Work-related decision-making among older workers in the Irish civil service

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DECLARATION

This thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university. It is entirely my own work. I agree that the library of Trinity College, Dublin may lend or copy this thesis on request.
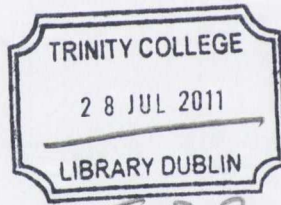
SUMMARY

This thesis is an exploratory study of work-related decision-making among mid-life to older workers in the Irish Civil Service. The issue of older workers is under-researched generally and is of significant policy interest given the increasing presence of older workers in the Irish workforce, and wider concerns over age-discrimination. As well as providing an empirical study of older workers, this thesis also engages with the much-contested debate surrounding Catherine Hakim's "preference theory" (Hakim, 2000). It investigates the degree to which decision-making is the result of a worker's own individual preferences (as preference theory suggests) and to what degree it is influenced by external factors such as legislation and policy, gendered social norms, the economy and organisational structures, as advocated by critics of Hakim's approach (e.g., Crompton and Harris, 1998). It also explores to what degree preferences can be considered to be "fixed" over time.

The thesis explores these questions by conducting a case study of particular group of older workers – that is mid-life to older workers in the Irish civil service. The research subjects include both men and women at different grades, with different career trajectories and varying degrees of continuity in the Irish civil service. The qualitative methodology employed allows the workers themselves to elaborate on the reasons for their decision-making, and thus provides a rich and complex array of findings.

Chapter 2 of the thesis locates the research in terms of existing debates on labour-market decision-making, especially preference theory and its opponents. Feminist critics of preference theory emphasise the often constraining effects that lack of childcare, lack of socio-economic resources, and gender inequality in the workplace can have on the freedom to fulfil work-related preferences. Other commentators suggest that the work organisation itself can impose constraints (e.g., Casey, 1995). The chapter goes on to critique the model of the self offered by preference theory. The latter is essentially static and assumes that for some people preferences are fixed from an early age. The chapter also discusses the usefulness of some functionalist and critical theoretical approaches to retirement, including feminist and political economy approaches and life-course theory (e.g., Giele and Elder, 1998).

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the thesis's methodological approach and the epistemological assumptions underlying it. It explains the choice of a qualitative methodology which allows complexities of decision-making to be articulated and respects the knowledge of the research subject him or herself. Interviews were conducted with 105 civil servants in a variety of grades and departments. The main focus of the interviews was on decision-making in relation to joining, leaving, re-joining, promotion and retirement.

For the purposes of analysis, the workers are divided into four groups – long-term workers, managers, returners and late joiners. Chapter 4 compares the decision to join of workers in three of these groups. The following four chapters (5-9) analyse the work orientations and promotion decisions of each of the four groups separately and Chapter 10 analyses the retirement decision of workers across all groups.

On the basis of these findings, the thesis argues that external factors have a strong influence on the freedom to fulfil preferences, and that the extent of this influence varies depending on gender, socio-economic resources and the degree to which a career trajectory is continuous. The specific factors that emerge as most important to these workers are legislation and policy, conditions in the economy, gendered social norms, and structural and cultural factors in the work organisation itself including location, promotional bottle-necks, the perception of age-related discrimination and policies such as de-centralisation. The thesis also finds that orientations to work are complex and contingent across all groups of workers. It concludes by drawing out the implications of the findings for theories of the self, for the sociological analysis of labour market decision-making, and by suggesting that feminist and political economy approaches and life-course theory are most useful for conceptualising the complexities of decision-making, and thus for more accurately informing policy.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The phenomenon of an ageing Europe has been described on the one hand as a "demographic time-bomb", or, more positively, as a potential source of "demographic bounty" (Amble, 2006; O'Shea, 2006). The increased presence of older people in our society poses significant challenges in terms of health services, formal and informal care, pension provision and so on – yet older people also contribute to economic life and social cohesion through their knowledge, labour, consumption, creativity and other forms of activity. To better understand the impact and needs of older people in our society, and to plan effectively for the future, commentators and policy makers alike agree that the issues around an expanding older population require urgent attention from researchers.

This thesis sets out to explore one particular aspect of older people's lives in the context of the labour market – that is, the work-related decision-making of older workers in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty-first century. More specifically, it seeks to establish whether and how such workers' orientations to work and attitudes to participation, promotion and retirement change over time.

Given the demographic ageing that is taking place in many European countries including Ireland, and the increasing presence of older workers in the labour market, there is a compelling case for research into the experiences and needs of these workers in order to develop appropriate policies. Researchers and policy advisers have recognised the need for continuing research on issues relating to older workers in Ireland for several reasons, including:

- the increasing presence of older workers in the labour market in recent years (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006);
- the larger proportion of older people in the population, leading to government concern about pension provision (Conboy, 2005);

- a perception that there is age-related discrimination in Irish society and in the workplace (Equality Authority, 2002a; National Economic and Social Forum [NESF], 2003b; Russell *et al.*, 2008);

- government (and EU) support for "healthy ageing" and a recognition that voluntary participation in paid employment may contribute to psychological well-being (Loretto, Vickerstaff & White, 2006).

- The European Commission has identified active ageing and increasing the employment rates of older workers as policy priorities under the European Employment Strategy (European Commission, 2007)

Despite such compelling policy reasons for investigating the experiences, promotion and retirement intentions of older workers, there has been very little empirical research (particularly qualitative research) carried out in this area in Ireland to date (see Basten, Irwin & Heaney, 2002). Part of the purpose of this thesis is to redress this.

As well as the obvious policy reasons for conducting this research, the thesis contributes to the existing body of research on work-related decision-making. One of the most influential sociological theorists in the area of work-related decision-making is Catherine Hakim. Her "preference theory" has generated much debate (see Hakim, 1991, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2007; Ginn et al, 1996; Crompton and Harris, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Procter and Padfield, 1999; Fagan, 2001; McRae, 2003a, 2003b; Crompton and Lyonette, 2007). This debate centres around the way in which work-related decision making is conceptualised: it asks to what degree decision-making is the result of a worker's individual preferences, and to what degree it is influenced by external factors such as legislation, social norms and organisational structures. Hakim, for instance, argues that people in general and women in particular have a genuine choice about whether and how to work, and that their individual preferences are the main determinant of their labour market decision-making and outcomes (Hakim, 2000: 169). Although she does acknowledge that social norms and policy do have some influence on choices, she strongly privileges the role of individual preferences. If this is true, then women's predominance in low-paid often part-time employment may be attributed for the most part to choices made by them.

By contrast, her critics, many of whom are feminist theorists, argue that women (and some men) may be severely constrained in their freedom to act on their preferences depending on the social and economic environment in which choices are made. While they do not

deny that workers are active agents, they attribute a much stronger role than Hakim does to legal constraints and gendered social norms. Crompton and Harris, for example, conclude that:

> women's employment behaviour is a reflection of the way in which women actively construct their work-life biographies in terms of their historically available opportunities and constraints.
> (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 119)

One task of this thesis is to test the validity of these alternative conceptualisations by analysing the accounts that workers themselves give of their decision-making process. This qualitative approach is an important feature of the thesis: it assumes that workers are "competent knowers" of their own experience and motivations, and that theory and policy must incorporate such knowledge if it they are to be truly useful. My approach is partly based on my previous research into the motivations of people who provide informal care; through qualitative research I found that many carers were heavily influenced by their embeddedness in familial and gendered social norms and did not perceive themselves to be free to choose in the manner suggested by rational choice theory (itself an intellectual antecedent of preference theory, sharing similarly limited assumptions about the self; see Ní Léime, 2000).

In choosing my sample of workers, I chose to focus on the Irish civil service, since this organisation offers a relatively homogenous work environment and a promotional structure that allows for comparison by gender and by grade. It also allows for comparison between different types of workers – those who have spent their entire working lives in the civil service (long-term workers and senior managers), those who have left the civil service but later returned (returners), and those that have only joined recently after working in other careers (late joiners). The civil service is an "ageing organisation" and so offers a rich source of participants for the research (O'Riordan, 2006) In addition, the typical civil service categories of women "clerical workers" and male "managers" designate a substantial component of the older workforce in Ireland (Russell & Fahey, 2004: 22).

Focussing on older workers as a cohort offers particularly rich opportunities to explore decision-making, since unlike their younger counterparts, older workers are likely to have made multiple work-related decisions over the course of a career. Older workers are also

interesting because their accounts of decision-making often reflect changes over time; it is thus possible to gain an insight into how decision-making and circumstances at an early stage in life may affect possibilities later on. A complex and nuanced understanding the decision-making of such older workers in the areas of joining, promotion and retirement should ultimately facilitate the creation of policies that are appropriate, effective and efficient.

1.2 Research on older people and the labour market in Ireland

The number and proportion of older workers in the labour market in Ireland has rapidly and demonstrably increased, particularly from the mid-1990s onwards. Among women aged 55-59, the employment rate doubled from 23% to 46% between 1994 and 2005 (Fahey, 2008: 24). Despite this increase, when interviewing for the thesis began in 1994 the participation rates for women aged 50-54, for men and women aged 55-59 and for women aged 60-64 in Ireland were below the OECD average (OECD, 2006). The rapid increase in participation rates is partly due to the fact that during the period 1995 to 2007, there were shortages in the supply of labour due to the high levels of growth in the economy. Because of this, the government and employers (both public and private) sought to attract older workers (particularly women) into the workforce in order to fill the demand for labour (see Public and Corporate Economic Consultants [PACEC], 2001; NESF, 2000; 2003a). The reduction in the number of children per family, and changing societal norms meant that women of this age were now both free to and more likely to participate in the labour force (Russell *et al.*, 2002: 2; Russell & Fahey, 2004: 17).

In keeping with demographic trends in western countries, men and women in Ireland in the twenty-first century are living longer[1] (Peace *et al.*, 2007). The European Commission has identified "active ageing" and the encouragement of older workers to participate in the labour market and prolong working life as policy priorities (European Commission, 2007). This is articulated in the European Employment Strategy in the Employment Guidelines (2005 to 2008)[2]. In order to fulfil the Lisbon Strategy, the Stockholm European Council has set a target that by 2010 at least 50% of the EU population aged 55-64 should be in employment (European Commission, 2007). This has helped shape the context for

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[1] Life expectancy at birth for Irish women has increased from 57.9 in the period 1925-1927 to 80.3 years in 2001-2003. For men it has increased from 57.4 to 75.1

[2] Council Decision of 12 July, 2005 on Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (2005/600/EC).

increasing the Irish government's interest in encouraging more older people to participate in the labour market (NESF, 2003a).

Although the demographic ageing of the population is due to occur later in Ireland than in other countries, concern has been expressed regarding pension provision, with the phenomenon of population ageing frequently represented in official and unofficial public discourse as a threat (Conboy, 2005). The fact that the Irish government (in common with many others in the OECD countries) is increasingly encouraging people to become proactive in providing their own pensions has also contributed to creating a climate where labour force participation by older people is encouraged at official level. Indeed, in recent years, several reports commissioned and/or conducted by various official government bodies have identified the importance of older workers to the economy (see for example, PACEC, 2001; NESF, 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Equality Authority, 2002a).

Yet, as has been noted by previous researchers, there was very little research of any kind into the experiences of older people in the labour market until around 2000 (Basten, Irwin & Heaney, 2002). The increasing policy interest in older workers is reflected in the number of (mainly quantitative) policy-driven research reports that have been conducted into labour market issues for older workers in Ireland since that time (McGivern, 2001; Russell & Fahey, 2004; Delaney et al., 2008). Much of this research agenda was driven by the demand for older workers in the booming "Celtic Tiger" economy and focussed on identifying ways of attracting older men and women into paid employment (NESF, 2000). One of the earliest reports sought to determine how to increase labour market participation by older workers and to identify barriers to participation (PACEC, 2001).

However, some of the research had an equality focus, deriving from a concern over the rights of older people rather than simply fulfilling the needs of the economy (see for example, Equality Authority, 2002). A qualitative study commissioned by the Equality Authority investigated the labour market aspirations of older people in Ireland from their own perspective, identifying the barriers to accessing labour market opportunities and outlining their own suggested solutions (Basten, Irwin & Heaney, 2002). A national quantitative study, *Older People's Preferences for Employment and Retirement in Ireland*, commissioned by the National Council for Ageing and Older People (NCAOP) was published in 2001 (Fahey & Russell, 2001). This research investigated the employment and retirement preferences of a nationally representative sample of older people aged 55-69.

The NCAOP specifically identified the need for qualitative research in order to provide richer data to inform their quantitative findings. In 2003 the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) produced a report entitled *Labour Market Issues for Older Workers* which advocates early intervention to improve retention and employability in older workers (NESF, 2003a). It investigated the attitudes of employers to older workers, the training of older workers, work-life balance and pensions/social security provision (NESF, 2003a). The Equality Authority commissioned a report, *Ageing and Labour Market Participation*, which was published in a year later (Russell & Fahey, 2004). By means of secondary analysis of existing quantitative data they found that the increased participation of older workers in the labour market was mainly due to women entering the labour market. Two recent initiatives will provide more national data. In 2008, the basic preliminary results of a large-scale survey – the Irish component of the Study of Health and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) – was published (Delaney *et al.*, 2008). This study will provide quantitative data on labour market trends combined with health data for older people which will be comparable to European data. The Irish Longitudinal Study of Ageing (TILDA) is another new initiative which will provide basic data on employment and retirement and will enable follow-up with particular cohorts of older people; its pilot study has recently been completed.

A recent review of the UK literature suggests that a similar situation obtains there, particularly in relation to retirement research (Phillipson, 2004). While large-scale surveys have been carried out in the UK which focus on or include information on older workers (for example the British Household Panel Survey and the British Retirement Survey), and there has been some secondary analysis of these surveys (see Evandrou & Glaser, 2004) and some research into issues such as work-life balance for older workers funded by the Rowntree Foundation (Yeandle, 2005; Emslie & Hunt, 2009) or into specific groups such as managers (Still & Timms, 1998; Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2005), and a number of studies into age-related discrimination (Taylor & Walker, 1993; Duncan & Loretto, 2004) there is a relative shortage of qualitative research into the experiences of older workers in the labour market generally and into their plans for retirement specifically (Phillipson, 2004). At an international level, there have been research studies from EU and OECD sources, many of which have a primarily economic perspective, and tend to focus on the issue of how to increase employment rates for older people (see for example European Commission, 1999; OECD, 2004, 2006).

The Irish studies cited above provide some basic national data against which the findings of the current study may be compared. However, there is clearly a lack of in-depth qualitative research into the actual experiences of older people currently at work. This thesis aims to help fill this gap, and it gives an insight into the experiences, attitudes and intentions of older workers in relation to work and retirement, and into the influences on their attitudes and behaviour. A case study of a given organisation like the civil service enables rich analysis because it can examine the impact of both work organisation and socio-economic environment on individual decision-making; it also enables comparisons by gender and place in the organisational hierarchy in a relatively controlled environment. Since it was not possible to collect meaningful longitudinal data, given the time constraints of a Ph D thesis, the data is composed of self-reports of (perceived) change over time. It has a retrospective element, which can illuminate how previous experiences can influence current possibilities, and a prospective aspect that enables us to see how people in the work-place make decisions for the future. Thus it contributes towards building a robust empirical picture on work/retirement decision-making in Ireland. It also represents an advance on previous empirical research on older workers in Ireland because it theorises the findings and locates the analysis in terms of existing theoretical debates in sociology.

1.3 Research questions

In seeking to establish the main influences and processes underlying work-related decision-making for older workers, this investigation focuses on the following specific research questions:

1. How do older workers define their orientations towards work – that is, what does work "mean" to them?

2. What are the main factors these workers perceive as affecting the following work-related decisions?
- Joining, leaving and re-joining the civil service
- Applying for promotion
- Timing of retirement

3. Do workers' attitudes to work, promotion and retirement change over time?

4. Is perceived age-related and/or gender-related discrimination an important issue for these workers?

The findings from the respondents in relation to these questions are used to address the wider theoretical question:

5. What are the implications of the findings for sociological theories of labour-market decision-making and for theories of the self?

In the most general terms, the argument of the thesis is that dominant sociological theories of decision-making in the labour market (as represented by rational choice theory and preference theory) are inadequate as they fail to conceptualise the complexity of human decision-making and over-emphasise people's freedom to choose in decision-making. They are unable to account for various levels of contingency and process which are evident in workers' own accounts of their individual agency. The evidence presented here suggests that preferences are best understood in relation to the variable contexts in which they are formed. The approach of theorists such as Crompton and Harris, which emphasises the importance of social, legislative, and economic conditions in shaping the environment in which work-related decisions are made, seems better able to explain the workers' identification of common contexts and constraints (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Proctor & Padfield, 1999). As we shall see, the findings of this thesis suggest that the decision of an individual worker to leave or return to the civil service or apply for promotion does indeed involve acting on his/her preferences. However decisions are made in the context of a complex range of situational and personal factors including social norms, legislation and policy, and their perceptions of whether participation or promotion is or is not a realistic prospect for them in their work organisation. These factors often appear to act as constraints on their freedom to act on their preferences and the combined impact is different for individual workers depending on their family situation, their gender and their age or stage in the life-course. This resonates with the "capabilities" approach of Amartya Sen which highlights the profound impact that membership of a group such as a family or gender group may have on a person's sense of entitlement to act on preferences or even to form preferences in the first place (Sen, 1990, p. 140)

The thesis also highlights the fact that people's identity in relation to work is fluid and changeable. The findings suggest that some or all of the influencing factors outlined above may and do change over time, and may either separately or together have more of an impact at a particular time in a person's life-course. The way in which people perceive their opportunities may result in their adapting their preferences over time (see Fagan, 2001). The (changing) contextual and personal factors need to be theorised and analysed in order to provide realistic and useful policy proposals.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis proper begins with an outline in Chapter 2 of the relevant theoretical debates. This theoretical chapter describes Catherine Hakim's influential preference theory and the way in which it conceptualises orientations to work and the decision-making of women and men. This outline is followed by a description of existing critiques of preference theory, such as feminist perspectives that emphasise the constraining effects that lack of childcare provision, lack of socio-economic resources and gender, inequality in the workplace can have on decision-making (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Walsh, 1999; Charles & James, 2003; Walters, 2005). Other theorists question the individualist basis of preference theory, emphasising the profound impact of gendered social and familial norms (Himmelweit, 2000). The theoretical review goes on to suggest that the formation of preferences and the question of their fixity should be empirically investigated rather than assumed to be true. Critiques of the static model of the self underlying preference theory follow; drawing on qualitative empirical studies they point to the fact that many workers clearly change their preferences over time often, for example adapting to the realisation that conditions in the workplace or the external environment mean that they are unlikely to be promoted (Crompton & Harris, 1998, 1999; McRae, 2003a; Nolan, 2005). It is argued that an alternative conceptualisation of the self that appears to resonate more with the way in which people's relationship to work actually changes over time is that of the contingent self or "self-as-process" proposed by Catherine Casey (Casey, 1995) in her ethnographic study of a corporation. There is some discussion also of Ulrich Beck's post-modernist macro-theoretical perspective, which suggests that due to the decline of authoritative social norms, there has been an increase in the level of individualisation in society, and that women and men are now more free to create their own biographies.

Having outlined various avenues of challenge to preference theory, the next section of Chapter 2 provides evidence from the literature on the type of factors that can profoundly affect workers' decision-making and outcomes – these include conditions in the economy (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Crompton, 2002; Charles & James, 2003), structures and processes in the work organisation (Scase & Goffee, 1989; Halford, 1992; O'Connor, 1996), gendered social norms (Folbre, 1994; Himmelweit, 2002), legislation and policy (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Crompton & Lyonette, 2006) and ageing and age-related discrimination (Loretto & White, 2006a). As we shall see, in Chapters 5-9 of this thesis there is strong evidence that these factors can act as constraints on the freedom of the research participants to act on their preferences (see especially Chapters 5 and 8).

The chapter goes on to discuss the ways in which orientations to work have been theorised and traces the increasing recognition in the literature that orientations are more complex than previous conceptualisations have implied (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1966; Blackburn & Mann, 1979; Nolan, 2005). The question of orientations to work is explored at the beginning of each of the Chapters 6-10 with a general finding that orientations among these workers are indeed both complex and contingent.

The theoretical review continues by examining the model of career development theory from management literature (Super, 1957, cited in Still & Timms, 1998) along with arguments that many women's career trajectories do not fit easily in to such models. In terms of the thesis, such conventional models of decision-making are only relevant for analysing the career paths of those who have worked long-term in the civil service – some long-term workers and senior managers (Chapters 6 and 7). The theoretical construct of "organisation man" is also outlined. In this model, the worker is characterised as committed to their work-organisation and success for the "organisation man or woman" is measured by position in the hierarchy and salary. The contrasting model of the "protean career" where the psychological growth of the individual careerist is the most important goal is then described. (Whyte, 1956; Roper, 1994; Hall, 2004). There is evidence in Chapters 6 and 7 that organisation man narratives are prevalent particularly among older senior managers in the civil service. However, there is also some evidence of protean career accounts among those who no longer expect to be promoted or who have joined recently (Chapters 7 and 9).

The issue of retirement theory is also considered, with the recognition that retirement in general has not been adequately theorised (Phillipson, 2004). Some of the earlier functionalist theories of ageing/retirement from psychology, economics and social gerontology are outlined and it is suggested that these are over-individualistic and universalising. It is argued that political economy of ageing and feminist approaches are more useful than the earlier functionalist theories in this regard.

Finally it is proposed that although political economy and feminist approaches help to highlight why certain cohorts of people may not have the same freedom to realise their retirement preferences, life-course theory (from the domain of social gerontology) provides a useful means of analysing work-related and retirement decision-making at the level of the individual. This is because it takes account of location in time and place, relational issues, timing and human agency (Giele & Elder, 1998). An example of how this theory operates is given in the case study in Chapter 10.

Chapter 3 explains my methodological approach and the epistemological assumptions underlying it. Since my main interest lies in establishing the factors informing work-related decision-making rather than merely describing the behaviour of these workers, I decided to conduct a qualitative study – an approach that allows for complex kinds of evidence to be gathered and utilises the knowledge of the research subject him or herself. A semi-structured interview was designed and conducted; a cohort of 105 interviewees was drawn from a variety of grades and departments. This large sample generated a great deal of data which allowed for rich comparative analysis and a substantial basis for testing the theoretical models. The interviews allowed workers to describe their career paths and work orientations in some detail, and discuss their motivations, preferences, constraints and perceptions in ways that captured the complexity of the decision-making process more effectively than purely quantitative methods.

In Chapter 4, I provide a context for the subsequent empirical chapters by describing the socio-economic and legislative context in which people, joined, left and re-joined the civil service. This includes national and civil service policy and legislation in relation to equality, particularly in relation to gender and ageing, and the question of age-related discrimination in organisations including the civil service. This chapter also describes the chief features of the civil service as an employment organisation and broadly sets out its recruitment, promotion and retirement arrangements in relation to older workers.

The empirical findings relevant to the research questions are presented in Chapters 5–10. The chapters are structured around the four categories of workers interviewed ("long-term workers" outside of senior management, "senior managers", "returners" and "late joiners"). Two of the chapters (Chapter 5 and Chapter 10) offer comparative accounts of all four groups together on the issues of joining the civil service and retiring respectively. For each of the chapters 6-9, findings are at first presented in tables and significant themes are illustrated by quotations from the interviews. Brief vignettes of individual workers are included to illustrate the complexity and contingency that may be involved in promotion-related decision-making. Finally, the workers are assigned to categories using a model based on a life-course approach[3]. Since the findings suggest that the category of "adaptive workers" in hakim's model is too large and undifferentiated to be useful, the model replaces this category with "satisficers" and "maximisers" (see Chapter 6). The life-course approach takes account of timing, relational issues, sense of agency, work-place and social structure and culture (see Giele & Elder, 1998).

Chapter 5 focuses on the decision to join the civil service among three out of the four groups of workers at the beginning of their working lives – that is, those who joined the civil service in the 1960s and 1970s[4]. In the case of "returners", the decision to leave the civil service is also analysed. The chapter begins with a discussion of the socio-economic, legal and normative environment in Ireland when these individuals joined the civil service. It then explores the degree to which their accounts seem to reflect the free acting out of preferences, or whether in fact significant constraints operated on their decision-making at the beginning of their working-lives. Broadly speaking, the analysis suggests that gender norms, lack of employment options, lack of economic resources, levels of education and parental expectations had profound and varying influences on their decision to join the civil service.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 present the analysis of work-life decision-making of long-term workers, managers and returners respectively. Each chapter, analyses their orientations towards work, their promotion experiences and intentions, and whether they describe themselves as fulfilling preferences in their decision-making. It also documents changes in

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[3] The model is partly based on previous categories devised by Crompton and Harris (1998).

[4] The motivations of those in the fourth group (called "late joiners") is analysed in Chapter 8 since these workers joined at a much later time – mostly during or after the late 1990s.

career intentions over time and makes comparisons by gender where applicable. Finally the workers are assigned to various categories which describe their current relationship to work.

In general, the findings suggest that preference-fulfilment forms only one part of work-related decision-making for each of these groups of workers. The following themes emerged as important constraining influences on decision-making.

Firstly, organisational structures and processes in the workplace: this includes being located in a regional location with few promotional opportunities; gendered organisational structures (such as the tendency to recruit women only at the lowest grade); de-centralisation policy which proved disruptive to many middle and senior managers and acted as a de-motivating influence on them. Many responded to encountering such organisational constraints by adapting their preferences (Fagan, 2001).

Secondly, gendered social norms had a strong influence on promotion–related decision-making with women in most groups having been constrained in fulfilling their preferences in relation to work, because of the social norm in Ireland that women are the main carers for dependent family members. This affected women in the returners group most, because they had to leave work on marriage. However, it also affected women in the long-term workers group, many of whom did not apply for promotion when their children were young. Senior women managers had the family, financial and/or educational resources to overcome some of these constraints; however, it was notable that most women at senior management level did not have children, while all of the men did. The male-breadwinner norm tended to prompt men to pursue promotion when they married and had children. The evidence supports relational theory and Sen's theory as to the important impact that gendered norms can have on behaviour (Sen, 1990, Himmelweit, 2001)

Related to this is the impact that legislation and policy had on workers' freedom to fulfil work-related preferences. The gendered social norm of women as primary carers was enshrined in legislation in the form of the marriage bar – which meant women had to leave work on marriage; this affected the women in the returners group. The lack of any publicly-funded childcare also acted as a constraint on women while the removal of upper age-limits for recruitment meant that these women could return to work . It also enabled men who are late joiners to join the civil service.

The state of the economy also had an impact on opportunities and on decision-making. The recession slowed down the careers of some middle and senior managers in the 1980's when promotion was frozen. The Celtic Tiger induced a demand for labour which created opportunities for older workers - returners and late joiners. The fact that conditions in the economy had an important influence on decision-making supports empirical research by Crompton and Harris, (1998, 1999) and the political economy approach of Phillipson, (2004),

Perceptions of opportunities also had a strong impact on behaviour. This included perceived age-related discrimination and to a lesser extent perceived gender-related discrimination and/or the perception of workers that they would not have a realistic chance of promotion due a variety of factors such as location, de-centralisation or age. This affected the relationship to work of many men and women in each of the groups

For workers in all groups, preferences form only part of the explanation for decision-making. Interestingly, and in contrast to what might be predicted by preference theory, some of the women returners are highly work-centred and ambitious. The work of theorists such as Crompton and Harris (1998), Collins and Wickham (2004) and Walsh (1999) seems to offer a helpful explanatory framework for the actual decision-making of the women in this group.

Following these chapters, Chapter 9 analyses the decision-making of a group of 6 men and 4 women whom I call "late joiners". These are civil servants who have worked in other occupations for many years and have joined the civil service recently; for many of them working in the civil service is a "bridge" between working and retirement. Their accounts indicate that decision-making for this group is affected by familial and financial constraints and by gendered social norms (especially caring for parents). Many were enabled to fulfil their preferences to work by buoyant labour market conditions in the economy and changes in equality legislation. Their accounts appear to confirm the argument of Crompton and others that conditions in the economy and changes in family and social norms need to be considered together in analysis (Crompton, 2002; Charles & James, 2003; Nolan, 2005).

Chapter 10 draws all four groups together and provides an analysis of their prospective decision-making in relation to the timing of retirement and of the influences that affect that

decision. It enables comparison across the groups on the question of whether workers are free to fulfil their preferences in relation to one particular decision. A case-study is presented here which indicates that a combination of gender and lack of socio-economic resources earlier in life may have strongly restrictive effects on peoples' choices in relation to retirement later. The chapter also demonstrates that workers' attitudes to retirement change over time – again a challenge to the assumption of fixed preferences that characterises preference theory. The findings in this chapter also suggest that women returners as a group, and men and women with lower incomes and interrupted career histories are far less likely to be able to retire when they wish. As is indicated, these findings confirm arguments found in the political economy of ageing and in feminist theoretical approaches to retirement and pensions (Ginn, Daly & Street, 2001; Price & Ginn, 2003).

Finally, Chapter 11 is a conclusion chapter which summarises and highlights the most important findings and explicates some similarities and contrasts between the groups. There are a number of commonalities between the accounts of workers in the different groups. Some members of all groups do act in according with preferences; however, the accounts of a large proportion of all groups are permeated by the impact of various factors which act as constraints (though different factors are emphasised by the different groups). This final chapter sets out the different constraints and factors identified by workers – gender, social norms, socio-economic conditions and structures, the work organisation itself, legislation and policy, and life-cycle changes. In addition to summarising these findings on the issue of decision-making constraints, this chapter reiterates the evidence that preferences change over time and that orientations to work are also complex and changing – both of which challenge the assumptions of self and agency that underpin preference and rational choice theory. Finally, there is some discussion of the possible policy implications of these findings both for the government and for the civil service and the possible directions for future research in this area.

Chapter 2

Theoretical approaches to decision-making

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the theoretical context for the analysis of work orientation and labour market decision-making. It takes as a starting point one of the most influential and controversial of the current theories used by sociologists in this area – that is, "preference theory", which argues that labour market behaviour is largely determined by individual preferences. This theory, especially as articulated in the work of Catherine Hakim in relation to women workers, pays some attention to the impact of social norms and legislation, but arguably retains problematic assumptions associated with rational choice theory, a dominant theory within the field of economics that asserts that decision-making is largely choice-based, and that individual preferences are fixed at an early age (see Hakim, 1991, 1995, 2000; Crompton & Harris, 1998). After outlining Hakim's arguments below I examine some aspects of the critique of rational choice and preference theory from feminist and institutionalist perspectives, including a discussion of alternative models of the self that appear to illuminate the findings of the present empirical work (for example, Himmelweit's concept of the self as profoundly influenced by (changing) social norms, and the model of the "contingent self", or "self-as-process" as described by Casey, (Himmelweit, 2002; Casey, 1995). The chapter goes on to discuss additional issues that may affect work-related decision-making among older workers, but have been de-emphasised by preference theory. These include:

- the impact of economic conditions which shape labour market conditions;
- structures and processes in the work organisation itself;
- social norms related to caring;
- legislation and policy;
- ageing and perceived age-related discrimination.

2.2 Preference Theory

One of the most prominent and controversial theories in the sociological literature in the past fifteen years has been Catherine Hakim's "preference theory", which is most comprehensively set out in *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21ˢᵗ Century* (Hakim, 2000). Hakim argues that people's preferences are the main determinant of their labour market decision-making, behaviour and outcomes (see Hakim, 1991, 1996, 2000, 2003). Focusing especially on women workers, Hakim suggests that women have more heterogeneous preferences than men, that they have a genuine choice about whether and how to work, and that it is their preferences that are the main determinant of their labour market behaviour (Hakim, 2000: 169). Although making some allowance for the impact of social norms and policy on decision-making and behaviour, she argues that choice and "fixed" preferences are fundamentally more important. In part, she argues, this is due to certain changes that have taken place in society – for example, the contraceptive revolution, the equal opportunities revolution, the expansion of white-collar occupations, the creation of jobs for secondary earners and the increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences in lifestyle choices. The effect of these changes has been that now women's preferences rather than legal constraints, social norms and lack of childcare determine their relatively low rewards in the labour market (Hakim, 2000: 169).

In elaborating her position, Hakim argues that women choose (supposedly early in life) between two significant life-priorities, making a commitment to either "career" or "family". Hakim envisages three "qualitatively different types" of women – "work-centred", "home-centred" and "drifters" or "adaptive" workers. Members of only one of these groups ("work-centred" women) are committed workers. Such women decide at an early age to prioritise their career and invest in education and training in order to do so. Hakim calls these "self-made women"; they are committed workers who work long hours full-time, put considerable time and effort into their career and often have very few or more usually no children (Hakim, 2000: 164-165). Some work-centred women may have children, but Hakim suggests that "work-centred women have children in the same way that men do: as an expression of normality, and as a weekend hobby" (Hakim, 2000: 164). They are responsive to employment policies and not to family policy (Hakim, 2000: 165).

By contrast, "home-centred women" (or "grateful slaves" as Hakim has labelled them) are "uncommitted" workers who choose at an early age to give priority to "a marriage career" (Hakim, 1991, 2000: 159-163). They only work if it fits in with their domestic responsibilities, which they will always prioritise. They may be well-educated, but they only invest in education in order to equip themselves with an intellectual dowry for the "marriage market". Interestingly, the main examples she cites for such women are models and air hostesses. According to Hakim, these women may work before marriage and may work (usually part-time) after their children are grown up. The "grateful slave" label is used to suggest that they are happy to work in poorly-paid part-time jobs because they have chosen to give their domestic life priority (Hakim, 1991). She states that these women are not responsive to employment policy; the number of children they have may be affected by government social policy (Hakim, 2000: 158).

It should be noted that she suggests that both home-centred and work-centred women "are consistent and persistent in goals and priorities across the life-cycle" (Hakim, 2000: 156). However, she suggests that women in the "adaptive" category are not consistent in their preferences although she does not explain why this is the case. These "drifters" or "adaptives" she argues want to combine employment and family without either taking priority (Hakim, 2000: 165-168); she describes them in somewhat judgemental terms as "refusing to choose fixed objectives", "pretending they can keep all their options open" and having "chaotically unplanned careers" (Hakim, 1996). Like the previous group, these too are seen as "uncommitted workers". She describes these women as responsive to all types of policies – social, employment, equal opportunities and to the economic cycle (Hakim, 2000: 158). They switch from one priority to the other over the life course apparently without explanation.

For Hakim, all women are assumed to fit into one of these three categories. For example, she estimates that 20% of women are "committed" or work-centred, 20% are primarily "homemakers", while the remaining 60% are "adaptive" (see Hakim, 2000: 158). The exact percentages vary from country to country.

Hakim uses a similar model to categorise men's orientations. She claims that men are more homogenous than women in their work orientations; most men (60%) are assumed to be "committed workers" (work-centred), 30% are "adaptive" and 10% are "uncommitted" or family-centred (Hakim, 2000: 255). She does admit that this claim is tentative given the

scarcity of actual evidence on men's orientations (Hakim, 2000: 254). However, she claims that it is the relative uniformity of male preferences, behaviour and interests that results in their higher rewards in the labour market in terms of promotion, pay and so on (Hakim, 2000: 255). She argues that it is because women are "divided in their interests" that they do not perform as well in the labour market as do men.

In many ways, Hakim's approach is underpinned by some of the same assumptions as "rational choice theory" although she has recently claimed that "preference theory has no underlying assumptions" which seems an extraordinary claim (Hakim, 2007: 123). Any theory of human decision-making must have underlying assumptions about the nature of the self. Rational choice theory, the main basis of mainstream economic analysis since the 1950s, also privileges the role of individual choice over constraint and context in economic decision-making. The main assumptions underlying rational choice theory are that individuals are rational, radically autonomous and utility-maximising and that their preferences are "fixed" – perhaps biologically determined. The typical economic actor or decision-maker in mainstream economics models is "economic man" who is rational, autonomous and utility-maximising in workplace decision-making (although altruistic in the home). Economists working in the rational choice theory tradition typically assume (rather than seeking to establish empirically) that economic behaviour reflects rational, utility-maximising preferences and does not allow sufficiently for the impact of social norms, familial obligations or other factors on decision-making.

Some of the work of more recent economists have addressed some of the deficiencies of rational choice theory, but have retained the notion that people's behaviour is determined mainly by their individual preferences. Theorists such as Amartya Sen have recognised the strength of social norms such as membership of family, community, nation, etc. in influencing and sometimes constraining people's choices (Sen, 1987, p. 45). He uses the concept of "entitlement" to explain decision-making processes, stressing the importance of people's perceptions in their ability to bargain or choose (Sen, 1990, p. 140). More recent work by evolutionary economists such as Susan Himmelweit have further developed this critique of the shortcomings of models such as "economic man" by adopting the "socio-cultural person" as a more appropriate model. Based on empirical research, she develops the concept of "substantive rationality" – the idea that people may be so profoundly affected by the perception that they have a duty to perform a particular role (e. g. caring for

a dependant) that they may not perceive themselves as free to "choose" to participate in the labour market.

Like rational choice theory, Hakim's account privileges intentionality, autonomy and freedom to choose and a notion of the self that is fixed at a particular point in time for at least two groups, that is work-centred and home-centred women. Yet Hakim's work is in some ways an advance on the work of rational choice theorists, since her approach does not simply rely on observing women's behaviour as economists tend to do, but tries to establish women's attitudes and preferences. She also allows that social constraints do have some impact on behaviour. However she claims that 'preferences become a much more important determinant of outcomes than in the past' in prosperous modern societies (Hakim, 2000: 168-169).

In response to empirical evidence which appeared to challenge her theory, Hakim explicitly says her theory does not apply to people born before 1960, and the respondents in this thesis were all born before then (Hakim, 2003: 8). However the theory itself is influential in sociology as is its predecessor rational choice theory in economics. Moreover, her contention is based on socio-economic conditions that existed in the UK and it is likely therefore that the socio-economic environment in which Irish workers make decisions is quite different and deserves to be empirically investigated. Therefore this thesis critically assesses the assumptions underlying these approaches (i.e., that preferences are the main determinants of outcomes and that such preferences are biologically-based and unchanging for home-centred and work-centred men and women).

2.3 Critiques of preference theory

There is an extensive body of critique of rational choice theory in the field of economics from institutionalists, feminists and others on the basis that men and women are not radically autonomous and utility-maximising when making decisions (Sen, 1990; England, 1993; Folbre, 1994; Himmelweit, 2001; McRae, 2003a, 2003b). So too, in sociology there have been many critiques of Hakim's preference theory, mainly from feminists who, although they accept that preferences do have a part to play in women's labour-market decisions and outcomes, also believe that the legal, social and economic conditions in

which choices are made may profoundly limit the extent to which such preferences may be realised. (Ginn *et al.,* 1996; Crompton & Harris, 1998; Procter & Padfield, 1999; Rose, 2001). There is a sense in which the debate between Hakim and her critics has recently reached a stalemate on the issue of the primacy of choice versus constraints in work-place decision-making and outcomes (Hakim, 2007; Crompton & Lyonette, 2007). Hakim asserts that all critiques of preference theory include the argument that "social structures remain the dominant, primary determinant of behaviour" (Hakim, 2007: 124). However, as Crompton and Lyonette clarify in their reply, they have always accepted and stated that "both structural *and* normative factors are important in explaining employment decisions" (Crompton & Lyonette, 2007: 133). Indeed in one of their earlier responses to preference theory, they clearly acknowledge the role of agency and therefore preference in the employment decision-making – they simply argue that it is not the major independent variable explaining women's employment patterns (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 119). Instead,

> [w]e shall argue that women's employment behaviour is a reflection of the way in which women actively construct their work-life biographies in terms of their historically available opportunities and constraints.
> (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 119)

This quote acknowledges the role of agency (as well as constraints) in shaping women's employment choices.

There are several recent, empirical studies which have investigated this issue and found that women with low incomes and low levels of education do not have a great deal of freedom to realise their preferences and may, for example, take up any job rather than a preferred job and may work part-time out of necessity rather than preference (Procter & Padfield, 1999; Walsh, 1999; Charles & James, 2003; Walters, 2005). For example, in countries where there is very low or no provision of state-funded childcare, it may be difficult to find affordable, good quality childcare and women may be pushed into part-time work even if their preference is for full-time work (Walters, 2005).

It has also been argued that Hakim's theory is simplistic and static and doesn't adequately account for the fact that many women (even apparently home-centred women) appear to change their preferences over time; that in fact "preferences and orientations often emerge

in a gradual, but continual adaptive process" (Fagan, 2001: 243) Others observe that sudden changes of circumstance such as illness, financial problems and/or marriage breakdown can change preferences (Crompton & Harris, 1998; McRae, 2003a; Nolan, 2005). According to preference theory, the differences in women's work orientations are largely explained in terms of choices made in early adulthood (at least for work-centred and home-centred women) who decide then either to opt for a career or for the "marriage market" (Hakim, 2000: 158). An interesting critique made by McRae is that some changes in preference may be unpredictable in advance and it is only through experience (motherhood, for example) that priorities become obvious even to the person themselves (McRae, 2003b: 588). Critics point out that these preferences can and do change over time depending on a variety of factors including the opening up and closing down of opportunities and changes in caring responsibilities over the life-cycle (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 127; Collins & Wickham, 2004: 41). They point to the need for a more dynamic theoretical conceptualisation of the self in relation to the social environment to encapsulate such changes in preferences (Fagan, 2001: 243; Walters, 2005: 211).

Crompton and Harris and other feminist theorists have also challenged Hakim's theory on the basis that she doesn't account for the existence of "types" of women or for the difference between men and women – apart from a biological essentialist argument from Goldberg that men are naturally more aggressive, dominant and competitive (Hakim, 2000: 258-260; Crompton & Harris, 1998; Collins & Wickham, 2004). The debate on the extent to which Hakim's theories are based on biological essentialist foundations was continued in a recent exchange in the *British Journal of Sociology* (Hakim, 2007; Crompton & Lyonette, 2007) where Hakim argued that preference theory does not rest on Goldberg's thesis, which she claims is presented as only one of four competing explanations (Crompton & Lyonette, 2006, 2007; Hakim, 2007: 126-127). If this is the case, the fact remains that she doesn't account for why women have the particular division of typologies (i.e. 20% work-centred, 60% adaptive and 20% home-centred) that she claims they do.

Critics argue that the formation of preferences in their social, economic and historical context needs to be investigated, rather than simply assuming that behaviour reflects the free operation of *a priori* preferences (England, 1993; Crompton & Harris, 1998; Walsh, 1999: 183). The feminist economist Susan Himmelweit (2001) has interrogated the assumption found in rational choice and preference theory that certain women have a natural "taste" for work in the home. She believes that economists should analyse the

formation of tastes and models should seek to encompass a more complex account of human decision-making. She has developed a circular model which attempts to map the way in which social norms are formed (and become stronger or weaker over time). She shows how norms and legislation are connected to the formation of individual preferences (Himmelweit, 2001: 191-200). This is important as it shows how enabling legislation can open up new opportunities and help to form new preferences for the individual – a process which resonates with the findings of this study, most obviously in the case of returners.

Another assumption questioned by critics of preference theory is that some people simply "have" and maintain fixed preferences that are formed in early adulthood – in Hakim's model, this assumption applies to the two extreme groups of "home-centred" and "career-centred" women, but not to adaptive women. Several critics have suggested that attributing behaviour mainly or entirely to such preferences is overly voluntaristic and does not adequately allow for constraints people may face even before they join the workforce (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Procter & Padfield 1999; Fagan, 2001). The earlier work of Blackburn and Mann on men's decision to take a particular job also found that they faced many constraints including lack of information and education (Blackburn & Mann, 1979). Several qualitative empirical research studies designed to investigate this issue found that many women and men face a lack of prior economic resources, educational qualifications and perhaps parental aspirations at an early stage in life. This, combined with societal gender norms, make it extremely unlikely that they would be free to "choose" a work-centred career at that early stage of their lives (Fagan, 2001; Crompton & Harris, 1998; Collins & Wickham, 2004; James, 2008). As we shall see, the accounts of many of the women (and some of the men), in this thesis found that economic, familial and normative constraints may impede both the formation and realisation of preferences to pursue a career. This question of the formation of preferences to work is explored in Chapter 4.

Similarly, in accordance with preference theory we might expect women managers all to have fixed work-centred preferences from an early stage in their lives. However, empirical research findings question this assumption and suggests that even apparently work-centred women may have adaptive preferences (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 127; James, 2008); for example some may be "careerists by necessity" rather than choice at first and only later become career-centred by preference (Crompton & Harris, 1998; 1999). In fact in their study of bankers and doctors, Crompton and Harris found that three quarters of their sample changed their orientations over time (Crompton & Harris, 1999: 139). When

circumstances change such as, for example the working environment becoming more enabling (e.g. through the introduction of gender equality policy), or when opportunities appear to close down, people tend to adapt their preferences in response to this. In particular, if people believe there is no realistic hope of promotion, they often become less work-centred (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 130; Scase & Goffee, 1989). Researchers from the late 1970s on have questioned the whole notion of having a "central life interest" as a restrictive concept that does not adequately capture people's complex and multi-stranded orientations to work. They suggest instead that most people have more than a single focus; they may combine being extremely ambitious at work with being very involved with family or with some other consuming interest outside of work (Blackburn & Mann, 1979; Pleck, 1985; Nolan, 2005, 2009).

The existence of Hakim's third group of "adaptive" women (and men) has also been the subject of critique. Firstly, there is no explanation as to why "adaptives" are different from the others and don't have fixed preferences. It has been argued that this category is not comparable to the other two – i.e. work-centred and career-centred. It appears to be a residual or catch-all category designed to accommodate any type of labour market behaviour that doesn't fit into the other categories (Procter & Padfield, 1999). Perhaps not surprisingly, several empirical studies have found that this category is too broad and undifferentiated to be descriptively or conceptually useful. Some theorists have suggested that the category needs to be sub-divided into distinct groups to be useful (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Charles & James, 2003). As we shall see, the need for a more differentiated category is borne out in this thesis. The category is sub-divided into "maximisers" and "satisficers" each of whom have a distinct orientation to work (see Chapter 6). Other critics have found that people move from being "work-centred" to "adaptive" or apparently "home-centred" to being "adaptive".

Hakim's assumptions about men's orientation to work and decision-making may be open to question also. As has been identified in the literature, there is a general paucity of recent qualitative sociological research into men's work orientations (Hakim, 2007: 124; Charles & James, 2003: 40; Nolan, 2005, 2009). However there have been a small number of qualitative empirical studies in recent years that have begun to explore this issue (Charles & James, 2003: 40; Nolan, 2005: 4-5). There was also some earlier research in the field of industrial sociology in the 1960s and 1970s which suggested implicitly that men (as well as women) may have heterogeneous orientations towards work (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968).

Goldthorpe's study *The Affluent Worker* found that some men have mainly extrinsic or instrumental work orientations (i.e. they see work primarily as a means of earning money) and do not derive much intrinsic or expressive satisfaction from their work (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968). This opens up the possibility that not all men are homogenously work-centred (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968: 38-39). However, critics of Goldthorpe's approach suggest that rather than being either exclusively instrumental (mainly working for extrinsic reasons) *or* expressive (valuing work for intrinsic reasons), many men had multi-stranded orientations – they simultaneously derive both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction from work (Blackburn & Mann, 1979: 144). Similarly, research carried out in the field of occupational psychology in the 1980s suggests that many men have multi-stranded work orientations (Pleck, 1985: 122-126). These findings tend to challenge the contention of preference theory that most men have fixed homogenous (work-centred) orientations. Recent work by Charles and James (echoing some of the early findings by Goldthorpe) found that men's work orientations may also vary by life cycle stage (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968: 148-149; Blackburn & Mann, 1979: 302; Charles & James, 2003)[5]. For example, men may become more interested in pursuing a career when they have a young family or they may opt to stay in a job that does not have promotional prospects, but provides more money in the short-term. This thesis offers an opportunity to analyse men's orientations to work and how this relates to their promotion decision-making (see especially Chapters 5 and 6 below).

Some of the limitations of preference theory (and its antecedent rational choice theory) rest on its simplistic assumptions about the individual "self" – for instance, that people are calculative, rational, autonomous and utility-maximising with preferences that are fully formed at an early age. An alternative way of approaching the concept of the self as decision-making agent is to theorise a more complex situation in which the self is not merely an autonomous and rational figure – or a "separative self" as it has been described (England, 1993). For example, the persona of the self theorised by feminist economists such as Susan Himmelweit may be described as a "socio-cultural person" – one who is essentially relational – that is, affected by social norms, by policy, and by their embeddedness in social institutions and familial relationships (Himmelweit, 2001, 2002). The decision to care for a child or a dependent family member may be seen by many people (especially many women) more as a moral obligation rather than as a calculated choice (Carling, 2002: 12). Thus a person's decision to enter or re-enter the labour market

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[5] Although, as noted by Crompton and Harris, Goldthorpe didn't pursue this issue of the intertwining of workplace and family life cycle issues in decision-making (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 123).

may be seen from this perspective to depend not only on preference stemming from individual choice but also to be influenced by factors such as national employment legislation, state provision of child care, tax arrangements, the structure of organizations as well as normative changes in gender relations and in people's expectations. Thus, they argue that the sphere of the economic (i.e. work) and the sphere of the social (family) should be seen and analysed as intertwined, an argument that is also made by life-course theorists and sociologists – see below (Giele & Elder, 1998; Moen *et al.*, 2000; Himmelweit, 2001; Crompton, 2002).

However, even though this relational construction of the person is more capable of describing the complexity involved in decision-making, it does retain the notion of a stable unified self characteristic of both rational choice theory and its institutionalist and feminist critique. A more dynamic conceptualisation of the self – one that challenges these might be termed a "contingent self". The recent work of Casey exemplifies this (Casey, 1995). She has conducted a case study of a US corporation in which she explores the notion of identity in relation to work. She draws upon the work of Kohn, who has argued that there is a reciprocal relationship between work and the self, whereby work constitutes the self and the self is constituted by work (Kohn, 1990, cited in Casey, 1995). Specifically, Kohn argues that the conditions of and experiences at work can profoundly affect people's values, self-conceptions, and orientations to social reality (Casey, 1995: 82). Personality can also affect people's perception of job structures and conditions, so there is a reciprocal relationship between the two. In other words people's conceptions of themselves and their orientation to the world around them is affected by changing structural conditions at work. There is some evidence of this type of relationship in the accounts given by returners to work in the current study (see Chapter 8 below). Some returners believed on their return to work that they would be able to pursue a career in the civil service, but gradually became disillusioned when they realised that the structures and processes of the organisation they were in meant it would be extremely difficult for them to be promoted. The accounts of the managers also provide evidence of such changing orientations in response to structural changes such as de-centralisation (see Chapter 7).

Casey identifies particular relationships of the self to the organisation. For example, some workers may collude with the culture of the corporation, while others may resist it. In such cases, other elements of a worker's identity (e.g., his or her role in their family or involvement in voluntary organisations) may feature more prominently in that individual's

account of decision-making. One limitation to Casey's theorisation is its exclusive focus on the relation between the self and work: it doesn't pursue to any great extent the possibility that work-related decisions may also be affected by several other factors such as cultural norms (including gender), perceived familial roles, state policy, civil service policy, stage in life-course, place in the organizational hierarchy, and life-experience.

One further source of an alternative model of self to help explain decision-making is the work of Ulrich Beck (see especially Beck, 2000). His concept of "reflexive modernization" suggests that there has been a decline in the power of authoritative norms and a rise in a new type of identity formation, with people becoming increasingly oriented around the lifelong project of constructing and exploring identities. He theorises that there is an associated decline in the capacity of social institutions to dictate people's biographies. As we shall see, in the civil service, some people do appear to be defined by the institution – those who identify themselves as "organisation men and women".

One implication of this theory is that gender relations have become individualised in late modernity. This individualisation model asserts that, in effect women decide for themselves in relation to work issues and aren't tied into having complementary work roles with their partners or into following pre-determined gender roles. For women, work is now part of the formation of their identity. This suggests that women have a greater degree of freedom to develop their own biography (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 59). However, this theory has been challenged on the basis that equality has not in fact been achieved either in the labour market or in the private sphere with regard to domestic labour (Lewis, 2002: 52). The way in which the accounts of the returners change over time (see Chapter 7) provides some support for the view that there is an increase in individualisation, but this is very gradual and the freedom of some men and women to develop their own biography is still severely constrained by gender norms and lack of resources (see also Chapter 7).

Although Beck doesn't explore the gender implications of his theory in any great detail (Beck, 2000) it would appear to be implied from his theory that the work-identities of men and women in management may be expected to converge in late modernity (Wajcman & Martin, 2002). One would expect that concerns from the private sphere would enter more into people's career narratives as work is relegated to being only one element in their personal project of self-formation in addition to family, hobbies, volunteering and so on. As we shall see, there is some evidence that work is one important source of identity

formation for some of the women returners; while for many men work is only one part of their identity formation so there is some evidence of a shift towards convergence; however, gender remains an important category signalling different practices and outcomes for the men and women in the sample.

2.4 Other influences on work-related decision-making

Because preference theory privileges the role of choice in labour market decision-making, it tends to de-emphasise certain other factors which may have a bearing on the decisions of older workers. These include the impact of the economic conditions, structures and processes in the work organisation, gendered social norms, legislation and policy, and ageing and age-related discrimination.

Economic conditions

Some theorists suggest that conditions in the economy may have an important (constraining or enabling) influence on freedom to realise preferences in work-related decision-making. For example, conditions of economic expansion may mean that there is a demand for older workers, thus opening up choices to them that did not previously exist. Several qualitative empirical studies have found that both women and men often have to accept whatever employment is available or that which fits in with their local circumstances rather than being able to fulfil their preferences (Charles & James, 2003; Collins & Wickham, 2004; Walters, 2005). How does this apply to the civil service? As we shall see later (see Chapters 4, 7 and 8) it applies to the decision to join or re-join the civil service and to the promotion decision, particularly where men and women have children or caring responsibilities .

Crompton and Harris (1998) have argued that the economic sphere and the social sphere are closely intertwined. When analysing people's work orientations, changes in the sphere of family relations and in gender norms need to be considered alongside changes in the economy and in working conditions (Crompton, 2002). The most obvious change they state is the transformation in the status of women in the last thirty years. This is mainly characterised by the higher levels of education they have attained and by the feminisation of the labour market (Crompton, 2002). There have also been some changes in gender

norms with men now being somewhat more likely to engage in household work although there is much disagreement about the extent to which this has changed. There is also a decline in the male breadwinner model of family life, and it has become much more the norm for all women including older women to be engaged in the paid formal labour market (Yeandle, 2005: 14; Fahey, 2008: 24). Yeandle argues that because of these changes, there are growing tensions for individual older workers (mainly women, but also some men) between the demands of employment and the demands of caring (Yeandle, 2005).

Structures and processes in the work organisation

An over-emphasis on choice may obscure the fact that structures and processes within the work organisation itself may affect decision-making. Such features of organisations may include restrictive recruitment and promotional policies, gender or age-related discrimination now or in the past, the existence and implementation of equality policies, and a gendered or age-discriminatory organisational culture.

Bureaucratic organisations in earlier theorisations (such as that of Weber) were assumed to be based on rational-legal principles and to be meritocratic, offering equal chances for career success to all. For Weber a bureaucratic organisation was characterised by having a strict hierarchy, transparent and neutral procedures which enabled each worker to attempt to progress through the career structure strictly on merit (Weber, 1947, cited in Witz and Savage, 2002). This model is seen to contrast favourably with previous forms of authority, such as charismatic and traditional authority. Weber believed that bureaucratic structures could ensure the most efficient type of organisation. If structures are neutral, this should ensure that inequality should not persist in the modern organisation. However, even a brief glance at national statistics demonstrates that significant (gender and other) inequalities persist in modern organisations (McCarthy, 2004; Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006). Several studies have pointed to the persistence of vertical and horizontal segregation by gender in bureaucratic organisations even after the introduction of equality policies as evidence that this is not the case (Scase & Goffee, 1989; O'Connor, 1996; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999; McCarthy, 2004). Feminist theorists have pointed to the fact that men and women often face different opportunities within particular work organisations (Witz & Savage, 1992: 12). For example, in the past, certain types of posts (usually at the bottom of organisational hierarchies) in some organisations were only open to women which meant that they had an extra rung to climb on the organisational career ladder if they wanted to reach management level (Ramsay & Parker, 1992: 162). These

constituted gendered structures of constraint which also had knock-on effects later in women's careers. Other feminist theorists have pointed out that organisational culture in many large bureaucratic organisations was male-defined and that women had to adopt male norms of behaviour to succeed after direct gender discrimination had been made illegal (O'Connor, 1996). The bureaucratic career was in fact the male career and the freedom of men to pursue such a career depended on women undertaking the routine work in bureaucratic organisations and most of the domestic work in the home (Crompton, 1986, cited in Witz & Savage, 1992: 11). An example of this is that career success as conventionally defined often called for the investment of time and effort at work during child-bearing years. The lack of women role-models at senior levels, it is argued, also makes it more unlikely that women will aspire to senior posts.

One type of theoretical explanation for the persistence of gender inequality in bureaucratic organisations is the neo-liberal explanation typical of the rational choice theory approach. Women simply haven't progressed in the organisation because they have chosen not to invest sufficiently in their careers. This type of explanation accepts at face-value that bureaucratic organisations are meritocratic and that women and men are judged fairly in accordance with rational-legal authority. Other theorists have argued that internal organisational factors may be extremely important in explaining persistent gender differences (Kanter, 1993). One explanation that has been advanced is that men have traditionally inhabited positions of power and this is very difficult to change, therefore male privilege tends to be re-produced, even when the organisational structures themselves are inherently fair and there is no intention to be unfair (Kanter, 1993).

Feminist theorists have suggested that many facets of organisational culture, both formal and informal have the effect of re-producing the status quo (the pre-dominance of men in higher positions in organisations). Formal structures may include working hours and career structures that require major effort during the child-bearing years. They point to the existence of masculinist culture in the management of organisations (the identification of "masculine" qualities such as being rational, aggressive and so on with being a good manager), the presence of informal "old boy" networks, sexual harassment and other aspects of organisational culture may render it difficult for women to be promoted in an organisation (see Halford, 1992; O'Connor, 1996). Critical theorists tend to envisage particular groups as being deliberately excluded by those who hold power (interest groups) within organisations.

Although Halford deals specifically with gender inequalities, their approach may be useful for analysing inequalities of treatment in employment based on age – firstly, because the intersection of age with gender may form the basis of a dual oppression, and secondly, because they do not take it for granted that the ordinary workings of the bureaucratic organisation are fair and meritocratic. Recent evidence suggests that although women have advanced in the civil service, they are still under-represented at senior management level relative to their presence in the organisation as a whole (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006). Finally, organisational changes such as re-structuring and de-centralisation constitute a disruption to the expected orderly career progression within an organisation – as is discussed later, this affects both men and women in the civil service.

Societal care norms

Several feminist theorists have demonstrated that societal gender norms continue to be influential for many women and men in their decision-making (Folbre, 1994; Himmelweit, 2002). The societal expectation that women are the primary carers for children and other dependants has been shown by Himmelweit and others to have an important bearing both on the formation of career-related preferences and on the freedom to realise those preferences (Himmelweit, 2002). For example, many people (particularly women) may feel morally obliged to provide care for dependant members of their families and this often influences the amount and nature of their participation in the labour market (Finch & Mason, 1993; Folbre, 1994). Furthermore, this has been shown to have a cumulative effect over time. The findings of this thesis seem to confirm that many human beings are primarily relational rather than autonomous, and that their decision-making may be profoundly influenced by their embeddedness in societal institutions and familial relationships. For example, many of the returners in the study chose to or in some cases were legally obliged to leave work on marriage in order to care for children and others did not see it as a "choice", but rather as a very strong societal expectation or obligation. This affected their length of service and therefore their prospects for promotion and it also affected their ability to build up a pension. Hakim points out that the societal expectation that men should be the sole or main breadwinner may have a constraining effect on their ability to fulfil their preferences (Hakim, 2000: 257) and this also seems to be borne out by the findings in the thesis.

Legislation and policy

Cross-national research has shown that the impact of national legislation and policy is important in shaping the context in which preferences are formed (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 132; Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). Crompton and Harris argue that legislation and policy such as the lack of childcare can impact on women's freedom to pursue a career (Crompton & Harris, 1999b: 109). They also found that different kinds of welfare state have affected both the level and the nature of women's employment and the domestic division of labour (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 132; Crompton & Lyonette, 2005).

In this context Ireland has sometimes been described as a patriarchal 'male breadwinner state' (Mahon, 1998; Kennedy, 1999). The main features of such a state are described in more detail in Chapter 4 but may be summarised by comprising legislation which restricts employment opportunities for women, lack of state provision or subsidisation of childcare, and social norms and a constitutional provision whereby women were discouraged from engaging in paid labour outside of the home. Employment equality legislation in relation to gender and age and family friendly policies in the civil service have been introduced in recent years and as we shall see have been mentioned by research participants as important in enabling them to gain access to employment and in relation to promotion (see Chapters 5, 8 and 9). This thesis analyses the ways in which individual older workers process the (changing) gender regime in which they operate in pursuing their work-life biography (see Collins and Wickham, 2004).

Perceived age-related discrimination

It is important to consider if and how age-related discrimination may affect older workers. For example, there is evidence in the literature that older workers, both male and female may perceive or have experienced age-related discrimination in the workplace and/or in society more generally (Duncan & Loretto, 2004), and this may act as a constraint on their promotion ambitions or induce them to apply for early retirement (Loretto & White, 2006a). Beliefs about ageing are also important. Older workers may perceive ageing itself as a constraint – they may believe that they are less able to function effectively at work after a particular age, thus having internalised ageist beliefs. If so, this may make them less likely to apply for promotion and more likely to apply for early retirement (Loretto & White, 2006a: 504). Previous theorists have suggested that the intersection of age and gender may make it doubly difficult for women to succeed in the work-place (Itzin & Phillipson, 1993, cited in Duncan & Loretto, 2004). For example, they may be excluded from work or restricted in promotion by legislation, lack of childcare and gender-related

discrimination during early child-bearing years which usually coincide with career-formation years (Still & Timms, 1998; Duncan & Loretto, 2004). If they then encounter age discrimination, they may be at a double disadvantage. As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 8, some of the women returners and long-term workers did experience such double impacts on their careers and pension prospects, providing some support for the "double jeopardy" theory.

