

# **Ageing and Work: a time of challenge or opportunity for older executive workers?**

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## Abstract

Ageing is seen as one of the most important social issues facing developed countries, including Australia. Government policy increasingly encourages workforce participation beyond traditional retirement age as a way of dealing with the fiscal and societal challenges of an ageing population – longer lives mean longer working lives (OECD 2006). However, there is a dichotomy between the view that conceptualises ageing as a problem and a phase of decline in peoples' working lives and the research that frames ageing for some people as synonymous with increased financial reward and advancement. This prompts the research question of whether there are specific factors that 'insulate' executive workers from the disadvantages associated with ageing and work.

This study explores how executive workers negotiate ageing in the highly competitive world of the technology industry - an industry where the work-force is widely acknowledged for its youthfulness and should logically be an exemplar of ageing being a problem. The study will draw on qualitative interviews as case studies of senior executives in large software companies to understand how they develop and mobilise their personal resources to maintain their position and employability as they age. Using a Bourdieusian analysis, the study will show how ageing intersects with different forms of capital that are valued within software companies to shape the employability of executives as they age. The study will advance current understanding of how one group of executive level workers navigate growing older at work and highlight the importance of Bourdieu's inter-related concepts of economic, social and cultural capitals in improved employability as we age. The findings will show ageing is not a problem for executive workers as it is for lower levels within the labour market due to their ability to accumulate and mobilise valued capital

## Statement of Originality

*This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.  
My Ethics Committee approval number is 5201950538449.*

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

Ageing is seen as one of the most important social issues facing developed countries, including Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015). The latest Intergenerational Report (Department of the Treasury, 2015) states that Australians are living longer and will continue to have one of the longest life expectancies in the world. In 40 years' time, life expectancy at birth is projected to be nearly 97 years for women and a little less for men. Australia's workforce is both ageing and shrinking (Noone et al., 2018). A decreased labour supply leads to declining real incomes and a huge financial pressure on social protection systems unless there is an offsetting increase in employment rates (Martin, 2018). Government policy increasingly encourages workforce participation beyond traditional retirement age as a way of dealing with the fiscal and societal challenges of an ageing population – longer lives mean longer working lives (OECD, 2006). As a society, our interest in the subject of ageing and work is reflected by the extent of coverage in the media. However, this coverage mostly emphasises the problems associated with ageing and the extension of working lives, including topics such as ageism (Allen, 2012), 'old at 50' (Brice, 2016) and the redefinition of what retirement now means for those over 65 years old (Attwood, 2019).

It is apparent that the academic literature mainly conceptualises ageing as a problem and a phase of decline in peoples' lives (Biggs, McGann, Bowman, & Kimberley, 2017; Australian Human Rights Commission 2015; Bowman et al., 2017). The discourse of ageing as decline is not consistent with a policy of 'longer working lives'. Previous research on older workers has often taken a negative view, highlighting "the inevitable loss of cognitive resources, physical functioning and mental well-being" as people grow older (Brooke & Taylor, 2005:2). In fact, there is an increased level of unemployment and under-employment among mature age workers (Bowman, McGann, Kimberley, & Biggs, 2017).

If we accept the policy proposition that living longer equates to working longer, then it must also be recognised there are difficulties that older workers face in keeping their jobs, or indeed, finding new employment (OECD 2006). These difficulties have been explained by two key factors; a decline in human capital for older workers and age-related discrimination (Bowman et al., 2017). The term human capital is defined as the "knowledge, information, ideas, skills and health of individuals" (Bowman et al., 2017:466), all of which are self-determined and are the most important form of capital in modern society (Bowman et al., 2017).

However, this conventional, economic model of ageing and work often treats ageing workers as a homogenous group and may not adequately explain the relational and social aspects of employability (Bowman et al., 2017). Cutcher & Riach (2017) suggest the "way in which people experience ageing at work tells us as much about their occupation as it does about ageing" (p.162) and furthermore they state there is little empirical exploration of how this occurs in particular occupational settings (Cutcher & Riach, 2017).

There are also a number of studies that frame ageing for some people as synonymous with increased financial reward, advancement and more senior positions (Allan, Faulconbridge, & Thomas, 2018; Spence et al., 2016). According to studies on industry sectors such as Finance and Professional Services, ageing does not seem to play out as a problem for executive workers as it does for lower levels within the labour market (Bowman et al., 2017; Riach, 2014; Spence et al., 2016). In

fact, there may be circumstances that promote advantage and privilege for executive workers as they age, resulting in economic wealth that sets them apart from the great majority of the population (Savage et al., 2013).

There is, therefore, a dichotomy between the view that conceptualises ageing as a problem and a phase of decline in peoples' working lives and the research that frames ageing for some people as synonymous with increased financial reward and advancement. This is the basis for my research question: "To what extent are there specific factors that 'insulate' executive workers from the disadvantages associated with ageing and work".

### **Ageing - a time of challenge or opportunity?**

In trying to understand what creates the tension between challenge or opportunity for ageing workers as identified in the literature, this study will explore how executive level workers manage particular personal 'resources' to maintain their position and employability as they age. These resources may include income and wealth, social background and status, personal and professional networks, education and professional reputation. Whilst conventional analysis tends to treat older workers as a uniform group, there are studies that successfully show the heterogeneous processes of ageing by applying the theoretical framework of Bourdieu (Bowman et al., 2017). This study will provide further empirical exploration of the process of ageing in a particular work setting and industry.

The technology industry was considered an appropriate occupational setting for this study of executive workers and their experience of work as they age for a number of reasons. It is an industry sector of interest and significance due to its importance as a growth industry and as a large employer. It is an industry where the workforce is widely acknowledged for its youthfulness (Comeau & Kemp, 2007) where "energy and ambition are markers of success" (Cutcher & Riach, 2017). It should therefore logically be an exemplar of ageing being a problem. This makes any advantages that may be associated with ageing for executive level workers in this space of greater interest. Therefore, my study is a qualitative interrogation of how Country Heads and Sales Leaders of global software suppliers function within their work environment.

### **The Software Supplier Industry in Australia**

The software supplier industry is a sub-sector within what is often more conveniently referred to as the technology or IT industry. As the software supplier industry in Australia is the focus for my study, it will be helpful at this point to provide a brief overview of what it is and why this specific sector is of interest. It is an industry in which I spent part of my professional career, so I do have access to relevant participants which will improve the quality of sampling and my inside knowledge of how the industry works will allow me to contextualise my analysis. The IBISWorld Software Suppliers in Australia Report (2018) defines the industry sector as 3,640 companies with combined revenues of \$8.6bn. It is a highly concentrated industry sector where the top four companies account for 55% of the revenues. The industry's largest companies in Australia are typically local subsidiaries of large, global software developers, such as Oracle, IBM, Google and Microsoft. Software supplier companies are mostly US based. My own experience in this industry indicates there are many senior executive workers who continue to advance to more senior positions or move to increasingly senior roles in new companies in their 50's and 60's. As stated, it is an industry sector of interest and significance for my study.

## **Bourdieu's Theoretical Framework**

My research takes its lead from a number of articles that successfully illustrate the heterogeneous processes of ageing by drawing on Bourdieu's theory of capital to analyse occupational settings (Bowman et al., 2017; Harvey & Maclean, 2008; Riach, 2014; Spence et al., 2016). Bowman et al's (2017) study on ageing, capital and employability was particularly useful in guiding the set-up of my study. The use of Bourdieu's theoretical framework permits the identification of the different capitals held by individuals (Spence et al., 2016:6). These capitals vary between occupational fields and leads to a more nuanced understanding of ageing and work (Bowman et al., 2017). A more complete outline of Bourdieu's concepts of economic, social and cultural capitals, field and habitus which act as the theoretical foundation for the study will be provided in Chapter 2.

## **Methods**

Capital is inherited, accumulated and deployed during the life-course and "domination in any field is contingent on possessing the right quantities and combinations of capital" (Harvey & Maclean, 2008:5). Therefore, in-depth, qualitative interviews with five senior executives from large, software supplier companies were conducted to draw out the measures and role of varying species of capital in their life and career stages. Economic, social and cultural capitals are likened by Bourdieu to "the aces in a game of cards, as powers that define the chances of profit in a particular field" (Bourdieu, 1985:724). The measures of capital at each life stage for the participants provide insights to the role capital in helping insulate executive workers from the disadvantages associated with ageing and work.

As capital is inherited and also developed and deployed throughout the life-course, I made a choice to organise and present the data according to the life course of the participants. This structure also emerged from the analysis of the data itself, as different roles and patterns for capital became evident at different points in the life-course. For this study, life-course stages are defined as:

- 1) "How they got there": early life stage which includes family background, growing up and initial work choices as participants enter the technology and software industry.
- 2) "How they stay there": mid-life and career stage covering how the participants develop and progress their career in the software industry.
- 3) "How they deal with ageing": later life stage which reflects how participants deal with ageing as they move through their 50's and 60's

## **Structure of the thesis**

The thesis includes a brief introduction and outline of the topic, a review of the relevant literature and theoretical framework, a description of the research methods and comments on the scope and limitations of the project. The chapters are structured accordingly. Chapter 2 reviews the literature to establish the tension between ageing in the work force as a challenge and as an opportunity. The chapter discusses how the conventional analysis of ageing and work tends to treat older workers as a homogenous group (Bowman et al., 2017) and how a Bourdieusian analysis allows a more nuanced view. The chapter also describes the theoretical framework of Bourdieu, the characteristics of the software supplier industry and how it is conceptualised as a 'field'. Chapter 3 describes the research

method that applies Bourdieu's framework to the software supplier industry, structures interviews based on concepts of capital and selects participants based on elite worker characteristics. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are the three findings sections that operationalise Bourdieu's theoretical framework across the life course by outlining 'how they get there', 'how they stay there' and 'how they deal with ageing'. Chapter 7 summarises the findings as five key conclusions: 'different start-points but similar outcomes', 'a theme of mobility', 'soft skills dominate', 'the importance of social capital' and 'coping strategies'. This final chapter reflects on the conclusions as the factors that insulate executive workers from the disadvantages associated with ageing and work. The insights from the study may also be a basis for advice to other workers on how to best 'insulate' against the downsides of ageing and work in their respective industries.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### Ageing as a Problem

Government policy in Australia appears to be based on the view that older people are a burden on the rest of society (Taylor, 2011:225) as “falling birth rates and increased longevity put pressure on the proportion of the population of working age” (Biggs et al., 2017:1458). The issues of demographic ageing and the concerns of a shrinking labour force, the rising dependency ratio of the economically inactive population, rising health-care costs and growing pension liabilities are factors at the forefront of government policy and attitudes related to ageing (OECD, 2006). The resulting view that “longer lives should be matched by longer working lives” (OECD, 2006:3) indicates the associated challenge of how a growing number of older workers will be managed.

In response to the need to prolong working life, the Australian Government have adopted a policy approach based on human capital theory. Government policy therefore emphasises the importance of training, updating and re-skilling and broadening experience at regular intervals in order that workers aged 50 or older remain agile and competitive in the workforce (Bowman et al., 2017). However, undermining this policy approach, the ageing workforce is stigmatized by negative stereotypes such as age-related poor health, inflexible attitudes, resistance to change and low trainability (Ng Alan, 2014). A survey of Australian Human Resources Institute (2018) members reinforced the challenge for older workers to remain competitive in the workforce. The report showed more than 30% of respondents “set an age of 50 years as the age at which they are unwilling to recruit workers (Australian Human Resources Institute 2018). In the last two decades, there has been a sharp break in the trend towards early retirement across all OECD countries. Participation rates for age-group 55-64 years have increased significantly due to a reversal since the late 1990’s in the trend to early retirement in all OECD countries. However, the dynamics behind rising participation rates show the increase is due to older workers being retained longer by their firms, whilst the hiring rate of older workers remains less significant (Martin, 2018).

An acceptance of the policy proposition that ‘living longer equates to working longer’ must also recognise the difficulties older workers face in both keeping their jobs and in finding new employment (OECD, 2006). These difficulties have been explained so far by two key factors; a decline in human capital for older workers and age-related discrimination (Bowman et al., 2017). This view of ageing assumes that longer and healthier lives are seen purely in economic terms and as an opportunity for increased production with an “emphasis on economic priorities and less consideration of life course change” (Biggs et al., 2017:1459).

### **A More Nuanced View of Ageing**

The conventional, economic model of ageing and work often treats ageing workers as a uniform group and may not adequately explain the relational and social aspects of employability. The rationalistic logic of human capital theory (Bowman et al., 2017) was therefore considered to be somewhat restrictive as a theoretical framework for this study. Bowman et al., (2017) emphasise that “peoples’ bodies are not marked or experienced as old in a universal manner” (p.468). Cutcher & Riach (2017) suggest the “way in which people experience ageing at work tells us as much about their occupation as it does about ageing” (p.162) and furthermore they state there is little empirical exploration of how this occurs in particular occupational settings (Cutcher & Riach, 2017). The literature considered in the context of this study reveals a Bourdieusian theoretical framework as helpful in three ways. Firstly, the theory “facilitates a more nuanced account of social ageing in organizations” (Riach, 2014:785), secondly, it enables “a more finely grained analysis that highlights how employment opportunities of different groups of older workers are shaped in different ways”(Bowman et al., 2017:471) and thirdly, demonstrates “how an empirical, qualitative focus on the habitus can be revelatory on the informal norms and conventions of business systems”(Spence et al., 2016:17).

