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### Thesis

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# The Changing Nature of Employment: How Self-Employed HR Professionals Manage Their Lives, Learning and Knowledge

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## **Thesis abstract**

This research has investigated how one particular group of knowledge workers, self-employed human resource professionals, are managing their lives, learning and knowledge.

Its contextual background is the changing nature of work and employment in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain, informed by the 'informational technological paradigm' (Castells, 1996), and the changing landscape of careers.

Although there is other empirical work that has investigated the lives of individuals pursuing non-traditional career models (e.g. 'portfolio career', or 'lifestyle career'), this research is different. First, it is based on a broader view of a career, where the term career is seen as applying to all life-areas, not just an individual's working life. Second, it has adopted a different methodological approach, applying the Life History Methodology. The research sample included twenty-six participants, seventeen male and nine female, identified through non-probability sampling.

By taking a broader perspective of the term career the research has illuminated how the decisions that these individuals make about their work career is balanced with the needs and demands from other life-areas e.g. family and learning, together with the availability of key resources.

The findings include: a description of the structural changes that occur in these individuals' lives; the benefits, threats, opportunities and paradoxes associated with the self-employed lifestyle, and the strategies adopted for managing their learning and knowledge. Whilst formal learning was found to have an important place in these individuals' lives, at strategic points, much of their learning falls into six informal learning categories.

The thesis concludes by discussing the implications and opportunities for policy making. These fall into two main areas. First, the insights into the different ways that individuals construct work-life balance could help organisations rethink policies aimed at addressing the phenomenon of work-life balance. Second, the insights into the tensions that these professionals experience with their learning could help inform the provision of learning resources aimed at self-employed professionals.

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## **Thesis introduction**

### **Research aim**

This research has investigated how self-employed professionals, working in the field of Human Resources Development, are managing their careers in the broadest sense. Its aim was to discover the impact of self-employment on these individuals' lives in general, but more specifically how they manage their learning and knowledge.

It has adopted a broader perspective of the term "career" than that adopted in more recent work on careers, reviewed as background for this thesis, which focused primarily on the work domain, in particular the impact of changing organisational structures on individuals' careers and the shifting responsibility for career management to individuals (Mabey and Isles, 1994; Herriot and Pemberton, 1995; Hirsch and Jackson, 1996; Herriot, Hirsch & Reilly, 1998).

### **Contextual background**

A number of significant changes have occurred in the global business economy, and in society more generally, over the past couple of decades (Castells, 1989; Allen, 1992; Castells, 1996). Allen (1992) argues that a "... *sense of economic transformation within the western industrial economies has been present for some time, at least since the 1970s.*" (p170). Whilst there are differing views as to what type of economy we are moving from (i.e. Fordist) and to (i.e. post-Fordist, or neo-Fordist economy), there seems to be some converging views that information and knowledge are becoming the primary source of economic value. Castells (1989) argues that "... *a series of scientific and technological innovations have converged to constitute a new technological paradigm.*" (p12). He argues that this new paradigm, the 'informational technological paradigm', is characterised by two fundamental features: a) new technologies focused on information processing, with its raw material being information and b) the main effects of these technological innovations affecting processes, rather than products.

This new 'informational technological paradigm', according to Castells (1989), is having a fundamental effect on business and society more broadly as processes enter into the domain of human activity, which in turn affects social structures and organizations. Within this new

technological paradigm, knowledge has become the material source of productivity and hence economic growth and social well-being. So as Castells (1989) observes, the capacity of these technological changes is not only changing the kind of jobs individuals do, but also the quality and the nature of the work that they do too. One observable change is the increasing number of professional and technical workers employed in 'information occupations' (Allen, 1992); a change that could lead to polarizations in the workforce, with knowledge-workers becoming an elitist group within organizations and society more generally (Castells, 1989).

A further economic change over the past decade has been a shift away from manufacturing-based businesses, to service-based businesses. During the period 1978 to 1998, the number of jobs in the service sector changed from three out of five in 1978, to three out of four in 1998 (DfEE Labour Market & Skills Trends 2000). With this shift, new organisational forms organised around the principles of 'flexible production' have emerged as a way of responding to greater diversity of consumer demands and fragmented markets (Allen, 1992). Some organisations have adopted different forms of flexible working practices including part-time working, fixed-term contracts, teleworking, and Associate Schemes. These types of changes have made it possible for individuals to enter into different contractual arrangements with organisations.

To-date, women have been the main adopters of flexible working practices. This way of working can make it easier for them to combine their work and family careers (Dex & McCulloch, 1995). With women now representing around 50% of the workforce (Labour Market & Skills Trends 1996/1997), the introduction of flexible working practices has become an important part of the recruitment and retention strategy for female employees. But it is not just women who are opting for different ways of working. A study carried out by the charity New Ways to Work (1996) provides case studies of men who have opted for flexible work options. More recent research by the DTI (1998) and the DfEE (2000) provides further examples of men who have chosen more flexible work patterns.

One form of flexible working that has been on the increase since the 1980s, and one that is of most relevance to this research, has been self-employment. Whilst self-employment is not a new

phenomenon in some business sectors, for example the construction industry, there has been an increase in the number of self-employed in the Business and Miscellaneous Services sector. Urwin and Alpin (1996) suggest that this shift may be due to changing organisational practices, particularly the practice of sub-contracting work back to former employees following organisational downsizing.

The career choices of individuals in this research have been influenced by a combination of structural change and their own desire to have more control over their lives. Despite the increase in other forms of flexible working over the past decade, such as part-time working, several in this research chose self-employment as a career option as they felt that it would provide greater flexibility, as well as higher earnings potential, than other forms of flexible working.

### **The changing landscape of careers**

The broader structural changes, outlined above, have implications for individuals and their careers (Schein, 1996). Here, I am using the term career in the plural, reflecting one school of thought about the career whereby the term is applied to other life-areas, not just an individual's paid work (Barley, 1989). Up until the 1980s, there had been relative stability and predictability in career terms for individuals with the dominant view of a career being "*A succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered predictable sequence.*" (Wilensky, 1960). This structure and order in career terms gave individuals a sense of security. However as organisations re-structured and de-layered, traditional career models based on the Wilensky (1960) definition, came under question. Schein (1996) questions whether the concept of an organizational career is still viable as individuals' working lives now consist of more fragmented sets of jobs. Other writers (Herriott and Pemberton, 1995; Herriott, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998) argue how a shift in the psychological contract of employment is having an impact on how individuals perceive a career.

During the nineties the concept of the 'boundaryless career' (Mirvis and Hall, 1994) and the self-managed career (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995; Hirsch 1996) began to emerge in the careers literature. These models are based on the assumption that it is the individual who is responsible for

managing his/her own career; something that in the past individuals would have relied on, and indeed often expected, organisations to do for them. Other new perspectives on careers began to emerge too, with careers being constructed as accumulations of information and knowledge, as opposed to purely progression in work experience (Bird, 1994).

Given the structural changes that have occurred in organisations over the past decade the issue of job security and employability has become a key concern for individuals. This has prompted some to rethink what they want from a career. However, instead of being passive players, during times of change some individuals are beginning to influence the change process for themselves. This has involved carving out a career that is more consistent with their own model of career success. For example, during the late 1980s and 1990s the concept of 'portfolio working' (Handy, 1989) and 'downshifting' entered into the discourse of careers literature. Marshall (1995), for example, studied the careers of senior women managers who chose to "move on" to a different phase in their careers in order to take into account "... *concerns and life considerations, other than employment.*" (Marshall, 1995, p19).

Whilst downshifting is perhaps more commonly associated with women and their careers, there are signs that this is not exclusively the case. A study of alternative career patterns for men, conducted by New Ways To Work (1996), indicates how some men are now looking for a career that enables them to have a more satisfactory balance between their work and family lives.

Over the six-year period in which the research for this thesis has been conducted, the tensions relating to work-life balance have been brought into the public domain with more individuals voicing their desire for a better work-life balance (Filipczak, 1994; Glynn, 2000). The establishment of the '*Employers for Work-Life Balance*' forum is one indication that employers are beginning to pay attention to individuals' concerns about work-life balance. The forum, chaired by Lloyds TSB Group plc, aims to provide a forum where employers can share policies and practices relating to work-life balance. At the time of writing this thesis twenty-two organisations had joined the Employers for Work-Life Balance forum. Work-life balance has also become part of the political agenda. In March 2000, the Minister for Employment and Equal Opportunities launched

its Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund. This scheme is intended to provide support to employers in both the private, public and voluntary sectors who want to initiate work-life balance policies and practices within their own organisations.

Poised as we are at the start of the 21st century the landscape of careers does seem to be changing: some individuals, such as those who participated in this research, are now working in more fluid ways with organisations. For these, the relationship with employers is that of a supplier relationship as opposed to an employer-employee relationship.

### **Structural changes in the workplace and implications for learning**

Structural changes in the workplace i.e. the shift from manufacturing to service-based businesses, where the means of production is information and knowledge, are having implications for the supply and demand for certain skills. Over the past thirty years there has been a shift in demand away from manual skills to cognitive abilities, for example problem solving, communication, and interpreting information (DfEE National Skills Task Force, 2000). Where these skills are in short supply, organisations are finding that they are struggling to recruit and retain employees (Gubman, 1998). Castells (1989) points out how in knowledge societies “*Labour has to be formed, educated, trained, and retrained, in flexible manipulation of symbols determining its ability constantly to reprogram itself.*” (p15). As the pace of change in society increases then the life-span of certain knowledge becomes shortened. Individuals in all sectors of employment, not just those working in the professions and in knowledge industries, are finding that they need to constantly update their skills and knowledge in order to maintain their employability; a situation that reinforces the need for continuous learning.

Encouraging and supporting continuous learning is something that businesses, governments and educationalists alike perceive as being crucial for the changing employment context. Speaking at the UK Presidency of the European Lifelong Learning Conference, Professor Coolahan pointed out how “... *the only way forward, the only way we can respond to these kind of fundamental challenges to our society is through lifelong learning.*” (Coolahan, 1998). Encouraging Lifelong

part of the political agenda, evident through the provision of resources such as Learn Direct, Individual Learning Accounts and Career Development Loans.

Other writers (Fuller and Unwin, 1998) argue that given the continuous changes in today's workplace, particularly new technologies and globalisation, there is a need to adopt a more integrated approach to learning. This would emphasise the positive relationship between work and learning, including learning from day-to-day experiences and informal learning communities (Wenger, 1998).

For those working within organisations there are normally structures and systems in place to help them plan and manage their learning, such as appraisal systems, mentors, peer support group, or career planning workshops (Mabey and Iles, 1994). However, for those following an independent career, like those in this research, these same systems do not always exist. Part of the managing task for these individuals involves planning and resourcing their own learning, as well as mobilising the necessary support structures.

### **The focus of this research**

Although there have been other studies of individuals following more independent careers (Cohen 1997; Mallon 1998; Dex et al 2000), this research is different in a number of ways. First, it is based on a much broader view of a career where the term is seen as applying to other life-areas, not just an individual's work. The research has thus been as much concerned with uncovering and understanding the interactions across life-areas (e.g. learning, work and family), as it has in capturing key events and decisions points in an individual's work career.

Second, it has focused on individuals working in the same professional discipline (i.e. Human Resources). The role of Human Resources (HR) within organisations has changed over the past decade with the HR function moving towards a more strategic role i.e. working in a business-partner role, rather than being purely a provider of HR administrative services to the business (Ulrich, 1998). In order to make this strategic shift HR practitioners have sought ways of delivering the HR administrative services in more cost-effective ways. This has been achieved by: delegating



certain operational tasks to line managers; outsourcing certain services to third party suppliers (e.g. training and development); establishing centralised HR service centres and through providing employees with a number of self-service tools offered through intranet technologies (e.g. Yellow Pages systems, tools for making comparisons about different benefits packages). HR practitioners, within organisations are becoming service purchasers as opposed to service deliverers. These changes have created a demand for independent HR professionals who are prepared to work with organisations on a more flexible basis i.e. on short-term contracts or on an Associate basis, to help deliver these new flexible services. The work carried out by individuals who participated in this research was quite broad-ranging. Some were trainers, some worked as management developers and some provided one-to-one services to clients (e.g. coaching, mentoring, or counselling).

One final way in which this research is different is that it has addressed the critical importance of learning amongst self-employed professionals. It has investigated how these self-employed professionals manage their learning and knowledge both day-to-day, as well as longer-term.

There were personal reasons for wanting to research the changing landscape of careers. This stemmed from a need to make sense of a particular phase in my own life. In the early 1990s I gave up a traditional career after fifteen years and returned to full-time higher education. After graduating I became self-employed. This way of working meant that I could spend more time with my daughter who was still very young at that time.

Whilst it was this change in my own personal situation that set me off down this path of enquiry to discover how other self-employed human resource professionals manage their careers, there were other motivating factors. First, as a knowledge worker myself, it is important that I keep my own knowledge about changes in the world of work, employment and careers up-to-date to enhance my own credibility with employers (i.e. purchasers of my services). I felt that having a PhD would enable me to build this credibility. Second, I felt that the learning process associated with carrying out a PhD would equip me with new skills that I could apply directly to my business.

Third, the opportunity to contribute to the learning and careers literature at a time when new ideas and concepts are being formulated was appealing and challenging.

Despite an initial interest in women's changing careers, the research has included a mixed gender sample (17 male and 9 female). The participants were identified on the basis of 'non-probability' sampling (Hornby and Symon, 1994). In other words they were included on the basis that they had information about the process and the phenomenon being studied. Some were identified from my own network, others were identified by placing advertisements in Sesame (the Open University Student Union Newsletter) and Open Eye (the monthly magazine of the Open University Alumni Community).

The research was designed to identify how self-employed HR professionals are managing their lives in the broadest sense. It has addressed areas such as:

- a) the factors that influenced individuals' decision to become self-employed including what was happening in each of their separate life-areas around the time of the transition;
- b) how individuals make decisions about their work career and how this relates to other aspects of their lives e.g. their learning, or family career;
- c) how individuals make decisions about how much and when to invest in their learning and knowledge assets, and
- d) the tensions and opportunities presented by the self-employed lifestyle and how individuals manage these.

The decision to focus on self-employed HR professionals was taken for two key reasons. First, the changing role of HR, from operational to strategic (Ulrich, 1998), has opened up opportunities for HR practitioners to work with organisations on more flexible work contracts. Second, as a member of the self-employed HR community myself, I had a personal interest in gaining an understanding of how self-employment is impacting on the lives of individuals in a similar situation to myself.

sociology, anthropology, as well as management theory and practice.

**Chapter 3** includes the broader methodological considerations taken into account when carrying out this research together with details about the specific methodologies used. The main methodology used was the Life History Methodology. This methodological approach was adopted for a number of reasons. First, it is an established methodology within the Social Sciences for gaining an understanding of individuals' life experiences. It encapsulates the three important components of career theory adopted by the Chicago School of Sociology (Barley, 1989): situational (i.e. social context), relational (i.e. interaction with different strands of an individuals' lives as well as other social actors) and chronological (i.e. changes over time). Second, the Life History Methodology, when combined with Life Course Analysis, provides a means for overcoming many of the issues relating to validity and reliability associated with qualitative research (Dex, 1991; Farnes, 1996). It provides a mechanism for collecting factual data about individuals' lives that can be systematically analysed for inter and intra career areas, as well as for gathering subjective data. Third, the Life History Methodology is consistent with more contemporary career theory where careers are perceived in a more integrative way (Hall, 1991; Schein, 1996).

**Chapters 4, 5 and 6** set out the main findings from the research. These are presented in separate chapters to enable different aspects of individuals' lives i.e. their learning, work and family careers to unfold gradually. Chapter four sets out the formal learning experiences of participating individuals (i.e. learning that has led to some form of externally recognised qualification). Chapter five sets out details about participating individuals' combined work and learning careers. This includes adding in details about individuals' informal learning experiences, enabling this type of learning to be seen in context. The chapter includes factual data about individuals' work careers i.e. the timing and sequencing of key events, as well as subjective data i.e. an individual's reflections about these events. Chapter six provides details about individuals' familial situation, as well as drawing together the inter-relationships and inter-dependencies with their work and learning careers.