These are the main structural factors that may affect the experiences of older workers, but which may be overlooked if preferences are assumed to be the main determinants of labour market behaviour and outcomes. I now turn to theories of ageing, in particular, life-course theory. This I argue is the theory most capable of providing a conceptual frame-work that can encapsulate the broad range of factors outlined above, all of which may affect the individual decision at a given point in time, linking individual motivation with societal structure. Importantly, life-course theory also accounts for the impact of previous experiences and future prospects – that is, change over time. I follow this discussion by providing a brief outline and assessment of some of the theories from psychology, economics and social gerontology literature that may be useful for analysing retirement decision-making.

2.5 Theories of ageing: life-course theory

Life-course theory (emerging from the psychology and sociology of ageing) illuminates aspects of workplace decision-making. The particular theory from this tradition that seems most useful for the current study is that elaborated by Giele and Elder who theorise that "any point in the life span must be viewed dynamically as the consequence of past experience and future expectation as well as the integration of individual motive with external constraint" (Giele & Elder, 1998: 19). As we shall see, this version of life course theory seems flexible enough to incorporate the wide range of factors that older workers actually use to explain their decision-making and it appears to be a very appropriate way of conceptualizing and analyzing workplace decision-making. This accommodation of complexity and change over time represents an advance over the static model offered by preference theory. The life-course perspective enables us to look at the ways in which

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people construct their lives and respond to various events or social roles by accepting, resisting or modifying them.

The model of life course theory devised by Giele and Elder focuses on four dimensions of life experience:

1) *Location* in time and place which alludes to history, social structure and culture,
2) *Linked lives* – which refers to the interaction of individuals with societal institutions and social groups,
3) *Human agency* – the active pursuit of personal goals and the sense of self and
4) *Timing* – the events in an individual's life that combine personal, group and historical markers.

(Giele & Elder, 1998: 2)

What is interesting about life course theory for analyzing workplace decisions is that it attempts to explicitly link individuals - their sense of self and their goals - with the social and institutional structures in which they operate and with past experiences and future prospects. Thus it incorporates both agency and structure, can accommodate a complex range of factors and allows for the possibility that perceptions are important and that the work orientations of all workers may change over time. The findings of the thesis suggest that life-course theory is more useful than preference theory which conceives of decision-making in simplistic terms as based on (fixed) preferences for at least two groups of workers. For example when the women returners are asked about their decision to return to work, they typically refer to some or all of these (changing) factors in explaining their decisions. This form of theorizing is useful for illustrating the cumulative effects of earlier decisions on a worker's current situation and prospects – as we shall see this is particularly relevant in relation to retirement decisions (see case-study, Chapter 10.4).

While life-course theory is useful for conceptualising decision-making at the level of the individual, certain critical theories of ageing such as the political economy approach and the feminist political economy approach are also needed to explain differences in experience and outcomes by gender and by level of socio-economic resources. This section outlines some of the main functionalist theories of retirement and assesses why critical theories are more useful for analysing the retirement accounts of the workers in this study.

One of the earliest theories of ageing is Cummings and Henry's (functionalist) disengagement theory, which emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s and which suggested that the older person gradually withdrew from societal institutions and that this disengagement took place in a harmonious mutual fashion which suited both the older person and the labour market (Cummings & Henry, 1961, cited in Estes, Biggs & Phillipson, 2003: 14). This theory was the subject of critique from the 1970s onwards, particularly by theorists from political economy and from feminist perspectives on the basis that it falsely universalized experience. Critics of this approach suggested that the experience of retirement was not always benign and that it could vary considerably depending on the gender, race and class of the older person. For example, Skucha and Bernard found that many older women identified strongly with their jobs, and that they derived many benefits form them in terms of self-esteem, sense of achievement and social interaction (Skucha & Bernard, 2000).

Activity theory also originates in the fields of psychology and gerontology. Proponents of activity theory see old age as a "roleless role" and associate it with a loss of social functions. This suggests that people need to adopt new roles to replace the old ones if they wish to have a successful retirement. Early activity theorists were pessimistic about people's possibility of having a "satisfied" old age outside of the economic role. As we shall see, a small number of civil servants who identify very closely with their work do appear to regard the prospect of retirement with some trepidation (Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953, cited in Estes, Biggs & Phillipson, 2003: 13).

Continuity theory (from social gerontology) assumes that people maintain the patterns of their former lifestyle, their values and their self-worth even after retiring from paid work (Atchley, 1982). So, for some people, as long as they can find fulfilling social roles, and have important personal goals to strive for, retirement may be a very fulfilling time for them. Continued social activities, interaction with others and spheres of interest may continue even when work ends (voluntary work is one example of this). A recent article in the literature suggests that at least some of those engaged in "bridge employment" are seeking to maintain some aspects of their employment role in accordance with continuity theory and this appears to resonate with the accounts of some of the late joiners in Chapter 9 (Seongsu & Feldman, 2000). "Bridge employment" occurs when workers who have taken redundancy or early retirement take another job, after having spent most of their working lives in their main career.

Many commentators emphasise that having a choice about when to retire is one of the main determinants of well-being in retirement (Kunemund & Kolland, 2007; Phillipson, 2004; Loretto, Vickerstaff & White, 2006). However, recent empirical studies have found that some identifiable groups of people have restricted choice over the timing of retirement (Gould, 2006; Vickerstaff, 2006). Early economic models of retirement represented the retirement decision as a rational choice based on a cost/benefit type of analysis typically including the economic costs and benefits of retiring, and non-voluntary factors such as redundancy, ill-health and non-economic costs and benefits (Lazear, 1979). As we shall see, events earlier in the life-course may in fact have an important bearing on retirement decision-making. Recent research indicates that social class has an important bearing on having control over when to retire, with professionals being in a much better position to demand and avail of early retirement (Gould, 2006; Loretto & White, 2006a).

In contrast to the individualistic focus of early psychological and economic approaches to retirement, the political economy approach to ageing emerged as an influential theory in the 1970s. This approach adds another dimension to analysis as it focuses on the relationship between age and the structure of the economy. Phillipson links possibilities for retirement to the way in which the state decides how and to whom financial resources should be allocated (Phillipson, 2004). For example, the kind of welfare state regime that exists and the condition of the economy itself have an important influence in shaping what choices are available to people in terms of retirement; in societies with high levels of social protection with relatively generous state pensions, there is greater choice in relation to retirement for people who are less well-off. Feminist theorists working in the political economy tradition highlight the way in which pensions are "engendered" – the way in which the gender regime interacts with the pension system in any particular country and how this has often tended to disadvantage women (Ginn, Daly & Street, 2001).

Critical approaches such as the political economy and feminist approaches to ageing help explain the relatively more economically vulnerable position of women returners and men with interrupted work histories in this study and the fact that they have fewer choices in relation to retirement than those in other groups (see Chapter 10 below). The fact that state pension and taxation policy in Ireland constructed women in Ireland as their husbands' dependents meant that typically they didn't provide adequately or at all for their own pensions and were potentially vulnerable in the event of unemployment, business failure or

the ending of marital relationships (Daly, 2001). The feminist political economy of ageing approach emphasizes the influence that powerful institutions such as the state and employers may have on the lives and choices of individuals.

In the 1990s, research on retirement and identity in later life has been influenced by post-modernism and focuses on the role of the older person as a consumer rather than as a producer. The assumption here is that older people are less likely to define themselves by their former work roles and their identity is more tied to their lifestyles and patterns of consumption. This theory stresses human agency and constructs retirement optimistically as an opportunity to attain a high quality of life rather than a stressful or loss-filled event (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000, cited in Kunnemund & Kolland, 2007). According to Kunnemund and Kolland, there appears to be little empirical support for this theory and it appears that former work identity may play a major role in shaping retirement, both in terms of economic and social outcomes (Kunnemund & Kolland, 2007). This approach tends to ignore or minimize the effect of structural and institutional factors in society and the workplace which may affect retirement decision-making such as legal retirement ages and/or the provision of early retirement schemes (Phillipson, 2004). It also tends to downplay the impact of social norms and life-course influences on the decision to retire and the fact that such decisions tend to evolve over time in response to life events.

In summary, at the individual level, the life-course approach appears to provide the most comprehensive and useful framework to conceptualise work-related decision-making and it is this approach that is used in this thesis to categorise the workers' current relationship to promotion (see Chapters 5 -9). In addition, feminist and political economy approaches are necessary to analyse the way in which particular groups (women and those in different socio-economic groups) may have faced greater constraints.

2.6 Orientations to work

Since work orientations are an important component of this thesis, in this section I will describe some of the debates about work orientations in the literature and describe how they will be classified in later chapters. Work orientations have been defined and used in many ways in the sociological literature. First "orientation" is used in a general sense to

describe a person's attitude to work. An example of this is Goldthorpe's description of the bureaucratic orientation to work – a definition which seems very suitable for civil servants. In contrast to the "instrumental orientation", having a "bureaucratic orientation" means seeing work not simply as a means to an end, but as providing "service to an organisation in return for steadily increasing income and social status and for long-term security – that is in return for a career" (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968). For people with this orientation, Goldthorpe argues that work is a 'central life interest'. Life is not divided sharply into work and non-work. There is some evidence for this type of orientation in the accounts of the workers in the present sample. However, as both early and more recent research on men's orientations suggest, it is often combined with elements of an 'instrumental orientation' and the notion of work being a 'central life interest' appears to be applicable to only a relatively small number of workers (Pleck, 1985; Charles & James, 2003; Nolan, 2005, 2009).

The early development of theory and empirical work conceptualising men's work orientations was developed most famously by Goldthorpe *et al.* in the field of industrial sociology in the late 1960s (Goldthorpe, 1966; Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968). This theory was developed in an attempt to explain why male workers in Luton were apparently happy working at boring, stressful jobs. The explanation was based on how the workers saw their work – the authors found that the workers had "instrumental" orientations to work – they were happy with the material rewards they received and found major personal "expressive" satisfactions outside of the workplace. This led subsequently to the categorization of men's orientations to work into intrinsic (job orientation) and extrinsic orientations comprising social (people) orientation and instrumental (money) orientation.

A recent article by Dooreward, Hendrickx and Verschuren builds on the earlier work of Goldthorpe by developing a model describing three types of work orientation that have been commonly used in previous research (see Dooreward, Hendrickx & Verschuren, 2004; Rose, 2001). These are:

- Intrinsic (job) orientation (the tendency of people to like their work because it is intrinsically interesting to them and/or allows them to develop their capabilities);
- Social (people) orientation (participating in work because it provides them with social relationships)

- <u>Instrumental (money) orientation</u> (working mainly for financial reward, security and income)

Recent studies suggest that orientations to work for both men and women are multi-stranded and complex, and may change over time. The idea of changes in orientation over the life-cycle was mentioned by Goldthorpe *et al.* in 1968 (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968) Specifically, they speculate that stage in the family lifecycle was one influence on the men's "instrumental orientation" to work. Men with young families and non-working wives were most likely to prioritise extrinsic returns from employment. However, as pointed out by Crompton and Harris, this insight into the links between family life and working life was not pursued by Goldthorpe (Crompton & Harris, 1998). The current study allows for the links between the public and the private sphere in work-place decision-making to be investigated.

Goldthorpe's theory of work orientations was the subject of much subsequent critique; the main arguments made were that actual orientations are complex – empirical studies found that workers simultaneously held both intrinsic and extrinsic work orientations and so couldn't be categorised as holding one simple orientation. Orientations were found to vary by context and over the life cycle. Critics also suggest that workers tend to adapt to what is realistically available to them (Blackburn & Mann, 1979). This resonates with the more recent work of researchers who (although not dealing specifically with orientations to work) also found that workers have adaptive preferences (see Fagan, 2001).

2.7 Career development theory

In addition to the economics and sociology literature, there is also a body of literature in the area of management and psychology which attempts to theorise work commitment, satisfaction and orientation. In the management literature, at least two sets of theories may be identified which have been used to interpret orientations towards work. These are, firstly, a theoretical perspective which focuses on the meaning of work in older people's lives and secondly career development theory (Still & Timms, 1998). The first theoretical perspective is very broad and empirically-based and posits that work is increasingly important for older women (Levinson and Levinson, 1996). They value it for income,

associations and relationships, but also for providing goals and feelings of accomplishment (Scase & Goffee, 1989, Bergquist, Greenberg and Klaum, 1993, Still & Timms, 1998). The narrative accounts of older women in the civil service are examined to see if their accounts agree with this previous research. Some empirical research suggests that older men managers are more likely to become less committed to work in the pre-retirement phase (Scase and Goffee, 1989) and that both men and women are more likely to want to spend fewer hours at work at this point (Fagan, 2001).

Career development theory was propounded by Super in 1957 (Super, 1957, cited in Still & Timms, 1998). It envisaged four stages of development in the typical career – exploration, establishment, maintenance and disengagement and proposed that people display different psychological attitudes towards work in each stage. The basic assumption is that the stage of the career is a main determinant of their level of engagement. However useful this approach may have been in interpreting men's career paths, it has been found to be limited in interpreting women's career orientation. Women are found to have more complex goal systems than men which influence their division of labour between work and family (see Levinson & Levinson, 1996). They often may follow career paths which allow for interruptions for family reasons.

Super's career development model is generally thought to be limited and unable to encompass less straightforward career paths such as those more commonly found in women's career paths (Still & Timms, 1998). Some researchers have found differences between men and women in relation to their engagement at different stages of their career. Smart and Allen-Ankins (1995) found that women's commitment to work diminishes at the maintenance and disengagement stages while men's continues to increase. Others have found that men and women managers have similar levels of commitment, but that women face more barriers to advancement in the form of organisational structures, informal male networks and not having the domestic labour of wives to free them to pursue male-defined career paths that entail geographic mobility (Wajcman, 1998: 42-43). In relation to the two sets of workers who have been in the civil service for long enough to have a career, we consider whether there are similar variations by gender and marital status among the workers in this study.

One other theorist coming from a management perspective whose work may be of particular relevance to this study is Hall, who has developed the concept of the "protean

career" (Hall, 2004). He contrasts this with the "traditional career" which was conceptualized by Whyte in his book *The Organization Man* (Whyte, 1956). The traditional career is characterized by commitment to the organization and success is defined by position in the hierarchy and salary. In addition to this, Michael Roper, in his book *Masculinity and the British Organisation Man Since 1945* adds that the organization man is "single-minded in his pursuit of career success but a responsible breadwinner and loyal servant of the company" (Roper, 1994: 1).The core value of the "organization man" is advancement within the organization. He also notes that the organization man's extreme devotion to company and career was "facilitated by the servicing work of secretaries and wives" (Roper, 1994: 1). As we shall see in Chapter 7, there are several examples of "organization man and woman" among senior management in the civil service.

Hall describes the protean career by contrast as one where the individual rather than the organization is responsible for career development, where the core values of the individual are freedom and growth; there is a high degree of mobility and psychological growth is the criteria by which success is measured (Hall, 2004). The key attitudes of the protean careerist are work satisfaction and professional commitment rather than commitment to an organisation and a single career. The protean careerist engages in life-long learning and is adaptable. Hall and Mirvis suggest that this protean career is likely to become more prevalent because of changes in the economy for example where large organisations downsize and older workers are encouraged to leave through redundancy (Hall & Mirvis, 1995: 271). They suggest that older workers are adaptable and capable of engaging in continuous learning. Career development theory is applicable only to those workers in the civil service who have had many years service and have advanced in their careers – that is, those at middle and senior management levels; their accounts are analysed in this thesis to see if they describe their careers in terms of traditional paths or protean careers and whether this varies by gender.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some of the main theoretical approaches in the literature to analyzing the decision-making of older workers, demonstrating the limitations of and

alternatives to preference theory, and providing an alternative framework for the interpretation of work orientation and decision-making.

Figure 1 on p. 51 draws upon the literature review and provides a diagrammatic representation of the main influences on work-related decision-making as set out in Sections 2.4 to 2.7 above. The factors in the blue boxes on the left are macro-factors that shape the context of individual decision-making – the state of the economy, demographic patterns, and the legislative and policy framework including taxation, childcare and anti-discrimination legislation. The arrows show that these affect decision-making both directly and indirectly. The indirect effects occur through the impact they have on the policies, practices and processes of the work organisation itself. These shape the promotional and retirement opportunities that workers face in their particular workplace. At the top of the diagram are "social norms" which are affected by the contextual factors and which have a reciprocal relationship both with the work organisation and with the decision-making individual. Examples of social norms are the male breadwinner family norm that was prevalent in Ireland. On the right-hand side, in yellow boxes, are personal characteristics such as gender, membership of family, preferences, perceptions of opportunities and sense of agency. These all affect the work-related decision. As the arrows show, many of the other factors such as the contextual factors, perceptions and social norms feed into preferences so preferences are socially constructed and not just innate. These all feed directly into decision-making also. The intricacy of this diagram demonstrates the complexity underlying decision-making itself. It also allows us to see how the sense of self in relation to work is almost inevitably fluid and contingent, since a change in one or more of the factors can result in a change in orientation to work and hence in decision-making.

Figure 1: Contextual and personal factors influencing work-related decision-making
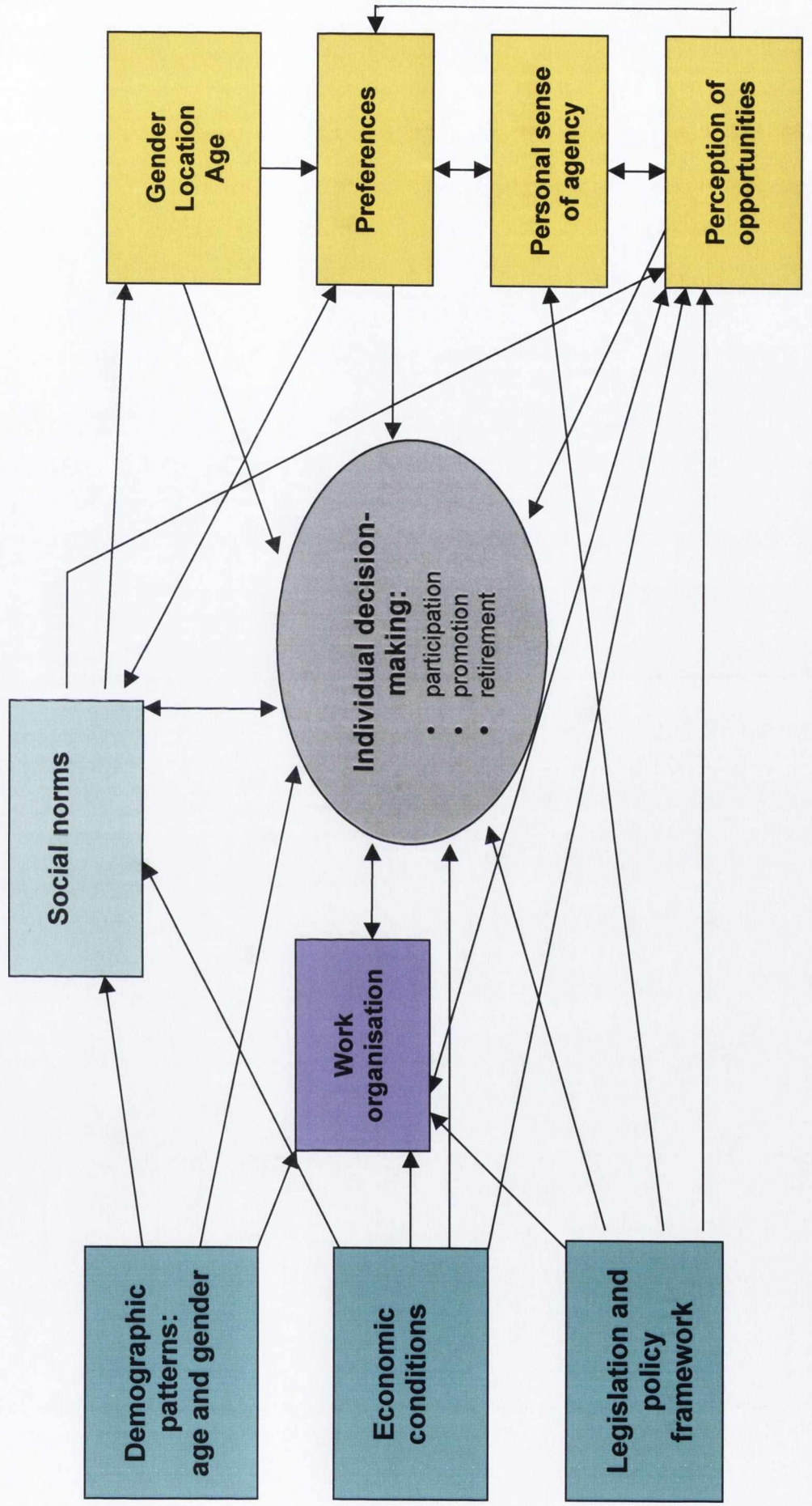
The next chapter describes the rationale for adopting a qualitative methodological approach – one which allows a rich set of data with which to test these approaches and which avoids the limitations of large-scale quantitative surveys that limit research participants to simplistic either/or responses and do not adequately capture the ways in which people negotiate constraints and agency in their work-related decision-making.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Methodological approach

My methodological approach is informed by my belief that in order to understand people's decision-making, it is important to identify and incorporate their own interpretations of the reality of the options that are open to them. I am interested in the meanings that work has for individuals, and in the process of how they understand and interpret their world. This arises from a concern with the limitations of positivist approaches to analysis arising both from my own previous research and from my reading of the literature on methodology and the philosophy of science. My main exposure to positivist analysis is in the discipline of economics where the uncritical use of a positivist methodology is common and has continued for longer than for most other disciplines, although it has been increasingly challenged in the past 15 years (Henderson *et al.*, 1993: 2; McDonald, 1995; Lawson, 1999). My MA thesis which explored the motivations of carers of older people in Ireland found that adopting a positivist approach to research and analysis obscured some of the important processes involved in decision-making, and that this potentially leads to ill-informed policy prescriptions (Ní Léime, 2000).

Typically a positivist approach to analysis adopts the methods of the physical sciences to study social phenomena. It involves certain basic assumptions. One of these is that there exists an objective reality which can be accurately described by means of a neutral language. The task of the scientist is to observe and describe these facts, assuming them to be empirically observable and knowable. This is accompanied by the assumption that these facts may be understood in relation to general laws or logic which can be represented through abstract models or theoretical constructs. Positivists often seek to find rules or equations that can explain and predict human behaviour. Because they look for rules that universally apply, they tend to abstract simple relationships from a complex reality and assume that context is not important (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 23). Critics of this approach argue that one cannot simply assume that context is unimportant; this is something that needs to be investigated empirically. Because they seek general rules, they tend to ignore

nuances and cases which contradict their models (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 23). However, philosophers of science and other critics of such approaches have pointed out that this approach is based on certain unexamined epistemological assumptions including the scientific privileging of rationality, the privileging of so-called detachment, the use of abstract theorising and a general gender-blindness (Harding, 1995: 8).

By contrast, feminist methodology in the social sciences takes a much broader view of what constitutes valid evidence. For example, feminist economists may interview the relevant economic actors to generate meaningful hypotheses, rather than simply generating their own in accordance with the dictates of neoclassical theories of behaviour. The model of human behaviour typically used in mainstream economics is that of "economic man" where the individual actor is assumed to be autonomous, rational, utility-maximising in the workplace, altruistic in the home and to have stable preferences which inform and are revealed by his/her behaviour. Critics of the positivist approach in economics argue that researchers should be much more rigorous about interrogating *a priori* assumptions (such as that people behave in accordance with the precepts of economic man) which neoclassical economists would see as neutral simplifications of reality. They argue that the way in which preferences are formed should be the subject of investigation; that preferences may change over time and that people should not be assumed to be radically autonomous and free to act on their preferences – this freedom may be affected by class, gendered social and familial norms and legal constraints (England, 1993; Himmelweit, 2002). Moreover, the uncritical use of this model is likely to lead to distorted policy recommendations.

There is also a different epistemological basis for these alternative approaches. Instead of having only one anonymous expert (the researcher) with a single pre-determined "scientific approach", the women and men who are the subjects of the research are now also constructed as experts and are enabled to input their own "expertise" in the analysis by providing information on personal motivations for making economic choices. As opposed to positivism's exclusive reliance on quantitative method, many feminists and other critics advocate the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in an investigation of a particular phenomenon, thus producing a "complex interweaving of theory, methods and data" (McDonald, 1995: 8).

Applying conventional economic methodology to the issue of labour market decision-making would involve simply analysing statistics (revealed preferences) and applying neoclassical assumptions (such as "economic man") to them. As has been noted previously, Hakim is committed to a positivist epistemology (Walters, 2005). This means she uses the doctrine of "revealed preferences" which is also used by many positivist economists and sociologists. The evidence she uses to support her theory is composed of statistics which show how people behave (e.g., working part-time) combined with attitudinal survey data which she uses to categorise people's orientations to work. However, she assumes that people are free to act upon their preferences - rather than verifying this empirically by allowing them the freedom to discuss the reasons for their economic behaviour. As Walters argues:

> Hakim wishes to advocate the importance of choice and preference and more fully account for women's agency in the labour market, but at the same time, she adheres to a research orientation that is largely blind to women's subjectivity
> (Walters, 2005: 197)

Critics of Hakim's approach to investigation have identified this failure to allow the subjects of the research to articulate what influences their behaviour as a fundamental weakness in her methodology (Walters, 2005; James, 2008). They point to the fact that quantitative methods do not allow people to articulate the way in which constraints (as well as agency) may influence their behaviour.

Typically, positivist researchers favour deductive methods – they begin with a theory or hypothesis which they wish to test by means of conducting empirical analysis. They place great emphasis on following scientific method – following standard procedures such as asking the same question from each individual, using neutral language and maintaining a stance of objectivity. However, critics have argued that the process of research is important – the use of *a priori* categories with which people are asked to agree or disagree inevitably limits their possibility of offering other reasons for their choices. This explains the assertion of some critics, that some positivist approaches are "not empirical enough" – the requirement that research methods should comply with a particular type of discourse simply excludes fuller explanation and some of these fuller explanations may be important in informing policy.

Another limitation that has been identified in Hakim's positivist approach is her ontological assumption regarding the persona of the subject of the research. She appears to assume that personality (and therefore work orientation) is "fixed" at a particular early point in the person's life. This is an assertion – an unsubstantiated *a priori* assumption and one that is based on a simplistic and reductionist conception of the self. In fact much recent theory and evidence challenges this characterisation of human subjectivity on the basis that the self is contingent and always in process; and that people are engaged in the life-long project of exploring identities – they may have multiple identities – which may conflict (Giddens, 1991; Casey, 1995; Wajcman & Martin, 2002). Evidence from a number of perspectives including that of life-course theory, social gerontology and psychology as well as empirical studies in sociology have demonstrated that people's perspectives and conceptions of self can change radically over the life-course (Giele & Elder 1998; Cohen, 2005; Collins & Wickham 2004; Charles & James, 2003). Post-structuralist critics point out that people frequently face conflicts of identity – for example there may be tensions between their identification with work and their expected role in the family – at any given time (Casey, 1995:3-4; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:55) However, these changes and tensions will tend to be obscured by the requirement to give a "yes" or "no" or very brief answer that fits into pre-ordained categories that are typically used in questionnaires. For example, recent empirical studies suggest that people's labour market choices are frequently the end result of complex negotiation of choices and constraints and often reflect acceptance of a least worst alternative as opposed to being the acting out of a preference (Crompton & Harris, 1998; McRae, 2003a, Walters, 2005; James, 2008). However, this process and the dilemmas that people face are rendered invisible in certain types of positivist research.

Another tendency of positivist research that has been problematised is that its practitioners often use static models "as if social life were stable rather than constantly changing" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005:23). The empirical evidence from many qualitative and some quantitative studies relating to work orientations suggests that actors are embedded in their changing social, historical, legal and ideological context and that this may profoundly affect their decision-making and behaviour (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Collins & Wickham, 2004). These contexts are not fixed, but changing and the identities of research subjects are contingent and models should be able to accommodate this fluidity.

The ontological and epistemological concerns outlined above account for my choice of a qualitative semi-structured interview approach to investigation. This approach was adopted in order to give people the freedom to tease out their understandings of their situation and to explain their previous actions and their current intentions. One epistemological assumption that informs my attitude to research is that people are "competent knowers" of their own lives (Stanley, 1990). Their own understandings of their situation need to be uncovered to enable us to come as closely as possible to comprehending their choices and behaviour. I believe this is a valuable approach to the analysis of work-place decision-making that can at the very least enrich our understanding of decision-making in a way that the "thin" data typically obtained from structured questionnaires cannot. One of the critiques of this conception of research is that it is not objective and that it cannot be valid to universalise from such data. However, recognizing the contingency and plurality of knowledge doesn't mean abandoning systematic scientific methods altogether. I believe the knowledge produced may be argued to be reasonable and persuasive. The usual methods of external verification through triangulation are used to ensure external validity for the research – for example, if somebody claims 'there was very little promotion in the 1980s' or 'there was no childcare back then', I would check whether this was, in fact, the case.

At one extreme, positivists assume that there is an objective meaning out there that can be accurately reflected. At the other end of the continuum, radical social constructionists assume that its not possible to gain knowledge about the world "out there" through an interview, because the interview is simply an interaction between the interviewer and the subject in which they both create narrative versions of the social world. However, I locate my approach somewhere between these two positions. I agree with the following statement:

> Research cannot provide the mirror reflection of the social world that positivists strive for, but it may provide access to the meanings that people give to their experiences and social worlds.
> (Miller & Glassner, 2006: 126)

I believe that gaining access to such meanings adds to our empirical body of knowledge of work-place decision-making among mid-life to older workers in Ireland. It also helps to

inform and refine sociological theory by enabling us to compare workers' own accounts with existing models in the literature.

3.2 Selection of civil service as case study

I decided to conduct a case study of the civil service for a number of reasons. Firstly, as already noted, focussing on a large organisation with a stable career structure provides a uniform context against which differences in work orientations and decision-making by gender are discernible. Secondly, because I worked in the civil service for several years I was reasonably familiar with promotional structures in the organisation, and interested in the outcome of the research. Thirdly, the civil service has quite a large proportion of older workers (21% in 2004) thus offering a relatively large pool of potential interviewees (Department of Finance, Equality Unit, 2006: 17). Finally, given the recent introduction of age equality legislation in Ireland and the fact that the civil service is a large public sector organisation, it is an opportune time to see whether and how age discrimination legislation and policy impacts on the experience of older workers.

3.3 Access and sampling

I explained the background to the project to staff in the Civil Service Equality Unit and they agreed to facilitate the research because the unit was interested in the potential findings. They agreed to give me a letter of introduction which I could then present to the HR managers in various Departments requesting that they facilitate the research (Appendix 1). I spoke to the HR managers in the selected Departments and explained the general aims of my research. They sent an e-mail to all of their staff aged 50 or over in general grades saying that they sanctioned the project. The e-mails attached a covering letter from me outlining the scope and purpose of the research and asking for volunteers to participate (Appendix 2). Most HR managers were very cooperative. Interestingly, one Department had initially agreed to take part and this decision was vetoed by somebody at a more senior level in the Department as they had a high court case pending regarding age discrimination – they thought the research would be too "sensitive" at this point.

3.4 Contextual interviews with HR and union personnel

At an early stage of the research, I conducted brief interviews with HR personnel from six Departments. The aim of these interviews was to establish the extent to which departments had policies in relation to older workers and monitoring of promotion outcomes and to obtain their perception of issues of concern for the group (see interview schedule, Appendix 3). In two cases, an Assistant Principal Officer, in another a Higher Executive Officer and two Principal Officers participated in these interviews. One personnel officer completed and returned the questionnaire by e-mail. I also interviewed key informants from the unions representing the civil servants interviewed for the study to obtain background information on their policies and practice and to see whether they were aware of issues of specific concern in relation to older workers and their involvement (if any) in representing older people in age-related discrimination cases[6]. These interviews were primarily undertaken to establish the perceptions and practices of HR and union personnel in relation to older workers in the civil service.

3.5 Pilot study and changes in strategy and approach

Before beginning the main interviews, I conducted a pilot study to alert me to thematic areas of interest. I interviewed six people (two men and four women) from different grades in the Department of Defence – a Principal Officer, a Higher Executive Officer, an Executive Officer, a Staff Officer and two Clerical Officers. In keeping with my primarily inductive approach, I endeavoured to be responsive both to the experience of interviewing and to the emerging data. As a result of my experiences, I made a number of changes to my approach to interviewing, to the amount of questions included and to my sampling strategy.

Firstly, I realised that too many questions interfered with allowing the participants to tell the story of their career to date, so I changed the way in which I carried out the interviewing. Even though I left many of the questions written on the interview schedule, I actually used many of them only as prompts in subsequent interviews if the participant

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[6] The Civil Public and Services Union (CPSU), the Public Service Executive Union (PSEU) and the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants (AHCPS)

didn't cover the issues concerned themselves. This allowed for a more free-flowing interview with more nuance and richer data. I began to follow the participant more and was able to be more responsive to issues they introduced, using questions mainly for clarification.

My initial sampling strategy was to interview people from a range of departments , a mixture of men and women from different grades in the civil service hierarchy. I selected two large departments, one medium-sized and one small department. I had contacted the remaining person – a senior manager - from an unidentified[7] small department to ask for their views on policy, but they agreed to complete the interview themselves in a personal capacity, and this interview has been included in the analysis.

I was reflexive in my sample selection. As I began preliminary analysis of the pilot study distinct groups with specific characteristics, themes and issues began to emerge. In response to this I categorised the workers into different groups – (1) long-term workers (outside of senior management grades), (2) senior managers, (3) returners and (4) late joiners and sought to ensure that there was a reasonably large number of people in each group. This now became the defining rationale for sample selection rather than attempting to select a sample that was statistically representative by grade for each department.

For the main study, I selected interviewees in accordance with the groups listed above and ensured in so far as possible that there were a mixture of people across Departments. The first distinct group identified are those who are long-term workers outside of senior management grades. Many of these men and women are at middle management level and have been relatively successful in their careers to date. However, they have not reached senior management and analysing their accounts uncovered their interpretation of why this was the case – whether choice and/or constraints were involved and whether there are differences by gender. Just over half of this group are women.

The second group are the senior managers; they form another distinct group who are in a higher position compared to long-term workers. There were issues that were of particular relevance to them, such as the fact that their chances of promotion diminished as they approached the top of the organisation. It was also interesting to consider whether this

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[7] To protect the identity of the participant

group had planned to have a career from the outset and whether this varied by gender. I tried to ensure that I included proportions of senior women managers in the sample roughly proportionate to the percentage in the civil service as a whole. The overall proportion of women in senior management in the sample is similar to the proportion in the civil service at the time although there is a slight over-representation of the proportion at PO level or above and a slight under-representation of those at Assistant Principal level in the sample interviewed.

"Returners" also emerged as a distinct group (all of whom are women and most of whom are in the lower grades of the promotional structure); they had all earlier left paid employment to work unpaid in the home and had subsequently returned to work some years later. Certain themes emerged that are particularly relevant to them such as the prevalence of references to structural and normative constraints in their life-history accounts and the impact of their break in their service on promotion and current concerns about pensions.

Finally, there was a small group of workers (I call "late joiners") who had joined the civil service relatively recently after having been in paid employment elsewhere for much of their working lives. This group consists of men and women who have some common issues with returners in that they don't have continuous service and are mostly in lower grades. However, they are different in that many of them had careers prior to joining the civil service which means that their attitudes to work and to promotion and retirement might be expected to be different.

Table 1 below shows the distribution of the sample by Department and gender. The sample included people from locations outside of Dublin. Overall 48 of the workers (46% of the sample) are male and 57 (54%) are female. Just over two thirds (68%) of participants were located in Dublin, with 14% from the west of the country, 8% in the north and 10% in the south. This geographical spread was included to ensure that issues relating to location would be reflected in the research findings. The research doesn't claim to be statistically representative by gender in a numerical sense, although an attempt was made to roughly approximate the proportions in grades by gender and to include proportionally more from larger Departments.

Table 1: Sample by gender and department

Department	Number interviewed			% of Total
	Male	Female	Total	
Agriculture	6	8	14	13%
Environment	8	4	12	24%
Revenue	13	20	33	30%
Social and Family Affairs	21	24	45	42%
Other Department*		1	1	1%
Total	**48**	**57**	**105**	**100%**
%	**46**	**64**	**100**	

* Department is not identified in order to protect the identity of the participant

Since this is a self-selecting sample, there is a possibility that there may be an over-representation of people who wish to raise issues in relation to older workers, such as age-related discrimination. However, many of the research participants said they had volunteered to take part for a wide variety of reasons. Some said they were interested in equality issues generally; some said they had never been asked to give their opinions before; others said their children were involved in research and they wanted to participate in order to help out. A small minority said they believed there was age and/or gender discrimination and they wanted to participate for this reason. Some were interested both in participating and in the outcome of the research.

3.6 Interviews with older workers

I carried out all 105 interviews personally; this helped to ensure a consistency of approach. The interviews were carried out between October 2004 and May 2006. Interviews with participants from the larger Departments took place first and those located in the same geographical area were interviewed at the same time. The interviews took place in the workplace – usually in an interview room – and lasted on average, slightly less than one hour each. The shortest was forty minutes and the longest was one and three quarter hours.

The main research instrument I used for the study was a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 4). The first portion of this interview schedule asked for a combination of demographic details (age, gender, marital status, occupation of spouse, number of children, level of education, whether currently studying, length of service) and information relating to their service in the organisation. Following this, the interview became more open-ended - respondents were asked to give an account of their career to date. While this part was open-ended, allowing for elaboration, certain specific areas were focussed on in each interview. The areas were as follows:

- their reasons for joining, leaving and re-joining the civil service
- their career path to date;
- their experiences and intentions in relation to promotion;
- a description of their current work;
- what their work means to them;
- their personal work-life balance;
- their views on and their practice in relation to child-care;
- their perception of attitudes to older workers in the civil service and on the existence of age-related, gender-related and/or disability-related discrimination;
- their plans for retirement;
- their views on certain civil service policies – work-share, term-time, the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) and de-centralisation.[8].

The interview schedule for returners was the same as that for other participants, except that they were also specifically asked why they had left and why they had returned to the civil service. The questions were usually asked in the same sequence unless the participant spontaneously mentioned issues that would normally be covered later in the interview. This sequence was designed carefully to allow people to reflect on some of the relevant issues before being asked attitudinal questions. For example, participants were asked about their day-to-day work and what they liked and disliked about their job, before being asked what their work meant to them. The latter question (designed to elicit their orientations to work) was a central focus for analysis in this thesis. This sequencing gave people a chance

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[8] The latter policy questions were included mainly in order to provide some information for a report to be compiled for the civil service as opposed to being of central interest to the thesis. This was also in accordance with my general belief that research should be of practical and policy value both to the research participants and to the organisation. In the letter, the interviewees were told that they would be given a copy of this report when complete, on request.

to reflect on the current realities of their work as well as having had an opportunity to reflect on their work-life history to date and their experiences of and attitudes to promotion just prior to that. This was designed to help overcome some of the limitations of isolated snap-shot questions taken out of context. Recent commentary on methodology within qualitative research suggests that when people are given an opportunity to reflect on or tease out their answers, quite often evidence which complicates or even contradicts their initial answer may emerge (Walters, 2005). All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Preliminary analysis was carried out on the interviews at an early stage to enable any problems to be detected and emerging themes to be noted.

3.7 Confidentiality

The interviewees were assured of confidentiality. With this in mind, when participants are quoted, they are identified only by grade, gender and age-group, not by Department. Where longer extracts, quotations or vignettes are used, pseudonyms are used and minor details (that don't affect the issue being discussed) are altered to ensure that they are not recognised. In cases where the numbers in a given grade or Department are too small to be sufficient to protect participant's identity, staff have been aggregated together in larger groups. This is done where they would otherwise be easily identifiable – for example, since there are only a small number of women in senior management, all women (and men) at the level of PO and above are grouped together. The data is stored under codes designed to protect participant's identity and lists of participants are stored separately.

The question of whether the information given by the respondents is reliable is an issue that has often been raised by quantitative researchers. I believe that is at least as likely to be reliable as that found in quantitative surveys since there is no more reason for respondents to intentionally mislead the interviewer than there is for them to enter misinformation in a written survey. In fact, in qualitative interviews, there is at least an opportunity for the interviewer to question the participant if they are believe they are being misled or if something needs clarification (see Walters, 2005).

It is also possible to carry out all the usual elements of external validation of data through outside sources that is customarily carried out in rigorous research. For example, if a

participant says they wanted to go to college, but it wasn't the norm for people at that time, this may be verified from official statistics.

3.8 Data analysis

The tape recordings from each interview were transcribed into a written document. I transcribed 60 of the tapes myself making sure to include several from each group and I had the remaining tapes transcribed professionally. I coded each transcript "up from the data" – in other words, I went through each of the transcripts systematically and created free nodes, using the NVIVO software coding system identifying each theme of interest. This process ensured that I was thoroughly familiar with all the transcripts and ensured that if there was information relevant to a particular theme in an unexpected part of the document, it was included in the appropriate place. For each of main topic areas that were of central interest I created codes arising from the data from the transcripts and arranged them in themes as they arose.

Since one of the central issues of interest in this thesis is to what extent preferences and/or constraints impact on people's decision-making, I grouped the sub-themes into larger themes that addressed this question. So for example, when respondents were asked why they had left the civil service, "legislation and policy" and "social (gendered) norms" emerged as important themes representing constraints while the theme "attracted by role of carer/full-time mother" represented the fulfilment of a preference.

All the data from the demographic section of the interview schedule was entered onto SPSS which was then transferred to NVIVO as case attributes to enable comparison by gender, age, education, grade and so on.

During the process of coding, it became obvious that different themes were more relevant to different groups than others. For example, legislative and financial constraints in general and pensions in particular were important issues for returners, whereas work-related issues such as de-centralisation and in some cases re-structuring were important for managers. It also became clear that people's negotiation of their careers required a complex negotiation of constraints and attempts to fulfil preferences that couldn't be adequately captured

simply by documenting constraints and preferences in table-form. For this reason, some vignettes or case-studies were included to demonstrate the complexity involved in work-related decision-making.

3.9 Reflexive approach

I believe it is important to be explicit about my own pre-conceptions and influences as I approached the work and to be responsive to what emerges from the research. I see the research as an iterative process; there was a constant interplay between what emerged from the data and my reading of the empirical and theoretical literature. This is evident firstly in terms of themes that emerged. It is not a purist grounded theory approach in that I did have some familiarity with the theoretical and empirical literature in the area before I began my data collection and analysis. However, I attempted to be open to what emerged from the data and didn't begin the analysis with pre-conceived categories, but allowed the categories to emerge from the data. Even after conducting the pilot study if certain issues emerged as important to the respondents I was alert for these in subsequent interviews. For example among the returners, some of the respondents spoke about how the lack of a pension restricted their choices for retirement, so in subsequent interviews, I asked about this.

The interviews occasionally led me back to the literature in search of additional theoretical or empirical material. For example, I found that many of the people who volunteered for the survey were returners to the workforce - so this opened up a new area of investigation - to see what previous work had been conducted in this area and how/whether it had been theorised.

The emergence of returners as a group and the significance of workplace changes have resulted in a re-framing of my topic. While still interested in how people make decisions and in the perception of age-related discrimination, I began to focus particularly on returners and senior managers (people in the top grades) as two distinct groups. The phenomenon of returners allows me to consider the impact of equality legislation, changes in the economy, and new conceptions of the self in shaping peoples' employment possibilities. The presence of a group who at first glance apparently had many of the

attributes of Hakim's "grateful slaves" would allow me to discern, if there were, in fact, discernible "types" of women and whether they corresponded to Hakim's categories, thus enabling me to test this aspect of preference theory (Hakim, 1991).

The discovery of "returners" has led me to look at literature on how people construct and relate particular stories about their lives. Returners typically describe how they made decisions in the past - to join or leave the civil service and how they decided to re-join. This led me to consider the usefulness of a life-history approach generally and life-course theory in particular for the analysis of their accounts (Jamieson, 2002; Giele & Elder, 1998). Analysing the accounts of managers allowed for comparison by gender and again provided a group who might be expected to have similar career opportunities, thus allowing for uniformity of context against which differences might be clearly discernible. This group appeared to have many of the characteristics of Hakim's "self-made men and women" and offered an opportunity to assess if the assumptions of preference theory held for people in this group.

At a practical level, I modified the interviews by allowing more time for each one and cutting down on some questions. In the pilot interviews, I had asked about all nine forms of discrimination listed in the 1998 Act and, subsequently, I restricted this to age, gender and disability as these were the forms that most people in the pilot study spontaneously commented upon and gender was linked to age discrimination in the literature (Duncan and Loretto, 2004). Since the interviews took place in the workplace and this was facilitated by the Civil Service, I had allotted an hour for each interview but in the event, I found that many of the participants were quite forthcoming so some of the later interviews tended to take longer.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the reasons for adopting a qualitative, interpretative approach to the exploration and analysis of decision-making have been outlined. The actual methods used and access, sampling and conducting of the interviews have been discussed. The next chapter moves on to describes the socio-economic background, legislative and policy contexts and organizational structures in which the research took place and which frame the experience of the workers whose responses are analysed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4

Socio-economic, legislative, policy and organisational context

This chapter outlines the contextual elements that have been identified in the literature as factors that set the parameters in which work-related decision-making takes place (see Section 2.4.1 to 2.4.5). It also sets these factors in a historical frame. Significant changes have taken place in the Irish socio-economic, normative, legislative and policy environment between the time the workers in the sample joined the civil service (most joined between 1961 and 1981) and the time they returned or joined late in life (most returned from the mid 1990s onwards). Chief among these changes have been the changing conditions in the Irish economy, evolving gender and familial societal norms, and the development of national employment equality legislation in relation to gender and age. Most of these changes had the effect of expanding choices and possibilities for older workers, particularly for older women. Having outlined the broader national scene, the chapter goes on to focus on the organisational context of the civil service itself, sketching the evolution of civil service gender and age equality policy and providing some evidence on the prevalence of age-related discrimination both in Ireland, generally and the civil service in particular. Finally the organisational context – promotional structures and policies that affect promotion and retirement in the civil service – are outlined.

4.1 Economic conditions

Most of the workers interviewed joined the civil service between 1961 and 1977. The early 1960s was a time of high unemployment and emigration in Ireland and there was a relatively limited range of occupations available for men and women in Ireland. Between 1961 and 1966, 33% of young Irish men aged 20-24 emigrated and 30% of young women emigrated (Conroy, 1999: 37). Apart from farming (the main occupation at the time) the relatively few occupations available to men with secondary school education were working as a teacher, a Garda, a civil servant, a bank employee, or for a local authority (Conroy, 1999: 37). Young women had an even more limited range of occupational choices available to them than men. There was little industrial employment – the main occupations

were clerical work in the bank or the public sector, service work, nursing and teaching (Mahon, 1987). At this time it was unusual for women to be in paid employment and the labour force participation rate of women was only 26% in 1971 (Doyle, 1999: 115)[9]. Those women recruited in the mid to late 1970s faced a somewhat different situation where the formal legal obstacles to women's continued employment began to be removed, after Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973.

For a short period at the end of the 1970s new posts were created in the civil service as part of an unsuccessful attempt by the government to counteract the effects of the economic recession. This briefly opened up employment and promotional opportunities. However, this was followed by a long period of recession throughout the 1980s and early 1990s when there was high unemployment in Ireland (reaching 19% at its highest level) and an embargo on recruitment in the public service where for a number of years during the 1980s only one in three vacancies was filled. There were very few promotional opportunities in the civil service at this time.

By contrast, the period of economic expansion that lasted from the mid-1990s until 2006 meant that there was a high demand for labour in the economy generally and this created a demand for older workers that had not existed previously. The civil service held competitions to recruit former civil servants to fill this demand. As we shall see, this resulted in the increasing phenomenon of (older) women returners and some recently recruited older men and women in the civil service whose experiences are analysed in Chapters 8 and 9.

The economic boom also resulted in demands from public sector unions for bench-marking to bring salaries in line with those in the private sector. Some of the research participants mentioned bench-marking as a factor which made them financially comfortable and less likely to apply for promotion (see Chapters 6 and 7).

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[9] Source: Census of Population of Ireland, 1971, V: 144-5, 148-53.

4.2 Gender norms in a male-breadwinner state

One of the factors that has been found to shape employment-related decision-making is the type of gender regime that exists in a country (Crompton & Harris, 1999). During the period when most of the workers in this study joined the civil service, Ireland had what is described as a "male-breadwinner" type of state (Mahon, 1987; Kennedy, 1999: 243). The typical features of a male-breadwinner state are low labour-force participation rates for women, a high incidence of part-time work, under-developed childcare and poor maternity entitlements. During the 1970s and 1980s in most families in Ireland, the man was the breadwinner and the woman stayed at home and looked after the children (although many women worked unpaid in family farms and businesses). In 1971 married women formed only 3.5% of the total labour force (Doyle, 1999: 115). This reflected the conservative, patriarchal social views that obtained at that time where the family was assumed to be the central unit of society and the primary role of women as mothers was enshrined in the constitution (Mahon, 1987)[10]. Many women valued the role of being the "woman of the house (Clear, 2000). Three fifths of women in Ireland agreed with the statement in a survey carried out by Fine-Davis in 1975 that "a women's place is in the home" (Fine-Davis, 1988, cited in O'Connor, 1998). O'Connor suggests that this identification of women with the family was reinforced by the education system (which encouraged women to "be caring" and to study non-scientific subjects such as home economics) and the church which advocated motherhood as women's true role in life (O'Connor, 1998).

Although it had declined somewhat over the previous two decades, average family size was still large in Ireland compared to most other EU countries. Between 1961 and 1981, the number of children per family declined only slightly from an average of 5 children to 4.7 (Mahon, 1991: 2). This large family size may be partly attributed to the fact that contraception wasn't legalised until 1979 because of the close links that existed between the Catholic Church and the state and partly due to the largely agrarian economy which obtained in Ireland until the late 1960s (Mahon, 1987). Given this situation, and the lack of any policy that might help reconcile work with child-rearing, women would have expected

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[10] Articles 41.2.1 of the Constitution states that: 'By her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good can not be achieved.' and Article 41.2.2 states: 'The State shall therefore endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.'

to be absent from the labour market for a considerable length of time or indeed never to return to paid employment (Kennedy, 1999: 244-245). As a consequence, as will become clear, many women did not regard work as a career when they joined the civil service (see Chapters 5-8).

Even after the removal of the marriage bar (see Section 4.3 below) and the introduction of equality legislation, this male breadwinner norm changed relatively slowly until the mid to late 1990s. Eventually, the decline in family size meant that women were more free to participate in the work-force. The average fertility rate of Irish women reduced from 3.23 in 1980 to 1.87 by 1994/5 (Mahon, 1998: 171).

By the late 1990s, when most of the returners and late joiners were recruited, it had become much more common for married women to be employed in the labour market – their participation rates increased to 19% in 1998 when most of them returned to work (Doyle, 1999: 115)[11]. Labour force participation rates (lfpr) for women aged 60-64 had increased from 16.5% in 1983 to 22.7% in 2002, while for those aged 55-59 lfpr rose from 20.6% to 37% and for women aged 50-54, lfpr doubled over that time period to reach 50.6% in 2002 (Russell & Fahey, 2004: 17). Thus there was a dramatic increase in the proportion of older Irish women, particularly married women in the paid formal labour market. According to a recent national study, most of this increase was due to women entering jobs from home duties (Russell & Fahey, 2004: 19).

During this same period, the proportion of male breadwinner families decreased from 53% in 1986 to 39% in 1996, while dual worker families increased from 16% to 32% (O'Connor, 1998: 110). However, the provision of public childcare remains low. Women in Irish society still usually are considered by themselves and others to be the primary carers for the young and other dependent members of the family (Crowley, 2008: 62) and there is evidence that this affected the career-related decision-making of some of the women in this study (see Chapter 6 and 8).

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[11] Sources: Census of Population in Ireland 1971, V: 144-5, 148-53; Quarterly National Household Survey, March-May 1998.

4.3 Employment legislation and policy

4.3.1 Irish legislation and policy on gender

Many of the research participants in this study identify legislation and policy as an important factor in their decision-making. In particular, until Ireland joined the EEC in 1973 legislation rendered it extremely difficult for women to progress (or even participate) in the labour market; this was most obvious in the so-called "marriage bar", and in the fact that women did not receive equal pay with men for comparable work until 1975. The marriage bar was a piece of legislation introduced in 1929 and not removed until 1973[12] which stated that if and when a woman working in the public service got married she had to leave her employment. On leaving, she was given a marriage gratuity worth a year's salary in lieu of pension entitlements. The marriage bar was in force for the period when most of the women in the sample first joined the civil service (in the late 1960s, and the 1970s).

Equal pay for equal work was not legally required in Ireland until 1975 under the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, 1974 which came into effect on 31 December, 1975 (Doyle, 1999). The first *Employment Equality Act* was introduced in 1977 – this prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sex or marital status in recruitment, training, conditions of employment and promotion. These changes in legislation came about partly in response to Ireland's joining the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 (Bryson, 2009: 147). Member states of the EEC were obliged to transpose equality directives into national legislation. The emerging women's movement also exerted pressure for legislative change (Doyle, 1999; Bryson, 2009).

It was not until 1981 that a statutory entitlement to maternity leave was introduced in Ireland. By the late 1990s, in addition to the legislation outlined above, the individualisation of taxation which took effect in April 2000 marked a change from a tax

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[12] The marriage bar was removed under the Civil Service (Employment of Married Women) Act, 1973.

system which had acted effectively as a disincentive to married women to joining the paid labour market[13].

Until the late 1990s (the period during which all of the women in this study had children) there was almost no public provision or funding of childcare in Ireland (Doyle, 1999). This lack of childcare was cited by research participants as a barrier to returning to work and in relation to applying for promotion, particularly for women who had low earnings.

4.3.2 Irish legislation on age and equality

Some of the research participants in this study cite legislation and policy in relation to age as important elements in their decision to join the civil service and to apply for promotion. The development and expansion of Irish national employment equality legislation in relation to age has been prompted partly by pressure from the EU to comply with its "Employment Strategy" and its directive, the "Framework Employment Directive" (Council Directive 2000/78/EC). This Directive seeks to ban direct and indirect age-related discrimination and prohibits age-based harassment. Other factors which provided an impetus to develop legislation were demands for better treatment of older people from groups representing them, a growing concern with equity generally among policy-makers the labour market shortages at the end of the 1990s when older people were identified as a group who might fill the gaps in labour supply.

In recent years, Ireland has come to be considered to be comparatively progressive in terms of its employment equality legislation (OECD, 2006). The main pieces of equality legislation relating to employment in Ireland are the *Employment Equality Act 1998* and the *Equality Act 2004*. The 1998 act outlaws discrimination in relation to employment on the grounds of age, gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, disability, race and membership of the traveller community. Discrimination is defined as occurring where a person is treated less favourably than another person is, has been or would be treated on the basis of one of the grounds.

However, a number of flaws were identified in relation to the 1998 Act, one of the chief of these being that people over the age of 65 were not protected under the terms of the Act.

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[13] Prior to this if both a husband and a wife were working, all the tax free allowances would usually be allocated to the main earner (usually the man) and this typically meant that the woman had to pay tax on most of her income.

The subsequent *Equality Act 2004* addressed some of these shortcomings. One of the main changes that is relevant to older workers is that persons over the age of 65 now have the same right not to be discriminated against as those aged under 65. This is an important provision for those who returned to work on hardship grounds in the civil service, some of whom are allowed to retain their jobs after the age of 65.

The Act also allows for positive action. Measures that have been suggested include the following: targeting older people for training; allowing people older than 65 to continue paying PRSI to get a better pension later; changes in tax relief on pensions to encourage people to stay in the workforce; extra tax allowances for older people in paid work and finally, making it unnecessary to leave work on receipt of the State Retirement pension (Mangan, 2001). It appears that, so far, there has not been a great deal of positive action in Ireland (NESF, 2003b).

The *Equal Status Act 2000* is another important piece of Irish legislation which focuses on older people as consumers of goods and services. While not directly relevant to older people as employees, it is indirectly related since it calls for age awareness training for civil servants and encourages a climate of respect for older people within the organization and in society generally. This is particularly important given the perception that there is persistent ageism in the civil service as an organisation (NESF, 2003b: 5).

In the past ten years, largely as a result of the introduction of equality legislation, a number of state institutions have been set up to ensure that employers and providers of services comply with legislation and policy designed to combat age discrimination, both in employment and in society. Under the equality legislation the Equality Authority is charged with the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity. It provides information, services and assistance to people seeking redress and has powers to tackle institutional discrimination. The Office of the Director of Equality Investigations (or Equality Tribunal as it is generally known) is a statutory body established in 1999. It hears individual complaints of discrimination in both employment and service areas. The decisions made by the Tribunal are legally binding. Redress of up to two years pay for employment equality may be granted by the Tribunal. The establishment of the Tribunal has provided an important channel for highlighting discrimination complaints. Age was the third most frequent ground cited under the Employment Equality Acts after gender and race in 2006 (Equality Authority, 2006, 2007). The cases (outlined in

Section 4.3.7 below) successfully taken by civil servants indicate that there is at least some evidence of age discrimination within the organisation.

4.3.3 Civil Service equality policy

The civil service has had a formal equality of opportunity policy since 1986. Originally, the main focus was on gender equality; then it expanded to include disability. The civil service has a wide range of "family friendly" flexible working policies including job-sharing, term-time, tele-working, e-working and a system of career breaks. There is a stated commitment to equality in the Civil Service which is articulated in *Gender Equality Policy for the Civil Service* and *Diversity in the Civil Service*, two Department of Finance documents (Department of Finance, 2001, 2002).

As a response to the *Employment Equality Act 1998* and the *Equal Status Act 2000*, the Department of Finance produced a document entitled *Diversity in the Civil Service: A Policy on Equal Opportunity* which was launched in July 2002. It outlines the policy of the civil service on implementing Equality of Opportunity in relation to employment. This together with the Gender Equality Policy replaced the 1986 Equal Opportunity Policy which had previously dealt with equality in relation to gender and disability. The main areas covered by the policy are recruitment, promotion, placement and mobility policies, training and development, family friendly working arrangements and achieving work/life balance, a positive working environment free from harassment, and bullying, elimination of discriminatory language and retention of staff (Department of Finance, 2002: 4).

Despite the introduction of gender equality policies over 20 years ago, and the existence of a progressive and proactive attitude to gender equality policy in recent years (more pronounced in some Departments than in others), there is still a large predominance of men in senior positions in the civil service (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006). Research has shown that for many years after the introduction of equality legislation, there was very little change in the pattern of vertical segregation by gender in the civil service (Mahon, 1990; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). This may be partly due to a liberal interpretation of equality policy which assumes that the removal of barriers to equality will result in equality of outcome without the need for further action. However, research has shown that ideological norms and historical cultural patterns have a tendency to persist in organisations and more proactive positive action is needed to effect meaningful change (Mahon, 1990; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). The civil service itself was concerned

about the slow pace of change; they commissioned a study which was conducted in 1997 to investigate the issue, twelve years after the introduction of gender equality policies. The results of this study are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7; it found that some of the reasons for the persistently low levels of women at senior management were organisational and cultural barriers, personnel practices and policies, lack of gender balance in interview boards, ageism, and societal factors such as sex-role stereotypes (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999).

As a result of this, a stronger, more proactive approach to implementing gender equality policy was adopted from 2001 onwards and specific numerical targets were set. By 2005, a target (of 33%) was reached for Assistant Principals, while the proportion of those at Principal Officer and grades above who are women was still relatively low, but is increasing (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006). It was only when this approach was adopted that significant movement towards gender equality was achieved.

The current study takes place at a time where there does appear to be a relatively recent cultural change in terms of gender equality (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006). However, many of the women in the study have joined and worked in the civil service at a time when those in senior grades were predominantly men – the implications of this for older women are discussed in the thesis.

4.3.4 Civil service policy for older workers

The civil service has developed a range of equality policies in recent years. However, while there is now quite a well-developed set of equality policies for gender and disability, policy and practice in relation to ageing appears to be at an earlier stage. The somewhat limited amount of policy that exists was developed as a response to the introduction of national equality legislation, while the fact that some departments may lose up to 40% of their staff to retirement over the next 10 years has prompted recent concern about the issue from a strategic management perspective (O'Riordan, 2006). A recent report commissioned by the Committee for Public Management research focuses on the challenges posed to human resource management by the loss of staff and managing the transfer of expertise and succession (O'Riordan, 2006). The expected losses are partly due to the age profile of the civil service and partly due to de-centralisation which, it is anticipated will cause early retirement among many civil servants. The author notes that

there is no civil service-wide policy or approach to ageing in the civil service and that the only major recent reform that has been introduced has been the removal of the mandatory retirement age (O'Riordan, 2006, p.2).

Up to April, 2004, Section 8 of the *Civil Service Regulation Act 1956* set a retiring age of 65 for the generality of civil servants and precluded the hiring of people over that age. There were certain exceptions to this (Department of Finance Circular Letter 13/75). Under Section 3 of the *Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004*, staff who began work on or after 1 March, 2004 will be able to continue working in the public service beyond the age of 65. These people will now receive the same protection against discrimination on the grounds of age as those aged less than 65 due to the provisions in the *Equality Act 2004*. Early retirement (previously an entitlement on reaching the age of 60 or on completing 40 years service in the public service) will not be an entitlement for people recruited after April, 2004[14].

In a section of the report headed *Age Awareness*, the Civil Service Equality Unit make the following recommendations in the light of the introduction of legislation (outlined above):

- HR policies should be age-proofed.
- Personnel sections should consider the HR issues surrounding older workers in relation to current staff and possible future recruits aged 65 plus.
- Care should be given to giving sufficient access to training and development opportunities for older staff.
- Departments should monitor promotion patterns in order to identify any possible discrimination in promotion policies.
- All staff involved in recruitment should be suitably trained.
- Departments and offices should inform themselves in relation to potential areas of discrimination identified by the Equality Tribunal and the Labour Court in recent years. (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006: 37).

