Using Work/Life Balance Strategies to Address Regional Skills Shortages

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ABSTRACT

While organisations in regional Australia face the difficulty of attracting skilled labour, an increasing number of individuals are considering amenity-lifestyle changes, commonly known as 'sea-change' or 'tree-change' decisions. As such, there is an interesting and complex nexus to be considered: how do regional organisations use their work/life balance (WLB) policies to attract skilled labour, and secondly how does this promotion of WLB appeal to individuals' mobility and decision making-processes? This dual-perspective issue will be examined using an analysis of both organisations and individuals drawn from the Goulburn-Murray region. Proposed findings will be twofold: firstly, organisational findings will focus on developing human resource strategies that better match the needs of regional organisations with the motivations and intentions of skilled migratory labour; secondly, individual findings will focus on the motivations and intentions of skilled migratory labour. Synthesizing these findings will provide a framework by which we can better understand how organisations can take advantage of wider population trends in order to address the issue of persistent skills shortages.

Keywords: *work life balance, skills shortages, human resource management*

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INTRODUCTION

Organisations in regional and rural Australia face two interesting, yet seemingly irreconcilable trends: the acute and persistent shortage of skilled labour; and the broader yet gradually emerging demographic trends of amenity-lifestyle migration changes, commonly known as 'sea-changers' or 'tree-changers'. As such, this research project aims to explore these two trends further by developing an empirical understanding of how organisations use work/life balance (WLB) strategies to attract resources, and secondly how individuals are drawn to regional areas for amenity-lifestyle maximisation and the affect this has on their employment mobility decisions. Therefore, the central research problem to be investigated in this study is: What is the effect of WLB considerations on skilled internal migration for both the organisation and the individual?

The study draws on several fields of literature which can be examined in a hierarchical manner: the macro-level literature on the persistence of the skills shortage problem in regional areas and changing workforce demographics of counter-urbanisation; the micro-level literature relating to the use of WLB policies as an employment branding strategy; and the literature examining individual employee's mobility decisions and propensity to be receptive to WLB policies.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Skills Shortages in Regional Australia

A large majority of Australia's regions are reporting widespread skills shortages. Australia is currently experiencing a robust period of high economic growth and low unemployment and these conditions conspire to make the skill shortage problem of increasing concern to those regional based residents, employers and those charged with developing governmental policy trying to deal

with the problem. In discussing skill shortages this paper will use the definition developed by Shah and Burke (Shah & Burke, 2003a, b) and used in subsequent research in this area (see eg. Canterford, Australia. Dept. of Transport and Regional Services, & Australia. Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics., 2006: ix):

> 'A skill shortage exists when the demand for workers for a particular occupation is greater than the supply of workers who are qualified, available and willing to work under existing market conditions'.

Skill shortages are felt across a range of industries and geographical regions in Australia (Canterford et al., 2006; Watson, Buchanan, Campbell, & Briggs, 2003). While a lack of detailed data about the exact geographical location and industrial distribution of regional skill shortages stifles the development of strategies to deal with the problem, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has at least put the issue on the political agenda by agreeing to share labour market information to identify and understand the location and extent of skill shortages (COAG 2006 cited in Canterford 2006). A number of publications including the June 2007 Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEWR) Skilled Vacancies Index (Department of Education Science and Training, 2007) report historical highs in terms of skilled shortages in the regions. In addition the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) notes that the availability of suitably qualified employees is consistently listed as the largest constraint on business investment (SAIGlobal, 2007) and these problems are magnified in the regional areas (DED, 2006). For many regional locations, the inability to attract skilled employees to a region to fill positions impacts on the level of production and a reduced ability to meet local demand (Canterford et al., 2006; Shah et al., 2003a).

Even though skill shortages are often discussed, the problem itself is not well defined (Shah et al., 2003b). Discussions about the regional impact of skill shortages are made more

difficult by the fact that available data on the location and extent of skill shortages is patchy at best. Finally, geographic details are required to provide a spatial analysis of skill shortages. An occupation may be in shortage in particular geographic areas, but not in others (DEWR, 2006). Skill shortages in one region can coexist with skill surpluses in another, but such geographic imbalances are more persistent in labour markets which are relatively inflexible or where geographic mobility is restricted (Shah et al., 2003b). Without an indication of location, it is impossible to determine whether the relocation of workers is a possible cause of or solution to the shortage.

Another reason for the difference between regional and metropolitan areas is the size of the local markets. A small market can feel the absence of one or two skilled personnel where a large market may not react to such a small loss. Treating skill shortages at a local level does not usually resolve industry wide shortages. A region that is able to recruit and retain skilled workers by wage incentives or by other means (sometimes referred to as "poaching" the worker) is usually relocating the shortage from one location to another. However, in a competitive labour market, where skill shortages occur, "poaching" may be the only way that smaller regions can address local shortages.

