Harnessing and leveraging time: Australian women's navigation of career transitions

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ABSTRACT: *Women experience multiple transitions across the life course, including beginning/resuming studies, entering/(re)entering the workforce and/or having children. This paper outlines a constructivist grounded theory research project that sought to identify factors impacting Australian women's lives during career transitions. Juggling work, care, study, domestic responsibilities, and for some, a business, women can experience an up to fivefold burden of time. While their motivation harnessed time, leveraging time would decrease time deprivation stress. The study found citizen-centred social structures offer support, reframing the burden of time, potentially releasing the women to leverage their time and improving work/life balance outcomes. While this requires structural change in Australia, Nordic models offer a glimpse of supportive social structures benefitting citizens for future sustainability.*

Keywords: Discrimination at work; gender in organisations; valuing diversity; women and work; work and family; work/life balance

Women experience multiple transitions across the life course including moving into, and out of, the workforce, and as they begin or resume study and/or have children. Little is known about Australian women's experiences during career transitions, particularly the periods prior to study and (re)entering the workforce. What is known is that complex factors affect women's lives after they transition to study and the workforce including time pressures as they struggle to achieve a balance between paid and unpaid care responsibilities (Elloy, 2001; Pocock, 2005; Winefield et al., 2002). Their time management dependent not only on their choices, but concurrently impacted by the level of support within families, communities, higher education and workplace policies, government policies, and social attitudes (ABS, 2009; HREOC, 2007; Stone & O'Shea, 2012). This paper examines one aspect of a larger project that aimed to explore how Australian women navigate and experience career transitions, particularly the transitions to higher education and to the workforce. In doing so, the research sought to understand the pre-transition and post-transition life-spaces during the transition phases to understand the lived experiences of the participants and investigate the impacts of transitions on their health and wellbeing. As a broader contribution to knowledge, the project aimed to provide critical information on opportunities, barriers and access to higher education and the workforce

leading to adjustments in relevant higher education and workplace policies. A qualitative approach underpinned by constructivist grounded theory was deemed most appropriate to identify and understand the factors associated with Australian women's navigation and experience of career transitions.

Career transitions

The term *career*, historically applied to professional roles for example doctors and lawyers, evolved to include other work and central life roles (Louis, 1980). Super (1979, p. 169) defined career as:

> The sequence of major positions occupied by a person throughout his [sic]
> preoccupational, occupational, and post-occupational life; includes work related roles
> such as those of student, employee, and pensioner, together with complimentary
> avocational, familial and civic roles. A career exists only as a person pursues it; careers
> are person centred.

Within the field of career development, the term transition relates to all life roles, a lifelong process beginning from birth (Super, 1990). 'Role' (tasks and behaviours associated with positions in organisations or social systems) is the primary concept in the definition of career as well as the principal concept in the term *career transition* (Louis 1980, p. 330, emphasis in original). C*areer transition* is defined as 'the period during which an individual is either changing roles (taking on a different objective role) or changing orientation to a role already held (altering a subjective state)' (Louis, 1980, p. 330, emphasis in original). Figure 1 depicts two major categories of career transitions; inter-role, where a new and different role begins, and intra-role, where a new and different orientation to an old role is adopted (Louis, 1980).

Insert Figure 1 about here

The research reported in this paper adopted the entry/re-entry category of career transitions, specifically the transitions to higher education and the workforce. According to Louis (1980, p. 330), the term 'transition' describes both the change and the duration of time over which the change is occurring. The duration of the transition period is governed by the extent of difference experienced by the individual between the new and old roles (Louis, 1980). Importantly, several career transition categories may be experienced by individuals at the same time, for example, extra-role adjustment, life-stage transitions and entry/re-entry transitions.