The following sections therefore look at the theoretical framework of Bourdieu and how the literature which applies this approach successfully explores a number of occupational settings to understand more meaningfully how workers navigate ageing in particular work environments.

### **Bourdieu**

There are studies that draw on Bourdieu’s interrelated concepts of field, habitus and capital “to develop a more nuanced understanding of employability” (Bowman et al., 2017:469). Fields can be understood as a social space in which a game takes place: ‘a competitive system of social relations which functions according to its own rules or logic’ (Moi, 1991:1021). Spence et al (2016) determine that an industry or profession can be conceived as a field in this sense. Each field generates its own habitus, a “system of lasting, transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge and act in the world” (L. Wacquant, 1998) which are embodied in the individual to orient and give meaning to social practices” (Bowman et al., 2017:469). Covaleski, Heian, & Samuel, (1998) state these dispositions ensure that work-goals, language and lifestyle come to reflect the imperatives of the organisation such that habitus includes not only the organisational norms and values but also “the gestures, postures and gait that become durably incorporated in the body” (Bourdieu, 1993:86). Bourdieu identifies three forms of capital: economic, social and cultural capital. Economic capital is viewed as income and wealth which is “immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised into property rights” (Bourdieu, 1986:281). Bourdieu also states that “economic

capital is at the root of all the other types of capital (Bourdieu, 1986:288). Spence et al., (2016) in relation to the study on elite executives in the Professional Services industry found that “economic capital dominated all other capitals” (p 10) and is manifested in the primary function of senior executives to increase revenue for their firms. Cultural capital is associated with social class, the ability to embody the language, accents and mannerisms of the elite (Bourdieu, 1986) and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1992). Bourdieu, (1984) identified the education system in particular as “a fundamental agency of the maintenance of social order” (p 387). Social capital is “made up of social obligations (connections) which are convertible into economic capital” (Bourdieu, 1992). In a work context, these ‘connections’ include personal, social and professional networks and contacts and “the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilise and on the volume of capital possessed in his own right by those to whom he is connected” (Bourdieu, 1986:286).

### **Studies that use Bourdieu**

Savage et al., (2013) developed a New Model of Social Class determined mostly by wealth and income but also taking into account other social and cultural factors such as educational attainment, forms of leisure participation and housing conditions. The theoretical framework for Savage et al.’s. (2013) study “deploys Bourdieu’s conceptual armoury to elaborate a model of class linked to the interplay between economic, social and cultural capital” (p.220). Savage et al. (2013), found over-representations within the elite of chief executive officers, IT directors, marketing and sales directors, roles which align closely with the sample to be used in my study. Whilst elite workers are not immune from some aspects of age related decline, there are academic debates that challenge the dominant view of growing older as a time of decline by framing it as “a break with the past and a move towards a view of ageing as an ongoing and cumulative process of value creation” (Riach 2014:772). Using the definition of elite workers provided by Savage et al. (2013) where income and wealth, social and cultural capital are the key determinants of power and privilege, then it is noted that the personal assets of elite workers such as wealth, authority, status and professional and social contacts are often seen to increase with age. Perhaps this increase in personal assets and capital as elite workers age also leads to a more positive experience of ageing and work for that group? Our knowledge of how ageing is experienced in a work environment may therefore be better understood by looking at specific occupations rather than work generically and by using a theoretical framework that recognises the effect of the ongoing and cumulative process of capital accumulation.

My project draws on these studies of particular occupations, workers and elite workers that use Bourdieu’s interrelated concepts of field, habitus and capital. (Bowman et al., 2017: Riach, 2014,

Spence et al., 2016, Savage et al., 2013, Harvey & Maclean, 2008). Harvey & Maclean (2008) explored how “business elites reproduce and regenerate themselves by examining the typology of forms of capital possessed by elite directors” (p 2). Their study established that social capital determines who advances in business and whilst “successful people use their allotted capital to best effect...human agency and responsibility continue to matter – career success is not pre-ordained” (p 2). Upward social mobility was more evident in Britain compared to France with a career in business providing a basis for “ascending the social ladder” (p 2) and could be expected to be evident in Australia also. A study of elite workers by Riach et al. (2014) explored the ways in which finance professionals in a UK hedge fund “navigate growing older at work” (p.771) by “building on Bourdieu’s notion of habitus to develop the concept of the body as an accumulation strategy” (p.772). The idea that these highly paid workers actively manage their ageing in an organisational culture which is “unsympathetic to those lacking youthful vigour and market virility” (p.783) has relevance in other industries and occupations which are characterised by high rewards and economic capital. A study by Spence et al. (2016) which tracks the habitus of partners in a ‘Big 4’ professional service firm explores how economic capital dominates all other capitals where the primary job function is to increase revenue for their firms and finds “the ability to generate economic capital was the de facto trump card when it came to career advancement at the higher levels” (p.10). The importance of the pursuit of economic capital for elite workers to maintain their positions of privilege is amplified in S M Allan et al., (2018) paper on partner experiences of working in a financialised professional services firm. The paper is based on an ethnographic study of a top UK law firm. Partners’ profit-sharing status is no longer “obtained by reference to knowledge and accomplishments but by economic contribution” (p.115). Partners retain their status and their positions as long as they remain ‘rainmakers’. There is an obsession with performance to the point that a possible downside for elite workers is the “distinct experience for many partners of fear and anxiety” (p.121) regardless of their standing and professional reputation to this point in time.

### **IT Industry**

This section covers the literature which explores the technology industry, its characteristics and IT workers. The section will identify the gaps in studies on elite, executive workers and older workers and also identify industry sources that inform the study. The literature points to the merit in further study of industry and work environments to increase our understanding of how work is experienced as workers age (Cutcher and Riach, 2017). The Technology Industry and the Software Supplier sector specifically are of significance and interest in this respect. It is an industry where the workforce is widely acknowledged for its youthfulness (Comeau and Kemp, 2007) and therefore, should logically be an exemplar of ageing being a problem. This makes any advantages that may be associated with

ageing for executive level workers in this space of greater interest. However, as Cutcher & Riach (2017) indicate there are very few studies that explore ageing in particular workplaces and the studies that do focus on the Technology industry are not specific to elite level executives. Comeau and Kemp (2007) explore age and masculinity in the IT industry and their study does provide a useful profile of the industry sector. The workforce, although demographically young, does not entirely comprise younger workers but is dominated by men and is ageing” (p.215). Their study also characterises IT workers as “a privileged group, well paid and highly educated” (p.219). The study tells us about the experience of younger technical workers working in small IT firms in Canada but says less about elite, executive level workers in larger technology firms. Schloegel, Stegmann, Maedche, & van Dick (2016) look at interventions to reduce negative age stereotypes in software development workers which “hinder communication, trust, decision-making, cooperation and team identification” (p.12). The study recognises that employees of different age groups need to work more closely in the IT sector, however their research is limited to a software development environment only. Brooke (2009) explored the influences that determined the careers of older workers in the Australian IT industry in terms of their exit or continuity of employment. This paper concludes the IT industry is not suited to an extended career although a “structural incompatibility was found between the exceptional dynamism and competitiveness of the IT industry and the conventional age-staged and extended career” (Brooke, 2009:237). The paper also highlights the problems for older workers perceived as being less trainable than younger workers in IT skills and limited by skills obsolescence. Cooper (2000) looks at masculinity and the organisation of work in the technology industry in 30 qualitative interviews with informants ranging in age from 30 to 44. The paper uses the term “Silicon Valley” as shorthand for what is a clearly defined way of being and doing” (Cooper, 2000:387) and provides an interesting description of working life in the tech sector as a ‘fast-paced, frenzied lifestyle where devotion to work is a norm’. These aspects of work in the IT sector that include masculinity, age stereotypes and technical roles in small and medium sized companies are all important topics in their own right.

Whilst they are helpful in building a perspective on the technology industry more broadly, they do not specifically address the central points of my study which is the experience of elite executive workers in the software supplier industry.

In the absence of relevant academic literature aligned to the experience of elite executive workers and the software supplier sector, it would seem pragmatic to turn to the business press for more industry specific commentary. Country Heads or Sales Leaders with Software Supplier companies have a primary function of increasing revenues for their company and it is “the ability to generate economic capital that is elevated above other forms of capital and is indicative of the field’s

heteronomy: selling ‘software’ is a means to an end” (Spence et al., 2016:10). Reports on the software supplier sector from Business Insider.com show that “those at the top of the game get treated very well — sales leaders’ compensation packages can easily top \$5 million a year” (Kim, 2016). It is a sector characterised by high rewards but also by high risk of unemployment in the event of any drop in performance (Cutcher & Riach, 2017). However, the earning power of these executive workers places them firmly in the elite class (Savage et al., 2013). The sector is significant in size, it is growing, is a large employer and considered youthful and therefore is interesting in the context of ageing and continued employability. Moreover, it is highly paid and therefore the executives have high economic capital and would be defined as ‘elite workers’. It is also an industry in which I have professional experience and therefore have insider access to senior executives as participants who would otherwise be difficult to reach or involve.

### **Research Gap and Summary**

In summary, the ageing workforce is an important social issue facing developed countries including Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015). The dominant literature treats ageing workers as a ‘homogenous group’ (Bowman et al., 2017) where ageing is generally conceptualised as a time of decline. This conventional analysis is unhelpful for studying elite workers for whom ageing can be a time of advantage in the workplace. The studies that successfully illustrate the heterogeneous processes of ageing have applied the theoretical framework of Bourdieu (Bowman et al., 2017; Riach, 2014; Savage et al., 2013; Spence et al., 2016). The use of Bourdieu “permits the identification of the different capitals held by individuals” (Spence et al., 2016:6) which vary between occupational fields and leads to a more nuanced understanding of ageing (Bowman et al., 2017). This framework will enable my study of elite workers in the software supplier industry to identify the ways in which knowledge and skills are translated into social and economic rewards or in “Bourdeusian terminology, the ways in which individuals in the software industry accumulate and convert different forms of capital in the course of their professional work” (Spence et al., 2016:6). Using Bourdieu’s concepts will facilitate a study to understand ageing at work at a time of established reputation and professional prestige that is “generally conferred on those who have successfully accumulated those forms of capital that are most highly valued by the surrounding field” (Spence et al., 2016:6) rather than viewing it as a continuum of decline. The literature on ageing and work using Bourdieu identifies a paucity of studies that explore ageing in particular industries or sectors (Cutcher and Riach, 2017) whilst at the same time, acknowledges that “the forms of capital underpinning employability vary between occupational fields” (Bowman et al., 2017:478). The studies to date on the IT sector specifically that have been considered, say little about the elite, executive cohort in the software supplier sector that is central to my research topic.

Furthermore, the IT sector has a workforce that is widely acknowledged for its youthfulness (Comeau and Kemp, 2007). This characteristic, along with the absence of studies on the ageing experience for elite workers in the software supplier industry makes my research of particular interest in helping facilitate a more nuanced account of ageing in the workplace (Riach, 2014:785).

The following chapter covers the research methodology that elicits how elite, executive workers inherit, accumulate and deploy economic, social and cultural capital during their life-course. The chapter will describe the use of a qualitative approach to identify the impact of capital in a work context.

## Chapter 3 Research Methodology

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, the review of existing literature on ageing and work established a number of key points that inform the research question, “to what extent are there specific factors that ‘insulate’ executive workers from the disadvantages associated with ageing and work”. In summary, the challenge of an ageing workforce is an important social issue in Australia. Ageing is generally conceptualised as a time of decline. However, for some workers, particularly the elite, executive worker, ageing can be a time of advantage in the workplace. The literature review identified a theoretical framework based on Bourdieu’s theory of capital and identified a ‘field’ (the software supplier industry) as a basis on which to advance the research question.

This chapter outlines the research methods used for my thesis. I will explain why a qualitative methodology using a case study approach was chosen. I will then outline the methodology, research methods and how the data was analysed. A section about the structure of the findings is included to explain the choice to present the findings in the next three chapters according to the life course stages of the participants. This chapter will also describe the limitations of the chosen research methodologies.

Bourdieu’s point is that it is possible to demarcate people with different amounts of each of the three capitals to distinguish the social world, including work, from a ‘game of chance’ so that everything is not equally possible or impossible (Savage et al., 2013). Bourdieu likens “these ‘capitals’ to the aces in a game of cards - as powers that define the chances of profit in a particular field” (Bourdieu 1985:724). The theoretical underpinning of the methodology is therefore based on drawing out the role of varying species of capital in the life and career narratives of executive workers. This chapter operationalises the theoretical framework of Bourdieu through the choice of research methodology, participant sample and field.

### Methodology and Methods

In order to understand the economic, social and cultural capitals of elite workers, the study explores their career trajectories and life biographies. It is essentially a question about elite workers’ personal resources or capitals and how they accumulate and mobilise those capitals during their life-course. It is this ‘longitudinal’ aspect of the study which is suited to a qualitative methodology. My study therefore uses a qualitative methodology. A quantitative approach was considered for this study but quantitative research is primarily suited to the “collection, analysis and development of understandings of data on social phenomena from large groups or large data sources” (Walter, 2010:25). Whereas, qualitative research is “about meaning making and does not require statistics

or large scale data” (Walter, 2010:25). My thesis takes its lead from a number of academic articles that draw on Bourdieu to analyse occupational settings (Bowman et al., 2017; Cutcher & Riach, 2017; Harvey & Maclean, 2008; Riach, 2014; Spence et al., 2016). These studies use qualitative methodologies to identify and analyse the impact of capital in a work context and in turn, they have informed my choice of methodology.