Taking a location focus, SCORD (2004) identified six factors that influence skill shortages in regional Australia. These factors are health; education and training; housing; jobs and career opportunities; infrastructure; and perceptions of lifestyle and community. When skills are in demand, skilled workers choose their location based on a number of personal preferences. Understanding why skilled workers choose to locate in a region can help regional employers provide incentives to attract workers in a competitive labour market. Identifying local shortages also allows regions to target recruitment strategies.

Counter-urbanisation and demographic changes

The populist conceptions of 'seachange' and 'treechange', plus the academic versions, are closely aligned to traditional migration flows of people from metropolitan spaces to rural or less urban places. In addition to this, notions of 'downshifting' and downsizing' have become prominent in popular discourse, which necessitates some discussion of the terminology. While many of these terms are used interchangeably in the popular literature and media, they all centre of some notion of change of an individual's circumstances; either by voluntary simplification of their lifestyle (Etzioni, 1998; Juniu, 2000; Leonard-Barton, 1981) or some form of relocation from an urban location to a less urban location (see for example, Burnley & Murphy, 2004; Salt, 2001).

The population movement described in this paper, from urban to rural, has been defined by many demographers, geographers and planners as counter-urbanisation. Irrespective of the terminology, the process being described amounts to the movement of people from urban areas down the urban hierarchy to smaller rural places beyond the metropolitan boundary. For the purposes of this paper, this relocation from urban to less urban areas may or may not involve some form of downshifting or voluntary simplicity. However, as will be discussed later, this counter-urbanisation is often for the purposes of (but not limited to) an individual's desire to maximise their amenity-lifestyle, or what is commonly referred to as work-life balance (WLB).

An attempt should also be made to define more precisely the terms 'mobility' and 'migration'. In the literature there is no clear differentiation between the terms 'mobility' and 'migration'. In some cases they are even used synonymously. Nevertheless the two terms should be differentiated as follows. What should be understood by the term spatial (interregional) mobility of workers is in general any movement of the production factor of labour (or the possibility of moving it) from one region to another. Spatial movement of labour with a simultaneous change of residence

is migration. Thus the term 'migration' is associated with a permanent character.

Pinder and Schroeder (1987) define a job transfer as a 'relatively permanent job reassignment that entails the movement of an employee within an organization from one of its operating sites to another' (Pinder & Walter, 1984: 188). By this definition, transfers may or may entail a change in hierarchical level or a change in function; the important point is that they entail a change in geographical location for employees and their families.

Who is moving and where are they moving to?

Burnley and Murphy (2002) contend that the movement of people away from metropolitan areas has not simply been contained to the beach but includes movement to rural and country areas. In the popular press this has been labelled 'treechange'. According to one report 'retirees were no longer looking for seachange and preferred a "treechange" back to the country where people were still friendly' (Duggan, 2005: 16). Likewise, Haxton (2005) suggested that the growing preference for rural areas, in preference to seaside environments, is because some seachange places are bulging. The difference between the locational choices, bush versus beach, is that people are now seeking lifestyle and amenity that emanates from living in rural settings as opposed to beach environments. While the movement to the coastline has a well-developed literature, there is much less research on the complexity of migration to rural areas. Indeed, according to Spencer (1995), much of the work on urban-rural migration has been too focused on macro-scale population movements.

Many researchers have argued that counterurbanisation is intimately bound up with capitalist restructuring, being a product of the urban-rural shift of manufacturing industry (Fielding, 1982); the reorganisation of agriculture (Marsden, Lowe, & Whatmore, 1990); the emergence of

particular class fractions with a strong predilection for rural living (Thrift, 1989); and the reorientation of house building towards cheap ex-urban sites (Robson, 1986). While a combination of these forces may explain aggregate counterurbanisation trends, the subtleties of the urban-rural population transfer revealed in more finely-tuned studies such as this cannot be 'read off' from understanding structural change.

With the notable exception of Flowerdew and Boyle's (1992) study, even the basic matter of whether demographic change in rural localities is, strictly speaking, counterurbanisation or suburbanisation has received very little attention. Clearly, attention needs to be switched to the local rural dimension in order to develop a firmer understanding of counterurbanisation. Cloke (1985) has already called for a rural perspective to complement the prevailing tendency to focus upon aggregate urban-centred centrifugal shifts,

Aggregate population growth and decline is not necessarily the only or principal mechanism re-shaping rural areas and their constituent settlements. In some instances, it may be a poor indicator of how urbanised rural communities are becoming (Spencer, 1995: 154).