This suggests that at central level, there is an awareness that age-related discrimination may be an important issue. However, this hasn't yet translated into actions such as age-related monitoring of promotion applications and outcomes and/or the development of specific policy initiatives in relation to older workers at individual departmental level. A recent report on equality initiatives does not list any initiatives under the heading anti-age

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[14] Very recent legislation allows people to retire early. However, this was not in place at the time the interviews wee carried out.

discrimination and ageing issues other than the present study. This contrasts with a large number of initiatives for staff with disabilities, and in respect of gender equality (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006). Yet most departments I approached were open to participating in the current study, a fact that suggests a lack of resources rather than a lack of willingness as a reason for the relative lack of initiative in the area of age-related policy.

4.3.5 Implementation of equality policy in the civil service

A report which assessed the implementation of equality policies for older people in the civil service recommended that there was a need to monitor age profiles and for the Department of Finance to be more proactive in identifying and addressing age equality issues (NESF, 2003b: 29). A more recent report together with interviews with HR staff suggests that these recommendations have not been implemented across the civil service (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006: 37).

The 1998 Act allows for positive action for people aged over 50. Such action may be civil service-wide or may be taken by individual departments or offices (Department of Finance, 2002: 4). However, a recent report suggests that very little if any positive action in relation to ageing had been taken by either the Department of Finance or individual departments or offices (NESF, 2003b:6).

Interviews conducted with those officers responsible for equality policy in six departments confirm this; they indicated that most of these departments did not monitor outcomes in promotional competitions in relation to age. Age-proofing of HR policies was not being practiced by the participating departments at the time of interview. Three of those interviewed said that they did not have the resources to engage in monitoring and/or that data protection concerns prevented them from using age-related data. Two HR personnel said that, in their departments, it is intended to collect such data in the future, but that they haven't yet done so. There were no specific policies adopted for older people, such as targeted encouragement of older workers to apply for promotion or ensuring that they took up training/development opportunities. Despite the fact that positive action is allowed in the 1998 Act, most of those interviewed said that they believed it would be unfair to treat older people more favourably than others. They believed that the most they could do was to actively encourage all line managers to encourage all staff to apply for promotion. Some

of the interviewees suggested that the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) which had recently been introduced should ensure that all staff would be encouraged to apply for promotion.

Interviews with key personnel in the unions representing civil service workers revealed a similar attitude in that for the most part those interviewed didn't consider that there were problematic issues particular to older workers as a group. However, the Civil Public and Services Union did allude to the issue of returners having inadequate pensions as a problem for their members. The fact that the previous years service of returners were not counted for pension purposes was also a problem that the union was addressing. Women who had taken a gratuity now had to repay the gratuity with compound interest if they wanted their previous service to count for pension purposes. This was problematic for some of the women given their relatively low pay. Union representatives said that they would represent their members at cases brought to the Equality Tribunal should they be requested to do so. The AHCPS representative said that some of their members were unhappy with the move away from "senior suitable" methods of promotion while all three unions mentioned de-centralisation as something that was problematic for older workers with families.

The introduction of equality policies in the civil service is closely linked to the modernisation measures being introduced in the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI). One of the modernisation measures introduced that affects older workers is the ability to recruit workers over the age of 65 (NESF, 2003b: 29). The Department of Finance has an equality monitoring and evaluation unit. It has been mainly involved in gender and disability equality issues up to now. One of the functions of this unit is to monitor whether the recommendations of the *Diversity in the Civil Service* report and of the Equality Authority report have been implemented. However, there is a shortage of staff resources in this unit which means that such monitoring has not been undertaken in relation to age. The unit produces reports which outline the situation in relation to equality issues in the civil service and make recommendations. Their recent report provided a comprehensive outline of equality policies and initiatives to date and provided data on gender equality and disability (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006). However while it displayed an awareness that age-related issues are important, there were no data presented specifically in relation to older workers.

Considerable resources appear to have been invested by the civil service in recent years into conducting research into gender equality and disability, while relatively little effort has gone into investigating or monitoring age-related equality issues. The recommendations in the recent report suggest that basic monitoring of promotion by age is not routinely being carried out. The number of recommendations with regard to age is a positive sign that the issue is being taken seriously. However, no targets have been set in relation to older people and promotion (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006: 37). It appears that the articulation of policy is progressing while the monitoring and implementation of such policy is either uneven or non-existent as yet.

4.3.6 Age-related discrimination in the civil service

Since one of the concerns of the thesis is to establish whether there is perceived to be age-related discrimination in the civil service, it is important to define what is meant by this term. Under Irish legislation, discrimination is defined as 'the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on any of the nine grounds which exists, existed, may exist in the future, or is imputed to the person concerned. The instruction to discriminate is also prohibited' (*Employment Equality Act, 1998*). Age is one of the grounds listed.

A brief survey of the available literature and press reports in Ireland suggests that a certain amount of age discrimination is discernible both in the wider national context and in the Civil Service itself. This is based on the accounts of older workers as revealed in various recent reports, the fact that a number of successful age-related discrimination cases have been taken to the Equality Tribunal and the considered conclusions of bodies such as the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and the Equality Authority who have conducted and/or commissioned the reports (NESF, 2003b; Basten, Irwin & Heaney, 2002). A report by the NESF which investigated attitudes by employers in Ireland towards older workers found that 29% of employers expressed a preference for hiring younger workers; the report also found that though employers valued some perceived attributes of older workers, there were very few structures in place to support older workers. Only 8% actively encouraged older workers to participate in formal training (NESF, 2003a: 43). The Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC) report indicated that negative attitudes to older workers were to be found among both employers and workers (PACEC,

2001). Unless the civil service is atypical of attitudes in society in general, it seems likely that similar attitudes may exist among individual managers in the civil service.

One indicator that age discrimination exists or is at least perceived to exist in Ireland is the number of cases of discrimination on the grounds of age brought before the Equality Tribunal[15]. A total of 75 cases were considered on the grounds of age in 2006 up from 45 in the previous year (Equality Authority, 2007).

Two cases were ruled upon in 2002 and 2003 shortly before interviews for this research were conducted. Both found that age discrimination existed in the civil service in relation to promotion. The first case (Equality Tribunal, Case Number: Dec-E2002-018) involved four civil servants employed by the Revenue Commissioners who applied for appointment to a duty which would give them higher pay. The Equality Officer found on the basis of statistical analysis that even when candidates were graded equally in assessments, they were less likely to be appointed to the higher paying position if they were over 50 years of age. The Revenue Commissioners were found to have discriminated against the employees and were ordered to pay €2000 each to the employees and to redress any disadvantage suffered by them (Equality Tribunal, Case Number: Dec-E2002-018).

A further case (Equality Tribunal, Case Number: Dec-E2003-035) was taken by a civil servant employed by the Department of Health and Children who claimed that he had been discriminated against in a promotion competition on the grounds of age. He applied for promotion twice to the grade of Principal Officer and was found to be unsuitable, despite having been recommended for promotion on a number of occasions previously. He claimed that the reason for his lack of success was because the Department appeared to have a policy of not promoting anybody over the age of 50. The Equality Officer examined the statistics and found that there did appear to be a virtual policy of non-promotion of people aged over 50. Nobody over 50 had been promoted in the Department for the previous three years. She also found that the complainant was at least equal in experience and qualifications to several of the successful candidates. She noted that there was a lack of record-keeping at both the interviews that were held and that there seemed to be no formal marking system in place. His claim was upheld and, significantly, he was awarded €40,000 in compensation. The Equality Officer ordered the Department to ensure that internal

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[15] The Equality Tribunal has the power to hear discrimination cases taken under the Employment Equality legislation .

interview boards have formal training, apply strict promotion criteria and introduce transparency and objectivity in their deliberations (Equality Tribunal, Case Number: Dec-E2003-035). The size of this award means that departments are likely to attempt to ensure that their procedures are fair and transparent in the future and do not discriminate on age grounds.

In the cases described above, it was possible to prove that discrimination had occurred through the use of statistics. However, indirect discrimination of any kind is more difficult to prove. The Equality Authority states that indirect discrimination is included in the meaning of the Acts. They define indirect discrimination as follows:

> Indirect discrimination – happens where there is less favourable treatment in effect or by impact. It happens where people are, for example, refused employment or training not explicitly on account of a discriminatory reason, but because of a provision, practice or requirement which they find hard to satisfy. If the provision, practice or requirement puts people who belong to one of the grounds covered by the Acts at a particular disadvantage then the employer will have indirectly discriminated, unless the provision is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.
>
> (Equality Authority, 2008)

This definition of "indirect discrimination" and more specifically "a provision, practice or requirement which they find hard to satisfy" is relevant for analysing some of the findings in this thesis. For example, unexpressed ageist attitudes on the part of individual managers, and expectations that older workers may not be capable of doing particular kinds of work may mean that older people may not be placed in high-profile posts and thus have little opportunity to demonstrate their capacities. This is not directly discernible through statistics. Other issues that may affect older people differentially and make it harder for them to compete with younger people are the use of aptitude tests for promotion in open competitions – this may constitute in effect a form of indirect discrimination (see Chapters 6, 8 & 9).

Different forms of discrimination may intersect and act to doubly disadvantage certain types of workers. Previous research suggests that ageism may be "gendered", for example, with women more likely to be negatively affected (Duncan & Loretto, 2004). There may

be particular issues where policies or attitudes (such as the marriage bar and entry level grades being confined to women) which made it difficult for women to progress in their career or even to remain at work in the past interacts with ageist attitudes to older workers in the present and acts to disadvantage older women in particular.

4.4 Civil Service polices on recruitment, promotion and retirement

This final section describes the procedures, policies and legislation in relation to recruitment, promotion and retirement that are in operation in the civil service with a specific focus on older workers.

Recruitment

Most of the recruitment for the civil service is carried out centrally, by the Department of Finance, although this has begun to change in recent years with line departments being enabled to recruit at local level (*Public Service Management Act 2004*). There have been changes in policy in recent years which have allowed for the increased recruitment of older workers. In general, since the 1990s with the gradual raising of the upper age limit for recruitment, older people increasingly applied for and were appointed to positions in the civil service. Prior to this, the relatively few older recruits were those who returned to work on grounds of hardship, having left work earlier due to the marriage bar (or for other reasons)[16]. In 1999 and 2000, specific competitions were held to recruit former civil servants. This occurred in the context of the general shortage of labour in the economy at a time when the civil service was finding it difficult to attract employees. Some of these were hired without having to take part in an exam on the basis that they had already competed for the post in the past.

Career progression/promotion

The civil service is a large organization with a hierarchical structure in which people in general service grades may progress by being promoted from entry level grades of Clerical Officer, Executive Officer or Administrative Officer through various grades until they reach Assistant Secretary. Staff Officer is a grade that is located between Clerical Officer

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[16] The marriage bar was a legal requirement which meant that women in Ireland had to leave their jobs in the public service when they got married. This was not removed until 1973.

and Staff Officer, but staff cannot join the civil service at that grade – they can only be promoted to it from Clerical Officer. In general, the order of promotional progression is from Clerical Officer to Staff Officer to Executive Officer (EO), to Higher Executive Officer (HEO) to Assistant Principal (AP), to Principal Officer (PO) to Assistant Secretary (AS) to Secretary General (see Figure 1 below).

Staff may also be recruited at Administrative Officer level – those entering at this grade are graduates and are typically regarded as being on a "fast-track" to promotion – they may apply for promotion directly to Assistant Principal, thus by-passing the grade of Higher Executive Officer. Clerical Assistant used to be the lowest entry-level grade but people at this grade were all re-graded as Clerical Officers in 1995 in an attempt to rationalize the promotional structure and increase pay and conditions. As mentioned earlier, part of the reason for choosing the civil service for analysis is that it is an organization where there is a relatively clear-cut promotional path.

Figure 2: Civil Service promotional structure

Secretary General

Assistant Secretary

Principal Officer

Assistant Principal Officer

Administrative Officer

Higher Executive

Executive Officer

Staff Officer

Clerical Officer

Clerical Assistant
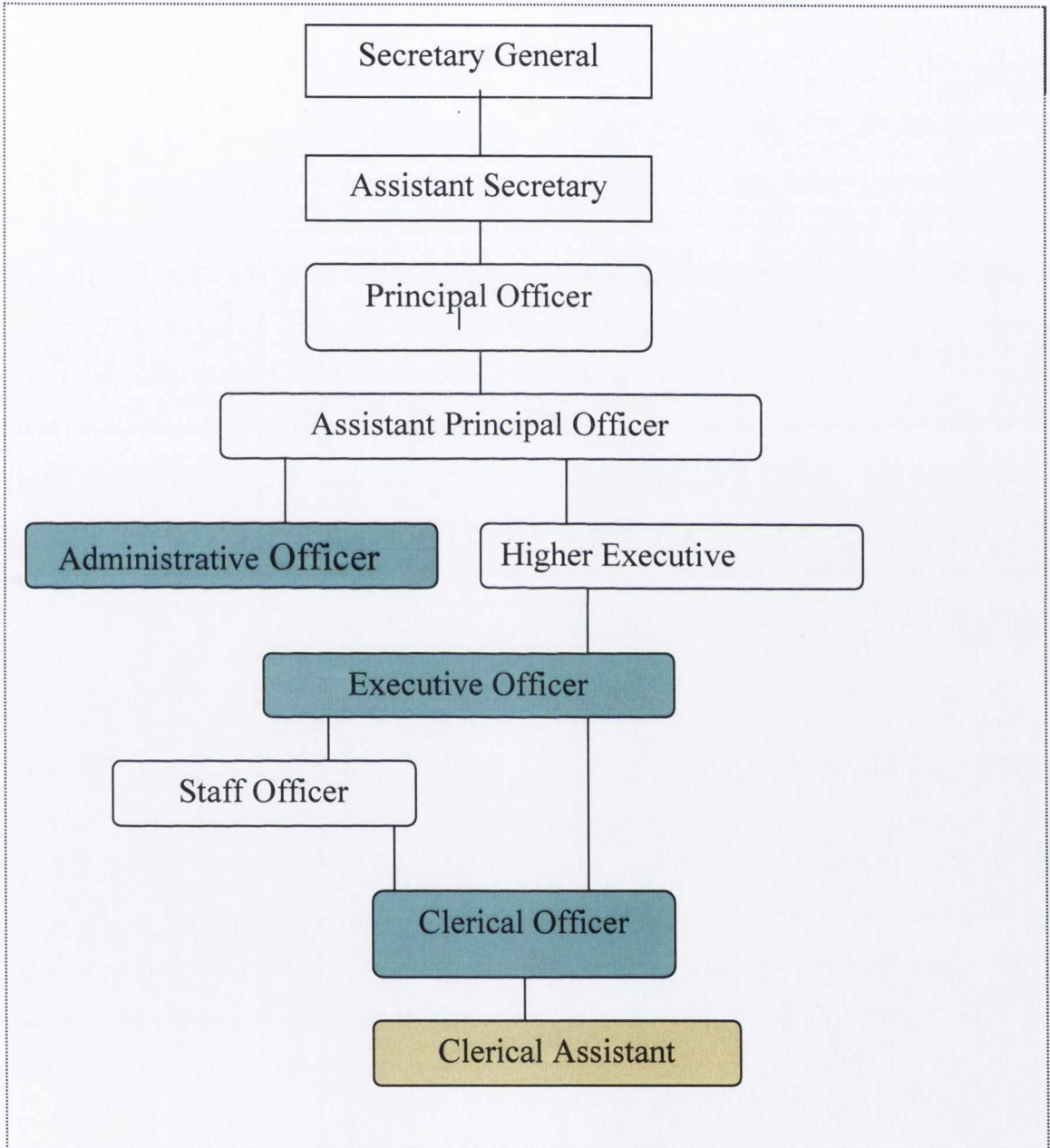
Clerical Assistant (grade no longer exists; all re-graded to CO)
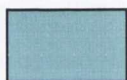
Entry level grade

Staff may gain internal promotion in two ways. There may be internal or "confined" competitions within a department (that is, confined to staff in that department), or promotion may take place through being deemed "senior suitable". The latter is a mechanism whereby people are promoted after a number of years through a combination of being recommended by their line managers and by satisfying certain requirements such as not having excessive sick leave. In such cases there is no competitive interview or exam. As part of the Strategic Management Initiative, there has been a move away from using "senior suitable" as a mechanism for internal promotion in recent years and towards promotion system based on performance at interview (and sometimes an exam). Staff from CO level to AP level may also apply for promotion through inter-departmental competitions – these typically consist of exams and interviews and are open to staff civil service-wide. Staff at CO level may apply for open competitions for Executive Officer – in this case they would typically be competing with school-leavers and university graduates – the competition usually takes the form of an exam and an interview. At PO level, promotion (to Assistant Secretary or Director) is carried out through the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) system. This is quite an elaborate process and involves being recommended by senior management in the Department as well as taking part in a highly competitive interview process (Top Level Appointments Committee, 2002).

Two major changes in Human Resource Management have taken place in the civil service. Firstly, line managers are being given greater responsibility for management of staff. Secondly, as part of the Strategic Management Initiative, the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) has recently been introduced. This provides a means of managing staff performance and their individual career development needs. Murphy *et al.* point out that "policies on mobility, promotion, reward, training and development may be based on a consistent approach to Human Resource Management supported by PMDS" (Murphy *et al.*, 2002: 11). In recent studies of the civil service, it has been noted that career progression involves not only promotion, but placement, training, mentoring/performance management and mobility (Murphy *et al.*, 2002; O'Riordan & Humphreys, 2002).

Two main policy documents, *Delivering Better Government, 1996* and the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, 2000* acknowledge that the civil service needs to respond better to the aspirations of civil servants by developing fulfilling career paths and creating a work

ambience which promotes the job satisfaction, motivation and commitment of staff (Government of Ireland, 1996, 2000). .

Currently, placement is carried out in a somewhat ad-hoc manner. Policy on career development is quite well-developed in principle, but in practice, application of the policy is uneven across departments (O'Riordan & Humphreys, 2002). In their research on career progression, O'Riordan and Humphreys (2002) found that many HR units are so busy with routine administration that they don't have the resources either to carry out career progression work themselves or to encourage line managers to do so.

So, in effect, it appears from recent research evidence that even though there is a demand for career progression among civil servants and recent policy documents articulate this as an aspiration of the service, neither HR units nor line managers are meeting this demand fully in a uniform way across the civil service (Murphy *et al.*, 2002).

Retirement policy in the civil service

Up to April 2004, most civil servants had to retire when they reached the age of 65 although exceptions could be made on a case-by-case basis to retain people over 65 on hardship grounds or in the case of a labour shortage. However, staff recruited after that date will be able to continue working after the age of 65.

There are a number of options for retirement available to staff in the civil service. Staff may retire on full pension once they have attained 40 years of service. However, they must be 60 years of age before they can receive their pension and lump-sum. Therefore, if they have completed 40 years service at the age of 57 or 58, they don't receive a pension until they are 60. Staff who were recruited since April 2004 have a minimum pension age of 65[17]. Since September, 2004, the civil service has introduced a cost-neutral early retirement scheme to staff aged 50 or over on an actuarially reduced pension. This is a facility which allows public servants to retire early (Department of Finance, 2005). This has increased the range of choices available to staff regarding retirement; however, as we shall see, this scheme is unpopular with the research participants in this study. In theory, staff may avail of work-sharing when they are approaching retirement, so there is flexibility. However, in practice, this means a reduction in their earnings and in their

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[17] This doesn't affect any of the research participants in this study.

pension; so for many workers, it is not an option. Due to the recent severe economic recession, the government has just introduced a scheme encouraging early retirement in order to reduce the public service pay bill – this shows the impact that economic fluctuations can have on older workers (an argument central to the political economy approach to the analysis of decision-making) (see postscript, pp. 299-300).

There is a limited amount of preparation offered to staff for retirement. They are offered a pre-retirement course before they retire. The timing at which this course is offered appears to vary between Departments. Most personnel officers interviewed suggested that the course is offered in the year prior to the person leaving work. One HR manager said that in her department, staff were notified about the course when they reached the age of 60. On the website of the Civil Service Training Centre, applicants are advised to book at least 12 months in advance for this course due to a high demand for it. This suggests that the amount of courses provided may not be sufficient to meet the demand and that some people may miss out if they don't apply sufficiently early.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described the socio-economic, legislative, policy and organizational context in which the older workers in the Civil Service make their decisions. It also gives evidence of previous and current gender and age-related discrimination in the civil service and describes the mechanisms that exist for addressing this and the level of awareness of and responsiveness to the issue in the organization and among union representatives. Finally it describes promotion and retirement policy generally – all of which provides a necessary background to the empirical chapters which follow.

Chapter 5

Joining the civil service

5.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the four main groups of workers who are the subjects of this thesis and outlines their reasons for joining the civil service and the social, economic and legislative context that obtained at the time they were recruited. The degree to which their accounts reflect preferences and/or constraints and whether and how this varies between the different groups is analysed. In particular, the discussion explore whether or not their initial job-taking decision-making was a question of exercising "preferences" or whether constraints were operative even at that early stage of their lives.

The chapter also seeks to establish whether these workers viewed their job as careers at that point, or simply as a means of earning money. In the case of "returners", their reasons for leaving the civil service are also outlined; this sometimes has an important bearing on later work-related behaviour (see Chapter 7 below, where motivations for re-joining the civil service at a later time are described). "Late joiners" are only briefly mentioned in this chapter since they joined the civil service at a later period than those in the other groups, and an analysis of their motivation for joining will be given in Chapter 8.

In this thesis the men and women who are the research subjects have been divided into four groups – "long-term workers" "managers", "returners" and "late joiners". The long-term workers group consists of 14 men and 15 women who have spent most of their working lives in the civil service and who are located at middle management level or below. The managers group is made up of 28 men and 10 women who are at senior management level (Assistant Principal or above). The returners group consists of 28 women who left the civil service (or other similar employment) usually when they married or had their first child. After spending a number of years either working in the home or combining this with paid employment, they have returned (or begun for the first time) to work in the civil service. Finally, there is a group of 10 late joiners (6 men and 4 women) who joined the civil service after having spent most of their working lives in other employment. They differ

from returners in that they haven't taken significant amounts of time out for childcare or care of other dependents. They have left their previous occupations for a variety of other reasons most commonly due to voluntary or involuntary redundancy.

The interviewees' descriptions of joining the civil service demonstrate that gender, levels of education, economic resources and parental and social expectations shape the conditions in which they make their decisions. This suggests that the "preferences" of these workers formed only one part of the decision-making process. A minority did appear to have formed a preference to have a career in the civil service, particularly those who had finished secondary school or had further education and/or whose parents were interested in their careers. However, a majority of both men and women did not see their work as "a career" at all at this point in their lives (see Collins & Wickham, 2004). Their accounts suggest that preference theory overstates the level of intentionality among workers.

5.2 Social and historical context

The social, legislative, ideological and economic background against which the men and women in the first three groups joined the civil service is set out in detail in Chapter 4. Overall, there were few employment opportunities for men or women; married women were banned from public sector employment and there was no state-funded or provided childcare.

Given the gendered social norms and discriminatory legislation, it is not surprising that there was a severe shortage of women as role models at top management level at the time these workers joined the civil service. There were none at Secretary or Assistant Secretary level, 1% at Principal Officer and 4% at Assistant Principal Officer level. Even at middle management, only 13% of Higher Executive Officers were women as late as 1972, while 99% of Clerical Assistants (the lowest entry grade) in that year were women (Doyle, 1999: 116).

Given this background, it is likely that at the time most of the research participants joined the civil service, men would expect to be the main breadwinner and women to only work as a stopgap until marriage at this time. We might expect that this would result in men

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being more ambitious than women at the start of their career, particularly for those in the older age cohorts.

5.3 Long-term workers

This section outlines the motivations for joining the civil service of twenty-nine workers who have worked there continuously for at least 20 years (their length of service ranges from 24 to 43 years) and who work in grades other than senior management. I discuss to what extent workers in this group may be said to have actively acted in accordance with their preferences or even whether they had formed preferences when joining the civil service. Their accounts suggest that social and familial norms and economic conditions play a significant role in shaping their choices. These findings suggest that preference theory alone is not sufficient to explain their behaviour. As we shall see, both relational theory and feminist social constructionist approaches accord more with their accounts of their decision-making and behaviour.

5.3.1 Profile of long-term workers on joining

This is only a brief outline of the characteristics of these workers – a more detailed profile is set out in Chapter 5. Most of them work full-time – two are job-sharing and one person is on term-time (i.e., they take time off during the summer). There were interesting variations in the level at which men and women joined with 13 of the women (and none of the men) joining at the lowest grade in the hierarchy that is, Clerical Assistant. The Clerical Assistant (CA) grade only opened recruitment to men from 1974 onwards (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). This is a form of gendered occupational segregation and in practice it meant that those who joined at CA level had an additional obstacle to overcome in order to reach management level. In contrast most of the men joined at Clerical Officer level – the next grade up the promotional ladder or its equivalent.

The men and women as a group had lower levels of education than the senior managers with 25% (2 men and 5 women) not having completed secondary school at the time of joining. Three of these went on to gain further qualifications later. In all, 55% of this group (as opposed to one third of senior managers) had Leaving Certificate (completion of secondary school) as their highest level of education. Two of this group had a degree when they joined.

5.3.2 Reasons for joining – long-term workers

In this section I will analyse the responses of the long-term workers to consider whether there is evidence that they had a preference to work in the civil service. I also consider to what extent there were constraints on their freedom either to form preferences in the first place or to act freely on those preferences. The following table summarises the responses of interviewees to the question "Why did you join the civil service?" The responses were grouped into general categories and are listed under these headings. Many respondents gave more than one reason for joining so the total number of responses exceeds the number of respondents. This convention is adopted for all the responses that are presented in the tables in the following sections.

Table 2: Long-term workers: reasons for joining

(29 respondents)

	Male (14)		Female (15)		Total No.	% of all*
	No.	[%] of men	No.	[%] of women		% of all workers
Attracted by features of the job • Wanted office job (1) • Liked conditions – security, pay etc (6) • Parents – civil service a good career (2) • Self – civil service a good career (2)	8	57	3	20	11	38
Family constraints • Eldest of family/family needed money(5) • Parents influence – secure job (6)	5	36	6	40	11	38
Financial constraints-education vs. work • Wanted to go to university/teaching	1	7	2	13	3	10
Little sense of agency • Drifted in (4) • No career guidance (3) • Didn't need Leaving Cert (2)	2	14	7	47	9	31
Societal norms • Just a job • Normal thing to do	3	21	3	20	6	21
Limited range of occupations available	3	21	6	40	9	31

*Participants could give more than one reason - % = % of total

Attracted by features of the job – acted on preference

A large minority of long term workers (38%) cited various attractions of the job as one of their reasons for joining the civil service; with a much higher proportion of men more likely to do so. They represented joining the civil service as the fulfilment of their preferences – a positive choice. Six of this group joined because they liked the conditions that are attached to the civil service such as job security. Two of these had previously worked in less secure jobs. One man had been in a series of such jobs and gives the following account of why the civil service was attractive by comparison:

Probably a whole history of having experiences of uncertainty in the private sector.... you get very aware that companies can go wallop and they did...One particular company, you drove in on Monday morning, the receiver said 'listen lads – your money is probably at home – leave the car keys there – good luck.'

(Interview 53, male HEO, age 55-59).

This supports recent research in the UK that found that where men have experienced their own or a friend's job insecurity, they are inclined to try to get a secure job, no matter what the job is (Charles & James, 2003; Nolan, 2005). One man had previously worked in a shop. He indicated that since his father had paid for him to attend secondary school he would therefore be expected by his parents to work in an occupation that would offer him reasonable career prospects. Speaking of his previous job in the shop, he says:

It wasn't going anywhere. It wasn't what you were being educated for...

And of the civil service, he says:

I suppose it was one of those permanent and pensionable jobs. In my home town, in Co. Kerry, you were being educated to leave....so you either joined the civil service, the guards or the bank.

(Interview 61, male HEO, age 60-64)

Others joined because either their parents or they themselves saw the civil service as an attractive career:

I thought it seemed like a reasonable career path – at least you have something to show after a number of years".

(Interview 47, male HEO, age 60-64)

Another woman joined because she wanted "an office job" (Interview 44, female HEO, age 50-54). Only two of the men and none of the women refer to the job in terms of a career – that is a permanent pensionable job with good promotional prospects – at this stage of their lives. In general a much higher proportion of men (57%) than of women (20%) acted on preference.

Family constraints

The issues of family and financial constraints are closely linked and are therefore discussed together. The accounts of almost one third of this group suggest that joining the civil service was connected to their concern for the welfare of their family of origin, rather than with making a specific choice to work in this occupation. Three people said they had joined because they were the oldest in their family and the fact that they had a job made it easier for their parents to provide for the rest of the family. They needed to work rather than invest further in their education. The following response illustrates this theme:

> I was the eldest of six and my father was a labourer and you just took the first job. Well you took any job that you could get like, you know.
>
> (Interview 54, male HEO, age 55-59)

It is interesting that the work-related behaviour of similar proportions of young men (as well as young women) in this sample also appear to have been influenced by familial concerns. This has been found in previous national research (Collins & Wickham, 2004). In this scenario, relational theory, which emphasises the effect of families on the individual, seems to better explain the work-related decision-making of both young men and women in Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s than does preference theory.

Financial constraints

Interestingly only 10% out of this group (as opposed to 18% of the managers) aspired to go to university although two others wanted to pursue teaching careers. One woman joined the civil service because her family couldn't afford to send her to university:

> I had planned to emigrate to England and maybe do social work over there. There were no opportunities here. I was the eldest of seven and my parents couldn't have afforded to pay for me in college.
>
> (Interview 51, female HEO, age 55-59)

Among this group, the social and economic conditions that their parents had experienced and the difficult economic circumstances of their families at the time these respondents joined the workforce were mentioned as being significant factors in their decision to join. Similar themes have been observed in previous empirical studies of Irish women workers (Collins & Wickham, 2004: 40).

Little sense of agency

Just over a third (47% of women and 21% of men) report having applied for and accepted the job without having thought about what it might entail - they say they drifted in or took it because they didn't succeed at other jobs or simply because they wanted to leave home and work in the city. It was relatively easy for girls to get a job in the lower grades if they had intermediate secondary education. More boys entered after leaving cert as EOs. Four people said that they had drifted into their civil service job almost by accident:

> I really drifted into it. I suppose that's what I did without any clear thought about what I was doing.
>
> (Interview 40, female EO, age 50-54)

Some said that they had taken the job as a fall-back option. For example, in the case of one woman, she joined because she didn't succeed in getting into her preferred career choices:

> I applied for teaching, nursing and the civil service, if I remember correctly. I didn't get the teaching or nursing originally anyway and took the civil service as I thought very short-term and then ended up being satisfied and staying.
>
> (Interview 41, female HEO, age 50-54)

Two people said that they joined the civil service because it wasn't necessary to have completed the Leaving Certificate to enter the civil service at Clerical Assistant level. These workers had relatively low social and/or economic capital on joining. This reflects the authoritarian education, family system and lack of encouragement of individuation in young people especially young women at the time .

Limited range of labour market opportunities

31% of this group mentioned that there was a limited array of employment opportunities available to them on leaving school. The following quotes are typical:

> Well, I suppose at that time jobs were scarce and I just saw an ad in the paper and applied for it and got the exam. At that stage there was very little choice in terms of jobs you know
>
> (Interview 55, male HEO, age 55-59)

As far as I was concerned at the time, it was either the civil service or go nursing and the civil service came up and ….. I did the interview and I got it and I joined then and I am here since.

(Interview 48, female CO, age 50-54)

This reflects the lack of diversification in the economy at the time and it suggests that this in itself was a constraint – respondents in this group appear not to have considered other options to be available to them.

5.3.3 Discussion: long-term workers at the start of their career

In general, only just over a third of the men and women in this group represent joining the civil service as a choice or as the fulfilment of a preference in any meaningful way. Only two (both men) say that they joined specifically because of the career possibilities, although a further six men and four women began to see and pursue promotional possibilities shortly after joining. A similar proportion of women as of men regarded their work as "just a job", when they joined and not as a career.

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One sixth of these long-term workers had not completed secondary level education at the time they joined the civil service – having completed Intermediate Certificate and /or being able to type was a sufficient qualification at the time. Overall, there was a sense that for many of the men and almost all of the women in this group there was very little thought or planning applied to their future careers either by their parents (many of whom were struggling to provide for large families), their teachers or themselves. Most of the other accounts suggest that they were conforming to social norms or complying with familial norms, or they stressed the lack of choice available to them given the social and economic circumstances of the time. As we shall see (Chapters 6 and 7), the lower levels of educational capital and economic resources in their families of origin meant that many in this group joined at lower levels and thus had a longer career path to travel than many of the senior managers.

5.4 Managers

In this section, I analyse the stated motivations for joining the civil service of the 28 men and 10 women in the sample who are now at senior management level. In general, while

they joined the civil service in a similar socio-economic environment as those in the previous group, many of them had a higher level of education, had parents with career aspirations for them and more of them appear to have formed preferences for a career than those in other groups. At the time they joined, there were very few women at senior levels in management in Ireland; there were none at Secretary or Assistant Secretary level, while only 1% of Principal Officers and 4% of Assistant Principal Officers were women in 1971 (Doyle, 1999: 116).

5.4.1 Profile of managers at joining

Leaving Cert was the highest level of education of approximately one third of the managers; only 2% joined not having completed second level education as opposed to 25% of long-tem workers. They later studied Leaving Certificate subjects at night. Only six (3 men and 3 women) had degrees before joining and others acquired third level qualifications later. More than half of the sample (22) joined either as Clerical Assistants (3), Clerical Officers (14) – basic entry grades or were in other public service posts (3) not directly in the general civil service career path. Just over half of senior managers joined at CO/CA level or below while two thirds of those in the previous group did so.

5.4.2 Reasons for joining

In this section, I will outline the stated reasons of the members of this group for joining the civil service, looking specifically at whether they appear to be acting on their preferences. The following table summarises the responses to the question "Why did you join the civil service?"

Table 3: Managers: reasons for joining

(38 respondents)

	Male (28)		Female (10)		Total No.	% of total*
	No	%	No.	[%]		
Attracted by features of the job: • Liked conditions in civil service (4) • Parent's influence – civil service a good career (6) • Self – civil service a good career (3) • Wanted to influence society- public service (5)	11	**39**	6	**60**	17	**44**
Family constraints: • Eldest of family – family needed money (7) • Parents' influence – good secure job (6)	9	**32**	4	**40**	13	**34**
Financial constraints: • Wanted to go to university but couldn't afford it	5	**18**	2	**20**	7	**18**
Poor sense of agency: • Drifted into it • No career guidance	3	**11**	1	**10**	4	**11**
Societal norms: • Just a job – normal thing to do	3	**11**	1	**10**	4	**11**
Limited range of occupations available: • There was very little choice back then - everybody applied for post office, bank, civil service	3	**11**	2	**20**	5	**13**
No reason given	2	**7**	0	**0**	2	**5**

* Respondents gave more than one reason for joining

Attractions of the job – fulfilling preferences.

As might be expected, the managers' narratives show that a higher proportion (44%) of this group, compared to 38% of long term workers, saw the civil service as an attractive prospect (rather than just a job) from the beginning and deliberately chose to work there. They were attracted either by the nature of the work itself, the opportunities for promotion and/or the conditions of employment. As can be seen from the table, a much higher proportion of women than men say they actively chose the job (39% of men vs. 60% of

women) possibly indicating a stronger interest in the work/a career itself from the beginning.

Three men and three women said they chose the civil service because they had a sense of public service or because they wanted to bring about change for the better in society:

> I actually wanted to join the civil service. There was a tradition in the family of trying to make things better for people – not so much make things better as do things better. My father was a civil servant … my mother… took over her brother's business and made huge improvements to it.
>
> (Interview 103, female PO or above, age 55-59)

Some of the managers had worked in other organisations such as semi-state companies or in the private sector – they had considered the options and concluded that the civil service offered the best career prospects. The following quote illustrates this:

> It seemed to me that where I was working in X *(a semi-state organisation)* that career opportunities in X were not great and it seemed to me that … the basic salary in the civil service is slightly higher and there were more opportunities for promotion at that time … so long story short, I came into the civil service because I perceived at that time that the opportunities were better".
>
> (Interview 100, male, PO or above, age 60-64)

Some members of this group were already planning to have a career in the traditional sense from the very beginning. Three women and three men joined with degrees and saw it as a career from the start. Others (three men) had specifically chosen to work in the civil service because they had previously worked in the private sector in jobs with more unstable conditions. Three of the women managers did have a conception of their jobs leading to a career from the outset – from their accounts, for them this was partly due to a strong personal sense of agency, partly to encouragement they received from parents (particularly fathers) to pursue a career and some had higher levels of education than was the norm for women at the time.

Family constraints

A similar proportion to that of the long term workers, 34% in all (32% of men and 40% of women) mentioned a lack of money in their family of origin as one reason for joining the civil service. The following is a typical statement:

> ... if I hadn't got the civil service, I would have done a secretarial course but there was no question I had to go to work as soon as the opportunity came ... there was no way – well, they were subsistence farming where I came from so there was no money.
>
> (Interview 89, female Assistant Principal, age 55-59 – joined as a Clerical Assistant)

Their accounts suggest that their parents strongly influenced them to apply for a secure job such as the civil service. They felt that they had little choice but to go along with their parents' wishes. For example, when asked why he had joined the civil service, one senior manager replied:

> My Mammy told me to ... they insisted, I have to be honest about it, they insisted on it – 'You are going to do the civil service exams' – and I did and I got second place in Ireland on the Clerical Officer exam ... and after that it was a no-brainer.
>
> (Interview 85, male PO or above, age 50-54).

Many parents particularly in rural Ireland saw the civil service as an attractive job, because of the security it offered. This sense that their parents considered the civil service to be desirable was mentioned in several of the accounts. An example of this is as follows:

> I come from ... good old rural Ireland where you know everybody, every parent's ambition was that their child would get a good steady pensionable job in the civil service above in Dublin ... the civil service was regarded as the plum job because you couldn't be sacked and you had a pension.
>
> (Interview 76, male PO or above, age 60-64)

They appeared to be closely connected to their family and to have complied with their parents' wishes regarding choice of occupation.

Financial constraints

A substantial minority, 18% joined the civil service at least partly because their families couldn't afford to pay for them to attend university or because they were reluctant to ask

their families to do so since they had already had to pay for them to attend secondary school which wasn't free at that time in Ireland. One manager described the situation in this way:

> Very few people went to college even from our school in those days; because there were fees for school... you had to pay for secondary school. I'd have had to get a scholarship, 'cos there was no way that they could afford me, that was a "no no" anyway because you had to pay fees as well as maintenance in those days.
>
> (Interview 89, female Assistant Principal, age 55-59).

This manager pointed out that fewer than half of her primary school class went to secondary school and hardly anyone went to university.

Little sense of agency

It appears, however, that at the time they joined a small proportion of the managers (11% of men and 10% of women) didn't actively choose to join the civil service. For example one manager explicitly says:

> I just drifted into the feckin' thing......just drifted into this and that was the end of it.
>
> (Interview 102, male PO or above, age 55-59)

This is somewhat lower than the proportion of long-term workers (31%) who also "drifted" in.

Societal norms

An identical proportion of senior managers (11%) said that they had joined because it was the normal thing to do as the following quote illustrates. :

> I just really decided to...apply for all the jobs and they are the jobs that people traditionally applied for at that time...looking at the whole class, I'd say nearly everybody did the civil service exam.
>
> (Interview 71, male PO or above, age 50-54).

The quotation below illustrates the fact that it was quite unusual for people to go to university at that time unless they came from a background where their parents had attended university:

It was just a job. I did the exam and got placed. I was also accepted into college, but there was no history of third level education in my family. Most people didn't go to college at that time.

(Interview 80, male, AP, age 50-54).

It was somewhat unusual for women to think of the civil service as a career at that time. For example, one woman (who chose the civil service out of a number of other options because the pay was better) who joined as an Executive Officer, describes the prevailing perception of gender norms as follows:

Our expectation wasn't even to get a job – I mean you got a secretarial job -....and you got a man and you got married and you left your job and that was the environment I would have grown up in.

(Interview 84, female PO or above, age 55-59)

This lack of a sense of deliberate choice was the case for 11% of the group – a lower proportion than that (21%) in the previous group.

Limited range of occupations

As was the case for the previous group, a lower but still substantial proportion of senior managers (13% vs. 31% of long-term workers) mentioned the limited range of occupations to choose from at that time as one of their reasons for joining the civil service. This reflects their generally higher level of education which gave some members of this group more opportunities even at a time when opportunities were limited for most people. A higher proportion of women (20%) than men (11%) mentioned this.

5.4.3 Discussion: senior managers at the start of their career

The reasons for joining given by some of them are similar to those given by the men and women in the previous group. Many were similarly influenced by social norms and financial constraints in their family of origin. However, more of the managers were also attracted either by the nature of the work itself, the opportunities for promotion and/or the conditions of employment, and represented joining as a positive choice.

As might be expected, almost half of this group – a much higher proportion than of any other sub-group appear to have made a deliberate specific choice to work in the civil

service and to have looked on it as a career from quite early on. In some cases, this is partly due to the influence of parents who were civil servants themselves and thus provided role models, a sense of public service and/or knowledge of how the system worked. In other cases, the parents took an interest in their children having a career. All of this reinforces the important role played by prior socio-economic resources, cultural capital and socialisation in the formation of preferences (James, 2008). This appeared to be particularly true for the women (see White, Cox & Cooper, 1992: 37; Crompton & Harris, 1998) for whom there were very few role models at a senior level in the civil service at the early stages of their career. While some of the women adhered to the traditional gender norm of seeing their job as something temporary until marriage at the start of their career, a substantial minority (40%) did not. Most of those (men and women) who had a degree at recruitment stage appeared to regard their occupation as a career from the start.

However, more than half didn't actively choose the civil service; many of them were subject to the same constraints facing long term workers – limited occupational choice, financial constraints in their family of origin and the lack of a deliberate career plan. Some of the managers also "drifted in" to the civil service or saw it as "just a job", although fewer did so than in the previous group

5.5 Returners: reasons for joining

This study addresses a gap in the literature since there have been few qualitative studies in Ireland of women who return to work after a long break in Ireland. Those that have been done have concentrated on the issues such as barriers to returning (Mulvey, 1995, cited in Russell *et al.*, 2002), to training (Cousins, 1995, cited in Russell *et al.*, 2002) and current reasons for returning of the respondents rather than looking in depth at their motivations and experiences in the context of their work-life biographies (Cousins, 1996 and Lyons, 2000, cited in Russell *et al.*, 2002). This thesis allows us to consider their decisions over time so we may see how earlier experiences affect later life.

5.5.1 Profile of returners
The typical returner in this group is a married woman with four or more children who has been out of the workforce for approximately twenty years. They have spent an average of 20.2 years out of paid employment and all but three of them have worked unpaid in the

home at some point either caring for children or for other dependent relatives. All of the returners are or have been married with one widowed and four separated or divorced. Most have children – with almost two thirds (eighteen) of them having four or more children. Four of the returners had an intermediate secondary level of education when they were recruited while 24 had completed the Leaving Certificate. As a group therefore, they had lower levels of education on joining than either managers or long-term workers. All returners who worked in the civil service originally joined at either CA or CO level or other equivalent posts.

5.5.2 Decision-making: joining the civil service (returners)

Table 4 below summarises the responses of the 22 returners to the question "Why did you join the civil service?

Table 4: Reasons for joining (returners)

(22 respondents)[18]

	Number	[%] of total
Family constraints • Eldest of family and family needed money • Parents influence	7	**32**
Attracted by features of the job • Always wanted to be a telephonist • Wanted a good secure job • Knew a civil servant, wanted to have a life like hers	6	**27**
Financial constraints • Wanted to do something else, e.g. teaching, but didn't get a scholarship, parents couldn't afford fees.	4	**18**
Societal norms • Just a job – "you just knew you were going to give up work and look after the children"	4	**18**
Little sense of agency • There was no thought put into it • Drifted into it • No career guidance	3	**14**

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[18] 6 of the 28 returners originally worked in occupations other than the Civil Service.

Limited range of occupations available • There was very little choice back then: everybody applied for post office, bank, civil service.	3	**14**

Family constraints

The response most commonly given by the group (32%) was that they took the job at least partly because their parents were pleased that they had a secure job and were earning money. The civil service was considered by parents (many of whom had themselves experienced economic hardship) to be a good secure job.

Many of them came from large families who were not well off. One woman said:

> I suppose at the time you had to take the job. There were six more in the family. I grew up in inner city Dublin. Oh sure ... everybody [*in her family*] was thrilled. I said I'd better take this.
>
> (Interview 9, Clerical Officer, age 60-64).
>
> *Information in italics inserted by author*

Her preferred option was teacher training but this would have meant that she would not be earning money for a further three years. She thought it was more important to begin earning straight away given that there were several other children in the family to be provided for. The narratives reveal a strong sense of concern for their parents and responsibility for their younger siblings. This supports relational theory which suggests that many women do not see themselves as free to act on their individual preferences but are constrained by their concern for their family (see Himmelweit, 2002). It also indicates that authoritative familial norms were quite strong at this time in Ireland for this group of young women. Their identity at that point was bound up with their family of origin.

Attractions of the job – fulfilling preference

Just over a quarter 27% of the returners described the decision to join the civil service as a positive choice and indicated that they actually wanted the job itself. For example one woman said:

> I wanted to be a telephonist, believe it or not – it appealed to me and then I applied to Posts and Telegraphs and got it and absolutely loved it.
>
> (Interview 28, Clerical Officer, age 60-64).

While another described her decision as follows:

> I was kind of influenced by a friend of my mother. She was an unmarried lady and when she was describing the work, it sounded like something I might like to do. She was a civil servant.
>
> (Interview 16, Staff Officer, age 55-59)

Two others said that they wanted a good secure job. For these six women, joining the civil service was an active choice – thus these women do appear to have chosen and been free to act in accordance with their preferences in the manner described by preference theory.

Financial constraints

18% of the returners mentioned financial constraints as having influenced their decision. These women saw the civil service very much as a second choice option and took the job because there was no money in their families to pay for further education for them. For example, for two people, teaching was the occupation they would have liked to pursue but in order to do so, they would have had to pay fees for teacher training.

> I wanted to do teaching ... that's all I ever wanted to do, but needs must, I suppose, at the time, you had to take the job. There were six more in the family.
>
> (Interview 9, Clerical Officer, age 60-64)

Others wanted to go to university but this would also have been too expensive in terms of the opportunity cost in lost earnings. One woman explains why she joined the civil service in the following way:

> Oh – money needed at home ... probably would have got a scholarship because I got one straight through secondary, but I felt that it [the job] was more needed for money coming into the house.
>
> (Interview 26, Clerical Officer, age 55-59)

Generally the financial and family constraints are connected and related to the general economic conditions and educational policy at the time. There was very little state support for families at that time and no free secondary school education for the older women in this group.

Societal gender norms – legal and ideological

In the accounts of 18% of the women's, there was evidence that they had internalised normative societal gender roles. Four of the respondents explained that they didn't put much thought into their choice of occupation because, as one woman said, it was just a "temporary" job that they would have to leave when they had children.

> You just knew you were going to give up work and be at home with the children.
> (Interview 24, Clerical Officer, age 55-59).

Little sense of agency

Three (14%) of the women said they had put no thought into or had simply drifted into their job. Two of these women said there was no career guidance at the time from teachers or parents – one woman contrasted this with the extensive amount of consideration given to her daughter's choice of career. These women did not actively choose their occupation or have a sense of agency generally. This is hardly surprising given their own and society's expectation that they would give up work on marriage. According to previous commentators, the church, the state and the education system encouraged identification with and absorption into family for women in Ireland (see O'Connor, 1998: 138-144). In general, both the church and the education system fostered a sense of obedience and acceptance among young people and didn't encourage individualism.

Limited range of occupations available to women

These women joined the civil service between 1958 and 1970. As described in Chapter 4 above, there was typically a very limited range of occupational choices available to women at that time especially for those who had to leave school without completing secondary education. Three respondents stated that the post office, the civil service or the bank were the only options suggested to them (by parents and teachers). The lack of employment generally and limited range of occupations open to women acted as a constraint on choice.

5.5.3 Leaving the civil service

Unlike other groups, returners made another major work-related decision. This was the decision to leave the Civil Service and this decision is the subject of the following section. It is important to establish the factors that affected this decision – was it the fulfilment of a free choice on the part of the women? The responses of returners to the question, "Why did

you leave your job?" are presented in Table 5 As this question is relevant to all returners there were 28 respondents to this question.

Table 5: Reasons for leaving work (returners)

(28 respondents)*

	Number	%
Legislation and policy • Marriage bar/ no choice (11) • Took gratuity (6)	17	**61**
Societal gender norms: • Just the way it was, most people left when they got married	8	**29**
Attracted by role of fulltime mother, housewife • Wanted to stay home and look after children (6) • Wanted to care of relative who was ill (1)	7	**25**
Unfulfilling job	7	**25**
Policy: lack of childcare or eldercare: • No crèches that time (4) • Had to look after relative who was ill (1)	5	**18**

* All returners answered this question

Legislation and policy

By far the most common response (from 61% of respondents) was that they had to leave due to the marriage bar. Most of the returners in the sample left the civil service or the workforce during the years between 1965 and 1980. The marriage bar was in place until 1973. The fact that many of the women in this group were forced to leave their jobs despite wishing to continue is clearly demonstrated by the following excerpts:

> *Participant*: You had your job and I loved it like. I didn't really want to leave, but sure, you had to leave in those days with the marriage bar.
>
> *Interviewer*: So, would you have stayed if you could?
>
> *Participant*: Oh, I would, yeah, because I had to get another job then. I worked in a shop then.
>
> (Interview 9, Clerical Officer, age 60-64)

This woman had to take up more insecure, poorly paid employment, after leaving the civil service job. During the later part of this period, from 1973 onwards, while married women were no longer legally prevented from working, there were financial disincentives to

staying in formal paid work. Although the marriage bar was removed, an amount of money (referred to as a "marriage gratuity") was paid to women who left the civil service if they left work within two years of getting married. This gave them a financial incentive to leave. Six women cited the gratuity as forming part of their reason for leaving. The following is a typical example of where the gratuity combined with other factors to induce one woman to leave even though she had been promoted twice:

> *Respondent*: I suppose we were kind of brain-washed – you know you didn't see yourself as – if you were going to get married I certainly felt my career was secondary to my – like when my children arrived, we didn't have the flexibility. For a start there were no crèches and I didn't have any family in Dublin, so you more or less didn't have any choice.
>
> *Interviewer*: And was there a marriage bar at that stage?
>
> *Respondent*: No, the marriage bar was gone, but I got a gratuity and that was an incentive.
>
> (Interview 8, Clerical Officer, age 55-59)

At this time, Irish social policy was premised on a male-breadwinner model of the family. Taxation policy reflected this, with married women being classed as secondary earners and subject to high taxation rates (Mahon, 1991). The fact that most of the returners were in the lowest paid jobs in the civil service combined with ideological pressures to leave meant that there were several obstacles to be overcome in order to stay at work.

Societal norms and gender roles

As described earlier, families with a large number of children were the norm in Ireland at the time these workers were starting out. Two thirds of the women in this sample had three or more children while half of them had four or more, conforming closely to the national picture. 29% of the women cited gendered social norms as their reason for leaving – as one woman put it:

> *Participant*: And then I got married in '68 and when I was expecting my first child, I left then – it wasn't – kind of – you didn't stay.
>
> *Interviewer*: And was that what you wanted to do?
>
> *Participant*: Well, that was the culture of the time
>
> (Interview 13, Clerical Officer, age 60-64)

The following quote illustrates the strength of this gendered norm and the way in which leaving work was for some people almost automatic behaviour rather than a conscious acting out of their preferences:

> It wasn't an option. I didn't even consider it. I just knew... you didn't even consider it. You said 'Oh well, I have to leave now; I'm getting married'. Afterwards, I was sorry some years down the line.
> (Interview 16, Staff Officer, age 55-59).

During this period, even after the marriage bar had been removed, comparatively few mothers continued to work in the civil service after having children, so there was a shortage of role models for working mothers within the organisation during this period. This is in keeping with the national situation where a minority of mothers in Ireland with children were in paid employment, (see Mahon, 1991: 7). Only 7.5% of married women were in paid employment in 1971 (O'Connor, 1998: 37). One woman described her experience of returning to work shortly after the marriage bar was removed. She received several comments from her fellow workers indicating that she shouldn't be there:

> I had one [*child*] in 1974 and I came back for nearly a year but that was unusual. I was nearly the first person to come back so you got a lot of 'what are you doing?' I was sort of expected to resign.
> (Interview 19, Executive Officer, age 50-54).

This woman did in fact resign, but returned later out of financial necessity. This indicates that in the early years at least, there were strongly-held negative attitudes regarding mothers working. This demonstrates that there was an ideological barrier to be overcome, by women who wanted to continue working.

Attracted by child-rearing, housework

A substantial minority of returners (25%) did actively choose to leave work in order to rear children and represented this as the fulfilment of a preference. For example, one woman explained that she really wanted to look after her children full-time at home:

> I always wanted to have a family – I think being the eldest and then kind of nurturing your brothers and sisters, you get this thing that you want to – you know you have that skill.
> (Interview 11, Clerical Officer, 50-54).

And another woman gives a similar account, displaying a strong orientation to be engaged full-time in child-rearing:

> Staying on was only new and I wasn't interested. I was more interested in staying home and having my baby and rearing my family
> (Interview 10, Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

These seven women appear to have home-centred preferences in keeping with the ideological climate at the time. Three fifths of women surveyed in Dublin in 1975 agreed that "Women should be more concerned with housekeeping and bringing up children than with desires for careers" (Fine-Davis, 1988, cited in O'Connor, 1998: 142).

Unfulfilling job
One quarter of the women said that they left partly because they found the job boring. This is hardly surprising given that some of them drifted into or felt constrained to take these jobs originally due to lack of access to alternative employment or higher education and all of them were either CAs, COs or in an equivalent role and so many of them were likely to have been engaged in unchallenging routine work.

Policy: Lack of childcare
18% of the women cited the lack of childcare as a factor in their decision to leave work. The lack of any form of state provision of childcare or contribution towards the cost made it extremely difficult for lower-paid women to work unless they had relatives who would provide care cheaply. Many of the returners were from rural areas originally and did not have relatives living nearby.

5.5.4 Discussion: returners' decisions to join and leave work
In summary, the frequent reference to legal, social and economic constraints that is evident in these accounts suggests that the possibility of acting on their preferences was very limited for many of these women from the very beginning of their working lives. Although a minority of returners represented joining the civil service as the fulfilment of a preference, most of their accounts are dominated by the constraints that existed for women in Ireland at the time – these were familial, financial, ideological and related to conditions in the economy. These findings challenge rational choice theory and preference theory. In order to understand these accounts it is necessary to place them in their social, economic

and historical context, as suggested by Crompton and Harris (Crompton & Harris, 1998). The narratives of the returners support relational theory in that many of the women appear to have been influenced in their choices by concern for those in their family of origin. The civil service offered a good job until marriage.

The next major decision for these women was leaving the civil service and for many of them there was no choice as they could not legally continue to work. Even for those who joined after the marriage bar was removed, strong societal norms of familism and the lack of childcare meant that if they had a preference to stay at work, it would have been extremely difficult to act upon it since most of the major societal institutions (the church, the state, the education system and the workplace itself) supported the normative role of women as full-time mothers (O'Connor, 1998: 100-101). There was almost no publicly funded childcare and taxation favoured a male breadwinner family arrangement. These findings support other recent research which suggests that education and socio-economic resources as well as affordability and availability of childcare affects women's possibilities for staying at work (Fagan, 2001; Collins & Wickham, 2004; Tomlinson *et al.*, 2005). The results suggest that social norms had a strong and direct effect on these women's choices. While some women embraced the role of full-time child-rearing and were happy to leave work, some resisted it and found (more badly paid and insecure) work elsewhere. Towards the end of this period, in the late 1970s there were the beginnings of legislative change (see Chapter 9) which would assist women in combining work and family and a slight change in societal attitudes towards women working.

5.6 Late joiners

This section introduces and gives a brief description of the remaining group – that is the ten workers who joined the civil service at a relatively late stage in their working lives - after spending several years working in other occupations. These constituted an unexpected sub-sample in the study, initially unanticipated when the research was planned. However, they include a key percentage of older workers and were included in the study. They are interesting in terms of certain issues, notably pension entitlement and attitudes to retirement raised in their interviews. The analysis of their reasons for joining is postponed until Chapter 9, because their decision to join took place at a much later time than the others. These workers differ from returners in that most of them have been in the full-time

paid labour market more or less continuously. Typically, their only breaks from the labour market were for periods of involuntary unemployment. Half of them had worked in private sector employment for many years and had been offered and had accepted redundancy packages, while the other half had been involuntarily unemployed. Briefly, most of the late joiners were recruited after the removal of the upper age limit for recruitment. The average age of the late joiners now is 56 and the oldest is 63.

5.7 Conclusion

While the long-term workers, senior managers and returners joined in similar socio-economic conditions there were clear differences between the groups as to whether they actively had a preference to join the civil service and as to whether they were free to act on their preferences.

Only 38% of long-term workers and even fewer (27%) of the returners referred to joining the civil service as the positive fulfilment of a preference, while a higher proportion (42%) of managers say they deliberately chose it as their preferred occupation, because of attractive features of the job. This difference is attributable to a number of factors including variations in the level of education, socio-economic resources and parental aspirations for them in their family of origin. Due to prior knowledge of the civil service and/or parental aspirations for careers for their children, more of the senior managers saw their jobs as careers from the start and joined at EO or AO level. Most of the returners and many of the long term workers generally didn't have high levels of education or have career guidance from teachers or parents and many did not appear to have formed a "preference" for a career in the civil service.

There are also obvious gender differences with most of the returners and the women long-term workers having joined at CA level in accordance with gender norms, legislation and civil service recruitment policy at this time that constructed women as "temporary workers" until marriage. Gender alone was not a determinant of decision-making, however. Many of the senior women managers did have a preference to have a career and were able to realise those preferences, in contrast to the situation of returners or long term workers.

While there does appear to be a high degree of intentionality and freedom to act on their preferences among almost half of the managers group, the accounts of those in the other groups are dominated by familial and financial constraints suggesting the importance of relational theory in analysing their behaviour. Their accounts suggest that any analysis needs to be socially and historically contextualised; that it is not sufficient simply to assume that their behaviour is primarily due to acting on preferences.

The findings in relation to returners in particular problematise rational choice theory and preference theory and demonstrate that the degree of autonomy to exercise choices enjoyed by many of these women was in fact extremely limited. They also suggest that authoritative social norms (familial and gendered) were very much in evidence at this time in Ireland. Concern for their family of origin and the societal expectation that they would inevitably have to leave work on marriage led many of the women to join the civil service without putting a great deal of thought into their decision. The authoritarian educational system did not lend itself to young people developing a strong sense of agency.

These findings challenge preference theory and suggest that social constructionist, relational and life-course approaches are needed for a comprehensive analysis of work-life decision-making. As will become clear in later chapters, some of the constraints that affected the freedom to choose of men and particularly women in some groups had subsequent effects that limited their choices later in life.

The next four chapters divide the sample of civil service workers into sub-groups, each with particular characteristics based on their length of service and their position in the organisational hierarchy. The first of these groups are long-term workers in grades other than senior management.

Chapter 6

Long-term workers: orientation to work and promotion decision-making

6.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the work orientations and promotion decision-making of long-term workers, most of whom are located at middle management level in the Civil Service at the time of interview. This group of 14 men and 15 women have worked in the civil service for most or all of their working lives. Two thirds of them (19 out of 29) are at the top grade of middle management (Higher Executive Officer [HEO]) and thus have progressed quite considerably in their careers. The grade of HEO represented the top rung of the lower organisational hierarchy (Mahon, 1991) – a relatively high achievement for those who entered as CA or CO. It is still an executive level rather than a (higher) policy-oriented post occupied by those at AO or above. Half of the long-term workers are located in offices outside of Dublin.

A distinctive feature of this chapter is the possibility it creates for analysing the work-life orientations of men as well as women. It has been pointed out that there has been a relative lack of qualitative research into men's work orientations until recently (Charles & James, 2003; Nolan, 2009; Emslie & Hunt, 2009); this chapter presents interesting comparisons by gender in terms of work orientation and attitudes to promotion.

In addition, the data presented below make it possible to assess the relative importance of preferences and constraints on decision-making. In the light of Catherine Hakim's arguments for preference theory, we might expect that there are qualitatively different "types" of workers all of whom fit into either the work centred, adaptive or home-centred categories (see Chapter 2). The men and women in the present group who have been promoted several times to reach HEO level (all of whom are long-serving workers in a large bureaucratic organisation) might be assumed to have had homogenous work-centred preferences which largely shape their work-related decision-making and outcomes. We

might expect that their current decision-making would be based almost entirely on fixed *a priori* preferences formed at the start of their working lives.

The chapter is organised as follows. Firstly there is a brief profile of the workers. Next, their orientations to work and their promotion experiences and intentions are outlined. The perceived structural and other barriers to promotion in the work-place are described and the impacts of other factors such as age, prior resources and (gendered) social norms are discussed. Changes in attitudes to promotion over time are outlined. On the basis of this analysis, the workers are then assigned to four different categories (more differentiated than the typologies in preference theory) which describe their current relationship to work. A dynamic model on the lines of the continuum model developed by Walters is presented to conceptualise the ways people may move from one category to another over the course of their working lives (Walters, 2005). Finally there is a concluding section in which the issues raised at the beginning of the chapter are addressed in the light of the findings.

6.2 Profile of long-term workers

While the men and women in this group are located in a mixture of grades, all but 4 of the 29 are either at supervisory or middle management level. At the time of interview, the majority (two thirds) of workers in this group were at HEO level. This is the highest grade below senior management level. It is the most senior supervisory grade and it forms the top tier of middle management. The remainder are from a mixture of grades with all except four at supervisory level. Half of the group are based outside of Dublin in regional offices.

Table 6: Grade and gender of long-term workers

(29 respondents)

Grade	Male	Female	Total
HEO	10	9	19
SO and EO	2	4	6
CO	2	2	4
Total	**14**	**15**	**29**

Age, education, marital status and hours worked

In general, the women in this group have a much younger age profile than the men with 87% of the women and only 36% of the men in the youngest 50-54 age-group; while 28% of men and no women are in the oldest (60-64) age-bracket. We might expect that these men would be less likely to apply for promotion given that they are very near retirement age and that the women might be more likely to apply, given that they are younger.

