at Time 2 both 'upward mobility' and 'peer respect' were less important to the sample as a whole; yet 'appreciation/recognition' were mentioned by twice as many participants as in Time 1. Perhaps upward mobility and peer respect were less salient in Time 2 simply because they had actually been achieved or accomplished over the intervening years. It is interesting that more participants mentioned appreciation or recognition as an important aspect of career success. They were clearly looking for this from their managers or other senior management in the company. It was seen as an important source of affirmation, even if career advancement through promotions was not proceeding apace. As for personal themes, the only change was a dramatic increase in the percentage of the sample talking about career success being about having fun, enjoying one's work, doing interesting things, from 12 to 31 per cent.

DISCUSSION

The findings reviewed above have theoretical implications, as they provide unexpected insights as well as challenges to state of the art knowledge in the field. The strongly held views of career success articulated by this sample also suggest the need for further research to examine contemporary views of career success from the perspective of other sub-groups of the new diverse workforce. If some of the themes and findings found here are replicated with other samples, there could also be practical implications in that organizations might benefit from adapting existing reward systems and advancement structures to be more appealing to the changing workforce of the twenty-first century.

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective one of the most provocative findings is that
the emergent themes did not conform to current distinctions made in the
literature between 'objective' and 'subjective' career success. Instead of
there being clear objective and subjective aspects of career success, only
four of the eight themes generated clearly fell into either of these two cat-
egories. This suggests that the theoretical duality between objective and
subjective criteria may be less clear in individuals' minds than in the heads
of career scholars. The findings also support Heslin's (2005) contention
that we need to pay more attention to career success conceptions that
involve others as the key referent. The predominance of themes that fit
subjective criteria of career success supports several authors' propositions
that, under the conditions of the new economy and more people being in
boundaryless careers, the traditional objective criteria are simply not very
meaningful (Arthur et al., 2005). And the fact that the subjective career
success themes found here were quite different from those most often
measured by career researchers supports suggestions made by others
(Arthur et al., 2005; Heslin, 2005) that the construct of career success is
more complex and multi-dimensional today than it was earlier, because of
demographic changes in the workforce and changing organizational
structures. Finally, our findings suggest that some people think of their
careers and career success in a broader life context, rather than a separate
domain where they operate independently of their family and personal
life. Career theory has tended to ignore the broader life context of indi-
viduals' careers.

Objective vs. subjective career success

Of eight emergent definitions of career success, only four fit well the pre-
sumed duality of objective and subjective aspects of the phenomenon.
Upward mobility is clearly an objective, outwardly visible manifestation of
success; but garnering respect from peers and getting appreciation or recog-
nition for one's work may or may not be visible to anyone other than the
job incumbent. In fact, these dimensions of career success are clearly other-
referent but not necessarily objective. And they are not other-referent in the
sense that the individual is comparing outcomes against others, which is
how the term is most often used in the literature (Heslin, 2005). These
dimensions of career success are other-referent in the sense that the indi-
vidual is dependent upon other members of the organization to achieve
these aspects of success. Yet there may be no evidence clearly discernible by
others of when these manifestations of career success happen.

   Another observation about the dimensions of career success that emerged

from this study is that the most dominant organization-based conception was *not* upward mobility – career advancement, increased responsibility, high salary and so on. Rather, the more prominent organization-based aspect of career success mentioned was respect from peers – being perceived as adding value, and so on. This aspect of career success also raises questions about the relevance of distinctions between the 'objective' and 'subjective' criteria. On the one hand, others' perceptions are not easy to assess and require the individual professional working reduced-load to make a calculation, draw inferences, make a judgment about whether others respect him or her, which might argue for 'peer respect' being treated as a subjective career outcome. On the other hand, presumably there are also data – objective, observable evidence – that could be gathered to assess how any given person is viewed or treated in a work unit. So peer respect seems not to qualify as strictly a subjective or an objective criterion of career success. We grouped 'peer respect' along with 'upward mobility' and 'recognition/appreciation' in the category of organization-based themes, because the source is organizational rather than personal. The individual professional working part-time does not have direct control over these career outcomes. For example, that individual could be performing at the very highest level according to his or her manager, yet a co-worker could still perceive him or her as not equally competent or committed because of a bias against part-time work in general. We wondered also whether this aspect of career success was important partly because some of these professionals and managers had accepted that they had made tradeoffs and might experience career plateauing or slower upward mobility, yet they realized that they must do something to maintain their 'career capital' while they were opting to invest more in their lives outside work. As long as their peers still viewed them as having valued expertise and being responsible and committed, these part-time professionals and managers could keep their options open for the future.