Within this qualitative paradigm, a case study approach is chosen as a suitable strategy for undertaking research that asks participants about aspects of their life-course with the aim of identifying how capital is accumulated and mobilised. Accordingly, the interviews are organised around categories that connect the theory to the participants’ lived reality by asking questions such as how they use resources and how they explain their success. A case-study approach enables a study of the “particularity and complexity of an individual” (Marshall, 1999:380) to map and measure capitals in this context. This approach allows an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2003:13). It is relevant to investigate the experience of ageing workers within the context of the companies in which they have been employed (Foweraker & Cutcher, 2015). A case study approach means that ageing as a factor affecting employment can be explored as a variable dependent on attitudes, capabilities, background and organisational context (Foweraker & Cutcher, 2015). The sample size of five participants was chosen to allow completion of multiple in-depth interviews within the limited time available to me. Crouch & McKenzie (2006) validate this choice, stating there is a “positive case for small samples where in-depth interviewing is the method of choice” (p 484). The research method will therefore comprise of five semi-structured, in-depth interviews with executive participants from the software supplier sector to allow a multiple case-study. The actual sample will be outlined in a following section titled Interviews.

It should be noted that my previous experience within the software supplier industry also informed the selection method and allowed me to identify the kinds of participants required. This insider connection has also informed the qualitative nature of the study and gave me access to participants that others might not reach. This access to executive worker participants offers a comparative advantage in focusing on a qualitative approach for this study.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethics approval was obtained in May 2019 from Macquarie University Human Ethics Committee and a copy of the approval confirmation is attached in Appendix 1. Participants’ privacy and confidentiality was ensured and respected throughout the research process and all data was anonymised with the use of pseudonyms. I was mindful of any personal sensitivity for the

respondents associated with the discussion of their ageing and work experience. The participants were not considered to be a vulnerable group. Respectful engagement was maintained throughout the research process. Summarised outcomes and findings will be shared with participants and this will be considered as beneficial to them to broaden their knowledge and help them make sense of their industry and work lives.

### **Interviews**

Participants were recruited from my network of professional contacts in the industry. They were executives that I had worked with as either clients or candidates during my fifteen years as a Partner in an international executive firm based in Sydney. The sample is therefore, partly based on convenience, taking advantage of my connections but also partly theoretical with participants complying with the following criteria. They are senior executives, typically country heads or managing directors of large companies, with experience during their career to date of multinational, US based software and/or technology services supplier companies. The sample includes executives in their 50's and 60's as an indicator of their awareness of the possible impact of ageing within a work context, of sufficient time to build capital and of their familiarity with their industry habitus. All participants hold senior positions within their companies with titles such as Managing Director (MD), Vice President (VP) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Mike, at the time of interview was about to retire at the age of 57 and another, John, had recently left his company where he had been Vice President of Asia Pacific and Japan. He was interviewing in London and Singapore for his next role when this study was conducted. Deborah has recently been appointed as CEO of a large technology services company and both Graham and Nick are currently senior executives running the Australian subsidiaries of US software companies. The participants have accumulated high levels of economic capital; wealth in the form of high incomes, company share options, superannuation savings and property. The software industry is male dominated which initially led to an all-male selection. I addressed this by recruiting a female senior executive to participate in the study. Participants are based in either Sydney or Melbourne to facilitate face to face interviews.

Participant	Gender	Age	Company Background	Location
<b>Deborah</b>	Female	51	CEO and MD in US multinational software, technology and services companies	Australia
<b>Graham</b>	Male	52	VP and MD ANZ for US software company	Australia but has also worked in roles based in UK and Asia Pacific
<b>Mike</b>	Male	57	CEO and Senior Director roles in US Multi-National Companies (MNC's) in software, services and technology	Australia but has worked in the UK
<b>John</b>	Male	63	Senior VP in US MNC's software suppliers	Australia and Singapore
<b>Nick</b>	Male	64	VP AP for US MNC's in software supply	Australia and Singapore

**Table 1 Summary of Participants with pseudonyms**

Typically, the participants have experience of working both in Australia and overseas within their organisation. Their roles entail a high level of international travel and frequent job changes – a reflection of the ‘fast-paced, frenzied lifestyle’ associated with Technology Industry executives. I considered the participants to be ‘seasoned executives’ which is, by definition, a proxy for capital. There were four male participants and one female participant. This combination was considered to be more than representative of the gender mix of 17% females at MD or CEO level in Australia across all industries (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2018). The targeted study participants were also considered to fit within the elite class of Savage et al’s New Model of Social Class where elite is defined as “the most advantaged and privileged group characterised by having the highest levels of every form of capital” (Savage et al., 2013:233).

Participants were recruited with an emailed invitation to participate and all five accepted the invitation without hesitation. Prior to interview, all participants were sent a Participant Consent and Information Form and a project summary for consideration and informal consent. One hour face to face, in-depth interviews were conducted with participants in cafes, their workplace and in one case by skype due to overseas travel commitments for that participant. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Bourdieu states that “acknowledging that capital can take a variety of forms is indispensable to explain the structure of differentiated societies” (Bourdieu, 1992:119) and therefore a semi-structured interview guide was used to elicit the types of capital participants have accumulated and how it has been mobilised. Questions covered aspects of participants’ social origins and family background, educational background, wealth and assets, interests outside of work including sport, arts and culture and personal and professional networks and contacts. Their career development was covered with specific reference to the ways in which they had negotiated the corporate career ladder during the course their working life. Participants were questioned about colleagues and associates who had been less successful in their roles or careers. The intention was to gain a comparative view on what resources or capitals are considered to be lacking for those who have failed when compared to those who have thrived in their careers. The interviews were both flexible and open-ended to allow participants to cover the areas they felt were important and relevant to the research topic. Therefore, not all the questions were asked in all the meetings and not asked every time in the same order.

All interviews ran up to or beyond the agreed time for the meeting and in some cases, this resulted in insufficient time to complete the interview. Follow up discussions were not conducted due to the time limitations for the project as a whole. However, most of the material was covered with all participants and was no limitation when analysing the data.

The interviews were conducted during June and July 2019. The interviews were initially transcribed using an on-line transcription tool. The transcripts then required extensive amendments and corrections by the researcher due to inaccuracies in the original transcription. This involved listening and re-listening to the original audio recordings whilst corrections were made. This ‘immersion’ in the interview data was important in avoiding any loss of closeness to the data. I did not use a qualitative software package for data analysis due to the small sample size.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the immersion in the data during the transcription process, I took a significant period of time for what Walter (2010) refers to as the ‘incubation stage’. This stage is about meaning-making and involves “mulling over the insights from the data and trying to make sense of them” (Walter, 2010:415). The thematic analysis of the data was based on Saldana’s Coding Manual for Qualitative Research (Saldaña, 2009). First cycle coding and analysis of the data from the transcribed interviews and field notes was undertaken to assign a word or short phrase that reflected the “summative, essence-capturing and evocative attribute of the data” (Saldaña 2009:3). In the second cycle of analysis, the interview transcriptions were read and re-read to link initial codes into categories in

order to arrange the data in a systematic order. Subsequently these categories were explored for patterns characterised by factors such as similarity, difference, frequency and causation. These patterns and relationships related to the main categories on ageing and work. This led me to identify three key themes of comparison in the data as shown in the coding table attached as Appendix 2

### **Structure of Findings**

Capital is both transmitted between generations and also accumulated and mobilised throughout the life-course. I therefore made a key choice to organise and present the data and the analysis according to the life-course stages of the participants. The structure also emerged from the analysis of the data as I identified different patterns and trajectories at different life and career stages. The interview questions were framed to correspond to Bourdieu's capitals so that the data analysis both reflects the theory and also incorporates new insights from the data. For this study, the life-course stages are defined as:

- 1) "How they got there": early life stage which includes family background, growing up and initial work choices as participants enter the technology and software industry
- 2) "How they stay there": mid-life and career stage covering how the participants develop and progress their career in the software industry
- 3) "How they deal with ageing": later life stage which reflects how participants deal with ageing as they move through their 50's and 60's

The purpose of organising the findings according to the life course is to highlight the trajectories of participants and to reveal how different start points in terms of inherited and accumulated capitals lead to common outcomes in terms of elite work positions in their later life stages.

Biggs et al. (2016) note that in examining the relationship between work and age, "it has been contingent on wider economic priorities with less consideration of life course change" (p. 1459). Similarly, this study was initially set up on the basis of Bourdieu's capital theory to understand how it might insulate and provide privilege for this sample of workers. However, in analysing the data, it is apparent that capital has different roles at different points in life, so the structure of the findings according to life course emerged from the analysis. Accordingly, the study describes how capital is accumulated and mobilised at each life stage based on empirical data from the interviews. Participants' experience will provide insight into what work capital is doing and how this changes during the life course. Capitals are important in terms of 'how you get there', 'how you stay there' and 'how you deal with ageing' but in different ways at different points in the life-course. The study

is about the related social processes as capital is developed and deployed and provides useful indications beyond this small interview sample.

The findings at each stage provide insights to the extent that elite executive workers are insulated from any disadvantage associated with ageing and work. For example, the findings will discuss how social capital is accumulated to build networks of “mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1992:119) which are deployed to secure new jobs, gain promotion and increase economic capital. The life course analysis shows the points at which capital is stronger or weaker, how it insulates and common patterns and points of difference between the participants. The insights from this study may also be the basis for advice to other workers on how to best ‘insulate’ against the downsides of ageing and work in their respective industries. However, the findings may identify factors that insulate which are specific to the software and technology industries and the related habitus of that field.

Each of the Findings Chapters, 4, 5 and 6 will begin with a summary to outline the purpose of that specific section and how the analysis relates to the conceptual framework of Bourdieu’s theory of capital. Each Findings chapter contains a table that summarises how the findings are structured, showing the subject area discussed and whether that relates to a habitus, capital or a strategy for the use of capital.

## Chapter 4 Findings Part One ‘How they got there’

This chapter is the first of three findings chapters which present the data from interviews with the participants. The findings chapters provide a perspective on key stages in the life course of the participants. The life-course stages will cover their early life and family background, their initial career, work choices and career progression and how they view the impact of ageing as they move into their fifties and sixties. As established in previous chapters, economic, social and cultural capital is both transmitted between generations and accumulated and mobilised during the life course. The findings chapters are intended to show how life starts and unfolds for the participants and the extent to which capital is inherited and then developed and deployed thereafter. The analysis of the interview data is based both on what they said and is “in relation to their particular labour market context or occupational field” (Bowman et al., 2017:472) as represented by the software supplier industry.

Within the conceptual framework of Bourdieu’s theory of capital, organising the findings around the life-course stages is effective in understanding the trajectory of the participants through their working life into ‘older age’. It also reflects how diverse start points in their lives can ultimately lead to common outcomes as participants become ‘elite’ workers. This chapter is structured to show the following subject areas that emerged from coding of the interview data and how those subject areas align with the theory in terms of habitus, capital or strategy.

Subject Area	Habitus, Capital or Strategy
<i>Family background and social origins</i>	Habitus and Economic Capital
<i>Wealth Assets and Family Home</i>	Economic Capital
<i>Education</i>	Cultural Capital
<i>Leisure Sports Arts and Culture</i>	Social Capital
<i>Agency, Moving, Resilience</i>	Strategy
<i>Entre to the Tech Sector</i>	Strategy

**Table 2 ‘How they got there’**

This structure allows the identification of the habitus and capital related to and inherited from their family background and subsequently developed and deployed as the participants move into their early work life in the technology or software industry. Hence, the chapter looks at ‘how they got

there' and aligns to Bourdieu's theory of capital at each stage. For example, Bourdieu (1996) states "the family plays a decisive role in the maintenance of social order, through social as well as biological reproduction" (p 23), so their starting points in terms of family background is a key point of interest in viewing participants' trajectories. Similarly, as Bourdieu contends that "economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital" (Bourdieu, 1986:288), then it is important to understand the level of economic capital enjoyed by the participants and their family as reflected by the family's wealth, assets and home.

The findings in this chapter confirm a number of interesting points. The participants are from very different backgrounds with two from a working-class background, two from middle class families and one from an upper-class family. They are all now in elite positions, so it is surprising they have such diverse starting points. Indeed, these starting points are manifested in their education background with only one participant educated to tertiary level and one who left school at fourteen. In terms of social capital, sport dominated the discussion of leisure and cultural activities during this life-stage. There was little mention of highbrow or emerging capital although cultural capital became more evident in subsequent life-stages in the form of theatre, galleries and a lifestyle interest in food and wine. However, these forms of capital distinction are not important for the participants at this stage. There is a theme of geographic mobility for all participants. There was also a theme of entry to the technology industry by chance rather than as a career plan and they define their careers by the soft skills they have acquired and use rather than by the technology industry itself. The details of the discussion are outlined below under the headings of subject areas as listed in Table 2:

### **Family Background and Social Origins**

Bourdieu states:

*"The family... is one of the key sites of the accumulation of capital in its different forms and its transmission between the generations...It is the main 'subject' of reproduction strategies" (1996:23).*

Bourdieu (1996: 23) has suggested the family is a key site of accumulation and transmission of capital between the generations. Therefore, it makes sense to review the details of our participants' early lives and family backgrounds in the context of capital. I am interested to understand if there are any indications from their background and upbringing of advantages that accrue from the transmission of privilege to them from previous family generations. Capital that when mobilised, is a foundation for the participants to become what Savage defines as the 'elite' who are "on all dimensions, the most advantaged and privileged group in society" (Savage, 2013: 233). The first section of the interview entailed a discussion about the participants' personal lives from childhood to early adulthood and their initial career paths.