**Chapter 7**, the integration chapter, begins by summarising the broader structural changes that have occurred in these individuals' lives since becoming self-employed. Changes in the nature of the work that they do, as well as where work takes place are considered, as are changes in the relationship they have with employers and within familial roles. The chapter then moves on to draw together the strategies that individuals adopt when making decisions about lives. For this level of analysis a tentative Resource-based Life Management model is introduced and applied. This model helps draw together the managing strategies that individuals adopt for managing the interactions across all three life-areas.

**Chapter 8** sets out the main conclusions of the research and discusses the key areas of contribution. These include:

- a) **Methodology** - the application of the Life History Methodology to the study of the careers of one particular category of flexible workers i.e. self-employed professionals working in the field of Human Resources.
- b) **Literature** – adding to the existing body of knowledge in the field of careers, adult learning (particularly how professionals manage their learning), as well as knowledge management at the individual level.
- c) **Implications and opportunities for policy making**. This covers two main areas. First, the policy implications of adopting flexible working practices as an enabler of work-life-balance. Second, the opportunities for providers of learning resources directed at self-employed professionals.

The chapter concludes with a discussion about the limitations of this research together with suggestions for further research.

# **Chapter 1: The changing nature of work, employment and careers in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Britain**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter sets out the contextual background to this research. It begins with outlining the key structural changes that have occurred in the world of work and employment over the past ten to fifteen years. In addition it provides an overview of the macro level forces that have influenced these. It emphasises how the shift towards a service economy based on flexible production models has influenced the demand for, as well as the supply of, different flexible work options such as part-time working and self-employment.

The chapter then maps out the key developments in the evolution of thinking about careers drawing on existing theoretical and empirical careers' literature. The aim is to illustrate how the concept of career is changing in parallel with the broader structural changes outlined at the start of the chapter rather than to provide an in-depth evaluation of existing careers literature.

## **1.2 Macro level forces affecting work and employment**

This section sets out the key macro level changes that have influenced the nature of work and employment from the mid-1980s onwards. It provides important contextual information background prior to the discussion about the changing landscape of careers in the next section. Other writers (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1977; Pettigrew, 1985) have stressed the importance of paying attention to the wider contextual framework of any phenomenon being studied as this enables us to see how individuals recreate structures for themselves, as well as being affected by structural change. Having an understanding of these broader structural changes will help put the findings of this research into context.

A number of significant changes have occurred in the global business economy, and in society more generally over the past couple of decades (Castells, 1989; Allen, 1992). Allen (1992) argues how a "... *sense of economic transformation within the western industrial economies has been present for some time, at least since the 1970s.*" (p170). Whilst there are differing views as to what type of economy we are moving from (i.e. Fordist economy) and to (i.e. post-Fordist, or neo-

Fordist economy), there are some converging views that information and knowledge are becoming the primary source of economic value (Castells, 1989). Castells argues how "... a series of scientific and technological innovations have converged to constitute a new technological paradigm (Castells, 1989, p12) and "... what differentiates the current process of technological change is that its raw material is information, and so is its outcome." (p13). This new paradigm, the 'informational technological paradigm', Castells (1989) points out is characterised by two fundamental features: a) the core new technologies are focused on information processing, so its raw material is information, and b) the main effects of these technological innovations are on processes rather than products. This is having a fundamental effect on both businesses and society since processes enter into the domain of human activity, which affect social structures and organizations.

As Castells (1989) observes the capacity of these technological changes is not only changing the kind of jobs individuals do but also the quality and the nature of the work that they do too. One observable change is an increase in the number of professional and technical workers employed in 'information occupations' (Allen, 1992). This shift could lead to polarizations in the workforce, with knowledge-workers becoming an elitist group within organizations and within society more generally (Castells, 1989).

The remaining discussion in this section is structured around the PEST model. PEST is a technique drawn from Strategic Management to enable the political, economic, social and technological forces that have influenced a particular phenomenon under investigation to be drawn out in a systematic way (Pettigrew, 1985).

At the **Political Level**, policies designed to free up the economy have had an effect on employment. These changes include a) the deregulation of public services, with these services being put in the control of the private sector. This has resulted in them being opened up to market forces and b) the removal of restrictions on foreign trade, and within the European Union, enabling

the freer movement of goods and services purchased abroad. Each of these changes have informed the way in which organisations plan, resource and manage their operations.

The critical importance of continuous learning as a means of sustaining business during times of continuous economic change has also become part of the political agenda, with the Government introducing policies to encourage lifelong learning. These policies include the establishment of Learn Direct and the University for Industry and Learning & Skills Councils, as ways of making learning more accessible. Financial support has also been made available through Individual Learning Accounts and Career Development Loans to help ease the financial cost of learning.

More recently the Government has intervened to encourage organisations to adopt family-friendly policies to help address the long-hours culture and the tensions relating to work-life balance. In March 2000, the Minister for Employment and Equal Opportunities launched its Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund. This scheme intended to provide support to private, public and voluntary sector employers willing to initiate work-life balance policies and practices.

At the **Economic Level**, several changes over the past fifteen years have had implications for employment. First, the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s created a particularly turbulent period for the labour market in Britain (Burgess and Rees, 1996). The level of recorded redundancies increased together with an increase in the number of long-term unemployed. During the height of the 1992/93 recession, unemployment rose to three million (Wedderburn, 1995). Second, globalisation has had an effect on business economies. The removal of trade barriers has led to changing markets and consumer demand. Third, the source of competitive advantage within businesses is changing too as information and knowledge become the primary source of economic value (Castells, 1989; Drucker 1993; Castells, 1996).

Statistics provided by the OECD indicate that the percentage of GNP that comes from knowledge-based business is now around 50% (OECD, 1999). Evidence to support the increasing knowledge intensity of the workforce comes from the changes in the percentage of the workforce employed in managerial, professional and technical roles (DfEE Labour Market & Skills Trends, 2000). In

addition, employees who fall into the category of professional and technical workers are amongst those listed in the statistics on 'hard-to-fill vacancies' (DfEE Labour Market & Skills Trends, 2000).

Castells (1996) argues that in the knowledge economy individuals who are unable to acquire the relevant skills, or who do not invest in continuous learning, may find themselves excluded from the labour force. Knowledge-based businesses apart, more and more jobs now seem to involve the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). ICT skills are seen as being essential in the modern workplace (Labour Market & Skills Trends, 2000). Participation in the Information Society is creating a need for continuous learning throughout all strata of the workforce and is seen as being critical to survival in today's ever-changing business world (Coolahan, 1998).

At the **Societal Level**, changing demographics have affected both the supply and demand for certain employees. Population statistics indicate that we have an ageing population. In 1992 there were 8.9 million people aged 50-59; a figure that is expected to rise to 10.2 million in 2001 (Age Concern England, 1995). Of particular concern to policy-makers is that the economic activity rates, amongst older workers, is falling. The trend towards early retirement has meant that economic activity amongst men aged 60-64 has fallen from 80% to 50%, and from 92% to 82% in men aged 55-59 (Disney, 1994).

Whilst some of those who have taken early-retirement will seek out other employment, others find that they are excluded from the later market altogether. A study by Disney et al (1994) into the retirement behaviour of men and women in Britain identified a number of different employment/unemployment transitions amongst older workers. Their study concluded that the expectation of stable long-term employment followed by retirement does not match with current observable patterns of retirement behaviour.

The number of young people aged 16-19 has fallen too. In 1992 there were 12.3 million people aged 16-19. This figure is expected to fall to 10.2 million by 2001. In addition the number of those aged 16-19 that are economically active is falling too, as more remain in full-time employment.



A further change at the societal level has been a gradual shift towards the concept of the 'twenty four hour society' with consumers (i.e. households) demanding more convenient opening hours from service-based businesses such as retailing and financial services. To provide these extended opening hours organisations have had to adopt more flexible ways of working, as well as alternative manpower planning strategies.

Overall at the societal level we seem to have evidence of what Pahl (1984) refers to as changes in the nature and habits of households. Pahl (1984) argues that we have developed a rather simplistic view of households with individuals being categorised as either employed or unemployed.

However in practice the picture is more fluid with individuals (and households) making choices between work, non-market work and leisure.

**At the Technological Level**, there have been significant and rapid changes in Information and Communications Technologies. Two important technologies evolved during the 1980's and 1990's. One was a change in telecommunications technologies providing a hundred-fold increase in the amount of data that can be transmitted over computer networks. Another was the growth in the number of networked computers enabling more open communications systems and new ways of working. These technological changes have enabled new organisational forms to develop, for example networked organisations, virtual organisations and e-businesses - all of which are based on a different set of assumptions about the way business should be organised and managed. In these new business environments, hierarchical structures have been found to be ineffective as they get in the way of providing a differentiated and responsive service to customers. In addition, they are based on a different set of assumptions about the way business should be organised and managed.

These combined technological changes have led to a number of observable changes in the way that work is structured and organised. First, information which in the past would have been restricted to individuals in certain job roles, can now be made more accessible both vertically and horizontally, within and across organisations. This is a change that can affect how and where business decisions are made. Second, these new technologies have enabled work to be more location-independent thus transcending traditional geographical boundaries. With the relevant technologies, work can be

distributed around the world in order to minimise production costs. Finally, these new technologies have opened up the possibilities for individuals to work from home thus bringing about a return to a way of living that existed in the pre-industrial era where work, family and community life were closely intertwined (Baruch and Nicholson, 1997).

### **1.3 Structural changes in the workplace – the shift to flexible production models**

#### **1.3.1 Employment changes across industrial sectors**

Throughout the 1990s there have been observable trends in the levels of employment in different business sectors. Whereas the number of people employed in the Manufacturing and Primary and Utilities Sectors has declined, employment in the Service Sector has increased by 22% (DfEE Labour Market & Skills Trends, 1996/97).

These changes in employment have generated much concern for individuals, organisations and governments particularly regarding the longer-term employment prospects for unskilled men. Whereas the supply of work for unskilled men declined during the 1990s, women's employment opportunities increased. This change has been attributed to the increase in the supply of part-time employment generated by the growth in the service sector. Women now make up around 50% of the labour force and are anticipated to account for 85% of the 1.5 million new jobs to be created over the period 1996 to 2006 (van de Vliet, 1996).

#### **1.3.2 Flexible production models and employment options**

The combined effects of economic uncertainty, globalisation and deregulation, have put businesses under increasing pressure to manage their operating costs more effectively to remain competitive. The ways in which businesses have managed these costs include: re-structuring and/or re-engineering their businesses; introduction of quality improvement programmes, as well as introducing more flexible production models and employment options.

This section starts off by outlining the different forms of flexible employment options open to employers. It then moves on to discuss the flexible employment option of most relevance to this research - self-employment.

There are four widely accepted categories of flexible employment: temporal, locational, numerical and functional flexibility (Dex & McCulloch, 1995; Rajan, and Van Eupen, 1997). These are outlined briefly below.

**Temporal flexibility** relates to the timespan within which work is carried out. The options that come under this form of flexibility include: part-time working, short-term contracts, annualised hours, Job-share, or V-time (where an individual reduces their hours to just-below full-time on a temporary basis) and Zero-hours or Bank (where individuals work for an organisation but do not have any guaranteed contracted hours), and Associate schemes (which include individuals who offer specialist services to organisations on a short-term, project-by-project basis). Utilising these different flexibility options can have significant cost benefits for employers such as reduced National Insurance contributions and other benefits. However, legislation relating to the employment of part-time workers and other flexible workers changed during the late 1990s to give this category of workers similar rights to full-time workers. It has yet to be seen whether these legal changes will have any dramatic effect on either the supply or demand for flexible working.

**Locational flexibility** relates to the physical location where work is carried out. This form of flexibility encompasses: teleworking, working at home, or a combination of working at home and at the office. Teleworking can enable individuals to benefit from Temporal as well as Locational flexibility i.e. offering greater flexibility over the overall number of hours worked and also the time-window within which work takes place.

**Numerical flexibility** relates to how organisations manage their overall resources in relation to the work that needs to be done. As part of an organisation's overall resource strategy they may choose to sub-contract some of their services or indeed outsource complete functional areas. Contracting out work to self-employed professionals would come under this category.

**Functional flexibility** relates to the way in which different services and/or skills are combined in order to increase the overall level of flexibility in service delivery. Today's workforce does seem to be more flexible than in the mid 1980s. The number of individuals employed on flexible work

contacts increased by one and a quarter million between 1986 and 1993 (Watson, 1994). Part-time working is still the most common form of flexible work option with around 28% of the workforce working part-time (DfEE Labour Market & Skills Trends 1996/97). However, there are structural differences within this overall figure. One is that the largest proportion of part-time working occurs within the Distribution, Business & Miscellaneous Services, as well as Public Services sectors. A second is that the majority of those who work part-time are women, particularly women aged 25 to 39, with dependent children (Dex & McCulloch, 1995). However, part-time employment amongst men, particularly younger men (aged below 25) and older men (aged 50 and over), is increasing (Naylor, 1994; Employment Gazette, Dec 1994). This rise in the number of younger men working part-time may be associated with changes in the availability of grants for higher education, leading young people to seek alternative sources of funding for their university education.

### **1.3.3 The growth in self-employment**

The next biggest flexible work option after part-time working, and the one of particular relevance to this research, is self-employment. This sub-section covers some of the general trends in self-employment.

The number of people in self-employment grew rapidly during the 1980s. It is anticipated that this growth will continue with self-employment accounting for 14% of total employment by 2001 (DfEE Labour Market & Skills Trends 1996/97).

One of the difficulties with the category of self-employment is that it is not a unitary category. The self-employed are a diverse category encompassing: independent and highly skilled professionals, manual and non-manual workers, as well as some categories of 'home workers' (Burrows & Ford, 1998). Some self-employed workers work purely on their own whereas others sub-contract work to other self-employed workers. Between 1981 and 1991 the number of self-employed, without employees, rose by 72%, as opposed to 20% amongst those with employees (Urwin and Alpin, 1996). Urwin and Alpin suggest that these differences may be due to organisational practices of sub-contracting work to former employees following redundancy and/or early retirement. During this period the number of businesses increased from 2.4 million to 3.8 million. This increase was

largely due to the growth in the number of one-person businesses established (DfEE Labour Market & Skill Trends 2000). This figure has remained relatively stable throughout the 1990's. In 1998, sole-trader businesses represented 64% of the 3.6 million businesses.

There are gender differences too within the category of self-employment. In general, more men are self-employed than women (Dex & McCulloch, 1995; DfEE Labour Market & Skills Trends 1996/97). However, the number of self-employed women has been increasing faster than that of men (Dex & McCulloch, 1995). The factors which may account for this difference include: the growth in divorce rates and the need for women to have an independent income; to counteract the 'glass ceiling effect' within organisations and to balance childcare and employment (Stanworth & Stanworth, 1995). Women who are self-employed tend to work fewer hours than men. This is possibly due to women's combined work and childcare responsibilities. Figures from Lloyds Bank's Millenium Monitor indicate that 28% of new business start-ups are established by women in their early forties. These are women with familial responsibilities seeking alternative employment rather than return to traditional employment.

There are also geographical differences in the distribution of self-employed workers. Figures compiled for the London Chamber of Commerce indicate that the number of self-employed in London (9% ) is less than the national figure of 13% (Urwin and Alpin, 1996).

### **1.3.4 The future for flexible working**

Some writers (Pollert, 1990; Burgess and Rees, 1996) are sceptical of the statistics used to support the case for an increased flexibilisation of the workforce. In particular they question whether policies designed to 'loosen up' the labour market have actually achieved this goal. From an analysis of data from the General Household Survey for the period 1975 to 1992, Burgess and Rees (1996) note that there have been some changes in the mean job tenure for men over this period (a shift from 10.8 years in 1982 to 9.4 years in 1991). However they conclude that this is insufficient evidence to support the current chant of the end of 'jobs for life'. One particularly interesting finding from the Burgess and Rees (1996) study is the variances in job tenure between different groups within the workforce, with job tenure being lowest amongst those in the lowest earnings

quartile i.e. unskilled workers, both male and female.

Pollert (1990) argues that it is sectoral changes that occurred within the 1980s that accounted for the biggest changes in flexible employment rather than any broader structural changes. She argues that it is the increase in the number of part-time workers in the public sector that has fuelled concerns about the flexibilisation of the workforce and the longer-term implications for employment.