Table 7: Age profile of long-term workers

Age-group	Male		Female		Total	%
	No.	%	No.	%		
50-54	5	36	13	87	18	62
55-59	5	36	2	13	7	24
60-64	4	28	0	0	4	14
Total	14	100	15	100	29	100

Almost two thirds (nineteen) of the workers are married; two are separated or divorced; seven are single and one is in a long-term relationship with a partner. Of the twenty who have children, half of them (ten) have two or less children; ten have three or more children; the remaining nine don't have children. A higher proportion of the women in this group (67%) than of the women senior managers (30%) have children. Interestingly only one third of the women who have reached HEO level have children, while most of the male HEOs have children and, as was true for male senior managers, most had wives working unpaid in the home who had primary responsibility for childcare while their children were young. Most work full-time; two (both women) are job-sharing and one woman works term-time[19].

Overall, the members of this group have slightly lower levels of education than the managers. At the time of interview, 17% have an intermediate level of secondary school education; 55% (9 men and 7 women) as opposed to 33% of senior managers have Leaving Cert as their highest level of education. Slightly fewer (28%) of this group as against 33% of senior managers have third-level primary or postgraduate degrees. More women (4) than men (2) have primary degrees while two men also have post-graduate degrees and two men

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[19] If a parent has a child aged 18 or under, they can take unpaid leave during the summer school holidays.

and one woman have Certificates or Diplomas which they acquired since they joined the civil service.

The amount of hours worked over and above the basic requirement per week is a possible indicator of the centrality work has in the lives of this group and thereby a possible indicator of work orientation. Just 28% (8) of this group works more than the required hours. Most are women HEO's who say that they intend to apply for promotion in the future. This represents a much smaller proportion than of the senior managers group, of whom two thirds typically work more than the required hours (see Chapter 7). Two (one man and one woman) used to work long hours, but don't any longer. Almost all of this group (26) take all or most of their annual leave.

6.3 Work orientation of long-term workers

In order to analyse the work orientations of older workers, this thesis adopts and expands a simple classification system used by previous researchers in the literature to categorise orientations towards work (see Rose, 2001; Doorewaard, Hendrickx & Verschuren, 2004). In this categorisation work orientation is split into three different types. The first of these is intrinsic (also known as "job") orientation: this describes a situation where people work because they like intrinsic features of the work itself, because it offers them opportunities for a career and enables them to use their abilities and qualifications. The second is social (or "people") orientation, where people enjoy work because of the social interaction it brings. The third is extrinsic (also called "money" or instrumental) orientation, where work is done mainly for income and financial security (Doorewaard, Hendrickx & Verschuren, 2004). While analysing the data from this study, it became clear that an additional category would be necessary to capture the way that for many of these civil servants, work related to a fundamental sense of personal identity. They see it as providing a sense of (sometimes gendered) identity and structure, and/or as a vehicle for personal development in their lives. Examples of this include the statement: "it's an important part of who I am", "it's an important part of my personal development"; "it gives me structure and identity"; or "it gives me independence". A recent study by Charles and James also mentions the importance that work has for reinforcing a sense of personal identity (Charles & James, 2003: 255).

The main source of data used to analyse the work orientations of these workers is the answer provided to the question "What does work mean to you?". Participants were however able to give a number of responses to the question. Therefore the responses did not simply fit into just one of the four categories above, but could include a number of the categories.

Table 8: Orientation to work: long-term workers

(29 participants)

	Male		Female		Total*	%
	Number	[%]	Number	[%]		
Extrinsic (money) orientation • Financial security (8) • Means to an end – e.g., pay mortgage(6) • Conditions of flexibility / security (5) • Pension (2)	10	**71**	11	**73**	21	**72**
Intrinsic (job) orientation • Interest / challenge of work itself (10) • See it as a career (5) • Like serving the public/making a contribution (3)	10	**71**	11	**73**	21	**72**
Social (people) orientation • Enjoy the day-to-day interaction (9) • Enjoy socialising with colleagues (5)	6	**43**	8	**53**	14	**48**
Identity orientation • Gives identity/structure to life/ "organisation man" (6) • Personal development / fulfilment (4) • Independence (3)	6	**43**	7	**47**	13	**45**

* Research participants typically gave more than one response

As we can see from the number of responses to the question, work holds more than one simple meaning for most participants. The four categories outlined above were not mutually exclusive. i.e. most interviewees appear to simultaneously hold a number of orientations towards work. For example, some of them explicitly say they see work both as a career and as a means of earning money. Interestingly, even many of those who don't see

work as a career, see it as forming an important part of their identity and are very committed to their work (see also Collins & Wickham, 2004).

6.3.1 Extrinsic (instrumental) orientation

The accounts of 72% of both men and women long-term workers indicate that they have an extrinsic or instrumental orientation towards work. Some of the most significant things about work for them are external to the work itself – factors such as pay, conditions, or the fact that it provides them with a livelihood and/or a pension.

Just over 25% highlight the fact that their work gives them financial security. Four people specifically mention the recession in Ireland in the 1980s during which many of their friends/relatives were unemployed or made redundant and said they appreciate the security that their job gave them at this time. This demonstrates the impact that economic conditions may have on orientations to work and echoes previous research findings in the UK (Charles & James, 2003).

For two women who were either the main or the sole breadwinner in their households, the financial independence that work gave them was highly significant. One woman who is divorced and has sole financial responsibility for her child says:

> Security is very important to me. It's not a career – it's mainly keeping a roof over my head.
>
> (Interview 63, female SO, 50-54)

However, only 17% (5) suggest that the sole meaning work has for them is the earning capacity it gives them. Three of these are people who are disillusioned with work, perhaps because of being passed over for promotion; one person simply regards work as a means of earning money and was never ambitious. Finally, an important meaning of work for some was as a means of providing for their pension.

While 71% of long-term workers do place emphasis on the earning capacity and on the external factors such as financial security (including pension benefits) that their job provides, only one fifth of these workers have a solely extrinsic orientation towards work; the remainder combine this with other orientations.

6.3.2 Intrinsic (job) orientation

A similarly high proportion (72%) of male and female workers in this group indicate that they have an intrinsic work orientation. In other words they value their work because of characteristics inherent to the work itself and/or the role they play in their organisation, the sense that they have a career, giving a good service and/or having developed expertise. Only 17% of this group say that they see their job as a career.

Over a third of this group (ten people) explicitly say that they enjoy the work itself. They mention that they derive satisfaction from problem-solving, setting their own goals and achieving them, the realisation that they have developed expertise in a particular area and serving the public.

One woman (a HEO) who is clearly very absorbed by and committed to her work describes it as follows:

> My work is always changing and high pressure. I have a flair for design and get a chance to use that in my job
>
> (Interview 66, female HEO, age 50-54)

Her work is quite central in her life as she goes on to say:

> It dominates my thoughts. When I'm at home, even making the dinner, I'd be planning things to do and getting inspiration and things like that, which I hate, but it's just the way I'm made.
>
> (Interview 66, female HEO, age 50-54)

Three people mention that they have developed expertise in their area and are recognised for this as a source of fulfilment for them:

> I mean I enjoy the job and you think sometimes I have a very limited knowledge but then people outside the job will ask you questions and you are able to answer them ... I mean I would know a lot about the laws of pubs and pub licences and stuff like that ...I've built up expertise in a whole lot of areas...
>
> (Interview 61, male HEO, age 60-64)

Overall, there is a strong commitment to work among both the men and women in this group and they derive satisfaction from the work itself. However only one sixth of this group have purely intrinsic work orientations.

6.3.4 Social (people) orientation

Almost half (48%) of the middle-managers group mention that they value the social aspect of their work. This represents a larger proportion of participants than among senior managers (34%). Five mention that they value the social interaction they have with colleagues. The type of interaction they describe varies from socialising outside of the office with colleagues who have become friends to simply enjoying the daily social interaction at work. One woman (a HEO), has made good friends at work with whom she meets and socialises outside work on a regular basis:

> Six or seven of the HEOs get together every couple of months and have a bottle of wine
> and a natter. We all get on well together.
> (Interview 43, female HEO, age 50-54).

The more usual comment is that they enjoy the social interaction that takes place during the course of the working day:

> I like the people I work with – we get on great. I like the building and the sense of
> community.
> (Interview 45, female SO, age 50-54)

> I like knowing the staff and being comfortable with them. I can take five or ten minutes out
> of the day to chat with them. I think there's a good atmosphere in the section.
> (Interview 42, female HEO, age 50-54)

Others enjoy actually working with others as part of a team:

> The part of work I enjoy like I wouldn't like working on my own – I like working with
> other people .... and I like meeting people.
> (Interview 54, male HEO, age 55-59)

Another two people said that they had been given a good deal of support from colleagues or managers in times of trouble – for example, when they themselves had been ill or when

their parents were dying and they mentioned this as something which positively disposed them towards work. There is very little gender difference with regard to social orientation with six men and eight women valuing work for social interaction. This poses a challenge to preference theory which suggests that it is mainly women (particularly home-centred and adaptive women) who value work for this reason.

6.3.3 Identity orientation

45% of these workers speak of work as very important in providing them with a structure and purpose to their lives, and some regard their work as forming an important part of their personal identity and value. For example, one male HEO said he derives a great deal of satisfaction from his role as a Social Welfare facilitator. He described an incident where he encouraged a client who had very little formal education at secondary level to participate in a return-to-work course and his subsequent gratification when she succeeded in graduating from that course and went on into a career of her choice. A small number (three) of these people (mostly men) state that they identify closely with the organization/department in which they work, a response that resonates with the theory of "organization man" (Whyte, 1956).

One man who no longer expects to be promoted still regards work as an important part of his identity as a breadwinner:

> Well as a male, it's still there, I suppose – you describe yourself by your job, don't you? I mean it gives you some kind of status.
> (Interview 52, male HEO, age 55-59)

One woman (a HEO) describes herself as a "conscientious workaholic" and her description of her work-life balance indicates that she doesn't have many interests outside of work other than her family. Another woman (also a HEO) suggests that work is such an important part of her identity that she is anxious about finding something to do when she retires. Another man echoed this theme; when asked what work means to him, he responded:

> Well it means a lot because if I was to suddenly stop, I don't know what I would do.
> (Interview 39, male EO, age 50-54)

Another woman who had suffered from a serious illness and who was caring for very ill parents said:

> *Participant*: "Well it *(work)* was a life-saver. My father was in the early stages of Alzheimer's and my mother had a serious stroke. It wasn't easy cope at home".
> *Interviewer*: So you were glad to be coming back to work then?
> *Participant*: I was because it was a bit of structure back in my life again".
> (Interview 48, female CO, age 50-54).

The importance of work as a means of providing a structure in people's lives particularly in the context of illness or marital breakdown has been identified in the literature (Skucha & Bernard, 2000; Skinner, 2003). Another woman (HEO) who had recently been promoted when asked about what work meant to her said:

> It is because it is my own development, you know it is very developmental for me, whatever path I choose in it.
> (Interview 65, female HEO, age 60-64)

This gives some support to Beck's individualisation thesis (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), which suggests that people in post-modernity regard work as forming just one component in the creation of their work-life biography.

Two women emphasise the fact that their work gives them financial independence which in turn establishes their sense of personal independence:

> I've been totally independent and supported both of us and paid the mortgage.
> (Interview 63, female SO, age 50-54)

This woman is divorced and it was important for her that she was able to support her child and her job enabled her to do that. When asked what her work means to her, the other woman, who is the main breadwinner in her household, said:

> It means independence – I'm financially secure and in control of what I do – it helps define what I am.
> (Interview 40, female EO, age 50-54)

These accounts suggest that even where they are disillusioned with their career prospects due to location or perceived age or gender-related discrimination, many of them remain very committed to their work because of its role in establishing their personal identity.

6.3.5 Discussion of work orientations

One of the most obvious points to be made from observing the sheer number of responses in Table 8 is that most of these civil servants report having multi-stranded orientations to work. Most of them value work for both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons, and to a lesser extent for social and personal identity reasons. One male HEO exemplifies this multiple orientation: The following quotes illustrate a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic orientations:

> Clearly I do it for money as well, but in the last 10 years, I would like to think that I have made some contribution with the work I have done.
> (Interview 47, male HEO, 60-64)

> I would see it as more that it is both...it provides me with a livelihood and a certain standard of living and I also get satisfaction from working.
> (Interview 57, male HEO, age 55-59).

> Well, I suppose I work to bring in the bread alright – you know I think I see it as a career ... I see it as something I like going to and I like working with the people I am working with.
> (Interview 53, male HEO, age 55-59)

This man is extremely committed to his job and to his career and frequently works more than the required hours. He has applied for promotion and intends to do so again in the future. He appears to hold at least three orientations (extrinsic, intrinsic and social) to work simultaneously. This suggests that models which divide people into those who are either exclusively work-centred (intrinsic) or non-work-centred (extrinsic or social orientations) are not useful since the reality is more complex. Walters suggest that instead of there only being three types of work orientation, there is likely to be a continuum of orientations towards work which may be affected by policy change, and different experiences in and outside of the workplace (Walters, 2005). A model of orientation to work which is more capable of reflecting the complex meanings work holds for people will be outlined in more detail below.

Secondly, for many people work appears to provide a fundamental sense of identity. Being a breadwinner, or providing a structure and purpose to their lives is an important function that work holds for some men and women, even when they are at lower levels of the organisational hierarchy and when there are few prospects of promotion. This supports findings in some recent research (see Nolan, 2009) and counters the view that work in contemporary society does not carry the same importance it might have formerly (Beck, 2000).

Finally, there are no major differences in the proportions of men and women holding the various orientations. We might have expected to see substantially more women with social and extrinsic orientations and fewer women with intrinsic orientations, but in fact proportions for intrinsic and extrinsic are identical.

6.4 Long-term workers - promotion experience and intentions

This section analyses workers' accounts of one of the main decisions facing them at this point in their working lives, that is, their promotion intentions. This allows us to consider whether people see themselves as free to realise their choices, or whether they regard themselves as constrained in various degrees. In this section, I briefly describe the routes to promotion for workers in this group. I then outline the factors that they consider to be barriers to promotion for them and conclude by discussing the gender differences in career trajectories.

The career trajectories of these long-term workers are quite varied, but in general the women in the group appear to have been promoted more often and more recently than the men (6 of the women and only 2 of the men have been promoted in the last 5 years).

Table 9: Long-term workers – number of times promoted

(29 respondents)

	1 time or less	2 times	3 times	4 times	Total
Male	6	5	2	1	14
Female	2	3	3	7	15
Total	8	8	5	8	29

Eight people from this group (most of them men) had either never been promoted (4 people) or had only been promoted once (4 people). A further eight had been promoted twice – most of these were men, another five three times and the remaining eight (7 of whom are women) had been promoted four times.

6.4.1 Pathways to promotion

This section gives an overview of the general route(s) to promotion for these workers. The progression from Clerical Assistant (CA) to Higher Executive Officer (HEO) is illustrated in the chart in Figure 1 in Section 1.5.2. It should be noted that the grade of CA (most of the women in this group entered at this level) has been discontinued since 1995. COs may apply for promotion to Staff Officer (SO) or Executive Officer (EO) depending on which Department they are in. EOs may apply for promotion to HEO. For most HEOs, Assistant Principal is the next grade to which they can be promoted and this promotion would bring them into the ranks of senior management.

As described in Chapter 1, there are a number of ways to be promoted – through the "senior suitable" system or through confined promotional competitions within a department. People may also apply for inter-departmental promotion competitions. Candidates usually take exams (aptitude tests, written tests based on assimilating information and presenting a case), followed by a competitive interview. They are then placed on a panel and assigned to a post in a Department as vacancies arise. There has been a move away from senior suitable towards more competitive interviewing in recent years.

Almost half of the group (13) had joined as Clerical Assistants and all of these were women; two people had joined as Clerical Officers and two as Executive Officers; six had joined the public service in other capacities such as Post Office Clerk and had later joined at CA or CO level. Finally, six had joined specific areas of the civil service known as Departmental Grades. This meant the grades were specific to a given department and for several years they could only apply for promotion within a given stream[20]. All of these workers are now in the main general service promotional stream.

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[20] These included tax officers and assistant preventive officers in the Customs and Excise and Revenue services and Social Welfare Officers in the then Department of Social Welfare. However those in Customs and Excise and Taxes typically had to go through two promotional steps to reach HEO grade and so faced a roughly equivalent trajectory, since most of the men joined at CO grade or its equivalent.

6.4.2 Future promotion intentions

Most of the group (23) have at some stage applied for promotion from their current grade while only four men and two women have never applied.

Table 10: Promotion intentions of long-term workers

	Men		Women		Total	
	No.	[%]	No.	[%]	No.	%
Will apply	5	36	8	54	13	45
Unlikely to apply/ Don't know	2	14	2	13	4	14
Won't apply	7	50	5	33	12	41
Total	14	100	15	100	29	100

A good proportion (41%) of the group say either that they don't intend to apply for promotion in the future or that it is unlikely that they will do so). They give a variety of reasons for this. By far the most common reason given by almost one third of the respondents (5 men and 4 women) is that they are living and working in a regional location and do not want to move – some in order not to disrupt their family, and some because they themselves had become very involved in their local community. Promotion would involve a change in job location. However, many of these respondents (both men and women) said they would have liked to progress in their career, but had accepted that they had to make a trade-off between career and quality-of -life and, at this point had adapted to this over time. This fact that many people have to adapt to what is realistically available to them has been found in previous research (Collins & Wickham, 2004; Walters, 2005). Crompton and Harris refer to this type of behaviour as "satisficing" (Crompton & Harris, 1998). Some are less accepting of this trade-off and hope that de-centralisation would offer more opportunities for staff in regional locations in the future. (See Section 6.4.3 below for discussion).

Almost half of the group (5 men and 8 women) do intend to apply for promotion. One interesting gender difference is that seven out of the eight people who have been promoted most often are women. All of these women except one intend to apply for promotion in the

future, which suggests that their positive experience in the work-place is very important in influencing promotion-related decision-making. It is likely that the presence of more women in middle management has acted to make promotion a more realisable prospect for them than would have been the case in the past.

6.4.3 Factors that affect the promotion decisions of long-term workers

This section outlines factors that affect long-term workers' decision about applying for promotion – many of these can also be considered barriers to promotion. The section is organised by discussing those factors related to the work organisation itself, then broadening the discussion to examine factors outside of work including beliefs about age, caring for parents, prior resources and societal gender norms. The focus of this section is on the current decision in relation to promotion, but there will also be some discussion of factors that affected promotion decision-making in the past.

As will become clear, it is the way in which factors at work and outside work intersect that actually affect people's promotion decisions. The following table summarises the responses to the question: "Do you see any barriers to promotion for you?"

Table 11: Perceived barriers to promotion – long-term workers

(29 respondents)

	Male (14)		Female (15)		Total	
	No.	[%] of total	No.	[%] of total	No.	%
Perceived age-related discrimination	9	64	6	40	15	52
Location-family, quality-of-life	4	29	5	33	9	31
Perceived gender-related discrimination against women (6); against men (2)	3	21	5	33	6	54
Interview	3	21	2	13	5	17
Exam	3	21	2	13	5	17
None	2	14	3	20	5	17
No financial incentive	3	21	1	7	4	14
Caring (parents)	2	14	2	13	4	14
De-centralisation)	2	14	1	7	3	10
Specialised kills not valued	3	21	0	0	3	10

	1	7	2	13	3	10
Belief they are too old	1	7	2	13	3	10
Low educational qualifications	1	7	1	7	2	7

* Participants could mention more than one barrier.

6.4.3 (a) Work-related factors affecting promotion decision

Perceived age-related discrimination

Quite a high proportion (52%) of this group say they believe that there is age-related discrimination in the civil service; a further 10% think that there may be age-related discrimination.

Table 12: Perceived age-related discrimination

(29 respondents)

Gender	Yes		No/Don't know		Possibly		Total
	No.	[%]	No.	[%]	No.	[%]	No.
Male	9	64	4	29	1	7	14
Female	6	43	7	47	2	13	15
Total	15	52%	11	38%	3	10%	29

One man expressed the following view:

> It appears to me now that the age the management and the system would like you to be promoted to AP somewhere in your 40s ... and after that they don't really want you. ... they are phasing out promotion of senior suitable which is another indication to me ... that the older you get the less they want you for promotion purposes.
> (Interview 54, male HEO, age 55-59).

Another male HEO who believes that there is age-related discrimination supported his opinion by referring to cases of age-related discrimination that had successfully been taken to the Equality Tribunal (see Chapter 4):

> Age? Yeah – we've had about two or three cases that were brought to court. I saw one of the interviewers asked one of the interviewees why he was going for promotion "at his age" and he said it was to improve his pension and that was a case brought to court last summer.

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This man believed there was an unspoken age limit beyond which, once reached, it would be difficult to get promoted:

> Well my current age, I'd say 55 is where it starts. Last throw of the dice that would be.
> (Interview 52, male HEO, age 55-59)

The perceived cut-off point ranged from mid-forties to mid-fifties. Some of those who believe there is age-related discrimination simply say that this is their perception and don't back it up with examples or evidence:

> Age, I believe now I don't know this for sure, but once you're over 45 no-one wants you. You won't get on in promotion ... I've no concrete evidence, but that's my impression.
> (Interview 41, female SO, age 50-54)

This concept of an informal "cut-off point" beyond which it is thought that people are unlikely to be promoted in a given organization has been found in previous research (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999: 159; Loretto & White, 2006a: 501).

One woman had been seriously ill in the past which prevented her from applying for promotion for a number of years. Now she believes that at her age she is at a disadvantage – both she and others believe that the fact that they are older or have been in the same grade for a number of years means they are automatically seen by management as less dynamic/committed. In support of this contention, she gave an example of how in a recent competition where people were being assigned to a higher payscale by a manager, a woman considerably younger than herself was given higher marks than she was. This woman then had to prove that she had in fact produced more work output and she was eventually vindicated and her marks were increased. However, she felt that there was age discrimination involved – that the younger person was more visible and vocal and was therefore assumed to be more dynamic and productive. This echoes findings in previous studies regarding the discursive invisibility of older women workers (Ainsworth, 2002).

In summary, there is quite a wide-spread perception among this group that there is age-related discrimination in the civil service. Five people say that it has stopped them from applying for promotion. Others say they believe it exists in the organisation, but it hasn't

directly affected them – some because they had already decided not to apply again in any case. The success of the cases brought to the Equality Tribunal suggests that there is some basis for this belief.

Location

The next most often-cited barrier to promotion for this group is location. This is an example of how work structures can impact on the freedom to realize preferences. Nearly a third (31%) of respondents who work in regional offices believe that this situation is and has been a barrier to promotion for them. Four of these had moved to a particular regional location over fifteen years ago and they accepted at that stage that, because of this, they were unlikely to be promoted. Most of these accepted this as a trade-off for a good quality of life for their family and themselves. As one male HEO expressed it:

> An AP would be the next grade up for me now and promotion would mean moving and I have no intention of moving for anybody. You know there is more to life than promotion … there are people in this job and they are very career orientated; they walk over their family, not walk over, but they are away in Dublin from Monday to Friday – sure that is no bloody life! Oh I mean I would consider it far more important to be happy in my work and to be with my family.
> (Interview 54, male HEO, age 55-59 – regional location).

Two other male HEOs (also married with children) in regional locations have a similar attitude and had not applied for promotion since moving to their current location. In one case, there were additional reasons for the man not to move because his wife was teaching locally; his children were settled in local schools and he himself was heavily involved in sports and other voluntary work in his community.

Both of these men felt that their only realistic chance of promotion would have meant moving to Dublin. They believed that they might have reached PO level had they stayed in Dublin. One of them had been very highly-placed (first and third) in previous promotional competitions and believed on that basis that he would probably have reached PO level, if he had stayed in Dublin.

For these men, the decision to move to a region years previously meant that they felt they were then constrained in their freedom to pursue a career path. It was the lack of promotional outlets in the regions rather than a "preference" not to pursue a career that was

the main influence on their decision-making in relation to promotion. These men made a conscious decision to place the quality of life of themselves and their family above promotion, given the very limited opportunities for promotion in a regional location. However, they expressed the hope that the new de-centralisation programme would mean that for HEOs in their position in the future, promotion would not be closed off to them.

Some of those in regional locations had moved more recently into Departments where there was a larger de-centralised office in one area (i.e. not just a smaller local or regional Social Welfare Office or Revenue office) and thus more openings for promotion. Some of these, particularly those in the younger 50-54 age cohort, still hope to be promoted and are striving to achieve career success as well as quality of life.

Perceived gender discrimination

In all, 21% of long-term workers - 33% of women (5) and 7% of men (1) believe that there is currently gender discrimination against women in the civil service – they base this on their perception that women were more likely to be promoted in recent competitions. A smaller proportion (two men) believe that there is currently gender discrimination against men – again this appears to be based on a general perception rather than on specific examples. However, none of these said that perceived gender discrimination would directly prevent them from applying for promotion, although two men said they were generally disillusioned because they felt that they were the wrong age and gender to be promoted.

A further four men and one woman said there had been gender discrimination against women in the past. Previous research has performed statistical analysis of cohorts of men and women recruited at the same grades in the same year and found that men were much more likely to be promoted in the past than women (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999).

Interview

A sizeable minority (17%) regard certain aspects of the promotion process as constituting a barrier to promotion for them. In recent years, there has been a move away from promoting people by the "senior suitable" system to a competitive interview process. Some of the interviewees regard having to do interviews as an impediment. They believe that people who are able to present themselves well at interview but are not necessarily capable at their work will be promoted over those who are excellent workers but who may not be able to

convey this to an interview board. Three men and two women felt that competency-based interviewing isn't a good means of judging what a person is capable of in the workplace and that there should be some other mechanism by which their work could be valued. The following quotes illustrate this:

> Well it's often just on the interview alone, you know – how you present yourself at that one particular interview whereas you might be working really hard and doing great things … but sometimes there'd be people who were well up on current affairs because they spent their time reading and not really participating.
> (Interview 40, female EO, age 50-54)

Interestingly, this view was corroborated in the interviews with managers, many of whom said that they saw staff they regarded as very good workers not being promoted because they simply weren't able to give a good account of themselves at interviews.

Aptitude tests a barrier to older workers: indirect age discrimination

17% of this group (3 men and 2 women) said that the aptitude tests for HEO were more suitable for younger people and they see this as a barrier for themselves in relation to inter-departmental promotion. This confirms previous research findings (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999: 158). In common with returners and managers, many of them didn't believe that aptitude tests were a good means of assessing people's work-related skills

> I have done written exams, public exams and I think younger people are quicker you know – they are more suited to the tests than older people – they are kind of speed tests.
> (Interview 39, male EO, age 50-54)

The fact that this form of aptitude test is an integral part of gaining inter-departmental promotion and the fact that this group of men and women are older acted as a deterrent to applying for promotion for some people. For some people who had not been free to apply for promotion previously due to caring responsibilities, having young children or illness, they felt that now that they were free to apply, having this type of test put them at a disadvantage compared to younger applicants. This may be a form of indirect discrimination (see Section 4.3 above)..

No barriers

Five people (17%) say they see no barriers to promotion for themselves. They believe they have as much of a chance to progress as anyone else. Most of these are people who have recently been promoted.

No financial incentive

This is a disincentive rather than a barrier to promotion. 14% (three men and one woman) were comfortably off and felt that there was no financial incentive for them to apply for promotion. Most of the men had been promoted to HEO level early in their career and the woman is also a HEO and her husband earns a good salary. She said she would only apply for promotion if she didn't get an interesting HEO posting. In the past she hadn't applied for promotion when her children were young and when asked about her decision-making said:

> and being satisfied with the job – if I am getting enough job satisfaction out of the job. I mean I was lucky in my postings ... a change is as good as a promotion in a way. You get satisfaction out of it. Ok, you don't get more money, but I mustn't have needed the money. (Interview 41, female HEO, age 50-54)

This tendency among a minority of women has been found in previous research on women who worked in the Customs and Excise service in the UK (Palmer 1996: 137). This woman is very committed to her work, but is not single-mindedly following a career path.

Specialised skills not valued

10% of long-term workers (three men) believed that their specific experience in a specialised stream within the civil service had not been and would not be valued by promotion boards – they based this view on their lack of success in previous interviews. These men had worked either in the Customs and Excise Service or as Social Welfare Officers. This view was echoed by another man who said that several of his former colleagues (in Customs and Excise) had already taken or were about to take early retirement due to the perception that there was no career future for them under re-structuring.

De-centralisation

Three people (10%) said that de-centralisation (having to re-locate in the event of being promoted) would deter them from applying for promotion – this is much less often cited

among this group than among the managers partly because many of this group either live in the regions already or have decided several years ago not to apply for further promotion.

6.4.3 (b) Non-work factors affecting promotion decision.

The following discussion focuses on the range of factors outside of work that impact on decision-making around promotion. These include age, prior resources and gendered societal norms.

Impact of age on promotion decision-making

For a small minority of people, beliefs about age affect their likelihood of applying for promotion. While most (90%) of long-term workers believe that people aged 50 or over can work as effectively as younger workers, a few (one man and two women) have themselves internalized ageist attitudes and believe that people slow down as they get older. The following quotation typifies this:

> At higher levels, age would rule people out. People do slow down. My mind was sharper in my forties.
> (Interview 51, female HEO, age 55-59)

This supports recent research with older workers in the UK which has found that some of them have internalised ageist attitudes about the effectiveness of older workers (Loretto & White, 2006a). This combines with the widespread perception held by 52% of long-term workers that there is age-related discrimination in the civil service and acts as a deterrent. This is particularly evident among men with 64% of them perceiving that there is age-related discrimination.

Impact of prior resources – education

Just under a fifth of long-term workers had not completed secondary school and two people (7%) believe that their relatively low educational qualifications make it difficult for them to be promoted at higher levels:

> You're competing against younger people as well that I would find would have a lot more education maybe than I would. A lot of them come in with degrees nowadays or a lot of full-time education.

This supports previous research carried out by Crompton and Harris that found that lack of prior endowments such as low levels of education can act as an important constraint on people achieving their preferred employment status (Crompton & Harris, 1998; James, 2008).

Impact of societal gender norms

This section considers the impact of societal gender norms on promotion. While people do mention gender norms as affecting their promotion-related behaviour, the effects vary over the life-cycle. It appears that most of the men did comply with the traditional "breadwinner" norm, but this didn't always lead to promotion-seeking behaviour. Some married women assume the traditional role of regarding themselves as the primary carer for children (outside work) and some didn't apply for promotion for a period because of this, if promotion meant re-locating or having unsuitable hours. There is evidence of more egalitarian attitudes among some women, and these women are more likely to apply for promotion, as are some women (married and single) who do not have children.

Impact of male breadwinner norm on men's promotion decision-making

Gendered social norms such as the requirement to be the breadwinner appear to have different effects at different stages of the life cycle, depending on the pay and conditions associated with their job. Four staff say they have no financial incentive to apply for promotion, because they have an allowance with their current job as the following excerpt shows:

> ... there's no financial incentive for me to look for an AP post because we have a special weekly allowance; we have a travel allowance which really means a free car.
> (Interview 59, male HEO, age 50-54)

Another male HEO said he didn't apply for promotion for several years in the past when his children were young because he was earning so much from travel and subsistence and didn't feel the family could afford to do without it at that stage. He didn't apply for promotion until he had reached the end of his time in that post. At that stage, at 45, he felt that he was regarded as too old to be promoted. This is an example of the perceived requirement to be a breadwinner working against this man progressing in his career.

Many of the men (7 out of 11 who were married) had wives who worked full-time at home and looked after their children while they were in the formative stages of their career. This meant that, as the main breadwinner these men had an incentive to apply for promotion when their children were young (see also Charles & James, 2003). They didn't have responsibility for childcare and were free to move in the event of being promoted. In this case, the breadwinner norm acted as an incentive for them to apply for promotion, particularly in the early stages of their career. For others if they had moved to a regional location and their children were settled in school, they did not want to disrupt their family at a later stage in the life-cycle.

Impact on women of assuming primary responsibility for care of children

In general, the women workers (now in their fifties) describe having children as making it less likely that they would apply for promotion when their children were young. The idea that having children is an impediment to women's careers, but not to men's has been confirmed by a recent study which found that a majority 58% of women in the civil service said that having children had a negative effect on career progression for them, while a majority of men felt that it had a positive or neutral effect on their career (Valiulis, O'Donnell & Redmond, 2008: 74). It is significant that almost two thirds of the women in this group have children as opposed to only one third of the women who have reached senior management level. Moreover most of the nine women in this group who have reached HEO level either have no children (6) or less than two children (1) as opposed to the ten male HEOs, most of whom (6) had three or more children. Most of these men had wives who performed most of the childcare.

The accounts of most (six) of the nine women who have children suggest that most of them regard themselves as having the primary responsibility for the day-to-day care of their children. For example one woman didn't apply for promotion while her children were of school-going age because being promoted would have meant that she would have to move location and she wanted to be able to collect her children from school. One woman worked in a specialized post and if she had been promoted she would have had to be prepared to move.

> If you got the promotion, it invariably meant that you would be outside of Dublin, so it just didn't suit…..it would have been a deterrent to go for promotion because you would have

been tied by school times; you would hear that a lot from women....you are glad to have a job that suits the family context, you know that you are the 9 to 5 type of thing.

(Interview 50, female HEO, age 50-54).

This woman is not now going to apply for promotion even though she is very interested in her area of work and has developed expertise in it. This appears to support the value of relational theory and life-course theories (see Chapter 2) for understanding the promotion-related decision-making for this group. This group didn't see themselves as free to act on any preferences they may have had for promotion; they felt constrained because of their family obligations.

Four women worked in a job-sharing capacity for over ten years in order to spend time with their children. One of them believes that this affected her promotion prospects as at that time job-sharers were not taken seriously in relation to promotion by management (see Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999: 154-155). However, some women didn't comply with gender norms regarding childcare. One woman said that having a child gave her the impetus to apply for promotion, whereas before that she had not seen herself as having a career – she is the breadwinner in her household and her husband often takes care of their child. Three other women report sharing the housework and childcare more or less equally with their husbands – they have a less traditional attitude and don't necessarily regard themselves as primarily responsible for care of children outside of work. A smaller proportion of women who have reached HEO grade than of those at lower grades have children. Two thirds of the women who have reached HEO level do not have children, so for them there was no conflict between the demands of children and career; by contrast five out of the six women below HEO level have children. Overall, for most women with children in this group, there were difficulties in combining the pursuit of a career with caring for children while for men, there were not.

Impact of providing care/support for parents on promotion decision
14% of respondents (two men and two women – all of whom were single) cited caring for their elderly parents as a factor in not applying for promotion in previous years. For example one male HEO needed to be near his elderly father and was reluctant to apply for promotion because if he succeeded he would almost certainly have had to move to Dublin.

I didn't go forward since. The main reason for it was that up to last year my father was still alive and was quite elderly so I felt I needed to stay close to him, because I was responsible for his care and welfare… and I felt that the worries at AP level, AP's are very responsible. (Interview 59, male HEO, age 50-54)

Another man said he wouldn't have been free to travel away from home for a few days at a time since he was taking care of his mother outside of working hours and he felt that if he had been promoted, he would have been expected to travel away from home for extended periods. This is another example of a social norm negatively affecting careers. Although the provision of informal care for dependant family members is more typically associated with women, in this case it affected men who had responsibility for the caring role in the same way.

6.5 Changes in ambition over time

A final issue connected both to work orientation and promotion is ambition. Ambition can be seen as an indicator of preference – that is, that those who are ambitious have work-centred preferences. This section considers whether long-term workers do appear to have fixed preferences with regard to careers. Hakim claims that women's work orientations (including ambition) are explained in terms of work-plans and educational choices made when young. This is a voluntaristic explanation and assumes that there is a great deal of choice available to the young person with regard to education and work (Proctor & Padfield, 1999).

Table 13: Changes in ambition over time

	Men		Women		Total	
	No.	[%]	No.	[%]	No.	%
Never very ambitious	1	7	3	20	4	14
Always ambitious	2	14	2	13	4	14
Less ambitious now	9	65	6	40	15	52
More ambitious now	2	14	4	27	6	20
	14	100	15	100	29	100

Only 14% of the men and women in this group regarded their work as a career when they started. This accords with findings in a recent study of ambition in the civil service where

women were generally found to have lower levels of ambition on entry to the civil service (Valuilis, O'Donnell & Redmond, 2008). Some people did regard the civil service as a career, but subsequently didn't apply for promotion due to the fact that they were carers or lived in a particular location and felt that they couldn't or didn't want to move for family reasons. Some people who worked in specialised grades (with an allowance) said they didn't have a financial incentive to apply for promotion or that their promotional prospects were restricted to a particular stream for a number of years. For others, their sense of themselves as ambitious or having the possibility of a career was something that developed only after a number of years. This is particularly true of four of the women in this group.

Never ambitious

In all 14% of long-term workers say they were never ambitious for promotion. One woman says she was never ambitious and that this hasn't changed over time. She sees working as an unplanned departure from her preferred life-option which was to work unpaid in the home. However, due to the ending of her marriage, she needs to work out of financial necessary:

> I never really had any ambition at all and I never thought I'd be working for the rest of my life – naturally I thought... that I'd give up work at some stage, but the way things have turned out with me, it wasn't to be.
> (Interview 63, female SO, age 50-54)

This woman is divorced and provides for herself and her son who is now a student. She regards her work largely as a means of providing for herself and her child and moved to an office located near her home in order to facilitate collecting her child from school throughout primary and secondary school years.

Always ambitious

In this group 14% (2 men and 2 women) say that they were always ambitious and that this hasn't changed over time. Some of these had aspired to reach HEO grade and now feel that they have achieved their goal. One woman says:

> Oh yeah, I wouldn't say I was happy enough to stay a CO now and retire as a CO.
> (Interview 43, female HEO, age 50-54)

A male HEO in a regional location also describes himself as having always been ambitious:

> The driver would have been one's own ambition.
>
> (Interview 57, male HEO, age 55-59).

The opportunity to act on that ambition was not available to him for many years because he wasn't prepared to move too far from a regional location while his children were young.. He sees de-centralisation as offering him greater opportunities for promotion now.

Less ambitious over time

Just over half (52%) of the group say they have become less ambitious over time. There are gender differences in this group of which most (9) are men and six are women; 65% of men and only 40% of women are less ambitious now. Five of these are men who moved to regional locations a relatively long time ago – between 15 and 25 years previously. They accepted at that point that they would not be promoted and became less ambitious at that stage.

Other men have become less ambitious over time; they are disillusioned because they believe that their particular skills are not valued by senior management in their Departments. One man and one woman have been passed over for promotion and they say they are disillusioned and less ambitious than they were originally. Another woman says she had originally aspired to be a Principal Officer, but this had changed since she had children – she is now content to remain at HEO level. She doesn't want the extra stress that she believes would accompany being Assistant Principal. For others, their level of ambition is now reduced after caring or illness prevented them from applying for a number of years and they now believe they are too old.

More ambitious over time

More women than men (27% of women and 14% of men) among long-term workers state that they have become more ambitious over time. Typically in this group, women say they became more confident as a result of being encouraged to apply for promotion and succeeding. One woman who is now a HEO describes the important role that mentoring played in her career. When she had applied for promotion to CO and to SO, she received no encouragement; however that changed in her subsequent attempts at promotion:

Later on, I found say your supervisor or whatever would say "Go for it" and give you loads of help and encouragement. I wouldn't have gone for probably EO because I would have thought "I'm not able for this" where they'd say "Yes, the quality of your work and your knowledge – you should do it". I wouldn't have had the confidence to do it.

(Interview 42, female HEO, 50-54)

This woman was subsequently promoted twice – this demonstrates the significance that mentoring can have for staff. The need for mentoring of women in an attempt to redress the gender imbalance at senior levels was noted in a previous study of the civil service and it appears that these women may have benefited from the implementation of this policy (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). Another woman who became more ambitious and focussed after she had a child – she was the main breadwinner in the family – also said that she became more confident after she succeeded in a promotional competition – she too had received encouragement from her line manager. Whereas originally her ambition was to reach EO level, she now aspires to become an Assistant Principal.

There appears to be a difference by gender in changes in ambition over time, with more women in this group tending to become more ambitious over time and a higher proportion of men becoming less so. This is partly due to the fact that when these women joined the civil service 30-35 years before at the entry-level grade, many of them expected only to have a job until they got married, certainly not a career; there were relatively few role models of women at middle management levels in the civil service; for example in 1971 only 13% of HEOs were women (Doyle, 1999: 116). Finally a higher proportion of women than of men are in the lower (50-54) age category. There appears to be some evidence of a change in social norms with one woman being the main breadwinner and her husband taking the role as primary carer. Finally a higher proportion of HEOs are now women and being promoted to HEO appears to be a more realistic aspiration for women now.

6.6 Long-term workers: categories

Reflecting upon and analysing the findings in relation to work orientation and promotion intentions for workers in this group, it appears that certain patterns or typologies are discernible that describe their current relationship to work. These may be represented as four categories, two of which are very similar but not quite identical to those proposed by Catherine Hakim in her preference theory – "work/career-centred" and "home/personal-centred" (see Chapter 2). It should be noted that as the label implies, the "work/career centred" category are devoted to both work and career progress. The category "home/personal centred" implies that the person is interested primarily in outside work interests; this includes other interests besides home and family – for example, they may be heavily invested in a hobby or other skill to which they devote most of their energy and interest. However, while Hakim has a third category she calls "adaptive", this does not appear to be sufficiently differentiated to describe the workers in this sample. There are important differences among the individuals that Hakim would label "adaptive". For example, some of these workers have settled for their existing position in the promotional hierarchy and do not intend to apply for promotion in the future. I have labelled this group "satisficers", a term adapted from Crompton and Harris (1998) who used it in their study of bankers and doctors[21]. Another set of what Hakim would include as "adaptive" workers are still actively applying for promotion and are also trying to maximise their activities outside of work – this group is labelled "maximisers/aspirers".

The categories I have decided to use in this study are as follows.

- **Category 1: Work/career-focused**. The worker regards work and career as of central importance.
- **Category 2: Maximisers.** The worker tries to maximise performance both at work and outside of work, and is still ambitious for promotion.

---

[21] The term satisficing was defined by Chafetz and Hagan as 'reaching a reasonably high level in both spheres (work and home) rather than attempting to maximise one to the substantial exclusion of the other'. They give examples: "satisficing may entail a decision to exit the labour force temporarily, to refuse a geographical transfer or a promotion entailing additional work commitment, or opting not to perform apparently voluntary overtime work actually expected of 'committed' employees" (Chafetz & Hagan, 1996: 197-8, 203-4).

- **Category 3: Satisficers**. The worker has compromised on pursuing a career path; having a balance between family/outside work interests and career is more important. However, they may still be very committed to the job and may accept promotion if offered.
- **Category 4: Home/personal-centred.** The worker is mainly interested in work as a means of earning money/social interaction and has no career ambitions.

Men and women were assigned to the various categories according to their stated intentions regarding promotion in the future, their work orientations and their descriptions of important experiences both inside and outside of the workplace in their work-life biography. I use a life-course approach to assign each individual worker to a category. This takes into account the worker's experience inside and outside the workplace, their relationship with their family and their intentions regarding promotion. Appendix D provides a table summarizing some of the data used in this thesis to allocate the workers to categories[22].

Table 14: Long-term workers: categories

	Men		Women			
	No.	[%]	No.	[%]	Total	%
Work/career –centred	0	0	2	13	2	7
Maximisers	4	29	4	27	8	28
Satisficers	6	42	4	27	10	34
Home/personal–centred	4	29	5	33	9	31
Total	14	100	15	100	29	100%

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[22] This table provides information abstracted from a larger table which contains more biographical details. These are not presented here in order to protect the identity of research participants.

The results of this analysis indicate that both men and women in this group have heterogeneous orientations to work. Most men (42%) and women (27%) are in the satisficers group – they don't intend to apply for promotion, but are committed to work and would take promotion if it were offered to them. The next largest group is the personal/home-centred group where work is seen (by 29% of men and 33% of women) mainly as a means of earning money or having social interaction; they are not interested in promotion or don't believe they will succeed in being promoted. However, 27% of women are either maximisers or unambiguously work/career-focussed (13%). Four of the men are maximisers and none of them is unambiguously career-centred. For example, while two men describe themselves as ambitious, they are not prepared to move in order to gain promotion. It is interesting that such a high percentage of men are either satisficers or home-centred. These results would appear to question the implications of preference theory – i.e., that most men are homogenously work-centred.

Attitudes to promotion have remained the same throughout their career for two men and three women over time, while over two-thirds of the men and one third of the women are less ambitious now. Some of the now "less ambitious" women have become so due to the difficulties they experienced in combining child or parent-care with pursuing a career. The men are less ambitious now mainly because they were promoted at an early stage to HEO or equivalent posts and moved to regional locations and accepted then that the quality of life and the allowances they had were an acceptable trade-off for very limited promotional opportunities. By contrast, many of the women have become more ambitious over time, particularly those who started at the bottom of the promotional hierarchy and have been promoted relatively recently. Many of them say they were encouraged by their line managers to apply for promotion and on succeeding, they became more confident and ambitious. This echoes findings in the literature that suggest that for women of this age, the notion of a career was highly unlikely at the time they started work, and that it is only when they are successful that they envisage a career for themselves (Still & Timms, 1998).

6.6.1 Long-term workers' categories: changes over time

Given the obvious changes in work orientations over time, the link between individual workers and these categories must be seen as contingent and subject to change. (see, for example, Gillian's story below, where she moves from being a satisficer to being work-centred over a relatively short period of time). An adaptation of the "continuum model"

devised by Walters is a useful means of conceptualising how changes over time might be modelled (Walters, 2005: 211-2). These categories may be located along a continuum going from "work/career-centred" at one end to "home/personal-centred" at the other. This dynamic model can be used to capture the fact that people tend to move between categories over time. Negative experiences may make a person less work-centred and they may move from being career-centred to being satisficers (as did many of the men who moved to a regional location earlier). Positive experiences in or outside the workplace may have the opposite effect.

Figure 3: Categories of long-term workers: changes over time

A	B	C	D
Home/Personal Centred	Satisficers	Maximisers/Aspirers	Work/Career Centred
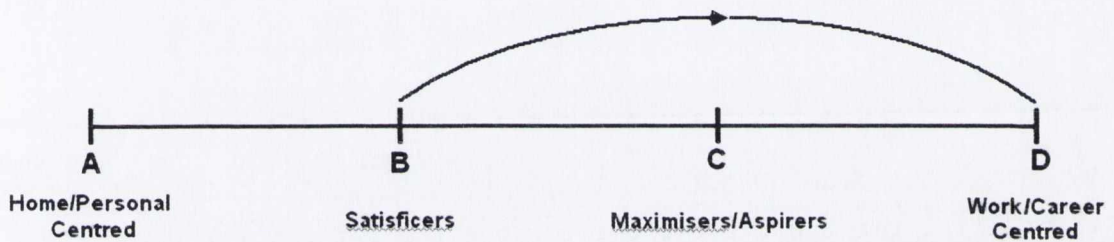
The following example demonstrates the kind of dynamic interplay between different factors that affect the self and its orientation to work that may happen over time due to changes in organizational structure and familial responsibilities.

Gillian's story
"Gillian" (interview 65, female HEO) is a woman who had been in the same post and remained at the same grade for approximately ten years due to the geographical location of the job (in a large town in a regional location) and to the fact that she was the main support for her father. There was no promotional opportunity in that location and since she felt she needed to stay there and be available to live with and care for her father if needed, there was effectively little hope of promotion for her. Five years before the interview took place, new posts were created in her region and she was encouraged by her managers to apply and was successful at interview. After her promotion she became involved in different types of work which she says "broadened my whole outlook really". She describes her

work-life prior to that as "plodding" even though she was committed to it and enjoyed it. She describes herself as a "late starter" and said she became more alert for opportunities after being promoted.

Subsequently a new process was introduced in her Department which created a large number of extra jobs. She felt that this suited her skills and applied for it. In the meantime her father died and this meant she was free to accept promotion even if it meant moving to Dublin. She did and was promoted for the second time in quick succession and this changed both her narrative and her conception of "self" in relation to the world of work. In her own words she said "it was an opportune moment for me to change completely". Another factor which helped bring about this change in her outlook was that she became involved in voluntary work in a group which encouraged personal development and achievement among its members. She is now determined to apply for promotion to the next level and sees her work as a career.

> I won't say it is the only thing in my life … But it is very important. I don't have other distractions.
> (Interview 65, female HEO, age 50-54).

This demonstrates that the relation of the self to work is contingent, and that it is necessary to pay attention to the accounts people give to decipher such change. In this case a structural and policy change at work accompanied by a change in domestic circumstances apparently transforms this worker from one of Hakim's "adaptives" to a "career-centred" individual.

In terms of the model described above, Gillian would have moved from "satisficer" (Point B) to "work/career-centred" (Point D): In her case, social norms, change in caring role, organisational policy and external factors all played a part in forming this career-centred orientation (see Cohen, 2005; Giele & Elder, 1998).

Tom's story is a typical example of the trajectory of the male HEOs in this group and illustrates that although preferences are important, it is often not possible to realise those preferences because of organisational/locational constraints.

Tom's story

Tom was ambitious at the beginning of his career. He lived and worked in Dublin and joined as a CO. He was promoted once to an EO position. He then applied for HEO and was placed 5th in a HEO competition. His wife wanted to move to a location "down the country" and he applied for and got a transfer to their desired location. However, he soon realised that there was no prospect of promotion in the region. Promotion would mean moving back to Dublin. At that point his children were settled in school and he was very involved in organisations in the local community. He than had to choose between living most of the week in Dublin away from his family and pursuing a career path or staying as a HEO and having more time with his family. Although, he had a strong preference to progress in his career, he decided to accept that it was unlikely that he would be promoted. While he remained committed to work, he also became very involved in local sports organisations and this provided him with an arena to use some of the abilities and energies that he would otherwise have devoted to his career. In figure 3 below, he moved from being work-centred (Point D) to being a satisficer (Point B).

Figure 4: Long-term workers: changes in category over time

A	B	C	D
Home/Personal Centred	Satisficers	Maximisers/Aspirers	Work/Career Centred
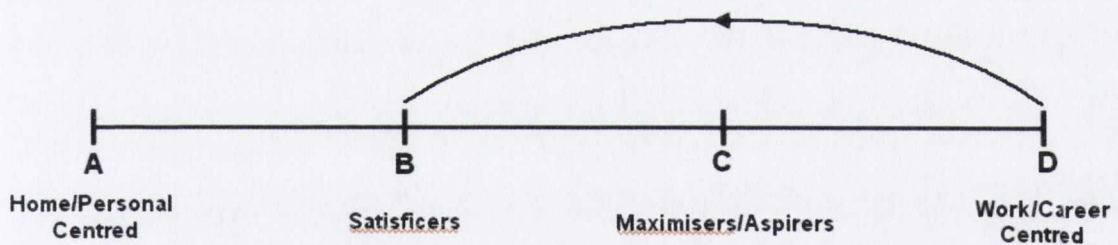
Tom's story demonstrates that structural constraints in organisations together with concerns about family can bring about a (reluctant) change in preferences – an acceptance of what is perceived to be available. Again we see that it is not necessarily preferences that are the main determinants of outcomes.

Clearly, these examples show that the notion of "self" posited by preference theory is insufficient insofar as it assumes the stability of self and a "fixed" orientation to work from the beginning of their career for those with work-centred preferences. To properly account for self-narratives such as those described above, it seems more useful to invoke a model

of 'self as process' – that is, a dynamic agent capable of change over time and in response to environmental and policy change.

6.7 Conclusion

The accounts given by these men and women appear at several levels to challenge preference theory and its arguments that people are possessed of *a priori* preferences at an early age and that preferences are the main determinants of work-place decision-making. Firstly, gendered social and familial norms and economic constraints appear to play a significant role in influencing the formation of preferences and the subsequent choices of long-term workers. This supports the kind of theoretical approach proposed by Susan Himmelweit who emphasises the influence of gendered social and familial norms on an individual (Himmelweit, 2001).

Secondly, the prior resources to which people have access in their family of origin such as lower levels of education and relative lack of money, together with gendered social norms appear to act as constraints on the extent to which people may form preferences in the first place (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Collins & Wickham, 2004). In this case, people accepted jobs in the civil service because there were very few other jobs available. The fact that many men and women may either not envisage work as a career or be free to engage with a career of their choice due to economic or other circumstances in their family has been demonstrated empirically in previous research and is relevant for the men and women in this group (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Collins & Wickham, 2004; Charles & James, 2003).

As well as preferences and gendered familial norms, the interaction of men and women with structures in the workplace itself is important in shaping workers' perceptions of the opportunities available to them (see Casey, 1995, 2002). Such structures were "gendered" particularly in the past – for example, the fact that most Clerical Assistants were women rendered it more difficult for them to advance. A previous study indicates that only a very small percentage of those who joined as CAs had advanced beyond EO level 30 years later (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). These gendered structures have been identified in previous studies of large bureaucratic organisations and were regarded as having helped create an "underclass" of women workers who were most unlikely to progress and who performed routine work thus freeing up men to follow male-defined career-paths (Witz &

Savage, 1992:11; Mahon, 1990: 52). Structural changes in the workplace such as de-centralisation also impacted on the careers of both men and women.

Among these long-term workers, life-cycle changes such as having or providing for children, or beginning to or ceasing to provide care for a dependent parent, influenced work orientations and decision-making. For example, the impact of having children and being the primary carer had the effect of deterring some (but not all) women from applying for promotion at least for some years and tended to have the opposite effect on men, confirming previous research findings (see quote from interview 50 above). Both men and women who were the main carers for dependent parents said that this had deterred them from applying for promotion in the past and that this changed when they no longer had to fulfil this role. A recent study of workers of all ages in the civil service confirms that people's level of ambition "ebbs and flows" over time (Valiulis, O'Donnell & Redmond, 2008).

Age appears to be an important factor in a number of ways. There is a strong perception that discrimination exists confirming previous findings (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999: 159). This perception deters one sixth from applying for promotion. A small number consider themselves too old to apply. One important age-related organisational barrier to promotion are the aptitude tests which some feel are more difficult for older people. This may be more of an issue for older women who were not free to apply due to caring responsibilities at a younger age.

The results seem also to challenge the notion that men and women are committed to one "central life interest" – instead they suggest that many men and women are committed simultaneously to both work and "outside work" interests (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Charles & James, 2003). There is also evidence that even those men who are full-time workers are not homogenous in their preferences as Catherine Hakim's theory might predict (Hakim, 2000). Instead, some are career-centred; some are committed to both their work and families/outside interests, some are not ambitious, but are committed to their work and some are disillusioned and have a mainly instrumental approach to work. This supports recent research findings on men's orientations to work (Charles & James, 2003; Nolan, 2005, 2009; Emslie & Hunt, 2009). The important influences that shape the labour market choices of men in this group are the ways in which they negotiate their experiences both inside and outside the labour market. These range from their experiences of

unemployment prior to working in the civil service, their negotiation of gendered social norms such as the requirement to be the main breadwinner, the way they adapt to the realisation that they are unlikely to be promoted, the implications of moving to a regional office and/or the impact of being in a specialised occupation which limits their opportunities for promotion.

In the next chapter, we look at another group who are also long-term workers, but this time at the level of senior managers. While considering the same issues as the present chapter, the relative seniority of these workers enables us to test Catherine Hakim's predictions relating to "self-made women and men" in particular (Hakim, 2000: 164-165).

Chapter 7

Senior Managers

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the work orientations and promotion decision-making of 38 senior managers (28 men and 10 women). "Senior managers" are those at the grade of Assistant Principal or above, and they typically have had continuous service for many years. They have achieved a higher position in the civil service hierarchy than the long-term workers in Chapter 5, although they may not have been promoted as frequently.

This chapter allows us to test some of theoretical issues raised in Chapters 1 and 2. For example, if we view the women managers among this group through the lens of preference theory, we might expect that because they have worked most of their lives in one organisation and have reached senior management level, they should all conform to Hakim's category of "self-made women" and to be unambiguously work-centred. Similarly, we might expect the men in this group to have homogenous work-centred preferences. Yet as we shall see the empirical evidence assembled here does not fully support these assumptions.

We might also expect to find confirmation of the "bureaucratic narrative" of workplace identity defined by Whyte in terms of the figure of "organisation man" (Whyte, 1956). "Organisation man" is characterised as being deeply committed to the organisation in which he/she works (Whyte, 1956; Roper, 1994). As the gender specificity of the name might suggest, this conceptualisation was typically associated with male workers and managers whose primary role was to be the family breadwinner. It was assumed to be prevalent where there was a stable organisational structure which provided a recognisable career path, such as the civil service. Given that some of these organisational conditions apply to the managers in the present study, we might expect that their accounts of their working lives would reflect "organisation man" narratives. Yet as we shall see, the predictable "organisation man" career path appears to be frequently disrupted by social

changes such as changing conceptions of the role of men in families, and political developments such as civil service de-centralisation.

This chapter is organised in a similar way to the previous one. Firstly, there is a brief review of some previous empirical research on older managers, and an outline of the gender breakdown at senior management level in the civil service. Next there is an analysis of the work orientations of the senior managers and an assessment of their decision-making in relation to promotion. In the section following that, there is an analysis of changes in promotional ambition over time for these workers. Finally, taking all the preceding analysis into account, managers are assigned to categories (set out in Chapter 5) which describe their current relationship to work. These categories form an alternative model to preference theory – one which has more differentiated categories and which accommodates the possibility that people may move between categories as their orientation to work and attitude to promotion changes over time.

7.2 Older managers: age, gender and civil service context

There has been little sociological research specifically on the impact of age on the work-related decision-making of older managers, although the issue is sometimes mentioned in studies on managers in general, (see for example Scase & Goffee, 1989; Roper, 1994; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999).

Some of this research suggests that some male managers, in their fifties, may cease to be psychologically immersed in their work particularly if they see no further prospect of promotion and/or are over-burdened. They may withdraw somewhat and begin to consider early retirement (Scase & Goffee, 1989: 13). Others who still anticipate promotion and/or who are very committed to their organization remain engaged. The focus in this chapter is on promotion-related decision-making, although a few people do mention that awareness of impending retirement affects their promotion decision-making (this will be discussed in Chapter 9). Research has found that the impact of societal changes such as the greater involvement of women in the labour market may mean that wives and families are not so likely to re-locate to facilitate their manager husband's career progression (Scase & Goffee, 1989: 15). This can cause career/family conflicts for some male managers.

There has been some empirical research conducted on the impact of gender on the careers of managers which attempts to explain the relative scarcity of women in senior management positions (see for example Schneer & Reitman, 1995; Still & Timms, 1998). There have been at least three types of explanations given for this. Some sociologists focus on the different types of socialisation that men and women typically receive in their families and from society in general, including the educational system. Alternatively, economists (particularly rational choice theorists) typically argue that women invest less in human capital (education and training) and work less hard than men, and that this explains their lack of success in the workplace. Other theorists (particularly feminist theorists) attribute at least some of the difference in outcomes for men and women to organizational or institutional discrimination (see for example, Bergmann, 1986; Mahon, 1990; Crompton & Harris, 1998; Collins & Wickham, 2004).

There is a body of empirical work on women in management internationally (see for example, Vinnicombe, 2000; Davidson & Burke, 2000; Lyon & Woodward, 2004) which considers different aspects of women in management. However, there is very little empirical research specifically on the careers and working lives of managerial and professional women over the age of 50 (see Still & Timms, 1998; Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2005). There appears to have been relatively little research on the individual careers of managers in Ireland, and none specifically on older managers.

There has, however been some research which highlights the relatively low representation of women at senior management level. One recent study gives some statistics relating to women in management in Ireland, and outlines the position of women in the civil service in the year 2000 (McCarthy, 2004). Among McCarthy's findings are that while the proportion of women in management in the public sector in Ireland has increased somewhat from a very low base, there is still vertical segregation by gender in the civil service and the proportion of women at the very top levels of management in the civil service remains very low: in 2000, women accounted for only 9% of Secretaries General (2 persons), 12% of Deputy Secretaries (13), 16% of Principal Officers (13). At the lower end of senior management, there were more women; for example just over a quarter (27%) of Assistant Principals were women (McCarthy, 2004).

However by 2005, (at the time the interviews took place) there was a considerable change in this situation. The proportion of Assistant Principals who are women had increased to 33% while the proportion of Principal Officers had increased to 23% by 2005 (Department of Finance, Equality Unit, 2006: 46). The increase in the proportion of Assistant Principals who are women is quite significant and appears to be at least partly attributable to the Gender Equality Policy which was implemented from 2001 onwards as a result of concern at the persistently low levels of women at senior management level (see Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999; Department of Finance, 2006: 21). The policy specified a target – that one third of AP level posts would be filled by women – and this target has been achieved. However, the proportion of Principal Officers who are women is still relatively low.

It had been recognized in the mid-1990s by the Civil Service that, despite the implementation of earlier gender equality policy measures, women continued to be under-represented at senior management level. A study commissioned by the Civil Service to examine the reasons for this identified three main categories of factors as contributing to the gender imbalance at higher grades in the civil service:

- organizational, cultural barriers (e.g., women are excluded from the core; long hours culture; work/family conflict; negative perception of job-sharing; lack of female role models);
- personnel policies and practices (negative historical legacy of marriage bar; lack of gender balance in interview boards; ageism etc.);
- societal factors (sex-role stereotypes, expectations and outcomes seen as still present in the civil service).

(Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999, cited in McCarthy, 2004).

There has been a limited amount of research conducted on the experiences of and attitudes to promotion of individual managers in public sector organizations in Ireland. Evelyn Mahon carried out a study of mothers in the civil service in the late 1980s and published a number of articles based on this research which was commissioned by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights (Mahon, 1990, 1991). This research looked at the experiences and intentions of mothers at a time when equality policies were relatively new. At that time there were relatively few women in senior management and most of these didn't have children. At around the same time an Irish study based on focus groups in two Irish Health Boards looked at the effect of the gendered nature of organizational culture as

a barrier to women's promotion (O'Connor, 1996). This study found that the public sector organizations concerned had a rigid male hierarchical management structure where women were not expected to be in senior management; it concluded that there needed to be profound changes in organizational culture and in the attitudes and practices of senior management in order for women to progress. The current chapter will add to the empirical literature by eliciting the views of both men and women in management, and focusing specifically on older workers in a particular organization.