Time relative to women's roles and responsibilities

The multiple roles and responsibilities many women juggle on a daily basis cause time deprivation stress, affecting their health and wellbeing (AHRC, 2014; Bishop, 2002; Elloy & Smith, 2003; Stone, 2013; von Doussa, 2007). Based on a sociological and political economic perspective, and using data[1] from of the *Household, Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia Survey,* Strazdins, Welsh, Korda, Broom & Paolucci (2015) measured the amount of time spent on care, paid and unpaid work relative to the intensity of time which was defined as rushing, effort and speed. Rushing was linked to efforts to save time and be on time (Strazdins et al., 2015). The research sought to identify the relevance of time to health. The research found that rushing is associated with being a woman, sole parent, having a disability, a lack of control and work-family conflicts (Strazdins et al., 2015). Daniels, Radel and Hillman (2016) found women frequently shoulder a quadruple burden of time as they add study to paid work, unpaid care and household tasks. The negative impact of chronic time deficits and rushing on women's health is undeniable (Daniels et al., 2016; Strazdins et al., 2015).

From a gendered perspective, for many women who transition to higher education, study time is split between paid and unpaid caring roles, while men's time is less regulated (Stone & O'Shea, 2012). For men and women who study, time is not apportioned in a like manner (Stone & O'Shea, 2012). Indeed, research reveals men's time is regarded as more important than women's time which is measured by the demands made on their time by others (Davies, 1990; Hughes, 2002; Knights & Odin, 1995; McNay, 2000; Stone & O'Shea, 2012). For many women, career transitions entail multiple time burdens.

In the field of physics, time and space are intertwined and relative (Greene, 2000). Time and space, from the psychological viewpoint, underpin the relational self (Gentile, 2016). Within the space-time framework, all individuals are connected in time (Adams St. Pierre, 2011). Within this convergence of frameworks, time impacts peoples' motivation (Robbins, Judge, Millet & Waters-Marsh, 2008). From the point of view of Australian women's transitions to study and the workplace, their management of time is vital.

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[1] Data from wave 9, n = 9,177 (Strazdins et al. 2015).

Time management and leveraging time

The effectiveness of individuals' time management practices relates to time management principles (Carlopio, Andrewartha & Armstrong, 2005). From a business perspective, effective time management occurs when a) individuals prioritise both important and urgent matters and are able to clearly distinguish between both, b) time management strategies focus on results rather than methods, and c) managing time effectively allows the guilt-free response of 'no' if necessary (Carlopio et al., 2005. P. 177). Effective time management strategies include daily list-making, prioritising important and urgent concerns, identifying priorities then scheduling accordingly, and addressing the most demanding matters during an individual's most productive daily time cycle (Robbins et al., 2008). Leveraging time consists of the smallest action that delivers the greatest results; it is assigning time to activities that supply the greatest returns (Perman, 2010). While effective time management is one of the daily practices that leverages time (Perman, 2010), many Australian women are unable to delegate their multiple roles and responsibilities due to the lack of support, be it financial, governmental or availability of the necessary help (ABS, 2009; Daniels et al., 2016; HREOC, 2007; Stone & O'Shea, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a qualitative approach underpinned by constructivist grounded theory, deemed appropriate for exploring the complexities associated with women's career transitions. Constructivist grounded theory makes participants and researcher's perspectives and their implications clear; the researcher is recognised as author and re-constructor of experience and meaning (Charmaz, 2000; 2014). Constructivist grounded theory assumes social reality is not separate from individuals actions; that data collection and analysis is interactive; and that participants lived experiences are recorded from their point of view (Charmaz, 2000).

Participants self-selected through purposive, convenience sampling, a process where participants are known through friendship and workplace networks (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Purposive sampling is more defined than convenience sampling; participants deemed most appropriate for the research are targeted (Neuman, 2000; Parasuraman, Grewal & Krishnan, 2004). Therefore, participants for this research were Australian women who had completed a university

degree and who had transitioned to the workforce (Veal, 2005). The research aimed to develop a deep understanding of the lived experiences of Australian women who have studied at university and transitioned to the workforce.