Clearly, a study with a small sample size of five participants is not designed to make any claims about what is typical or generalizable in terms of the pattern of capital accumulation and mobilisation for participants who find themselves in elite, senior executive roles in software companies. However, the findings outlined in this chapter provide insights into the different pathways which have taken the participants to their current career and life positions regardless of the advantages or disadvantages experienced in their early life-stage. The findings, therefore, help to identify the different trajectories of the participants through their life course.

The participants were surprisingly candid and willing to talk at length about their personal and family backgrounds. They mostly welcomed the opportunity to speak in detail about their childhood circumstances, their parents, siblings and extended families and to paint a picture of how early life unfolded for them presenting both challenges and opportunities.

I am aware the participants, as experienced business leaders, are adept at framing their answers in a very positive way. However, I felt their accounts of early life and family backgrounds were sincere except for one participant whose 'positive spin' dominated his responses.

Regardless of their actual circumstances, participants stressed the modest nature of their origins but on further questioning, their backgrounds were often less lowly. Their descriptions and view of their positions in early life relative to others was generally understated. In their interviews with French executives, Harvey & Maclean (2008) also observed this tendency to understate social and family factors and to credit individual agency, a trait that Bourdieu (1986) terms as 'misrecognition'. Whilst three of the participants spoke of genuine hardships in their childhood, there was evidence for all participants of upward mobility in their mid-life and later life stages.

When asked to talk about their family, their backgrounds and where they lived when growing up, most participants described traditional, nuclear family structures including mother, father and siblings although there was little discussion of extended family or grandparents. In some cases, a very comfortable, middle-class existence was portrayed. Mike talked in an understated way about his parents who were both school principals:

*So mum and dad paid off their house after they retired from teaching, so they were never wealthy but they were comfortable lower middle class. They were on teaching incomes and their parents were quite poor. On both sides, they never had inheritances. They travelled extensively. My parents travelled a lot over the years including going to China in the year after it was first recognised and a whole pile of things like that. So they certainly gave us, me personally, the idea of travelling a lot. We*

*never wanted for anything. Dad was a member of a private golf club and all that sort of stuff right. But we were, and they were frugal as well.*

It was noted that Mike chose to use class language in describing his family. His account is a good example of understatement, with both parents as school principals and travel to non-European destinations suggesting more than 'lower middle' class and significant cultural capital alongside economic capital. His use of the term 'frugal' is a classic expression of the Protestant work ethic and an indication of strong personal values and discipline being modelled within the family.

For Deborah, it was also a very middle class upbringing but also expressed in quite an understated way. She said 'we grew up in middle Australia, meat and three veg on the table and we had the opportunities as kids to do a little overseas travel and to be exposed to different things'.

For others, it was recognised that their family background and their parents' circumstances provided levels of advantage that would influence their later lives:

*And my dad was by trade an engineer and he became a business director and ran multinational conglomerates, so he was a business person. My mum was at home and was really a primary carer and looked after the household and family.... he probably did come from an affluent background you know.....*

Participants generally had an awareness of their social class as a child and whilst most spoke of a middle class upbringing, one participant referred to 'coming from a classic working class background...my family had a pretty tough upbringing themselves.....my father was a self-made person who was in the trawler industry from the age of 16 until he joined the Air Force from about 21 years old'. Another participant, Nick, who had the least privileged background, talked of his father working 'on the council and so we seemed to move every 2-3 years....I always had a sense my father was running from something – I've no idea what that was'.

### **Wealth, Assets and Family Home**

Bourdieu asserts:

*"So it has to be posited simultaneously that economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital ....."* (Bourdieu, 1986:288).

In order to understand and measure the extent of economic capital within a family, Savage (2013) includes questions on household income, savings and the value of owner-occupied housing. Whilst I considered questions at this level of detail as too intrusive for my interviews, discussion of where participants lived and their parents' occupations were indicative of levels of economic capital within

the family. For some, their family circumstances suggested very high levels of wealth and affluence. One participant, Graham, was the most obvious example of understatement when he talked of growing up in a house just outside of London. On further questioning, the house 'just outside of London' turned out to be:

*a private estate in Weybridge and we had people like Cliff Richard next door to us and Eric Sykes. It was very affluent neighbourhood - a celebrity neighbourhood!! It was and it is now a Russian neighbourhood and that was the family house that my dad built and he said he would be taken out in a coffin and he certainly was!! And then we sold it.*

Whilst I did not ask about the financial implications of the sale of the family house, it could be assumed there was a transfer of significant economic capital at that time. At the other end of the scale, Nick seemed to move every two to three years in the remote parts of Western Australia. 'It was a very Spartan life but I'm not saying I didn't enjoy my childhood because I had a lot of fun'.

Deborah spoke of her mother as the primary carer following her divorce. Whilst her mother was then left looking after three young children, she did also work:

*".....she always worked. She either worked in a job when we were younger. And then, in life, you know, had a number of businesses, small businesses that she ran. So we probably were exposed to that"*

Deborah described her mother as "incredibly energetic and still is, and you know would have a go at anything". Her mother subsequently re-married and her stepfather 'was an absolute rock in our lives, a stabilising influence'. It seems that her mother's energy and drive, along with her stepfather's stability, provided not only a level of economic capital that funded private schooling and overseas travel for Deborah but also set the foundation for approach to draw on this capital which is apparent in her later life story.

These accounts of early life confirm there is a wide range of starting points for the participants in terms of family wealth. For one participant, there was a comfortable home environment, in a very expensive home on an exclusive private estate and for another, rented accommodation in small outback towns in Australia. However, all are now successful as defined by their elite jobs and it is surprising they have such diverse start-points. While they are predominately better off than average, they are not uniformly from either rich or business-focused households, suggesting a degree of mobility.

## Education

Bourdieu states:

*“the reconversion of economic capital into educational capital is one of the strategies which enable the business bourgeoisie to maintain the position of some or all of its heirs, by enabling them to extract some of the profits of industrial and commercial firms in the form of salaries....” (Bourdieu 1984:137).*

Given that capital is transmutable (Harvey & Maclean, 2008) and that “for example, economic capital can be used to purchase cultural capital in the form of an education at a prestigious establishment” (Harvey & Maclean 2008:6), questions on education and the consumption of cultural goods were included in the interviews.

Two of the five participants attended private schools which is an indication of high economic capital accumulated within their family unit. In the case of Graham, he attended private schools at both primary and secondary levels:

*Yes primary locally, still private school and it was a boys school - my early kindergarten was mixed and then primary was boys only out at Oxshott. And then went to boarding school which is just outside of Oxford. Again, you know, a big sort of sports school and quite entitled school*

It is one the most prestigious schools in England. In contrast, Mike went through the mixed, public school system which was mandated by his parents who both taught in the public system. For Nick, it is not surprising that his education reflected the relatively low level of economic capital in his family. He described his schooling as follows:

*I left school when I was 14. I have no further education than that. So my life has panned out pretty well. I've never completed secondary school - I've never done any tertiary education. So just to be clear, the part of Australia that I was in at that time had junior high schools, they finished at form three in secondary school. So when you're 15, school finished. The only way to continue school after that would have been to board in either Perth or one of the major rural centres which means you've got to have some level of wealth. So I was never going past that year of school - that wasn't possible. Therefore anything that comes after that wasn't possible either...*

Nick's experience reflects the effect of economic capital on education at this life-stage. However, only one out of the five participants continued to tertiary education. Even then, the participant originally had no intention of going to university but changed his mind after one year of an apprenticeship which convinced him he was capable of more. He finished with a first-class honours

degree in engineering and the university medal from UNSW. Despite a good secondary education for all participants other than Nick, the low level of take-up for tertiary education may reflect the norms for the 1980's. The ABS statistics show that less than 10% of people aged 25-64 years had a vocational or higher education qualification at that time (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002). But overall, the findings do confirm that family circumstance and their economic capital determines educational opportunities.

### **Leisure, Sport, Arts and Culture**

Bourdieu maintains:

“surveys establish that all cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading etc.), and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level and secondarily to social origin.” (Bourdieu 1984:xxiv)

“the practice of sports such as tennis, riding, sailing or golf doubtless owes part of its interest’, just as much nowadays as at the beginning, to its distinguishing function and, more precisely, to the gains in distinction which it brings” (Bourdieu 1978:828).

Savage (2013) concludes that any analysis of social and cultural capital is complex. The participants’ educational background and opportunities as discussed are important in understanding the participants’ accumulation of cultural capital, an aspect which Savage (2013) as “credentials institutionalised through educational success” (p.223). In order to build a more complete picture of social and cultural capital, the interviews also asked about leisure interests, hobbies, and particularly sport to determine the participants’ awareness of and ability to engage with cultural goods and in social pursuits.

Questions were asked specifically about leisure activities and understandably the responses for the early life-stages of the participants were mostly about sport. Nick who had a fairly tough early life in remote Western Australia spoke of the importance of sport in his early life and interestingly how the church was also part of that aspect of country life:

*swimming was a big part of my life. I played football all my life from age 6, Australian Rules football. Tennis all my life from that sort of age as well and cricket. In country Australia, the world revolves around church and sport -they go hand-in-hand.*

For Nick, his sporting activities were not motivated by “the gains in distinction which it brings” (Bourdieu, 1978:828) but rather it was “.... just what you did because there's pretty much nothing else to do actually.” Each participant spoke about being actively involved in sport through their early

life although it was not clear if this was encouraged by parents or just a by-product of Australian and UK school life. Mike did mention that his dad was a member of a private golf club but his chosen sports were the typical Australian program of football, rugby union, cricket and athletics. Whilst Mike did admit he was not actually a good sportsman, he was “extremely competitive to win and succeed”. Graham talked of playing rugby and cycling holidays around Holland during the summer holidays. Deborah says she:

*always played sport and as a good Australian, love sport, you know, always was involved in netball, softball, cricket, you know I think I even played football with the boys at one stage*

Whilst it is apparent that sport was played by the participants for the enjoyment or it was ‘just the thing to do’, it does seem that it set up each participant for involvement in later life in sport, clubs and charitable organisations which as Bourdieu observes “bring gains in distinction, are techniques in sociability and enable the accumulation of social capital” (Bourdieu 1978:828)

Savage (2013) distinguishes between ‘highbrow and emerging’ cultural capital as an alternative classification to clarify what Bourdieu referred to as ‘high culture and ‘popular culture’. Highbrow is defined by Savage as “classical music, attending stately homes, museums and art galleries. Emerging culture included video games, social networking sites, playing sport, watching sport, the gym and spending time with friends” (Savage et al., 2013:227). There was little mention by participants of any highbrow culture during their early family life. As adults, most participants talked of activities that relate to ‘highbrow culture’ including theatre-going, exhibitions, galleries, a lifestyle approach and interest in food, wine and restaurants and in some cases, jazz music. Also, most participants maintained an involvement in sport in the adult life stage. Their involvement was both for personal fitness (gym, running, swimming) and for team or social activities (cycling, golf, trekking, sailing). I will say more on this in the following chapter which is focussed on the participants’ working lives. These mid-life sport and club activities are more aligned with Bourdieu’s context of sport and capital accumulation. In some cases, sport is used as a means to become involved in charities and fund-raising activities which in themselves are tools for social capital accumulation. However, the key point is these forms of capital distinction are not important for the participants at this life-stage.

### **Agency, Moving, Resilience**

A characteristic which was evident for all participants was the theme of mobility both as children and into their working lives. John’s father was in the UK Air Force and having been born in the UK then spent his early life in Singapore. He joined the British Army and travelled extensively before pursuing his professional life in the Technology industry which then took him to live in Australia. Graham emigrated to Australia after his early career in the Technology industry and subsequently

spent time in Malaysia and Singapore before returning to Sydney. Nick moved as child every 2-3 years for his dad's work and Deborah moved between Queensland, Sydney and Melbourne as a child before she took up very senior roles in Technology companies involving extensive travel throughout Asia, Japan and the US.

The ability to adapt to these frequent relocations may be a factor in the apparent resilience and agency of the participants. As stated, I am interested not only in the 'hand dealt to the participants' in terms of capitals but also how they draw on this capital. "Career success is not pre-ordained" (Harvey & Maclean 2008:2 and in the case of Nick, the 'hand dealt' to him in remote, rural WA was not comparable to the hands dealt to others. He relates the story of how he 'escaped' from what could have been very difficult circumstances:

*I had an epiphany moment when I was 16 and I can remember this distinctly..... at that time, the thought that was going through my mind was there only seems to be two possible outcomes in that part of Australia. You either end up a drunk or you end up in jail or both. And I was feeling very trapped. As I was having that thought and reading the paper, I came across an ad for the Air Force. And I instantly, without any further consideration thought OK, I'm gonna do that and that's what I did. I joined the Air Force. And I guess that's what got me out of there.*

He recounts this in a very matter of fact way but it was an example of agency that 'parachutes' him to a set of life chances that offer significant advantage over his existing trajectory.

Similarly, for Deborah, whose husband passed away when she was 31 and her children were 2 and 5:

*We were in Queensland and I moved back to Melbourne where I had family and support at that time -- it was a pretty horrid time. And so I wasn't going to go back into hotel management because I had two little kids and I was it. So it was a time where you sort of go okay well, what do you do?*

Deborah then went on to take what was her first role in the technology sector – a career path that has taken her to be the CEO of a large, publicly listed technology firm. The following two chapters will talk a little more about the impact of agency, positive thinking and an attitude of making the best of situations as factors evident in the participants work life and approach to ageing.