Such repopulation in rural areas is, in the Australian experience, quite complex. Vartiainen (1989) suggested that these movements are not indicative of wider national trends of population turnaround. Neither are they trends towards ruralisation, nor do they reflect a process of urban decentralisation and subsequent rural growth. There is not an across the board repopulation of the 'rural' occurring; rather, one contained to particular places that have scenic or Arcadian ambience (Selwood, Curry, & Koczberski, 1995).

CENTRAL RESEARCH PROBLEM

Organisations in regional and rural Australia face two interesting, yet seemingly

irreconcilable trends: the acute and persistent shortage of skilled labour; and the broader yet gradually emerging demographic trends of amenity-lifestyle migration changes. Based on the contextual literature survey conducted, the following research questions have been developed for further analysis and exploration:

> *What is the role of WLB policies in addressing skills shortages in Regional Australia from the perspective of both the organisation and the individual?*

It is proposed that the answer to this research problem lies in the investigation of two different yet congruent perspectives: the organisational use of WLB policies to attract skilled labour to regional Australia; and the decision making processes and factors that lead individuals to be receptive to such WLB and hence relocate to regional Australia.

MICRO LEVEL FACTORS – AN INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

As Williams and Sofranko (1979: 239) state, "research on internal migration has emphasized the importance of economic forces on the volume and direction of population movement." Hicks (1932: 72) went even further, stating that "differences in net economic advantages, chiefly differences in wages, are the main causes of migration." Stated differently, people move in order to take advantage of economic opportunities in a particular area.

The human capital model views mobility as an investment in which costs are borne in some early period in order to obtain returns over a longer period of time. If the present value of the benefits associated with mobility exceeds the costs, both monetary and psychic, we assume that people will decide to change jobs or move, or both. If the discounted stream of benefits is not as large as the costs, then people will decide against such a change. What determines the present value of the net benefits of mobility—that is, the benefits minus the costs—determines the mobility decision. In this model the decision regarding a potential migration is based on weighing up the

expected costs and the benefits of the alternative residence. The decision is made in favour of the residence with the highest expected net benefit. This approach is, however, viewed critically due to the lack of consideration paid to the costs of procuring and processing information.

In this model the decision regarding a potential migration is based on weighing up the expected costs and the benefits of the alternative residence. The decision is made in favour of the residence with the highest expected net benefit. This approach is, however, viewed critically due to the lack of consideration paid to the costs of procuring and processing information. What is important here is the issue concerning the return of investment in human capital. It is, however, necessary to take various restrictions into consideration. Thus the decision to migrate, which is based on expected net benefits, is subject to uncertainty and imperfect information.

The Role of Work/Life Balance Factors

Salt (2001) argued that at the end of the 20th century there was a new and emerging culture in Australia, the rise of a beach culture. He put this change down to new emerging values in the Australian population and the desire for 'lifestyle', some of which has been facilitated by the increased financial capacities of the baby boomers. The difference between the historical trends and the more contemporary movement found in Australia is the importance placed on lifestyle gains provided by this migration. As Burnley and Murphy (2004: 157) argued:

> The category of 'better environment' is a broad one and includes the desire for peace and quiet, security needs, and less crime, as well as the aesthetics of the natural environment itself.

A study by the Australia Institute (Hamilton & Mail, 2003b: 21) on downshifting in Australia highlights the role of lifestyle gains. While this report was primarily concerned with the more narrow phenomena of downshifting, the findings are insightful for a consideration of lifestyle factors on mobility choices. The report found that the main five reasons for downshifting included:

more balance, more time with family, more fulfilment, the desire for a healthier lifestyle and a post-materialist lifestyle.

As noted by Hamilton and Mail (2003b), studies in Australia and abroad have uncovered several primary motivations for downshifting. Although people who downshift are rarely actuated by a single factor, their motives can be divided into personal reasons and those based on principle. A dominant reason for downshifting is the desire to gain more fulfilment from life (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). While various factors can underpin a lack of fulfilment, it is commonly centred on the increasing dominance of work and career over all other life goals, especially relationships with family and friends. The desire to spend more time with family is commonly cited as a strong motive for many downshifters with children (Tan, 2000). Tan (2000: 17) has identified technological change and growing emphasis on work, in addition to changes in the economy and structure of organizations, as contributors to career downshifting.

In Australia, the movement of people from urban areas to more scenic places, has typically been conceptualised as being for the purpose of lifestyle gains, with retiree migration the traditional and largest cohort. Likewise, Ford (1999) theorised that the processes of counter-urbanisation are distinct and the desire for a lifestyle change becomes a crucial driver or indicator.