Human Research Ethics Approval was gained. Participants consented to participating in the research which included permission to publish the results. Participant anonymity and that of their organisations and their location was assured. Participants were purposively selected to gain insight and understanding into how Australian women navigate and experience career transitions, particularly the transitions to higher education and the workforce, and to understand the pre-transition and post-transition life-spaces during the transition phases. Fifteen participants were asked about their experiences before and after transitioning to study and the workforce. Qualitative data were generated through semi-structured interviews that were digitally recorded taking up to an hour each. Notes and recordings were transcribed and an open-ended process of thematic coding, cross referencing and theoretical integration across various sources completed analysis.

FINDINGS

Theoretical integration merged findings from the grounded theory analysis processes, ultimately producing a grounded theory of Australia women's career transitions. The following sections expound the findings and include participant's responses italicised in inverted commas thus providing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Myers, 2009).

Emergence of two groups of women

One of the unexpected findings in the research was the emergence of two distinct groups of women; ten women who transitioned to study as mature age students (Group 1) and five who transitioned directly from high school to university (Group 2). The Group 2 women who transitioned from high school to university were not married at that time they transitioned nor did they have children. However, after gaining undergraduate degrees, some participants continued their educational journeys. The data includes reflections of their first transition to university and later transitions to study when they may have had partners and/or children.

Figure 2 details the pseudonyms of each participant, their age bracket, their general field of work, whether they were married and/or had children while studying and their occupational area and education level.

Insert Figure 2 about here

This study involved women from New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. To maintain confidentiality, participants are not presented within their state affiliation, the number of children and their age is not identified, nor is the participant's age which is presented between the standard descriptive, that of 30-35, 35-40 and so on. The women in both groups had differing care responsibilities. Combining the two groups to maintain anonymity, four of the women care for aged parents, one cared for a family member with a disability, two are Indigenous Australians, four manage chronic health conditions of varying severity and four have suffered the impact of domestic violence.

Factors associated with Australian women's career transitions: support and confidence

Group 1 women's motivation to enrol in a university degree varied; some were encouraged by employers and friends, others motivation was to '*get out of poverty*', to '*prove*' they could gain a degree, to gain qualifications for an '*interesting job*' or because it had always been a '*dream*'. The Group 2 women had always known they would transition from high school to university they '*were expected to go to university*'; while studying, they focused on their future '*career*'.

Support was a distinguishing factor between the two groups. Group 2 women were overwhelmingly supported by their families. Conversely, the Group 1 women experienced a lack of family and partner support: '*my husband became threatened about me going to university and we split up*'; '*I was told to quit by my husband*'; '*my family was not supportive because I dared to get out of the box they had put me in*'; '*most of the time he [my husband] tried to sabotage my degree*'; '*I thought I was too stupid to go to university, I was always compared to my older brother "he's Dux of the school"*' and '*his [my husband's] treatment of me, it's physiological domination, he's trying to be dominant*'. This lack of support was underpinned by the hidden dimension of '*time*' and '*money*' pressures, the internal pressure of '*guilt*', and the overwhelming issues of '*marriage*' breakdowns.

While all participants were '*empowered*' and experienced increased '*confidence*' after gaining a degree, some of the Group 1 women felt they had achieved something they '*never thought possible*',

with one women sharing '*who knew I'd have the brains and could use them. My husband had decided I shouldn't. He told me there were things I couldn't do'*. The Group 2 women were excited about their future careers after graduating. However, many Group 1 women, even after gaining employment, experienced continual '*worry*' and '*stress*' associated with '*fixed term positions [which] are extraordinarily stressful because if you are in a casual position you don't accrue superannuation, there is no annual leave or sick leave'*.