### **Entrée to the Tech Sector**

The transition to work in the technology sector for the participants highlighted a number of similarities and some differences across the five interviewees. It was a process of career development and evolution for some. Nick and John spent time in the forces before a move into employment in the technology industry. Mike pursued a career in what was at the time, an emerging

field of industrial automation. He said 'I saw myself as an engineer. But through circumstances drifted into technology in my early 30s and stayed in I.T. and I.T. management and consulting ever since'. It appears that even when people have relatively advantaged upbringings, their backgrounds do not automatically translate into a chosen or planned profession.

The experience of Deborah was based on her need to find a job that aligned with the demands of parenting after the death of her husband. A chance call from a personal contact at this time led to her entrée to the technology industry:

*It was really through some networks and some contacts. I went in and did pretty much a contract sort of position for what was a tech start up and it was 2000. Uh, it was a tech start –up and they did sort of application development and they were doing some pretty cool things.*

Her experience was similar to other participants, where their entry to the technology sector was to a large extent unplanned and in some cases almost 'accidental'. Personal contacts and networks are instrumental for some participants such as Deborah in securing their initial job in the technology industry. However personal networks become more important and influential as their careers develop and will be discussed further in the next chapter. For other participants, there is an evolutionary aspect to their early working life which leads eventually to sales-oriented roles which become the platform for them to secure senior executive and leadership positions in software supplier firms.

A common pathway in this evolutionary process is to start in a support or technical role in a technology firm and then work upwards from there. For Graham, following a brief time as a trainee accountant, he moved into a sales role with a recruitment firm, was made redundant and after six months unemployment took a job with a small IT firm on the support desk taking inbound calls for an accounting software package. This role led him to join Microsoft where he worked for 18 years in various countries – an unplanned journey where "one thing led to another". Nick also started his IT industry career in a field technician role after leaving the Airforce. After a series of job moves, he went into a sales role which led to his first CEO position in an Australian publicly listed software company. At the time when the participants began their careers in the 1980's, the technology sector was considered a 'sunrise' industry. There were few precedents or specific educational and experiential requirements for people who were hired. This may explain the 'unplanned', almost accidental nature of the participants' entry to the industry.

All participants described career paths that shared the common characteristic of moving at some stage into a sales or revenue generating role. In the technology industry, "the ability to generate

economic capital was the de facto trump card when it came to career advancement at the higher levels” (Spence et al. 2016:10). Hence, success in revenue generation for the company is important in enabling the participants to move into senior executive roles. As John confirmed when asked what the organisation saw in him as a contender for his first senior management role:

*I suppose the driven personality and having won some sizable contracts and you know ..... When you're a sales professional and you're really good at the role, people will gravitate to being part of the team that you're with. And I think he probably saw some of those qualities in me. And you know, the discipline, the organizational skills that I have.*

There is a theme that emerges from how they entered the technology industry. Participants mostly define their careers by the soft skills and business skills they possess which seem to be of value in a technology company. For those that enter the industry later in their careers, the common theme is the importance of contacts, social capital that alerts them to job opportunities. Having established themselves in the technology industry and more specifically in senior roles with software suppliers, the next chapter looks at how they stay there and continue to thrive and advance their careers into their 50's and beyond.

## Chapter 5 Findings Part Two ‘How they stay there’

*“Domination within any field or sub-field is contingent on possessing the right quantities and combinations of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital... members of the elite within any field are capital rich, and can apply this in a variety of ways to maintain their dominant position. In this way, they reap the rewards of capital accumulation, control, legitimacy and distinction.” (Harvey & Maclean, 2008:5).*

In the previous chapter, the pathways for the participants whilst growing up are shown to be varied in terms of the inherited and accumulated capitals from their family backgrounds. However, in most cases their eventual career pathways into the technology industry reflected an almost serendipitous quality, appearing to be more accidental than planned.

This Chapter is about the second key stage in the participants’ life course as they progress their careers in the software supplier industry. During this stage they move into more senior positions which are elite job roles in a dynamic industry with high rewards but also with high risk. In this section, the participants are asked about their experience in their senior job roles and the factors they believe have helped them to reach and to stay at the top of their game in the Software industry. The Chapter is structured to cover the following subject areas where the common structure of habitus, capital and strategy helps to bring out the argument:

Subject Area	Habitus, Capital or Strategy
<b><i>Attributes for Success</i></b>	<i>Habitus</i>
<b><i>‘Fit for Work’</i></b>	<i>Habitus</i>
<b><i>Reputation</i></b>	<i>Social Capital</i>
<b><i>Professional Networks</i></b>	<i>Social Capital</i>
<b><i>Property and Assets</i></b>	<i>Economic Capital</i>
<b><i>Gender</i></b>	<i>Strategy</i>

**Table 3 “How they stay there”**

Participants are asked for their opinions on what attributes are essential for success in their industry. Whilst the importance of generating economic capital and ultimately their financial performance is acknowledged, the discussions tended to focus on other aspects of their contribution. Factors that were mentioned consistently included trust, client focus, leadership and the ability to ‘harmonise’

the team and the organisation. The consistency of their comments is evidence of the software supplier industry habitus, where the mantra of the 'customer is king' is a prime example of that habitus. Soft skills are dominant and little mention is made about technical knowledge or technical proficiency. The prominence of managerial, soft skills reflects that successful older workers select into roles that reward those types of skills. The Chapter will also cover more about the software industry habitus under the heading of 'fit for work' which draws on Riach & Cutcher's (2014) article that explores ways in which men negotiate ageing in highly competitive industries.

It is also a life course stage where social capital in terms of reputation and professional and personal networks come to the fore as an essential aspect of career progression and protection of their senior positions. The personal connections that are important for their careers are specifically those with senior people and other leaders in the software industry. It is recognised that gender is an important factor in the overall discussion of ageing and work but the intention of this study is to foreground ageing. However, questions were asked on their thoughts about gender in what is a strongly gendered workforce within an industry with an overtly male habitus. Participants were somewhat puzzled by questions on the advantages that masculinity has provided them and by default the discussion tended to move on to company policy on gender diversity. This puzzlement reflects the idea of a deep-seated, often unconscious investment in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot be easily reshaped (McNay, 1999:103). Further commentary is provided on the continued importance and impact of economic capital in the form of housing assets.

### **Attributes for success**

Spence et al., (2016) emphasise the importance of business development and generating revenue as the key for career advancement at senior levels in the professional services industry. Harvey & Maclean (2008) conclude that "homologies exist between fields that lead dominant actors to share similar dispositions across domains" (p.5). And so, it is also evident in the software industry where ultimately it is a performance based industry and "those who are able to perform were those who advanced up the career ladder" (Spence et al., 2016:11).

Graham confirms that 'you just have to ensure this quarter's numbers look good because we're reporting into a US multi-national'. Nick supports this observation 'our primary objective is the revenue number, it's a numbers driven game'. Distinctions were made between different types of software companies in this respect. Smaller, US based start-up software companies were considered to be more acutely driven by 'the numbers' and therefore defined by Graham "as all they are after is their market value for initial public offering (IPO). That's all they care about and it is just personal gain and you see that in the way they attack the market". The 'illusio' of "being caught up in and by

the game” of business (Webb, 2002:26) appears to be stronger in start-up software companies where short term, personal financial gain is the main incentive.

Mike, whose career as with other participants is with larger software companies, took the financial performance aspect of the role almost for granted but also extended the conversation on how senior executives maintain their seniority to other important factors:

*So you know there's some just hygiene issues you've got to be good at managing – the numbers, the financials, the profit and loss, the administrative running of the business. But there are lots of people to do that, particularly in a software orientated organization that's all about people. And also you've got to have really strong leadership skills. You've got to have honesty and transparency with people, you build trust and all those things.*

Indeed, much of the discussion about attributes for their success revolved around factors beyond financial performance. There is generally much discussion of the importance of building trust between themselves and their staff and their customers. The mantra of ‘customer is king’ dominated the commentary by the participants on what made their company and themselves successful and in turn ‘kept them at the top’. Graham expressed this in terms of not being competitive for himself and his financial targets but by being competitive for his ‘customers success’:

*I'm not competitive in the same way that people who are fighting for the deal – ‘cos the deal is not what I am fighting for - the success is what I am fighting for but that doesn't happen at the deal, it happens at the end of the project when it is actually delivered.*

Deborah also spoke at length about being ‘client-focussed’ as an important part of her recipe for success:

*I think I've always been client-focused and I'm the person that needs to be the bridge from the customer back into the organization - because the customer shouldn't need to navigate an organization, that's my job. I have that balance of making sure that you get the outcome for the customer because if you've got client satisfaction then usually revenue and everything else follows.*

Social skills are clearly very valuable in these roles and in the case of Deborah, this capability links back to her earlier family experience with an educated, working mother and ‘lively’ sisters with whom she needed to learn both assertiveness and cooperation.

This client focussed approach which is espoused consistently by all participants during their interviews reflects the habitus generated by the ‘field’ of a software supplier company. Covaleski et al. (1998) state this habitus or dispositions from the industry ensure that work-goals, language and

lifestyle come to reflect the imperatives of the organisation such that habitus includes not only the organisational norms and values but also “the gestures, postures and gait that become durably incorporated in the body” (Bourdieu 1993:86). The ‘customer is king’ and a ‘client focussed approach’ are examples of these organisational imperatives that can be both conscious and unconscious (Webb, 2002).

Participants were also consistent in emphasising the importance of leadership versus management as an approach and business philosophy that underpinned their success and ability to ‘stay at the top’. John is very forthright on this aspect of his success:

*Well, number one is leadership and it's not management. Management is about control. And leadership is never about control. It's about providing the environment where people will be successful. And the team comes together and the whole is bigger than the individual parts.*

The participants say little about the relevance or importance of technical skills for their job positions. Their emphasis is on leadership and client management and development. It is a similar situation to that observed by Spence et al. (2016) in the Professional Services industry where “the soft skill set which distinguished partners from non-partners was built around understanding client needs, being perceptive, knowing the market and holding meaningful conversations with senior management” (p 14).

Deborah adds to this view:

*I don't know whether it's innate or whether you know you learn it over time but you know obviously I've got a style that means I take people on the journey and they want to work you know around me and with me.*

Riach (2014) says that “professional settings are viewed as cultivating shared outlooks, attitudes and dispositions” (p 774) and the consistency of views on leadership and focus on customer success as contributors to their personal success reflect the habitus of the field. Thus, the habitus is shaped by the demands of the job (Riach, 2014).

Nick adds to this debate with comments on personal style as an important component of successful leadership as distinct from being a manager through the application of soft rather than hard skills:

*...there's a hard edge required in a manager role that doesn't come naturally to me. I'm a conflict avoider. I don't like conflict. Good managers have to embrace conflict to a large extent. But as a leader, I work well across functions, so I tend to harmonize people. The ability to harmonize in an organization while still leading within your area is actually really important.*

In order to gain further insight into the participants' opinions on what has made them successful, I did ask what was lacking in colleagues, peers or other managers they felt had failed in some way. They outlined the need for 'commercial acumen' as a basic requirement performance in their roles. Trust and authenticity were words frequently used as a success factor or a reason for failure if it was lacking:

*I think trust is a large factor. I think people will follow, work with and support people they trust. And I think trust comes through, it's a word that's overused, but through authenticity. I've seen a lot of people where the authenticity isn't there. And so they don't have the team support and you're only really as good as the team.*

Others when asked this question cited self-interest and self-seeking behaviours as limiting traits for those who have not made it as far in their profession as they might hope for:

*..... I think there's that balance where I've seen some potential leaders where the ego has got them carried away - they have been so ego centric. It's masked some of their other qualities. Their aspirations are political and perhaps self-seeking. And it hasn't served them well.*

So there is remarkable consistency of views on what does and does not make people succeed at their levels in their industry. Words and ideas that are frequently used in the interviews include customer-focus, trust, authenticity, cross-function, silo, harmony and leadership. This is the language of senior executives in the software supplier industry, the language of shared outlooks, attitudes and dispositions that define the habitus of this field. This language describes skills that have longevity and it indicates that this sample of successful older workers select into roles that reward these types of skills. In a sense the role of senior management insulates older workers.

### **'Fit for Work'**

The software supplier industry is considered to be a sector with exceptional dynamism and competitiveness and a fast-paced, frenzied lifestyle where devotion to work is a norm' (Comeau and Kemp, 2007; Schloegel et al., 2016; Brooke, 2009; Cooper, 2000). For senior executives in client facing roles, appearance and the retention of a youthful body and attitude are factors they are mindful of, particularly as they age. In line with other professional industries such as Financial Services with its similar emphasis on sales and customer service, there is a noticeable and strong inclination to involvement in sport and fitness by the participants. In a tough competitive business environment, this is a life stage where executives need to ensure they are "built to last" (Cutcher & Riach 2017:777) and a "youthful embodiment is considered important: it is an industry where you

have got to look cool and be cool” (Bowman et al. 2017:474). The comments of one participant capture this aspect of executive life in the software industry:

*And I keep myself physically fit; I still work out every single day. I hardly ever miss a beat. And would work out pretty intensely, an hour and a half every day and have done since my early 20s. I'm still carrying a little bit more weight than I should but I'm still super fit.... And that's important to me. I want to look good, feel good....*

Nick confirms the importance attached to ‘fitness’ as a necessity to last the pace in the software industry:

*I'm very focused on remaining fit and healthy. That's a really important part of what I do. So I still play competitive sport. I still have a gym regime that I keep up every week. And I don't think that I'd be able to do what I do if I didn't do that.*

But he also considers his focus on fitness as an investment for the future so that he has a ‘level of health for the future when he finally retires’. The interviews highlighted the similarities of the software sector with characteristics noted for employees in the Financial sector, where “physical activity was a measure of their affluence with active consumption translating capital onto the body” (Cutcher and Riach 2017:780). There was generally a high level of involvement in sport and physical activity amongst the participants. These activities included gym membership, cycling running and hiking: all socially acceptable sporting for elite executives resulting in a ‘fit for work’ ethos and “informed by the need to present a professional body” (Cutcher and Riach 2017:782).