Mitchell, Bunting and Piccioni (2004) considered that this desire for rurality is based on an idealised construction of a mythical rural lifestyle. They suggested that there are both tangible and intangible aspects to which people aspire or assume they will receive in rural living. Nonetheless, it is believed these aspects, like those described by Burnley and Murphy above, are important in understanding recent moves to rural areas.

Mobility is often defined and studied in the context of turnover, i.e. external mobility or

job changes. However, while internal and external mobility may seem different phenomena, they also have some features in common. From an individual and psychological perspective, both moves bear resemblance as they involve adaptation of the individual to (at least partly) new environments, and both may have similar loss effects as judged by peers and supervisors (Riordan & Griffeth, 1995; Weiss, 1990). Overall, the factors that affect employees' external mobility may be quite comparable to those that affect employees' internal mobility. Based on this correlation, this research constructs a model of the antecedents of sub-national mobility by drawing on the extensive literature from the field of international human resources management and expatriation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research question can then be further investigated by the following research questions:

1. Do individuals seek opportunities for internal migration in order to maximise some amenity-lifestyle return (eg, quality of life)?
2. Does the recognition and/or desire for amenity lifestyle changes drive the demand for internal migration, or does the demand for particular skills lead individual's to consider amenity lifestyle changes?

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF INDIVIDUAL DECISION MAKING

Based on the human capital approach to mobility, migration is not automatically considered in connection with a potential for increased lifetime earnings. It must be weighed against the expected gains. Relevant costs of the decision to migrate are transportation expenses, income foregone during the move, the psychological costs of leaving family and friends, and the loss of seniority and pension benefits. Rationally, a person opts for migration when the sum of the discounted expected future earnings exceeds the total costs of the discounted decision to migrate. If the non-monetary disadvantages exceed an expected increase in income, the person concerned will opt to remain in the place of origin. These factors affecting the present value of the net benefits and

the decision to migrate are: demographic, personal traits, family-related factors and job-related factors.

This research focuses on the specific issue of how amenity-lifestyle considerations are factored into individual's decisions about relocating from an urban area to a less-than urban (regional) area.

Attractiveness of relocation (mobility) = f (age – marital status + education + children + age of children + employment status + household income + tenure + previous job changes – job satisfaction + life satisfaction + tolerance of ambiguity)

Specifically, this conceptual model has several facets that require specification.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable in this model is the attractiveness of relocation to regional Australia. The definition of regional Australia is not intended to be geographic specific, beyond the notion that it includes all areas that are not urban. For example, this would include all areas and regions outside major cities and urban corridors (eg, the Gold Coast region in south east Queensland, and the Blue Mountains precinct west of Sydney). In this case 'regional' is also used to include rural and remote areas.

The dependent variable is measured as a self-report factor on a four point Likert-scale from not very attractive to very attractive.

Independent variables

The independent variables included in this conceptual model include several categories: demographic factors, work-related factors, life-related factors and mobility factors.

Demographic factors

The demographic factors considered are drawn from a large and well-established literature

on mobility, in both the domestic and international context. Tung (1982), Harvey (1985) and Black and Stephens (1989) have all empirically found that the relationship between marital status and international mobility is negative. It is hypothesised that this will remain the case in this study within a sub-domestic setting, however it is also expected that this relationship will be weakened by the role of work-life balance in achieving more time with family, as stated by Hamilton and Mail (2003a) as a major consideration.

Age is the single most important factor in determining mobility. Amongst others, Brief and Aldag (1980), Dornstein and Matalon (1989), Kushman (1992), Mathieu and Zajac (1990), Morris and Sherman (1981) and Morrow and Wirth (1989) have empirically demonstrated a negative relationship between mobility and age. It is expected in this study that the relationship will be curvilinear: that is, that it will be negative in lower age groups, positive in the middle age groups (25-40 years) and then negative in older age groups.

The level of education is hypothesised to be positively correlated with mobility, based on the findings by Naumann (1992) that higher levels of education provide individual's with greater employment seeking opportunities and therefore greater mobility.

The decision to migrate is usually not an individual decision but is generally a group decision. This decision situation plays a role for example in the case of couples in which both partners work or in the case of families with children of school age. If there is more than one employed person in a family the decision to migrate is likely to have different earnings effects on the members. Employees who are not married would be expected to be more mobile due to fewer restrictions on the timing, destination and manner of any move. In addition to this flexibility, there is a resultant lack of need to make extensive arrangements for other family members, meaning that

mobility can occur over a shorter time period.