An article in the Economist - *The World Economic Survey: The end of work?* - stresses that the current level of 'job churning' is a normal phenomenon for economies undergoing a period of technological change. The author points out how Britain has undergone other technological revolutions. The spinning jennies in the early 19th century, and the factory automation of the 1930s, created equal uncertainty for employment until workers developed the skills to participate in the new economy. But does it make sense to compare the current IT revolution with the technological revolution of the 19th century? The Economist article suggests possibly not. The IT revolution seems to be more pervasive than previous technological revolutions and the pace of change is more rapid.

Are flexible working practices simply a means to an end? In other words, are they just a convenient way for businesses to manage changes in economic situations? Is the situation in the labour market quite so deterministic? Whilst the ability to be more responsive to market changes does seem to have been a primary reason for adopting flexible forms of employment, several recent studies suggest that this shift has not been totally employer-driven. Research by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, for example, indicates that organisations have adopted part-time working for reasons other than economic ones. Out of the organisations surveyed, 44% had introduced part-time working for economic or organisational flexibility reasons and 31% had introduced part-time working in response to requests from employees for reduced working hours (Wedderburn, 1995). DfEE Statistics indicate a similar picture with 27% of employers introducing flexible working practices in response to requests from employees (DfEE Labour Market & Skill Trends 1996/1997), particularly female employees, the majority (81%) of

whom are not looking for full-time employment.

Whilst there are concerns that most flexible working is confined to lower paid jobs, research by the Institute of Management (1995), amongst their own membership, indicates that nearly 50% employ professionals and managers on a part-time or Associate basis. Creating opportunities for individuals to work on an Associate basis addresses several flexibility issues for organisations. First, there is the option to draw on specific skills that may not exist within the organisation. Second, organisations can draw on specialist skills to work on a specific project, without the overhead of employing these skills on a permanent basis. Third, it can provide a way of attracting and retaining professionals particularly where their skills are in short supply.

The above discussion suggests that there is a growing demand for flexible employment options amongst men and women from different age cohorts. Whilst women still make up the largest percentage of the flexible workforce, the number of men in part-time employment is increasing (Dex and McCulloch, 1995).

The relationship between the demand for, and supply of, flexible workers is a dynamic one. On the demand side, organisations have a need for workers who are prepared to adopt different flexible work patterns so that they can provide a flexible and responsive service to customers. On the supply side individuals are looking for flexible employment options to match their personal/familial situations at different life-stages. There is evidence to suggest that where the supply of labour is particularly in scarce supply, some organisations see offering flexible employment options as a way of attracting and retaining key skilled employees.

The next section considers the effects that the structural changes in the workplace, discussed above, are having on individuals' careers. For some individuals, these structural changes are perceived as threatening. However, others, such as those who have been the focus of this research, have seen the opportunities that these new looser structures and ways of working can bring in career terms.

## **1.4 The changing landscape of careers**

### **1.4.1 Introduction**

As discussed in the preceding section structural changes in the workplace over the past fifteen years have changed some of the givens for individuals in terms of traditional employment opportunities. This situation has implications and opportunities for individuals and their careers. Other writers point out that, in the future, individuals may have as many as three careers in their life-time (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Still, 1993) and will experience multiple career transitions (Herriot, Hirsch & Reilly, 1998).

This section summarises the evolution of thinking in the careers field. It draws on prior theoretical and empirical work from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, anthropology, business and management, and feminist literature. Each of these disciplines has contributed to the overall body of knowledge on careers in different ways, at different times. The aim is to show how and the concept of a career is changing. It will also draw out some of the implications of these changes for individuals, thus providing further contextual background to the research findings.

### **1.4.2 Key developments in the evolution of careers thinking**

In the 1920s the work on careers, conducted by Sociologists from the Chicago School of Sociology, focused on developing an understanding of how individuals construed their career within the context of their whole life (Barley, 1989). They argued for three important components to be associated with careers research - the situational (social context), the relational (interactions with different strands of own life, as well as with other social actors/institutions) and the chronological (moving perspective over time).

In the 1950s the subject of careers became of interest to psychologists. This interest seemed to have developed from earlier work on motivation theories, particularly concerning individuals and their work. Super (1957), for example, extended his theory on 'Why People Work' into a theory of careers identifying a number of career patterns.



In the 1970s, there was a growing interest in careers within the Occupational Psychology and Organisational Behaviour disciplines. Whereas some of the earlier work by psychologists on careers took the individual in isolation as the starting point for their theories, within these disciplines interest switched from studying the individual in isolation to studying the dynamics between individuals and organisations (Schein, 1978). This switch in interest seems to have coincided with the period when managerial careers were becoming more prevalent due to the increasing number of bureaucratic organisations. Focusing on the relationship between individuals and organisations led to the notion of a career as being a vocation. This initiated an interest in the development of psychometric tests to facilitate individual-occupation matching (Holland, 1985) ensuring that individuals entered a career with the best fit with his/her psychological profile.

However Levinson (1978) argued that life choices, such as the type of occupation to enter into, are a complex matter involving many different interactions set within a social and historical context as career decisions are often interwoven with other life choices. He argued that when studying how individuals make career choices we shouldn't deal with the 'choice' in isolation, but instead "... *consider the meanings and functions of each choice within the individual's life structure*" (Levinson, 1978, p43).

Since the mid-1980s there has been an interest in the subject of careers from those working in the field of Business and Management and Organisational Behaviour. This interest seems to have stemmed from observable changes in career structures as a result of changing organisational structures resulting in a growing re-interest in the subjective nature of careers as posed by questions like '*How do people construct meaningful careers?*' (Roberts, 1980). This led to research that focused on the subjective experiences of individuals and their careers (Young and Borgen, 1990; Bird, 1994). So in one sense we seem to have come full-circle in terms of addressing the situational, relational and chronological factors in careers' research, as advocated by Sociologists from the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920s.

### 1.4.3 The relationship between work and careers

Before discussing some of the key theoretical perspectives on careers it is important to consider some of the differences between work and careers. Key questions to be considered here are 'Why do individuals work?' and 'What distinguishes a career from a job?' and 'Does it make sense to separate these two concepts?'

Super (1957) identified three major needs which influence why individuals work: human relations, work roles and livelihood. He argues that individuals are happiest when their relations with others are perceived as being personally satisfying. By this he meant that the individual sees him or herself as a person in his/her own right, as well as being perceived by others as being a person in his or her own right. This recognition by oneself, and others, of being a person in one's own right contributes to self-esteem.

Referring to the area of work Super (1957) argued that individuals need to have opportunities for interesting work that provide opportunities for self-expression and where their skills and knowledge are fully utilised. In addition he argues that individuals seek out a satisfying physical work environment. A further need that drives individuals to work is their need for livelihood i.e. the ability to provide for basic needs. Super argues "*It's not the job you have that gives you security, it's the jobs you can get.*" (Super, 1957, p14). In today's discourse this equates to the term employability. Work also determines an individual's social standing and status, it provides a means for 'placing' oneself within society, as well as how others 'place' us.

Maslow (1961) argued that there are other psychological needs other than physiological and safety needs which can be satisfied through work. In his theory of a hierarchy of needs he argued that through work, individuals can achieve self-actualisation. By this he meant that they realise their full potential and become all that they are capable of becoming: a state which affects an individual's self-esteem i.e. their feeling of worth, pride, influence and sense of importance. If work is so important to our self-esteem, it has implications for the psychological well-being of individuals who are not working, or possibly those not following a traditional career.

Goldschmidt (1990) makes the distinction between work outside the home and work within the home in his writings on careers. He sees a career as something which is socially differentiating, thus a means of reinforcing social order: "... *this pursuit of a career in modern society, like that in tribal societies, offers a basis for self-realisation and the satisfaction (and disappointment) of social life.*" (Goldschmidt, 1990, p247). He argues that it is the psychological drive for self-realisation that leads to a sense of urgency in terms of pursuing 'gainful employment' i.e. employment which takes place within a public arena. By associating the term career with paid work that takes place outside the home, this immediately excludes those who do not work outside the home from being considered as having a career.

Super (1957) perceived work careers as a series of patterns - "*a sequence of occupations in the life of an individual*" - linked to the psychological life stages of Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance and Decline. From studies of the work histories of men in different occupational settings, Super identified four career patterns. The first he defined as the stable career pattern where the individual moves from school to work and remains in a single occupation for all of their working life. The second he defined as the conventional career pattern where the individual tests out different types of work before settling into stable employment in one in one occupational area. The third he defined as the unstable career-pattern where the individual's work pattern is erratic with several changes of direction taking place before the establishment stage. The fourth pattern he defined as the multi-trial career pattern where the individual experiences frequent changes of employment. Super (1957) linked each of these career patterns to psychological life stages thus giving rise to the notion of 'on-time' career patterns.

Whereas it was assumed that the norm for men would be to follow a continuous work pattern throughout their working life, this same assumption did not apply to earlier career theories relating to women. Women, it was assumed, did not pursue careers in the same way as men, as "... *women's' lives will usually include, if not revolve around the roles of homemaking and childrearing. An assumption not relevant to the studies of male career development.*" (Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987, p24). Super (1957) categorised women's careers into one of seven career

patterns: stable homemaking career (marriage after leaving college and thus no significant work experience); conventional career pattern (college followed by working followed by homemaking); stable working career (college followed by work, to be resumed after a period of home-making); double track career (college, followed by work, and marriage and career move along in parallel, with some time out for child rearing); interrupted career (working followed by homemaking, and a return to work only when the children are old enough to look after themselves or have left home altogether); unstable career pattern (working followed by non-working and then working and then full-time home-making) and finally multiple-trial career pattern (a succession of unrelated jobs with no sense of stability). We can see here then how the assumptions held in the past about women and their careers are distinctly different from those made about men's careers.

#### **1.4.4 The rise and function of organisational careers**

The changing organisational forms that developed from industrialisation gave rise to the need for different control mechanisms. Instead of businesses and factories being managed directly by business owners, managers were brought in to manage the day-to-day operation. Foucault (1977) described the role of these early managers as 'surveillance agents' i.e. acting as a control agent on behalf of the owner.

As bureaucratic organisations grow in size, this creates opportunities for individuals to progress up the managerial hierarchy with each position affording different forms of status and rewards. In bureaucratic career structures, career success is linked to position within a hierarchy, as well as certain extrinsic rewards. Together these form the hallmarks of career success. Here then we have the roots of the managerial career, one that has traditionally been associated with white middle-class males. In bureaucratic organisations the hierarchy provides an in-built control mechanism. At each level within the hierarchy individuals are allocated specific roles and responsibilities.

Progression through the hierarchy brings with it known rewards and recognition. These could be in the form of increased salary and benefits, changes in the physical surroundings within which individuals' work, or privileges of some other nature. Each of these rewards reinforces the notion of status.

Several writers have commented on the benefits to organisations of adopting hierarchical career structures. Hughes (1968), for example, argues that in highly structured societies careers serve to reinforce social order by providing clearly defined positions, each with identifiable statuses attached. Pahl and Pahl (1971) also point out how hierarchical career models bring stability, order and security for organisations. Up until the 1990s order and security had been at the heart of the employer-employee psychological contract (a point that will be referred to and explained later). Wilensky (1960) argues that careers defined as "*A succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige*" provides an order and predictability for individuals. New recruits entering at the lowest rank have the least prestige and those at the top of the hierarchy have the most prestige, with the steps for advancement being clearly and rigidly defined. Evetts (1992) argues how organisational careers serve to ensure that employee motivation and commitment are secured.

If we consider some of the benefits to individuals of working within bureaucratic structures, these include: clear roles and responsibilities, known and predictable career paths, stability of income, well recognised status symbols. However, there are downsides to this type of ordered regime. First, as Hughes (1968) points out, where career paths are closely controlled, this can be restrictive, leaving opportunities for individuals to create their own career plan or carve their own niche. In addition, if a wrong career decision is taken, or a wrong career path taken, then this could have serious consequences for an individual's longer-term career.

Second, adopting a linear career model can lead to a narrow definition of what constitutes career success. This becomes linked with upward progression where individuals become drawn into playing the corporate game. However, the realities of corporate life often mean that the rules for progression are not always clearly mapped out or based on rational criteria (Hughes, 1968). There are unwritten rules that individuals need to attend to i.e. the cultural norms that can determine promotion criteria, for example gaining the right level of sponsorship at senior management level.

Third, there is an assumption that individuals will eventually reach a point in their career where they plateau, where they are perceived as not having the potential to progress further. At this point

development opportunities become less frequent, or in some cases, are withdrawn. In organisational terms, this is dysfunctional as it does not allow an individual's talents to be directed in other ways.

Fourth, as Wilensky (1960) argues, the definition of a career characterised by order and predictability can only apply to a minority of the labour force. Women's careers, for example, are frequently disjointed and lack the order associated with men's careers, since women's work spans both the public and private domains (i.e. paid work and domestic work). Traditional career theories on the other hand are firmly located in the public domain.

A complementary perspective on the theme of movement in relation to careers can be found in the work of Marshall (1987) who uses the metaphor of a river to define her perspective on careers. She argues that just as rivers ebb and flow, so too can an individual's career. There may be times when an individual feels that his or her career is moving at a faster pace or times when he or she feels that it is standing still. Marshall argues that these periods of ebbing and flowing are equally important. Drawing upon the work of Perera (1981), she argues that periods of standstill in a career can provide opportunities for development and harnessing creativity whereby *"Our concepts need, then, to develop a dual appreciation of movement and stillness, flow and pause and how these interrelate. This may mean valuing 'stagnation' - perhaps better called incubation and stagnation - learning its lessons and creative potential."* (Marshall, 1987, p284). In adopting a more liberal interpretation of movement, Marshall (1987) provides a more dynamic and creative interpretation of a career. This moves us away from the concept of career plateauing that underpins traditional career theories (Super, 1957; Wilensky, 1960; Hughes, 1968).

#### **1.4.5 Difficulties associated with organisational careers**

As argued above, the term career, within bureaucratic organisations, has become characterised as being orderly and predictable. However, organisations are only able to provide order and predictability, in career terms, when there is relative stability in the business environment within which they are operating. Order and predictability have been the antithesis of the business world in the late 1980s and 1990s where the only constant has been change.

To remain competitive in today's ever-changing business world organisations have sought different ways to minimise their cost base whilst at the same time provide a more responsive and differentiated service to customers. Some of the ways in which they have achieved this include: restructuring, down-sizing or de-layering. Whilst historical information about organisational restructuring is patchy, surveys carried out by two management institutions indicate that restructuring through de-layering was fairly widespread in the early 1990s (Holbeche, 1995; Institute of Management, 1995). Through de-layering, organisations have stripped out the chains-of-command perceived as acting as a barrier to the changes needed to make them more competitive. However, in doing so they have removed the certainty and predictability in career terms that had become an expected part of the psychological contract of employment up until the mid 1980s.

Earlier career theories (in particular stage theories) would appear to have little relevance in environments characterised by constant change. Indeed some writers (Dex 1985; Evetts 1992) argue that theories of careers built up from research conducted within organisations have reified the notion of a career. This has produced a rather deterministic picture of a career with organisations providing structures which individual social actors (i.e. employees) are then forced into. It leads to a set of assumptions regarding what constitutes a 'normal' career. The term 'normal' based on the assumption that individuals have continuous service within a single organisation with regular promotions to the highest achievable position. It also assumes that individuals are single-minded in their career objectives in working towards such promotions.

Evetts (1992) argues that a limitation of theories of careers, linked to organisational levels is "*... the reification of career routes and career structures in research is that such models focus exclusively on developments in the paid work sphere. Careers are only constructed or developed at work and do not take into account experiences outside of work*". (Evetts, 1992, p7). Drawing on Giddens' (1981) notion of the duality of structures (where structures are constructed as the rules and resources of social systems which social actors draw on to structure their actions, but where rules and resources are reproduced by the actions of social actors), Evetts (1992) argues that we need to study careers by considering the interactions between individual actors and structures and how

individual actions can influence and lead to changes within structures. There are similarities here then with Bourdieu's (1977) work on 'structures and the habitus'. Here he argues that as social actors we are both products and producers of our social world "*Each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy, nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning.*" (Bourdieu, 1977, p79).

#### **1.4.6 The search for alternative career models**

Changes in organisational career structures, in the 1990s, have triggered a search to find alternative career models. Despite the removal of layers and jobs within existing structures, organisations still have a need for people. Equally, people still need organisations to provide employment. In the past an individual might have been expected to have followed one career, developed in two or three organisations. In the future it is expected that individuals will have two or three careers over the life-course (Still, 1993), or follow several careers in parallel adopting Handy's (1989) notion of the portfolio career.