Factors associated with Australian women studying and working: organising and managing time

Most Group 1 women struggled to '*organise*' time to fit everything in. Their 'to do' list became overcrowded as they organised study, work and care responsibilities. They '*organised*' their time to fit it all in because they lacked support, and often finances, and felt they had few choices. Most Group 1 women's partners shared few household or care responsibilities as the women pursued their educational goals; they did not want the women to change. Group 2 women managed their time. While their 'to do' list increased somewhat with study obligations, supportive family members and partners assumed tasks to lighten the women's work load. Group 2 women's 'to do' list had strikes through many household tasks. Nevertheless, both groups experienced reduced leisure time, with some having little time for leisure activities. Incredibly, some participants in the study carried a five-fold burden of time that included managing their partners '*business'*.

Factors associated with work/life balance

Flexible workplaces, understanding employers and managers and workplace policies that reflect equity and support were the yearning of the women in the study. However, work/life balance for many women was a '*myth'*; it did not exist in their lives. One woman felt the lack of work/life balance was '*a hangover from our past patriarchal society; we haven't quite caught up with women's place in society today'*. Generally, the women felt you must have support to attain work/life balance. For working mothers, '*after school care*' and '*school holiday care*' were urgent issues; '*good quality, affordable and conveniently located childcare*' because working mothers '*need to know their children are safe and that they're cared for'*. One woman felt employers need to have '*open conversations*' about work/life balance, explaining conversations were not happening with employees and '*women

are punished because these conversations don't occur'. This participant felt the entire workplace space and work/life balance area requires a *'huge cultural'* shift for employers.

DISCUSSION

The divergent experiences of the two groups of women in the study revealed that time is handled differently by each group and the transition to university emanated from differing motivations. Group 1 *'organise'* time as they struggle to fit everything in; many experienced a turning point that motivated their transition to university. Group 2 *'manage'* time as they delegate tasks to others, or others offer assistance; their transition to university planned from a young age. Therefore, time and motivation is not equal for all. Group 1 women's time is measured and moulded by others demands on it (Davies, 1990; Hughes, 2002; Knights & Odin, 1995; McNay, 2000; Stone & O'Shea, 2012) and by what they can squeeze into their days; their decision to study stemming from diverse motivations, including the desire for security. Group 2 measure and meter their time to fit tasks into their days without causing prolonged, excessive overload; their decision to study emanated from early life course decisions.

Successfully managing time is dependant not only on the women's choices; it is also influenced by the level of support existing within families and communities, government policy, workplace policies and practices and social attitudes (HREOC, 2007). The primary reason sixty per cent of Australian working women with care responsibilities feel rushed and pushed for time, whether they are lone parents or partnered, is attributed to the struggle to attain a balance between work and family (ABS, 2009). In spite of progress in work-life balance in the workplace; legal, social and policy barriers continue to impact the paid work and family arrangements made by Australian families and individuals, often interfering with their ability to manage a satisfactory work/life balance (AHRC, 2014; HREOC, 2005). For those women who experienced pressure variously from their families, partners and their multiple roles and responsibilities, pushing through the pressures helped them complete their studies. The women's self-belief and for some, the belief of others, urged them forward. Thus, a multiple combination of forces impacted their lives over time. Indeed, the women's motivation to study harnessed time.

Leveraging time reduces women's time pressures during their days

Many women in the study experienced time related pressures caused by their multiple roles and responsibilities. They used various coping strategies as they organised/managed their time; they persevered and overcame barriers. The successful navigation of career transitions for Australian women requires opportunities to leverage time. Figure 3 illuminates the concept of time management as embedded in time, where the future incorporates leveraging time for a sustainable way forward for women navigating career transitions.

Insert Figure 3 about here

For Australian women, leveraging time also requires policies, procedures, and social and workplace legislation to address social, political, cultural, economic and time deficits that impede women's transitions.