Generally speaking, married persons and other individuals strongly attached to someone else are less likely to decide to go. Family ties are also likely to reduce the propensity to migrate. Family motives for migration have been subject to a significant number of empirical studies. Several studies verified that married persons are less likely to move than singles. This reluctance to migrate is even stronger if the spouse is attached to the labour-market emigration and/or children attend school.

Tung's (1982) study showed that family-related problems account for two out of three of the most commonly cited causes of expatriate failure. Harvey (1985) reinforced this view, and further noted that failures to make necessary cross-cultural adjustments adversely affect expatriate managers' on-the-job performance. Similarly, appropriate family adjustments have been associated with successful foreign assignments (Black et al., 1989). Other important factors are the potential costs of migration multiply as family size increases. The number of children and the age of those children are expected to have a curvilinear relationship with willingness to relocate. It is expected that smaller families with infant-age children or families with adult (independent) children will be more likely to relocate than those with children at either primary or high school ages.

Job-related factors

It is unclear from the literature what the relationship will be between organisational tenure and mobility. On the one hand it is hypothesised to be either negative (Gordon & Arvey, 1975) or curvilinear (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993), indicating that the longer an individual works for an organisation the less likely they are to leave, and that this is particular so at the start and end of one's tenure with an organisation yet not so in the 'middle years' of tenure. Other research indicates

that the relationship is positive: the longer tenure at an organisation, the more valuable skills an individual has developed and therefore is more likely to be able to gain employment elsewhere using those skills (Kovach, 1977).

Job satisfaction has been recognized as a component of organisational commitment (Kraut, 1975; Mobley, 1982; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). Researchers have found that job satisfaction is correlated with turnover but not to the extent that a predictive model can be created. (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Price, 1977; Rose, 1991), yet several researchers have made the case that job satisfaction is a predictor of organisational commitment (1962).

An empirically tested indicator of willingness to move is previous experiences with mobility. A number of theorists have discussed the importance of previous experience for enabling an individual in a new setting to cope with its requirements. For example, Louis (1980) described the roles of cognitive scripts (cf. Abelson, 1981) and sense-making practices based on previous learning for employees in new work settings. As noted by Jones (1983: 465-466):

> 'The strategies that newcomers adopt to deal with uncertainty or ambiguity and the way they make sense of a situation depend on the way they have learned historically, to deal with new situations.'

On the basis of the work by Louis (1980), Nicholson (1984) and Jones (Jones, 1983, 1986), we would expect that employees who are frequently mobile will learn how to cope in and adjust to new work settings, which will help them to become comfortable and productive more easily and faster with each successive transfer. However, results of an earlier study failed to support this hypothesis (Pinder & Das, 1979). On balance, the evidence suggests that employees do not seem to learn through experience how to become proficient following transfers, so that the individual and organizational cost associated with post-transfer socialization will not decrease appreciably as

experience with transfers grows. For this study, it is expected that individuals who have had some prior experience of relocation will be more willing to consider relocation.

Person-related factors

The role of tolerance for ambiguity is important. Having intolerance for ambiguity means that an individual tends to perceive situations as threatening rather than promising. Lack of information or uncertainty, for example, would make such a person uncomfortable. If a migrant does not know if he will get a job at the in destination, he/she will have to make up his mind about the risk to take. Since incomplete information increases the degree of insecurity, the individual degree of risk aversion becomes an important element in the decision to migrate. This is at odds with simple theories of migration where the potential migrant is assumed to be risk-neutral. While many measures do exists to accurately and extensively test this variable, such as Budner's (1974) 16 item scale of novelty, complexity and insolubility, for the purposes of this study the measure has been restricted to a single item Likert-scale self-report measure.

Quality of life includes life autonomy and life satisfaction. Life autonomy emanates from Andrews and Withey (1982) and Janoff-Bulman and Marshall (for example, see Deming, 1991; Sussman & Smith, 1992), and ascertains how far individuals feel free to live life as they choose. While life satisfaction has not been a major factor in domestic satisfaction and turnover research, other studies have shown that off-the-job problems may affect job performance

Job satisfaction vs. life satisfaction

Two major themes are expected to emerge from this study. First, is the analysis of and interaction between job satisfaction and life satisfaction when making choices about mobility. Second, is the analysis of the benefits and challenges reported of relocating to regional Australia as

opposed to staying in the current location?

The existence of a relationship between job satisfaction and life statisfaction (JSLS) has been discussed and tested extensively in the literature, and it would seem logical that satisfaction in one life domain should have implications for satisfaction in another domain (Rain, Lane, & Steiner, 1991: 287). The notion that life satisfaction is a consequence of the work domain has been tested as early as Weitz (1952), and more recently the quality of work life literature (Drexler & Lawler, 1977).