7.3 Profile of managers

This section provides an outline of the demographic characteristics and the gender breakdown of the sample. Managers from five different Departments were interviewed. Almost one third were working in locations outside of Dublin.

Table 15: Grade and gender of senior managers

	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	[%]	Number	%
Principal Officer/ Assistant Secretary/ Director-General	11	69	5	31	16	42
Assistant Principal	17	77	5	23	22	58
Total	28	74	10	26	38	100

As this table shows, 26% of the senior managers interviewed in this study are women. This is an over-representation of the total proportion of older women at higher managerial level in the civil service. However, this high proportion of women was included in order to provide sufficient interviews to allow comparison of results by gender. In the event, there was a somewhat lower percentage of women Assistant Principals in the sample (23%) as opposed to the actual proportion (33%) in the Civil Service as a whole in 2005; on the other hand there was a higher proportion of women at Principal Officer level in the sample (33%) as opposed to 23% in the Civil Service as a whole (Department of Finance Equality Unit, 2006: 46).

Age, education, marital status and hours worked

Men and women senior managers have broadly similar levels of education. For approximately one third of them Leaving Cert was the highest level of education attained; a further third also had certificates or diplomas, and the remainder had degrees and professional qualifications. All of the senior managers were aged between 50 and 60, with an average age of 56. As a group, they were older than the "middle managers" described in Chapter 5 (only 45% of senior managers were in the youngest age-group, as opposed to 62% of middle managers).

Table 16: Age group of senior managers

Age	Men		Women		Total	% of total
50-54	13	**46**	4	**[40]**	17	**45**
55-59	10	**36**	6	**[60]**	16	**42**
60-64	5	**18**	0	**0**	5	**13**
Total	28	**100**	10	**100**	38	**100**

Less than half (45%) were aged between 50 and 54, while nearly the same proportion (42%) were aged between 55 and 59. Almost one fifth (18%) of men and no women are in the lower end of the 60-64 age group. Given this, we might expect that all of them might still have prospects of promotion – however, it should be noted that many of those aged 60 will be eligible to retire early with full pension, because they will have completed 40 years service and this may affect their attitude to promotion.

There were striking gender differences in terms of marital status and the numbers of children of those at senior management level. All 28 of the men were married, while five of the women were single; three were married; one was separated and one was in a long-term relationship with her (male) partner. Only 33% of the women managers had children while all of the men interviewed had children; over two thirds of them had at least three children. This is similar to trends for women in management in the UK and Europe and the Irish civil service where it has been found that relatively fewer women managers are married or have children when compared to men (Vinnicombe, 2000, Lyon and Woodward, 2004). It also reflects the findings of a recent survey of managers in the civil service which found that 86% of senior male management and 56% of female management are married, while 86% of male managers and only 53% of female managers have children

(Valiulis, O'Donnell and Redmond, 2008). 71% of the men had spouses/partners who were working in the home when their children were young. Three of the single women managers are currently providing the main support for a parent outside of working hours. One woman work-shares because she cares for a parent. One man takes term-time leave to spend time with his family.

The interviews reveal that there is generally a culture of working long hours among senior managers; this is one indicator of a high commitment to work. Almost two thirds of managers (24) say that they usually work more than the average hours per week that they are officially expected to work. A further seven managers occasionally do so but the remaining seven do not – four of the latter used to do so but have stopped in order to have a better work-life balance. There is a large variation in the number of hours worked, ranging from people who work daily from 9.15 to 5.30, to people who regularly work from 8.00 am to 7.00 pm with half an hour for lunch and who also work at week-ends. Hours spent at work don't appear to vary by gender – 70% of women and 71% of men work more than the average hours. This suggests that most women who have reached senior management have adopted "male" norms of working long hours, reflecting international trends (Lyon & Woodward, 2004).

7.4 Work orientation of senior managers

This section analyses the orientations to work of senior managers using the categorization introduced in Chapter 5 above – that is intrinsic, extrinsic, social and identity orientations.

Table 17 below summarises the responses of the senior managers to the question "what does your work mean to you?":

Table 17: Orientations to work – managers

(38 respondents)

	Male		Female		Total	% of total
	No.	%	No.	[%]		
Intrinsic orientation • See it as a career (10) • Interest/challenge of work itself (11) • Enjoys job, variety, training, serving public etc (9)	22	79	8	**80**	30	**79**
Extrinsic (money) orientation • Means of earning money, comfortable (10) • Security (9) • Lifestyle(2) • Pension (4)	21	75	4	**40**	25	**66**
Social (people) orientation • Friends, socialising (6) • Colleagues – atmosphere important (5) • Support from colleagues (3)	10	26	4	**40**	14	**37**
Identity Orientation • Identifies with organization/department (6) • Identifies self as public servant (6) • Personal development (3)	8	21	7	**70**	15	**39**
Total	60		22		84	

* Research participants typically gave more than one response

The total number of responses suggest that work orientations among this group are multi-stranded and complex. Some interviewees described having two or three orientations simultaneously. Although Hakim's schema might lead us to expect that senior managers would be essentially "work-centred" in orientation, the findings here give a more complicated picture. As will become clear in below, not only are the managers'

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orientations multiple; they appear to change over time depending on individuals' experiences both inside and outside the workplace, on structural and institutional factors and on people's stage in the life cycle.

7.4.1 Intrinsic orientation

As we might expect, given their position in the career hierarchy, a slightly higher proportion of those at senior management level (79%) appear to have an intrinsic or job orientation when compared with long-term workers (72%). There is very little gender difference, with similarly high proportions of men (78%) and women (80%) reporting that they find their work interesting or challenging. As we might expect, a higher proportion of senior managers (26% as opposed to only 17% of long-term workers) describe their work as a "career". One Assistant Principal said:

> I see myself as a professional civil servant – a career civil servant.
>
> (93, male Assistant Principal, age 50-54)

Another manager said:

> It's a career and a substantial part of my life.
>
> (105, female PO or above, age 50-54).

Several people speak about their enjoyment of the work itself. There is a wide variation in the kinds of roles managers play within the civil service, ranging from managing a social welfare office or being in charge of IT in an area, to being a policy expert, to implementing changes in the way a department is run. Some people enjoy seeing a project through from start to finish, others enjoy drafting speeches for Ministers; others derive enjoyment from making sure that the operation in their area runs smoothly and anticipating problems. Others spoke of the feeling of achievement they have from making an impact on society at government level. One Assistant Principal in a policy area described it as follows:

> I enjoy the work because it is interesting, but I enjoy it because I'm well able to do it too. I enjoy that feeling that I'm on top of the job and I suppose that at this stage, I feel I'm kind of seen as a bit of an expert.
>
> (87, female Assistant Principal, age 55-59)

Another manager liked being able to apply the principles of good management to whichever area he was assigned. He described having been moved to an area where he had no experience and how he managed to grapple with the difficulties of this. He saw this as part of the skills needed to be an effective civil servant – a capacity for adaptability. He was about to implement a policy he didn't agree with, and saw it as his role to ensure that it was done as well as possible.

7.4.2 Extrinsic (money) orientation

Two thirds (66%) of respondents (25) value work for extrinsic reasons. Seven of these (particularly those who don't foresee themselves being promoted) see their work primarily as a means of earning money. As one manager put it:

> I suppose at this stage, it's just a way of earning money … in a way, it's going through the motions at this stage.
> (Interview 91, male Assistant Principal, age 50-54)

Another Assistant Principal who had decided some time ago not to apply for promotion was also quite clear about the role of work in his life:

> Work is really a source of income for me. Family comes first and relationships
> (Interview 73, male Assistant Principal, age 50-54)

Three people specifically mention that work provides them with the means to earn money for their pension and that this is important to them. Nine people state that conditions of work in the civil service such as security are important to them. This is often the case where the person has worked in an insecure job previously, or where their spouse is in insecure employment (see Charles & James, 2003; Nolan, 2005). A higher proportion of men (75%) as opposed to women (40%) value work for extrinsic reasons. This confirms previous research on the civil service where it was found that men are more likely to say that they apply for promotion for extrinsic reasons (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999: 108-9). This may also be because many of these men were the main breadwinner in their household and earning money was very important.

As was the case for long-term workers, several people valued work for both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons. For example, a group of 8 people saw their work as providing them with a comfortable lifestyle, but this was in addition to seeing their work as a career.

7.4.3 Social (people) orientation

Well over a third (37%) of senior managers (10 men and 4 women) describe work as an important source of social interaction for them. Four people describe having developed close friendships in the civil service; two say that almost all of their friends are at work. However, five people simply enjoy the collegiate atmosphere at work, the way people work as a team, going for coffee or perhaps lunch with their colleagues; they don't socialize with them outside work. Three people mentioned having received great support from their colleagues at a time when members of their family were dying and said that they appreciated this. Overall a lower proportion of managers than of returners or long term workers mention the social aspect of work as being important to them.

7.4.4 Identity/personal fulfilment orientation

39% of managers said that work formed an important part of their identity. Six managers took the role of being a public servant seriously and described this as an important part of what their work meant to them and even of their identity as the following two quotes suggest:

> I never applied to move out of the civil service, I like the fact that it is, I suppose - old-fashioned words - patriotic, working for the state....you're a public servant, you're doing something for the public good...... not everyone understands what being a public servant is, outside.....but it's part of who I am.
> (Interview 75, male PO or above, age 50-54)

> If you really understand your role as civil servant, you will be given a marvellous opportunity to contribute to a better society and develop ways of doing things - that is most positive.
> (Interview 77, female PO or above, age 55-59)

Others identify very strongly with the particular Department in which they work – one describes a satisfying reciprocal relationship with his Department said, "A lot is demanded and a lot is given" (Interview 100, male PO or above). This man describes himself as a

"Revenue person" and says he regards the organization "as a family as much as a department".

Two women felt that having attained the position they were in had been a personal triumph and represented a significant personal achievement for themselves, something they would never have expected at the outset of their career, reflecting the major change that had taken place in opportunities for women. One of these women had invested in courses on personal development and other work-related courses to improve her prospects for promotion. There was a marked difference in identity orientation by gender, with a much higher proportion of women (70%) than of men (21%) senior managers identifying closely with their work role.

7.4.5 Discussion of orientations

Many of the managers also appear to have multi-stranded work orientations and to consider money and career as of equal importance to them:

> Well, you know, a career, it's always...both – you see, they're not mutually exclusive – those things ... well, I thought, yeah a career, well, I came in first for the money and then I saw it as a career and em, yeah, I think of it as a career and money.
> (Interview 100, male PO or above, age 60-64).

This quote also illustrates how the meaning of work changes over time for the manager according to his personal circumstances and the phase in the life-course that he is going through. This sense of change is further demonstrated and indeed explicitly stated in the following excerpt from the transcript of another manager:

> I think it changes over time and life – I think now obviously it's a career – it's the prospect of ... making an impact at a high level. ... And it's still the prospect of probably earning more money for my pension now ... and I think it's also ... a sense that you're part of the structure of government and whatever that you have a small part to play in something that matters.
> (Interview 72, male PO or above, age 50-54)

It should be noted also that he mentions at least three types of work orientation – intrinsic, extrinsic and identity. This sense of multiple orientations is prevalent with at least half of

the managers specifying three or more types of meaning that work has for them and almost everybody mentioning two strands.

As well as being affected by their stage in the life-course, their current orientation was affected by their history within the workplace, particularly their history in relation to promotion. Those who have been disappointed and see little hope of promotion tend to regard work primarily as a source of income, although they may enjoy the social aspect of work and even be very committed to doing a good job.

Work orientations among these managers appear to be multi-dimensional and to change over time. Some people have a strong commitment to the organisation in which they work. While some managers, particularly those whose wives were working in the home and some of the single and married women managers, display strong intrinsic work orientations , many managers (both men and women) display a simultaneously strong commitment to work and outside work interests (including family). There is also evidence of types of orientation to work which are related to identity-formation projects of the kind described by Beck (Beck, 2000). Sometimes these appear to develop as a reaction of the person to obstacles encountered in their attempts to negotiate their career pathways; others have a strong sense of agency and feel it is important to have a balance between work and other pursuits. There are some differences in work orientation by gender. A similar proportion of women and men (80%) have intrinsic work orientations perhaps because many of the women who have succeeded in reaching senior management have adopted similar career norms. Fewer women (30% vs. 75% of men) have extrinsic orientations – perhaps because it is quite unusual for women to have reached senior management level, and because most of those who do so tend to be very involved in their work (see Mahon, 1991; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999).

7.5 Promotion experience and intentions

Having analysed the orientations to work of this group, the following section gives a brief overview of these managers' career trajectories, then analyses their stated intentions and opinions regarding promotion, the factors that have influenced their decision-making, and changes over time.

7.5.1 History of and pathways to promotion

The general route to promotion for senior mangers is illustrated above in Figure 1: Section 4.4..2. The senior managers in the sample followed a number of different types of career trajectories to their current post. The table below sets out the grades at which managers were recruited.

Table 18: Grades at which senior managers were recruited

	CA	Other public service[23]	CO	EO	AO	Total
Men	0	3	15	9	1	28
Women	3	0	1	5	1	10
All	3	3	16	14	2	38

It is significant that more than half of the sample (22) joined either as Clerical Assistants or equivalent (3), Clerical Officers or equivalent (16) – in other words, at basic entry grades – or else were in other public service posts (3) not directly in the general civil service career path. For those recruited at CA level, this meant they needed to be promoted either four or five times to reach the level of AP or five or six times to reach PO level[24]. Those recruited at CO level typically needed to be promoted either 3 or 4 times to reach AP and 4 or 5 to reach PO level.

Table 19: Senior managers – number of times promoted

	2 or less	3	4	5 or more	Total
Men	6	11	7	4	28
Women	2	4	2	2	10
All	8	15	9	6	38

The remaining managers were recruited at EO (14) or AO (2) level. The EOs need to be promoted only twice to reach AP or three times to reach PO. Of the 16 managers who are

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[23] Such as Post Office clerk, postman, Social Welfare Officer.

[24] Some Departments have a promotional grade called Staff Officer which is ranked between CO and EO. Other Departments don't have SO's and staff may be promoted directly from CO to EO – this is why it could take either four or five promotions to reach AP level.

currently at the grade of PO or above, five had started out as a CA or a CO while 11 were recruited at EO or AO level. Being recruited at EO level meant the person started off at junior management level, while those recruited at AO were graduates and this grade was seen as a fast-track to promotion to AP.

It is striking that so many joined at or near basic entry level – their subsequent advancement suggests that they must have had a strong and consistent desire for promotion. The routes to promotion (either through the "senior suitable" system, through interdepartmental competitions and/or through confined internal competitions) are set out in Chapter 4. Most of those eligible (88%) had at some stage applied for promotion from their current post.

Given the pyramid-like career structure of the civil service, the likelihood of being promoted inevitably grows less likely as one approaches the top of the hierarchy (Mahon, 1991, 1998). For those who have reached Principal Officer level the mechanism for being promoted to Assistant Secretary is through the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) system. This is regarded as quite a difficult process – the person has to be nominated by management in their Department and the process generally involves weeks or months of preparation (Top Level Appointments Committee)[25]. It is thus not surprising that only a relatively small proportion of managers had been promoted during the five years preceding the interview (24% of senior managers: 7 men and 2 women). Eight of the remaining 29 managers have had their posts upgraded, which means the person receives more money and is given the title AP1 or PO1 (as opposed to AP or PO respectively). Upgrading was introduced to give an inducement and reward to those who perform well but are unlikely to be promoted due to the structure described above.

7.5.2 Future promotion intentions

When asked if they were planning to apply for promotion in the future, a large proportion of these managers (22 of the 38) said they were not planning to do so; a further three (2 men and 1 woman) said they "may apply", while only one third of managers (11 men and 2 women) definitely intended to apply.

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[25] The fact that candidates had to be nominated by their Department's senior management was thought to act to disadvantage women in the past when most senior managers were men and they were not used to working with women at senior levels and so were unlikely to regard them as serious contenders.

Table 20: Promotion intentions of senior managers

	Male	Female	Total	%
Will apply	11 (39%)	2 [20%]	13	34
May apply	2 (7%)	1 [10%]	3	8
Will not apply	15 (54%)	7 [70%]	22	58
Total	**28**	**10**	**38**	**100**

A larger proportion of this group (58%) than of middle managers (41%) do not intend to apply for promotion. The main reasons they give for not applying are as follows, in order of frequency:

- they believe there is age-related discrimination or that they are too old to apply (the frequency of this response is greatest among the older respondents);
- they don't want to have to move to a de-centralised location in the event of promotion (this reason is less prominent than among the middle managers in the previous chapter)
- they don't want to take on the extra responsibilities that they believe it would entail;
- they believe the long hours would negatively affect their quality of life;
- some are financially comfortable or feel they have achieved enough in career terms;
- a small number of men and women don't believe they have the ability or don't like the promotion process.

Of the 34% who say they will apply (11 men and 2 women), most (but not all) are in the 50-54 age-cohort and many have been promoted in the past 5 years, which implies that age and positive experiences in the workplace are important factors. In fact, two of the women had previously been extremely ambitious and only gave up hope of promotion when they had passed their mid-fifties and had been unsuccessful a number of times in TLAC competitions. Many of the respondents in fact don't believe that there is age or gender-related discrimination in the civil service. Most of them identify strongly with either their

Department or the public service and have strong intrinsic work orientations characteristic of "organisation man" accounts.

7.5.3 Factors that affect the promotion decisions of senior managers

This section outline factors that affect the decision to apply for promotion – many of these can be considered barriers to promotion. The section is organised by discussing those factors related to the work organisation itself, then broadening the discussion to examine factors outside of work including beliefs about age, caring for parents, prior resources and societal gender norms. The focus of this section is on the current decision in relation to promotion, but there will also be some discussion of factors that affected promotion decision-making in the past.

Table 21: Perceived barriers to promotion – senior managers

(38 respondents)

	Men (28)		Women (10)		Total (38)	% of total
	No.	%	No.	[%]	No.	%
Age-related discrimination in the civil service	13	46	5	50	18	47
Gender-related discrimination (against women [6]; against men[2])	7	25	1	10	8	21
De-centralisation	5	18	2	20	7	18
Work-life balance	5	18	2	20	7	18
No barriers	5	18	2	20	7	18
No financial incentive	5	18	1	10	6	16
Location	4	14	1	10	5	13
Lacking in qualities needed	3	11	2	20	5	13
Skills not valued	4	14	1	10	5	13
Promotion process (interviews, TLAC system)	2	7	2	20	4	11
Beliefs about ageing	2	7	2	20	4	11
Caring for parent	0	0	3	30	3	10

Note: Research participants named more than one barrier.

7.5.3 (a) Work-related factors affecting promotion

This group of senior managers appear to have identified a wide range of work-related barriers. They are discussed in order of frequency for the most part, except that non-work related factors are discussed separately. Even though these factors are discussed separately for clarity, it is the way in which work-related factors combine with non-work factors in an individual's life that shape their work-life trajectory.

Age-related discrimination in the civil service

There were mixed perceptions among senior managers as to whether there is age-related discrimination in relation to promotion in the civil service. A large proportion (47%) of these interviewed (13 men and 5 women) stated that they believe that there is age-related discrimination in the civil service which would make it unlikely that older workers would be promoted. When asked to elaborate on this, most of them said that they believed that older workers are valued in terms of their day-to-day work and for their corporate knowledge in the organisation. However, they believed that there was an unspoken "cut-off point" – an age beyond which people were unlikely to be promoted. This confirms findings from previous research (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). The cut-off point was perceived differently depending on the grade to which people were aspiring to be promoted For example, some felt that the cut-off point for becoming AP was about 40:

> there was a perception that people over forty were unlikely to be successful certainly in AP or PO competitions.
> (Interview 88, male Assistant Principal, age 50-54).

It was felt that the cut-off point for becoming Principal Officer was 45 or 50:

> Well, I think if you are not a Principal Officer by the time you reach the age of fifty, you have an uphill battle and you will be very lucky if you get it.
> (Interview 89, female Assistant Principal, age 55-59)

For promotion beyond Principal Officer level the cut-off point is thought to be between fifty and fifty-five:

I've seen people who have got TLAC competitions that would certainly be in their mid-fifties but if you look at it in recent years, a lot of them would tend to have been in their early forties … or their late thirties … good luck to them!

(Interview 71, male PO or above, age 50-54).

When asked why they had this perception, some referred to successful age-discrimination cases that had been brought to the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations, or challenges taken by the union – for example, one manager said:

I remember there was – the PSEU did challenge some of the HEO to AP competitions on the grounds of what subsequently came to be known as ageism.

(Interview 88, female Assistant Principal, age 50-54).

Another person described how she had personally encountered what she believed to be age-related discrimination in a recent promotion competition. She was competing for a post for which she was very well qualified, having worked in that area previously:

I felt that there was a bit of … age discrimination. Because I was – I would have been close to fifty at that time. Whereas my colleague would have been in his mid thirties. So I felt that that was definitely an issue.

(Interview 89, female Assistant Principal, age 55-59)

Some people noted that in recent AP competitions in their Department nobody over 50 had been promoted. Others noted that in a Principal Officer promotional competition in one Department, nobody over 45 was promoted and they interpreted this to mean that older workers were extremely unlikely to be promoted. Previous studies have found that where there is a perception that people are viewed negatively as they grow older, this often acts as a de-motivating factor for them in terms of applying for promotion (Still & Timms, 1998). This seems to be borne out in the case mentioned above, where the manager indicates that she will not apply for promotion again because of her experience. However, believing there is age-related discrimination doesn't always mean the person won't apply for promotion – while most (72% or 13) of these managers who believe there is age-related discrimination don't intend to apply for promotion, 5 others either will or may still apply.

As has been noted in Chapters 1 and 5, the fact that cases have been successfully taken to the Equality Tribunal suggests that there is at least some age discrimination in the civil service. It is not possible to verify statistically whether there is discrimination, since age-

related data regarding applications for competitions is not routinely kept in all Departments. However, the wide-spread perception of discrimination is a matter of serious concern.

Another instance of gendered age discrimination (not directly related to promotion, but making her work environment very uncomfortable) was cited by a woman who worked as a manager in a male-dominated area. She said that references were made to "menopausal women" by men she worked with; she believed that this was done in an attempt to undermine her authority.

Finally another woman who hadn't applied for promotion for a number of years while her children were young (she would have had to travel abroad frequently) believed that this was seen as an unexplainable gap in her career by management and as a lack of commitment and by the time she was free to travel, she was regarded as too old. Her case lends support to Itzin and Phillipson's "double jeopardy theory" (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995).

Gender-related discrimination in the civil service

A smaller percentage of these respondents (21%) believe that there is still discrimination against women in the civil service. However, 18% of male managers (5) and one woman believed that it is more difficult for women to be promoted – two of these men were in a department where there were still relatively few women in senior positions. A very recent study found that there is still a "male-dominated culture" in the civil service with informal male networks and women senior managers tending to be placed in traditionally "female" roles such as HR (Valiulis, O'Donnell & Redmond, 2008).

A small number (two) male senior managers believed that there was currently gender–related discrimination against men in relation to promotion. In support of this, they cited the fact that more women than men had been promoted in recent competitions. They felt that this was an attempt to redress the gender imbalance that existed at management level in the past and that (in the case of the men) it had an injurious effect on their own career. Both of these were working in a large Department which had a proactive approach to gender equality and had achieved the targets set in the gender equality plan for having a third of women Assistant Principals. Half (19) of the respondents (54% of men and 40% of

women) said that there had been discrimination against women in the civil service in the past – in support of this they referred to the statistical under-representation of women at higher levels and the marriage bar. This perception is confirmed by previous research (Bryson, 2009; Mahon, 1990, 1991; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999).

Several of these managers contextualised the issue of gender discrimination in promotion by drawing attention to other areas in which gender discrimination may exist. Four of the women mentioned incidents or sexist attitudes that they encountered during their career. For example, one woman (now at a very senior level) said it was expected that she would not return to work after maternity leave – she was one of the first at senior level to avail of this type of leave. Another woman was questioned by her HR manager as to whether it would be worth sending her on a training course – it was assumed that because she was a woman she might leave before the organisation would recoup the value of sending her on the course. Another woman in a male-dominated Department had been introduced by her Principal Officer at a meeting with senior colleagues as "one of his girls" (even though she was in her late forties at the time) a few years prior to the interview. This woman believed that it was harder for a woman to succeed in the civil service:

> I think it is slightly harder for women. You just have to be that little bit more determined. I honestly think – men rule in the civil service, so you don't necessarily get brought to the meetings.
> (Interview 84, female PO or above, age 50-54).

However, both this woman and others said they had not encountered direct gender discrimination in relation to promotion.

Another woman senior manager in a male-dominated area was described by a man in her department as "menopausal"; she believed that this was done in order to undermine her authority and it made her feel uncomfortable in her work environment.

De-centralisation

The third major factor respondents cited as a barrier to promotion was the most recent Civil Service de-centralisation programme in which 10,000 civil servants were to be moved from Dublin to new offices in towns around the country. Since the government were unable to attract sufficient volunteers to move, they introduced a system whereby

those who applied for promotion would have to agree to move to a regional location if they were promoted. 18% of the managers perceived de-centralisation as constituting a severe disruption (if not an end) to their careers. They were particularly likely to see it in this way if they identified strongly with their particular Department and if they felt unable to leave Dublin because of not wanting to disrupt their school or college-going children or if their spouse was working in Dublin. As one Assistant Principal put it speaking of himself and colleagues who found themselves in a similar situation:

> We were basically gutted because you know – you've given twenty plus years to the Department and the only option on it now is to get out of the Department where I've a huge amount of experience built up ... if I go somewhere else certainly the same promotional opportunities are not going to present themselves.
> (Interview 93, male Assistant Principal, age 50-54)

He explained that he was involved in his local community; his wife was working locally and his children were attending school and college nearby. This man was in the 50-54 age cohort and his attitude to moving was different to some of the older men whose families had moved around with them. He was ambitious and identified strongly with the Department in which he worked; however, he didn't want to disrupt his family and indeed didn't want to move himself because of his own ties to the community. This is an example of an "organisation man" narrative coming into conflict with an "egalitarian family" narrative due to structural changes in the workplace.

Four male managers said that their families (either wives or children) refused to move which meant they would effectively be living apart from their families if they did choose to go. One quoted his wife as saying:

> I was told 'you can go to X but you can get a cell down there, on your own'
> (Interview 71, Principal Officer or above, age 50-54)

This manager quoted one of his children as saying:

> You can go if you like Dad, but we're staying here.
> (Interview 71, PO or above, age 50-54)

This reflects a change in the way families negotiate decision-making; moving from the more authoritarian parenting that was prevalent when these managers were themselves teenagers (see Chapter 4) to one where decisions about location appear to be negotiated not only with spouses/partners, but also increasingly with children.

Work-life balance

18% (five men and two women) had decided not to apply for promotion because they felt it would interfere with what they considered to be an appropriate work-life balance. Four of these were at Principal Officer level or above and three were Assistant Principals. They said the long hours and the commitment required at Assistant Principal or Principal Officer level was more than they were prepared to give: For example, one Principal Officer referring to the time demands said

> I feel I have sold my soul to the Department – I don't want to sell my whole life to them too so I'm not going to apply for Assistant Secretary.
> (Interview 84, female PO or above, age 55-59)

Three of these had decided a number of years previously not to apply for further promotion. One person had looked at his life holistically and decided to take time to spend with his family and at various leisure pursuits. He had taken term-time for the past few years in order to facilitate this. He had found in his forties that he became stressed and angry when working long hours and had re-evaluated his life and decided that he would aim for a balance of work and leisure time:

> I suppose the main thing that we took into consideration was sort of lifestyle, time versus work I suppose. It was always an issue I was aware of and I always said before any of these schemes came into operation that if I had enough money I would opt for time rather than more money. I was highly aware of that when I was looking at this Celtic Tiger and public service pay –you know, we were paid quite well.
> (Interview 73, male Assistant Principal, age 50-54)

The way in which these managers describe their decision-making draws on a rhetoric of self-development, where they look at their lives as a totality and work is seen as only one constituent part of this whole. Some of these managers had participated in personal

development courses. Their narratives resonate more closely with Beck's theory than with Whyte's "organisation man" account (Beck, 2000; Whyte, 1956).

One man describes how his perception changed over the life cycle – how in the early years when his children were young he had applied for promotion because he needed the money and now, having reached a certain level, he is no longer going to apply. He said:

> When you get to sort of PO stage … I think that, that ah you know quality of life comes into it and, and that sort of thing in a big way, you sort of think in terms more of…working to live rather than living to work unless you're very ambitious or unless you feel you've some kind of missionary desire to solve the problems of Ireland or whatever….in my own case certainly quality of life has become a big consideration, I mean in the early days it was different you needed the money.
>
> (Interview 70, male PO or above, age 55-59)

Similar views were expressed by a similar proportion of long-term workers in Chapter 5. These are examples of people who have moved from the "maximisers" category to the "satisficers" category in the course of their career.

"No barriers"

Less than one fifth (18%) of senior managers (five men and two women) believe that there are no barriers to promotion in the civil service. For example one senior manager when asked if he believed there was age-related discrimination in the civil service said quite emphatically:

> I have never seen it – I have never ever witnessed it or seen it.
>
> (Interview 85, male PO or above, age 50-54)

Another manager in a different department suggested that there used to be age-related discrimination in the past, but that this doesn't happen anymore partly because of the protective legislation that has been introduced. Some managers argue that the recent age-discrimination legislation makes it very unlikely that age-related discrimination would occur. One manager drew on her own experience on interview boards as the evidence for her perception:

No, it would be purely on merit – I know myself from being on interview boards – I've been on a lot of interview boards over the years … that doesn't … you don't even consider it now … I think the ageing thing has gone.

(Interview 87, female Assistant Principal, age 55-59).

No financial incentive

Six managers (16%) said they didn't have an incentive to apply for promotion because they were financially comfortable. For example, one Principal Officer said that when he was younger and buying a house, the extra money was a great incentive to apply for promotion, but at this stage, he considered quality of life to be more important and was financially comfortable (this man also believed that he was unlikely to be promoted anyway because he was aged over 55). Another Assistant Principal said that there were very few promotional competitions in the 1980s due to the economic recession and the embargo on recruitment that was in place at that time and by the time promotion did open up again:

I didn't need it at that stage – financially I mean.

(Interview 82, female Assistant Principal, age 55-59)

Several respondents said that they were comfortably off – bench-marking was mentioned by a few people in this regard. They said that the extra responsibility they would gain as a result of being promoted would outweigh the extra pay they would receive. These managers were earning enough to realise their preferences for work-life balance.

Location

Four men and one woman (13%) all working in offices located outside of Dublin, suggested that the fact that they were in regional locations acted as a barrier to promotion. They explained that they wouldn't be known to those in top management positions who would be assessing and/or recommending them for promotion and that this would affect their chances of success. A few managers accepted this as an inevitable consequence of leaving Dublin. One man explained that when he decided to move to a rural location a number of years previously:

The decision was, was to come to X because you knew you were jumping off the Assistant Secretary handicap hurdle you weren't ah, you weren't in that game anymore.

(Interview 102, male PO or above, age 55-59).

This manager accepted that there was a trade-off between quality of life and promotion. Others also accepted the trade-off and had become very involved in leisure activities or voluntary work in their local communities. Yet, some felt that this situation was unfair. This was often linked with the idea that being the manager of a regional office (such as a social welfare or revenue office) was not valued by the civil service in terms of being seen as promotable. They believed that they lacked credibility when it came to promotion even though they themselves saw their jobs as demanding a wide range of skills.

Specialised skills not valued by management

As was true for the long-term workers 13% of managers felt that the specific skills they had were not valued when it came to promotion as they had worked in specialised areas such as IT, Customs and Excise or Social Welfare and lacked general service experience.

Lacking in qualities, skills and profile needed for promotion

Five people (13%) said they were lacking in various personal qualities they felt were needed for promotion. Some said they didn't have the leadership or the vision necessary. Others felt that senior management now placed too much emphasis on presentation skills and not enough on proven ability to perform well at their job. Three men felt that the skills they had would not be valued by those who would be judging them at a competency-based interview – these were people who were in specialised areas of the civil service such as IT, or particular areas in Revenue or managers of Social Welfare Offices. They said that interviewers regarded them as not having enough experience in general service grades. There was a general perception that one needed to be in a policy rather than an operational area and to be located in Dublin in order to have the profile and visibility needed to demonstrate ability to senior management in the Department.

Promotion process

Four people (11%) saw the interview process as a barrier to promotion. Some of them said they are not able to perform well at interviews and as was true for some of the middle managers they regretted the move away from the "senior suitable" system of promotion. Several others mentioned the TLAC process as a deterrent. However, they said they would still apply, but noted that it was a gruelling process.

Discussion of work-related factors

Some of the work-related factors described above are disincentives rather than barriers –
for example, being financially comfortable. These managers' senior position in the
organisation means they do have more choice in realising their preferences than those in
other groups. However, this group of senior managers do feel subject to some constraints
in realising their preferences. Perceived age discrimination, de-centralisation and perceived
gender discrimination are the main barriers they face – some also cite changes from "senior
suitable" to competency-based promotion methods as de-motivating. It is often the
interaction of a number of factors that actually prevents a person from applying for
promotion; for example, the fact that they are financially comfortable – together with the
fact that they will soon be eligible for retirement on full pension, and that they perceive
that older people are unlikely to be promoted – may act together to prevent them from
applying.

7.5.3 (b) Impact of non-work factors on promotion decision-making

The senior managers identified factors not directly work-related that affect their promotion
decision-making. These include their beliefs about ageing and ability to work, the effect of
societal gender norms in relation to being the breadwinner, and family caring norms.

Impact of age on promotion decision-making

A similar proportion to that of long-term workers (11% vs. 10%) said that they won't apply
for promotion because they are "too old". This belief amounts to a psychological barrier
for themselves in applying for promotion. Two of these are in the 60-64 age group and one
is in the 55-59 age-group. One woman felt that it is "more appropriate" for people in their
40s to apply for promotion. This appears to be related to people's beliefs about age rather
than to their chronological age because other senior managers in the same age-groups feel
that age is not likely to affect their performance and *are* willing to apply for promotion.
Two of the managers appear to have internalised ageist attitudes themselves (i.e. the idea
that people are inevitably less effective at work when they are older) so they suggest that it
is natural that people are less likely to succeed when they are older as the following quote
illustrates:

> If you get into the early fifties your chances of success at interviews are less....but you're
> probably less determined and less up-to-date and you're less driven and all that sort of stuff

(Interview 102, male, PO or above, age 55-59).

Because they are at higher grades, the senior managers have higher salaries and therefore higher pensions, so from the age of 55 onwards, these factors combined with the perception of age discrimination (47% of managers perceive that there is age-related discrimination in the civil service), and perhaps a lack of success in promotion may cause many of them to "switch off", even if they were previously highly committed to their work and careers. Four people in the 55-59 age-group mention the fact that they are approaching 60 means that they are thinking of retirement rather than promotion, and they are unwilling to build themselves up to taking part in promotional competitions again. This resonates with research findings in the UK (Yeandle, 2005). Finally, the evidence that some of these senior managers believe that people are less productive as they grow older is highly significant, since many of these managers sit on interview boards, which implies that some of them have ageist beliefs which might affect their assessment of an older applicant's suitability for promotion. On the other hand, many managers explicitly said they would welcome having older workers in their sections on the basis that they see them as more reliable.

Impact of societal gender norms on women's promotion decision-making
The issues of childcare and the effect of having children on promotion decision-making feature differently in men's and women's narratives. The first and most obvious gender difference is that all of the men at senior management level in the sample have children while only three of the women do. This is reflective of the actual situation in higher grades in the civil service as a whole; a recent study found that men in senior management are six times more likely to have children compared to women in similar positions (Valiulis, O'Donnell & Redmond, 2008). These women were among the first in their departments to combine having children with occupying a senior management position so they were pioneers in many senses and their narratives reflect an awareness that their position both was and was regarded as unusual. All three of the women with children discussed at some length how they managed both to have and rear children and progress in their career. This suggests that this was an issue for them in a way that it tended not to be for most of the men in the sample. This is not surprising given the long-hours culture in the organisation and the fact that many managers feel it is necessary to work long hours in order to progress in their careers. One woman describes herself as fortunate that she could afford good private full-time care for her children in the home because she was older and had

progressed considerably in her career before having children. In another case, the manager stressed her good fortune in being able to have continuity of childcare, a lot of energy and healthy children – this woman was also in a position to afford private childcare. Previous research on the women managers in the civil service in the 1980s reports similar findings (Mahon, 1991). The fact that the most crucial career-building years tends to coincide with the period when children are young may act as an impediment to mothers in developing their careers, given the societal expectation that women are the primary carers for the young. Two interviewees in this study identify the time their children were young as a time when they did not apply for promotion. One of these felt that this was perceived as a gap in her CV which was regarded unfavourably later by promotion boards. For all three of the women with children, both work and family were important and they tried to combine career and family. Two of them were in egalitarian relationships where it wasn't automatically assumed that they were primarily responsible for childcare. For example, one of the women had agreed with her husband that if any of their children were sick, one of the parents would stay at home. It wasn't assumed that she would be the person to stay at home. Another had good private childcare and her husband was available to take over care of the children if she needed to stay late in the evenings or travel abroad.

Impact of marital status on decision-making

All of the men were married and so cannot be differentiated by marital status. There didn't appear to be a difference in ambition among the women purely on the basis of marital status. One might expect that the single women would be more ambitious. In fact, all three of the married women either were or had been highly ambitious, while 4 of the single women say they were not originally ambitious and had to be pushed to apply for promotion by their managers. One of the single women says that at a particular point in her life, she chose not to marry and instead to put her career first. She worked in an area where it was customary to work very long hours and to be "on call" for work; marriage would have meant one or other of the couple re-locating or else not spending much time together. However, this issue of consciously making a choice between marriage or career was not explicitly raised by any of the other single women. Interestingly, the recent study referred to above found that men in senior civil service posts are about five times more likely to be married than are women in these posts (Valiulis, O'Donnell & Redmond, 2008).

Impact of male breadwinner norm on men's promotion decision-making

One interesting difference between the accounts of the men and women who are parents is that many of the men didn't spontaneously mention children as an issue when discussing their career progression. For most of the men, having children wasn't presented as an impediment to their career. Similar to the men in Chapter 6, many of these male senior managers speak of having children as a reason to settle down and pursue a career path. Many of them had wives who were working full-time in the home and were the primary carers for the children when they were young. Some acknowledged that their wives had facilitated their career progression by looking after most of the domestic responsibilities including the children and where necessary moving location with the family – thus enabling the manager to combine career progression with family life. The men had negotiated this differently; some (work-centred) had expected their wives and family to move; others (maximisers) compromised and only moved at particular times when their children were not in a secondary school cycle, for example; others again (satisficers) effectively gave up on being promoted. This was often unproblematic if their wife worked unpaid in the home and if the men were based in the general service grades in Dublin where there were opportunities for promotion without having to move location. There is some evidence of a shift from the breadwinner model to a more egalitarian model of family life. For example, one man had just taken a day off to care for a sick child because his wife was working while another was working term-time in order to spend time with his family.

Impact of providing care/support for a parent on promotion decision-making

While most of the single women at senior management level do spend long hours at work and appear to have adopted male career norms, three of the single women had responsibility for providing care and support for dependent parent(s) outside of work. One person who was work-sharing in order to facilitate caring was not going to apply for promotion because she was afraid that she would not be guaranteed work-sharing if she did succeed in being promoted (although officially work-sharing is available at higher grades). The others said that their caring responsibilities had in the past and would now prevent them from applying for promotion as they couldn't move from their current location, since they were the main providers of care and support for their mother or father. Unlike the long-term workers, all of this group are women – this accords more closely with societal gender norms. The societal norm operative here is that there is an expectation that single women (and sometimes men) will take on care for their parents if/when they become dependent.

Impact of prior resources – education, parental encouragement

As a group, the senior managers tend to have a higher level of education than the long-term workers. In fact only one man (at PO level or above) mentions that his lack of third level education may prevent him from progressing further. Several senior managers had parents who encouraged them to have a career (not just a job) in the civil service. This appeared to be particularly important for the women in this group; 40% had parents who encouraged them, while 35% of men claimed to have had such support.

7.6 Changes in ambition over time

The preceding section analyses the current decision-making of senior managers regarding promotion in "snapshot" fashion. However, it was clear from the accounts that these mangers' level of ambition for promotion had changed over time and in response to changes both inside and outside of the workplace. This section gives a sense of how ambition for promotion changed over time. The information in the table below is taken from the answers to the following question: "Are you more likely to apply for promotion now than, say 20 years ago?"

Table 22: Changes in ambition

	Male	Female	All	%
No change: never ambitious	1	3	4	11
Less ambitious now	15	5	20	53
More ambitious now	2	1	3	5
No change: always ambitious	4	1	5	13
Response not recorded	6	0	6	16
Total	**28**	**10**	**38**	**100**

Never ambitious

Surprisingly four people – all AP's say they were never very ambitious. There are gender differences in this group; 75% of them are women. Interestingly, one of these women was promoted 5 times throughout her career by means of the "senior suitable" system! These women describe themselves as having been pushed to go for promotion or as being interested in the work itself, but not in promotion – one woman is also in a caring role; finally another woman drifted in rather than chose to work in the civil service; she was promoted three times and is financially comfortable and not ambitious. The man works in a particular specialised area and enjoys the work, but never applied for promotion.

Always ambitious

Perhaps surprisingly among a group of senior managers, only one woman (in the 50-54 age group) and 4 men say they have always been ambitious. The woman did have a sense of a

career path from very short time after joining the civil service. This was partly due to interest in and advice from her parents regarding her career:

> When the offer came as a school leaver, I was actually working in X [another large bureaucratic organisation] in an equivalent-type post. It was the first year that they recruited females into what was the equivalent of the EO grade in X – I had other offers at the time … but I was working in X when the offer came to join the civil service and I suppose I was influenced by what my father thought would be a good career path for me and it was unclear at the time how women might fare in X at that level.
> (Interview 105, female PO or above, age 50-54)

It is clear that this woman and her family had put a good deal of consideration into her career (although she claims not to have been very career-conscious at this stage). The idea that prior resources (parental knowledge and interest) can have an important influence on women's careers has been found in previous research and suggests that such preferences are not simply *a priori* and unchanging attributes of a person but are to some extent linked to prior knowledge (White, Cox & Cooper, 1992). This may be contrasted with the experience of women among the long-term workers in the previous chapter, most of whom joined at CA level and who mentioned a lack of career guidance and of parental guidance or knowledge.

Other women and men describe having an awareness of work as a career from the outset; this was particularly likely when their parents were civil servants and/or took an interest in their career. Some men describe themselves as always having been ambitious. One man explained:

> I would have had an understanding of a career and my father would have been promoted …
> I can remember him being promoted.
> (Interview 75, male PO or above, age 50-54)

This man had aspired to become a Principal Officer or Assistant Secretary from early on in his career; having prior knowledge of how the system worked appeared to be an advantage to him.

More ambitious over time

Only a very small group of senior managers (two men and one woman) say that they are more likely to apply for promotion now than they were 20 years ago. They are all relatively young. The woman never expected to reach her current grade. In fact when she started work the prevailing expectation for women was to expect to have a stop-gap secretarial job and then leave on marriage. However, in her case, as she succeeded in being promoted she became more ambitious over the years. The men are those who have recently been promoted, are relatively young and now having been promoted see greater career possibilities for themselves. They typically say they took their career "one step at a time".

Less ambitious over time

Most (55%) of this group of senior managers are less likely to apply for promotion now . Of these, 32% believe that they are too old to be promoted. Seven of these are relatively young – in the 55-59 age group – and two are aged 60. Four say that they are looking towards retirement rather than promotion. Two men and one woman mention de-centralisation as a reason for being less likely to apply. In general, following an initial period where they became ambitious, these managers began to realise they were not going to be promoted due to one or more of the barriers outlined above, and they became less ambitious. It was generally after reaching the age of 55 that people changed from being work-centred or maximisers to being satisficers. Six people mention choice-based reasons – such as location, being in a relationship, not wanting responsibility – for being less likely to apply at this point in their career. Many of them have became less ambitious during the past 5-10 years.

Discussion of changes over time

There are some interesting points to be made about the changes in ambition. Firstly, only a quarter of the group (six men and one woman) say that their likelihood of applying for promotion has stayed the same throughout their career; most managers did not therefore display "fixed" preferences in the form proposed by preference theory. Moreover, many of these workers went through two changes in terms of preference. They were not ambitious to start with, then become more ambitious, but as they got older, they became less ambitious again, if they perceived that they didn't have a realistic chance of being promoted. Some people changed over the life cycle and became more career oriented after a certain point in their career. The men usually became ambitious when they got married.

Others developed a sense of a career when they started to be promoted – a few people mentioned that when they reached HEO level they saw themselves as being on the career ladder. For five people in this group, one enabling factor was when the Department sponsored people to go on a management training course. Five people (two men and three women) mentioned this as something which made them think in terms of a career. Another institutional factor that affected promotion (by inhibiting it) was the embargo on promotion in the 1980s. For some, this happened during their forties, and they felt they would be considered too old to be promoted by the time the embargo was lifted.

7.7 Senior managers: categories

Based on their orientations to work and on their intentions regarding promotion, the following table divides the managers into categories which attempt to describe their relationship to work at the time of interview. The description and rationale for these categories is provided in Chapter 6.6, above.

Table 23: Senior managers by category

	Men (28)		Women (10)		Total (38)	% of total
	No.	%	No.	[%]	No.	%
Category 1: Work/career centred	6	21	1	10	7	18
Category 2: Maximisers/aspirers	4	14	1	10	5	13
Category 3: Satisficers	10	36	6	60	16	43
Category4: Personal/home-centred	8	29	2	20	10	26
	28	100	10	100	38	100%

According to preference theory, we might expect all of the senior managers to be homogenously career-centred or, at the very least, maximisers. However, as we can see, there is quite a wide variation among the senior managers. Currently, only 18% of the

group (6 men and 1 woman) are unambiguously work/career-centred. As we might expect, this is a higher proportion than for long-term workers (7%). Most of these are men, aged 50-54, have been promoted 4 or more times, and half of them had parents who were in the public service or who encouraged them in their careers. All are going to apply for promotion; six of them identify strongly with the role of public servant or with their Department, work long hours and may be said to be "organisation men or women". Two of them are now concerned about the potential problem of de-centralisation because they do not wish to disrupt themselves or their families. A typical example of a work/career centred man is "Aidan" who has been promoted 5 times and is now at PO level or above . He is aged 53, was promoted 3 years ago and will move if promoted – he expects his family to move with him if necessary. He usually works 60 hours per week and sometimes more.

A further 13% of these managers (4 men and 1 woman) may be classified as maximisers/aspirers. These are very committed to work and most of them work long hours. They are planning to apply for promotion, but they also try to maximise their quality of life outside of work. For example, they may apply for promotion selectively – in a region near them, but not in an office a long distance away. An example of a maximiser is "Stephen". He works in a regional location and is a PO or above and typically works 55 hours per week. He is aged 59, has been promoted 5 times and will apply again. However, he will only apply for promotion within a radius of 80 miles of where he lives.

Most (43%) of the senior managers (36% of men and 60% of women) are in the satisficers category. This means that they are no longer going to apply for promotion, but may still be highly committed to work as demonstrated by the findings in relation to hours worked and orientation; they would accept promotion if it were offered. This category includes people who moved to a regional location and had to accept that they were very unlikely to be promoted. They are not prepared to move. Others may be based in Dublin, and not have been promoted and now believe that there is age and or gender-related discrimination; they have settled for their current grade either resignedly or unhappily. Others in this category include single women providing care/support for dependant parents. Interestingly, 20% of women only moved to this category in their mid-fifties when they realised they were not going to be promoted; they were very ambitious prior to that and would have been work/career-centred.

Finally, a surprisingly sizeable proportion – 26% (29% of men and 20% of women) – are in the home/personal-centred category. These are people who are working mainly for extrinsic and/or social reasons. All but one of this group are aged 55 or over. Some of them are disillusioned workers who have not been promoted for a long time and definitely do not intend to apply for promotion. Some are disillusioned due to perceived age and/or gender discrimination; others in this group suffer from ill-health and for others their main focus of interest is outside of work – this could include family, relationships or developing other interests such as voluntary work that they plan to take up when they retire.

7.7.1: Managers' categories changes over time

As was the case for long-term workers, many senior managers have moved from one category to another over time, a frequency of change that emphasises the need for a dynamic model to represent their decision-making. For example, over half the group say they are now less ambitious than they were 20 years previously; thus they have moved from right to left on the diagram below, from being either maximisers or work/career-centred to being satisficers Nicola's story is an example of this type of change.

Nicola's story

Nicola joined as a CA and was promoted several times until she reached the grade of Principal Officer or above. She is single and describes having worked very long hours in her early years of establishing her career. The team she worked with also worked long hours and there was a great sense of camaraderie among them; both she and her colleagues were achievement-oriented so she enjoyed this period of her working life. She is now in the 55-59 age group and has applied several times for promotion over the last number of years without success. She attributes this at least partly to the fact that she is seen as having expertise in a particular specialised sphere and is therefore not seriously considered to have sufficient general Departmental experience. She describes herself as having finally accepted that she will not now be promoted a few years previously, in her mid-fifties. She has moved from point D to point B on the diagram below.

Figure 5: Long-term workers: changes along continuum

A — Home/Personal Centred | B — Satisficers | C — Maximisers/Aspirers | D — Work/Career Centred
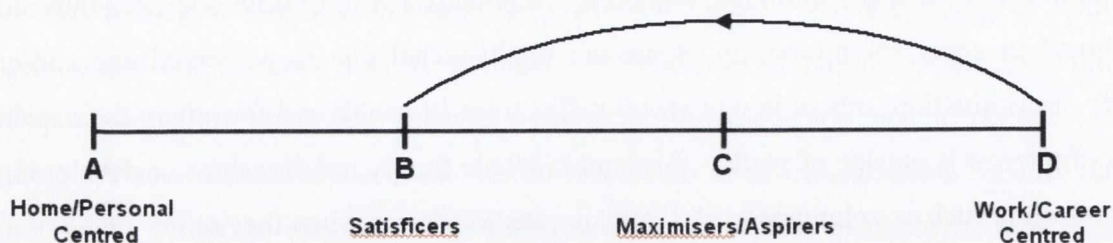
This trajectory is typical of many senior managers, both men and women and reflects the difficulties involved in getting promoted at this level

7.8 Conclusion

As might be predicted by preference theory, more senior managers than long-term workers have homogenous, intrinsic "work-centred" preferences. However, their accounts indicate that their orientations are complex; like other workers they have a mixture of extrinsic, intrinsic, social and identity orientations. As we might expect, there is strong evidence of "organisation man" accounts – many of the men and women do identify strongly with their Department or with their role as a public servant. There is also strong evidence of high commitment to work and a long-hours culture among a majority of senior managers. Yet, many of the men in this group of senior managers are committed both to work and to outside-work interests, thus confirming findings from previous research that challenge the assumption that men are single-mindedly work-centred (Blackburn & Mann, 1979; Pleck, 1985; Nolan, 2009). There are fewer gender differences in terms of orientations to work than there are among the long-term workers. This is perhaps because as has been found in previous research, most of the women in senior management have adopted "male norms" of work.

The senior managers identified many work-related barriers to promotion. The most frequently-mentioned barriers are perceived age-related discrimination and de-centralisation. One of the most striking results is that there is a strong perception among half of senior managers that there is age-related discrimination in the civil service (a

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sentiment shared equally by women and men). This supports recent research in Ireland that found that at least some Irish employers felt that older people have inappropriate skills, are less productive, less flexible, less ambitious and take more sick leave than young people (PACEC, 2001). This gives some indication of attitudes towards older workers in the labour market in Ireland and one might expect that similar attitudes may exist among at least some managers in the civil service. The successful cases brought to the Equality Authority and cited in Chapter 4 also suggest that there may be at least some age-related discrimination. Both this evidence and managers' own beliefs set out in Section 7.5.3 above suggest that there is a strong possibility that even though formal equality exists, individual managers may have ageist attitudes and this may affect older people's chances of promotion. Even if this were not the case, the strong perception that age-related discrimination exists is a matter for concern.

Another work-related barrier that is important for this group is de-centralisation. This reflects the fact that a higher proportion of this group than of the workers in the previous chapter are based in Dublin. In addition, the senior managers have progressed farther in their careers and there is more at stake for them than for those at lower grades. The fact that they identify closely with their organisation and have envisaged progression within it also makes anything which potentially disrupts this progression more problematic for them.

The men and women in this group did not mention societal gender norms to the same degree as did the long-term workers. This is probably because most of the male senior managers were married to women who worked unpaid in the home when their children were young and thus the men were free to work long hours and pursue their careers. Most of the women in this group were single, or could afford good childcare and/or had spouses who could and would share child-rearing outside of working hours. Even so, however, two of the women didn't apply for promotion while their children were young. There was some evidence of changing gender norms among the younger men, and in cases where they were also ambitious, there were tensions between their work needs and their family needs.

We might expect all the managers to be in the work/career-centred or at least the maximisers/aspirers category. However, they are spread across the categories with almost 60% in either the satisficer or home/personal-centred category. This is larger than the equivalent group of long-term workers. Part of the explanation for this lies in the changes

that have taken place over time – over half of the senior managers state that they are less ambitious now.

Qualitative investigation shows that there are co-existing narratives at play in the accounts provided by managers of their work-life careers. From the findings above, it appears that models such as "organisation man" can describe the way in which many of the older managers in the civil service identify with their organisation. This role was relatively unproblematic to combine with family life when "organisation men" were in the breadwinner role with their wives working unpaid in the home and performing all the domestic labour. However, this narrative model is complicated in the accounts of younger men and women with children by structural changes such as de-centralisation, changes in civil service policy such as the move away from "senior suitable" methods of promotion and changing familial norms such as the increase in the "dual-earner" household (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998: 42). There can also be a greater societal expectation for fathers to be involved in the day-to-day interaction/caring for their families whereas in the past, their main expected role was that of breadwinner (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998: 43-44). There is some evidence of a different concept of career in the accounts of some of the managers - one that resonates more closely with Beck's theory of reflexive modernisation (Beck, 2000).

It appears that many of the managers (both men and women) have complex goals which often involve both work, family and outside interests. The accounts of some of the senior managers indicate that many of them do appear to have had a preference for having a career from the time they joined the civil service. Many of them were influenced in their career choice by economic constraints, parental preferences and social norms. Many of them changed their work orientations over time as opportunities either became available to them or appeared to become closed off.

The next chapter explores the decision-making of a group with very different experiences and facing very different options from the senior managers. These are women returners who have had interruptions to their career paths, and who now face a different set of opportunities. We might expect this group to be unambitious and uncommitted in the manner of Hakim's "ungrateful slaves" (Hakim, 1991, 2000: 159-163) in fact the reality is much more complex.

Chapter 8

Women returners: coming back to work, orientations and promotion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the work orientations and promotion decision-making of 28 women (aged 50-64), all of whom have returned to work after some time spent working in the home. Unlike the long term workers and senior managers, most of the women in this group are located at the lower end of the civil service hierarchy and they have had interrupted work histories. There is quite a variation in the type of work in which returners engage, even though they all receive the same pay. Many of the women work in areas where tasks are routine – processing claims, taking in fees, dealing with social welfare claims, answering queries, dealing with the public either on the phone or in person in Social Welfare Offices or in Revenue. This work can be demanding depending on the volume of work to be done and the level of staffing in the section. Other women work in roles which are very demanding - working as key administrators in a team or as the equivalent of a Personal Assistant. These roles may require many skills – providing administrative support to staff in the section, responding to media queries, organizing meetings and conferences and can also be very challenging. Their descriptions of joining and leaving the civil service (see Chapter 5) indicate that while some of them chose to do so, many of them appeared to have had little choice but to leave due to legislation, financial incentives, lack of childcare and strong social norms.

One of the main contributions of this chapter is that it provides rich empirical material that illuminates the work orientations of mid-life to older women returners. This data is not only on their motivations for returning, but also on their experiences in the work-place since returning and on their current attitudes to promotion. This chapter also assesses whether the assumptions and predictions of preference theory hold for this group of women. Preference theory would predict that a percentage of these women who have "chosen" to leave their jobs on marriage would have homogenous "home-centred" preferences. Therefore, they would be "uncommitted" workers, would only work if it didn't interfere with family life, would have extrinsic and social work orientations and

would not be pursuing promotion. Furthermore, these preferences would be expected to remain the same across the life-cycle. As Hakim has argued, 'the two "extreme" groups of home-centred and work-centred women are consistent and persistent in goals and priorities across the life-cycle' (Hakim, 2000: 156).

In general, many of the women seen to have more choice and ability to realise their preferences at this later stage in their lives. By contrast, the narratives describing their earlier lives (see Section 5.5.6) reflect a greater tendency to accommodate the needs of others. This is partly due to changing social norms and economic, social and cultural conditions (see Chapter 4 above) and partly due to the women's individual negotiation of their stage in the life-course (see Phillipson, 1998; Giele & Elder, 1998). However, as we shall see, they face more constraints in realising their preferences than either the long-term workers or senior managers due to their lower earnings, shorter service and location in the organisational hierarchy.

In this chapter, as well as analysing work orientations and decision-making, I include narrative accounts that illustrate how previous restrictive legislation and conditions can have knock-on (constraining) effects on current decision-making for individual women. They also demonstrate that employment status and stated intentions for the future regarding promotion/retirement are not simply a direct reflection of work orientation, but are mediated by the constraints under which such choices are made.

Almost half of the returners (13) are part-time workers – a much higher proportion than that of the higher or middle managers. As has been found in previous research, some of these women have had great difficulty in achieving their preferred employment status (Walsh, 1999, Collins & Wickham, 2004; James, 2008). In the literature, theorists who favour voluntaristic explanations tend to characterise part-time workers as "uncommitted", and "home-centred" as opposed to full-time workers who are seen as "committed" (Hakim, 2000). A number of recent empirical studies have challenged this stereotyping of part-time workers and , as we shall see, in this sample, some of those who are part-time workers are work-centred and ambitious (Walsh, 1999; Wicks, Mishra and Milne, 2002).

This chapter first outlines the social and economic changes that occurred between the time these women joined and left the civil service and when they returned. This is followed by a profile of the workers and a brief outline of their activities during their absence from the

labour market. Next there is a description of the women's decision to return to work in the civil service, followed by an analysis of their current orientations towards work. Then their experiences and future intentions regarding promotion are analysed. Finally, the women are assigned to categories that describe their current relationship towards work.

8.2 Context: Changes in social and economic norms and legislation

This section outlines the radical social and economic changes that took place between the time most of these women left the workforce (most left between 1970 and 1980) and the time they returned. While a minority (one third) of returners went back to work between 1979 and the early 1990s, usually on grounds of economic necessity, two thirds of them returned between 1999 and 2002. Of the group who returned later, most were in their late forties or early fifties.

The main socio-economic and legal changes relevant to the decision-making of these women that took place between the time these women left and when they returned are outlined in detail in Chapter 4 above. They may be summarised as follows:

- Gender norms had changed. All women, particularly older married women were now much more likely to be in paid employment and to have fewer children than their counterparts twenty years earlier. Households were much more likely to be dual-earner.
- Gender equality and age equality legislation had been introduced which protected them against discrimination in employment. Flexible, family-friendly policies had been introduced in the civil service.
- The economic boom had created a high demand for labour.
- Taxes had become individualised.

8.3 Profile of women returners

The typical returner in this group is a married woman with four or more children who has been out of the workforce for approximately twenty years.

Table 24: Age and grade of women returners

Age	Clerical Officer	Staff Officer	Executive Officer	Total
50-54	9	0	1	10
55-59	9	1	2	12
60-64	6	0	0	6
Total	**24**	**1**	**3**	**28**

As we can see most of the returners (88%) are at the basic entry grade of Clerical Officer with only one at the grade of Staff Officer and three Executive Officers. Most (22) are in Dublin – the remaining six are in regional locations.

Age, marital status, education

All 28 returners are women and are aged between 50 and 64, with an average age of 56. Most of the women are or have been married – twenty-four are married; three are separated or divorced and one is widowed. The number of children per family is quite high by today's standards, but was average for the time – seventeen of the women have 4 or more children while nine have three or less and two women do not have children. Overall, this group has a slightly lower level of education than either the managers or the long-term workers in the sense that fewer of the women have third level qualifications. However most (19) have completed secondary school education, with only three women not having done so. Finally, six women have third level education acquired in recent years which include 3 with certificates, and 3 with diplomas or degrees. Several have completed extra-mural courses or other vocational qualifications.

8.4 Returning to work in the Civil Service

Between the time they left the workforce and returned to or joined the civil service all of the women worked in the home caring for children or other dependent family members. However, in addition to this, most of them worked in many other activities. Only five people returned directly to the Civil Service after working in the home. Eighteen had made the decision to go back to work earlier and had found full-time (9) or part-time work (9) elsewhere. Most worked in clerical jobs, in factories and/or in the retail sector. Even those

who worked full-time in the home were often involved in either keeping students, doing the accounts for their husband's business or doing very casual work such as supermarket demonstrating, while a few did intermittent work such as census enumerating. Only two women appear to have engaged in no paid work of any kind in the intervening period.

A large percentage (over two thirds) of the returners in the current research had undertaken some form of re-training prior to returning to work. Six had completed a FÁS return-to-work course specifically designed for people returning to work after working unpaid in the home for a number of years[26]. Seven had completed other forms of training with FÁS (these courses ranged from computerised bookkeeping to electronics) and seven had done some other form of training outside of FÁS (ranging from counselling to alternative medicine). Quite a few women appear to have made sustained efforts to get back into the workforce, overcoming many obstacles to do so. In summary most of these women were economically active to a greater or lesser degree during their time out and many of them sought out training to prepare for their return – they tend to have a higher level of training than the returners in Russell's study (Russell *et al.*, 2002).