Nordic supportive social structures: benefit women's career sustainability

Nordic nations (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) are governed through social democratic governments that promote the principles of democracy as well as their citizen's personal freedom (Brandal, Bratberg & Thorsen, 2013). Nordic countries restructured their governments to reshape capitalism after their 1990s financial crisis; the governments grew more efficient, flexible and fiscally responsible and they invested more in their citizens (Here's why Nordic governments are WAY ahead, 2016). Compared to Australian workers, particularly women, Nordic citizen's work less hours, have substantial paid parental leave and publicly funded childcare, effectively reducing time pressures that many Australian worker/carers struggle with on a regular basis (Scott, 2014).

Workforce participation and the resultant lack of time from juggling multiple roles and responsibilities is a major problem in many Australian homes due in part to inadequate/unfair workplace laws and practices (Pocock, Skinner & Williams, 2012). As well as State support across a range of domains, Swedish citizens can claim a 50% tax deduction for domestic service work that includes renovations, repairs, cleaning and maintenance of their homes (European Monitoring Centre on Change [EMCC] 2013). This initiative addressed black market activity around home maintenance, effectively increasing employment and taxation revenue as well as addressing the problem of unequal time allotted to domestic tasks between working men and

women (EMCC, 2013). Sweden's practically proportional tax system taxes all individuals separately, including those in marital partnerships (Gustafsson, 1995).

Redefining Australia's workplace, welfare, gender equality and social policies requires more than adopting the Nordic model as a template (Broomhill & Sharp, 2012; Ruppanner, 2017; Scott, 2014). More equitable policies require adopting a comparable government structure to the Nordic nations which places citizens before political ideologies such as out-of-control capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy which currently operate in Australia (Kincheloe & McClaren, 2000; Sennent, 2007; Stilwell, 2002). Nordic states social structures, while not a cure for all social ills, offer the best way forward for a nation and its citizens regarding gender equality, pay parity and childcare, taxation, welfare and workplace policies in developing a fair, just and equitable society.

Grounded theory of Australian women's career transitions

The grounded theory of Australian women's navigation and experience of career transitions was developed and interpreted within the social, political, cultural and economic contexts and the 'realities' of Australian women who transitioned to higher education and the workforce. When committing to study, Group 1 participants busily *organised their time* to fit study into already full schedules. For Group 2 participants, committing to study meant *managing their time*. Amid the struggle of juggling multiple roles and responsibilities when studying and working, the women's motivation harnessed time. However, leveraging time would effectively decrease the stress women experience during career transitions and across the course of their working lives. Social, cultural, political and economic change though systemic and structural change in Australian governmental processes, similar to the Nordic model, has the potential to advance equality and assist with managing and leveraging time.

The essence of the women's words emerged through constant comparative analysis, providing the foundations of the grounded theory model illustrated in Figure 4. Relative to the (up to) five burdens of time (study, paid and unpaid care, home duties and business partnerships), and the accompanying juggling of roles and responsibilities experienced by the women as 'time related pressures', support played a major role, particularly support from partners, family, friends, and colleagues. The degree of support from family and partners had a direct impact on the women's lives

for the better or the worse, depending on their circumstances. The greater the time and financial deprivation experienced, the greater the requirement for support.

<u>Insert Figure 4 about here</u>

The model (Figure 4) illustrates the potential busyness of the women, depending on how many burdens of time they shoulder. The model does not include leisure time; for many of the women, leisure time was unachievable within their tight schedules. For those who experienced four or five of the time burdens listed as studies, unpaid care, home duties, business partnerships and paid work, their health was compromised by stress. Nevertheless, obtaining a university degree and securing a career pathway held the promise of future security. Results of this study reveal that supportive managers, supportive policies and social, political, cultural and economic change would pave the way to less stressful career transitions for Australian women. All of this indicates changes are required in the system; changes where support and equity are commonplace, where adequate support facilitate less stressful career transitions. The stress associated with multiple roles and responsibilities and burdens of time experienced by many Australian women can be alleviated by a government that recognises stress points and initiates actions to relieve them, offering a better way forward for individuals, families, states and indeed, the nation.