A meta-analysis of the literature by Tait, Padgett and Baldwin (1989) supports the existence of a relationship between JSLS. Most typically, one of three hypotheses was suggested that differed simply in terms of the nature of the correlation: spillover, compensation or segmentation. The spillover hypothesis suggests that the level of job satisfaction or life satisfaction will spillover to influence the other area (i.e., a positive relationship between the two). The compensation hypothesis predicts that either high job satisfaction or high life satisfaction compensates for lower satisfaction in the other area (i.e., a negative relationship between the two). Finally, the idea that job satisfaction and life satisfaction function independently is termed the segmentation hypothesis (i.e., no correlation between the two).

While the majority of research rests with the spillover hypothesis, this hypothesis as well as the other two have been criticized (Rain et al., 1991: 294). A number of researchers have suggested that the three-hypothesis approach is too simplistic (Champoux, 1980; Evans & Bartolome, 1984; Kabanoff & O'Brien, 1980; Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986). Some evidence suggests that more than one JSLS relationship may exists at any given time for a particular individual (Champoux, 1980; Lounsbury et al., 1986)

The survey asks respondents to report their current level of both life satisfaction and job satisfaction. While it is understood that both of these variables are inherently complex to understand and measure, it is proposed that the simple survey items used for this study are sufficient for the task. What is important beyond the simplistic measures used is the relativity between the variables. In particular, it will be important to understand the relocation intentions of those respondents who have either high or low levels of life satisfaction and job satisfaction, or have differing levels of each. Demonstrated in the following two-by-two matrix, the respondent scan be categorised into four distinct segments.

FIGURE 2

LIFE SATISFACTION

		High	Low
JOB SATSFACTION	**High**	Staying	Possible Relocation <u>LIFE-SATISFACTION DOMINATED</u>
	Low	Possible relocation <u>JOB SATISFSACTION DOMINATED</u>	High propensity to relocate

The variables of job satisfaction and life satisfaction will be used to segment the respondents into the four groups hypothesised in the matrix, and as such the willingness to relocate will be measured accordingly. From this it will be possible to further see if job satisfaction or life

satisfaction has a dominant effect on an individual's willingness to relocate to regional Australia.

> *Hypothesis 1: Individuals who report both high job satisfaction and high life satisfaction will have a low willingness to relocate to regional Australia.*
>
> *Hypothesis 2: Individuals who report both low job satisfaction and low life satisfaction will have a high willingness to relocate to regional Australia.*
>
> *Hypothesis 3: Individuals who report high job satisfaction and low life satisfaction will have some willingness to relocate to regional Australia.*
>
> *Hypothesis 4: Individuals who report low job satisfaction and high life satisfaction will have some willingness to relocate to regional Australia.*

Dual factor approach to Benefits and Challenges of Relocation and Not Relocating

A second major area of investigation that this study aims to explore is the underlying reasons stated for finding relocation to regional Australia either beneficial or challenging. In order to explore this fully, it is proposed that there is a need to explore the correlated reasons stated for not relocating. This analysis is based on the understanding that the reasons stated for relocating are not simply the opposite end of the spectrum for the reasons stated for not relocating. This area of analysis is drawn from and loosely modelled on the Motivator-Hygiene Theory developed by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959). Motivator-Hygiene theory states that one distinct set of factors is associated with job satisfaction and another separate set of factors is associated with job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Motivator-Hygiene theory varies greatly from traditional views of job satisfaction, which assumes that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are simply opposite states on a single continuum (Davis & Newstrom, 1989; Lawler, 1977; Sergiovanni, 1984; Whitsett & Winslow, 1967).

Using this framework of dual-factors, it is logical to hypothesise that the benefits of relocation are not simply at the opposite end of the continuum from the challenges of staying. Likewise, the challenges of relocation are not simply at the opposite end of the continuum to the benefits of staying.

Hypothesis 5: The reported benefits of relocation are not directed related to the challenges of not relocating.

Hypothesis 6: The reported benefits of not relocating are not directed related to the challenges of relocating.

To this end, the survey asks respondents to identify factors that are both benefits and challenges of relocating and not relocating. The survey provides a randomised list of suggested factors, that can then be categorised into family, work, financial (including housing), and personal/community reasons. It is anticipated that this will produce four categories of distinct factors that cannot be placed along the one continuum: challenges of relocating, benefits of relocating, challenges of not relocating and the benefits of not relocating.

Synthesis of Satisfaction and Reasons for Relocating and Not Relocation

The final group of hypotheses to be tested in this study bring these two areas together: are the stated benefits and challenges of relocating and not relocating substantially different for those respondents who report either low job satisfaction or low life satisfaction, but not both. That is, a more rigorous analysis to examine the intentions of those respondents in Hypotheses 3 and 4.