### **Reputation**

Bourdieu states that “the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilise and on the volume of capital possessed in his own right by those to whom he is connected” (Bourdieu, 1986:286). Our cohorts of participants have built extensive and formidable networks of important and influential connections throughout their time in the technology and software industry. This social capital stands them in good stead when it comes to maintaining or securing job opportunities that take them into their 50’s and 60’s in seemingly effortless way.

Spence et al. (2016) found the accumulation of social capital is more a result of performance in an organisation rather than something that is inherited “giving the impression of largely meritocratic organisations where those who were able to perform advanced up the career ladder” (p 11). The data confirms this process for our participants. John spoke of this effect in describing how he was recognised as a candidate for promotion to senior management ‘When you're a sales professional

and you're really good at the role, people will gravitate to being part of the team that you're with.... and I think he probably saw some of those qualities in me'. Spence et al. (2016) also described the process of building reputation as being "able to deliver good results in the early stages of one's career" (p 11) which built trust with senior colleagues and managers. This 'internal capital' begets 'external capital' Therefore, the accumulation of social capital within the company results in more exposure to major clients, influential colleagues and managers and leads to generally being marked as a high performer within the industry.

In talking about the key factors in his career progression and ability to move into bigger and better roles, Mike ranked his reputation as the most important factor:

*I'd put my reputation at the top of that list. Without wanting to sound big headed - there's not anyone that is asked about me, that's worked with me, who would not say you want Mike on your team.*

The importance of reputation and ones' personal network is validated in a study of elite business networks in the UK, where it is concluded that "amongst these capital assets, connections and connectability, mentoring and networking, arguably provide a *sine qua non* for individual advancement and admission into elite business groups" (Martin 2018:24). Reputation is a key form of capital, as are networks and the two forms of capital are related.

### **Professional Networks**

Bourdieu emphasises the importance of the network in terms of our participants connections, stating "Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships" (Bourdieu 1992:119).

The participants were initially selected in part for their reputation and profile as 'successful individuals' who are highly paid, senior executives in large multinational software supplier companies who are able to move with apparent ease from job to job, firm to firm and to work into their 50's and 60's in prestigious, senior positions. How does this happen in an industry which is highly performance based, where job tenure is limited and therefore job turnover is high? Bourdieu tells us "Acknowledging that capital can take a variety of forms is indispensable to explain the structure of differentiated societies" (Bourdieu 1992:119). This section explains the importance of social capital for the participants in maintaining their position in the elite levels of our differentiated society.

For some, there has been recognition of the importance of their network throughout their life resulting in multiple social circles they are able to tap into:

*My school group - we still meet. There is my university cohort from college and university and various work friends over the years. And then there is a social cycling group which I enjoy, parents and things that you meet through your children's experiences.*

Whereas one of the participants, whose tougher, early family life circumstances did not model the importance of social capital in the same way as others and found this aspect of capital accumulation more difficult:

*One of the great weaknesses that I have, one of the things that I've done badly all my life that falls into the category of why do we do what we do when we know what we know, is I haven't networked enough now. And I still don't.*

Whereas for some participants, the contribution to their advancement from their connections, their network and from 'mentoring' is easily acknowledged:

*I'm very active on keeping in touch with people and connecting with people. I'll sit on the phone every night and I'll make calls and we'll connect. I've got to be careful with it - it's not to achieve a goal but it's to retain a connection and then you never know where that connection may come up and how that may benefit me or somebody else.... I'm more of a believer that says if I help others then help will come to me*

There is a combination of generalised generosity, but it is within a context where it is clearly seen as fostering distinct individual advantages. This practice and the prominence of soft skills are characteristic of this sample of successful executives. Participants are quite considered and respectful about how they maintain their network and avoid making it overtly about self-interest. In many cases it is seen as a two way relationship:

*I suppose I've always tried to achieve probably what I consider a balance of trade. I mean I always try to do the right thing by people and hopefully that's reciprocated. So I've always had good support when I've needed.*

A selective approach to building social capital is also evident:

*I don't have a massive sort of social network.... I have some people over my career that I'd consider to be, you know, the personal board of directors or people that I can reach out to (Deborah)*

Interestingly, this comment reflects the conscious or unconscious link that is made between social capital and the impact this can have on career and work related advantage. However, there appeared to be little value placed on the social capital that might accrue from membership of clubs, industry associations and more organised or formal groups. Participants have attended various events through the course of their career but generally they could not find any real value or outcomes from participation.

Sponsorship of charities and involvement in fund raising activities was something discussed in the interviews. Most participants related their personal experience of charity involvement, fund raising and volunteering. Clearly it is done with the best of intentions but it also enhances social capital within their industry and network. It provides an opportunity to mix with other influential people within their industry and their client base and enable a display of participants' high social capital. Charity networks are seen as valuable then, not because they involve people who can help, but because they validate the individual to the other social networks they do rely on.

### **Property and Assets**

It was noted during the interviews that participants had bolstered their economic capital through the accumulation of residential property during the mid to late stages of their careers. In some cases they had built a portfolio of property often purchased with the proceeds from share option grants which were common in software and technology companies through the 80's and 90's and indeed still to this day. Participants spoke of their homes in affluent suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne. There was a common theme in conversations about home renovation which was regarded as a 'project' and the attraction was the end result described in terms of 'an outcome'. By this life-stage they already have substantial economic capital in savings, superannuation and property. This provides a buffer for those 'in-between-jobs'-times and allows for planning and decisions in later life which reflect the privilege that stems from substantial economic capital. This life stage will be looked at in detail in the next chapter.

### **Gender**

The software supplier industry is 'dominated by men' at senior executive level (Comeau & Kemp, 2007). In software companies in Australia with more than 1,000 employees, only 20% of leadership positions are held by women and in technology companies under 100 employees, the ratio falls to 15% (Great Places to Work, 2019). Whilst my study is designed to foreground the subject of ageing and work experience for a number of senior executives, it is recognised that gender is an important factor in the overall discussion of ageing and work and could be the focus for future study on work and ageing more broadly. However, the topic of gender was addressed in the interviews with

questions to understand what resources of masculinity participants draw on and their awareness of the importance of masculinity in their progress and position. The question about the advantages that come from masculinity in the software industry seemed to be difficult to answer for the male participants:

*I don't know, not sure I see any but maybe that's me wanting to blank that out. What is my advantage? Don't know, what is the advantage?*

The discussion reflects an interesting tension between people acknowledging they are supposed to have done something about the issue of gender within their industry but not really having any real idea about what is going on or what is to be done. Indeed, this tension may derive from the view expressed by (McNay, 1999) that “men and women have deep-seated, often unconscious investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot be easily reshaped” (p 103).

Most found it easier and more comfortable to talk about gender in a very general way in terms of company policy on diversity. There was a range of views on gender diversity. One participant believed the software sector had moved on from ‘being male dominated in the 1980’s to now being gender neutral’. Another participant who was a representative on a government advisory board on women in technology in 1992, was adamant that:

*It was a major issue then in 1992. Hasn't changed a bit, hasn't improved a bit. Now that's interesting I'm having some conversations with people at the moment about how could that be? Thirty years on, a whole bunch of passionate people on the subject of Women in IT have made no progress whatsoever.*

The track record on gender diversity differed across various companies according to one participant:

*My old company was a strong advocate and supporter of women and that was clear in the number of senior executive women they had in their line businesses as opposed to just in HR and stuff like that. Another company was a classic old boys club, what mattered was your network of old boy relationships.*

And whilst some felt they could not find enough female candidates when hiring, they also found when they did hire women, the industry norms and expectations were stacked against retaining them after any maternity leave:

*Finding enough women to come in and then to be able to sustain them into middle and senior levels, I've always found challenging. They've always found the hours that have been expected, the*

*challenges of motherhood and things like that have been extremely hard for most of them, because the working hours have been extremely unfriendly for most females.*

So, there was little insight into the issues around gender from a broader societal perspective but positive intent and a strong recognition that improved gender diversity would be a good thing for their business. However, the female participant did provide commentary on gender issues within both the financial services and technology. During her first role in the technology sector, Deborah had a phone call from a contact which led to a temporary contract with a major bank, then to a permanent role and within 5 years Deborah was appointed to a General Manager(GM) position. She was not only one of the youngest to reach GM level at 36 years old, but also one of the few female GM's at that time:

*Going in to work for a bank was quite daunting because I felt like I didn't know that much about the industry and I'd been through not the greatest of times (referring to the sudden death of her husband) and then two small children to take care of. It was a very male dominated bank and that is something you would prefer not to have experienced – whenever you're the minority, it is hard. As when I moved into technology, which was incredibly male-dominated – and it still is to a large degree, you have to be incredibly tenacious, you have to be pretty thick-skinned...*

Since her early role in banking technology, Deborah has gone on to be the CEO of a large, publicly-listed technology and software firm. She is arguably the most senior and 'successful' participant in the sample. She speaks of a values-based approach to her work, emphasises building trust and taking people on the journey. Skeggs, (1997) contends that "gender is not capital as such, rather it provides the relations in which capitals come to be organised and valued" (p 9). In this sample of five participants, Deborah's experience indicates that contrary to Skeggs' research, she has successfully traded the cultural capital of her gender at least as, if not more so, than her male counterparts. Deborah's concluding remark on the subject of gender is well made:

*...reflecting on my career, I would think that you get a much better outcome with balance in the room. Doesn't matter what it is whether it's gender or broader diversity. And I think that we actually have a name for it now but you know even when I was going through my career in earlier days, you know, that the whole unconscious bias was always there. We just didn't call it that.*

During this mid-career life-stage, it is apparent that the industry habitus values soft-skills over technical proficiency. Personal fitness and appearance is also a factor in the habitus. However it is reputation and professional networks and the social capital that ensues which are prominent factors in helping participants to secure and maintain their senior roles in the software industry. There are

interesting observations made about gender but also a general difficulty in making meaning of the associated issues. The next chapter will explore the next life-stage and how the participants deal with ageing in their 50's and 60's.

## Chapter 6 Findings Part Three ‘How they deal with ageing’

The previous chapter discussed the accumulation and mobilisation of capitals through their mid-career life-stage including the mobilisation of social capital through their networks to gain access to more interesting assignments and to ascend the career ladder. This chapter relates to the final stage in the life-course for this study. It looks at their current situations and their thoughts and plans for the latter stages of their careers as they move through their 50’s and 60’s. This age-point is when participants can be defined as older workers. For example, Noone et al. (2018) categorise workers over the age of 45 as mature aged and use the term ‘older workers’ as roughly equivalent. It is a life-stage when “negative attitudes and negative portrayals of older people may be a major factor impacting on their experiences in the workplace” (Browning 2017:29). The chapter reflects the questions and discussion with participants according to the following subject areas:

Subject Area	Habitus, Capital or Strategy
<b><i>Software Industry Habitus (US Corporate Culture)</i></b>	<i>Habitus</i>
<b><i>Cognitive Decline</i></b>	<i>Habitus</i>
<b><i>Property and Assets</i></b>	<i>Economic Capital</i>
<b><i>Cognitive Adaptation</i></b>	<i>Strategy</i>
<b><i>Regrets and Positive Attitude</i></b>	<i>Strategy</i>

**Table 4 “How they deal with ageing**

The purpose of this section is to understand whether our participants think of ageing as a problem or an advantage for them in their work. It was established in the literature review that the broader working population experience ageing as a time of decline and a time of disadvantage due to age-related discrimination and reduced employability. Bowman et al. (2017) contend that this conventional analysis of decline and ageism can underplay the impact of “specific labour market contexts and the forms of capital that carry symbolic power” (p 468). This chapter is therefore structured to explore how the specific market context of the software industry and the capitals available to our participants shapes their work experience at this life stage. The findings will help to identify the extent to which participants are insulated from any age-related disadvantage. Indeed, it will be seen that for these participants, “opportunities for upward social mobility appear somewhat in evidence” (Harvey & Maclean, 2008:24).

The specific market context of the software industry is therefore acknowledged in the section on Software Industry Habitus. Participants express views that address the negatives aspects of still 'being on the bus' as they age and the more positive aspects of ageing as maturity strengthens their position at work. Age-related decline does apply to these participants as they move through their 50's and 60's but they do have strategies for coping that negate any disadvantages for them. The final section looks at agency as "human agency and responsibility continue to matter – career success is not preordained, though successful people still use their allotted capital to best effect" (Harvey & Maclean, 2008:2).