CONCLUSION

The research provided a snapshot of how Australian women navigate and experience career transitions which spanned multiple spheres of their lives. This limited view revealed that Australian women navigate multiple, complex spaces as they study and work. These spaces are impacted by the women's social location, marital status, care responsibilities, support systems, time commitments, and university and workplace policies and procedures. Within this field of multiple spaces, women's experience of study and work are fluid and changeable. Study adds to the available burden of time. Harnessing and leveraging time through adequate social support processes and appropriate political, cultural and economic change would benefit Australian women, (and indeed their families), as they navigate career transitions.

While findings in this study are context and situation specific (Collis & Hussey, 2009), the small number of participants may be viewed as a limitation. Future study could involve interviewing

the partners of the women who have transitioned to study, both those who transitioned from high school and those who transitioned as mature age students. It could also involve inter-continental comparisons of how women navigate and experience career transitions, between Australia and New Zealand for example.

The results of this study suggest a system such as the Nordic social democratic model where people experience less stress, more support, and greater equality than most other nations on earth would benefit Australian women. The implications of these findings point strongly to the need for systemic change where equality is a matter-of-course.

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FIGURES

Figure 1 Categories of Career Transitions

| **INTER**-ROLE TRANSITIONS *New and different role begins*	**INTRA**-ROLE TRANSITIONS *New and different orientation to an old role*
1. **Entry/Re-entry:** entering/re-entering the labour market indicates an entry transition; there is a change of roles e.g. a university student transitioning to work or a woman returning to work after a break for child care responsibilities. Entry/re-entry to higher education to develop or further career opportunities can be included in this list. 2. **Intra-company:** individuals take on a different role within the same organisation. 3. **Inter-company:** individuals transfer from one organisation to another 4. **Inter-professional:** individuals change professions e.g. from dentist to lawyer. 5. **Exit:** individuals retire, are made redundant, experience involuntary unemployment or take a leave of absence.	1. **Intra-role Adjustment:** Individual's adjustment to a role in response to experiences over time; the transition is an internal change in the individual's orientation to the role. 2. **Extra-role Adjustment:** affected by the potential interaction and interdependence of an individual's multiple life roles, (e.g. birth of a child), leads to an adjustment in orientation to another role e.g. work role. These role changes reflect differences in the relative importance of one role in relation to other roles. 3. **Role/Career-stage Transition:** Different issues, personal needs and organisational opportunities are associated with different career stages where roles, responsibilities and tasks may change. 4. **Life-stage Transition:** Relates to passage through normal stages in human development. Similar to models of career stages, different concerns prevail at different stages; these concerns indirectly guide individual's orientation to their life-space and tasks.

Source: Adapted from Louis, 1980, pp. 332-335.