There were three clearly subjective career success themes – being able to have a life outside work, opportunities to do challenging work and continue to grow professionally, and enjoying work. However, none really matches the notion of intrinsic satisfaction or psychological success usually associated with subjective career outcomes (Hall and Chandler, 2005). The theme closest to psychological success or intrinsic satisfaction was 'performing well'. But this was categorized as a personal and organizational inter-linked theme, rather than personal, because participants clearly expressed that they wanted evidence that they were performing well. It was not sufficient for them to carry out an internal assessment and feel that they were doing well. There had to be a confirmation externally.

Performing well and having an impact, which were categorized as personal and organizational inter-linked themes, clearly could not be catego-

rized as either objective or subjective, because they represented a synthesis of the two, or a sort of incorporation of the objective into the subjective. Performing well and having an impact or making a contribution can be viewed as both self-referent and other- (organizational-) referent. To feel that one is performing well requires some external verification or confirmation but is not necessarily a matter of a visible designation. Having an impact or making a contribution is of the same order in that it is clearly the individual's reaction ('feeling' that one is having an impact) and yet seems to require some visible evidence, even if there is no tangible attribution made by any organizational member.

So four of the eight themes that emerged from respondents' reflections on the meaning of career success suggest that the boundary between objective and subjective career success is ambiguous. Peer respect, Recognition/appreciation, Performing well, and Having an impact are all conceptualizations that demand, in fact, a synthesis of the objective and the subjective. These themes also suggest that career success research could be enhanced by approaches that gather information from multiple sources and that, in fact, offer the opportunity to compare the individuals' perceptions with those of key stakeholders in the organization.

What is subjective career success?
The part-timers studied here appeared to be similar to knowledge workers labeled by Arthur and Rousseau (1996) as having boundaryless careers in that they had a tendency to put more weight on subjective aspects of career success (such as continuing to learn and grow). This focus may be because they see fewer promotional opportunities in any one given employer, or it may be because they prefer the independence to determine their own career movement. But knowledge workers in the new economy are generally portrayed as having little loyalty to employers and as thinking of their careers in a broader industry context. Part-time professionals and managers in our study, however, were quite loyal and committed to their employers, and they believed that, given their desire to work on a reduced-load basis, their career capital was greater staying in an organization where they had built up credibility and a good reputation based on past history, as well as a set of strong networks and relationships.

Of the three self-referent dimensions of success found, all did seem to fit the subjective category – able to have a life outside work, feeling that one is doing challenging work and continuing to grow and learn professionally, and having fun, enjoying work. However, none approximated the subjective criterion which is most often measured in the empirical literature – career satisfaction – which raises questions about what this construct actually means. The term suggests that individuals maintain a long-term perspec-

tive on their sequence of work-related experiences over time and indeed can articulate a coherent reaction or attitude toward that sequence at a given point in time. Only one of the emergent themes in this study included a longitudinal view (upward mobility), and the rest were clearly grounded in the present. Perhaps the idea of people feeling a sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their careers is a social construction of academic researchers rather than a reflection of something professionals and managers actually think about.

Career in a life context
The most novel and yet not surprising finding in this study was the high percentage of participants who talked about career success simply meaning being able to have a life beyond the workplace. To suggest that career success consists of something outside the career domain, or even that it is determined by something outside, may seem outlandish or paradoxical. However, for individuals who have chosen to work less in order to create more space for other things in their lives, this concept seems almost commonsensical.

The emergent theme of career success as being able to have a life outside work may also have to do with the predominantly female sample. Career success for men has traditionally been assumed to be associated with career-related achievements and accomplishments and the concomitant recognition received. The meanings of career success to women may well turn out to be somewhat different, as a function of the different roles they play and the salience of various identities at different times in their lives. Lee et al. (2004) have proposed a model of Identity Transformation which suggests that, after professionals become parents, they go through a gradual process of socialization into parenthood, while also enacting changes in their work and family patterns, leading to a new overall identity as professional and parent. If they are correct, it would clearly follow that the meaning of career success would change through this process. Of course, more research is needed to investigate women's definitions of career success and their career conceptions at different points in time, and how career fits into their overall lives. Hall et al. (1976, 2002, 2003) are in the process of developing an instrument that measures career and life orientation in a manner that recognizes the embeddedness of individuals' careers in a broader life context. It may help us to identify more precisely how professionals working reduced-load differ from professionals working full-time in their conceptions of career success and their career thinking in general.