For those respondents that are life-satisfaction dominated (that is, low life satisfaction and high job satisfaction and a report that relocation to regional Australia is attractive) it is anticipated that they will be motivated by family and personal factors, as opposed to work factors. Likewise, it is anticipated that respondents that are job-satisfaction dominated (that is, low job-satisfaction and high life-satisfaction and report that relocation to regional Australia is attractive) will be motivated by work factors, as opposed to family and personal factors.

Hypothesis 7: Life-satisfaction dominated respondents will identify the benefits of relocating as family and personal factors, and the challenges of relocation as work factors.

Hypothesis 8: Job-satisfaction dominated respondents will identify the benefits of relocating as work factors, and the challenges of relocation as family and personal factors.

Absent in this discussion has been the role of financial factors. It is unclear at this

conceptual stage whether financial factors will be seen as a positive or a negative factor for either life-satisfaction dominated respondents and job-satisfaction dominated respondents. This is due to the inherently complex and ubiquitous nature of income and financial security with both lifestyle factors and job related factors.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology to be applied in this study has been determined by that dual-perspective being employed: the organisational perspective and that of the individual employees. For the purposes of triangulation, four methods will be conducted. However, prior to methodology design, several major considerations need to be addressed for the parameters of the study, in particular: the geographic nature of the study; the definition of mobility; and what are 'skilled employees' and 'skills shortages'?

Geographic definition

For the purposes of this study, the geographic area will be restricted to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Standard Geographical Classification (Detailed Main Structure) areas of: Murray (1-55), Murrumbidgee (1-50), Goulburn (2-40) and Ovens-Murray (2-45).

Definition of 'Skilled Employees' and 'Skills Shortages'

There exists an array of definitions that examine skills shortages and related terminology. For the purposes of this study, we will use the definitions offered by the Department of Education, Science and Training (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations & National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2002: 3). Skill shortages exist when employers are unable to fill or have considerable difficulty in filling vacancies for an occupation, or specialised skill needs within that occupation, at current levels of remuneration and conditions of employment, and reasonably accessible location.

Shortages are typically for specialised and experienced workers, and can coexist with relatively high unemployment overall or in the occupation. An occupation may be in shortage even though not all specialisations are in shortage. Occupations may be in shortage in particular geographical areas and not in others. Skill shortages generally involve skills that require a significant period of training and/or experience.

Skill gaps occur where existing employees do not have the required qualifications, experience and/or specialised skills to meet the firm's skill needs for an occupation. Workers may not be adequately trained or qualified to perform tasks, or may not have up-skilled to emerging skill requirements.

Skill gaps do not simply relate to formal qualifications. Employees in an occupation may have the necessary vocational qualifications for the occupation, but not the specialised knowledge, skills and experience needed to adapt to new technology and new methods of working. Recruitment difficulties may be due to characteristics of the industry, occupation or employer, such as: relatively low remuneration, poor working conditions, and poor image of the industry, unsatisfactory working hours, location hard to commute to, inadequate recruitment or firm-specific and highly-specialised skill needs

Roundtable of HR Managers

It is proposed that a roundtable of approximately eight regional organisations is held in order to generate in-depth discussion on several of the key issues to be investigated. It is intended the roundtable session will take approximately 90 minutes. The participants for the roundtable will be HR Managers from regional companies known to the researchers.

Case Study

In order to investigate and analyse the key issues involved with the development and

implementation of a WLB employment brand in attracting skilled labour, a short case study of a regional organisation using a WLB employment brand will be conducted. The case study research methodology will use in-depth interviews and document analysis to collect the data. In-depth interviews of both HR Professionals and employees will enable the researcher to develop an understanding of both the role that WLB plays in shaping the employer brand and the motivations of individual employees that have migrated from a metropolitan location. Document and content analysis will be used to corroborate and augment evidence from the in-depth interviews as proposed by Yin (1994). The case study will allow for preliminary testing of some of the key hypotheses.

It is intended that the resulting case study data analysis, round-table discussion and literature review will result in the development of a set of hypotheses to be tested using a survey instrument in the second phase of the research project.

Recruitment for the case study will take place after the roundtable phase of the research. A large regional organisation that has recruited skilled workers to the region will be contacted to determine their interest in participating in the research. It is envisaged the HR Manager of the selected organisation will be the first point of contact. At this stage an information statement and consent form will be sent to the HR Manager. In consultation with the HR Manager at least four to six individual participants will be identified as potential research participants. The individual employees of the case study organisation will be contacted to seek their permission to participate in the research project. An information statement and consent form will be distributed to those individual employees for their consideration.