8.4.1 Reasons for re-joining the civil service

This section provides an analysis of the women's motivations for returning to work. This helps us to understand their later orientations to work. This is interesting in itself as it enables us to see the complex variety of factors that influence that decision and helps us to understand how preferences are formed. Secondly, it allows us to see how orientations to work evolve over time and helps build a picture that enriches our understanding of the women's current orientations towards work in Section 7.5 below. Table 25 sets out the responses of the women to the question 'Why did you return to work?' It is important to note that many women gave multiple reasons for returning.

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[26] FÁS is the state training agency that provides "return-to-work" courses for women funded in the past by the European Social Fund

Table 25:Reasons for returning to work

(28 respondents)

Reasons for returning*	Number	% of total
Financial necessity • business failed (5) • no pension (3) • income not supporting family (2)	10	36
Personal development • always wanted to (go back to) work (5) • wanted something "for myself" / wanted own money (4) • changed after accident (1)	10	36
Dissatisfaction with role at home • bored at home, isolated, left behind (5) • not appreciated at home, confidence eroded by being at home, ability/intelligence not used.(5)	10	36
Stage of life-cycle (e.g. children were older)	8	29
Family friendly policies and job security in civil service	8	29
Economic conditions	7	25
Relationship broke up / partner ill / partner died	5	18
Changing social norms • so many women were working by then/friends working	3	11
Changes in legislation and policy • individualisation of taxes makes it worthwhile to work • removal of upper age limit for recruitment	3	11

* Note: participants could give more than one reason.

Previous studies have elicited the following motivations for returning to work: financial need, self-esteem, and the opportunity to meet other people (Spain and Bianchi, 1996; Rose, 2001). In the current study, people gave a mixture of motives for returning: an increased demand for labour, legislative change and social changes appear to influence women's decision to return to work.

Financial necessity

A large minority 36% of the women cite financial necessity as their reason for returning to work. Of the earlier returners, some were taken back into the civil service on the grounds of financial hardship (due to their being widowed, separated, not supported by their husbands or their family suffering financial difficulties due to business failure or unemployment).

> My husband was a driver and he was injured and he did some kind of on and off work, but he eventually had to give it up, so I applied to come back on what is called 'hardship grounds'.
> (Interview 18, Clerical Officer, age 55-59)

Many of these had returned in the earlier years (between 1979 and 1990, often at a relatively young age - in their twenties, thirties or early forties). Some were married to lower-paid self-employed men and realised in their forties that they had no pension provision – they mentioned this as an incentive for them to go back to work.

Personal development

A similar proportion (36%) of the returners described themselves as having positively wanted to come back to work for some time. Some of the women had increased their educational qualifications in the meantime – one had completed the leaving cert and one now had completed a degree and one had completed some modules of a degree course while several had completed FÁS return-to work courses. Some women spoke of their return in terms of personal development. As one woman expressed it:

> I wanted to just get back into the workforce because – well, I felt a bit disconnected – just as being a wife and mother at home – I felt disconnected from the whole big world out there – I always did for the twenty years – even though I had all those skills – it's not the same as having a job.
> (Interview 12, Clerical Officer, age 50-54)

In these accounts a rhetoric of emerging personal freedom and development is discernible; there is the sense that they are now free to act on their preferences which are to engage in paid employment. Four others described working in the civil service as giving them the

opportunity for personal development – to contribute to society and to be engaged in interesting work. For these women, work appears to be central to them at this stage in their lives. This echoes similar findings in the UK (Skucha & Bernard, 2000). This supports Beck's argument that by the late 1990s, authoritative norms are breaking down and that leaves people more freedom to create their own biographies. One woman, when asked if she consulted anyone before deciding to return, said:

> I felt that it was my privilege to make up my mind at that stage myself.
> (Interview 24, Clerical Officer, age 55-59).

This is indicative of the development of individuation among these women – of constructing a new sense of identity separate from the family. Previous psychological studies of women (and men) in their fifties have found that at this age, many women who have spent much of their lives providing care for others, find that engaging in paid employment enhances their sense of autonomy and purpose and can in itself be a source of gratification and achievement (Bergquist, Greenberg & Klaum, 1993; Levinson & Levinson, 1996). Eight people positively chose to work in the civil service specifically either because they had enjoyed their previous experience working there or because they liked office work itself .

Dissatisfaction with working unpaid in home

One third (36%) of the women said they felt bored and isolated working at home. Others expressed even more strongly that they felt that their confidence had been undermined as a result of their years working unpaid in the home (see below). These women appeared to experience working unpaid in the home as unfulfilling at best and destructive to their confidence and ability at worst. One woman actually applied to re-join as a Clerical Assistant - two grades below the grade she had attained just prior to leaving the civil service. A report on returners in Ireland also found that some women experienced a loss of confidence in their abilities after spending a period of time in the home (Russell et al., 2002: 64-5).

Others reported feeling "left behind" – by this they explained that they were aware that they were not au fait with the latest technology.

I felt I was being left behind. My husband and children were coming in and talking about technology and I didn't know what they were talking about.

(Interview 28, Clerical Officer, age 60-64).

They felt that their ability and intelligence wasn't being used. These were cited by them as factors which impelled them to look for paid work. The legislative and ideological environment which had originally influenced these women to leave the paid labour market had changed sufficiently to facilitate their return by the end of the 1990s.

Stage of life-cycle

29% of women typically said they were returning to work because their children were now starting secondary school or university. These women do appear to have "home-centred" preferences; their primary orientation was to home and family but they now felt free to work since it wouldn't interfere with family life. Work supplemented the family finances and/or gave them some money to spend on themselves.

Some of the social changes that affected these women included the reduction in average family size (although still comparatively large in European terms) due to the lifting of the ban on contraception (Mahon, 1998: 171). The women returners typically had four children. By the time their children were older, some of these women began to feel redundant at home. One woman describes it in this way:

It was getting kind of boring at home and you're not appreciated. When they get older, they actually don't appreciate you being there. When they get older, they don't *want* you being there nearly. You're too interested in what they're doing and you need something for yourself so – all of that.

(Interview 24, Clerical Officer, age 55-59).

Even for women who were strongly involved with their families originally, life-cycle transitions such as children growing up revealed to them that a central element of their identity (their role as full-time mother) was no longer required of them or was not fulfilling to them in the way that it had been.

Family friendly policies in the civil service

As described above, many of the women had returned to work in less secure occupations e.g. retail work. Many of them were attracted to the civil service by the conditions such as

job security and "family friendly" policies. Eight of the returners (29%) cited the availability of family friendly policies in the civil service as making it an attractive option for them enabling them to combine care of older children with paid work and these were cited as important elements in their decision to return to work (see Table 25 above). During the late 1980s and 1990s the civil service had introduced new schemes and/or broadened the scope of existing family friendly policies. For example, flexi-time, work-sharing and term-time schemes were introduced and the type of work-sharing that could be availed of was expanded so that people could work almost any number of days in a week. The changes in legislation, ideology and civil service policy combined with the stage they had reached in their life course made the civil service an attractive option for these family-centred women.

Conditions in the economy.

The advent of the "Celtic Tiger" meant that there was a shortage of workers and employers (including the civil service) tried to attract former civil servants. During the period when most of these women returned to work – ranging from the late 1990s to 2002 – there was an economic boom and there was a strong demand for labour by employers. The civil service was finding it difficult to attract workers since the wages they could offer compared unfavourably with wages in the private sector. In order to fill the gap in the labour supply, they initiated a recruitment campaign targeted at former civil servants and ran competitions in 1999 and 2000 specifically for them. Seven (25%)of the workers mention these competitions as significant – as being the specific event that triggered them to come back to work. For example, one woman who was previously employed in a factory described the recruitment campaign as "a godsend". This increased demand for older workers in the economy acted as a "pull" factor. Not only were constraints removed, but this group of former civil servants was specifically targeted as part of a recruitment drive.

Relationships/marriage ending

For 18% of the women, the death of a partner/spouse or the break up of a relationship were mentioned as motivating factors in their going back to work. One woman whose marriage broke up said it was important for her to demonstrate to herself and others that she could provide for her son. For the women whose marriages had broken up, there was usually a financial need to work. For some of these women, their work role now became a more important part of their identity (see Skucha & Bernard, 2000; Skinner, 2003).

Changed social norms

By 2002 it had become more the norm for older women to be in the formal paid workplace in Ireland. Three returners mention their awareness of this societal trend as something that influenced them to return to the civil service. As one woman put it:

> I suppose you could say that the climate at the time was that women started to go back to work and I suppose you could say that I felt so should I and I did.
>
> (Interview 10, Clerical Officer, age 50-54)

By 2002, societal gender norms in Ireland regarding whether women should be in paid employment had changed. Whereas in 1975, 60% of Irish men and women surveyed thought women should be more concerned with housework and children than with careers, this had reduced to less than 40% by 1986 (Fine-Davis, cited in O'Connor, 1998). By 1997, 36% of women surveyed in Ireland favoured equal roles for men and women. By 1999, only 15.4% of Irish people surveyed in the European Values Survey agreed that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women; this was down from 35.5% in 1990 (European Values Survey, 1990). Clearly there had been a marked change in attitude to women working in Ireland since the time these returners left work originally (European Values Survey, 1999).

What had caused this change in attitudes? As well as the structural changes in the economy and demographic factors mentioned already, another factor which contributed to changing societal norms was the influence of the women's movement which had had several effects on Irish society in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including the setting up of women's groups in many communities. The government's introduction of training courses (funded by the European Social Fund) aimed at encouraging women into the labour market also had an impact on the women in Ireland in general and on the returners in this study in particular. Some of the women's groups ran Back to Education courses for women who hadn't completed their secondary schooling. FÁS return-to-work courses also had an impact on a number of the returners. One woman who completed a FÁS course said it had alerted her to the fact that she used to provide many hours of free labour to community organisations. She now valued her time and skills more and wanted to be paid for her contribution to society and this had formed part of her motivation for returning. So, among some of the returners there was evidence of a developing consciousness of the value of their efforts – a new way of seeing themselves that led them into paid employment.

Legislative changes – taxation and anti-discrimination

Three respondents (11%) mentioned the individualisation of taxation as being influential in her decision to return to work. Three people cited taxation policy and/or the removal of the upper age limit for recruitment. One woman said:

> He [Minister for Finance Charlie McCreevy] changed the tax system so it was worthwhile
> for women to go back to work. You know, you'll be taxed on an individual basis – that was
> a huge thing for women.
> (Interview 26, Clerical Officer, age 55-59).

highlighting the disincentive to work that existed before this legislative reform. The legislative environment was changing during this period with anti-age discrimination laws being enacted from 1998 onwards. This resulted in the removal of upper age limits for recruitment.

Returning to the civil service in particular

The women gave a variety of reasons for returning to the civil service in particular, reflecting a mixture of constraints and choice. Just over a quarter (eight) of the returners represented their return to the civil service as a fall-back option. Some said they returned there because they weren't qualified for anything else. Some of these women had not finished secondary school or gone past Leaving Cert level and felt that this would be a disadvantage in applying for other work. This finding tends to support the life course approach which suggests that previous (disadvantageous) circumstances can have a cumulative constraining effect on the individual at a later point in their career. Similar reasons for taking up/staying in jobs were reported in a recent UK study (Walters, 2005: 206).

Dissatisfaction with previous work experience and ageism encountered in the private sector

Several of the women had previously worked in the private sector and had encountered poor conditions of work and/or ageist attitudes. They perceived the civil service as offering better conditions of work. Prior to returning to work in the civil service, nine of the women had worked full-time and nine part-time; twelve of them worked in clerical jobs and/or in

the retail sector. This reflects the limited opportunities open to women of this age and education returning to work – almost 60% of older women workers in Ireland are employed in service, retail or elementary occupations (Russell & Fahey, 2004: 22).

A few women stated that they encountered ageist attitudes when they were applying for jobs in the private sector. For example, one woman discovered from her colleagues that her employer had asked them if they would mind working with an older woman before giving her the job. Another woman said that she and her fellow-students were advised by the instructor in the FÁS return-to-work course not to put their age on job application forms. While not everyone in this study perceives the civil service as non-discriminatory in relation to age, it is seen among this group as less discriminatory than other typical employers of older women in Ireland. For many women in this group, their previous jobs had been insecure with poor conditions, and any regular, permanent job was an improvement. Bad experiences in their previous employment history have been found to be important in shaping acceptance of current relatively better employment conditions (Walters, 2005).

"Easy job"

Finally, some women said they joined the civil service because they wanted a relatively easy job or "cushy number". Some of these had previously worked in stressful jobs or in shift-work in factories. One woman observed:

> Well, I wanted to move from the multi-national because there were 12-hour shifts and it was very unsociable – I mean hours-wise.
> (Interview 21, Clerical Officer, age 55-59).

As was the case for some women working in the home, dissatisfaction with conditions in the other types of work available to them led these women to regard the civil service as a relatively benign employer with good conditions.

Discussion

The accounts of most of the women joining the civil service are dominated by the constraints that existed for women in Ireland at the time – these were familial, financial, ideological and economy-related. The accounts of their earlier decisions to join and leave

the civil service are in general indicative of identification with family and lack of individuation, although some women explain that they wanted to continue work, but this simply wasn't possible for them. During this period, there were the beginnings of legislative change which would enable women to combine work and family and a slight change in societal attitudes towards women working. The accounts they give of their motivations for returning to work are indicative of vast social changes over the intervening years – changes in the structure of the economy, the presence of more women in the labour market, reduced family size and a changed ideological climate. Life-course transitions such as children growing up emerge as an important motivation for returning to work in the context of economic and social change. For one group of women, their narratives are permeated by the rhetoric of personal development and fulfilment – indicating that they have a more individuated conception of their own identity – one that is now partly based on their employment. This lends some support to Ulrich Beck's theorisation outlined in Chapter 2 (see Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). There is, nevertheless, also evidence that the constraints that affected them previously have knock-on effects on their lives, a finding that lends itself to a life-course approach in terms of analysis. There is evidence that there are still restricted employment opportunities for older women in Ireland. The next section explores their decision-making after returning to work in relation to promotion.

8.5 Work orientation among returners

In analysing the orientations of the returners, we might expect (if we accept the tenets of preference theory) that they would not display intrinsic orientations, but instead have almost exclusively social and/or extrinsic orientations. As in previous chapters, the women's orientations to work are categorised into intrinsic, extrinsic and social orientations and I have added a fourth orientation – identity/personal fulfilment (see Chapter 5 for details). However, there have been a number of studies in recent years that suggest that workers don't fit neatly or exclusively into any one of these categories (Fagan, 2001; Collins & Wickham, 2004, Nolan, 2009). As was the case for long-term workers and managers, returners' work orientations also appear to be multi-faceted.

Table 26: Orientations to work: returners

(28 respondents)

	Number	% of total
Extrinsic (money) orientation • own money (4) • means to an end (3) • main income (2) • money for extras (holidays / renovations / dental work, etc. (7) • further education (2) • flexibility, security (2)	20	71
Intrinsic (job) orientation • interest in work itself (8) • satisfaction out of giving good service / helping public (6) • see it as a career (5)	19	68
Social orientation • friends, camaraderie (10) • "love going out to work" (4) • wouldn't like to be at home (3)	17	61
Identity orientation • personal fulfilment /achievement (3) • independence (1) • work "means everything", a structure, a status (3) • boost to confidence (1) • doing my best/my contribution (1)	9	32

* Research participants typically gave more than one response

It appears from the number of responses that returners' work orientations are not reducible to one particular type. 61% of the women (17) have a "social" orientation – they like the opportunity that work provides them with to interact with other people – but many of these are simultaneously very interested in the work itself and the opportunity to earn money also matters to them.

8.5.1 Extrinsic orientation

As might be expected, the most frequently-mentioned type of orientation for returners was extrinsic. Well over half of the women (71%) mention factors which fit into the "extrinsic" category. They value earning their own money – being able to pay for holidays, buying clothes for themselves and putting money into a pension fund. As one woman put it:

> Yeah, well I sort of had no money for myself except the children's allowance – you know what I mean. Everything went on the children and the house and you just didn't have money you could call your own, you know.
>
> (Interview 9, Clerical Officer, age 60-64)

Others say that the job has enabled them to spend money for their own personal use that they might not otherwise have done. For example one woman mentioned that her job paid for her to have dental work carried out. For one person her wage is the main household income and two others see work only in terms of the money it earns for them. While many women mention that they enjoy the money they get from working, some of these also enjoy the work itself. Only three of the women may be classed as working purely for the money.

8.5.2 Intrinsic (work) orientation

Perhaps surprisingly, a sizeable group of women (68%) appear to be very committed to and to enjoy features of the work itself – to have an intrinsic job orientation. As we might expect, this is a lower proportion than for either long-term workers (72%) or managers(79%); however, it is a surprisingly large percentage for this group, whom preference theory might expect to have purely extrinsic and social orientations. The satisfaction they report ranges from enjoying understanding how the system works to providing a good quality service to the public, to developing new more efficient ways of working. Three of these women won awards for developing improved operations in their sections. For example, one woman realized there was no systematic description of processes in the section and she devised one herself for training in new recruits. The following quotations illustrate the types of intrinsic satisfaction they report getting from the work itself:

> I find Revenue work very interesting ... the real dealings of people with Revenue – it's an education in itself. I wouldn't have known any of that before I came back – it's a whole

network of stuff and it's all very interesting ... I really enjoy it and find it very stimulating. I would hate to be in a boring job with very little to do and it to be uninteresting.
(Interview 12, Clerical Officer, age 50- 54)

Another woman says:

You're making a commitment to give a good quality service and you feel you're doing it.
(Interview 11, Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

This evidence that over two thirds of the women have an intrinsic job orientation tends to challenge the contention that "home-centred" women are "grateful slaves" with no real interest in or commitment to work.

8.5.3 Social orientation

There is evidence that 57% of the women also enjoy the social aspect of their work – and may be said to have a "people" orientation. Several women mention that they have made good friends at work. A few of these women are not very interested in the work itself – for example one woman says:

Well, it doesn't really mean that much to me – it's not really a big thing, like family, friends or health.
(Interview 15, Clerical Officer, age 55-59)

However, others with a social orientation also appear to combine this with an extrinsic orientation and/or an intrinsic orientation. For example, one woman, a Clerical Officer says:

Yes, we're a small division - it's a bit like family. We all get on very well, really and at the same time, people slag each other to a very great extent too.
(Interview 10, Clerical Officer, age 50-54)

but she also exhibits a strong work orientation:

I like the buzz of the job. There's always something different to do... There are a lot of hard-working people here. It's very different. What's in the paper can dictate what you are going to do that day. (We) have to deal with the media.

Her narrative also showed that she had an extrinsic orientation – she loved the fact that earning money to enabled her to buy clothes for herself. In the case of this particular woman, she had been selected for a very responsible job and was evidently very enthusiastic about her work, but also enjoyed both the social aspect of it and the purchasing power it gave her. This supports the contention that many women may have multi-stranded orientations to work (Proctor & Padfield, 1999; Fagan, 2001; Collins & Wickham, 2004).

8.5.4 Identity orientation

Finally 32% of the women say that their work is a very important source of identity for them or that it gives them personal fulfilment. This is perhaps surprisingly high (almost as high as that for the other two groups) given that preference theory would predict that these women would have mainly social and extrinsic orientations to work. This is a form of discourse that was not very often evident when the women were describing their decision to join or leave the civil service originally. The following is an examples of a woman who describes her work as fulfilling for herself in some way:

> It's stimulating. It's making me more aware of what I am capable of – mentally and it's broadening my - I think it's given me more confidence and more of an idea of who I am.
> (Interview 11, Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

This language of self-fulfilment is much more in evidence in the later parts of the women's accounts. In the earlier parts describing their decision to join and leave the civil service, societal norms and financial constraints are mentioned much more frequently. In the narratives describing the earlier part of the women's lives, work is referred to not as something chosen or preferred, but as something they *have* to do.

8.5.5 Discussion of orientations

As suggested above, many of the women appeared to have multiple co-existing orientations to work. One particular woman's narrative speaks with great enthusiasm of her work itself, but also of what it means to her in terms of money and opportunities for self-fulfilment – evidence of multi-stranded work orientations.

I'm part of the big picture as regards government I took in €X million this year for the government.

(Interview 11, Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

She goes on to describe improvements that she has made to work systems – how she has developed and now uses a database to carry out a task that used to be done manually. She also emphasises that she has developed a better sense of her own capabilities:

It's stimulating. It's making me more aware of what I'm capable of – mentally and it's broadening my ... it's given me a broader view of myself as a person.
(Interview 11, Clerical Officer).

She also described how her job enabled her to buy a second house which she planned to use as a pension since neither she nor her husband had any pension provision. This woman's account gives evidence of multi-stranded orientations (there are several other similar examples of this among the returners) and challenges the idea that people possess exclusively intrinsic or extrinsic orientations or are primarily driven by a kind of *a priori* preference that they "have" early in life (see also James, 2008). Rather people form new preferences as they grow and change and the ability to do this depends on opportunities being available to them. This woman has both a home-centred and a work-centred orientation and her choices are made within a particular social and economic environment that has changed significantly since she first joined the workforce. Before the upper age limit on recruitment was removed, this woman would not have been able to return to work and may not have discovered that she had these capabilities. This suggests that a conceptualisation like Casey's conception of the "self-as-process" is more useful for understanding the work orientations of these women than the static, simplistic model offered by preference theory.

8.6 Returners: promotion experiences and intentions

One of the most crucial work-related decisions for returners is whether or not to apply for promotion. The analysis of this decision and of the women's stated reasons for their decision gives an insight into how they locate themselves in relation to work.

8.6.1 Routes to and experiences of promotion

Most returners were recruited either as Clerical Officers or Clerical Assistants[27] and for people at CO level, there are basically three ways of getting promoted (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed description). One can apply for inter-departmental promotion which involves both a written and a mathematical exam and an interview or for internal (departmental) promotion which usually means undergoing an interview. Following these interviews, successful candidates are placed on a panel and called in order of placement (based on performance at the interview). The exam for promotion, particularly the mathematical portion of the exam was mentioned by several of the returners as an obstacle to them. The large numbers of Clerical Officers and the few promotional outlets in some large Departments mean that it is extremely difficult to be promoted through the "senior suitable" method and the civil service is moving away from using this method in many departments (see also Mahon, 1990: 19-20; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). Those at EO level, may apply through either inter-departmental competitions or internal competitions. Generally most returners are at a disadvantage in relation to promotion based on senior suitability due to their relatively short service.

From their promotion-related decisions to date, it appears that a majority of women returners are or at least were interested in career advancement. In all, 68% had applied for promotion at least once and often several times since they returned to work, but only 4% of them had actually been promoted since returning[28] . This lack of success cannot be solely attributed to the women only having been back in the civil service for a short period of time. At least nine women have been back in the civil service for over 10 years – some have over 20 years service. As we shall see, the promotional process and structures have a part to play in this.

8.6.2 Future promotion intentions

Half of the returners (a considerably smaller proportion than the 68% who originally applied) say they will apply for promotion in the future, while 32% will not apply and 18% may apply. This indicates that a majority of the women are still interested in advancement, contrary to what preference theory might predict for this once apparently "home-centred" group.

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[27] This grade no longer exists – all CAs have been re-graded to CO.

[28] One woman had been promoted twice and one had been promoted three times (from CA).

Table 27: Promotion intentions of returners

	Number	%
Will apply	14	50%
May apply	5	18%
Will not apply	9	32%
Total	**28**	**100**

Perhaps surprisingly, the proportion of this group intending to apply for promotion (50%) is higher than that of managers (45%). Some of these women say they are ambitious and would like more interesting work; others would like more money and a better pension; other say that succeeding in promotion would be a personal achievement for them. Those who are not going to apply give a variety of reasons including not having any interest (these are home-centred women) - they had never applied for promotion and saw their job just as a means of earning money and having a social outlet. Some were happy in their current position and didn't want extra responsibility. Two others had almost been promoted (had been placed high on promotional panels) and were then disappointed. This is due to the small number of promotional outlets in their Department; others were unable to do the mathematical aptitude tests and this deterred them. Those who may apply say they may apply if they could get promotion in a location near them; others may apply depending on when de-centralisation goes ahead in their department; finally one person would apply if she no longer had caring responsibilities. All of these issues are discussed more fully in the next section.

8.6.3 Factors that affect the promotion decision

This section analyses the factors identified by returners as having impacts on their decisions around promotion.

Table 28: Perceived barriers to promotion – returners

(28 respondents)

	Number	% of total
No barriers	9	32
Promotion system / • mathematical aptitude test	9	32
Perceived gender-related discrimination	7	25
Structural constraints: • no realistic chance at CO level	6	21
Choice: • don't want responsibility	6	21
Perceived age-related discrimination • ageism	6	21
Perceived personal inadequacy • can't do interviews(3) • don't have the personal qualities required (1)	4	14
Lack of educational qualifications	4	14
Age	3	11
Decentralisation	2	7
Caring for dependant family members	2	7

Note: Some research participants named more than one barrier.

"No barriers"

It is interesting that 32% of returners perceive no barriers to promotion in the civil service. Part of the reason may be that many of them mention observing or experiencing age-related and/or gender-related discrimination from employers in the private sector and perceive the civil service as relatively fair by contrast to this. Others have no interest in promotion and so have not encountered any barriers.

8.6. 3 (a) Work-related factors affecting promotion

Promotion process: aptitude tests

It is interesting that almost two thirds of returners had hoped to be promoted when they first came back and that had changed for some due to their experience. It appears that many returners are ambitious, but that the structures and some elements of the promotion process are discouraging and they gradually become disillusioned. A third (32%) of the returners said the exam "put them off" – in particular the exam that required rapid mathematical reasoning. Many of them felt that this exam was easier for young people just out of school who would have done similar tests recently. As one woman put it:

> It's just not for my generation ... I think younger people out of college or out of school would be better able to handle those.
> (Interview 13, Clerical Officer, age 60-64)

And another said the experience of doing these aptitude tests has put her off applying for promotion

> I did two aptitude tests at different times for the next level up – EO and I wasn't successful with either. I find those tests absolutely horrendous. They're absolutely a complete and total barrier – I wouldn't even bother trying again.
> (Interview 12, Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

They also felt that this type of exam didn't reflect their ability to do the job. Having this type of exam as a requirement for inter-departmental promotion appears to be an age-related barrier, amounting to a form of indirect discrimination. This very issue was highlighted in a recent study of the civil service as something affecting older women (Humphrey, Drew & Murphy, 1999).

Perceived gender-related discrimination.

A higher proportion (25%) of the returners than of managers (21%) or long-term workers (7%) state that they believe that there is currently gender-related discrimination against women in the civil service while a further 11% said that there had been such discrimination in the past. They cited the absence of women in senior posts and the difficulty of getting promoted from CO level, a level where women are pre-dominantly to be found. However, they didn't directly say it would stop them personally from applying for promotion.

Structural barriers – promotional bottle-necks

Overall 21% of returners cited promotional structures as a barrier; in some departments they were such that it was very difficult to get internal promotion because of the large numbers at CO level, so the exam was the only way to move forward. One woman's narrative described just such a process. She had won an award for her work and had performed well at interview and was placed on a panel, but the panel expired just a few places before her number was reached. A similar process happened to at least two other returners. She comments: "I'm applying no more" (Interview 24, Clerical Officer, age 55-59).

Interestingly, from a methodological point of view, if this woman were simply asked if she were interested in promotion she would have replied "no". It is only by reading her narrative account that it becomes clear that she was ambitious, very competent and interested in her work and in promotion and that it was workplace structures that rendered it almost impossible for her to get promoted – the promotional panel expired just two places before she was called (see also Walters, 2005).

Perceived age-related discrimination

A much lower proportion of returners (21%) than of managers (47%) or long-term workers (52%) said they believed that there was age-related discrimination in the civil service at the time of interview. Seventeen respondents (61%) of the total said they didn't believe that people were unfairly treated or discriminated against on the basis of age in the civil service. The remainder said they didn't know or hadn't come across it. Of those who did believe there was age discrimination in the civil service, their view was based on either personal experience or observation. For example, one woman expressed her intention to apply for promotion and the manager of her section expressed surprise that she would think of applying at her age. As a result of this, she decided not to apply as she felt it would be a waste of time if that attitude were shared by people in authority who might be interviewing or assessing her. Two other women had worked in sections where they had heard the managers say they wanted only young people to be assigned to them.

Part of the reason that fewer of the returners than other groups perceive age discrimination may be that one third of them have never applied for promotion and so have not come

encountered discrimination; another possible reason is that they perceive the civil service to be fair in comparison to the employers they have encountered in the private sector. Although 20% perceive discrimination, only 10% say that this perceived discrimination would actually stop them from applying for promotion.

Stress

One woman says she is not going to apply for promotion because she is planning to leave due to stress induced by her work. This woman works in a very busy high profile section and often works more than the required hours – sometimes 10 hour days. While she enjoys the work which is varied and demanding, the constant pressure has taken its toll and she found that her life was dominated by work.

De-centralisation

De-centralisation is cited as an issue that might deter them from applying for promotion by only 7% of returners. Clearly it is not as important for them as for either managers (18%) or long-term workers 10% of whom mention it as a barrier. Returners possibly face similar barriers in either Dublin or a de-centralised location whereas managers see fewer opportunities for themselves in regional locations.

8.6.3 (b) Impact of non-work factors on promotion decision

The returners identify other factors outside of work which affect their willingness to apply for promotion. From their descriptions of joining and leaving the civil service, it is quite clear that most of the women in this group were profoundly affected by societal gender norms – particularly the gender norm that women are expected to be the primary carer for children and dependants. It is clear also that leaving the work place negatively affects their current chances for promotion since their length of service is shorter. This section describes those issues that they identify as currently affecting their promotional opportunities.

Work-life balance

As might be expected six women (21%) said that they had never been and were not now interested in promotion and want to preserve the work-life balance they currently had. They chose not to apply for promotion because they didn't want a more responsible, taxing

position. These women appear to fit with Hakim's "home-centred" workers who have extrinsic and/or social orientations and who just want a relatively easy job to enable them to earn money. For some this is associated with currently caring for dependent parents and consequently feeling that they are not in a position to take on further responsibility.

Lack of prior resources, educational qualifications

As we saw in Chapter 4, many of these women joined without any kind of career planning, and many needed to earn money to assist their families or at least not to be a financial burden to them. Four of the women (14%) said that they saw their lack of third-level educational qualifications as a barrier to promotion now. Generally speaking the women returners, when contrasted with the long-term workers and managers, do have somewhat lower educational qualifications (although as we have seen, many of the senior managers do not have third level qualifications). This demonstrates the implications that lack of resources earlier in life may have on later career chances.

Age

A small proportion of returners (11%) state that they are "too old" for promotion and two of these women are aged 63 and 64. This may be because the group of women have successfully negotiated the experience of taking on new challenges (applying for jobs) and succeeding in mid-life and are less likely to regard age as an obstacle. However, one woman said she wouldn't do an exam at this stage of her life (she was in her mid-fifties) – the reason she gave was that her children were doing exams. She appeared to have internalized the idea that it was inappropriate for her at her age to take an exam. This attitude had a significant effect on her chances for promotion as the exam was the most direct mechanism for getting promoted. The other route to promotion was seniority and there was a waiting list of many years in her particular department. This woman was very successful at her job and had been chosen for a very responsible post so it was extremely likely that she would have been promoted had the exam not been a requirement.

Perceived personal inadequacy

A further two women said they believed that they didn't have the qualities necessary for a more senior post. Two women wouldn't apply because they felt that they couldn't do interviews. Interestingly many of the managers confirmed this, saying that some of their best workers didn't get promoted because of their inability to perform well at interviews.

Societal gender norms: caring for dependent family members

Only 7% of women mentioned caring for dependent family members as something which was preventing them from applying for promotion at the time of interview. They said they didn't want to have to move location if promoted or that their current job allowed them to combine caring, commuting and working and they didn't want to disrupt that balance. However, a further 11% said that caring in the past had prevented them from returning to work when they wanted to.

Societal gender norms: primary carer for children

In the past, most of these women have been profoundly influenced by societal gender norms and legislation to the extent that they left work for long periods of time. This has had obvious impacts on their opportunities for promotion and knock-on effects in reduced length of service. However, the women do not mention children as affecting their willingness to apply for promotion at the time of interview. The probable reason for this is the stage of the life cycle; in most cases the children are now grown up and independent.

8.7 Changes in ambition over time

According to preference theory we would expect the returners to have "home-centred" preferences and therefore we would not expect them to apply for promotion. We would also expect those preferences to remain stable over time. However, as the following table indicates, only one third of the returners were "never ambitious" and remained that way over time. The table below summarises responses to the question, 'Are you more likely to apply for promotion now than in the past?'

Table 29: Changes in ambition: returners

	Number	%
No change: never very ambitious	8	28
No change: always somewhat ambitious	5	18
Less ambitious now	10	36
More ambitious now	5	18
Total	**28**	**100**

Of the 68% of women (19) who originally did apply for promotion, over half (10) of these have become disillusioned and are less ambitious now as a result of encountering some of the barriers outlined above – their experience of applying for promotion and their encounter with the organizational structures that makes promotion on senior suitability extremely unlikely and /or the exam system that applies in the case of competitive promotion (see Section 8.6.3 (a) above). They either won't apply again or may apply again, but are not hopeful of being promoted.

However 18% of returners report that they are more ambitious now than they were when they first returned. Some of these are women who have been promoted. Three attribute this partly to encouragement from their line managers to apply for promotion. For example, one woman who had been promoted once and who was on a panel waiting to be promoted again explicitly said that her attitude to work had changed from seeing it mainly as a means of earning money to seeing it as a career. She attributed this transformation to her experience of succeeding at promotional competitions:

> I'm beginning to see it now as a career – it was just a means of earning money but now I'm
> beginning to see I'm up there with the career people.
> (Interview 16, Staff Officer, age 55-59)

However some women (32%) became less ambitious over time. The following example illustrates how a person's confidence and level of ambition may be affected by factors outside of work. One woman had been work-centred, ambitious and successful when she had worked in the civil service originally and had been promoted twice – she was an EO when she left. She re-joined the civil service at Clerical Assistant grade. When she was asked why she hadn't applied to come back as an EO, she said:

I'd say my confidence was well eroded after all the time I spent at home.
(Interview 26, Clerical Officer, age 55-59).

This echoes findings in research in the UK which has identified a pattern of downward mobility among women returners (McRae, 1993; McGivney, 1999, cited in NESF, 2000; Barrett *et al.*, 2000) and indicates that adverse experiences outside of work may result in reduced self-esteem, thus apparently changing people's work orientations. In addition to feeling less confident, these women re-begin their careers in a less advantageous position (than those who have been able to remain in the civil service) in relation to promotion and pensions. This again suggests the importance of incorporating a life-course approach to analysis of attitudes to work.

18% of women state that they were always ambitious. They said that if they were starting out now they would take every opportunity to apply for advancement, but that at the time they had joined the civil service, the climate was such that they were expected to resign on marriage. Thus there is evidence that many of the returners have work-centred preferences. However, due to the legislation and the social norms that prevailed in the past, there was no outlet for such preferences to develop. Recent feminist theories and theories of psychological development challenge the view that peoples' basic existential stance or attitudes towards work and other issues are immutably "fixed" in early adulthood (see for example Cohen, 2005; Giele & Elder, 1998). There is a good deal of empirical support for the view that orientations to work do change over time (Collins & Wickham, 2004; Proctor & Padfield, 1999; McRae, 2003a; James, 2008).

8:8 Returners: categories

In this section, I outline the distribution of returners into categories (see Chapter 6.6 for details of categories)[29]. Since most of these women left the labour market and spent several years at home caring for their families, preference theory would suggest that they would all be home-centred or perhaps "adaptives" and that none of them would be work/career-centred. As we might expect, most (68%) returners do fit into categories 3 or 4, that is satisficers or home/personal-centred workers. However one of the most striking and

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[29] See Chapter 6 and Appendix 5 for description of categories and how workers are assigned to them

perhaps unexpected findings is that a substantial proportion (32%) of this group are either work/career centred workers or maximisers/aspirers. They are ambitious and do intend to apply for promotion. As was shown earlier, they did not have an opportunity to fulfil or even express this preference earlier in their lives due to restrictive legislation.

Table 30: Returners: categories

Categories	Number	%
Category 1: Work/career centred	2	7
Category 2: Maximisers/aspirers	7	25
Category 3: Satisficers	10	36
Category 4: Home/personal-centred	9	32
Total	**28**	**100**

The two women who are in the work/career-centred category share some characteristics. Both describe themselves as "having to leave" the labour market and as having certain regrets about this later. One woman was unable to find childcare and had no family nearby. Both had acquired many skills and some formal qualifications during the period after they had left their original jobs. These skills (IT and leadership/facilitation skills) were acquired through involvement in voluntary organisations and committees and through various kinds of paid employment including running a business. One woman describes herself as having a strong sense of public service. She mentions the removal of the upper age limit for recruitment as an important factor which enabled her to apply to the civil service; the other woman mentioned the competition for former civil servants and financial necessity as the trigger factors for her to apply to re-join the civil service. Both received encouragement from their line managers to apply for promotion – one has already been promoted and is on a panel for future promotion. Both are in the 55-59 age group and both describe their work as a career and aspire to reach the next grade.

8.8.1 Returners' categories: changes over time

Two more detailed case studies – those of "Sheila" and "Janet" – illustrate the complexity of returners' decision-making and attitudes to work in general and promotion in particular and demonstrate how they change over time

Sheila's story – home-centred, work-centred or adaptive?
Sheila appears to be home-centred. She had to leave work due to the marriage bar which was still in operation in 1970. Of her decision to leave the civil service, she says

> I never regretted staying at home with my children – I feel sorry for girls now who have to try to do everything – we were lucky.
> (Interview 24, Clerical Officer, age 55-59).

She had two children and returned to work when they were teenagers because she felt that she was no longer needed at home:

> Your kids don't need you – they don't *want* you at home nearly. You're too interested in them and you need something for yourself.
> (Interview 24, Clerical Officer)

She regards her job now as useful for providing extra money and because it can fit in around her family. But she also says that work is very important to her: She has won an award for her suggestions to improve processes at work and has applied for promotion; she has twice been placed on a panel for promotion but the panel expired before she was reached. She now says she is no longer going to apply. She attributes this to a bottle-neck in her department at her grade which means that it is highly unlikely that she will be promoted internally. In inter-departmental competition, the kind of exams she must take make it unlikely that somebody of her age will succeed although she (and her managers) feel that she would be well capable of working at the higher grade.

Thus, although at one level, Sheila appears "home-centred", she is quite strongly committed to her work, and has applied for promotion. It was only after a number of disappointments that she has resigned herself to seeing her job as "just a job". If we

analyse her changing preferences according to preference theory, she was home-centred when her children were young, became work-centred and now has reverted to being "adaptive". This leads one to conclude that these typologies are not robust – that they are not stable in the long-term (see Procter & Padfield, 1999). In terms of the model used in this thesis, see figure 5 below she moved from being home/personal-centred (Point A), to being a maximiser (Point C)and then back to being a satisficer (Point B). She will no longer actively apply for promotion, but would accept it, if it were offered to her.

Figure 6: Returners: changes on continuum

| A | B | C | D |
| Home/Personal Centred | Satisficers | Maximisers/Aspirers | Work/Career Centred |
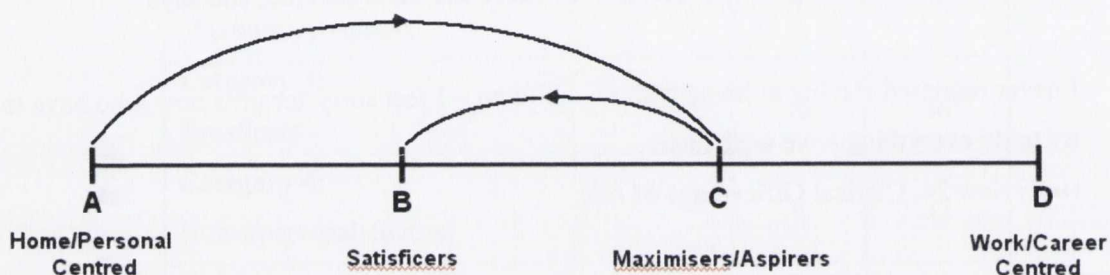
Janet's story

Janet left the civil service in 1978, because it was the "normal thing to do" – the gratuity was useful and there was no childcare. She realised very quickly that she felt isolated and somewhat unfulfilled as a full-time mother of small children. While she did enjoy looking after her children, she always wanted to return to work, both because work was important to her and for the money it would bring. She was delighted when the opportunity arose that the civil service was recruiting former civil servants. She had completed a FÁS computer course with the intention of returning to work and worked part-time as secretary to a professional person, but didn't like the relative isolation in this job and the lack of career prospects. She says:

> I really appreciate being back in the workforce … I was without it so long and I really enjoy it and find it stimulating.
> (Interview 12, Clerical Officer, age 50-54)

She sees the civil service in a positive light as a place where it was possible to work and progress in a large organisation. She says work is very important to her – she loves her job

and intends to apply for promotion again. However, she sees the aptitude test as a barrier. She says the test is

> good for young people, but not for people my age-group.... And you don't need those skills for the job.
> (Interview 12, Clerical Officer).

In her account of leaving the workplace, Janet invokes social norms (rather than choice) and institutional constraints together with a financial impetus for leaving the workplace. Currently, even though she work-shares, she sees herself as very committed to work and hopes to have a career. This is not simply attributable to an innate fixed preference, but is a position that has emerged through both her personal and work-related experience. She has an intrinsic work orientation. In terms of preference theory, she has moved from being an apparently "home-centred" person to being a "work-centred" person. However, using the model developed outlined in Figure 5, she can be said to have moved from being home-centred (Point A) to being a maximiser (Point C). She aspires to reach the next grade and although she finds the aptitude tests off-putting, she hopes that this system may change and that interviews may be used.

8.9 Conclusion

The accounts of the returners indicate that 32% of them are highly committed to their work and are in fact ambitious. Furthermore, it appears from the evidence in the narratives that the social, legal and economic situation in which the women make choices have an important bearing both on the formation of preferences and on their freedom to act on their preferences. This lends further support to the empirical and theoretical findings of critics of the overly voluntaristic nature of preference theory (Walsh, 1999; Wicks, Mishra and Milne, 2002; McRae, 2003a). For many of this group their preferences appear to change and evolve over time. Several of the options they are now availing of simply didn't exist at an earlier point in their lives due to restrictive legislation and gendered social norms. There is evidence in the narratives of the returners that some of the women may always have had work-centred preferences, but not have been free to pursue them in earlier years (Walters, 2005:209). According to Hakim's theory we would expect all of these women to be either home-centred or adaptive, whereas, quite clearly a sub-set of these returners are work-

centred. There is evidence of a stronger sense of agency among returners in their accounts of their later decision-making. Their deployment of a rhetoric of personal fulfilment suggests that as they become older, these women do increasingly perceive themselves as somewhat more free to construct their own biography as suggested by Beck (Beck, 2000).

The case studies demonstrate how people's preferences may change over time as a result of their experiences, the changing economic and social climate and their evolving sense of agency. An approach to analysis which takes account of both constraints and agency seems a more illuminating way of explaining the early career choices and outcomes of the women in the case studies. It appears that the work-related choices and behaviour of these women may be more usefully seen not as the pure enactment of preferences in a neutral market, socio-economic and legal environment, but as the result of the attempt to realise and negotiate (changing) preferences in a (changing) legal, social and economic context (Crompton & Harris, 1998, Collins and Wickham, 2004, Walters , 2005).

The accounts of their attempts to be promoted also suggest that workplace structures themselves can have a major effect on people's orientation to work. In the case of both Janet and Sheila, each of them became discouraged due to their experiences with promotional structures and procedures despite being enthusiastic about and skilled at their work and valued by their managers. This supports the use of qualitative modes of investigation such as that employed by Catherine Casey (1995) and Sally Walters (2005) which demonstrate the need for models that can incorporate such changes over time. Crompton and Harris's (1998) sophisticated theorisation which envisages social actors as engaged in a constant interplay between structure and agency resonate with the narratives of the women in this study in a way that Hakim's theory does not (Hakim, 2000).

The next chapter explores the decision-making of a group I call late joiners who share some characteristics with returners in that they have not had long uninterrupted careers in the civil service and most are at lower grades. They represent a somewhat new phenomenon in the civil service in that their entry has been enabled by the "celtic tiger" and the lifting of age limits on recruitment.

Chapter 9:

Late joiners: recruitment, orientations and promotion decision-making

9.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the accounts of ten mid-life to older workers (6 men and 4 women) who joined the civil service at a relatively late stage in their working lives – that is, after spending several years working in other occupations. They differ from returners in that most of them have been in the full-time paid labour market more or less continuously throughout their working lives. Their breaks (if any) from the workforce were for periods of involuntary unemployment rather than for childcare or elder-care. Half of them had worked in private sector employment for many years and had been offered and had accepted redundancy packages, while the other half had become unemployed involuntarily due to down-sizing or their own ill-health. Most (80%) are involved in routine work such as updating computer records and dealing with queries from the public in relation to social welfare benefits, tax credits and agricultural schemes; others prepare reports, answers to Parliamentary Questions and one is involved in developing a particular scheme which makes use of knowledge and skills he had acquired previously.

As well as contributing further to the literature on work orientations and decision-making for older men and women, this chapter will explore a new and relatively under-researched phenomenon which is sometimes referred to as "bridge employment" (Seongsu & Feldman, 2000) or "downshifting" (Yeandle, 2005). "Bridge employment" is a term used to describe employment that takes place after a person's (often early) retirement from a full-time position but before the person's permanent withdrawal from the workforce (Seongsu & Feldman, 2000). The recruitment of people who have retired from middle to senior management level jobs is a relatively new phenomenon in the civil service in Ireland and one which has only become possible on a larger scale since the removal of the upper age limit for recruitment.

The late joiners in this sample may be divided into two sub-groups. The first of these is composed of people who have had relatively successful careers and had reached middle management or its equivalent in the private sector. For example, one man had a well-paid post in a technical area and another was self-employed. At the time that they joined the civil service, they were either just about to or had recently taken early retirement/redundancy packages. This sub-group are engaged in "bridge employment". As we shall see, their accounts of joining the civil service resonate with certain theories of retirement such as Atchley's continuity theory (Atchley, 1989), which suggests that "middle-aged and older adults attempt to preserve and maintain existing structures … and prefer to accomplish this objective by using continuity, i.e., applying familiar strategies in familiar arenas of life" (Atchley, 1989). While some people achieve continuity by expanding their role in voluntary work and/or through increased involvement with family and/or friends, Atchley further suggests that individuals who have high career identification are more likely to seek continuity through some form of work involvement (Atchley, 1989).

The second sub-group are workers who have had careers that have been disrupted by organizational change and/or the desire on the part of their employer to shed relatively high-paid senior staff. This is part of a trend that is characteristic of late capitalism where "jobs for life" are no longer guaranteed. These people find themselves somewhat unexpectedly without their "career job". We may expect that their accounts may resonate with the theory of reflexive modernization which suggests that for many people in late capitalism, work is just one part of the project of identity–formation with family, hobbies and sometimes voluntary work also forming important components of the whole (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

In accordance with preference theory, we might predict that all of these men and women have homogenous personal/home-centred preferences since they have ended their main careers and are now engaged in bridge employment as a stepping-stone to retirement. We would expect that (in common with the stereotypical expectations of returners) they work mainly for social and extrinsic reasons and are not ambitious for promotion. Finally, we would expect that they would be "uncommitted workers". However, as we shall see, the reality is more complex and varies according to age and experiences in and out of the work-place.

This chapter is slightly different from the previous findings chapters in that it presents the findings in relation to the decision to join the civil service as well as current orientations to work and promotion intentions. Since most of these workers have only joined the civil service recently, changes in ambition is not a central focus of this chapter although the changes between their attitudes in their previous occupation and now are discussed. The men and women are categorised on the basis of the foregoing analysis. The findings are organized under thematic headings that have emerged from the data and that also address the theoretical question of the extent to which these late joiners exercised agency and/or were subject to constraints in their work-related decisions and behaviour.

9.2 Socio-economic context

This section outlines the conditions that led to the emergence of bridge employment in Ireland and look briefly at previous research on this phenomenon. This is becoming a more common phenomenon in Ireland in recent years, with many employers deliberately targeting older workers for recruitment. This form of employment was made possible by the economic boom which meant there was an increased demand for labour which was not being filled by the usual means of supply – i.e. school leavers. Most of these workers joined the civil service between 1995 and 2002[30]. The removal of upper age limits for recruitment and the introduction of equality legislation created a climate which made recruitment of older workers (both men and women) more likely. Despite the increase in "bridge employment", a recent article notes that there has been very little research in the social sciences on bridge employment in general and specifically on the non-economic influences that motivate people to engage in this type of employment (Seongsu & Feldman, 2000). This chapter will help address this gap by analysing the motivations of these workers for joining the civil service.

9.3 Profile of late joiners

Most of these workers (8) are Clerical Officers; the other two are Executive Officers. Those among them who previously worked in middle or senior management may be

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[30] Chapter 4 describes the socio-economic conditions that obtained in Ireland at this time.

described as part of a category Yeandle has identified as "down-shifters" in her study of older workers in the UK (Yeandle, 2005: 16).

Table 31: Grade and gender

(10 respondents)

Grade	Male	Female	Total
CO	5	3	8
EO	1	1	2
Total	6	4	10

Age, marital status and education

In general, the men in this group have a somewhat lower age profile than the women; more of the men are concentrated in the 50-54 age bracket and 80% of the entire group are aged less than 60.

Table 32: Age group of late joiners

Age-group	Male	Female	Total	%
50-54	4	1	5	50
55-59	1	2	3	30
60-64	1	1	2	20
	6	4	10	100

Six are married, one is divorced, while one man and two women are single. Five of the men and one woman have children; one man and two women do not have children. Two of these are single, while one woman had married relatively recently. One woman is currently the primary carer for her mother and two others are very involved with supporting their parents.

As a group, they had slightly lower levels of education than either managers or long-term workers and were more similar to the returners. 40% of the late joiners (3 men and 1 woman) have either a degree or a diploma in addition to the Leaving Certificate. A further 40% (2 men and 2 women) have the Leaving Certificate as their highest level of education; while two people (one man and one woman) had not completed a second-level education.

Two of the late joiners are currently engaged in work-related further study. Like the returners, many of this group had built up considerable skills and experience which included running their own business, managing staff and acquiring and using professional and/or technical skills.

9.4 Previous employment

Three members of this group had previously worked at either middle or senior-management level or in a well-paid technical capacity in the private sector for an average of 30 years and had taken redundancy packages. A process of re-organization which had either changed the nature of their jobs or rendered them obsolete, combined with the offer of redundancy impelled two of them to leave their middle-management positions in the organizations where they were originally employed. One woman had reached a certain level (senior management) in her career in the private sector, and felt that she wasn't being challenged any more and this formed part of her decision to leave. Another man had left his original occupation as a self-employed person to study/train for another job, but discovered that he didn't like the occupation (teaching) for which he had re-trained. Finally one woman had left her place of employment for a number of reasons – she was not in favour of the changes in working conditions that were taking place there and there was age-related discrimination which suggested to her that she would have no career future there so she took a redundancy package.

Three people were unemployed involuntarily having been made redundant from their previous jobs or failed to gain employment in their chosen field; they joined the civil service after spells of unemployment – two of these had joined recently, while one person had joined over 20 years previously. Another person had worked in a service industry for many years and had joined the civil service many years ago for the more secure and better-paid employment it offered and another had had to leave her previous employment due to illness a few years previously.

9.5 Reasons for joining the Civil Service

Their reasons for joining are varied, ranging from simply needing a job to being attracted by the conditions and the quality of life the civil service offered. Most people mentioned a combination of reasons that prompted them to join the civil service including gendered social norms, the effect of earlier life-course events, their personal employment history, economic conditions, location and stage in life-cycle.

Table 33: Why did you join the civil service?

(10 respondents)

	No. (10)	[%]
Wanted to continue to work after retirement: • semi-retirement/redundancy package • attracted by conditions in civil service	5	50%
Unemployment • unable to find employment in occupation of choice/training • just needed a job	5	50%
Quality of life • less pressure, fewer hours • location	4	40%
Financial reasons • supplement pension/redundancy income • need to earn a living	3	30%
Want to continue working • too young to stop • didn't like retirement	3	30%
Dissatisfied with previous occupation	3	30%

Research participants gave more than one response

Wanted to continue to work: attracted by civil service conditions/work
Four people were either about to accept redundancy packages or had recently retired and wanted to continue to work. They had joined the civil service relatively recently. Three of

these (1 woman and 2 men) had been working in their previous occupations for quite a long time (for between 25 and 32 years). Three of them had been offered and had accepted redundancy packages at a relatively young age (ranging from 50 to 56).

One woman who had been based overseas for many years suggested that her career in middle management in the private sector had reached a plateau and no longer engaged her interest. She decided that she wanted to move back to Ireland:

> I was really repeating exactly what I had done in previous companies and frankly it just got boring after a while … I thought, you know, I think I'll go back to Ireland although, I did know that that was the end of my management career as such … and I thought, I can afford to be kind of semi-retired, maybe retire, we'll see.
> (Interview 31, female Clerical Officer, age 60-64).

After a short period of time not working she realized she still wanted the structure and challenge that work gave her and she first worked in a series of temporary jobs and then joined the civil service. People in this group still wanted to work and either needed or wanted the money that working would bring to supplement their existing income.

One man in this group had originally worked in the civil service and knew exactly what the work would be like at Clerical Officer level:

> I knew that the work was going to be mundane and was happy for that, prepared to do all that. All I wanted was a nine to four job, go home and forget it … so I'm as happy as Larry now.
> (Interview 34, male CO, age 50-54).

The other four hadn't specifically chosen the Civil Service – they had applied for a number of jobs and had accepted this job because it was the first job that was offered to them or because it was one of the few available jobs in a location in which they wanted to live. Workers in this group tended to be attracted to the civil service as a relatively undemanding occupation with good working conditions which allows them to supplement their income in the post-redundancy, pre-retirement phase of their lives.

Attracted by conditions

Two people were attracted by the security and flexibility of conditions offered by the civil service:

> One of the biggest things I suppose for my type of person ... is security, regular income ... It *(time)* means more to me than money; I don't want it now. I want the time off; so I have 26 flexi-days off – that's 13 four-week periods of the year multiplied by two plus your annual leave of 21 days plus ... 8 or 9 bank holidays and a couple of privilege days – I mean I've got about 60 days holidays a year.
> (Interview 34, male CO, age 50-54).

They appeared to value having more leisure time than extra money at this stage of their lives. This man explained that his children were now independent and didn't require any financial input.

Work-life balance

Three people regarded working in the civil service as offering a better quality of life in terms of reduced number of hours worked and less pressure of work than had been the case in their previous occupations. This was an attractive feature of working in the civil service for those who had previously worked in high-pressure jobs in middle or senior management. One man who had previously worked in middle management in the private sector for over 30 years describes the difference it makes to his life:

> Like these days, I leave the house at 8.30 in the morning and I'm home before 6 o'clock. In the past, it was leaving your house at 7.30 in the morning and you'd be lucky to be home before 7 o'clock in the evening.
> (Interview 35, male CO, age 50-54).

Another male Clerical Officer also cites shorter hours as being important to him:

> I'm 9 to 5 ... there's no pressure here at all; no pressure at CO level; you come in and do your work and if you don't get it all done, just go home.
> (Interview 34, male CO, age 50-54).

Some downshifters find their new jobs frustrating. One woman found that the way the work was organized in the civil service offered very little scope for her to use her skills.

However she appears to have made a trade-off whereby the improved quality of life compensates somewhat for not being able to use her skills fully.

> I thought … I want something which doesn't involve travelling. I don't want to have to spend a lot of money on petrol… and the conditions are good here in the sense of it's a very pleasant building, pleasant environment …. I decided okay, I'll put up with it … but it's been very disappointing … one can't really utilize one's expertise.
> (Interview 31, female Clerical Officer, age 60-64).

For those "downshifters" who previously worked in more high-pressure positions with high responsibility, the quality of life in terms of location, working hours and commuting time all form part of their decision to join the civil service. They vary in the way they respond to the less demanding jobs, with some finding it difficult to adjust.

Stage in life-cycle: relationship

Two people (1 man and 1 woman) mentioned that working in the civil service as opposed to their earlier more high-powered career enabled them to spend more time with their spouses/partners. This echoes previous research into retirement behaviour where several studies have found that couples' influence each other in their decisions to retire or leave the labour force (Smith & Moen, 1998; Szinovacz & De Viney, 2000)

A male clerical officer who had previously worked in the private sector values the fact that he may work up an extra day's annual leave by working longer hours each day and that this enables him to spend time off with his wife who works a four-day week.

One woman had previously worked in senior management in the private sector. Her husband, whom she married two years before she decided to leave her job had a similar position in another firm; they both had worked long hours and also travelled quite frequently in the course of their work. She now wants to spend more time with her husband who has recently retired, so a job with regular hours appeals to her:

> You know in the first two years I was married, he would see me weekends if he was lucky … It was a conscious decision that, well this marriage is not going to work unless I do something to change this.
> (Interview 31, female CO, age 60-64)

She links this with her stage in the life-course and in her career:

> I thought well, I've had a good run in at it, you know … it's not … the early stages of my
> career … I have almost sort of been there, done that, you know, so it wasn't too much of a
> sacrifice to make, if you like.
> (Interview 31, female CO, age 60-64).

Her decision to leave her previous career was partly in order to gain more free time to spend with her husband who was planning to retire at that time.

Unemployment/ involuntary redundancy

Two men and one woman joined because they were unemployed or had been made redundant and needed a job. They represented joining the civil service not as a positive choice but as a necessity and expressed relief that they had found any kind of employment. One clerical officer who had previously trained for and worked in a technical area in the private sector suggests that the civil service was a fall-back option for her, since she couldn't find employment in her chosen field:

> My idea when I went into the civil service was that I was going in and this was only
> temporary. There was no idea of staying in the civil service. I was going back to x, but sure
> it didn't work out. It was just so impossible to get anything. I considered myself very lucky
> to get that.
> (Interview 37, female Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

This woman had joined the civil service in the early 1980s, at a time of generally high unemployment. Another man had been unemployed for a number of years after twice being made redundant from private sector employment. Another had re-trained to work in a specialist area but was unable to find employment. He believes that his age was possibly a factor in his not being offered job interviews in the private sector. While he didn't have concrete evidence for this, he said:

> Most of the interviews offered would be the semi-state, government, health boards.
> (Interview 32, male CO, age 50-54).

Those who had been unemployed hadn't specifically chosen to work in the civil service, but were pleased to have secured any job.

Dissatisfied with previous occupation.

Four of the late joiners mentioned that they were dissatisfied with their previous occupations. One man had been self-employed for many years and had then re-trained and subsequently discovered that he didn't enjoy the occupation (teaching) he had chosen. He applied for the civil service and joined at EO level and, even though he had originally had a negative impression of the civil service, when he began to work there, he in fact found the work very interesting. The particular area of work enabled him to draw upon his previous experience in the private sector. His main motivation in joining was to work at something he finds stimulating:

> As I said, money is not the sort of major drive for me. I sort of would be into the work criteria I have and I wanted to do some that I wouldn't dislike ... and as I said the money is the least of my worries because I don't have any sort of financial problems.
>
> (Interview 33, male EO, age 50-54)

A large part of this man's motivation for joining was to find work that interested and engaged him. Two other clerical officers (a man and a woman) didn't like the new work practices that had been introduced in their previous organization and this was one of their stated reasons for their accepting the redundancy package. Another man had worked in a service industry with relatively poor pay and high demands. He joined the civil service over 20 years ago in order to have a better-paying, more secure job that enabled him to buy a house and was less stressful.

Supplementing redundancy income and pension

For those who regard the civil service as a good bridge or step-down job when approaching retirement, some regard the earnings as useful for paying for extras. However for others, it is necessary to enable them to pay their day-to-day living expenses. Those in the first group mention having holidays, re-decorating their own house or a holiday house as an enhancement of their lifestyle made possible by their job. One woman describes it as follows:

> The money is very useful especially when you go on holidays and do big things to the house you know sort of thing.
>
> (Interview 31, female Clerical Officer, age 60-64)

She later says that, if she didn't have the job, she wouldn't be able to pay for these extra items until after she retires.

Depending on their stage in the life course and their particular family situation, others found that they needed the money in order to pay for items such as their children's education:

> Quite honestly, financially the package I got – it would have been difficult to survive on. … my daughter and son were in secondary school – there were quite a few expenses so it would have been tight then you see.
>
> (Interview 35, male CO, age 50-54).

Others (two single people who had previous spells of unemployment) simply need the money that their job brings in order to earn their livelihood.

Age (too young to retire)

Two out of this group said that despite being offered and having accepted redundancy packages, they felt they were not old enough to stop working. One man was only 51 when he took redundancy:

> I decided that I wanted to keep working – I was too young to stop working.
>
> (Interview 35, male CO, age 50-54)

Another woman who had worked in senior management for over 20 years and decided to retire in her early fifties said:

> I decided to … basically to retire or semi-retire and got fed up with that after a year or so.
>
> (Interview 31 female CO, age 60-64).

This demonstrates that preferences can change over time and through experience – in this case this woman disliked the actual experience of retirement itself. She had been used to a

relatively high-powered career and found it difficult to adjust to not having paid employment (Seongsu & Feldman, 2000). This supports previous research that shows that far from having stable preferences, people often are unable to predict how they will respond to a particular experience (in this case retirement) until they actually try it out (Charles & James, 2003, McRae, 2003b).

Combination of reasons

Even though the reasons for joining the civil service have been presented separately for clarity, in fact respondents typically gave a number of reasons for joining the civil service and it is the way in which these combine at a particular time in the person's life that result in a particular decision. The case of "Michael" illustrates this:

Michael's story

Michael joined the civil service shortly after accepting a redundancy package offered in his workplace in the private sector – he had worked there for over 30 years. When describing his decision, he mentioned a number of factors that he took into consideration – conditions in the economy and work-life balance. Later in the interview he mentions his relative youth and the fact that his children are still financially dependent as motivations to continue working.

He was offered a redundancy package at around the age of 50 which allowed him to add extra pensionable years to his service. The post he had previously occupied and which he had enjoyed was being absorbed into another section in his former place of employment. He perceived that there were very slim promotional prospects for him in the organization in which he had worked.

> Once you've reached the age of 50, it's a bit more difficult to get promotions.