Figure 2 Participant's demographics, occupation and educational level

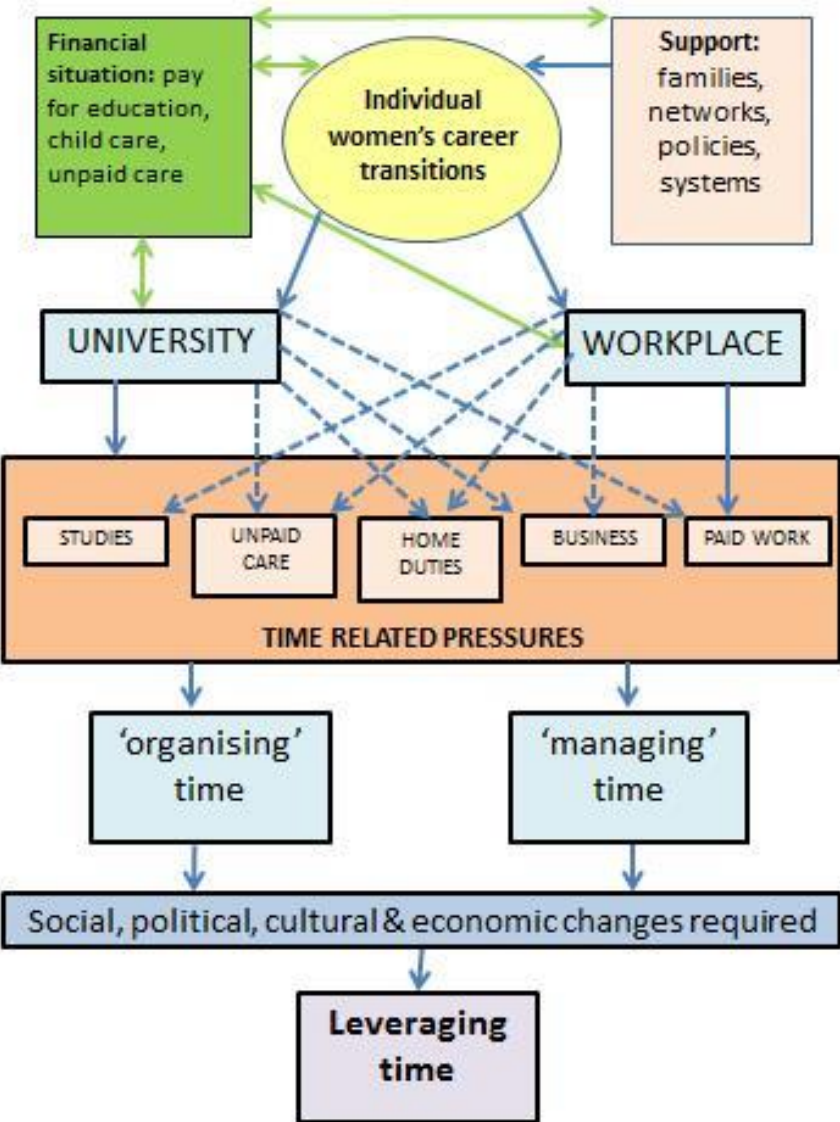| N	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Education level	Married	Children
GROUP 1 – MATURE AGE (transition to study)						
1.	Marion	50-55	Health Education	PhD	Yes	Yes
2.	Marlene	50-55	Health Education	PhD	Yes	Yes
3.	Mary	40-45	HE Teacher	PhD	No	No
4.	Meghan	50-55	RHD Student	RHD student	Yes	Yes
5.	Maria	35-40	Professional Service	Undergrad	Yes	No
6.	Monica	35-40	Professional Service	Undergrad	Yes	Yes
7.	Margaret	50-55	Counsellor	Masters	Yes	Yes
8.	Melisa	55-60	RHD student	RHD student	Yes	Yes
9.	Matilda	60-65	Research Related	Undergrad	Yes	Yes
10.	Millicent	50-55	Admin/Counsellor	Incomplete	Yes	Yes
GROUP 2 – HIGH SCHOOL (transition to study)						
1.	Haley	45-50	Professional Assistant	Masters	Yes	Yes
2.	Hilary	45-50	HE Teacher	PhD	Yes	No
3.	Hanna	30-35	Research Related	PhD	Yes	Yes
4.	Heather	55-60	Education	Undergrad & diplomas	No	No
5.	Helen	45-50	Education	Masters	Yes	No

Source: Developed from the research

Figure 3 Future career transitions: leverage time
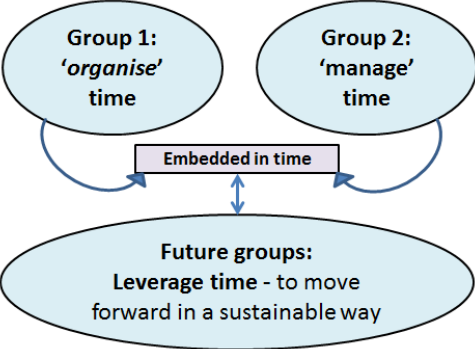
Source: Developed by the research

Figure 4 Australian women's navigation and experience of career transitions

Source: Developed from the research