By breaking down existing structures organisations have consciously, or otherwise, created a culture where attachment begins to diminish. Whilst it can take existing employees some time to see the implications of changes in structures on their own situation, new employees seem clearer about what the new organisational structures mean for them. Filipczak (1994), writing about generation X, points out "*... their perceptions of the working world were shaped in a time of economic turmoil. Consequently, they tend to see every job they take as temporary and every company as a stepping stone to something better, or at least something different.*" (Filipczak, 1994, p4). However, the something better does not necessarily mean a position higher up the hierarchy. Deutschman (1990), cites an example from his work of a young employee working in a Fortune 500 company who turned down several promotions because this would have entailed moving to a new plant, affecting the individual's personal life. In the past (even as little as ten years ago), this type of decision would have resulted in career stagnation with the individual being overlooked for future promotions.



If the notion of a stable, predictable and ordered career, linked to organisational structures, is being challenged, what alternative models can we draw on? One new career model that has emerged is that of the 'boundaryless career' which is characterised by movement across levels/functions either within a single organisation or across multiple organisations. The 'boundaryless career' is based on an assumption of work as encompassing a variety of tasks with a periodic redefinition of career aspirations and anticipated discontinuities.

Mirvis and Hall (1994) have developed the concept of the 'boundaryless career', introducing the concept of the 'protean career' where "*... the person, not the organisation, is managing their career. It consists of all the person's varied experiences in education, training, work in several organisation, changes in the organisational field ... it is not what happens to the person in any one organisation.*" (Mirvis and Hall, 1994, p369). In arguing for the protean perspective on careers, Mirvis and Hall point out how this creates a much larger career space encompassing paid and non-paid work and where the boundaries between these two domains are more elastic.

Bird (1994) offers another perspective on the 'boundaryless career', defining a career as 'repositories of knowledge' consisting of "*... accumulations of information and knowledge embodied in skills, expertise and relationship networks acquired through an evolving sequence of work experiences over time*" (p326). Bird's (1994) career model seems of particular relevance to this research given the growth in knowledge-based businesses. He suggests that there is a need to acknowledge the semantic characteristics in careers research, focusing on the content and the meaning of work experiences where "*The contents of a career are located in what is learned from experiences - in the information, knowledge and perspectives that are acquired or changed over time as a result of a series of work experiences.*" (Bird, 1994, p.327), rather than the syntactic aspect of careers i.e. the structural aspects including the sequence of work experiences and the hierarchical properties. If we adopt Bird's perspective on careers then the focus of careers' research needs to shift away from extrinsic symbols, such as positions held within an organisation, to the significance and meaning associated with individual experiences. Whereas many other career models exclude those not pursuing an organisational career, Bird's (1994) perspective on careers is

more inclusive. It is thus of particular relevance to a study of the careers of self-employed professionals.

There are two key points to be drawn out from Bird's (1994) perspective on careers that are of particular relevance to this research. The first point is that in a knowledge economy, knowledge is a key source of competitive advantage "*Through knowledge creation firms [and people] are able to revitalise themselves and set themselves apart from their competitors.*" (Bird, 1994, p328). The second is that "*... the responsibility to develop tacit knowledge falls squarely on the individual.*" (Bird, 1994, p337). Both of these points will be returned to again in the next chapter.

#### **1.4.7 Empirical studies of non-organisational careers**

Other writers (Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995; Kidd, 1996) point out that there is very little in the existing careers literature about the career dynamics of those following an independent career, such as the self-employed.

A study by Granger et al (1995) looked at the career dynamics of the self-employed within the UK book publishing industry. This is an industry that has undergone structural changes within the past twenty years opening up opportunities for individuals to work on a freelance basis. Their study was concerned with identifying the personal factors that motivated individuals to become self-employed, together with factors that influenced movement back into traditional employment. The study resulted in four self-employed career types being identified: '**Refugees**' - self-employment is a forced choice following redundancy; '**Missionaries**' - the motivation for self-employment is to have more self-direction over work; '**Trade-offs**' - a need to accommodate the constraints of non-work activities, such as bringing up a family, and '**Converts**' - individuals who had initially seen self-employment as a stop gap but had subsequently developed a greater attachment to the idea of self-employment.

Despite the scope of their own study, Granger et al (1995) point out that research into the careers of the self-employed which focuses purely on the point of transition into self-employment, rather than exploring background career histories, results in a partial view of the career dynamics of these

individuals. Gathering historical data about an individual's earlier career could help build an understanding of how well prepared individuals were for a career of self-employment, for example, which earlier experiences had been more helpful in terms of building the necessary skills and knowledge needed to manage an independent career.

Two more recent pieces of empirical work have focused on the transition from organisational employment to portfolio working (Cohen, 1997; Mallon, 1998). Portfolio working, first identified by Handy (1989), is another form of flexible work arrangement. It involves "... *packages of work arrangements for the plying and selling of an individual's skills in a variety of contexts.*" (Cohen & Mallon, 1999). Both Cohen & Mallon echo the fact that there are few studies of how individuals experience careers that sit outside of organisations.

In both of these pieces of research Cohen and Mallon explored the experiences of individuals who had moved from an organizational career to portfolio career. The Cohen (1997) research focused on the experiences of middle and senior women managers (drawn from different business sectors) who had gone on to start their own business. The research by Mallon (1998) had a similar focus. However she included a mixed gender sample drawn from a single business sector - the National Health Service. Both of these studies explored: the factors that had influenced individuals' decision to leave organizational employment; the initial expectations of portfolio working and the actual experiences of portfolio working. The authors considered factors such as: whether individuals' expectations of freedom and control were fulfilled; the level of preparedness for portfolio working; the impact of portfolio work on domestic arrangements; relationships with other portfolio workers and the extent to which individuals had reconciled their experience of portfolio working, particularly with regard to the issue of social inclusion.

Both the Cohen (1997) and Mallon (1998) research provide mixed findings in terms of the extent to which portfolio working brings the rewards that individuals expect i.e. enhanced freedom and control and greater opportunities for learning and development. Some of the difficulties they encountered with this career option include greater freedom and variety of work, but set against financial uncertainty and a loss of attachment. Although they experienced opportunities to grow

and develop, these often proved problematic outside the support framework of organizational employment. Their findings suggest that individuals' experience of portfolio working is more about reconstructing boundaries as opposed to breaking free from existing organizational boundaries. On a more positive note, the findings indicate that portfolio working did enable most individuals to find a better balance in their lives than when they had been in traditional employment. One final conclusion from these two pieces of research, that Cohen and Mallon described as particularly interesting, is the extent to which individuals saw their own experiences of personal change as mirroring wider social change.

A more extensive study (436 respondents) of the lives of freelance workers working in the British television industry, was conducted by Dex et al (2000). The television industry has undergone extensive regulatory and technological changes over the past couple of decades resulting in a deregulated workforce where over fifty per cent works on a freelance basis. The Dex et al study focused on the uncertainty associated with freelance working and the strategies individuals adopted for managing this. Again the sample was of mixed gender (56% men and 44% female) and included ages from 21 to 65. Most of the individuals worked on a fixed-term contract basis, with contracts ranging from one to thirty months.

The key finding from the Dex et al (2000) study was that the majority of individuals found the uncertainty associated with this way of working was problematic, which resulted in them experiencing stress. However the level of stress experienced varied, depending on a number of factors: personal attributes of individuals; extent of human capital and labour market characteristics, as well as familial situation. The age group who seemed most vulnerable were those in the mid-thirties to early forties. The study revealed a number of combined-strategies for reducing the risks associated with this way of working. These include: building up a portfolio income, from work, other than in television, combined with a partner's income; gathering relevant information and building informal contacts; building informal contacts, as well as considering leaving television, and finally building up a portfolio income, as well as building informal contacts.

#### 1.4.8 Implications of following non-organisational careers

For those following non-organisational careers, like the self-employed professionals that have been the focus of this research, there would seem to be a number of important managing tasks. These include: managing and resourcing their own learning and knowledge-building activities; managing transitions; mobilising support systems, as well as reconstructing their own career success criteria.

We saw earlier how success, in traditional career, is constructed in a number of ways. One is through comparison with others in one's community group (Goldschmidt, 1990), by comparing one's own position within the hierarchy in relation to that of significant others. Within these structures, some of the other symbols of success are linked to organisational rituals and routines. But how is career success constructed amongst the self-employed? Who acts as the community group for them to measure their success? Is measuring success in this way meaningful, where there is a fragmented and differentiated workforce?

Some writers (Hall, 1986a; Schein, 1996) argue that when working in unstructured environments, success criteria needs to be focused on internal, or subjective, criteria. Schein (1996) argues for a shift in focus away from 'organizational career' to the concept of an 'internal career', which he defines as "*... the subjective sense of where one is going in one's work life, as contrasted with the 'external career', the formal stages and roles that are defined by organisational policies and societal concepts of what an individual can expect in the occupational structure.*" He points out that individuals need to develop a strong self-concept in order to hold their 'internal career' together during times of change. But, when working independently, how do individuals get the feedback needed to sustain a strong self-concept?

To build a successful 'internal career', within the context of changing structures, Schein (1996) argues that it is crucial for individuals to establish what their career anchors are so that they can find the best fit between their career anchors and emerging occupational structures. He argues that those with entrepreneurial, autonomy, service, pure challenge and life-style as their career anchors may find a better fit amongst smaller organisations. He also argues for the need to consider careers

as being part of a 'life system' where "... *two careers and two sets of personal and family concerns need to be integrated into one lifestyle.*"

Closely related to the issue of success, for those following an independent career, is the management of knowledge and learning. Bird (1994) argues that in adopting the 'boundaryless career' model, career success becomes associated with learning "*The motivation behind career moves may not be money or higher status, but instead may be because people are able to learn new things ... Individuals who voluntarily pursue such careers maybe driven by a stronger desire to learn and be more creative than those who do not.*" (Bird, 1994, p340). However for the self-employed, there are potential resource implications associated with keeping their knowledge up-to-date. When employed, the cost of training and development is often met by the organisation (either in full, or partially through loans and/or sponsorship for learning). However, it is likely that the self-employed will have to resource their own learning. In addition, they may not have easy access to the learning resources and support available when working for an organisation, for example, mentors, line manager, peer support group, or career planning workshops (Mabey and Iles, 1994).

There may be other resource implications connected with knowledge creation for self-employed professionals. If we accept that knowledge leads to competitive advantage, then clearly there is an imperative for self-employed professionals, like other businesses, to develop their knowledge base. An important career issue then for these individuals would seem to be that of finding ways of maintaining and enhancing their own knowledge assets in a cost-effective way. Whilst the scope of the work that these individuals do can provide more opportunities for knowledge creation, there is the danger that others (i.e. clients, or business associates) may focus on knowledge extraction, as opposed to knowledge exchange. Thus there may be a negative balance in knowledge exchange interactions whereby, with each client interaction, knowledge resources become more and more depleted. In addition, self-employed professionals also have to address the paradox of how knowledge creation involves collaboration and rivalry (Von Krogh and Roos, 1996).

### 1.4.9 Self-employment and career management

This chapter has highlighted the many structural changes that have taken place in the global economy and the world of employment, particularly over the past decade. We do seem to be living in an era of continuous and rapid change brought about by changes in technology and globalisation (The Economist : World Economic Survey, 1996). Whilst there doesn't seem to be any consensus about the overall impact of these structural changes for individuals and their careers, some common themes are emerging. These include the importance of developing the ability to manage transitions (Herriot, Hirsch & Reilly, 1998) and the importance of continuous learning (Schein, 1996). Whilst both of these areas will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter, there are some key points that are worth drawing out here.

One is that, given the pace of change in organisations today as well as in society more generally, the term transition would appear to be changing. Recent work by Herriot, Hirsch & Reilly (1998), for example, points out how organisational change now seems to consist of a series of overlapping transitions, some being more profound than others, where often one transition is not completed before another transition commences. This phenomenon of overlapping transitions has led these writers to suggest that the stabilisation phase, present in more traditional transition models, is possibly outdated, as many organisations today do not reach this stage. The comments of other observers and commentators on global business trends seem to support this view. Speaking at the IACMP 2000 Global Conference, Edie Weiner, President of Weiner Edrich Brown, argued how, in today's business world, we need to think about the concept of 'transitioning' i.e. of changes where there are no clear beginnings or endings, as opposed to the concept of transition singular.

Where organisations are in constant transition, this would seem to have implications for learning. Thus a key managing task would seem to be to develop the capability to learn from each transition experience in order to be better prepared for subsequent ones. Herriot, Hirsch & Reilly (1998) argue that the key career development task now in organisations is a) helping individuals to make transitions effectively and b) learn from the process, so that individuals are better prepared for making even bigger transitions in the future. This involves providing the right kind of support at

each of the three transition phases: preparation, encounter and adjustment phases. However, their work does not address how those following an independent career gain the support needed to manage multiple career transitions.

Hall (1986a) argues for the importance in contemporary society of developing 'metaskills'. These he defines as: adaptability (routine busting), tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty, self-awareness and identity change. But how do individuals learn these 'metaskills' and who provides the necessary support to develop them? Questions, Hall (1986a) argues, requires further research.

Finally, the whole area of how individuals following non-organisational careers mobilise support for their career development has been largely ignored in the careers' literature to-date (Kidd, 1996). Mirvis and Hall (1994) question whether the necessary structures and support mechanisms are in place to support individuals who adopt the 'boundaryless career' model. There seems to be an issue here of ownership and responsibility for career management. Hirsch and Jackson (1996) argue that in the 1980s and 1990s there has been a change in ownership with regard to career development. They cite the introduction of Career Workshops, Personal Development Planning, Learning Resource Centres and the development of self-help materials as being indicators of this shift in ownership for career management.

But how might the self-employed manage their own career? Kidd (1996) suggests that a satisfactory model of individual career management consists of six elements: a) it reflects an individual's aspirations within a framework of personal values, life-style and life-roles; b) gives consideration to the skills for lifelong planning and dealing with change; c) contextualised; d) it reflects differing relationships; e) has a temporal perspective (a lifetime perspective) and f) resilience i.e. a capacity to cope with uncertainty and to challenge exploitative practices.



Law (1996) suggests career development involves an ability to use two basic cognitive processes - sensing and sifting, and two developed cognitive processes - focusing and understanding, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

<b>Learning Stage</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Some examples and questions</b>
<b>SENSING</b>	Gathering information	Identifying opportunities Gathering feedback from others
	Assembling sequences	What has happened to-date? Are there any patterns or gaps?
<b>SIFTING</b>	Making comparisons	How is my view of the world similar or different to that of others?
	Using concepts	Uncovering shared understandings
<b>FOCUSING</b>	Reflecting on own view of self	Understanding why you are accepting/rejecting a course of action
	Dealing with the views of others	How do others see me? Are these views similar or different? How will I deal with differences?
<b>UNDERSTANDING</b>	Developing explanations	Linking cause and effect
	Anticipating consequences	Experimental, or 'What if?' thinking

**Table 1: Summary of Law's (1996) Career Learning Theory**

In Law's (1996) Career Learning Theory there seems to be a clear relationship between career development and learning. Career development requires the ability for gathering and organising information, flexibility, capacity to manage ambiguity, together with a deep background knowledge of changing cause and effects. All of these tasks Law (1996) argues, can be learnt. However the learning associated with Sensing and Sifting needs to occur before that of Focusing and Understanding. Addressing the relationship between careers and learning would seem to be an important consideration for future career theory. Although Law's (1996) Career Learning Theory has gone some way to addressing this relationship, as Law himself points out, further empirical work is needed to identify how these relationships manifest themselves in practice.

## 1.5 Summary

This chapter has mapped out the key structural changes that have occurred within the world of work and employment over the past fifteen years, drawing out the implications and opportunities for individuals and their careers. This contextual background was seen as being important to enable the findings that follow to be seen in context. Figure 1 acts as a summary of the key areas covered in this chapter.