He also took into account the general employment situation:

> So, I felt at that stage that there was no point in me hanging around … at that stage in 2002 … I knew that there were other jobs available and I felt that maybe in 2 or 3 years there may not be as many jobs available and so there were lots of various things that caused me to go at that stage.
>
> (Interview 35, male CO, age 50-54).

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He chose to work in the civil service because it was the first job that he was offered and it was well-paid compared to others he applied for. He was attracted by the shorter working hours, less pressure and less commuting time. Michael was in a relatively comfortable financial position (compare to those who had joined after being unemployed) and was to a large extent free to act on his preferences. It is the way in which the timing of events in this man's life-cycle (having dependent children and being the main breadwinner) interact with his preferences, legislation, social norms and economic conditions that shape his work-related decision-making. Life-course theory takes into account all of these factors (Giele & Elder, 1998).

9.5.1 Discussion of reasons for joining

For half of these workers, their decision to join the civil service is part of a double decision – to accept redundancy from their former occupation and then to apply for and accept this job. Some of this group deliberately chose the civil service, while others just applied for any job they could get and "happened into" it. For this relatively well-off sub-group and for at least one person from the other sub-group, joining the civil service appears to form part of their attempt to avoid the loss of structure, social interaction and "rolelessness" that would otherwise result from early retirement/redundancy. Previous research has found that people who have high career identification are likely to seek continuity through paid employment of some kind (Atchley, 1989; Seongsu & Feldman, 2000). For most of these, there was a good deal of choice involved – most of them didn't *need* to take the job out of financial necessity although it did provide them with extra money – it was more to provide themselves with a continuing identity as a worker with the structure and challenge that that role provided for them.

For the other half who were involuntarily unemployed, joining the civil service was represented in their accounts as a relief at having found a means of earning a living and there was no evidence that they actively chose the civil service – it was simply one among many other organizations that they applied to seeking employment. For this group their accounts were dominated by constraints – the necessity to find any means of earning a living – familial and financial constraints, conditions in the economy and gendered social norms dominate their narratives (Phillipson, 1998; Collins and Wickham, 2004). We might expect that these workers would have only extrinsic work orientations.

9.6 Orientation to work

This section analyses the orientations to work of the late joiners in a similar manner to those in the previous groups – that is they are categorised into intrinsic, extrinsic, social and identity orientations (see Chapter 6.6 for definition of categories). We would expect that these workers would have extrinsic and social orientations, having joined simply to earn extra money and have some social interaction.

Table 34: Orientation to work: late joiners

(10 respondents)

	Men (6)		Women (4)		Total (10)	
	No.	[%]	No.	[%]	No.	[%]
Extrinsic orientation • means of earning money(2) • pays for extras (2) • supplement pension (2) • conditions – security, flexibility (2)	5	**83**	3	**75**	8	**80**
Intrinsic orientation • career (2) • enjoy giving good service to the public (2) • work itself is interesting (2)	4	**67**	2	**50**	6	**60**
Social orientation: • enjoy working with others (2) • have made friends (2) • enjoy socializing with work colleagues(1)	3	**50**	2	**50**	5	**50**
Identity • structure (2) • striving to do things differently/better (1) • life is about doing your best (1)	1	**17**	3	**75**	4	**40**

Note: Some research participants gave more than one response.

It appears that, as was true for the other groups, most of the late joiners simultaneously hold a number of orientations to work, including intrinsic orientations. These will now be discussed in more detail.

9.6.1 Extrinsic orientation

As we would expect, a large proportion (80%) of late joiners (both men and women) mention that work is important to them for extrinsic reasons. For some, work is their main means of earning income for the household; one woman who had been unemployed before getting the job says:

> It's a means of earning money. It's a job I got when I badly needed it. I've been in it ever since and it pays the bills.
>
> (Interview 37, female CO, age 50-54)

For others, it simply supplements their redundancy payment, giving them money for extras such as holidays

> The money is useful. It allows one to go on holiday and do things to the house.
>
> (Interview 31, female CO, age 60-64)

Others value the fact that the job will add to their pension or mention the conditions at work as attractive to them for the quality of life it offers them – security, flexibility, shorter hours, longer holidays and they associate this with their stage in the life-course.

9.6.2 Intrinsic orientation

Contrary to predictions, 60% of this group value work for intrinsic reasons. Two people see the job as a career in which they hope to advance as this excerpt from an interview indicates:

> *Interviewer*: So you would see yourself as ambitious then – you would like to progress?
> *Respondent*: While I'm here ... I certainly would.
>
> (Interview 33, male EO, age 50-54)

Others enjoy aspects of the work itself:

What it means to me is that I'm using my brain; I enjoy the work.... I feel that I can use my own initiative – okay obviously within parameters, I can use my own initiative to get things done.

(Interview 35, male CO, age 50-54).

It's an interesting section and I would be asked to do jobs that people in other Departments at PO level would be asked to do ... so they have a lot of faith in me in that respect.

(Interview 33, male EO, age 50-54).

People's experience of work varies according to the section in which they are placed and the degree of autonomy or initiative they can employ in that position. Three people say that the work itself is mundane, but two of these enjoy serving the public well and efficiently and another makes work interesting by trying to improve processes:

and still you know, I would still strive to do things differently or better... no matter what sort of job I was doing so I try to make it interesting anyway.

(Interview 31, female CO, age 60-64)

A majority of the group (half of the women and two thirds of the men) therefore have an intrinsic work orientation.

9.6.3 Social orientation

Surprisingly, only half of the group say that the social aspect of work is important to them. Some value friendships with people at work while others enjoy both the day-to-day interaction with others and socialising with their colleagues as the following quotations demonstrate:

I've made friends and met nice people. Its important for me to meet people because I live on my own. I found when I took redundancy that that was a gap in my life.

(Interview 3, female CO age 55-59)

This response supports continuity theory (Seongsu & Feldman, 2000). Others in this group enjoy the social interaction with the public:

We also have the phone service for customers and you can get a bit of *craic* out of that. …
The best part of it is how surprised some of them are at how helpful we are.
(Interview 34, male CO, age 50-54).

One man appears to have disengaged from socializing at work as he got older, while another person who is the primary carer doesn't have time to socialize outside of working hours. We might expect that more of this group would value work for its social interaction. Social orientations have been typically associated with women, but in this sample, three men and two women value social orientations.

9.6.4 Identity orientation

For 40% of the group (one man and three women), working is important to their sense of identity. It gives them a sense of structure in their lives:

Well work is important to me – it provides me with stability – also it gives you a purpose, very important for a purpose.
(Interview 38, male CO, age 55-59).

This man had previously been unemployed for a number of years before joining the civil service and had found the lack of structure in his life to be very disconcerting. Another woman when asked what her work means to her says that it offers her a structure, something she found she had missed when she had accepted a redundancy package:

Because I still need a structure in my life… (Interview 31, female CO, age 60-64)

These workers highlight the importance of work in providing a structure and focus for their lives

9.6.5 Multi-stranded orientations

Again, as was the case for the other groups, most people have a number of co-existing orientations towards work. For example one man described what work means to him in the following way:

It means using my brain – I enjoy the work – dealing with people. I can use my own initiative and I can use my previous experience. The money means we can do things more easily – pay for holidays and my sons expenses in school and college.

(Interview 35, Male CO, age 53).

9.7 Promotion experience and intentions

This section analyses the attitudes of the late joiners to promotion. As suggested above we might not expect these workers to display much interest in promotion. Only one person out of this group (a man who had worked in the civil service for over 20 years) has actually been promoted within the civil service from Clerical Assistant to Clerical Officer and this had happened approximately 10 years earlier. None of the group had been promoted during the past five years.

It is interesting that over two thirds of this group (4 men and 3 woman) have applied for promotion from their current grade already. This is a similar proportion to that in the returners group. Two people had not applied and one was not yet eligible to do so. Most of this group (4 men and 1 woman) didn't perceive any barriers to promotion for themselves apart from one man who said the interview was a barrier to him and another man who saw his lack of higher education as a barrier.

Table 35: Promotion intentions of late joiners

	Men	Women	Total
Will apply	4	1	5
Won't apply	2	3	5
	6	**4**	**10**

Interestingly, half of this group (4 men and 1 woman) say that they are willing to apply for promotion in the future while two men and three women do not intend to do so. One woman states she lacks the personal qualities to be suitable for promotion while the man doesn't want the responsibility of a more demanding job; both of these workers have been in the civil service for a long period of time. Two women are deterred from applying by de-centralisation and the fact that they don't want to move because they provide support to

elderly parents. Another man says he probably won't apply as he is quite satisfied with the level of responsibility he has. Those who do not intend to apply for promotion identified the following factors listed in Table 36 as possible barriers to promotion.

Table 36: Perceived barriers to promotion – late joiners

(10 respondents)

	Women (4)	Men (6)	Total No. (10)	[%]
Location • de-centralisation (3) • don't want to move - family, caring (3)	3	3	6	60
No barriers	2	2	4	40
Promotion process • exams (3) • panels(1)	3	1	4	40
Don't need the money	0	2	2	20
Lack of educational qualifications	1	1	2	20
Lack personal qualities necessary for promotion	0	1	1	10

Note: Research participants could give more than one response.

Exactly the same proportion of this group as of returners (half) are willing to apply for promotion in the future.

9.7.1 (a) Work-related factors affecting promotion

Location

60% of late joiners mention location as a barrier. Three clerical officers said that they would not accept promotion if it meant they had to move any great distance from their current location. Three of them perceive de-centralisation as something that would potentially prevent them from accepting promotion:

I made a decision that I will be de-centralised 30 kilometres north, south or west of Dublin and that's as far as I will go.

(Interview 35, male CO, age 50-54)

This man goes on to say that both he and his wife are heavily involved in the local community and that his (school-going) children would not move. He said 'Oh, I couldn't leave home'. Two other people who mention location are actually living in towns located outside of Dublin and don't want to move from there because of quality of life they enjoy there.

"No barriers"

40% of this group perceive no barriers to promotion in the civil service. This is higher than for any other group. In general, the men and women in this group perceive the civil service as a fair employer compared to those in the private sector. At least three people mention that they had encountered age-discrimination in their work organisations outside of the civil service.

Promotion process – exams

As was the case for returners, 40% felt that the current promotion system which involves exams puts them at a disadvantage in competition with younger people who have only recently left school or university; 20% will not apply for inter-departmental (open) promotional competitions for this reason. One man says:

I'm not going to be doing the open EO ... that type of thing where I'm competing against university graduates and this is their 18th aptitude test that they're doing.

(Interview 34, male CO, age 50-54)

Another woman who was unable to apply for promotion while she was a carer for her father also considers she has very little possibility of succeeding in one of these competitions. She has effectively decided not to compete any more although she needs the money and would accept promotion if she were offered it.

I could possibly get SO on seniority. If I did, I would take it. The likelihood would be slim. There are huge numbers of young people – they're far more skilled at exams.

(Interview 37, female CO, age 50-54).

As was true for previous groups, a sizeable minority of late joiners feel that exams are easier for younger people and put them at a disadvantage. This means they are effectively only going to participate in confined competitions. Otherwise they have to rely on promotion through senior suitability and given their relative lack of service, this means they have a reduced chance of succeeding compared to long-term workers. One person believes that the process of placing successful candidates on panels is very cumbersome compared to promotion processes in the private sector. Only one person feels that there is an over-reliance on interviews for promotion. This person believes that people's job-performance is not given enough weight in the promotion process.

Disincentive – don't need the money
Two men (20%) say that they don't need the additional money that they would earn from being promoted and this means that they are either not going to apply or that are selective about what type of promotion they would apply for or accept. One man has children who are financially independent his wife is also working and he owns property

> I mean we didn't need the level of salary and the hassle that went with it.
> (Interview 34, male CO, age 50-54)

The other man is willing to apply for promotion, but would only accept the post if he were interested in the type of work involved.

9.7.1 (a) Impact of non-work factors on promotion decision-making

Effect of societal gender norms / caring for dependant parents
Three women are not prepared to move at this time in their lives because they are providing care and/or support for elderly parents and so cannot apply for promotion as they need to avoid de-centralisation.

Lack of educational qualifications
Two people (20%) feel that their lack of third level educational qualifications would be a disadvantage to them when looking for promotion. They believe that the civil service values third level qualifications.

Lack of personal qualities

Finally 10% (one woman) cites a lack of self-belief as one reason for not applying for promotion. She feels that she lacks the personal qualities – that she doesn't have the "skills and talents" needed for promotion. She would accept promotion if she were promoted on seniority; but because she didn't succeed in promotional competitions (exams) in the past, she is not going to apply again even though she is aware that she needs the money both now and for her pension.

9.8 Ambition changing over time

Since most of the group have a length of service of less than seven years, we may not expect them to have time to have changed in relation to promotion[31]. Some people discuss whether their level of ambition has changed since they were in the private sector. Four people from this group say that they are less ambitious now than they were originally. One person was "always ambitious" and two men and one woman were "never ambitious", while two people say they are "selectively ambitious" – they would apply if a post came up in a nearby location or if the work was interesting.

The change in their attitude to ambition is influenced by their experiences in the workplace and their age. For those who see themselves as less ambitious, one man associates this with his move from the private sector:

> When I worked in … the financial services, I always felt kind of – you always had an ambitious edge you might say and looking for promotion, now at this stage… I'm a bit more relaxed about it; I don't feel under the same pressure to go for promotion.
> (Interview 35, male Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

He had left his previous job partly because he could see he was going to go no further in that organization. Even though, from his account, he had been very enthusiastic about his work and had a very strong intrinsic work orientation, the organization was rationalizing and offering early redundancy to many senior staff at middle-management level. Clearly, this was not his preference or a reflection of his innate orientation to work, but an adaptation to what was realistically available. In the civil service, he is conflicted about

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[31] Because of their short length of service, the changes in ambition are not represented in a table, but simply described.

whether he should now continue to put himself under pressure to apply for promotion or not.

> I just wonder should I be applying. I sometimes have the feeling that this isn't right. Should I not just be taking – trying to take it easy, you know?
>
> (Interview 35, male Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

This example demonstrates clearly that people's work identity is contingent and in process and may continually be made and re-made and influenced by their workplace (and other) experiences rather than being determined by their work orientation (Casey, 1995). Orientation has a part to play, but doesn't fully explain decisions and outcomes. Of the others who have become less ambitious, two women suggested that their experience of the processes for promotion in the civil service were that they were slow and frustrating compared to the private sector, while two were ambitious and remained so, but one was not going to apply because she would have to move location and she didn't wish to do so. Two men and one woman describe themselves as never having been ambitious. They did regard their job as just a means of earning money and this had not changed since they joined.

9.9 Late joiners: categories

We might expect all or most of this group to have homogenous home/personal-centred preferences. Indeed half of the members of the group fit into this category. They do not intend to apply for promotion and work is not a priority for them. However, somewhat unexpectedly, 40% of the group are either work/career-centred (1) or maximisers/aspirers (3). This may be explained by the fact that many of these workers had been quite ambitious in their previous working lives and they retained a similar orientation to work when they first joined the civil service. However, while one man retained this orientation, two men had become less ambitious due to the wish to avoid moving location and they are now in the maximisers/aspirers category. The woman was also still planning to apply for promotion, but was not prepared to move location. The satisficer is a woman who has caring responsibilities who does not intend to apply for promotion, but would accept it if it were offered to her. .Finally three men and two women are in the personal/home-centred category and they are quite definite that they have no interest in promotion – two had decided not to apply – one in order to retain a good work-life balance in the transition to

retirement; the second man does not want additional responsibility and the third does not want to change his conditions of work – he is currently in a convenient location.

Table 37: Late joiners: categories

	Men (6)		Women (4)		Total (10)	% of total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Category 1: Work/career centred	1	17	0	0	1	10
Category 2: Maximisers/aspirers	2	33	1	25	3	30
Category 3: Satisficers	0	0	1	25	1	10
Category 4: Home/personal-centred	3	50	2	50	5	50
	6	100	4	100	10	100%

The home/personal-centred workers either need to work out of financial necessity or are happy to work but don't want anything more onerous; members of the second group (satisficers) have a predominantly instrumental approach to work, but may enjoy it and believe in giving a good service; and those in the next group (the maximisers/aspirers) are very committed to and engaged with their work and regard the job as a career but while they will apply for promotion, they will only do so on a selective basis; finally there is one man in the work/career-centred group who is ambitious and puts career first.

9.10 Conclusion

Qualitative investigation shows that even among this small group which may be expected to be homogenous, orientations to work are complex and multi-faceted with most of the group simultaneously displaying two or more orientations to work in their accounts (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Walters, 2005). In accordance with findings in previous research, work orientations are also subject to change over time and in response to workers' experiences inside and outside of the labour market (Walters, 2005; James, 2008). For example, even in the relatively well-off group who had accepted redundancy packages from previous employers, only one person came in with and retained a fixed attitude – that the civil service was a step-down job before retirement; others in this

situation were open to applying for promotion and, depending on their experiences both in their job and in relation to promotion, their orientations changed in response to this. This variation in behaviour and outcomes supports Casey's contention that experiences in the workplace (not just pre-existing orientations) help shape workplace behaviour (Casey, 1995).

The other relatively less well-off group who joined after being unemployed were more constrained in being able to fulfil their preferences at this stage of their lives due to familial roles earlier in the life-course such as being a carer, or being the only breadwinner in low-paid insecure employment. This lends support both to relational theory and to the argument made by Crompton and Harris and others that preferences are only one of the factors that influence men's and women's employment behaviour (Crompton & Harris, 1998; James, 2008; Nolan, 2009). The lack of jobs in their chosen line of work meant that some of these men and women were in the civil service more out of necessity than choice.

Gender alone is not a predictor of behaviour for this group. There do not appear to be easily-identifiable gender differences among them. It should be noted that this is a small group – too small to make generalizations. There appear to be differences among the women with one being and remaining ambitious, another being and remaining unambitious and two who were originally quite ambitious becoming less ambitious due to promotion processes, concerns about health and de-centralisation. There are similar variations among the men – see Table 37 above. Their attitude to promotion appears to relate to their prior attitude to promotion, and their work history mediated by current opportunities rather than to their gender *per se*.

The impact of age is not predictable either with one person in the older age cohort (60-64) being ambitious and the other not while two people in the 50-54 age cohort believe they may be "too old" for promotion. Their attitude appears to rest on their personal interpretation of ageing and most men and women in this group do not believe there is age discrimination in the civil service.

As was true for previous groups, the findings in this chapter indicate that familial and financial constraints, gendered social norms, experiences in the workplace, conditions in the economy and legislation (and not preferences alone) all play a part in influencing the

work-related decision-making of the men and women in this group. Even for this small group, work orientations are complex and change over time.

As has been found to a greater or lesser degree in the previous groups, decision-making regarding joining and promotion is more complex and dynamic than has been encompassed by traditional models that assume identity is "fixed". The accounts of these late joiners indicate that half of them are relatively privileged and see their work in the civil service as a bridge between leaving the civil service and retirement. We might expect that they would have relatively homogenous work orientations and attitudes to promotion. However, it appears that even within this group, there are differences with some willing to apply for promotion and others not. Some have become less willing to apply over time due to lack of success in promotion.

In the other sub-group (those who joined because they became involuntarily unemployed) some appear to have a mainly instrumental extrinsic orientation – they see work mainly as a means of earning a living. Others enjoy working but appear to have little sense of their job as a career. Their decision-making reflects the individual project of identity formation of which work forms one component in post-modern society; it is complex and dynamic and models need to be able to accommodate this. For some people, their decision-making regarding promotion affects their attitude to retirement. In the next chapter, I compare and contrast decision-making regarding retirement for the men and women in the four different groups and analyse whether the research participants are free to fulfil their retirement preferences.

Chapter 10

Retirement: getting on or getting out?

10.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the decision-making of the research participants in relation to the timing of retirement and also provides an outline of the factors that influence retirement. One of the objectives of the chapter is to consider one of the main underlying themes in the thesis, the degree to which workers are free to fulfil their preferences in relation to retirement and/or the extent to which they are subject to constraints. It addresses the question of whether freedom to choose varies according to sub-group, to gender and/or place in the organisational hierarchy. It also enables us to see if and how some of the factors that have been found to be important in previous decision-making also affect the retirement decision. These include previous experiences in the life-course; level of socio-economic resources, legislation and social norms, orientations to work and experiences in the work-place.

In theoretical terms, retirement decision-making has been conceptualised in the social gerontology literature from the perspective of psycho-social theories if ageing such as disengagement theory and continuity theory as well as from a rational choice theory approach in the economics and sociological literature (see Chapter 2.4 for an outline of these theories). Just as previous critics have argued that preference theory is inclined to over-emphasise the impact of preferences on promotion-related decision-making, commentators have found similar problems with the use of certain psychological theories of ageing and rational choice theory to analyse retirement decision-making. For example, theorists in the tradition of the political economy of ageing and feminist theorists have argued that such approaches falsely universalise experience and don't adequately account for the impact that government policies in relation to pensions and employment now and in the past, social norms and societal arrangements such as the male-breadwinner state and inequality of resources may have on people's freedom to choose in relation to the timing of retirement. For example, people may not be freely able to realise their preferences regarding retirement depending on their socio-economic resources. Moreover, as we have

seen in earlier chapters, the lack of resources at an earlier stage in the life-course may have serious restrictive effects on current choices for some people. The chapter also considers whether there is evidence of people's preferences and decisions in relation to retirement changing over time, since this emerged as a feature of accounts in earlier chapters. This has implications for theories of the self and for preference theory.

This chapter offers a comparative discussion of similarities and contrasts among the long-term workers, managers, returners and late joiners. It contributes to the literature by providing an insight into the prospective retirement decision-making of men and women from their perspective; this is an issue has been identified as a gap in the sociological and social policy literature (Hirsch, 2000, Phillipson, 2004, Loretto and White, 2006). According to Phillipson, there has been a good deal of large-scale quantitative survey work and reviews carried out in the UK, (Hirsch, 2000; Phillipson, 2004). Although data is available from the British Household Panel Survey and the Retirement survey, there has not been much qualitative analysis of the decision-making of older workers regarding retirement (although see Skinner, 2003, Yeandle, 2005, Loretto and White, 2006). In Ireland, too there has been some recent national quantitative research which gives some basic information on retirement preferences and behaviour among a national sample of older people (Fahey and Russell, 2001b). Another recent development is the Irish section of the Study of Health and Retirement in Europe of which the first very basic findings have been published very recently (Delaney et al., 2008). Further studies of this sort are underway – one which should provide some interesting data is TILDA – the Irish Longitudinal Study of Ageing – a pilot study has recently been conducted; this is likely to be useful because it can show changes over time. However, to date there has been relatively little qualitative research in the area. In particular, women's experiences and attitudes to retirement is an area that is under-researched generally. There has been some research carried out on women, work and pensions and the transition to retirement in the UK (Skucha & Bernard, 2000; Ginn, Daly & Street, 2001,) there has also been a limited amount of research on the issue of women and pensions in Ireland and in the UK and this has highlighted the economic vulnerability of older women who had expected to share their husband's pensions particularly in the event of widowhood, divorce or redundancy (Peggs & Davies, 2001, Davis, 2001; Price & Ginn, 2003). However, there is a need for further qualitative research.

It should be noted that the retirement decision differs from the promotion decision in a number of ways. Firstly, it is a prospective decision and some (younger) people may not have thought about it at all. Secondly, it is a more constrained decision. For example, everybody has to retire eventually at the age of 65 – so there is less choice involved. People may retire when they have completed 40 years service so there is a "default retirement" zone of 60-65 (see section 9.1.2 below). Therefore the central focus of analysis will be on those who attempt to do something different – either to stay on as long as possible or to leave as early as possible

10. 2 Current policy regarding retirement in the civil service

Retirement policy in the civil service is described in more detail in Section 4.4.3. Currently, the arrangements are that normal mandatory retirement age is 65, but workers may retire on full pension when they have completed forty year's service so, in fact some workers may have completed 40 years service at the age of 57 or 58, if they were recruited as school-leavers. However, they have to wait until they are 60 to receive their lump-sum and pension. Therefore, the default "normal" retirement age for these workers may be anywhere from 60 to 65 or even younger if they can afford to manage without a pension up to the age of 60.

There is an early retirement scheme on offer in the civil service under the terms of which people may retire from the age of 50 onwards. If they take this option their pension is actuarially reduced. This measure is widely regarded as having been introduced in order to reduce the burden of pension provision for the government in the future. There is another form of flexibility available to civil servants in that they may opt for work-sharing. If they do so, however, their pension is reduced because it is based on a percentage (half) of their salary.

10.3 Timing of retirement

In this section, I analyse the accounts of workers across all the sub-groups of their decision-making regarding the timing of retirement, and briefly outline what influences that decision. Most of the long-term workers and managers have sufficient years of service

to ensure that they will have full or almost full pensions by the time they reach the age of 60 or shortly afterwards. Table 38 below sets out the choices of the research participants regarding the timing of their retirement. The default option for most of these workers is to retire at some time between the ages of 60 and 64. The next option listed is to stay until they are 65 - people who want to stay at work as long as possible or until the official legal retirement age. Next those who would like to stay on after 65 are expressing a preference for something different and challenging the norm that people should have to retire at a given age. The final category is those who intend to retire as soon as they have amassed 40 years of service or at age 60. This means that they want to leave at the earliest opportunity of full pension. Others wish to retire at 40 years service for more positive reasons; they regard it as a natural withdrawal to a period of deserved leisure to which they are entitled after giving long service.

10.3.1 Timing of retirement: all groups

The table below sets out the intentions of all sub-groups of workers regarding when to retire. We might expect that long-term workers and managers would have similarities since they have long service and relatively high salaries compared to returners and late joiners.

Table 38: Timing of retirement for all groups of workers

(105 respondents)

Timing of retirement	Long-term workers (% of 29)	Managers (% of 38)	Returners (% of 28)	Late joiners [% of 10]
Retire between 60 and 64 (for returners and late joiners = before 65)	38	58	32	20
Retire at 65	31	18	46	50
Retire at 40 years service or at age 60 or as soon as possible	21	24	11	0
Would like to stay on after 65	10	0	11	30

Note: the actual numbers on which these percentages are based are given in Appendix 6.

Retire between 60 and 64

In all, 40% (11) of long-term workers as compared to a large majority 58% of managers say that they intend to retire at some point between the age of 60 and 64. Some know exactly when they intend to retire, while 24% of the long-term workers and 42% of managers are undecided as to exactly when to do so. Either they hadn't made any plans or their plans depended on when their spouse was going to retire, whether their health remained good or other factors including whether the work was interesting, the levels of work-related stress they were experiencing, whether they have prospects of promotion and whether they had financial obligations such as children to educate or mortgages to pay.

Fewer (36%) of returners intend to retire before the age of sixty-five – some to spend time with their husbands who are about to retire, some to take part in activities that they have not had time for before this. Some are undecided or vague about their plans – their plans are dependent on other people or on the availability of decentralization. For some, the work status of their spouses and the desire to spend time with them has an important bearing on the timing of their decision. This echoes findings in previous US and UK studies (Szinovacz & DeViney, 2000; Skucha & Bernard, 2000; Fairhurst, 2003: 31-35).

Among the late joiners, two male clerical officers intend to retire at some point between the ages of 60 and 64. They appear to have considerable discretion over the timing of their retirement, mainly due to the fact that they have built up reasonably large pensions in their previous jobs. One man enjoys the social interaction at work and the relatively relaxed pace of life and plans to retire when he is aged between 61 and 63. The exact timing depends on a number of factors including the (as yet uncertain) outcome of de-centralisation for both himself and his wife. They make decisions regarding work after consulting with each other (Szinovacz & Deviney, 2000). Because of his relatively comfortable financial position, this man currently is free to act in accordance with his preferences.

Retire at 65

People who plan to retire at 65 intend to remain at work as long as is legally possible. Just under one third (31%) of long-term workers (as opposed to only 18% of managers) – similar proportions of men and women chose this option; members of both groups give similar reasons for doing so. Most of them say they will stay at least partly because they enjoy working; a small number need to stay for financial reasons – either they have a

mortgage to pay or they have a child in university or they want to build up their pension. Some indicate that they could finish work earlier if they wished because they have already completed 40 years service. For example. one man explains his decision in terms of a mixture of extrinsic, intrinsic and social work orientations:

> I have my service done, I bought a number of years service … so I would have the option to go at 60 and I am still here. I suppose partly because of economic reasons and partly because I like what I'm doing … I like the people I am working with, so I haven't made immediate plans.
>
> (Interview 47, male HEO, age 60-64)

Even though managers have relatively high salaries, sometimes life cycle factors such as having children at school or college can constrain their freedom to choose when to retire. However, the number of long-term workers and managers affected by financial constraints is much smaller than for other groups.

A much higher proportion (46%) of the returners said that they plan to stay on at work until they are 65. The most often-cited reason given by 32% of the returners is that they need to stay on in order to have a reasonable pension; these women generally have low pensions because of the break in their service (see Chapter 8). The proportion of women who state that they are concerned with the amount of their pension is almost double that for either managers or long-term workers. Therefore inadequate pensions are a major issue for returners. Apart from pensions, as was clear from Chapter 8, many of the women wanted to stay at work as long as possible because they had only recently returned to work and thus felt motivated and interested displaying strong intrinsic orientations to work. This may also influence their decision to stay as the following quotation shows:

> No. I suppose the fact that I was at home for so long – I still love going out to work. Maybe if I was working all my life, I'd be fed up of it – I'd say I'd finish work because I was working all my life.
>
> (Interview 12, Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

Clearly, the desire to stay on until they are 65 is choice-based for some, but for many returners, it is driven by financial necessity.

Finally, a very high proportion (50%) of late joiners intend to work until they are 65. The reasons they give are as follows: three people need to stay until they are 65 for financial reasons. Of these, one enjoys working, while the other two need to continue to work to build up their pensions. One woman who is single (and the primary carer for her parents) and for whom her job is the main income in the household says she would like to retire earlier than 65, but cannot afford to do so:

> It depends on money ... money is a problem for me. It would be okay, if I had been there all the time.
> (Interview 37, female CO, age 50-54).

Some of these people are clearly not entirely free to act in accordance with their preferences. Previous life-course events including being the primary carer for parents, unemployment, having low-paid non-pensioned employment in the past and being the main breadwinner affects their freedom to act in accordance with their preferences at this stage of their lives.

Retire at 40 years service or at age 60 or as soon as possible
The next option is to retire as soon as possible. Similar proportions of managers (25%) and long-term workers (21%) plan to retire as soon as possible either when they have completed 40 years service or at age 60. There are two very different sets of reasons for this choice – firstly disaffection because of not being promoted and secondly, the wish to try something new. Some workers have to remain at work until they are 60 in order to get their full pension. Some workers mostly men want to retire as soon as possible because they are disillusioned with regard to their prospects for promotion (see Chapters 6 and 7). This echoes previous studies which found that where there is perceived to be little chance of promotion, those in management often wish to retire early (Scase & Goffee, 1989).

Some of those who intend to retire at the earliest opportunity plan to do so for more positive reasons – because they intend to open a business or take a part-time job and/or engage in voluntary work. For example, two of them have quite a strong intrinsic work orientation, but also have interests outside of work and would like a chance to engage in those activities. One woman says: 'I've worked all my life …,' and goes on to explain that she would like to set up her own business and combine this with travelling for long periods. This view of retirement as offering the long-awaited freedom to try something

new has been found in previous UK and Irish research (Yeandle, 2005; Fahey & Russell, 2001b) and provides support for the emergence of "lifestyle" consumerist approaches to retirement (Gilleard, 1996, Gilleard & Higgs, 2000). However, the ability to do this depends on having the resources (money and health) to do so.

Very few (only 2) returners, both of whom are in extremely busy jobs in high-profile areas, plan to retire early. One plans to leave as soon as possible due to work-related stress and the other anticipates that she wouldn't want to continue working at her current pace for more than 3 years. Generally, the women returners who intend to retire early have access to resources that mean they are not totally dependent on their earnings (or pensions) for survival. Not surprisingly, none of the late joiners plans to leave early.

Remain at work after 65

Interestingly, none of the managers expressed a wish to stay on after 65; those who wanted to continue to engage in paid work planned to do so elsewhere. Only a small proportion of long-term workers (two men and one woman) say that they would like to remain working after the age of 65; this is close to the proportion of Irish people found wishing to continue working after the age of 65 (14%) in a previous national study (Fahey & Russell, 2001b: 32) It is somewhat surprising that people who have already worked for up to 40 years wish to stay on longer. One woman (a HEO) who is very involved with and identifies closely with her work is worried about what she might do as a replacement activity when she stops working and thus wants to stay on as long as possible (see Chapter 6). Perhaps more predictably, 11% (three) of the returners say that they would like to continue working after they have reached the age of 65. One woman in her mid-60s says:

> I have asked to stay on at work. I enjoy it and as long as I am capable of doing a job equal
> to all, I'd like to stay on as long as I'm able to. I can't put a date on it, but ideally, I'd like
> to stay on for a number of years.
> (Interview 11, Clerical Officer)

This suggests that these women perceive the work itself as giving them a sense of achievement and purpose; this echoes findings in previous research about the beneficial effects of work for older women (Skucha & Bernard, 2000). For both long-term workers and returners, the desire to remain at work appears to be linked to strong intrinsic and identity work orientations. A high proportion, 30% (two men and one woman) of late

joiners would like to remain on at work after the age of 65. Of these, one man says he wants to stay because he enjoys the work; one woman says working gives her life both structure and social interaction:

> It gives structure to my life, the social aspect you know of dealing with people both internally and externally.

She goes on to question the concept of retiring at a particular age:

> This business of having to retire at a certain age. I mean that's fine for some people; for others it's not. I mean from where I stand at the moment, I mean I'm not really ... that would be very strange you know. I mean what I would probably want to do is if the facility was there is maybe to continue on a three and a half day week or something like that.
> (Interview 31, female Clerical Officer, age 60-64).

She is one of three people in the group who would ideally like to cut down work gradually after the age of 65 – to perhaps move on to work either three or four days a week.

A male Executive Officer who doesn't want to retire at 65 says:

> I hope that they extend the age that you work to. I would be very unhappy there retiring at 66 if I'm capable.
> (Interview 33, male Executive Officer, age 50-54)

He has an intrinsic work orientation, is ambitious and would like to be promoted to two grades above his current grade. The other man had been unemployed for some time and says he would like to continue working for as long as possible. Explaining why he wants to stay on at work he says:

> I had my retirement when I was unemployed.
> (Interview 38, male Clerical Officer, age 55-59)

Under current legislation, however, these workers will have to retire at 65 because only those recruited after April 2004 may stay on at work after that time.

Early retirement scheme

Shortly before the interviews took place, another option was introduced; this was an actuarially-reduced early retirement scheme (see Section 9.1.2 above). However, very few workers (only 5% overall) said they were interested in it, although some said it might be useful for people with alternative sources of income. Most long-term workers and managers said that it was not good value for money, while most workers in the other two groups didn't have enough years of service to apply for it.

Desire for gradual retirement

Only six long-term workers (21%) and 16% of managers said that they would like to ease into retirement gradually by cutting down to, say, a four-day week. This echoes but is somewhat less pronounced than trends in national and international literature (Fahey and Russell, 2001:62, Loretto & White, 2006). Some intend to apply for work-sharing in order to start putting alternative interests/activities in place for their retirement. One woman a HEO says she would like to cut down to a three-day week for a few years before she retires, but that her job is so busy that it simply wouldn't be possible. Another male HEO believes it would be a good idea to have a period of work-sharing to facilitate the handing over of skills in jobs from those who are retiring to those taking over. The lower percentage of managers who want gradual retirement may reflect the fact that there is a higher proportion of career-oriented workers in this group, whereas many of the long-term workers had become satisficers and had developed other interests that they wish to expand in preparation for retirement. One way of retiring gradually is to workshare and this is available to all workers

10.3.2 Changes over time in preferences for timing of retirement

Just as orientations to work are contingent, orientations towards retirement may also change as the following case illustrates. One woman had originally intended to retire at 60 and had recently decided to stay on because she realises work is an increasingly important part of her life. She had recently been promoted and had become more ambitious. The following quote illustrates this:

> At first I thought I would like to retire at 60, but not now. It would be very difficult to retire and stop. I might cut down a bit first and retire gradually.
> (Interview 40, female EO, age 50-54).

This demonstrates the contingent nature of orientations to retirement and shows how they may change in response to experiences in the work-place. One of these men had intended to retire earlier, but realizes that he needs to stay at least until he is 60 and preferably until he is 62 if he is to receive any sizeable pension from the civil service. He is the main breadwinner and his children are still dependent. However, he enjoys the work and the conditions and is happy to continue until then.

10.3.3 Discussion: retirement timing decisions for all groups

In general, there are differences between the groups in relation to their freedom to realize their preferences in relation to retirement. Both groups who have long tenure – senior managers and those located in middle or lower grades tend to have more control over their retirement choices, due to the fact that they have had long service and adequate pensions. However a small number of people in these groups are not free to realize their preferences in cases where they have relatively low earnings and/or financial obligations to provide for children or to pay mortgages. Some of the late joiners (those with substantial pensions from previous employment) also have greater choice.

Lack of financial resources tends to act as a constraint for a large proportion of those in the returners group (and for some of the late joiners) who have not had an opportunity to build up adequate pensions. Even if they wish to retire, many of them need to continue working. At first glance, gender appears to act as an important constraint on retirement choice given that all of the returners are women. However, it is not gender alone but the way in which it interacts with lack of resources that acts as a constraint on choice. Firstly, the women in the other groups are generally in a position to realize their preferences. Secondly, not all returners need to stay on at work; those who have access to other socio-economic resources besides their wages (e.g. their husband's income may be high) have greater freedom to choose the timing of retirement.

Some of the findings do appear to support psycho-social theories such as continuity theory; it appears to accord with how some people who have the resources to choose freely actually make decisions regarding retirement. However, political economy and feminist approaches are also needed to account for differences in retirement decision-making at the aggregate level – differences based on gender and/or socio-economic resources (Price and Ginn, 2003).

The findings also suggest that relational theory has a bearing on decision-making – at least some men and women consider the future plans of their spouses or other partners when making their retirement decisions. As was the case for their promotion decision, for some people, their previous experiences and prospects for promotion influence their retirement decisions.

The women returners as a group and both men and women with interrupted work histories and low salaries were the most likely to have constraints on their level of choice, because of their low levels of pensions. This supports arguments made by feminists who stress the impact of gendered social norms and legislation which encourage women to leave the labour market to care for children or other dependants (Price & Ginn, 2003). This interrupts their pension-building and means they have fewer choices when it comes to retirement. Finally the changes over time indicate that people do not have and retain fixed preferences in relation to retirement, but instead, their attitudes and decisions may change in response to positive and negative experiences in the work place and outside.

10.3.4 Influences on the retirement decision of all groups of workers?

This section provides a discussion of each of the factors cited by the research participants as affecting their retirement decision. A recent review of the literature indicates that there has been relatively little empirical research conducted on the factors or combination of factors that exert most influence over the retirement decision and in particular on the possible variations by gender which may exist (Phillipson, 2004, Loretto and White, 2006). In this study, many people mention one or more factors that influence their decision as to when to take retirement. They cite a variety of influences such as the type of work they do – whether it is interesting to them; the necessity to work for money particularly if they are the main breadwinner; the need to build a pension; the desire to try something new – paid or voluntary work; and finally the wish to retire while they are healthy.

Table 39: Influences on retirement decision for all groups

	Long-term workers	Managers	Returners	Late Joiners
	% of total 29	% of total 38	% of total 28	[% of total] 10
Haven't thought about retirement	34	11	7	0
Current financial needs and pensions	31	26	43	60
Nature of work itself	14	21	29	30
Social aspect of work/structure	14	14	14	50
Desire to try new ventures	14	14	25	0
Health of self and spouse	10	21	14	10
Age	10	11	0	0
Life-cycle relational – spouse's intention	0	11	21	20

Hadn't thought about retirement

When they were asked about their retirement plans, a large minority (34%) of long-term workers (six women and four men) said that they had not yet thought about retirement. This may be partly attributable to the fact that most of them are in the younger 50-54 age group and retirement is 10-15 years away for them. Just over one tenth (11%) of managers hadn't thought about it. It may also be partly because most of those in the managers and long-term workers group have long service and a reasonable pension – most of those who

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hadn't thought about retirement were at HEO level or above. Since they have a predictable pension and a straightforward set of options, they may not yet regard retirement as an issue requiring a great deal of consideration. By contrast, only 7% of returners and none of the late joiners had given no thought to the issue. This makes sense as several of the returners had re-joined partly in order to build up a pension and had thought about retirement at this time; similarly some of the late joiners had already retired from previous employment or were concerned at how they would manage financially and socially in retirement.

Financial needs and pensions

A large proportion of returners (43%) said that the lack of an adequate pension formed a constraint on their freedom to choose when to retire. This is a much higher proportion than of either the long-term workers (31%) or managers (26%) (see Table 38 above). A much higher proportion of returners and late joiners than of long-term workers and senior managers are constrained in their retirement decision-making by concerns about having enough money for day-to-day spending. Current financial pressure appears to be an issue for more wome than men in the long-term workers group. One woman in her mid-fifties who had recently separated from her husband now realises that she may have to stay on at work longer than she had originally intended due to possibly having to finance a large mortgage. She had originally planned to leave work at the age of 60. Speaking of her situation she says:

> I could end up having to change houses. I could end up having to get a massive mortgage
> at this hour of my life which would determine what I do.
> (Interview 43, female HEO, age 50-54).

Previous research in the UK has also found that separation or divorce can cause major disruption to the retirement plans of older workers especially women who tend to find themselves at a disadvantage financially in the event of an unexpected change in marital status (Skinner, 2003; Price & Ginn, 2003; Yeandle, 2005). Other long-term workers say that the timing of their retirement will be influenced by whether or not their children need to be provided for at university.

As we might expect, given their higher salaries, both current finances and pensions are a concern for a smaller proportion of managers (26%) than for other groups. However one

woman needed to work to pay for a recently-acquired mortgage and another who was the main breadwinner needed to provide for her son at university.

Two of the late joiners say they need to keep working in order to have an adequate income for day-to-day expenses. Again these are people for whom money is a constraint due to their past work history combined with their family history indicating the importance of interlinking personal and work spheres and life-course events in accounting for retirement decision-making (Szinovacz & De Viney, 2000).

The women returners say that they need to work until they are 65 because they haven't built up sufficient pension entitlements. Four women link this to having to leave work because of the marriage bar and three others were unhappy with the level of additional voluntary contributions that they were allowed to make to their pensions. Others said that due to their low salaries, they were unable to afford to pay enough extra contributions to bring up their pensions to a reasonable amount. A number of these women were unhappy that they had to start at the bottom of the pay-scale when they re-joined the civil service despite their previous work experience. They said that at the time of interview, their union was trying to obtain pension recognition for previous service for them. As one woman put it:

> I haven't plans to retire soon because of the break in my service. I need to go to 65 to have any kind of a sizeable pension.
> (Interview 24, Clerical Officer aged 50-54).

Five of these women say they are worried by the inadequacy of their pension – this includes two women whose husbands have made no pension provision. Several of the women (including some who have access to other resources such as husbands with high earnings or reasonable pensions) said that they would not like to have to depend on the Clerical Officer pension for survival in retirement. A small number (4) of the women hadn't thought about the issue of pensions at all. Some assumed that they would receive half of their husband's pension. Other studies have found that this is quite a common assumption. However as a qualitative study conducted in the UK suggests, reliance on sharing a husband's pension is a risky undertaking (Peggs & Davies, 2001). In the event of widowhood, separation or divorce or even business failure for those who were self-

employed, some women may be left with very low levels of pension provision (Daly, 2001). This was the case for some of the women returners in this study.

As might be expected, concern about the amount of their pensions is less evident in the accounts of the long-term workers. Only two women and two men (14% of the group) express concern about the adequacy of their pensions. This is probably because these workers generally have had uninterrupted career paths and so most will have their full pension by the time they retire. Those who do express concern about pensions are people whose pension-building has been interrupted by job-sharing in order to care for children or those men who do not have full service because they were recruited when they were older (see Yeandle, 2005).

Most senior managers said that their pension was adequate but several commented that it would be difficult to manage on the level of pension that workers in lower grades were paid. Finally a high proportion (60%) of late joiners (particularly those who were unemployed or employed in an non-pensioned occupation) are anxious about pensions:

> CO pay isn't bad, but when it comes to pension age – it's a problem area. I'm conscious at the age of 54 – the pension is a pittance.
> (Interview 37, female Clerical Officer, age 50-54).

Those who have pensions from other occupations, are much more financially comfortable, particularly if their spouse is working. However one man who took a redundancy package now realises he needs to stay on for three years longer at work than he had intended in order to support his children in college.

One man, clearly an "involuntary worker" says "I would be gone tomorrow" (Interview 36, male Clerical Officer) if he didn't need to build up pension contributions. This man is the main breadwinner in his household and he had worked in non-pensioned, insecure, relatively low-paid employment before joining the civil service and his wife worked unpaid in the home in accordance with social norms at that time. He mentions this as a factor in his need to stay on at work now. This is an example of how the male bread-winner norm which obtained earlier in the life-course can have negative financial consequences later in the life-course for men (especially those in low-paid employment) thus restricting their choices in subsequent years.

Intrinsic and identity orientations to work

14% of long-term workers mentioned that the nature of work they were engaged in would influence their retirement decision. One female HEO with a strong intrinsic work orientation said that she would probably remain at work until she was 65. Another man said that if he were left in his current job which he enjoyed, he would stay at work, but if he were asked to move, he would retire. Another male HEO who could afford to retire on full pension because he has completed 40 years service explains that part of the reason he hasn't retired is because he enjoys his current job:

> That's while I'm doing this job and as I said, my daughter is still in college so those would be the main reasons, but I'm enjoying what I'm doing. If I wasn't enjoying it, certainly, I would have a different outlook.
>
> (Interview 61, male HEO, age 60-64)

This man enjoyed both the work itself and the company of his colleagues. It is clear that many of these workers have a good deal of choice over the timing of their retirement.

As we might expect, for some senior managers, too, the retirement decision is related to their orientations to work. Some managers (21%) say that if an interesting promotional opportunity arises, they would be tempted to stay on longer at work. Other senior managers say that they enjoy coming to work and would like to continue for that reason.

A larger group of returners (29%) want to stay on at work until the age of 65 or after either because they love working or having time and/or money for themselves. For these women, work appears to form an important part of their identity and they have strong intrinsic work orientations. This fits in with the accounts they gave of their reasons for re-joining and their orientations to work (Chapter 8). They mention various aspects of work that appeal to them, ranging from features of the work itself, to the structure it brings to their life.

A similar proportion (30%) of late joiners mention their enjoyment of and involvement with work itself as a strong influence on their retirement decision. One man enjoys the actual work that he does; another likes striving to improve procedures in her particular area of work and a third enjoys giving good service to the public. They feel fit and able to continue working as described in Section 8.9.3 above and resist the idea of retiring simply because they have reached the "normal" retirement age of 65.

Social aspect of work

A small percentage (14%) of long-term workers with strong social work orientations anticipated that they would miss the social interaction with colleagues. For some people, work provides a focus in their lives and they are concerned about what to do when they retire as the following quote suggests:

> I have concerns about when I retire as well. I mean, what'll I do with my time? I mean, would I like to take a part-time job or what?
>
> (Interview 42, female HEO, age 50-54).

This woman would experience a vacuum if she weren't working. This supports previous research findings in Ireland and the UK which also found that some people valued the social aspect of work and therefore were reluctant to retire (Fahey & Russell, 2001b:66; Loretto & White, 2006: 499).

A slightly lower proportion (11%)of senior managers (two men and two women) also say that they would miss the social interaction when they retire. One woman feels that retirement would entail a major loss to her in this way as the following excerpt suggests:

> I would see isolation *(in retirement)* as a problem. I would be afraid I would end up on my own. Work provides a social aspect to my life – I meet people for lunch. I work long hours and get home late and so don't have much of a social life outside of work.
>
> (Interview 84, female Principal Officer or above, age 55-59)

This reflects the effect that the long hours culture can have and suggests the need for earlier preparation for retirement -perhaps having a pre-retirement course five years before workers are due to leave work – in order to begin putting a structure in place and begin to engage in other activities outside work in their spare time.

One fifth (21%) of returners and 50% of late joiners also mention the possible loss of social interaction as an influence on their thinking about retirement. One person says:

> I like meeting people – I'm a people person.
>
> (Interview 38, male Clerical officer, age 55-59)

He doesn't want to retire at 65 because he became aware when he was unemployed of how much he missed the social interaction that work gave him. The need for structure was also echoed by a woman who had stopped working for a brief period of time – again this person wants to remain on after the age of 65. The high percentage of late joiners and returners who value social interaction may be explained by the fact that some of them have disliked being outside of the workforce either working unpaid in the home, being unemployed or retired.

Opportunity to try new ventures

Exactly equal proportions of long-term workers, managers and returners (14%) see retirement as a long-awaited opportunity to try new ventures – this reflects findings in a national study on attitudes to retirement (Fahey & Russell, 2001b). Two women HEO's typify this outlook; they have developed and practiced skills in their limited spare time over the years and now plan to use these as a means of earning a living at something they enjoy. One woman says:

> I plan to open a drama school. I plan to retire at 57. I have always worked all my life.
> (Interview 67, female HEO, age 50-54).

The other woman has developed her skills as a creative writer and plans to engage in that as her main activity after her retirement. The men plan to engage in consultancy work or to expand the amount of voluntary work they do.

Senior managers intend to engage in either full-time or part-time work after retirement – most mention consultancy work as their preferred option. They obviously see themselves as capable of contributing productively to the labour market. Some of these managers are happy to try another occupation and feel they have spent enough time in the civil service. Some returners have definite ideas for other kinds of paid work they would like to undertake including working in a bar or shop.

Health

Only 10% of long-term workers and 14% of returners mention their own or their spouse/partner's health as an issue that would influence their retirement decision. One person says that health problems in the past has affected her accumulation of pension and

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she may need to stay on longer because of this. One man said his retirement would depend on his wife's health – he may have to retire early to take care of her.

A higher proportion of managers (21%) mention health as an influence. Several mention wanting to retire while they are still healthy and can take advantage of their retirement to go travelling or take up or expand hobbies or voluntary work – some people want to retire at or close to 60 for this reason:

> I think health would be a major issue – you know I'd like to think that I could retire and have a healthy retirement.
>
> (Interview 90, Assistant Principal, age 55-59)

Others (including some who are very committed to work) say they will retire when they feel they are no longer capable of doing a good job:

> I suppose that would depend on how I'm feeling about….my capacity to do the job and if I feel that I'm not doing it or not able, I'll just go.
>
> (Interview 85, male PO or above, age 50-54)

This group includes two men and one woman who say they currently find their work to be somewhat stressful and would like to reduce their stress levels. Three managers also refer to their spouses/partner's health as a factor that would influence them – they would like to leave while their partner was healthy. Most of those who mentioned health had either suffered from ill-health themselves or had a close relative who was ill.

Age

Only 11% of long-term workers and 8% of managers directly mention the issue of age in relation to retirement. They challenge the notion that workers should have to retire at a given age. One man (a HEO who has both an intrinsic and social work orientation) indicated that he would like to be able to continue working after the age of 65. He said that his ability to work is unlikely to disappear overnight:

> I suppose that I feel if you are fit after 65 or whatever that you can go on for another couple of years, I feel it's a bit arbitrary you know … it is a bit arbitrary that one day you can do the job and another you can't, I think that is it.
>
> (Interview 53, male HEO, age 55-59)

Many others appear to accept the notion that somewhere between 60 and 65 is a "normal" time to retire or at least they don't question it. Several managers mention that they have given a sufficiently long contribution to the organisation rather than that they are "too old" to continue working. None of the returners or late joiners mention age.

Relational/life-cycle factors

Previous research suggests that after a particular age, the work-lives of managers become less central to them and the importance of life outside work reasserts itself so that family and personal life becomes more important (Still & Timms, 1998; Scase & Goffee, 1989). A relatively small proportion (11%) of senior managers in this sample mention the wish to spend time with their spouse/partner as something that influences their plans for retirement.

Meanwhile 20% and 21% respectively of returners and late joiners say their plans depend on their wives, husbands or partners. The person's stage in the life-course appears to feature in their retirement decision-making. However, people vary in the way in which they take this into account. For those who have children, where their children are independent, in some cases this means they consider themselves free to retire and having children of school/college age means they need to continue working. The employment/retirement status of their spouse/partner affects the decision-making of some people. The accounts of three late joiners suggest that they regularly consult their spouses about all of their work-related decision-making (including retirement) and decide together what action to take.

Working as a resistance to familial and societal expectations

Finally, one interesting finding among the returners group was that , while many of the group adhere to traditional social norms, some of them want to stay at work to avoid what they perceive to be societal expectations for women of their age – for example being expected to mind their grandchildren or to do voluntary work. One woman says:

> It's important to have a plan – I might move to X. I definitely don't want to be minding grandchildren. Sometimes I take a day off and don't tell my kids in case they expect me to mind them (her grandchildren).
>
> (Interview 19, Executive Officer, age 50-54).

Another woman said she had begun to job-share but had returned to full-time work because she found she was approached by many local voluntary organisations as soon as it was perceived that she had free time – she preferred to go back to work.

10.4 Ellen's story: A life-course analysis (accumulated disadvantage and pension)

Although the influences outlined above have been listed separately for clarity, it is in fact the particular combination of circumstances coming together at a particular time in the context of a particular work-life biography that results in particular choices and outcomes. The narrative below describing Ellen's current position and attitude towards retirement and pension demonstrates the usefulness of a life-course perspective in analyzing retirement and pension-related decision-making.

Ellen had five children; she and her husband discovered that his pension (from private sector employment) would be very low even after many years spent working. Ellen had always managed to find some part-time work (cleaning) when her children were young despite the lack of childcare. She had left school without completing her Leaving Cert since she was the eldest of a large family who needed the money to support her younger siblings. She subsequently had to leave the civil service due to the marriage bar. She didn't wish to leave and was always determined to go back to work; following a series of poorly paid part-time jobs, she completed a FÁS return-to-work course. She felt that she wasn't qualified for anything, so she went back to full-time education at the age of 50 and passed several subjects in her Leaving Cert. She subsequently encountered age discrimination on applying for jobs (this was before the labour shortage) and poor conditions of work in the private sector where she worked full-time for a number of years before re-joining the civil service.

Now in her late 50s she both needs to work in order to build up a pension and she also enjoys working in the civil service. However, she finds herself at a great disadvantage in terms of her pension as she hasn't been able to build up sufficient years service to give her an adequate pension and only half of her original years of service are being taken into account for pension purposes. Her retirement decision-making appears to be shaped by a

combination of cumulative disadvantage arising from her enforced ejection from the labour market and her husband being in low-paid relatively unprotected work in the private sector. This is combined with her strong sense of personal agency which induced her to be always engaged in voluntary or paid work despite her large family. Despite these efforts on her part, she is vulnerable in terms of pension provision – from a policy perspective it seems unfair that not all of her previous years service do not count for pension purposes[32]

In order to interpret Ellen's narrative, it is useful to draw upon Giele and Elder's life-course analysis which incorporates four dimensions – social structure and culture, linked lives, human agency and timing.

This case history shows that a combination of factors need to be taken into account in analysing retirement decision-making. Despite a very active pursuit of personal (career) goals (displaying a high degree of agency and a strong intrinsic work-centred orientation) and a strong work ethic, the legal and economic constraints and societal expectations that obtained at crucial points in Ellen's career mean that it is currently very difficult for her to obtain promotion and/or a decent pension. For example location in time and place was important – financial hardship in her family of origin meant she had to find paid employment as early as possible. The marriage bar meant she had to leave work on marriage. In accordance with societal norms she had a large family which was very common at that time. Due to the lack of publicly-funded childcare, she was effectively excluded from the labour market except for poorly-paid part-time work for many years until her children were older. She had to overcome several obstacles to re-enter the workplace. She struggled for several years to get a job with reasonable conditions. Timing was important – she encountered difficulties that people in later cohorts were able to avoid due to the changing economic climate which brought with it an increased demand for labour. By the time she did get a job in the civil service at the age of 57, she felt that promotion was unlikely because of her age even though she does still intend to apply. Analysing her pathway from this life-course perspective reveals a very different story than would emerge from simply interpreting her employment behaviour as entirely choice-based. This case highlights the value of qualitative enquiry which reveals that even those

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[32] Those women who received a marriage gratuity had given up their pension rights by accepting the gratuity. If they wanted their previous years service to count for pension purposes after they returned to work, they had to repay their gratuity together with compound interest. For women who returned to work on relatively low wages, this sometimes was not possible, unless they had other sources of income, for example if their husband was well-paid.

with strong work-centred preferences may not be able to realise those preferences and have to accept the least-worst option (see Collins & Wickham, 2004; Crompton & Harris, 1998; Walters, 2005).

10.5 Conclusions: retirement decisions for all groups

I will address the questions raised in the introduction and discuss the implications of the findings for retirement theory. In general, there are differences between the groups in relation to their freedom to realize their preferences in relation to retirement. Both groups who have long tenure – senior managers and those located in middle or lower grades tend to have more control over their retirement choices, due to the fact that they have had long years of service and adequate pensions. However a small number of people in these groups are not free to realize their preferences in cases where they have relatively low earnings and/or financial obligations to provide for children or to pay mortgages. Some of the late joiners (those with substantial pensions from previous employment) also have greater choice.

It is very clear that for retirement as well as for promotion lack of financial resources tends to act as a constraint for a large proportion of those in the returners group (and for some of the late joiners) who have not had an opportunity to build up adequate pensions. Many of them are not free to realise their preferences; even if they wish to retire, many of them need to continue working.

At first glance, it appears that gender is an important constraint on choice. However, it is not gender alone but when it is combined with a lack of resources that it acts as a constraint on choice (Ginn and Arber, 2001:64). Firstly, the women in the other groups are generally in a position to realize their preferences. Secondly, not all returners need to stay on at work; those who have access to other socio-economic resources besides their wages (e.g. their husband's income may be high) have greater freedom to choose the timing of retirement.

The women returners as a group and both men and women with interrupted work histories and low salaries were the most likely to have constraints on their level of choice, due to

low levels of pension accumulation. This supports arguments made by feminists who stress the impact of gendered social norms and legislation which encourage(d) women to leave the labour market to care for children or other dependants (Ginn, Daly and Street, 2001). This interrupts their pension-building and means that they have fewer choices when it comes to retirement.

The findings suggest that relational theory has a bearing on decision-making – at least some men and women consider the future plans of their spouses or other partners when making their retirement decisions. As was the case for their promotion decision, for some people, their previous experiences and prospects for promotion influence their retirement decisions.

There is evidence that several people in the group have changed their intentions regarding retirement over time; some of them now plan to work longer than originally planned in response to various events and realizations – for some it is financial needs; for others it is due to a growing appreciation of the positive role that working plays in their lives. In order to understand the individual retirement decision-making of people in this group, a life-course perspective which is able to capture the way in which personal and work trajectories are interwoven over time is useful. As was true in earlier chapters, this provides support for a conceptualisation of the self that is not "fixed" at an early point in life, but is in process and open to change over time.

The section on influences demonstrates that many of the factors which affected earlier decision-making are still important when it comes to retirement decision-making. For example, financial resources are still an important issue for some more than others; work orientations are clearly important too with most of those who wish to stay on until the age of 65 or above having strong intrinsic, social and/or identity orientations.

However, certain other "new" influences come into play at the stage of retirement decision-making such as (later) life-cycle factors and trying to fit in with the retirement plans of spouses or partners. Health assumes a growing importance as does the issue of pensions. As has been found in previous research, retirement decision-making is subject to an array of influences. However, as the case-study demonstrates previous events in the life-course may have a very restrictive impact on the opportunities that are available at retirement.

Having analysed the intentions of the research participants regarding retirement, the final chapter reiterates the main empirical findings of the thesis and discusses these in the light of the research questions set out at the beginning of the thesis.

Chapter 11
Conclusion

11.1 Introduction

This thesis draws upon rich empirical accounts of work orientation and decision-making among mid-life to older workers in the civil service in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth-first century. One of its broadest conclusions is that many older workers have a good deal of skill, energy and enthusiasm to contribute to the workplace. In fact many older civil servants are highly committed to their work and many wish to remain at work after what in the past has been considered "normal" retirement age.

From a scholarly point of view, the thesis makes an important contribution to both empirical and theoretical literatures. Among its original contributions to the empirical literature are its analysis of certain types of workers over the life-course: women returners, for instance, who form an increasingly large and important group in the Irish labour market (Russell *et al.*, 2002; Fahey, 2008). It also investigates another relatively under-researched group – those who have left other long-term careers due to redundancy or early retirement (mainly men) and have re-joined the labour market in later middle age. By including managers and other long term workers in its analysis, the thesis also provides data useful for comparisons of workers' experiences and perceptions by gender and by position in the organisational hierarchy.

At a theoretical level, the thesis contributes to the wider sociological debate about the relative weighting of structure and agency in work-place decision-making. In particular, it has assessed the applicability of Catherine Hakim's preference theory to this group of older workers. The evidence here seems to indicate that Hakim's model offers a useful starting point for analysis (it appears that women do indeed have different preferences which influence their decision-making). However the assumptions of preference theory concerning the fixity of preferences of two groups (managers and returners) and the freedom of workers to realise those preferences do not explain the actual decision-making of the workers interviewed in this study. Structural and normative factors (as both

constraints and enabling factors) appear to have a fundamental role in setting the parameters within which decision-making takes place.

One of the most significant features of this thesis is its demonstration of the way peoples' preferences may change over time, and that workers have "adaptive" rather than fixed preferences. It highlights the process by which previous experiences both inside and outside the workplace strongly influence workers in forming and adapting their preferences during the life-course. This supports previous research findings (McRae, 1993, Fagan, 2001, Collins and Wickham, 2004). For example, some male managers adapted their preferences by becoming less ambitious when they perceived little realistic hope of promotion due to constraints or structures in the work organisation (see Chapters 6-9).

Figure 1 (p. 51) illustrates the complex range of factors that influence the individual decision-maker including legislation, social norms, membership of family, and the work organisation itself. This emphasises the significance of social agency as well as individual preference. From this it is also clear that a change in one or more of these factors can affect the perceptions and orientation to work of the decision-maker, and that this in turn feeds into preferences which affects subsequent decision-making.