### **Software Industry Habitus**

It was established that a field, in this study referring to the software and technology industry sector, generates its own habitus. It was also established that these dispositions ensure that work-goals, language and lifestyle come to reflect the imperatives of the organisation such that habitus includes not only the organisational norms and values (Covalesski et al., 1998) but also "the gestures, postures and gait that become durably incorporated in the body" (Bourdieu 1993:86). Habitus is shaped by the demands of the job (Riach, 2014) and the demands of the software industry are defined by its dynamic, competitive and fast-paced, frenzied lifestyle where devotion to work is a norm (Brooke, 2009). There comes a point where executives either become disillusioned with the habitus and the norms and values of the software sector or feel anxious about what the future may hold as they feel less able or choose not to match these expected norms as they age. Specific concerns about the imperatives work goals of his company were expressed by a number of participants:

*My company introduced some people practices that I really struggle with. They're not bad practices but they're practices that for me I found challenging. The moves to work from home, hot desking etc., I found particularly challenging because it broke down the sense of team in the community that I found at work. And so, progressively I found myself as an older employee getting disenfranchised.*

Another spoke of the habitus of their company in terms of US corporate culture and their growing unease with maintaining the 'upbeat positivity' demanded by the job:

*I no longer felt I was on the bus so to speak at work -- the rah-rah - the endless positive enthusiasm - and look, that's the way work should be. And I wasn't on that bus and I don't want to be the negative, miserable old git in the corner. I realized it was time for me to move on and hopefully start a new phase of life doing work in a different way.*

The feeling of no longer 'being on the bus' was a factor in his recent decision to retire from his senior position. His decision to retire from the industry was also facilitated by his level of financial independence and a feeling that he needed a 'new challenge and a way of working in a different way'. At 57 years old, the opportunity to retire reflects the generous salaries, bonuses and share grants the software industry provides to its senior executives and for some, the accumulated economic capital that empowers their independence from the need to work at this stage of life.

Nick who is 64 years old and the oldest participant does not believe he is in a position to retire due to a need to rebuild his financial position having gone through two divorces. He works for a software company that is 'more focussed than most organisations on ensuring they maintain a long relationship with the customer...laying a path for the 10 year journey'. His view is that this approach, compared to a more aggressive, high growth company fighting for market share, needs a more mature workforce:

*So having people who have the maturity to understand that model and what it takes to live that model demands people who've been around a little longer with a wider breadth of experience. That tends to favour the older person as I think the way in which we need to present ourselves to our customers, the way we need to behave demands a level of maturity*

### **Cognitive Decline**

Despite his positive viewpoint on these upsides of ageing within his company, Nick is also very candid about the downsides. 'There are aspects of what we do that don't get done as well with ageing'. He described the sheer volume of information that one needs to be intimately familiar with:

*There are probably 15 business opportunities that I need to be intimately familiar with and need to be monitoring and managing and maintaining an awareness of every day. I get them confused. Is that a function of age? I think it is.*

*I'll get into a business review and I'll say very early on, hey remember I'm not involved in this every day. Just remind me. No one seems to think that's an issue but they seem to think that's a fair request. I don't think they think it's an age-based request.*

When asked if there will come a time when he says 'I'm not sure I want to do this', Nick felt that customers do not think his age is a problem and his employer is very politically correct and would not raise age as a problem. However he goes on to say:

*You wouldn't want too many of me in the building. And maybe there's a point where you don't want any. I'm OK with that.*

Whilst not clearly stated, it seems that the message here is there does come a point in terms of age when an older worker is no longer aligned to the industry habitus and this is not a comfortable place to be.

### **Property and Assets**

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that by mid-career, participants have already accumulated substantial economic capital – in savings, superannuation and property. By this late-career stage, it is apparent that their wealth has increased further. This is a life-stage when economic capital assumes more importance as ‘insurance’ for any ‘in-between- jobs’ - times and a strategy for managing insecurity.

### **Cognitive Adaptation**

A number of the interviews touched on this aspect of adaptation as a response to handle the impact of ageing on work and life in general. Taylor, (1983) argued that adaptation to threatening events is a process that centres around three themes – a search for meaning in the experience, an attempt to regain mastery and an effort to restore self-esteem through self-enhancing valuations (p 1161).

These themes are evident in the discussion with Graham when asking him about how he regards the next ten year period for him in terms of his anxiety about the future:

*There are days when that anxiety does exist, absolutely, and generally with the performance for this quarter, just because corporations are very predictable in their unpredictability. We always joke that our last job in tech will be as an account manager. To some degree we both believe that's right cos you don't want to bother with managing people anymore. I just want to go and engage with customers around the technology that I am passionate about and help them get outcomes and achieve some goals. I can see that the hierarchy for me is not important.*

The response reflects the uncertainty that these executives face in a performance based and quarterly results driven industry with the “possibility that one’s future career could be derailed by an unforeseeable poor performance” (Allan et al., 2018:122). It also reflects Graham’s ability to anticipate and withstand a possible setback and to rationalise his choice of options. Whether the cognition of stepping down to a lower position, if needed, is founded on an illusion (S. E. Taylor, 1983) is unimportant for Graham as it seems to help restore his self-esteem.

The participants think carefully about the size and style of company that suits them best at particular life stages. Distinctions have been made between the smaller, start-up software companies which are typified as ‘fighting for market, a land-grab, the wild west’ and the larger, established software companies with a business model that takes a longer term view. These large companies are where

the participants are employed. For Graham, he has a strong preference to work in a larger organisation where employment and tenure is more predictable:

*..predictability is probably the piece people at my age worry about. For someone with my background - I did 18 years at Microsoft - I'd love to do another 10 years at a single, large organisation, yet the last 3 roles I have done are 2 years, 2 years, 3 years. That's not because I enjoy jumping around - it's because these are the jobs I end up doing in smaller companies.*

Graham 'ends up doing these jobs' because having worked as an MD with a smaller software firm to re-establish himself in Sydney after a long stint working overseas, these smaller company MD roles are more accessible through his personal networks. There is a trade-off for the participants between MD roles in smaller software companies and mid-level roles in larger companies. Despite a strong belief that five years is probably the ideal length of tenure so that 'you don't become myopic or typecast as a one company guy', Nick explains the reasons behind his twelve year stint with his present employer:

*It's the fact that I probably don't have a lot of alternatives in all honesty at my age. So, do I think age is impacting me? Going out of my current role into the market and looking for a job, I believe it's a massive impediment. I would struggle enormously to get a role in an open competitive environment. I don't think I'd even be considered. So it's a massive issue.*

Despite the high levels of economic and social capital, the participants reveal the fears and anxieties that stem from ageing in their 50's and 60's. For those in their 50's, it is about maintaining a level of income 'which is always important with a young family. For those in their 60's, there is a realisation that life could be tough on the open market if they need to find a new job. And even for those who have decided to retire based on their financial independence, there are concerns:

*Yeah I'm scared! What the hell are you doing? I'm highly paid, you know, it gives us so many benefits and all the rest of it. Are you mad? I have a very flexible workplace so I get to travel business class and other perks. And you're doing what? Retiring?*

But for one participant in his 60's, ageing held no concerns whatsoever:

*I don't even think about age really at all. It doesn't play. I look at some of the younger generation and you know, I can still be highly competitive - I can outrun my son in laws. Yeah I'll outpace them. You know I'm still combative and competitive that way. Yeah. It just doesn't even enter my head.*

His comments reflected his attitude both at work and in his life outside of work. His strategy aligns with those identified by Riach and Cutcher (2014) where "ageing strategies reproduced the ethos of

competition, aggression and survival by challenging conceptions of slowing down and stressing an inverse relationship between their fitness and age” (p 778). He did however believe that age discrimination does happen in the software industry, particularly in the US. John reasoned that age discrimination may happen due to a “heightened importance of bodily appearance as a form of capital” (Bowman et al. 2017:468) in an industry where fitness and sharp presentation are an organisational norm:

*I've seen examples of that where somebody perhaps more experienced has been set aside because they are in those twilight years. But then again, maybe that's how they presented themselves.*

### **Regrets and Positive Attitudes**

Despite the “precariousness of ageing in a sector characterised by high rewards but also high risks in terms of sudden unemployment” (Cutcher and Riach 2017:174), the participants displayed a positive attitude to their situations as they aged through their 50's and 60's. They viewed this life-stage as a time of new challenge and opportunity. John summed this up with a Chinese proverb which he strongly subscribes to:

*When the wind of change blows, there are those that put up walls and there will be those that put up windmills.*

This is a metaphor for that ‘can-do’ sense of personal agency that is embodied in the participants and is reflective of the organisational norms typical of the software industry. Most of the participants held few regrets on decisions taken and how careers and lives had unfolded as in ‘I’m not a big fan of going back and saying why didn’t I do something? – I didn’t do it ‘cos I didn’t do it’. For one participant however, who started with the least inherited capital, there was a significant regret:

*If I have any regret at all, the one thing I would change would have been the opportunity for education. I just never had that. Therefore anything that comes after that wasn't possible either*

Having left school at 14 and then entering the workforce, he had never been unemployed since. One participant had just retired at the time of the interviews. He did have a list of activities, charities and volunteering initiatives to fill the void of time beyond work. Perhaps this is about the “restless experience of time that makes it ever more difficult for people to give in to the desire for forms of leisure and play that are done for their own sake” (Biggs et al. 2017:1469). However the questions did not address the topic of retirement per se and this may be a subject to consider for future work on this subject.

## Chapter 7 Conclusions

### The Research Question and Its Importance

This paper set out to study older workers and is situated in the context of ageing being considered as one of the most important social issues facing developed countries including Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015). The latest Intergenerational Report (Department of the Treasury, 2015) states that Australians are living longer and will continue to have one of the longest life expectancies in the world. There are a number of interesting and at times conflicting dynamics behind the demographic. In summary, the ageing population will put “strong downward pressure on the labour supply, leading to a decline in real incomes and huge financial pressures on social protection systems” (Martin, 2018:2). Government policy increasingly encourages workforce participation beyond traditional retirement age as a way of dealing with these fiscal and societal challenges. At the same time, ageing is conceptualised as a problem and a phase of decline in peoples’ lives (Biggs et al., 2017). Despite increased participation rates for age-group 55-64 years (Martin, 2018), there is an increased level of unemployment and under-employment amongst mature age workers (Bowman et al., 2017). According to studies on specific industry sectors including Finance and Professional Services, ageing does not seem to be a problem for executive workers as it is for lower levels within the labour market (Bowman et al., 2017; Riach, 2014; Spence et al., 2016). This dichotomy between ageing conceptualised as a problem and time of decline and the research that frames ageing for some workers as synonymous with advancement and reward is the basis for my research question: “To what extent are there specific factors that ‘insulate’ executive workers from the disadvantages associated with ageing and work”. The findings do show ageing is not a problem for executive workers as it is for lower levels within the labour market due to their ability to accumulate and mobilise valued capital throughout the life-course.

### The Relevant Academic Literature

The review of relevant academic and business literature confirmed a conventional analysis of ageing and work that is based on the proposition that “living longer should be matched by longer working lives” (OECD, 2006:3). The literature also stated that government policy in Australia is based on the view that older people are a burden on the rest of society (Ennals & Salomon, 2011), putting pressure on the proportion of the population of working age as the dependency ratio increases as the population ages (Biggs et al., 2017); (Martin, 2018).

Bowman et al (2017) contend that a conventional, economic model of ageing and work based on human capital theory often treats workers as a homogenous group. Cutcher and Riach (2017) state that the “way in which people experience ageing at work tells us as much about their occupation as

it does about ageing” (p.162) and furthermore they state there is little empirical exploration of how this occurs in particular occupational settings (Cutcher and Riach 2017).

This thesis uses Bourdieu as a theoretical framework to examine the software supplier industry. The literature review reveals many studies use Bourdieu as a theoretical framework and find it helpful in the following ways. Bourdieu’s inter-related concepts of field, habitus and capital support a more nuanced view of ageing in a work context and offer a more meaningful alternative to human capital theory (Riach 2014:785). It also supports a more granular analysis to shows how work and ageing is shaped specifically in the software supplier industry (Bowman et al., 2017). Finally, it demonstrates “how an empirical, qualitative focus on the habitus can be revelatory on the informal norms and conventions of a particular industry” (Spence et al. 2016:17). My project has drawn on studies of particular occupations, workers and elite workers that use Bourdieu (Bowman et al., 2017, Riach, 2014, Spence et al., 2016, Savage et al., 2013, Harvey & Maclean, 2008). These studies established that measures of capital are combined to determine who advances in business and whilst “successful people use their allotted capital to best effect...human agency and responsibility continue to matter ... career success is not pre-ordained” (Harvey & Maclean, 2008:2). Therefore, Bourdieu provides a framework to assess how the accumulation and deployment of capital influences the experience of ageing for older workers.

The reasons for choosing the software supplier industry for my study of elite, executive workers were guided by the following factors. The review of literature characterised the technology sector as youthful but not entirely comprised of younger workers, dominated by men who are seen as a privileged group, well paid and highly educated. The technology sector is also described as a “fast-paced, frenzied lifestyle where devotion to work is a norm” (Cooper, 2000). It is therefore an industry that should logically be an exemplar of ageing as a problem. My previous professional experiences in the software industry had sparked an interest in exploring ageing and work in this sector and importantly gave me access to senior executives who are a normally hard to reach and relatively small population.