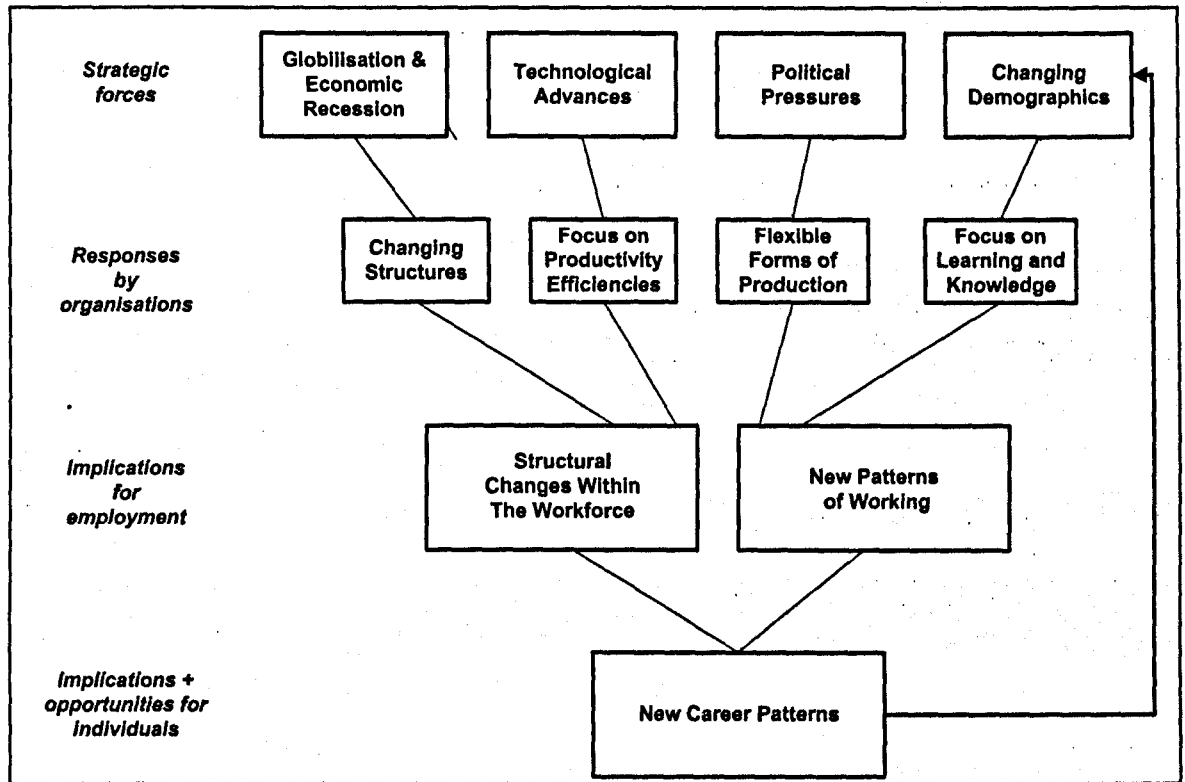


Figure 1: Strategic forces that have influenced work, employment and careers from the mid-1980s up until the present time

The top level of Figure 1 sets out the main strategic forces that have affected the economy over the past fifteen years. The next level sets out some of ways that organisations have responded to these strategic forces, for example re-structuring, introducing flexible forms of production, as well as developing a focus on learning and knowledge creation. At the next level, the main implications for employment are indicated followed by the implications and opportunities for individuals and their careers in the form of new career patterns. This typology is intended to represent a dynamic situation whereby changes at each level can inform, as well as be informed by, other changes (this is represented by the feedback line on the right of Figure 1).

This chapter has summarised a number of significant changes in the business world over the past fifteen years, highlighting the implications for employment and individuals and their careers. A key change has been the decline in the number of people employed in the manufacturing sector and a rise in the number employed in the service sector as well as an increase in the number of knowledge-based businesses. These combined changes have had implications in terms of the skills and the tools used by individuals in their work.

These broader structural changes have not all been negative from the individual's perspective. Changing organisational structures, combined with the introduction of more flexible working practices, have opened up opportunities for individuals to work with organisations in different ways e.g. part-time working, short term contracts, as well as through self-employment.

The review of existing careers literature shows how the landscape of careers in contemporary society does appear to be changing. Many of the existing career theories have dealt with the concept of a career from a narrow perspective i.e. confined to careers within an organisational context. However, other writers argue that career decisions often take much broader life considerations into account (Levinson, 1978; Bird, 1994; Schein, 1996).

The removal of traditional career structures has given rise to a search for alternative career models which focus on individuals' subjective career experiences, for example: 'boundaryless careers' (Mirvis and Hall, 1994), 'careers as repositories of knowledge' (Bird, 1994) and 'careers as part of a whole life-system' (Schein, 1996). Each of these new ways of thinking about careers reflect the fluidity of career experiences encountered by some individuals. They also enable a much broader interpretation of the term career to be adopted, one which encompasses an individual's whole life, not just his/her working life.

However, adopting these new career models seems to have some inherent tensions. These include: a need to reconsider what constitutes career success; developing the ability to manage multiple transitions; managing and resourcing ones' own learning and knowledge development, as well as mobilising the relevant support for learning and career development. In addition, a key

consideration for individuals in contemporary society is how to ensure their future employability. Several writers link employability with investment in continuous learning (both inside and outside the workplace); knowledge acquisition; anticipating and responding to change; development of soft skills (interpersonal, team working, self-marketing); flexibility and adaptability (willingness to change); skills that come under the category of 'metaskills' (Hall, 1986a). However, as Hall argues, we do not yet have sufficient knowledge of how individuals develop these 'metaskills'.

This background chapter has surfaced some important questions for this particular research, these include:

- a) Can individuals who are employed on flexible contracts, such as the self-employed, be considered as having a career?
- b) How do individuals make career decisions? What factors do they take into account? Are career moves influenced, as Bird (1994) argues, by the desire to learn new things?
- c) How do they construct career success?
- d) When individuals are no longer following an organisational career do they create new structures to replace those that exist when working for an organisation? If so what form(s) do these structures take?

The next chapter introduces and discusses the key theoretical perspectives on learning and knowledge that have informed this research.

## **Chapter 2: Key theoretical perspectives that have informed this research**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This research is concerned with how a particular group of self-employed professionals are managing their career in the broadest sense i.e. their work career, in relation to their family and learning career.

Chapter 1 discussed the main implications of following a non-organisational career, these include: having to build new skills and knowledge; having to resource one's own learning, including mobilising the necessary support, as well as having to adjust to working with new structures.

This chapter begins by reviewing the key theoretical perspectives that have helped to illuminate how these individuals might set about managing these implications. These include: the knowledge creation process; theories of adult learning; transition dynamics, as well as theories of building and mobilising social support. Reviewing these theoretical perspectives has generated specific questions that have been addressed by this particular research.

The chapter concludes by introducing a tentative model for building an understanding of how self-employed professionals manage their learning and knowledge. The model encapsulates the key themes that have emerged from the theoretical perspectives on learning and knowledge-creation reviewed in this chapter. It was developed to help shape the research questions as well as formulate interpretations from the empirical data gathered about how these self-employed professionals actually manage their learning and knowledge.

### **2.2 Transition dynamics - a framework for understanding life transitions**

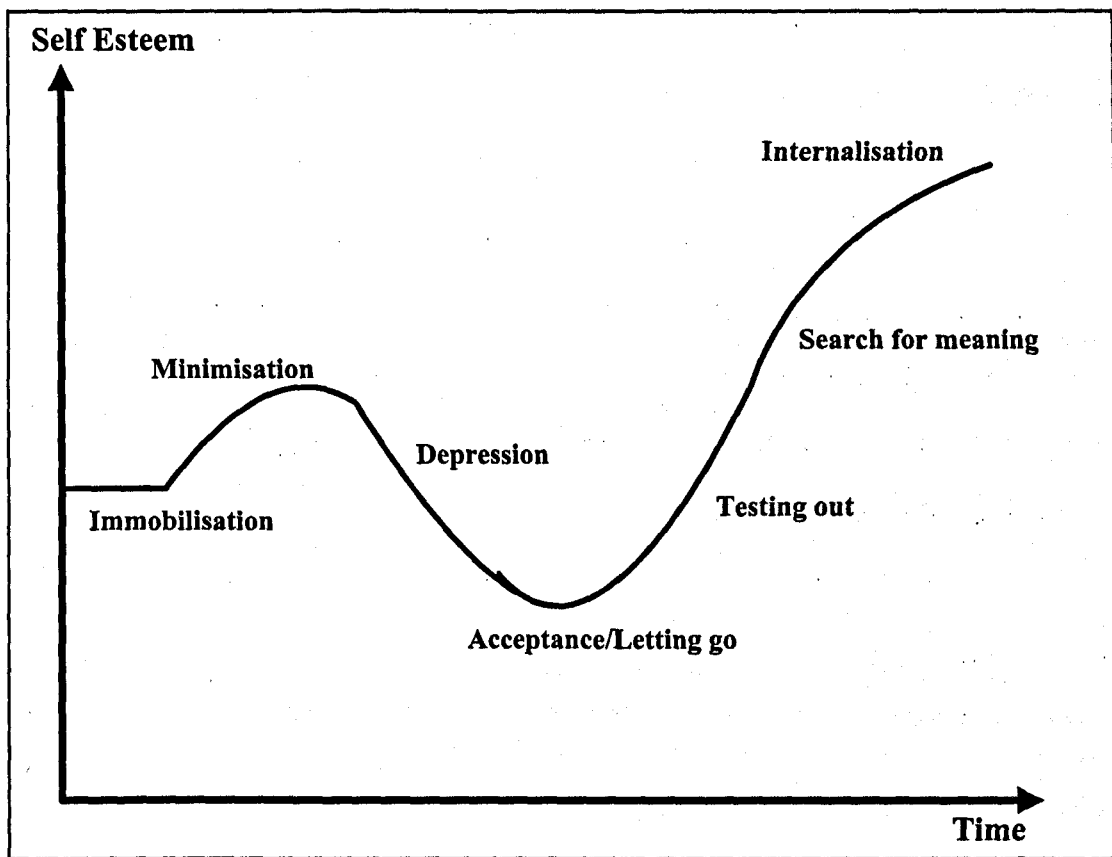
Throughout their adult lives individuals are faced with many life transitions such as leaving school/college to start their first job, getting married, starting a family, moving jobs, or changing career. Transitions are an expected part of an individual's career development in organisations, hence the notion of 'on-time' career moves such as gaining promotion. Other transitions include: geographical relocation; departmental transfer; demotion or being side-tracked into a dead-end position, as well as 'career plateauing' (Minor, Slade and Myers, 1991).

Some writers define career transitions in terms of the boundaries encountered in careers within organisations where a boundary is defined as “... *that which lies between two conditions that are seen to be different by the organisation, the individual, or both*” (Hayes & Hough, 1978, p84). Hayes and Hough have developed a three-phase career transition model that focuses on the dynamics of boundary crossing. Phase one of their model relates to an individual’s desire to cross an organisational boundary and the organisation’s part in encouraging or discouraging this type of movement. They argue that “... *many individuals will have a positive orientation towards boundary crossing because they evaluate many transitional opportunities in terms of gain, as a means of closing the gap between their ideal world and the world as it is.*” (Hayes and Hough, 1978, p91). Phase two of their model relates to an individual’s attitude towards boundary crossing i.e. their desire for movement or non-movement, in relation to that of the organisation. Depending upon the organisation’s position, an individual may perceive the move as either a voluntary move, blocked, pushed, or a voluntary stay. Phase three of the model considers the implications of a boundary move in terms of the impact on an individual’s coping strategy, self-concept and identity.

Whilst Hayes and Hough’s (1976) model provides a useful framework for understanding career transitions that take place within the context of an organisational career, it doesn’t reflect the types of transitions those who are self-employed might experience. Here we need to look at a much broader definition of the term transition, for example where a transition is defined as:

- a) “*A discontinuity in a person's life space.*” (Hopson & Adams, 1976)
- b) “*Where the individual is faced with the need to give up one mode of life and accept another.*” (Parkes, 1972).
- c) “*The process of disengaging from the old expectations, the old assumptions, and the old identity that the [old] job world provided and required.*” (Bridges, 1996).

Hopson and Adams (1976) argue that irrespective of whether a transition is an intentional, or unintentional, change in a person’s life, or simply a growing awareness of some form of discontinuity, it will trigger a cycle of predictable reactions and feelings, as illustrated in Figure 2.



**Fig 2: Changes in self-esteem during a transition. Adapted from Hopson & Adams (1976)**

Figure 2 sets out a series of stages which individuals often go through when experiencing change in their lives. These stages are not uniform, some will be more pronounced and extended than others, depending upon the circumstances in which an individual finds him or herself in at a particular point in time. The stages can also vary depending on how well developed an individual's coping skills are. Hopson and Adams (1976) stress the importance of moving swiftly to the 'Acceptance of reality/letting go' stage as it is only then that energy is released to develop new behaviours and to enable learning to take place.

The relationship between transitions and learning was identified by Aslanian and Brickell (1980) in their study of Americans in Transition. They argue that their transition model, developed from this study, can be applied to smaller life changes than those in Erikson's (1977) Lifestage model and Sheehy's Passages (1976) as it reflects the differences in the scale of the learning associated with different transitions. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) argue that the bigger the transition the greater the scope for learning. However, they do not qualify what counts as a little, or a large transition. In addition they do not give any indication of the timespan associated with life-transitions. In other

words when does a transition start and end? They argue that a transition is complete when the individual has moved from one status to another, for example from non-manager to manager. However, they don't define how long this process might take, or what criteria might be used to determine when a transition is complete.

Some writers (Herriot, Hirsch & Reilly, 1998; Weiner, 2000), as discussed in the previous chapter, argue that the term transition, as we now know it, is possibly an outdated concept given that many change situations today do not reach the stabilisation phase of the transition cycle. It is important then to think about the concept of 'transitioning' i.e. of change where there is no clear beginning or ending, as opposed to the concept of a transition in the singular (Weiner, 2000).

Despite this concern over the definition of the term transition, there would appear to be some distinct phases in managing successful transitions. Bridges (1996) refers to three distinct phases as: handling endings, dealing with the 'neutral zone' and making a successful new beginning. Herriot, Hirsch & Reilly (1998) refer to three transition phases of: preparation, encounter and adjustment. They see a key role for managers being that of supporting employees through each of these transition phases in order to identify how each of these phases could be better managed so that the organisation, as well as individuals, learn from each transition experience.

Although these generic transition models do not provide specific insights into the types of transitions that self-employed professionals are likely to experience, they provide important contextual background helping to shape questions to be addressed in this research. First, they draw attention to the relationship between learning and change which, combined with the discussion in Chapter 1 about the changing nature of work, draws attention to the importance of learning in societies experiencing continuous change. This raises a question as to how the self-employed might prepare for, and learn from, life-transitions. Second, they draw attention to the fact that life-transitions need active management. Although there are structures in place to support transitions that occur when following a traditional career, this raises a question as to how those following an independent career mobilise the support, as well as other resources, to manage life-transitions.



### 2.3 Mobilising social support

Traditional career transition models normally consider the impact of life changes from a narrow perspective i.e. the impact on a person's work career, rather than considering the impact on other life-areas, for example family career, or learning career. However, individuals undergoing a transition in one life-area often experience simultaneous changes in other life-areas. Managing life-changes can result in stress (Adams et al, 1976). However, the extent of the stress experienced depends upon a number of factors: the scale of the change; the level of predictability of the outcome(s); an individual's coping style, as well as the extent and type of social support available.

The mobilisation of support before, during and after career transitions, and other life changes, would seem an important factor in managing change. Minor, Slade and Myers (1991) argue how "*Socialization activities increase immediately before and after a career transition as employees adapt to their new role.*" (p111). Managers have a crucial role to play in helping individuals adjust to their new role. This is a role that requires managers to adopt a nurturing/supportive leadership style rather than adopting a 'sink or swim' leadership style. Pascale (1985) argues how an increased level of interpersonal contact between an individual and his or her manager during a transition can help individuals cope more effectively.

But it is not just when making career changes that social support is important. Morgan (1990) argues that there are observable changes in social networking when individuals experience major life-changes. The contact with supportive members increases, whereas the contact with less supportive members decreases. In her research into deliberate change in adults' lives Calder (1989) identified that personal conversations with others were a major resource used in each of the stages of change defined in her research. A study of unemployed female managers by Fielden and Davidson (1998) concluded that emotional support is crucial in determining women's mental well-being during unemployment. However, just at the time when these women need most support, they can find that they have restricted access to support relationships within a work context. In addition, the financial constraints of unemployment can mean that they miss out on the social support of friends outside of work too. It is possible that the self-employed experience similar difficulties to

those encountered by the unemployed given that they too do not have access to regular support within their work environment.