Eaton and Bailyn (2000) point out that the conventional view of career has been that professionals act as individuals and are always seeking to maximize their own outcomes independent of other elements in their lives. Yet men and

women are embedded in a set of relationships, and in a context much larger and broader than a single employing organization, or even several over time. They suggest thinking of 'career' as life path, as a trajectory that unfolds as a function not only of workplace events, accomplishments, relationships (and industry characteristics and so on), but also as a function of individual, family, partner (and partner's employer) and community events, accomplishments, relationships. This way of thinking may be helpful, but it still puts the individual career as the central focus. One thing we learned from this study is that some professionals conceive of their careers in a context rather than as a separate pursuit or domain inhabited solely by the individual and the implicated organizations that employ them. Perhaps, if we thought about careers as embedded in a larger context, we could gain more insight into the different meanings they have for people, because we would pay more attention to the different contexts of different individuals and study more of the interactions and changes that occur over time.

Practical Implications

Among part-time professionals and managers studied here, the three most prevalent definitions of career success at Time 1 were: being able to have a life beyond work; performing well; and doing challenging work and continuing to grow professionally. At Time 2 'performing well' was replaced by 'having an impact'. These conceptualizations of career success suggest that organizations have a lot to learn about the shifting priorities and values of their professional and managerial employees, and that they may need to redesign their reward systems and career paths if they want to stay competitive in attracting and retaining the best knowledge workers and leaders of people. Not surprisingly, this research with non-traditional professionals who have chosen to work part-time simply confirms what other writers have suggested: that there has been a shift from the prominence of a more traditional definition of career success (meaning regular promotions and increasing responsibility, compensation and status over time) to the emergence of a more individualized and idiosyncratic definition of career success (Arthur et al., 2005; Cleveland, 2004; Heslin, 2005; Moen and Roehling, 2004). At first glance employers might be concerned about this change, because it suggests that they lose some leverage to motivate, to relocate, to redeploy their valuable people if these employees value highly goals other than upward mobility in the corporation. However, this shift in employee goals can be viewed as felicitous given the widespread flattening of corporations and the dramatically reduced opportunities for vertical movement up the ladder.

It should also be noted that two of the top three definitions of career

success in our sample at both points in time suggest that these part-time pro-
fessionals are still highly committed to their careers and able to deliver
added value to their organizations. They wanted either to perform well or
to have an impact, and they want to be challenged and continue to learn.
This bodes well for organizations, and they would be well-advised to experi-
ment with ways of supporting their part-time professionals and managers.
One of the biggest barriers to successful part-time work is the challenge of
constituting or redesigning professional and managerial jobs in such a way
that they can truly be done on a reduced schedule. Yet, given the importance
of performing well or having an impact to these employees, it is clearly in
the best interests of the organization *and* the individual to succeed in con-
stituting reduced work loads so that there is a win-win situation.

The importance of doing challenging work and continuing to learn to
part-time professionals and managers also represents a great opportunity
for employers to benefit from the changing values and priorities of their
employees. These highly committed knowledge workers are saying that they
are more motivated by being challenged and stimulated to develop profes-
sionally than by being enticed by the carrot of upward mobility.
Organizations can ill afford not to pay attention to this, even as they face
the reality that there is always a risk of investing in and developing your
best and brightest and then losing them to the competition. This does not
mean just sending people to training courses or workshops, of course. It
means making sure that part-time professionals and managers are not
accommodated by just being given low-challenge assignments or 'put on
hold' in marginal positions until they are willing to return to full-time work.
It means really grappling with how to constitute jobs with different work-
loads and how to be creative in deploying talent. It means making sure that
there is high-quality mentoring going on with people choosing to work less
for a while.

The prevalence of respondents viewing career success as meaning having
a life outside work should be taken as a call to action for any employers who
have up to now been trying to dismiss work–life initiatives as a passing fad
or trend. This finding is especially significant given this is a sample of pro-
fessional and managerial employees. The fact that this theme was most
common among our sample suggests that, if organizations want to retain
this new generation of professionals who are in dual-career families, they
simply must find ways to support and facilitate employees in continuing to
progress in their careers while also committing the time and energy they
want to family or other personal life commitments. Because of the greater
diversity in the workforce, this support will not be forthcoming from devel-
oping one or two policies with standard parameters, or launching a single
initiative designed to 'solve the problem'. It will mean that organizations

must develop a capacity for responding flexibly and constructively to individual requests and must develop a culture that promotes acceptance of a wide variety of career paths and means of making a contribution.

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