## **Methods**

Chapter 3, Research Methodology, outlined the choice of a qualitative methodology using a case study approach to operationalise the theoretical framework of Bourdieu. The sample was a combination of convenience and theoretical sampling. I used a sample of five senior executives who were country heads or managing directors of large software and technology supplier companies. The sample was aged in their 50’s and 60’s and therefore familiar with the impacts of ageing in a work context and the industry norms and values (habitus) and had accumulated capital. The sample

consisted of four male and one female participant. The study asked participants about their family and childhood, how they entered the technology industry and how they explained the important factors in their success. A question on how they had drawn on resources of masculinity was included to prompt discussion of issues related to gender. A question was included to prompt discussion of any positive and negative affect of ageing on their career. The questionnaire in Appendix 3 outlines how the questions were organised around categories that connected the theory to their lived reality.

As the data was analysed, it was apparent there were different patterns and trajectories at different life and career stages. As capital is transmitted between generations and also accumulated and mobilised throughout the life-course, the data was presented and analysed according to the participants' life-course. The stages were:

- 1) "How they got there": early life stage which includes family background, growing up and initial work choices as participants enter the technology and software industry
- 2) "How they stay there": mid-life and career stage covering how the participants develop and progress their career in the software industry
- 3) "How they deal with ageing": later life stage which reflects how participants deal with ageing as they move through their 50's and 60's

### **Key Findings**

The study showed Bourdieu does offer a useful framework to provide insights to the extent there are specific factors that insulate executive workers from the disadvantages associated with ageing and work. At each life-stage there are distinct categories that emerged from the analysis of the data which relate to habitus, capital or strategy. For example, in the participants' early life-stage defined as 'how they got there', their family background, family home and wealth are used as an indication of economic capital. Their education is used as a measure of cultural capital and leisure activities as both social and cultural capital. Applying Bourdieu to the study enables the identification of ways in which elite, executive workers in the software industry are able to accumulate and convert different forms of capital in the course of their professional work (Spence et al., 2016). In particular, it is social and economic capital that are important factors in insulating elite executive workers in the software industry from the downsides of ageing. The key conclusions are summarised under the following five headings:

#### *Different Pathways*

Inherited capital did not play a major part in career success for these participants. There is a mixed story when looking at family background and family wealth. Two participants are from working class

backgrounds, one from the top 10% and two who are firmly middle class. They are not uniformly from either rich or business-focussed households and yet all participants have now ascended to elite, executive positions. In keeping with the findings of Harvey & Maclean's (2008) study of elite directors in the UK and France, there is opportunity for upward social mobility and the "individual's chances of ascending the social ladder through a career in business" (p 24) may be higher in Australia than was envisaged by Bourdieu in the context of French society.

### *Mobility*

There is a consistent theme of mobility for the participants throughout the life-course. There is mobility in a geographic sense, mobility between companies and jobs and social mobility. The participants spoke of international and inter-state moves for their family during childhood and mid-life and they experienced frequent changes of company, job and job location. These moves imply a level of adaptability and resilience in the participants which reflects that regardless of "the kinds of capital like aces in a game of cards" (Bourdieu, 1985:724), "the hand which players are dealt must still be played" (Harvey & Maclean, 2008:2). Mobility may provide greater opportunity for agency but it is recognised that mobility also has its own structuring effects and may partly explain the technology industry as a male-dominated sector.

### *Soft Skills (industry habitus)*

At the time the participants joined the technology industry, it was considered a 'sunrise' industry. There was something quite different happening in this sector, as a rapidly expanding global industry with no established rules or norms. Cultural capital in the form of education is less valued in the technology sector compared to more established professions such as law, medicine and banking where inherited capital, family connections and educational credentials are more important. Soft skills are dominant with little mention of technical proficiency or educational credentials as an important attribute for success. The language used to define the soft skills emphasised the importance of leadership, client focus and management, trust, 'taking others on the journey with me', authenticity and harmony. These soft skills and language are the product of an industry habitus where business development and revenue generation are the keys for career advancement.

### *Social and Professional Networks*

Factors that do insulate these executive workers are linked to the power and extent of social capital. Social capital is represented by connections and connectability, mentoring and networking and personal and professional networks. Their ability to accumulate social capital is driven by performance and their track record of meeting financial targets which in turn enhances their professional reputation. The connections that matter in helping to advance their positions or to secure a new job when needed come specifically from connecting with other senior people in the

software industry. The essential social capital for our participants is different to the soft, cultural social capital described by Bourdieu. It is very specific to the software industry which as a field is a well-defined and relatively small 'club' where reputations are built and recognised.

### *Ageing Strategy*

These executive workers are not however, completely insulated from the downsides associated with ageing but they have strategies to cope. Cognitive decline is apparent for some but they learn to adapt their workplace practices to compensate. Their social capital has enabled them to move to new companies and jobs as needed but there is, nevertheless, some anxiety about any possibility of needing to compete in the open job market as an older worker. A strategy used to cope with these situations is cognitive adaptation to help manage self-esteem and regain mastery by being open to moving to progressively less senior roles in smaller companies as they age. This can be part of an exit strategy when they are 'no longer on the bus' with the upbeat positivity that defines the industry habitus by moving to another job where their age-related soft skills are highly valued.

For the older executive worker, this is a life-stage when high levels of economic capital have been accumulated acting as insurance against job loss or gaps in employment. Overall, there is a generally positive view on ageing as a time of opportunity, expressed by one participant as:

*When the winds of change blow, there are those who put up walls and there will be those who put up windmills.*

### **Implication for Further Research (including limitations of this study)**

The findings from this study offer an interesting perspective on the ways in which capital is inherited, accumulated and deployed in relation to the subjects of ageing and work. It should be noted that the study is based on only five in-depth interviews and therefore it is recognised that any claims can only be modest. The interviews were 'lightly guided' and therefore wide-ranging. It was apparent that more discussion time would be of benefit to cover some aspects in more depth. Further study on the subject may provide additional time to conduct interviews more comprehensively. It has also been acknowledged this study foregrounds ageing as the focus but that "women and men experience ageism in different ways and to different degrees" (Bowman et al., 2017:468). Whilst gender has been addressed in the sample and in the interviews, a full exploration of gendered dynamics is beyond the scope of this study. I am aware that gender is an important factor in ageing and work and specifically in the technology industry. Whilst the study has not been designed to handle gender as a variable, this is recognised as a limitation and also an opportunity for further work in this area. In the context of an ageing population and workforce and in an industry which is committed to increased gender diversity, this would provide interesting and useful commentary.

Although the study is a small sample of five participants, it does indicate the importance of accumulating social capital to 'insulate' older workers in the technology industry. This may be a source of useful advice for ageing workers more generally if explored further. Awareness of social capital does not appear to be a subject or skill that is taught within the industry but its prominence poses the question of why not? Soft skills are also highly valued in the technology industry and more research on how older executives define their careers, whether by their industry, their occupation or by the soft skills they develop is of merit.

The study indicates that mobility, social capital and soft skills are important factors that should explicitly inform further research on ageing and work and consideration will be given to the sample and scope that would help verify the claims from this small study.

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01/05/2019

Dear Associate Professor Spies-Butcher,

**Reference No: 5201950538449**

**Project ID: 5053**

**Title: Ageing and Work - How one group of professional in the Tech sector navigate growing older at work**

Thank you for submitting the above application for ethical review. The Arts Subcommittee has considered your application.

I am pleased to advise that ethical approval has been granted for this project to be conducted by Associate Professor Benjamin Spies-Butcher, and other personnel: Mr Paul Kelly.

This research meets the requirements set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007, (updated July 2018).

### Standard Conditions of Approval:

1. Continuing compliance with the requirements of the National Statement, available from the following website: <https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2007-updated-2018>.
2. This approval is valid for five (5) years, subject to the submission of annual reports. Please submit your reports on the anniversary of the approval for this protocol. You will be sent an automatic reminder email one week from the due date to remind you of your reporting responsibilities.
3. All adverse events, including unforeseen events, which might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project, must be reported to the subcommittee within 72 hours.
4. All proposed changes to the project and associated documents must be submitted to the subcommittee for review and approval before implementation. Changes can be made via the [Human Research Ethics Management System](#).

The HREC Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures are available from the Research Services website: <https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics>.

It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to retain a copy of all documentation related to this project and to forward a copy of this approval letter to all personnel listed on the project.

Should you have any queries regarding your project, please contact the [Faculty Ethics Officer](#).

The Arts Subcommittee wishes you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Mianna Lotz

Chair, Arts Subcommittee

*The Faculty Ethics Subcommittees at Macquarie University operate in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007, (updated July 2018), [Section 5.2.22].*

## Appendix 2 Data Coding Table

Interview Coding and Analysis - First and Second Cycle – October 2019		
Codes	Categories	Themes
<b>Family Background</b> <b>Growing Up</b> <b>Parents Work</b> <b>Parents Education</b> <b>Parental Home</b> <b>Moving</b> <b>Travel</b> <b>Education</b> <b>School</b> <b>University</b> <b>Qualifications</b> <b>Sport</b> <b>Clubs</b> <b>Memberships</b> <b>Career Choice and Planning</b>	Family Background and Social Origins (Economic & Cultural Capital) Wealth, Assets and Family Home (Economic Capital) Education (Cultural Capital) Leisure, Sport, Arts and Culture (Cultural & Social Capital) Agency, Moving, Resilience (Life) Entrée to the Tech Sector	<b>1) How They Got There</b>
<b>Life Skills</b> <b>Agency</b> <b>Hardship</b> <b>Resilience</b> <b>Small Biz</b> <b>Large Corporate</b> <b>Networks</b> <b>Leadership</b> <b>First MD role</b> <b>Clubs, Ind Assoc,</b> <b>Attributes for Success</b> <b>New Roles, Next Job</b> <b>Gender/Masculinity</b> <b>Trust Authenticity</b> <b>Reputation</b> <b>Tenacity</b> <b>Culture and Arts</b> <b>Family</b>	Professional Networks and Social Capital - Arts and Charities Reputation Business and Personal Values Leadership and career progression Sales roles Attributes for Success Gender Property and Assets Agency (Career) Outcomes	<b>2) How They Stay There</b>
<b>Plans</b> <b>Norms</b> <b>Regrets</b> <b>Funding</b> <b>Positive Attitudes</b>	Cognitive Adjustment Work Style Adjustment Wealth (Economic Capital) Tech Industry Habitus	<b>3) How They Deal with Ageing</b>

## Appendix 3 Interview Questionnaire

### Research Project Interview Guide and Questionnaire May 2019

Subject Area and Purpose	Question
<b>1 Introduction and Summary of Personal Profile and Professional Profile</b>	Firstly, how would you describe yourself to someone in terms of who you are professionally and personally? How has life to date unfolded? (a brief intro as we will cover some specifics in more details)
<b>2 Social origins (Economic and Social Capital)</b>	As a start, tell me a little about your family, their background, where you lived when you were growing up What did your parents do for work and what was their educational attainment? Did they own their home? Where was it and was it expensive or modest?
<b>3 Educational background (Cultural Capital)</b> a. Schools attended b. University attended c. Qualifications achieved	Please talk me through your educational background in terms of school and further education. Was it a single-sex school?
<b>4 Leisure activities and Family life and Life Outside Work (Social and Cultural)</b> a. Sport played b. Interests and hobbies c. Memberships d. Partner & childrens' schools, education e. Where they live (Economic Capital)	What sports have you been involved in during your earlier years and now? What are your interests outside of work – sport, arts, culture, food, wine? Tell me about any clubs, organisations or charities you are involved in? Tell me about your partners' education level? Tell me about your childrens' schooling – what level, where do they go? What suburb do you live in and what type of house? Why did you choose to live there?
<b>5 Career trajectories and outline of career progression</b>	Let's talk about your career to date – how has it unfolded? How and when did you get into an MD (or leadership) position? Please tell me about formal and informal promotion processes you have experienced
<b>6 Development of skills and Professional credentials and memberships (Cultural and Social Capitals)</b> a. Qualifications b. Courses & Institutions Attended c. Clubs, professional associations and industry networks	What qualifications do you now have?  To what extent would you describe yourself as a continuous learner? What about membership of industry clubs, associations or industry networks and organisations?

<p><b>7 The requisite attributes and characteristics of sales leaders and Country Heads. (Prioritising Capitals)</b></p>	<p>What is your opinion on the key attributes and skills needed for someone to be successful in your position? How would you rank the importance of those attributes? You will know of people or colleagues who have not been successful at this level or have failed in their roles / careers – can you tell me your thoughts on why you this happened and what characteristics or resources they were lacking? What was missing?</p>
<p><b>8 What the participants actually do on a day to day basis (Rainmaker? Economic Capital Accumulation?)</b></p>	<p>How would you summarise what you do on a day to day basis and what is your most important contribution in the role that you do?</p>
<p><b>9 The changes they have observed in both the company and the industry more generally over their career. (Masculinity, Gender, Ageing)</b></p>	<p>How has the picture you have painted on what is important to be successful changed over the time of your career?</p> <p>Tell me about the changed impact of gender awareness for you and your company. Are you aware of the importance of masculinity for your progress and position? What resources of masculinity do you draw on?</p> <p>In what ways, both positive and negative, do you feel ageing has affected your career experience to date?</p>
<p><b>10. How is the professional habitus of senior executives shaped by their work experience as they age? (Habitus)</b></p>	<p>Describe the culture in your company – the norms and values. How are you aligned with those norms and have they shaped you? How does ageing affect your alignment with those norms and values? How is the above linked to age? What are the key factors for you in either retaining your senior role or in securing a new role? How have you secured a new position when needed? Any gaps in work and why? What is the importance of your network – your reputation – your personal style? How do you define your personal style?</p>