Other writers (Brown & Harris, 1978; Duck, 1992) argue how membership of a social group can influence the state of an individual's health, particularly their psychological health, given that our self-worth and self-esteem are informed by our personal relationships. Duck (1992) argues that it is through "... *the transactions of daily life, grounded as they are in conversational interaction, that individuals gain a sense of others being there for them and can see the degree to which others can offer them assistance, or can develop their ability to cope.*" (Duck, 1992, p196). It is for this reason, Duck (1992) suggests that when researching how individuals mobilise social support we need to study the social interactions made within the context of what is happening in an individual's life, at a particular time point in time.

Social Network Analysis, a tool that evolved from the work of the social anthropologists Barnes, Mitchell and Bott in the 1950s and 1960s (see Scott, 1991) provides a methodology for gathering and interpreting information about an individual's social support network in a systematic way. Scott (1991) defines four key areas of social support. First, **emotional support**, this is support that is linked to areas of a more intimate nature such as self-confidence and self-esteem. Second, **informational support**, which is linked to the provision of information. Third, **instrumental support**, which is concerned with support of a more practical nature, and finally, **companionship**, which relates to friendship.

The way in which individuals mobilise support can be broken down into two categories (Eckenrode and Wetherington, 1990). The first is 'solicited requests', this is where an individual actively seeks out help from others. The second is 'unsolicited requests' where support is volunteered without an individual having to directly ask for it. Eckenrode and Wetherington (1990) point out that the size, density and level of inter-connectedness of an individual's support network all have a bearing on the type of support that can be mobilised and whether it is 'solicited' or 'unsolicited'. They argue how mobilising social support does have a number of costs. One is the cost of having an unbalanced exchange process i.e. an unequal exchange of resources between individuals. They

found that women in particular can suffer from 'network overburden' as they are often more responsive to requests for help, than men. As a consequence they may suffer psychological stress. In addition, in certain contexts, women may have limited access to supportive helpers e.g. when working in male-dominated organizations. Other costs associated with mobilising social support include: not wanting to create a negative impression by admitting that you have a problem which you cannot solve yourself; the issue of ensuring confidentiality, as well as not wanting to become dependent on others for support.

The next section, which covers the importance of networking for the knowledge-creation process, considers the extent to which the costs and benefits associated with mobilising social support, discussed in this section, apply to networking aimed at building one's learning and knowledge assets.

#### **2.4 The knowledge creation process**

The critical importance of acquiring and utilising knowledge in today's business world was referred to in Chapter 1. Some writers (Stacey, 1993; von Krogh and Roos, 1996; de Geus, 1988) argue that a firm's knowledge assets is the means by it sets itself apart from its competitors.

However, much of the literature in the knowledge management field to-date refers to the knowledge creation process within organisations, focusing on the business imperative for managing knowledge, together with the factors that support and inhibit the knowledge creation process.

Given that the self-employed professionals who have been the focus of this research are effectively small businesses, the way in which they manage their knowledge is of particular interest to this research. In trying to build an understanding of how these individuals might manage their knowledge, the existing literature on knowledge creation and transfer, as it applies to large organisations, has been reviewed to identify whether the factors that support and inhibit the knowledge creation process within organisations, apply to this group of individuals.

### 2.4.1 Definitions of knowledge and knowledge management

Before discussing the term knowledge management it is important to give some consideration to the definition of the term knowledge. In his taxonomy of educational objectives, Bloom (1956) refers to three types of knowledge:

- a) **Knowledge of specifics**, such as specific terminologies and symbols, as well as knowledge of specific facts.
- b) **Knowledge of ways and means of dealing with specifics**, such as ways of organising and classifying things methods of enquiry, as well as rules for making judgements.
- c) **Knowledge of the universals and abstractions in a field**, such as knowledge about theories that enable inter-relationships between different forms of knowledge to be made.

Bloom (1956) emphasises how having knowledge about how phenomena and ideas are organised contributes to our ability to make generalisations from observed phenomena, as well as being able to make predictions, or plan future actions.

More recent writers (Davenport and Prusak, 1998) argue that it is difficult to come up with a single definition of knowledge as applied to an organisational context, given its many elements. In their book, *Working Knowledge*, they provide a working definition of knowledge as: *"...a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organisations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organisational routines, processes, practices and norms."* (Davenport and Prusak, 1998, p5).

A key assertion by Davenport and Prusak (1998) is that knowledge is different from information, since information only becomes knowledge when transformed by one or more of the following processes:

**Comparison** - how does information about this situation compare to that of other situations?

**Consequences** - what implications does this information have for decisions and actions?

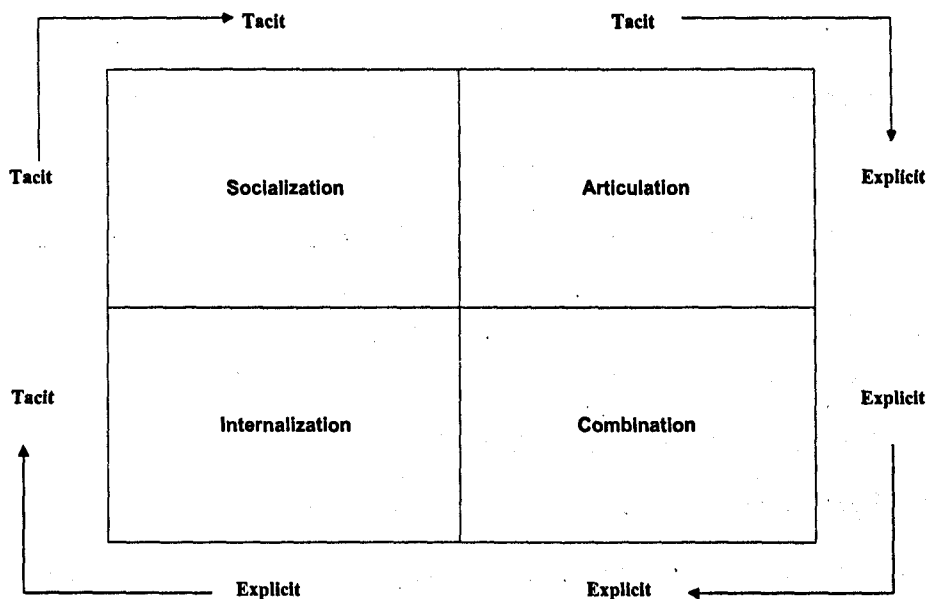
**Connections** - how does this bit of knowledge relate to other pieces of knowledge?

**Conversation** - what do others think about this information? This particular point emphasises the importance of social interaction for the knowledge creation process.

The importance of the human element in the knowledge-creation process also features in the work of Bird (1994), who argues for the need to distinguish between the transmission of information and the creation of knowledge in the learning process whereby "*Information may be thought of as the 'flow' and knowledge as the 'stock'*" (p329). Bird (1994) qualifies this argument by drawing on the example of someone who is trying to explain how to write an essay to someone else. The information received, i.e. the words on a page represent only a portion of the knowledge obtained, the rest is created by the individual as s/he interprets, categorises, and links new information with existing knowledge.

#### **2.4.2 Models of knowledge-creation within an organisational context**

Before discussing the knowledge-creation process amongst self-employed professionals, consideration was given to how the knowledge-creation process within large organisations is addressed as a way of identifying whether there are any parallels. Nonaka (1991a), one of the formative thinkers on knowledge-creation within organisations, sees knowledge-creation as consisting of four processes, as illustrated in Figure 3 below. His model is based on an assumption that there are different forms of knowledge - **tacit knowledge** i.e. - knowledge embedded within the experiences of individuals and hence difficult to communicate and **explicit knowledge** i.e. knowledge which can be transmitted to others through systems, procedures and written texts. These different forms of knowledge get transmitted through different processes.



**Figure 3: Nonaka's model of the knowledge creation process (Reproduced from Bird (1994))**

One way in which knowledge-creation occurs within organisations is through the transmission of tacit knowledge through the **Socialization** process. An example is the transmission of knowledge between a master craftsman and an apprentice, often through observation and imitation, rather than through spoken language.

As Nonaka (1991a) argues there are limitations of the **Socialization** process as a means of knowledge-creation because of the problem of the 'knower knowing more than can be told'. Bird (1994) argues that one of the key difficulties for organisations of this form of knowledge-creating process is that the transmittal process is time consuming. This makes it difficult to reproduce for large numbers of people. One of the ways in which this difficulty can be overcome is through the **Articulation** process, where a master craftsman, or knowledge expert, explains why and how he uses a particular technique. Through language, tacit knowledge becomes articulated so that it becomes more accessible to the knowledge base of others.

Despite the limitations of the Apprenticeship model there has been a renewed interest in this as an effective learning model for building the skills required in the modern workplace. Apprenticeship is seen as playing an important role not just in specific skills development amongst young workers, but in developing the reflexive capacity of the overall workforce (Fuller and Unwin, 2001).

Another way in which knowledge creation can occur within organisations is through the process of **Combination** where related pieces of information are brought together to provide a fuller picture. Bird (1994) provides an example of where, when the Profit and Loss accounts of separate business units are combined to provide an overall Profit and Loss picture for the organization, this can lead to new insights. A fourth way in which knowledge-creation can occur is through **Internalization**. This is where the knowledge acquired is re-framed to fit with existing stored knowledge in a way that is meaningful to the individual so that he or she can apply to future situations. Bird (1994) sees this process as being important for the self-renewal of employees, which in turn leads to the self-renewal of the organisation. Bird (1994) argues that although all four types of knowledge-creation processes are important, **Articulation** and **Internalization** are the most crucial as they provide the mechanism by which ideas and views on the world are articulated, adapted and changed.

To facilitate the knowledge-creation process within organisations, Nonaka (1991a) suggests that different conditions and factors need to be in place at different levels, as indicated in Table 2.

Level	Critical property	Factors critical to knowledge creation
Organization	Structure	Competitive resource allocation
Group	Interaction	Direct dialogue
Individual	Autonomy	Action and deliberation (reflection)

**Table 2 : Levels of organisational knowledge. Adapted from Nonaka (1991a)**

These conditions seem to reflect Gidden's (1984) notion of structuralisation (i.e. the dynamic relationship between structures, agency and processes) referred to in Chapter 1. Whilst organisations may perceive structure as being a critical property of knowledge creation, from the individual's perspective too much structure could restrict opportunities or create barriers. Bird (1994) argues how *"Because knowledge derives from first-hand experience, autonomy is critical in that it allows for trial and error, action and deliberation."* (p340).

### **2.4.3 Cultural factors that can inhibit knowledge transfer**

Both Davenport & Prusak (1998) and Leadbeater (1999) raise some of the tensions that can inhibit the knowledge-creation and transfer process. As it is likely that these same tensions may be of

relevance for those following an independent career, they are summarised in Table 3 below.

<b>Tension</b>	<b>Possible solutions</b>
Lack of trust	Build relationships of trust and common ground through face-to-face contact. Ensure that the medium of communication is right for the knowledge transfer exchange.
Different language and frames of reference	Create common ground through education, discussion and team working/rotation. Develop a shared language or utilise 'boundary spanners'.
Perspective held of productive work i.e. tangible vs intangible outputs	Establish places/events for knowledge transfer. Encourage experimentation and play.
Status and rewards go to knowledge holders	Reward knowledge sharing.
Lack of absorptive capacity in receivers of knowledge	Educate on benefits of flexibility. Make time available for knowledge absorption and application - this enhancing 'viscosity' of knowledge transferred.
Belief that knowledge relates to certain groups/positions	Create environment where quality of ideas more important than status of source.
Intolerance of mistakes and lack of support when help needed	Accept and reward creative errors.

**Table 3: Cultural factors inhibiting knowledge transfer within organisations**

Davenport and Prusak (1998) argue that in a knowledge-driven economy talk is real work and that *"Conversations at the water cooler, or in the company cafeteria, are often occasions for knowledge transfer as conversations are the way in which knowledge workers discover what they know, share it with their colleagues and, in the process, create new knowledge for the organisation."* (p90).

Paradoxically, the move towards 'virtual offices' and 'virtual teams' can inhibit these informal knowledge transfer processes. This has potential implications for the participants in this research.

From his research amongst knowledge-based businesses, Leadbeater (1999) suggests that there is an emerging consensus about what the knowledge-creating company of the future will look like. He argues that these organisations will be good at learning and unlearning. They will be open to ideas from people in diverse networks and linked to knowledge supply chains as a way of connecting into knowledge that is outside their immediate area of expertise. These same characteristics would seem to be of relevance to self-employed professionals. Leadbeater (1999)



also argues that knowledge-creating organisations will thus need to embrace a number of core principles, as set out in Table 4 below.

<b>Core principle</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Cellular structures</b>	Adaptive. Able to work autonomously as well collaboratively. Networked.
<b>Self-managing</b>	Essential to unlock potential of employees. Requires free flow of information for people to take responsibility.
<b>Entrepreneurial</b>	Capacity to spot and act on opportunities.
<b>Equitable membership and reward systems</b>	The means to ensure a sense of membership amongst self-managing and entrepreneurial organisations. Membership made tangible through equity based pay, plus opportunities for people to pursue own interests.
<b>Deep knowledge reservoirs</b>	Ability to acquire and generate specialist expertise and know-how.
<b>Integrated</b>	Integrates diverse skills and different kinds of knowledge
<b>Holistic</b>	Deeper interdependence between public and private sectors, as well as consumers and producers, recognising that the knowledge assets needed lie outside own organisation.
<b>Collaborative leadership</b>	Role of leader is to create a sense of enterprise i.e. an organisation with a purpose. Cellular organisations need a smaller, more strategic and inspirational core. Leaders need to help create and maintain a social contract.

**Table 4: Core principles of knowledge-creating organisations (Leadbeater, 1999)**

#### **2.4.4 Managing knowledge - the implications for self-employed professionals**

Having considered different definitions of knowledge management, as applied to an organisational context, as well as identifying some of the blocks and stimulants to knowledge creation, what lessons can we learn to help build an understanding of knowledge-creation at the individual level? What types of knowledge are individuals, such as the self-employed professionals in this research, likely to need? What strategies might they adopt for managing their knowledge?

One framework for thinking about the types of knowledge that self-employed professionals might need comes from the work of Boydell (1999). He devised a framework for linking different types of knowledge with different levels of knowledge and learning.

Boydell (1999) refers to four types of knowledge:

- a) Knowing about things;
- b) Knowing how to do things;
- c) Knowing how to become yourself; and
- d) Knowing how to achieve things with others.

and three knowledge levels;

- a) Knowing how to implement,
- b) Knowing how to improve; and
- c) Knowing how to integrate.

By distinguishing between *Knowing about things* and *Knowing how to do things*, Boydell's (1999) framework seems to reflect the different forms of knowledge referred to earlier in this section (i.e. explicit and tacit knowledge). Boydell's (1999) Knowledge Level-1 relates to codified knowledge, with Knowledge Level-2 and 3 relating to the development of tacit knowledge. He argues that it is at Knowledge Level-2 and 3 that social interaction and collaborative working are particularly important for the knowledge-creation process, and they require more inter-dependent learning.

What can we draw from these different theories of knowledge-creation applied to an organisational context to help build an understanding of how those working independently, such as self-employed professionals, manage their knowledge? Some of the potential issues for these individual that they will need to address include:

1. Having sole responsibility for developing and resourcing their own knowledge (Bird, 1994).  
Although independent working may mean that individuals enjoy greater autonomy and freedom, they may encounter difficulties deciding which work experience will generate the maximum opportunities for knowledge development. In addition, as Bird (1994) also points out how the uncertainty associated with greater freedom could result in individuals relying too

much on first-learned behaviours which could lock them into repetitive and dysfunctional behaviours.

2. Interaction, which is key to the articulation of tacit knowledge and the internalisation of explicit knowledge, may be affected by the extent of an individual's social and professional networks given that the interactions they have are less likely to be situated within an organisation (Bird, 1994).
3. Individuals may be excluded from the supportive cultures within which important 'learning conversations' occur. These conversations are key to the development of tacit and explicit knowledge (Davenport and Prusak, 1998).
4. The assumptions held by organisations about what they are buying from self-employed professionals i.e. 'buying an expert' may mean that they are reluctant to facilitate their knowledge development (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995).
5. Other barriers to knowledge creation for the self-employed might include: reduced opportunities for experimentation due to clients' expectations of the consultant-client relationship; unwillingness to take risks with knowledge creation because of the associated costs vs rewards, and lack of resources for knowledge development (e.g. time, money, access to computers and internet technology, access to other professionals and/or colleagues with whom they can develop their own knowledge assets).
6. The development of knowledge at the individual level is also likely to be influenced by an individual's prior learning experience.