Survey of Individual Mobility Motivations

Due to the short time frame of the proposal development process, it is intended that a small survey will be conducted to examine the motivations and intent of individuals making amenity-

lifestyle changes who are new arrivals in the region. Two samples will be generated for this method. Firstly we will survey from metropolitan areas that have not relocated to the region, but may or may not be considering this. Secondly, a sample frame of newly relocated people is available from the local government authorities.

The sample frame will be contacted with the assistance of the relevant local government authority. Some local councils (e.g. Wodonga City Council) sends an information pack (called a Welcome Pack in Wodonga) to new arrivals and we will ask council to include information about the survey including an information statement and contact details. We are yet to determine if councils will give permission for the survey (with info statement, consent form, survey and reply paid envelope) to be included in the welcome pack. For the metropolitan sample frame the researchers will use publicity to raise awareness of the research project and a link to the project web site will be available for potential participants to access the information statement, consent form, and link to the on-line questionnaire.

The instrument is an online survey that will take approximately 10-12 minutes to complete. Being online, the survey can be complete at a time and location convenient to the respondent, and the survey once started, can be resumed at a later time without having to go back and start the survey over. The survey has been extensively pre-tested to ensure that the completion time is less than 12 minutes.

Job vacancy survey

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the true nature and extent of the skills shortages in regional Australia, it is important to accurately measure this. As such, it is proposed that a database will be collated, drawn from advertised job vacancies within the region from www.seek.com.au. The database will be generated by searching for job vacancy

advertisements placed that indicate they are recruiting in the Albury-Wodonga, Shepparton, Wagga Wagga regions.

These job vacancies will be collected over a two week period (resulting in approximately 350 vacancies). The researchers will use the list of job vacancies for the nominated regions and contact the nominated contact person on the job advertisement and ask permission to provide them with an information statement and consent form should they wish to participate further, and then followed up with a short phone call to ascertain: how long the vacancy took to be filled; whether the vacancy was filled by a local; and what work-life balance issues (if any) became apparent during the process. In addition, the database of job vacancies will be coded to indicate if there were any WLB issues used in the actual job advertisement itself, and if so, what these were.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Notwithstanding that research on regional skill shortages, employer branding and WLB, to a lesser degree, are still in the early stages of development a number of 'knowledge gaps' can be identified from the existing literature. Very little is known about the strategies used by local regions in dealing with the regional skill shortage problem. While it's understood that many stakeholders at a regional level (e.g. local councils, employer groups, chambers of commerce) are now promoting the region as a great place to live at the meso-level, are employers at a micro level also tapping into the lifestyle mobility motivators by promoting the organisation as a great place to work? Future research into this area should examine the use of WLB employer branding strategies by organisations within and alongside the destination marketing strategies used at a regional level to attract workers to areas experiencing skill shortages to meet the lifestyle change needs of potential internal migrators.

This important issue requires a mixed methods approach. Exploratory qualitative research by way of case study using in-depth interviews, focus groups and content analysis will uncover rich insights into the motivations, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of internal migrators seeking a lifestyle change. This will be an important stage in the theory building and refining stage before a large scale quantitative survey can be used to test the framework and draw conclusions about the WLB employer brand, lifestyle - amenity change seeking internal immigrants and regional skills shortage nexus. This will require a dual approach examining the strategies used by organisations in developing and implementing a WLB employer brand and the views of those employees that are attracted to it.

CONCLUSIONS

While this study started out to explore the macro level issue of the role of WLB in attracting skilled labour to regional Australia, it quickly became evident that a simplistic and monolithic explanation was not sufficient. Instead, the issue needed to be analysed according to a dual perspective of both the organisation and the individual.

An understanding of the mobility motivations of internal migrants suggests that a desire for an improved lifestyle plays an important role in the decision making process of individuals as they weight up the perceived costs and benefits of relocating. In particular, this study aims to better understand the decision making processes of individuals when considering relocation to regional Australia based on a regression analysis of a variety of independents variables that measure propensity to relocate to regional Australia. Secondly, the study also aims to better understand the motivating factors behind those intentions, and develop a dual-factor approach to understanding the perceived benefits and challenges of relocation, against the perceived benefits and challenges of not

relocating.

Congruent to this is the organisational perspective. Very little is known about the importance of the WLB credentials of the regional employer trying to attract skilled workers. This paper calls for research to explore the strategies used by employers to position their organisation as a great place to work for those seeking better WLB and the motivations of those that are drawn towards the promise of a better WLB. The research will provide an important contribution to both the theoretical and practical understanding of the regional skill shortages and WLB research nexus.

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