This thesis proposes an alternative model to preference theory – one that better explains these men and women's current relationship to work, and that enables comparison between the different locations in the hierarchy and between genders. Among this group of workers, there appear to be at least four identifiable categories, which I have labelled "personal/home-centred", "satisficers", "maximisers/aspirers" and "work/career-centred". In assigning the individual workers to categories which describe their current relationship to work, I draw on a life-course analysis (Giele & Elder, 1998). As described in more detail in Chapter 5, this model draws upon categories previously identified by Crompton and Harris (Crompton & Harris, 1998: 126). Sometimes workers are not assignable to these categories in predictable ways; for example, this thesis has found that men are not as homogenously career-centred as has been suggested by previous research (Hakim, 2000; 2003). I also draw upon a "continuum model" developed by Walters (Walters, 2005). This allows for the possibility that other categories may potentially be identified anywhere along a continuum from work-centred to home-centred. It also allows that people's preferences and relationship to work may change in response to experiences over time.

11.2 Factors influencing decision-making

The findings from the thesis strongly suggest that contrary to one of the main assertions of preference theory, preferences are not the main determinants of work-place decision-making and outcomes. Gender, social norms, ageing, age-related discrimination, socio-economic conditions, processes and experiences in the work organisation, legislation, policy and life-cycle transitions all have a part to play in decision-making.

Gender relations

The findings of this thesis suggest that gender and gender relations have a significant impact on labour-market decision-making. The accounts of the returners in particular highlight the extremely constraining effects that gender had in the past on women's possibilities both for obtaining employment and for advancing in their careers (Chapters 5 and 8). Some of this was due to restrictive national legislation – the marriage bar, the marriage gratuity, upper age limits for recruitment, the lack of any publicly-funded childcare provision, and a taxation system which favoured a male-breadwinner model of family and work life. Some of the constraint was due to patriarchal ideology, social norms and legislation, which forced women to work unpaid in the home by banning them from the workplace (see Chapters 5 and 6; Mahon, 1990). Gender-related constraints do not map simply on to the civil service grade structure, however. Senior managers in the sample tend to share similar work orientations and attitudes to promotion and retirement, regardless of whether they are women or men. A large proportion of them are strongly committed to work and the idea of a career, whereas women in the long-term workers group and returners who have normally joined at lower grades tend not to have regarded work as a career from the outset, although many of the women came to regard it in this way eventually. A relatively high proportion of men and women state that there was gender discrimination in relation to promotion in the civil service in the past and that this constituted a barrier or at least a disincentive to women, a fact well-documented in previous research (Mahon, 1991; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). The degree to which the women managers and long-term workers have the freedom to realise their preferences in relation to retirement contrasts with the situation of women returners, many of whom need to stay on at work until they are 65, even if they would like to retire. This is because the returners were forced to leave the workplace often for several years due to the

marriage bar and now have interrupted service which will leave them with a very low pension. It is clear that a combination of gender and lack of socio-economic resources often result in relatively poor labour-market outcomes for women.

The accounts of the research participants suggest that there is now a relatively low (compared to age discrimination – see below) but still substantial perception of gender discrimination in the civil service. Almost 20% of the respondents believe that there is currently gender discrimination against women while 8% perceive that there is discrimination against men. However, a further 28% said that there has been gender discrimination against women in the past. This is somewhat less than the proportion found in a recent study of the civil service, but is still substantial and indicates the difficulties facing women in career progression (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). There is evidence to suggest that a small number of the women who are now at senior management level and those at HEO level did not put themselves forward for promotion but instead were either promoted automatically through the senior suitable system or had to be encouraged to apply by managers – a fact that suggests the possibility of perceived if not actual discrimination in the past.

Social norms
Gender-inflected social norms around caring and family roles featured significantly in many of these workers' accounts. The expectation that women should be the primary carers for children was evident in the accounts of some women in each of the groups, particularly at the start of their careers. It was most obvious in the case of returners and long-term women workers, with many of them leaving their jobs to look after their first child even after the marriage bar was removed. It is quite striking that one third of the women who eventually became senior managers envisaged themselves as having a career almost from the outset of their employment, a preference which they attributed partly to the influence of parents. This has some resonance with Catherine Hakim's "self-made women" concept, but also suggests that the support and aspirations of parents helped shape the preferences of these women and helped them to resist the societal norm. It was notable that only three women at senior management level had children, while all of the men did. The senior managers who are mothers had the means to pay for childcare and/or had an egalitarian relationship and were well-resourced to deal with the pressures that this social norm imposed on them and to continue working full-time. As McRae has argued, they had the capacity to overcome some of the constraints that gender norms impose and were more

free to fulfil their preferences to work (McRae, 2003a). Meanwhile, more of the mothers in the long-term workers group appeared to regard themselves as the primary carer. Some job-shared when their children were young in order to make it easier to combine childcare with work. Some of them didn't apply for promotion while their children were young as they didn't want to have to move location or change their hours or conditions of work. This contributes to the greater difficulty that women with children had in progressing in their careers, a perception that is corroborated in a recent study of ambition in the Irish civil service where most women believed that having children had a negative effect on their career, while most men felt that it had a positive or neutral effect on their progression (Valiulis, O'Donnell & Redmond, 2008).

However, there was some evidence that these societal norms are changing. Some of the women in the youngest cohort who were the main breadwinners or who were in dual-career families (where responsibility for child-care outside of work was genuinely shared) became more ambitious when they reached their early 50s (see Chapter 5). Susan Himmelweit's model, which demonstrates how individuals absorb societal norms and how norms can change over time, helps illuminate this reciprocal process (Himmelweit, 2001).

For men respondents, the societal gender norm was to be the breadwinner. The effect of this varied over the life-cycle, depending on the group and sometimes on the location in which the men lived and worked. Most men across all groups cited getting married and having children as an incentive to apply for promotion. This applied especially where their wives worked in the home caring for their children. However, for some men with large families the fact that promotion might involve losing an allowance acted as a disincentive to progression for them. Some men had jobs that were HEO level or its equivalent early on in their careers and had moved to a regional location; these men were reluctant to apply for promotion as they did not want to disrupt either their families or themselves. There is some evidence of changing gender norms here too. Some men (most but not all) in the younger 50-54 age cohort took more responsibility for childcare outside of work (for example taking time off to look after a sick child) and gave accounts of negotiating with their wives and family on promotion decisions that meant moving.

The societal norms around caring for dependent relatives also featured in workers' accounts, which accords with the generally strong sense of closeness and obligation to family that has been highlighted in earlier chapters (see especially, Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7).

In the current study, it is mainly single women and men who provide the main support for their dependant parents. Most of these carers are women, although there are some male carers in the long-term workers group (there are no male "main carers" in the senior managers group). Some women returners reported having to delay their return to work in order to provide care. The chief impact of this norm appears to be the constraint it imposes on the freedom to fulfil a preference for following a career path. In this sample at least, it affected a higher proportion of women than of men. These findings would seem to support the relational approaches such as those advocated by Himmelweit, who emphasised the often profound impact that gendered societal and familial norms may have on behaviour; (Himmelweit, 2001).

There is evidence particularly in the accounts of some of the returners that their later accounts reflect a less familial and more individuated sense of self which provides some support for the theory that women now have a greater degree of freedom to develop their own biography (see Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, it is important not to over-state this as it appears that although improvements have been made in terms of gender equality in the civil service, particularly in the last five years, many women (and men) in this sample subscribe to either a traditional gender division of labour or see themselves as the primary carers for children outside of work. So although gender roles are changing, this process appears to be quite slow and it appears to be more difficult for those women with fewer economic resources to fulfil the preferences they may have to work or to advance in their careers. This challenges the simplistic assumption that once legislation has changed, and women have access to contraception women are now free to act on their preferences. It corroborates approaches that emphasise how deeply embedded gendered norms may be (Himmelweit, 2001;).

Ageing and perceived age-related discrimination
There is evidence that half of senior managers and a slightly higher proportion of long-term workers believe that there is age-related discrimination in the civil service (see Chapters 5 and 6). Despite the introduction of legislation to combat age-related discrimination, there is quite a strong perception that it exists – in particular, that there is a 'cut-off point', or age beyond which it is extremely unlikely a person will be promoted. This perception was also found in a recent study of ambition in the Irish civil service (Valiulis, O'Donnell & Redmond, 2008: 48). The impact of this perception on decision-

making varies; for some it has quite a strong impact and directly prevents them from applying for promotion (others won't apply because they are disillusioned for a combination of reasons, age being just one of them). In contrast to the senior managers and long-term workers, a very small proportion of returners and of late joiners perceive age-related discrimination as a problem. Interestingly, several interviewees from these two groups experienced age-related discrimination in the private sector and perceive the civil service to be relatively non-discriminatory by contrast. There is some independent evidence to suggest that a degree of age-discrimination does exist in the civil service (Equality Authority, 2005; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999: 159); a hypothesis supported by the perceptions and anecdotal material reported in this study. There is also evidence that there may be 'indirect indiscrimination' in the form of promotional processes (psychometric or "maths" tests) that are more difficult for older people than for people who have recently left school (see especially, Chapters 5 and 7), an issue that was raised in previous research (Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). Even if there were not much evidence of actual age discrimination, however, the fact that there is such a strong and prevalent perception that it exists is of concern, and does appear to impede some older workers from applying for promotion.

A very small proportion of the long-term workers, the managers and the returners believe that the ageing process itself impedes their ability to perform well at work, and won't apply for promotion for this reason. This perception is quite individual and is not related to actual age – some people who believe they are "too old" to apply for promotion are in the 50-54 age group, while some in the older 60-64 age group have no such belief.

Socio-economic conditions and structures
Socio-economic conditions featured prominently in these workers' accounts of decision-making, especially among returners and long-term workers at the time they joined the civil service. The important impact economic conditions may have on social norms and on individual work-related decision-making has been highlighted in previous research (Crompton & Harris, 1998, Charles & James, 2003). This illuminates the reciprocal effects of the economic on the social spheres. Sometimes this involved direct socio-economic impact, as in the effect of job scarcity at the time they originally joined the civil service. Sometimes there was an historical dimension – many workers joined the civil service to comply with the wishes of parents who had themselves experienced severe economic depression and consequently pushed their children in the direction of the "permanent and

pensionable" jobs. The impact of the more recent economic cycle is very obvious in the case of returners and late joiners. The advent of the "Celtic Tiger" increased the demand for older workers to fill the gap in supply and created employment opportunities which, historically, had simply not been available to older workers, particularly older women workers. This created the opportunity for both returners and late joiners to join the civil service (see Chapters 5 and 9).

Work organisation

The positive and negative experiences that workers have within the work organization itself appear to have had a very strong impact on the orientations of workers, and on their willingness to apply for promotion and to time their retirement. The type of policy and general gendered work environment that obtained when these workers first joined the civil service had an important impact on their chances of career progression, a phenomenon that has been found in previous studies (O'Connor, 1996, Colgan and Ledwith, 1996). The evidence supports theoretical approaches that have found that large bureaucratic organisations (such as the civil service) are not gender neutral (Witz & Savage, 1992). For example career-paths were designed when the civil service was an overwhelmingly male organisation, and the long hours culture and linear career-path make it more difficult for women with children to reach senior management level. The fact that most of the women in the long-term workers group and in the returners group joined as Clerical Assistants was partly due to civil service policy (the CA grade wasn't open to men until after 1974) and partly due to the fact that it was the norm for women in Ireland only to work until marriage in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. There is clear evidence in this thesis that joining at basic entry level made it more difficult for women to advance in their careers, corroborating previous research findings (Mahon, 1990; Humphreys, Drew & Murphy, 1999). Experiences such as being placed high on promotional panels and not being promoted simply due to the high ratio of applicants to promotional positions in some departments caused ambitious returners to become disillusioned (see Chapter 7). A shortage of role models at senior level for women workers in the formative years of their careers, the lack of promotional opportunities in the regions, and being in a specialized stream all had dampening effects on people's expectations for career progression. On the other hand experiences such as being supported by their Department early in their careers to participate in management training had a positive impact on many of those now at senior management level and whose accounts reflect a strong commitment to the work

organization (Chapter 6). These reciprocal effects of the individual's negotiation of their career path in an organisation have been highlighted by Casey (Casey, 1995) and point to a conception of the self that is fluid and in process rather than fixed and unchanging.

Organisational changes such as de-centralisation constituted a major disruption to the expected career progression of many workers. Those who identified de-centralisation as most problematic were typically men at senior management level, particularly those at Assistant Principal level who had followed a conventional career path and were progressing steadily in their own Department ("organisation men and women"), were located in Dublin and were in their early 50s. If they wanted to continue progressing in their careers, they now had to be prepared to move away from Dublin. Most of these men had families; some had wives who were working and some were themselves very involved in their community. De-centralisation is an example of how an unexpected organizational change may cause severe disruption to promotional intentions and cause people to move away from the work/career-centred side of the continuum to become maximisers or even satisficers. Clearly, these managers' preferences hadn't changed, but their opportunities to realise those preferences have unexpectedly reduced.

Legislation and policy
The existence and/or lack of legislation and policy emerged in people's accounts as another important influence on actual labour-market choices, in both negative and positive ways. As already noted, one of the main pieces of legislation that prevented labour market participation for women was the marriage bar; along with the marriage gratuity, the lack of childcare and the taxation system which encouraged a male-breadwinner form of family life. Women were encouraged or even forced to leave their jobs and discouraged from returning to work, even if they had a preference to do so. On the other hand, enabling policies and legislation such as the individualization of taxes, the lifting of the upper age limit for recruitment, the implementation of a gender equality policy after 2000, and the specific recruitment of former civil servants at the height of the economic boom were all cited as enabling factors (particularly by women returners; see Chapter 7). Mentoring, role models and encouragement to apply for promotion were also cited by some of the women at middle management level as important factors in encouraging them to be more confident and work/career centred (see Chapter 5). All of this emphasizes the important role that equality legislation and policy may play in creating conditions in which even those with lower socio-economic resources may fulfil their preferences.

Life-cycle changes

The fact that this thesis gathered information on the entire work-life careers of the research participants enables us to see the impact of life-cycle changes on work-place decision-making. Changes that take place over the life cycle did have an effect on decision-making for some women and men. The most obvious example of life-cycle changes impacting on work-related decision-making was the phenomenon of women returning to work as soon as their children had finished secondary school or college (though interestingly many women returned to employment elsewhere before re-joining the civil service). There was evidence that for many women managers, their identity was closely bound up with their work-roles. Because (as demonstrated by Wajcmann and Martin) women's private lives are still deeply "gendered", women managers with children or other caring responsibilities had more difficulty reconciling their private and their public roles than did men (Wajcman and Martin, 2002: 999). Work became increasingly important for many women in all groups as they grew older and their other caring responsibilities eased. For men, getting married and having children was mentioned frequently as an impetus to apply for promotion. Having to provide for children in school or university was also cited as a factor in applying for promotion or delaying retirement even where the person's preference was to retire. Of course, retirement itself is a life-course transition. In Chapter 9, some of those who had taken retirement found that their identity was closely bound up with working and they were eager to return to the work-force for the structure it provided. Similarly, some of the long-term workers and managers did not look forward to retirement (Chapter 6 and 8). This suggests that for many people working remains an important part of their identity formation and challenges those theories that suggest that work is no longer a relevant category (Sennett, 1998). The frequent mention of the constraints and enabling factors outlined above in workers accounts suggests that the freedom of all workers to realise their preferences is over-stated in preference theory.

11.3 Preferences change over time

One of the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis is whether preferences change over time. Hakim's preference theory would predict that members of the two extreme groups, home-centred and work-centred women and men have preferences that do

not change over time. An important finding in this thesis is that many men and women in each of these groups do change their preferences as they negotiate organizational and structural changes, relationship and life-cycle changes and in response to changing social norms and legislation and changes in the economy. Figure 1 (p. 51) shows the way in which a variety of influences feed into decision-making. A change in any one of the individual factors can result in a change in the perception of opportunities and capabilities and this feeds into changes in preferences over the life course.

These changes over time are particularly obvious in the case of the women returners. The way in which the preferences of a substantial proportion of these women changed in response to changing legislation, changing social norms and increased labour market opportunities due to changes in the economy may be clearly seen in Chapter 8. Almost one third of these women were extremely ambitious. This challenges one of the contentions of preference theory – that home-centred workers retain this basic preference throughout their working lives (Hakim, 2000). Instead it gives support to those theorists who adopt more social constructionist or institutionalist approaches (Crompton & Harris, 1998, 1999; Himmelweit, 2001; McRae, 2003a).

Changes also occur in the work/career-centred group. Some of the long-term women workers changed and became more ambitious for career success in recent years (see Chapter 5). This appears to have been in response to a complex variety of factors – including mentoring, recent success in promotional competitions, their freedom from caring responsibilities and the fact that there are now more women role models at middle and senior management levels in the civil service due to the implementation of the gender equality policy. This idea that ambition "ebbs and flows" over different stages of life is corroborated by findings in a recent study of women and ambition in the Irish civil service (Valiulis, O'Donnell & Redmond, 2008: 49). Meanwhile some of the male long-term workers tended to become less ambitious over time due to a combination of work-related factors such as structural barriers to promotion in various locations, having achieved a comfortable level of income relatively early in their careers and a perception of age-related discrimination. Similarly, many of male and female senior managers have become less ambitious over time for a variety of reasons including the perception that they won't be promoted because of perceived age-related or gender-related discrimination, or because there are fewer promotional positions at the top of the hierarchy or in their location or structural changes such as de-centralisation (see Chapter 6).

The fact that senior managers do not necessarily have fixed preferences offers a particularly unexpected challenge to the model offered by preference theory. A large proportion of senior managers report that their attitude towards work changed over time (sometimes more than once) and in fact, relatively few senior managers saw their work as a career at the beginning of their lives.

It thus seems that these people's relationship to work should be seen as contingent. It is clear from the thesis that both men and women may move from one category to another over time. Therefore there is a need for a dynamic model which can accommodate the fact that people's work/life identities and therefore their attitudes to promotion are subject to change under pressure of a variety of factors and influences. The thesis proposes a dynamic model of decision-making, which combines the type of categorization developed by Crompton and Harris with the concept of the continuum developed by Walters as the best means of conceptualising people's relationship to work (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Walters, 2005). A model of this sort can incorporate changes over time as demonstrated in Chapters 6-9. It is possible to model how people move from one category to another in response to various changes. These findings suggest that theories of the self which conceive of the self to be fluid and changing rather than fixed at a particular point in time are more reflective of the actual work-life histories and decision-making processes of these women and men (Casey, 1995; Giele & Elder, 1998). In terms of broader debates in sociology about the relative significance of structure and agency, the accounts of the men and women in this study suggest that it is important to take account of structural issues and constraints both inside and outside of the workplace itself as well as preferences in order to understand the work-related decisions that people make.

11.4 Orientations to work are complex and change over time

One of the most interesting findings of the present study is that orientations to work are complex and multi-faceted. Most workers value both intrinsic and extrinsic features of their jobs, while others also value work for social reasons and/or because it forms an important part of their identity (see Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9). These orientations are not simple. For example, workers do not have either exclusively extrinsic or intrinsic

orientations as suggested by Goldthorpe or Hakim (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968; Hakim, 2000) Workers typically cite two or three types of meaning that work holds for them; moreover these orientations do not always translate directly into a specific type of decision-making.

The proportions allocated to categories in the various groups are presented at the end of each chapter. It is these categories rather than orientations that are comparable with the categories (work-centred, adaptive and home-centred) used by Hakim and others (Hakim, 2000; 2003; Crompton & Harris, 1998; Nolan, 2005). The categories I use are work/career-centred, maximisers, satisficers and personal/home-centred (see Chapter 5). I argue that the maximisers and satisficers categories are better able to explain and predict actual behaviour than the large and undifferentiated adaptive category proposed by Hakim. This is because they are arrived at by taking account of not only preferences, but also of people's intentions in relation to a specific decision (whether or not to apply for promotion) and their reasons for their choice. This thesis clearly corroborates previous research which shows that people may have similar preferences, and yet that they may make very different decisions because other factors feed into their actual decision-making (Collins & Wickham, 2004; McRae, 2003a; Nolan, 2005). In particular, they may not have the economic resources to freely fulfil their preferences. This is only clearly revealed by qualitative methods. For example, if interviews reveal that returners are no longer going to apply for promotion because of structural bottlenecks in their department, this can have very different policy implications (the structures may need to be changed) than if we assume somebody is not applying for promotion because they prefer not to.

This thesis raises interesting issues in relation to gender and orientations to work. One of the most striking and unexpected findings is the relatively low proportion of men (even those at senior management level) who are unambiguously work/career centred (25%) or maximisers (14%), contrary to what would be predicted by preference theory for men who have worked full-time in one organization with a predictable career path. In fact a sizable majority of the male managers fall into the categories of either satisficers (32%) or personal/home-centred (29%) workers. The fact that we have an account of the work/life-histories of these men helps to explain this somewhat unexpected finding. While there is substantial evidence that most senior managers are highly committed to their work, many either realise that they are not going to be promoted for a variety of structural reasons and are no longer going to apply for promotion and so cannot be described as work/career-centred at this time; others had made a decision to put their personal and/or family interests

first and were not going to apply for promotion. While previous theorisations have suggested that this may be a "natural" process of disengagement due to ageing (Cummings and Henry, 1961, cited in Estses, Biggs & Phillipson, 2003: 14), the evidence here suggests that for many people their orientations and preferences do not necessarily change due to ageing *per se*; rather they are affected by individuals' experiences of both barriers and enabling factors that are encountered inside and outside the workplace (Scase and Goffee, 1989, Rose, 2001). This confirms recent findings (Charles & James, 2003; Nolan, 2005, Emslie & Hunt, 2009) in an area (men's work orientations) that has been under-researched in recent years and challenges one of the assumptions of preference theory that most men at senior management level have homogenous, work-centred preferences. Further research needs to be carried out to establish men's orientations to work in other occupations.

11.5 Theoretical implications

At a theoretical level the thesis offers a critique of certain aspects of Hakim's preference theory, while agreeing with her contention that women do have heterogeneous preferences and that they are now more free to realize those preferences since the societal changes described in Chapter 4 have taken place. However, the findings provide strong support for theoretical approaches which indicate that legal, normative, economic and familial constraints are still demonstrably important in shaping the work-related decision-making of both men and women (Crompton & Harris, 1998; 1999; McRae, 2003a; James, 2008). The heterogeneity of orientations to work appears from these findings to apply to many men as well as to women.

Hakim has herself stated that the test of a model ought to be its usefulness (Hakim, 2003: 8). By that criterion, her model is not robust. As has been noted previously, the category "adaptive" women appears to be a residual "catch-all" category which includes everybody who is neither work/career-centred nor "home-centred" (Procter & Padfield, 1998; Nolan, 2005). Based on the findings of this thesis, it is important to differentiate between those who are maximisers/aspirers and satisficers. For example, the maximisers do actively intend to apply for promotion, whereas the satisficers will not apply, but would accept it if offered, so it is more useful in predicting future labour market behaviour. In addition to this, the other categories are not robust; some of the apparently "home-centred" women on closer examination appear to actually to have the attributes of "career-centred" women.

Even in this one occupational group of civil servants, there appear to be more than three "types" of women and of men with distinct relationships towards work. Orientations appear to change over the life-course and in response to changing norms, legislation, organizational changes and changes in the economy. This suggests the need for a dynamic model such as that devised by Walters and outlined in Chapter 6. This allows for the possibility that people can change from one group to another as they negotiate changes in their work and personal lives (see Walters, 2005). This allows for a more complex post-modern construction of identity (self-in-process) to be conceptualised and moves away from the simplistic model of "fixed" identity posited by Hakim (Hakim, 2000).

This lends support both to relational theory and to the argument made by Crompton and Harris and others that preferences are only one of the factors that influence men's and women's employment behaviour.

The theoretical implications of the findings may be summarised as follows:
- The influence of choice/preference on labour market behaviour is over-emphasised in preference theory
- Orientations are complex and contingent.
- A robust model of the self needs to allow that people are in process and contingent.
- Decision-making possibilities are shaped by factors such as gender and family membership; institutional and legal arrangements,, the state of the economy, and social norms..
- The effect of earlier events in the life-course are an important influence on decision-making possibilities in relation to participation, promotion and retirement

At a macro-theoretical level, predictions of the "end-of-work", the rise of individualism and convergence of men and women's career paths are premature. Work remains an important source of identity for many of these workers, although there are signs that for some men and women, it is only one of a number of factors that feed into their biography. There are signs that societal norms are less strong, but for this group at least, familial norms remain strong and have differential effects over the life-course. For some men and women (particularly those at middle and senior management level), there is evidence of convergence of identities. However, for most men and women societal gender norms

continue to play an important though less constraining part in shaping people's career possibilities, as do the knock-on effect of legal and social constraints in the past.

11.6 Policy implications

The thesis demonstrates the important role played by national equal opportunity legislation in creating genuine opportunities for older women and men to return to work in and/or progress within the civil service. It also demonstrates the usefulness of government-provided return-to-work courses. The slow pace of change in the proportion of women at senior levels indicates how deeply embedded certain cultural practices within an organisation can be and how difficult it is to change them. It suggests that substantial changes in the proportion of women at senior levels have only taken place in the past six years. It appears that the more robust implementation of gender equality policy in recent years was necessary to enable such change and the continuing low proportion of women at the very highest levels indicates that gender inequality still needs to be addressed by setting targets, providing mentoring and networking opportunities and providing resources to monitor and implement gender equality policy.

The thesis has shown that a substantial portion of women returners did not choose to leave work, but were forced to do so. The requirement that returners who accepted a marriage gratuity have to pay it back with compound interest should be re-considered especially for those women who had to leave due to the marriage bar. The cost of repaying this can be prohibitive for workers on a low income and most returners re-enter at basic entry grades.

The introduction of national anti-age discrimination legislation to Ireland expanded the possibilities for women and men (who had previously been forced to leave their employment) to fulfil their preference to work. The removal of upper age limits for recruitment was also instrumental in this process. All of these findings emphasise the necessity of strengthening national gender and age-equality legislation and of ensuring that equality policy is implemented and monitored.

The fact that there is a widespread perception among long-term workers and among senior managers that age-related discrimination exists in the civil service should be a matter of

concern for the organisation, particularly if they are concerned about retaining staff due to expected losses because of the increasing age profile and de-centralisation (O'Riordan, 2006). Given the prevalence of this perception, the civil service needs to send out a strong message that being older does not in itself act as a barrier to promotion. There is a need to develop specific measures to monitor and combat age-related discrimination in the civil service. Age awareness training for managers and indeed all staff is recommended.

The civil service may need to look at its promotional structures as the high numbers of those at senior level who are satisficers mean that many of the staff are de-motivated in terms of pursuing a career (although many are strongly committed to their work) with no realistic hope of promotion. De-centralisation is perceived by many managers as severely disruptive to their careers and acts as a de-motivating factor for them. This policy may need to be re-considered if the civil service is concerned about losing some of its senior managers and much of its corporate knowledge.

There are also promotional bottle-necks at the lower end of the organisation. The promotional exam for SO and EO (referred to as the "maths test") by many research participants seems to favour recent school leavers and thus could be argued to constitute indirect age discrimination. It should be changed to a means of assessment more closely reflecting the actual work carried out by SOs and EOs.

National legislation regarding retirement needs to be re-considered. The desire and obvious commitment and capability of many workers to stay on at work after the age of 65 suggests that the current policy which requires all workers recruited before April 2004 to retire at 65 should be changed. This retirement age made sense when people had a shorter life expectancy and were less healthy in older age, but life expectancy has increased. While staying on should not be compulsory, there should be an option to remain at work, preferably with flexible hours for those who wish to do so.

11.7 Suggestions for future research

The thesis findings demonstrate that large-scale quantitative studies need to be accompanied by qualitative research in order to fully explain motivations and properly

inform policy. One of the limitations of this thesis is that while it provides valuable analysis of the experiences of older workers in a large public sector organisation, it cannot be assumed that this is generalisable to other types of occupations such as private sector companies, self-employed workers and/or older workers in the service sector. Since one of the findings is that organisational culture and structural factors are important, there is a need for similar qualitative research to be conducted in other sectors of the economy to see if the results of this thesis are applicable in other contexts.

It was notable that many of the returners who had previously worked in service sector jobs in the private sector had encountered age-related discrimination there. Given that many of these older workers (such as cleaners and retail workers) are unlikely to be unionised or to have the kinds of flexible working and job security offered by the civil service, research into their experiences is desirable.

Although the current study was not designed to explore the influence of class on labour-market decision-making, the results suggest that lack of socio-economic resources both in the past and in the present may have a strongly restrictive impact on people's current freedom to act in accordance with their preferences. This suggests that exploring the impact of class on employment choices and outcomes may be an interesting line of enquiry to pursue in the future (James, 2008). Similarly gender has emerged as an important influence on choice.

11.8 Conclusion

The increased presence of older workers in the labour force is a pressing issue for contemporary Irish society. One of the aims of this thesis has been to facilitate the understanding of some aspects of this phenomenon – ultimately in order that policies may devised that contribute to optimal outcomes both for older workers and for organisations in which they are employed. The focus on a relatively large sample of older Irish civil servants with different relationships to the civil service hierarchy, gender and length of service has usefully enabled the experience of diverse kinds of workers to be compared. The qualitative aspects of the methodology have enabled workers to articulate and interpret their own experiences in ways that provide especially rich data for analysis. It is clear that

people may make similar choices for very different reasons with different policy implications – returners being a very obvious example of this. Interviews demonstrate that a strong perception of age discrimination does exist among older workers, and that this perception in itself a major influence on certain kinds of decision-making, regardless of its factual validity. One of the major concerns of the thesis has been to show the complexity of decision-making among older workers, and to challenge the simplistic assumptions both about workers' behaviour and about the relationship between agency and environment. It is clear that a flexible and heterogeneous approach to the theorisation of decision-making, while producing a more complex and challenging understanding, is also more likely to lead to policy outcomes that will be realistic and productive.

Postscript December 2009

Conditions in the Irish economy have changed dramatically since the field-work for this thesis was completed in 2006. Since the collapse of the "Celtic Tiger" economy in 2007, there is no longer a strong demand for labour in Ireland. There is now a severe economic recession that is predicted to persist for several years.

This has affected both the general economic context and the specific options for promotion and retirement available to older workers in the civil service. For example the government has offered a new incentivized scheme for early retirement to staff in the public service aged over 50 to operate from 1 May 2009 (Circular 12/09). This was introduced in order to reduce staff numbers in the civil service and thus reduce the pay bill. This acts as a stimulus to older workers to leave work and shows the strong impact of economic conditions on choices. Interestingly, although it was predicted that there would be a flood of applications for early retirement, the proportion of those applying for early retirement (2%) is lower than had been expected (De Breadun, 6 Nov., 2009). The findings of this thesis that work is an important part of the identity of many older workers may help to explain this low uptake.

The implementation of much of the de-centralisation programme has been postponed due to the recession, with 5,900 posts now being prioritized to be de-centralised as opposed to

the 10,300 originally proposed in 2003 (www.decentralization.gov.ie, downloaded on 25 November 2009).

The full implications of these changes have yet to be seen; however they are likely to result in a relatively large proportion of older workers retiring early. One implication may be that older workers are essentially treated as a "reserve army of labour" to be drafted in or suddenly dropped in accordance with the needs of the economy. This highlights the importance of having anti-age discrimination legislation in place to protect the rights of older workers and ensure that they are not forced to leave work invountarily. Despite the current recession, it remains a fact that given demographic projections the proportion of older workers in the population is likely to increase substantially in the medium and longer terms, and research such as this that seeks to describe the experiences and decision-making of older workers will enable more informed policy-making in the future.

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12/2/2009

APPENDIX 1

An Roinn Airgeadais
Department of Finance

Ref: E109-89/01

73-79,
Sráid an Mhóta Íocht.
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Éire

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To the Personnel Officer

Dear Personnel Officer

I wish to confirm that Ms Áine Ní Léime has been in contact with this Unit over the past number of months in relation to her research on older civil servants, which will form the basis of her Ph. D thesis for the Sociology Department, TCD.

I also wish to confirm that the Personnel and Remuneration Division has provided Ms Ní Léime with general information on the policies and procedures in this area, together with some statistical data.

The subject of this thesis is of interest to the Equality Unit and I believe may also be of interest to your organisation in furthering the implementation of policies on equality of opportunity in relation to older workers.

I would therefore be grateful if you would assist Ms Ní Léime with her research. Ms Ní Léime has confirmed that confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that the results of the research will be provided both to this Unit and to the participating organisations. She will also provide you with any further details you require.

If you wish to clarify any aspect of this process, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

12 August 2004

APPENDIX 2

Department of Sociology,
Foster Place,
Trinity College,
Dublin

March, 2006

Dear Staff member,

I am engaged in research into the work experience, attitudes and behaviour of people aged between 50 and 65 in general grades in the Civil Service. This research forms the basis for a Ph.D thesis in the Department of Sociology, at Trinity College, Dublin and is being carried out under the supervision of Dr. Evelyn Mahon who has previously conducted research into employment in the Civil Service. The Civil Service Equality Unit of the Department of Finance (through X) have given approval to the proposed research project.

The research will focus particularly on the areas of recruitment, promotion, pensions, resignation and retirement. Therefore, the results should be useful in documenting the experiences and highlighting the concerns (if any) of this group of employees. It should help in informing future HR policy. The topic is timely given the removal of the upper age limit for recruitment into the civil service, the recent introduction of equality legislation and the fact that the work experience of people in this age-group is under-researched generally.

The research involves interviewing a number of employees aged 50 or over in grades from CO to PO in various departments in the civil service. I have asked the Personnel Officer in your Department to forward this letter to you kindly requesting your participation in the research. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in an interview exploring the topics set out above and I assure you that confidentiality will be strictly observed at all stages of the research. Your participation will make a valuable contribution both to future HR policy in the civil service and more generally to research on the concerns of workers in this age-group generally.

I intend to carry out all the interviews personally and it is estimated that each interview should take approximately one hour. If you would like to participate, please indicate this to your Personnel Officer and I will then contact you to arrange an interview. When the research is completed, I will send you a copy of the research report, on request[33].

Yours faithfully,

_____

Áine Ní Léime

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[33] Research report refers to a report I will prepare summarising the findings of the results from the questionnaires.

APPENDIX 3

Questions for HR Personnel

Statistics:

Do you have /could you provide statistics on the numbers of people aged 50 or over in general service grades in your Department?

Recruitment:

Since the removal of the upper age for recruitment, have there been many people aged 50 or over newly recruited in your Department?

Promotion:

1. Do many people aged 50 or over apply for promotion or is there a slowing down at this stage?
2. Is there a gender difference?
3. Do people aged 50 or over apply for and attend training courses?

Early retirement/resignation

1. Is there generally a high number of applications for early retirement and/or resignation?
2. Is this an issue of concern for your Department?
3. Any idea of the gender breakdown?
4. Does your Department routinely conduct exit interviews with people who resign?
5. Is there data available on the reasons for early retirement/resignation?

Pensions:

1. Is this an issue of concern particularly for older people who have recently been recruited?
2. Can they purchase extra years of pension if they wish?

Policy:

1. Are there any particular initiatives in your Department to encourage older people:

- to apply for jobs
- to apply for promotion
- to participate in training
- to remain at work

2. Are there initiatives to support employees who are caring for dependent relatives?

General:

Are you aware of any complaints about discrimination on the grounds of age (re. promotion etc) in your Department?

Data and equality monitoring:

1. Is there monitoring of the career progression of workers by age and gender?

2. Do you collect data (by age and gender) on how many people apply for promotion/ succeed in internal and external promotion competitions?

3. Who is responsible for such monitoring?

Other issues

Are you aware of any issues that are of particular concern to people over 50 in your Department?

APPENDIX 4

Interview Schedule   CODE_____

1. Department

2. Male/Female

3. Grade

CO	SO	EO	HEO	AP	PO	AS/SEC

4.

Workshare	Termtime	Full-time	Other

5. Age

6. Marital Status

Single	Married	Separated	Divorced/Annulment	Widowed	Re-married

7. Dependent children or others?

8. Employment status of spouse/partner

9. Educational Qualifications

Primary	Inter/group/ junior	Leaving Cert.	3rd Level Cert/Diploma	3rd Level Primary Degree	3rd Level Post-graduate Degree	Other

10. Currently engaged in further study

None	Leaving Cert	3rd Level Cert Diploma	3rd Level Primary Degree	3rd Level Post-graduate degree

11. Location

Dublin	
Elsewhere	

12. Length of service (years).

Career History

1. Why did you join the civil service originally?
2. Why did you leave?
3. Why did you return to work in the civil service?

Date	Department	Method of Entry	Grade

Promotion

1. Have you applied for promotion?
a) If not, why not?
b) If yes, were you successful?
c) In your opinion, why/ why not?

2. When making promotion, transfer, etc decisions, what factors do you take into consideration?

3. Do you consult anybody when making these decisions?

4. Were you encouraged to apply for promotion?

5. Has your attitude towards promotion changed over the years? Are you more likely to apply for promotion now?

a) Why/Why not?

6. Do you see any barriers to promotion in the civil service for you personally?

7. Do you believe current policy and implementation of procedures regarding promotion is carried out fairly in the civil service?

        a)   If not, what could be improved?

8. Do you intend to apply for promotion in the future?

a) If yes, why?

b) If no, why not?

9. Are you satisfied with your current position?

10. What position in the civil service is your long-term goal?

11. Has this changed over the years?

Current work and meaning of work

1. Could you describe the type of work are you engaged in?

2. Could you describe a typical day/week? (Include travel etc)

3. Do you ever work more than the required hours?

4. Do you take all of your annual leave?

5. What aspects of your work do you enjoy/value?

6. What aspects of your job do you find unsatisfactory?

7. What are the most positive aspects of working in the Civil Service?

8. Can you describe what your work means to you? (e.g. do you see it as a career, just a means of earning money, enabling a certain lifestyle or something else)?

Work/life Balance

1. Where does work fit in among your life priorities? (e.g. family, hobbies, relationships voluntary work, socialising etc)

2. How much time do you spend in voluntary work/hobbies?

3. If involved in voluntary work/hobbies what does this mean to you?

4. What do you believe is the ideal childcare arrangement?

5. (e.g. do you believe children should be looked after by a parent in the home up to school age?

a) If so, which parent?

6. Who carried out the main childcare/ housework tasks in your home when the children were dependent?

Retirement

1) Have you made plans regarding retirement (other work, travel, relaxation etc.)

1) Would you like to take early retirement (before the age of 60)?

a) If yes, why?

b) If no, why not?

2) What is your opinion of the new early retirement scheme?

3) Do you think that current arrangements regarding retirement in the civil service are sufficiently flexible?

4) Is there adequate planning for retirement in the civil service?

Attitudes towards older workers (aged 50 or over)

1. Do you believe that older workers are valued equally (to other workers) by managers in the civil service? Please explain the reasons for your views.

2. Do you believe that older workers are valued by younger colleagues? Please explain the reasons for your views.

3. Do you believe older workers can work as effectively as younger workers?

4. Do you believe that people in the civil service have been unfairly treated or discriminated against because of any of the following:

Gender	Age	Disability	Other

5. Is this based on your own experience or that of colleagues or media reports?

6. Is it in connection with promotion, placement? Please explain.

Civil Service Policies

1) What is your opinion of the current workshare scheme?

2) What is your opinion of term-time working?

3) What do you think of the PMDS?

a) If you have a negative view, what could be done to improve the scheme?

4) What do you think of the de-centralisation programme?

a) If you have a negative view, what could be done to improve the scheme?

APPENDIX 5

Workers' allocation to categories and retirement

Code No. Age-group Children? Y/N 4+ = 4 or more children	Sub-group: Returner Late joiner Long term worker Manager Gender: M/F	NOTP (= no. of times promoted) Intention: • Will • Won't • May apply	Significant experiences/ circumstances	Category 1=Work/career-centred 2 =maximiser 3 = satisficer 4= personal/ home-centred (change)	Retirement: 1 60 or less 2 60-65 3 Stay after 65 4 Don't know
1 50-54 N	Returner F	NOTP=0 Won't apply	Currently a carer – can't move	4 (was 3)	4. Depends on husband's plans
2 50-54 Y 4+	Returner F	NOTP=0 Will apply	Left gratuity Location – won't move, children. Age discrimination.	3 (was 2)	2: 60-65 Depends on health, husband's health
3 55-59 Y<4	Late Joiner F	NOTP=0 Won't apply	Disappointed at not being promoted. De-centralisation-caring	4 (was 3)	2: 60-65 – gradual retirement
4 55-59 Y; 4+	Returner F	NOTP=0 Will apply	Marriage bar; changed jobs often;	3	Have to stay to 65 - need money and pension
5 50-54 N	Late Joiner F	NOTP=0 Won't apply	Structures; De-centralisation/caring, health.- less ambitious	4	2: Have to stay to 65 for pension
6 55-59 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP= 0 Won't apply	No interest in promotion. Husband's job more important Wouldn't move. Same	4	Will retire with husband. Have choice husband well-paid. May retire b. 65
7 60-64 N	Returner F	NOTP=0 Won't apply; Too old	Never ambitious. Carer for many years. Same	4	Stay till 65. Enjoy job.
8 55-59 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP=0 Did apply; Will apply	Loss of confidence; working in home. Structures and exams. Same	2	Stay till 65. Want a good pension
9 60-64 Y4 or more	Returner F	NOTP=0 Will apply	Marriage bar; Had to leave Always worked. May be too old? Same	2	60-65. – 3 yrs. Need pension. Husband low pension. Depends on de-centralisation
10 50-54 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP=0 Won't apply Same	Wanted to rear children. Social norms – w. working Exams for young people	4	Retire Before 60 Ret or cut down in 3 yrs. V. demanding job. Spouses pension good, don't have to depend on CO.
11 50-54 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP=0 Will apply Same	Wanted to rear children, Felt isolated. Husband no pension	2	Stay after 65. Enjoys work. Don't know about pension
12 50-54 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP=0 Will apply Same	Wanted to rear children, Felt isolated. Exams, Structures	2	At 65. Happy to be able to work. Start of career
13 60-64 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP = 0. Did apply; Same. Won't apply	Worked in PS. FAS rtw: Exams; structures	4	At 65. Look forward to it

14 50-54 Y4+	Returner F	Did apply. Will apply Same	Marriage bar Wd try for career if starting out Mother "marry a business-man" Age now a barrier; Exams and structures.	3	Retire at 65. Interested in other work.
15 55-59 Y<4	Returner F	NOTP=0 Won't apply	Marriage bar. Never interested	4	Stay till 65- possibly. Might cut down.
16 55-59 Y<4	Returner F	NOTP = 1 Will apply – more interested	No pension; business failed Encouraged to apply; Got promoted – "a career" Skills, experience	1	Have to stay till 65. Need money. Enjoy job
17 55-59 Y<4	Returner F	NOTP=0 Will apply	Left - no childcare. Encouraged to apply for prom. Role model, female AP	1 (	Stay till 65. Enjoy the work
18 55-59	Returner F	NOTP = 2 Won't apply	Wanted teaching. Returned hardship. Disappointed re. not being promoted. Location a barrier	3 (was 2)	Was going to stay until 60. Now stay until 62. Doesn't want to do voluntary work
19 50-54 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP=2 Will apply	Returned – needed money separated	2	Retire as early as possible Hobbies.
20 50-54 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP=0 Will apply	Accident Changed life – will try anything	2	Stay after 65
21 55-59 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP=0 May apply – caring now	Rtw FAS course. children grown Caring role Exam	3 (was 2)	Stay till 65 Need pension
22 50-54 4+	Returner F	NOTP=0 May apply	Left on marriage Exams bad. No 3rd level ed. Don't want stress. Less ambitious No qual's.	3 (from 2)	Would like early retirement (not specified) to do nursing
23 55-59 <4	Returner F	NOTP = 0 Won't apply – stress. Less ambitious	Left on marriage. Exams, structures a barrier. Work stressful	4 (from 2)	Retire soon because of stress.
24 55-59 Y<4	Returner F	NOTP = 0 Won't apply	Promotion Very difficult due to structures. Came close twice. Less ambitious now	3 (from 2)	Have to stay till 65 – need to, for pension.
25 55-59 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP=0. May not apply, but would accept.	RTW -Marriage ended. Barriers – structures; Location. Less ambitious	3 (from 2)	Work to 60 or 65 Not sure – may go abroad
26 55-59 Y4+	Returner F	NOTP = 0 Won't apply, but wd. accept if in current location	Gratuity Rtw – lower grade RTW when age limit removed. Less confident now	3	60-65 Don't know – vague. Happy
27 Y4+ 60-64	Returner F	NOTP=0 Won't apply	No thought of career .no childcare Ageism in CS. ageism, job-sharing, location. Never amb	4	60-65 Not sure – next few years
28 60-64 Y<4	Returner F	NOTP=0 Won't apply	Marriage bar – had to retire. Rtw – felt left behind, not valued at home. Never amb Lack of qual's	4	60-65 Love working Not sure.
29 50-54 Y<3	Returner F	NOTP=0 Will apply	Marriage bar, gratuity. Panel expired Wanted pension. Encouraged – more ambitious	2	60-65. Retire at 63. Love working Need money

30 60-64 Y<4	Returner F	NOTP =0 Will apply	Marriage bar. No promotion in past for women. Age a barrier? Same	3	Wants to stay after 65. Job is main income
31 60-64 N	Late joiner F	NOTP=0 Will apply	Disappointing. Panel expired – structures a barrier. Less amb	2	Want to stay after 65 – purpose, structure
32 50-54 N	Late joiner M	NOTP = 0 Will apply	Exams possible barrier. Amb. same	2	Don't know
33 50-54 Y<4	Late joiner M	NOTP=0 Will apply	Re-trained. De-centralisation a deterrent Have been encouraged	1	Stay after 65. gradual retirement
34 50-54 Y<4	Late joiner M	NOTP=0 Won't apply	Redundancy. Not ambitious. same QOL	4	Retire at 60
35 50-54 Y<4	Late joiner M	NOTP=0 Will apply	De-centralisation a barrier. Not age.	2	Retire when kids finish- will stay later now - 62
36 50-54 Y<4	Late joiner M	NOTP=0 Won't apply; ill-health	Previous insecure job, no pension. Not ambitious same	4	Have to stay until 65 for pension
37 50-54 N	Late joiner F	NOTP=0 Won't apply – would accept promotion	Made redundant many years ago, needed work. Exams a barrier. Not ambitious	4	Have to stay until 65 for pension
38 55-59 N	Late joiner M	NOTP=0 Won't apply	Was made redundant. Glad to get CS job	4	Retirement: Stay after 65
39 50-54 N	Long-term worker M	NOTP=2 Will apply	Didn't choose CS. Ill-health for years. Was Carer. More ambitious now	2	Retirement Need to stay for pension
40 50-54 N	Long-term worker F	NOTP=2 Will apply.	Encourage dto apply. Recent promotion Sole breadwinner	1	Was going to go at 60 – now wait on longer.
41 50-54 Y	Long-term worker F	NOTP=4 May apply	Job-shared when children young – didn't apply for promotion then. Job satisfaction more important than promotion. Doesn't need money. Less amb	3.	Will stay to 63 – unless bad posting
42 50-54 Y	Long-term worker F	NOTP=5 Will apply	Was encouraged to apply. Learned interview skills. Inspired by success. More ambitious now	2.	Will stay to 65 - like structure etc
43 50-54 Y	Long-term worker F	NOTP=4 Will apply	Separation Age discrimination. De-centralisation. Always somewhat ambitious	2.	Was going to go at 60. May have to stay because of separation.
44 50-54 Y	Long-term worker F	NOTP=5 Won't apply	Moved to region. Achieved goal. Don't want more responsibility	3.	Will go at 60 (Could go at 57, but no pension until 60)
45 50-54	Long-term worker F	NOTP = 2 Won't apply	Wanted to work. Stress. Was unsuccessful Sees life differently – not interested	4	Depends on de-centralisation
46 50-54 N	Long-term worker M	NOTP = 2 Won't apply	Passed over for promotion Disillusioned Gender and age "against him"	4	Wants to stay on past 65 (contradictory)
47 60-64 Y4+	Long-term worker M	Won't apply	Passed over for promotion. Low educational qualifications.	3	Will stay till 65 – enjoy work, structure, social aspect.

48 50-54 N	Long-term worker F	Will apply	Carer in the past – didn't apply. Mentoring important Region. More amb now	(2)	Have to work till mortgage paid - 61
49 50-54 Y<4	Long-term worker M	NOTP=1 May apply	Special stream, skills not valued Has applied often and failed De-centralisation a disincentive	4 (was 3)	Work to live Retire at ??
50 50-54 Y<4 Degree	Long-term worker F	NOTP=0 Won't apply, but would accept	Special stream Couldn't move – didn't apply when children young. Did apply , didn't succeed – age, gender prejudice	3 (more then less)	Will retire at 65 – may move to 4-day week later.
51 55-59 N	Long-term worker F	NOTP=3 Won't apply – would accept	Special stream Not ambitious – encouraged to apply Location a barrier Region	3	Will retire at 60 unless move job
52 55-59 Y<4	Long-term worker M	NOTP=2 Will apply	Special stream – skills not valued Didn't apply when kids young – lose allowance	3	Will retire at 60 Will take other part-time work
53 55-59 Y<4	Long-term worker M	NOTP = 1 Will apply	Late start impacted career Previous job inseecure	2	Will retire at 65 Enjoys work
54 55-59 Y<4	Long-term worker M	NOTP= 2 Won't apply	Special stream Region, accepted won't be promoted in region. Less amb	3	Retirement. Could go now – wait until next year – enjoys job
55 55-59 Y<4	Long-term worker M	NOTP =3 Won't apply	Special stream Region Encouraged by managers Family, QOL, community over career	3	Don't know – depends on job contract
56 60-64 Y<4	Long-term worker M	NOTP= 3 Won't apply	Joined from insecure job. Ill-health. Just a job	4	Retire next year –wife ill
57 55-59 Y=4+	Long-term worker M	NOTP=3 Will apply	Moved to region Wdn't want to move but want promotion. Opp's with de- centralisation	2	May go at 60 – depends on health
58 55-59 Y=<4	Long-term worker M	NOTP=0 Re-graded Won't apply	Special stream – disillusioned. Illness Missed the boat Family first Outside interests, then work	4	Go at 60
59 50-54 N	Long-term worker M	NOTP=0 May apply	Special stream Region. Carer; want not to move, keep allowance; didn't apply. Gender and age disc.	3	Go at 40 years – have income. May do work.
60 50-54 Y4+	Long-term worker M	NOTP=1 Will apply	Region Won't move Studied – extra qualifications. Not happy not promoted. Gender and age disc.	2	Not decided yet
61 60-64 Y<4	Long-term worker M	NOTP=2 Won't apply	Region – less amb. Won't m,ove Special stream Family most important/QOL important	3	Retirement – go at 65 – enjoying job. Daughter in college

62 55-59 Y<2 WS	Long-term worker F	NOTP=2 Won't apply – child in school	Region – didn't apply when children young ws	4	Will stay as long as able – 60 at least
63 50-54 Y<4	Long-term worker F	NOTP=2 Won't apply – wd. accept	Family first. Won't leave location - a barrier. Divorced. Not ambitious	4	Will go at 60 – like work
64 55-59 Y=4+	Long-term worker F	NOTP=3 Won't apply	Applied – not successful. Family first, work second. Region Location a barrier	4	Will go at 60 – full pension
65 50-54 N	Long-term worker F	NOTP=4 Will apply	Caring role ended Promotional possibilities NGO encouraging	1	Will go at 60- may stay longer now
66 50-54 Y<4	Long-term worker. F	NOTP=3 Will apply	Serious illness in past prevented applying. WS. More ambitious now, but less confident as older	2 (from3)	Will go at 60 – new ventures
67 50-54 N	Long-term worker F	NOTP=4 Won't apply	Always tried for promotion – transfers experience. Won't apply now de- centralisation. Developing other skills/interests	4 (from 2)	Will retire before 60 – open drama school.
68 55-59 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP=2 Won't apply	Don't have leadership qualities Committed work mtrh Less ambitious now	3	May retire early. Haven't decided Probably not before 65
69 55-59 Y=4+	Manager M	NOTP=3 +U May apply. Wd accept promotion Quite ambitious	Specialised stream Tried a few times – pigeon-holed	2	Will stay until 65 – enjoy work
70 55-59 Y=4+	Manager M	NOTP=3 Won't apply	Don't want promotion Pay good De- centralisation an issue No age discrimination	3	Go before 65. Don't know when
71 50-54 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP=4 Will apply	Original drining force provide for family. Special stream. De- centralisation a problem. Age may be a barrier. Ambitious	2	Stay until 60 – not 65 – if health holds out
72 50-54 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP=6 Will apply	On marriage serious De-centralisation a deterrent. Mentoring. Example to kids	1	Will retire at 65. Want structure
73 55-59 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP = 3 Won't apply	Was ambitious – stress, anger decided to step back in 40s	4	Will go at 60
74 55-59 Y<5	Manager M	NOTP=4 +u Won't apply	Didn't visualise career. Took opportunities Age a barrier. Health scareNear retirement Too much effort	4	Near retirement – won't apply for promotion.
75 50-54 Y<5	Manager M	NOTP=4 Will apply	Always encouraged by managers Poss. Barriers – lack of third level education	1	Won't retire early; Possible loneliness
76 60-64 Y4+	Manager M	NOTP=3 Won't apply	Applied twice – didn't get it. Settled. Comfortable . Benchmarking. Age – will retire at end of year. Satisfied – achieved ambition. Too onerous –long hours.	4	Will retire at end of year

77 55-59 Y4+	Manager F	NOTP= 2 Won't apply	Didn't apply when children young Applied several times – have decided not to apply. Less ambitious now due to not being promoted, but still very committed	3 (was 1)	Could retire next year, but on't plan to for 3 years
78 60-64 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP=2 Won't apply	Special stream. Location. Stress. Don't want to move – wife, children	4 (was 3)	Will cut down when 60. Start business.
79 50-54 Y4+	Manager M	NOTP=3 +u Won't apply – wd. accept	Special stream. Didn't succeed – didn't prepare properly at first. Then got and took opportunity. Applied – didn't succeed. Took stock. Comfortable – bench-marking. Contented	3 (was 3, then 2, now 3)	Would retire now if had money, love work - happy
80 50-54 Y<3	Manager M	NOTP=4 Will apply	Specialised area. Didn't apply at first. Will apply – money, status, something to offer	1 (from 3)	Would retire if money was right. May do consultancy
81 55-59 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP=2 Won't apply	Didn't want "ritual humiliation". Was encouraged. Thinks age discrimination. Comfortable	4	Will go at 62. Looking forward to it
82 55-59 N	Manager F	NOTP=3 Won't apply	Embargo in 1980s. Feel promotion for people in 40s – decided (with partner) not to apply. QOL. Doesn't want stress. Older staff not encouraged to apply for promotion	4 (was 3)	Will retire early. Have plans to travel, live in country etc.
83 50-54 N	Manager F	NOTP=3 Won't apply	Lack of confidence at first. Bullying. Gender disc. in past. Became more ambitious in 40s – saw capabilities. Re-structuring – neg affect – special stream. Less ambitious now	4 (was 3, then 2, now 4)	May take early retirement. Go into different work. Wd. like to retire in good health.
84 55-59 N Degree at entry	Manager F	NOTP=3 May apply	Lack of self- belief. Was encouraged by managers. Did personal development work. Now proud of achievements. Possibly too old – need experience in grade. Work long hours not much social life – no time	2 (from 3)	Plan to retire at 60 – not stay until 65. Would miss social side of work. More to life than work. Balance.
85 50-54 N	Manager M	NOTP=5 Will apply	Parents insisted I join. Promotion a challenge- want to be in higher-level decision-making. Age not an issue. Career most important.	1	No plans yet. Would move, write a book. Depend on post etc. Stay til ?
86 55-59 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP= 3 Won't apply	Maximised both – free to move for promotion. Wife and family moved with him. WMTRH	3 (was 2)	Will go soon after 60 . Wd like to cut down. Do voluntary and travel
87 55-59 Y4+	Manager M	NOTP=5 Won't apply – feel too old.	Permanent job- parents in civil service. Had to be pushed by managers to apply for promotion. Less ambitious now – too old	3	Don't know. Don't like to plan – father died at 50. Cd. Retire at 60

88 50-54 N	Manager F	NOTP=2 May apply (selectively)	Not hugely ambitious first Carer – special leave, work-sharing. 1980s embargo. Age discrimination., Little mentoring at first	3	Haven't thought. Work until 60. – long enough to work
89 55-59 Y<4	Manager F	NOTP=5 +u Won't apply – wd accept	Secure job- parents influence. Cdn't afford college. Didn't apply when children young. Had to move due to family circumstances – disrupted career. Embargo. Experienced age discrimination	3	Somewhere between 60 and 65. Have to pay college fees
90 55-59 Y4+	Manager M	NOTP=3 +U Won't apply – wd. accept	Early motivation – money for family. Age discrimination. Happy in current position. Feel too old. Location region affected promotion negatively. Many outside interests	3	Maybe 61 or 62 – depends on post I'm in. Like to retire have healthy retirement
91 50-54 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP=4+U Won't apply	Drifted in . Barriers : age discrimination. Change from senior suitable, location in region. Waste of time to apply unlikely to succeed.	4	Will retire after 40 yrs. Burnout – work has changed
92 55-59 Y4+	Manager M	NOTP=1 +u Unlikely	Moved a lot at start. Regional location a disadvantage – not visible. Age a barrier. Good QOL.	4	Hope to retire at 60 – no realistic chance of promotion
93 50-54 Y4+	Manager M	NOTP=5 Will apply – byt de-centralisation an issue	Management training important De-centralisation a trheat to career Egalitarian family. Wife, family, self involved in community	1 (may change to 2 if decentralisation)	Not sure hen. Wouldn't go at 60 unless smthg. Planned.
94 60-64 Y <4	Manager M	NOTP=2 May apply selectively	Special stream. Very committed to work. Younger people favoured	3	Could go now, but like work
95 50-54 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP=4+U May apply	Had career plan from EO onwards. Applied 3 times – thinks age discrimination and gender discrimination. Resigned but angry	3	May retire at 40 years. If not promoted
96 50-54 Y<4	Manager M	NOTP=3 Will apply	Career – one step at a time. Regional location – not visible. Family was a deterrent – not now. More ambitious now – wd. like input into policy	2	May retire at 40 yrs. Service if not promoted
97 55-59 Y	Manager M	NOTP=4 May apply- Money for pension	Region. Age discrimination. Gender discrimination vs women.	3	Not definite. Prob. Before 65. Wd. need routine
98 55-59 Y4+	Manager M	NOTP = 4 Won't apply	Joined for secure job. Became ambitious as succeeded. IPA course important. Structures obstructive. Age discrimination	4	Will retire at 60. realised not getting promoted. Develop other interests

99 55-59 Y4+	Manager	M	NOTP= 3 Will apply if right post comes up	Left other career. Wanted more responsibility and to make a contribution. Always ambitious and this has increased over time. Age would be a barrier – old fogey attitude. WMTRH 60-70 hrs pw	1 (may change to 2)	Very involved in work. Could retire at 60 but probably won't.
100 60-64 Y<4	Manager	M	NOTP=3+U Won't apply	Always ambitious – left other organisation to make more money, have a career. Not an organisation man. Was ambitious. Health scare – work not so challenging now.	4(was 1)	May retire soon Thought would retire at 60. Felt too young – may go at 62.
101 60-64 Y4+	Manager	M	NOTP=5 Will apply – selectively – not in Dublin	Challenged self – not career ladder. Quality of Life important. Age not a barrier. WMTRH=60	2 (same)	Enjoy what I'm doing – should. consider it next year.
102 55-59 Y<4 Degree (night)	Manager	M	NOTP=3 Won't apply	Drifted in. Moved to region – understood then off career ladder. Wdn't move now – family. Unlikely to be promoted now. Well-paid, bench-marking	3 (was 1)	Depends on health. Could go at 60 if operation works. Golf. Vol. work
103 55-59 N	Manager	F	NOTP=5+U Won't apply, would accept	Father a cs. Wanted to improve things. IPA course important. Was always ambitious but was passed over three times. Had to be one of the lads – worked long hours. Chose to focus on career, not marry. Barrier: specialist area	3 (was 1)	Will wait until 60. Depends on health
104 50-54 N Degree (night)	Manager	F	NOTP=3 +U Won't apply	Just joined never ambitious. Senior suitable. Transfer to region. Main support of parents. Nervous at interviews	3 (same)	Had planned to go at 60. Have to stay 5 years to pay mortgage. Enjoy job - stressful
105 50-54 Degree (After starting work)	Manager	F	NOTP=3+U Did apply. Will apply	IPA important. Didn't go for promotion outside of Dublin when children young, husband's job in Dublin. Could now	1 (was 2)	Plan to retire at 60. Travel with husband. Vol. work

APPENDIX 6

Appendix Table 1: Timing of retirement for long-term workers
(29 respondents)

Timing of retirement	Male		Female		Total	%
Retire between 60 and 64	5	36	6	40	11	38
Retire at 65	5	36	4	27	9	31
Retire at 40 years service or at age 60	2	14	4	27	6	21
Would like to stay on after 65	2	14	1	6	3	10
Total	14	100	15	100	29	100

Appendix Table 2: Timing of retirement for managers
(38 respondents)

	Male (28)		Female (10)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	[%]	No.	%
Retire between 60 and 64	15	54	7	70	22	58
Retire at 40 years service, or at age 60.	7	25	2	20	9	24
Retire at 65	6	21	1	10	7	18
Would like to remain after 65	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**28**	**100**	**10**	**100**	**38**	**100**

Appendix Table 3: Timing of retirement for returners
(28 respondents)

Timing of retirement	Number	%
Retire at 65	13	46
Retire before 65	9	32
Don't know	3	11
Stay on after 65	3	11
Total	**28**	**100**

Appendix Table 4: Timing of retirement for late joiners
(10 respondents)

Timing of retirement	Male		Female			
	No.	[%]	No.	[%]	Total	[%]
Retire at 65	2	33	3	75	5	50
Retire before 65	2	33	0	0	2	20
Stay on after 65	2	34	1	25	3	30
Total	6	100	4	100	10	100