Some of these points will be addressed in the next section when theories relating to adult learning in general, as well as learning amongst professionals, are discussed. Other points will be returned to later in the thesis, particularly in Chapters 7 and 8 (Integration and Contribution chapters).

## 2.5 Why, when and how adults learn

### 2.5.1 Definitions of learning

Before considering different theories of adult participation in learning, it is important to consider the meaning of the term learning. Kolb (1984), one of the influential thinkers in the field of learning, defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Learning, Kolb argues, is a continuous process that involves reflecting on specific learning activities, hypothesising about different ways of achieving outcomes in the future and then formulating new strategies for action.

Other writers (O'Conner and McDermott, 1997) also see learning as a process as opposed to a one-off activity that occurs at a specific point in time. They define learning as "*... a process ... something you do. It means change ... taking decisions and changing what we do in response to the feedback we get.*" Drawing on Systems Theory, they refer to learning as a continuous feedback loop, encapsulating Argyris and Schon's (1974) concepts of 'single loop learning' and 'double loop learning'. In 'single loop learning' the individual acts upon the world, gains feedback on their actions, assesses the difference between where they are now and where they want to be, and makes decisions based upon this assessment. With 'double loop learning', the learning that takes place involves surfacing existing mental models and questioning whether these are still valid.

Wenger provides a different perspective on learning, emphasising the social context for learning. He refers to learning as "*... changing who we are, by changing our ability to participate, to belong, to negotiate meaning. And this ability is configured socially with respect to practice, communities and economies of meaning where it shapes our identities*" (Wenger, 1998, p226). He argues that there are a number of common principles associated with a social perspective on learning. These are summarised in Table 5 below.

<b>Principles relating to social perspective on learning</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Learning is inherent in human nature</b>	Integral to our lives, not a separate activity.
<b>Learning is the ability to create new meaning</b>	Involves the whole person, and shouldn't be reduced to pure mechanics. Links knowing and learning and the processes by which competence is developed.
<b>Learning creates emergent structures</b>	Requires structures for continuity but sufficient discontinuities for meanings to be renegotiated.
<b>Learning is experiential and social</b>	Involves our own experience as well as the competencies within learning communities.
<b>Learning constitutes trajectories of participation</b>	Builds personal histories, connecting an individual's past and future. Practice involves shared learning.
<b>Learning is about engagement</b>	Requires opportunities to actively contribute (i.e. by adding value) to learning communities and make creative use of learning repertoires.
<b>Learning is about imagination</b>	Requires reflection and orientation to place practices into a broader context.
<b>Learning cannot be designed</b>	Learning is a living experience – it cannot be designed, only designed for.

**Table 5: Principles associated with adopting a social perspective of learning (Wenger, 1998)**

As Table 5 indicates practice and reflection are integral to Wenger's theory of learning, however these are mediated by social relations. If we accept that learning is a process, one that involves different activities (action, review, drawing conclusions and planning next steps), then the link between learning and change becomes more apparent. O'Conner and McDermott (1997) argue that whereas 'single loop learning' leads to improvement, 'double loop learning' leads to change. 'Double loop learning' is seen as being essential in organisations striving to be learning organisations as it enhances their creative capacity (Senge, 1990).

Other writers (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980; Revans, 1983; Herriot and Pemberton, 1995; Guile and Fonda, 1999) also stress the important link between learning and change in their perspectives on learning. In their study of Americans in Transition, Aslanian and Brickell (1980) identified how life-changes involve some form of learning without which the transition to the new status cannot be made. For some adults learning is triggered by some form of identifiable event, for example, gaining a promotion acts as a trigger to learn about managing people. However, the relationship

between life-events and the learning that follows isn't easily identifiable as it doesn't always map directly onto the event that triggered the status change. A serious illness, for example, might lead to a move to a less strenuous job. Although the trigger is related to a person's health, their learning is associated with the transition to a new job.

### **2.5.2 Motivational factors associated with adult learning**

Whilst the Aslanian and Brickell (1980) study indicates that life-events trigger learning at specific points in an individual's life, it does not help our understanding of why adults engage in learning at other points in their lives. What are the conditions and variables that might influence learning at other points, other than during a transition? This sub-section summarises generic motivational factors that can influence adult participation in learning before considering the motivation for learning amongst professionals.

Cross (1981) developed a Chain-of-Response (COR) model as a conceptual framework for thinking about why adults participate in learning. Underpinning Cross's model is an assumption that "*... participation in a learning activity, whether in organised classes or self-directed, is not a single act but the result of a chain of responses, each based on an evaluation of the position of an individual in his or her environment.*" (Cross, 1981, p125). Using the notion of behaviour as a flowing stream of activity rather than a series of discrete events, Cross identifies a number of variables that seem to affect adult participation in learning, these are summarised in Table 6.

<b>Individual variables that influence adult participation in learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Self-evaluation</b> – Cross (1981) sees this as the start of the chain-of-responses. It is linked with motivation for achievement and self-view.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Attitudes about education</b> – this is either individuals own experience of prior education, or that of significant others. A positive experience more likely to result in further participation.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Goals and expectations</b> – link here with ‘expectancy theory’ whereby expectation of achieving desired goals provides motivation for learning.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Life-transitions</b> – this relates to the ‘teachable moment’</li> </ul>
<b>External variables that influence adult participation in learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Opportunities and barriers</b> – lack of accessibility of information about different forms of learning acting as a barrier for some individuals.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Information</b> – linking motivated learners with appropriate learning opportunities.</li> </ul>

**Table 6: Variables influencing adult participation in learning (Cross, 1981)**

Despite an underpinning assumption in Cross’s model that participation in learning, whether in organised classes or self-directed, involves a chain of responses, her model seems more directed at explaining participation in formal learning as opposed to self-directed learning. Many of the examples that she uses to illustrate her model are drawn from formal educational situations. Yet formal learning, such as classroom based training or structured open learning programmes, constitute only the tip of the iceberg with regard to learning (DfEE Labour Market & Skills Trends, 1997/98). This may be, as other writers (Richter, 1998) argue, because informal learning, or situated learning, is more difficult to study systematically due to the difficulties encountered in defining self-directed learning, or because formal learning is more easy to capture through survey research methodologies (Edwards, et al, 1998).

Does self-directed learning include both formal and informal learning? Thus, for example, if an individual follows a planned, structured learning activity, such as a distance learning course, is this self-directed learning? If we apply Knowles’ (1980) definition of self-directed learning to this scenario - “*A process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, choose appropriate strategies and evaluate learning outcomes*” – it would appear that this learning activity

could be considered self-directed. However, if an individual casually skims through a professional journal then, using Knowles' (1975) definition, it would seem not.

One of the other difficulties with the term self-directed learning relates to the scalability, or size, of self-directed learning activities. Tough (1993) overcomes this difficulty by attaching certain criteria to self-directed learning projects. These include:

- a) more than fifty per cent of the motivation for learning must be related to learning new skills or knowledge as opposed to learning for pleasure. Participation here then fits with the category of goal-oriented learners as opposed to learner-oriented learners, or activity-oriented learners (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980).
- b) the individual needs to have a clear focus on what he/she wants to learn, and
- c) the individual must invest a minimum time period of seven hours a week over a period of several months, what Tough (1993) refers to as 'major learning effort' projects.

Proactivity would appear to be one of the underpinning elements in Tough's (1993) definition of self-directed learning. He argues that individuals need to have clearly defined learning goals and be prepared to invest significant effort in order to achieve their goals. In this way individuals develop the skills in learning how to learn e.g. goal setting, selecting learning resources and managing personal change. Tough (1993) cites numerous resources that individuals can draw on when engaging in personal growth projects. These include: books, conversations with others, as well as self-help groups.

As adults we are capable of learning, and indeed do, learn constantly through our interactions with others, through our day-to-day work, as well as through our experiences of managing change. The recent focus on knowledge creation within organisations has generated a renewed interest in Social Learning theory. This is where learning that is embedded in day-to-day practice leads to shared meanings and identities (Wenger, 1998; Richter, 1998; Fuller and Unwin, 1999). This theoretical approach to learning cuts across existing distinctions (and thus problems) between formal and



informal learning, where formal learning (learning that takes place in educational institutions) is perceived as being superior to informal learning (Fuller and Unwin, 1998).

Closely related to Social Learning theory is the phenomenon of Social Capital, which Kilpatrick, Bell and Falk (1998), refer to as "... *the oil that lubricates the process of learning through interaction.*"(p131). It is made possible through the elements of networks, commitment and shared values. In their study of a 'learning community' project amongst rural farmers in Australia (known as Executive Link <sup>TM</sup>), Kilpatrick et al (1998) highlight the dynamics of the relationship between learning and social capital. Social capital, they argue, is another outcome of learning in learning communities and learning is more effective when facilitated through social capital. The small business owners in their study were found to have benefited from the social capital developed through the 'learning community' project. Previously these small family businesses were very isolated with few opportunities for learning from outside. This sort of situation can leave small businesses resource poor.

### **2.5.3 When and how professionals learn**

Having discussed more general theories of adult participation in learning this section considers the area of motivation for learning amongst professionals. Several writers (Dubin, 1972; Cross, 1981; Schon, 1983; Marsick and Watkins, 1990) argue that the question of motivation for learning amongst professionals is less problematic as professionals are driven by a commitment (or calling) to continually enhance their knowledge. Cross (1981), using the term 'knowledge society' as long ago as 1980, stresses how participation in the 'knowledge society', facilitated by changes in technology, has led to additional learning amongst adults more generally. One explanation is that in a knowledge society, knowledge workers have to address the issue of obsolescence where skills and knowledge become rapidly out of date.

Dubin (1972) asserts that "*The half-life of a professional's competence is defined as the time after completion of professional training when, because of new developments, practising professionals became roughly half as competent as they were upon graduation.*" Dubin (1972) argues that

because of the half-life concept, professionals need to spend twenty percent of their working-time learning about recent developments in their field.

If professionals are driven by a calling to continually enhance their knowledge it could be assumed that they would adopt a proactive approach to learning since this would seem to be essential for their on-going career success. Their approach to learning then ought to mirror the factors that Marsick and Watkins (1990) argue enhances self-directed learning experiences. These include:

- a) **Proactivity** - actively seeking out the conditions and resources to help with learning;
- b) **Creativity** - ability to break away from existing patterns and habits that inhibit learning; and
- c) **Critical reflection** - surfacing and critiquing assumptions and beliefs, so that these can be re-framed.

Drawing upon the work of Schon (1983), Marsick and Watkins (1990) argue that professionals need to engage with the concept of the 'Learning Loop'. This involves formulating problems, designing solutions, implementing solutions and assessing results. There are similarities here then with Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, referred to earlier. The concept of the 'Learning Loop', has been further developed by Guile and Fonda (1999) into a six-stage learning cycle:

- a) **Questioning** - exploring outcomes and behaviours required by a particular situation and questioning organisational practices which may limit the capability to respond to the situation;
- b) **Analysing** - exploring learning needs;
- c) **Modelling** - identifying learning opportunities that could help develop the desired behaviours;
- d) **Negotiating** - developing a learning plan and agreeing responsibilities and support requirements;

- e) **Implementing** - all parties fulfilling their responsibilities to meet the learning plan; and
- f) **Reviewing and consolidating** - following through on the broader implications of the learning plan.

Guile and Fonda (1999) argue that their learning cycle reflects the fact that building capabilities, certainly within an organisational context, is not the sole responsibility of the individual. Instead it is a social or collective responsibility that is enacted through an organisation's processes, systems, relationships and routines. Dale (1994) argues that in professional communities individuals facilitate the learning of their fellow professionals by collectively acting as reflective practitioners thereby providing mutual support when things get tough.

If we apply the concept of the 'Learning Loop' to the study of how self-employed professionals learn this raises questions like: With whom do self-employed professionals collaborate when learning? With whom do they agree responsibilities and gain support for learning? and What systems and routines do these individuals engage with for building their knowledge? How individuals negotiate resources for learning is not covered in any great depth in Guile and Fonda's (1999) model of how professionals learn. One must assume therefore that their model is based on learning that takes place within an organisational context where the resources for learning (i.e. financial, time, or support) are provided by the organisation. But how might self-employed professionals resource their learning?

The importance of having the right support for learning (Mabey and Isles, 1994; Calder and McCollum, 1998), and when managing life transitions (Hopson and Adams, 1976; Minor, Slade and Myers, 1991; Dale, 1994; Herriott, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998), was raised earlier. Practitioners working in the area of organisational change, see support as being one of the essential conditions for learning (Garratt, 1991; Hale and Whitlam, 1997).

Given that learning can involve a degree of risk, for example the risk of failing to achieve set goals, or not meeting the examination requirements, the mobilisation of support can be crucial in maintaining one's self-efficacy and self-esteem. Edwards et al (1998) argue that in the Learning

Society guidance needs to play a more central role in helping individuals make decisions and negotiate learning opportunities.

Closely related to the area of access to learning resources amongst self-employed professionals is the question of whether it is only at work where they learn. What about learning that takes place outside of work? How might this contribute to an individual's overall body of knowledge? How transferable are the skills and knowledge developed in other life-areas to the work domain? Several studies of learning have considered the notion of the generalizability of learning i.e. the extent to which skills and behaviours learnt in one life-area can be transferred to other life-areas (Vaillant and Vaillant, 1981; Kohn and Schooler, 1983; Lane, 1991).

The Vaillant and Vaillant (1981) study indicated that individuals who develop the qualities of commitment and perseverance at work embody these qualities in their married life. Kohn and Schooler's (1983) study showed how individuals' preferences for challenging self-directed work 'spilled over' into their leisure activities. However, might this relationship work both ways? Do skills and knowledge developed in an individual's non-work life spill-over into their work life?

When considering the knowledge and behaviours required to be a successful self-employed professional to what extent are these likely to be specific i.e. related to a particular professional area, or more generic as in Hall's (1986a) 'metaskills' (see earlier)? How do self-employed professionals set about learning these?

So whilst Cross's (1981) Chain-of-Response model and Aslanian and Brickall's (1980) transition model cover the motivational aspects of adult learning, this still leaves a question regarding the actual learning content i.e. what individuals actually learn, and also the management of learning. Marsick and Watkins (1990) argue that being part of a professional body gives some shape/direction to the learning content for professionals since they "... *have developed a set of procedures for going about learning. They use one another, and the body of knowledge produced by the profession, as reference points in learning.*" (Marsick and Watkins, 1990, p46). But are there equivalent 'reference points' for those in 'professionalized occupations' (Marsick and Watkins

(1990)? These are occupations where the work involves the communication of specialized knowledge and the provision of solutions which call for judgement, as opposed to rule-based solutions, but which may not be considered professional in the strictest sense.

To what extent might these individuals' learning be informed by observing the successes and failures within day-to-day practice, either their own, or that of others? In other words to what extent might their learning be consistent with the assertion that "*Virtually all learning from direct experience, occurs on a vicarious basis, by observing people's behaviour and its consequences.*" (Bandura, 1977, p248)? Of particular relevance to this research is Wenger's (1998) perspective on learning, with its focus on learning communities as it emphasises the importance of informal structures and connectivity for learning as well as the concept of learning being all-pervasive (i.e. an aspect of all activities).

### **2.5.5 Tentative model to help build an understanding of how self-employed professionals manage their learning and knowledge**

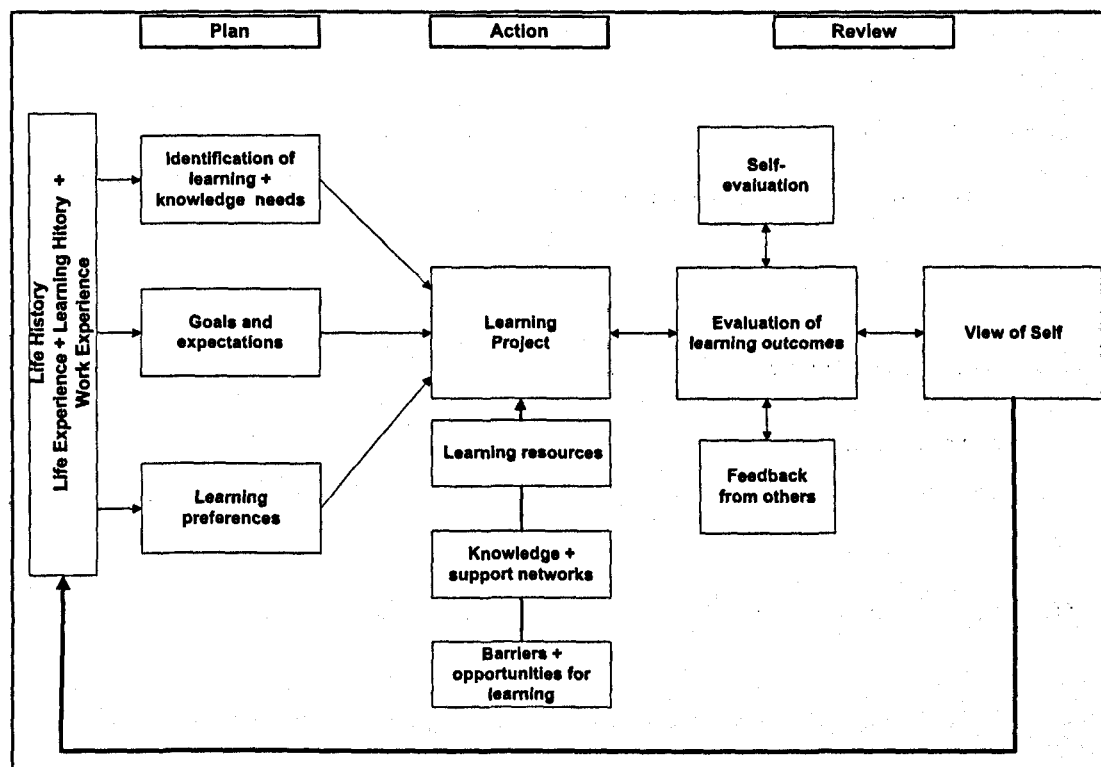
The review of existing literature on learning and knowledge management has provided different theoretical insights into learning at the individual level together with how knowledge is managed within an organisational context. Together, these theoretical insights have helped highlight some of the implications and tensions for learning and knowledge creation amongst self-employed professionals. This section introduces a tentative model for developing an understanding of how self-employed professionals manage their learning and knowledge. It was designed to help formulate questions for the empirical stage of this research, as well to help draw interpretations from the data. The model encapsulates the key themes relating to learning and knowledge creation, discussed in this chapter. These include:

- a) Learning is an integral part of individuals' lives, not a separate activity (Wenger, 1998) which involves taking decisions and making changes (Schon, 1983; O'Conner and McDermott, 1997).
- b) Learning and knowledge creating activities occur within a social context (Nonaka, 1991a;

Bird, 1994; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Wenger, 1998).

- c) Learning constitutes trajectories of participation (Wenger, 1998). In other words it builds on personal histories, connecting an individual's past and future.
- d) Adult learning is proactive (Knowles, 1980; Tough, 1993 and Marsick and Watkins, 1990), reflexive i.e. it incorporates the concept of the 'Learning Loop' (Kolb, 1984; Marsick and Watkins (1990); Guile and Fonda, 1999) and involves different levels of learning i.e. 'single loop learning' and 'double loop learning' (Argyris and Schon, 1974; O'Conner and McDermott, 1977).
- e) Learning is important to our self-efficacy (Rogers, 1951) and our identity (Wenger, 1998) and hence the setting and achievement of learning goals seems an important aspect of self-management (Makin, Cooper and Cox, 1996).
- f) Cultural and environmental factors can inhibit knowledge creation and transfer (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Leadbeater, 1999).
- g) Learning and knowledge creation activities require certain resources e.g. money, time, social support (Farnes, 1992; Tough, 1993; Herriott, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998). These resources are taken as a given when working for an organisation and are often embedded in organisational processes and routines (Mabey and Isles, 1994; Wenger, 1998).
- h) The skills, knowledge and behaviours learnt in one life-area can be transferred and utilised in other life-areas (Vaillant and Vaillant, 1981; Kohn and Schooler, 1983; Lane, 1991).
- i) Learning amongst those following an independent career may need to focus on certain 'metaskills' (Hall, 1986a). These include: routine busting, tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty, self-awareness, as well as managing changes in identity.

The model in Figure 4 below has also been informed by generic management models including the managing tasks of planning, organising, co-ordinating and controlling (Fayol, 1916) and critical reflection, managing motivation, developing relationships, resolving conflict, establishing information networks and decision making (Mintzberg, 1990).



**Figure 4: Tentative model for building an understanding of how self-employed professionals manage their learning and knowledge**

The model in Figure 4 consists of three managing activities: Plan, Action and Review, and a number of lower-level activities and/or inputs that relate to these core activities. There is an implicit assumption within the model that there is on-going interaction and feedback between the *Action* and *Review* stages rather than this being a linear process. This reflects a key theoretical perspective of learning being an iterative process (Schon, 1983; Kolb, 1984). A more detailed description of each of the components of this tentative model is given below.

### **Life History**

The left-hand side of the model: **Life History** - provides an essential starting point for developing an understanding of how self-employed professionals learn and acquire knowledge. It acknowledges arguments made by other writers (Knowles, 1980; Cross, 1981) that an individual's attitude towards education is influenced by their own direct educational experience, as well as by

that of 'significant others'. However, participation in learning projects is also likely to be influenced by an individual's previous knowledge, skills and behaviours in relation to learning as well as their skills in self-management (i.e. goal setting, action planning, evaluating outcomes

### **Planning Phase**

Moving on now to the areas that make up the *Planning Phase* of the learning project/activity, these include: a) Identification of learning and knowledge needs, b) Goals and expectations, as well as c) Learning Preferences, in the model above.

The activity of the **Identification of learning needs** is where individuals identify what it is that they want, or need, to learn at any given point in time. Here individuals may have to make decisions about a) the different type(s) of knowledge that they need to develop (Nonaka, 1991a; Boydell, 1999), as well as b) specific practical skills that they need to acquire, such as mastering new ICT technologies necessary to participate in the knowledge economy, or c) more softer skills, such as Hall's (1986a) 'metaskills'.

Having differentiated between wants and needs in the learning process, it would seem that these could be informed in a number of different ways: self-evaluation, feedback from others, client demands and expectations, peer pressure or feedback, legal requirements of running a small business, as well as standards set by the professional bodies to which these self-employed professionals belong. The extent to which learning needs are self-identified, or other-identified, could influence an individual's motivation for learning as well as the timing and timescales associated with learning activities.

Other writers refer to the notion of the 'teachable moment' for learning (Cross, 1981; Wenger, 1998). Here then we are dealing with considerations relating to the timing of learning activities. Given the different influences outlined above, it is likely that there will be different timescales. For example, a learning need which relates to a particular piece of client work may be more pressing, and of a shorter duration, than learning that is linked to the longer term sustainability of an individual's business.



There is a link here then with the second area of the planning phase - **Goals and expectations** i.e. what is the expected outcome that the individual is striving for? The learning goals that an individual sets him or herself could be influenced by a number of factors. These could include: how well previous learning goals have been achieved (Cross, 1980), or the extent of earlier participation in learning (Edwards, 1993), or the availability of certain resources, including that of support for learning (Herriott, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998).

There would seem to be a number of influencers here. Continuing with the example used above of a learning project linked to a specific piece of client work, there may be several anticipated outcomes. One outcome might be the expectation of having a satisfied client who will contract the individual's services in the future. A second outcome might be that the knowledge acquired could be applied to work with other clients.

The final part of the *Planning Phase* of this tentative model concerns the learner's **Learning Preferences** (Honey and Mumford, 1989). In practice it is likely that an individual's learning preferences will be influenced by a number of factors: his/her learning history, accessibility of learning resources, support for learning, as well as opportunities for learning, which may mean that one particular learning style becomes more developed/utilised than others.

### **Action Phase**

Moving on now to the *Action Phase* of this tentative learning model we can see how, when individuals are actively engaged in a learning project/activity, they draw on a number of inputs: Learning Resources, Support for Learning, as well as Opportunities for Learning. In terms of **Learning Resources** these may include: books, conversations with others, self-help groups (Tough, 1993). There may be other variables to consider here too, such as: financial resources, time for learning, accessibility of learning resources, opportunities for utilising learning resources, as well as access to Information Systems (a source of explicit knowledge).

The type of informational resources that self-employed professionals might need includes: up-to-date taxation rules, information about company law, business directories, professional network

groups, market information, latest financial indicators, as well as company reports. Some of this information may be stored in paper form in reference libraries, but increasingly is available through new technologies, such as internet and intranet technologies.

However, not all of the information that is critical to a self-employed professional's business, will be available in information systems that are in the public domain. Some of this business critical knowledge is likely to be acquired through more informal channels and hence accessibility and connectivity to **Knowledge and Support Networks** would seem crucial to developing business critical knowledge (Nonaka, 1991a; Bird, 1994; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Wenger, 1998). As previously discussed, holding conversations with others, is crucial to the creation of tacit knowledge (Bird, 1994; Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Through conversation, as Bird points out, ideas can be articulated, critiqued, and reframed, enabling new knowledge to be created. However, the opportunities for these knowledge-creating conversations may be limited by the size, connectivity, as well as the nature of the relationship with others within their networks (Bird, 1994). Developing relationships of trust, as mentioned earlier, is an important cultural condition in a knowledge creating organizations (Davenport and Prusak, 1998).

Through networking, individuals may also gain critical insights into particular organisations and/or business sectors and the difficulties/opportunities that they are experiencing. These insights could then inform future learning and/or business activities. Thus an individual's **Knowledge and Support Networks** may serve multiple functions.

The final area of the *Action Stage* of this tentative learning model relates to the **Opportunities and Barriers** that might affect learning and knowledge development amongst self-employed professionals. Some of the generic barriers to learning amongst adults which may also apply to self-employed professionals include: availability and accessibility of information about learning resources (Cross, 1981); access to other professionals and professionalized bodies (Marsick and Watkins, 1990), as well as the availability of the right support for learning (Mabey and Iles, 1994; Herriott, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998).

However, these individuals may experience other barriers to learning too. One of these might relate to the availability of resources for learning, for example financial resources. When working within organisations the cost of learning activities is normally funded directly by employers. However, for those who are self-employed this cost may have to be born directly by the individual. Given that these individuals are working in knowledge-intensive business then continuous investment in learning is likely to be a necessary expenditure; without this individuals will be faced with the issue of obsolescence. How then might these individuals balance the resources needed for learning and knowledge creation against other demands on their limited resources?

Another barrier relates to the availability of time for learning; a resource that isn't necessarily made available, even for those following a traditional career within organisations. Self-employment involves a number of different types of work, fee-earning as well as non fee-earning work, which could limit the time individuals have available for learning and knowledge creating activities. However, given the volatile nature of self-employment, it could be that these individuals find that they have more free-time on their hands which they could choose to allocate to learning activities.

A final barrier to learning for these individuals is that the independent nature of their work, together with the contractual arrangements with clients, may affect opportunities for learning directly from others. Thus these individuals may not have the same opportunities for the learning conversations that occur as part of the daily routines of organisational life e.g. conversations at the water cooler, or in an organisation's cafeteria (Davenport and Prusak, 1998), or through the process of Socialization (Bird, 1994), or through participation in Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998).

### **Evaluating Learning Outcomes**

The final component of this tentative learning model is *Evaluation of Learning Outcomes*. Two sources of feedback are reflected in the model. One is feedback gained from **Self-evaluation** thus reflecting the assertion that, if learning is to result in growth, it must be valued within the learner's meaning system (Merriam and Clark, 1993). But what form does this self-evaluation take? Is it through conversing with oneself (Sheila Harri-Augustein and Laurie Thomas, 1991)? As we have seen, conversation is important to the knowledge creation process, as it enables shared meanings to

be created (Bird, 1994; Wenger 1998). Does the process of critical reflection (i.e. self-questioning) enable individuals to gain these same insights? This may depend on the extent to which individuals utilise 'double loop learning' techniques (Argyris and Schon, 1974).

The other source of feedback is **Feedback from others**, thus reflecting Marsick and Watkins (1990) argument that "*Feedback and disclosure are central to learning at this level [professional].*" (p45). To maximise the opportunities for learning these individuals will need to elicit feedback from others. However, there are a number of potential difficulties associated with gaining feedback on performance for those working independently. First, in many organisations, the giving and receiving of feedback is built into day-to-day management practices e.g. performance management reviews, supervisory meetings, as well as project meetings. Second, the contractual arrangements with clients, together with the assumptions held about the status of professional's knowledge (Herriott and Pemberton, 1995), may mean that clients are reluctant to provide direct feedback. In view of the difficulties in gaining feedback from clients, do these individuals develop alternative processes for gaining feedback?

The outputs from the **Evaluation of Learning Outcomes** include a) a revised view of self i.e. enhanced self-awareness and self-esteem and b) enhanced knowledge base. Both of these outputs will then form part of an individual's experience base (i.e. Learning History) which will then influence future participation in learning and knowledge-creating activities.

This tentative model seems congruent with Bandura's (1977) notion of self-regulation within the learning process, whereby individuals enhance and maintain their behaviour by devising their own rewards for achieving self-prescribed learning goals. The learning process described above is self-regulating since the individual is responsible for planning the learning project, actioning the learning project and then reviewing outcomes. Although there may be inputs from others during this process it is the individual who establishes the goals and expectations, chooses the appropriate learning resources, takes responsibility for managing the learning project and the review process.

## 2.6 Summary

This chapter has introduced the key theoretical perspectives that have informed this research. They include: transition dynamics; mobilising social support; the knowledge-creation process, and theories relating to adult learning.

One of the key areas discussed has been the relationship between learning and change. At the individual level, life-changes such as making a career change, act as a trigger for learning (Aslanian and Brickell 1980; Cross, 1981). At the organisational level, the drive to become knowledge-rich has created an increased emphasis on learning (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Wenger, 1998).

The chapter has drawn together the characteristics of knowledge-creating organisations (Leadbeater, 1999), together with the cultural conditions that can inhibit the knowledge transfer process within organisations (Davenport and Prusak, 1998) as a way of drawing out the likely implications of managing knowledge for self-employed professionals. Some of these implications include a) whilst self-employment may lead to greater autonomy and choice with regard to work, individuals may have difficulty in deciding which work assignments will be the most knowledge enhancing (Bird, 1994); b) the extent to which knowledge can be codified and transferred between work assignments (Davenport and Prusak, 1998); c) the potential for reduced opportunities for experimentation because of client assumptions about buying 'expert knowledge' (Herriott and Pemberton, 1995) and d) limited opportunities for 'learning conversations' (Bird, 1994; Davenport and Prusak, 1998) or become members of 'learning communities' (Wenger, 1998).

The chapter has discussed how as employees there are structures, processes and routines to help facilitate their learning. In addition, many of the resources for learning are normally provided by the organisation. For those following an independent career, such as the individuals who have been the focus of this research, it is likely that they have to resource their own learning. This factor may act as a barrier when developing their knowledge assets.

In the final part of this chapter, a tentative model for developing an understanding of how self-employed professionals manage their learning and knowledge was introduced. This model was

developed to help formulate specific questions to be explored during the data-gathering phase of the research, as well as to help draw interpretations from this data. It encapsulates the key themes drawn from the existing literature on learning and knowledge, discussed in this chapter. These include: how learning needs to be viewed as an integral part of our lives, not as a separate activity (Wenger, 1998); learning is an active process that involves making decisions and bringing about change (Schön, 1983); learning is an iterative process (Kolb, 1984; Guile and Fonda, 1999); learning and knowledge creation is fundamentally a social process, that is mediated and enhanced through interactions with others (Wenger, 1998; Kilpatrick et al, 1998; Fuller and Unwin, 1999), and learning involves the identification and management of certain resources (Calder, 1989; Farnes, 1992; Tough, 1993; Herriott, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998).

The next chapter describes the methodological considerations and specific methodologies adopted for this research.

## **Chapter 3: Methodological considerations and overall research approach**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter starts off by addressing some of the broader methodological considerations that need to be taken into account when designing a piece of research aimed at gaining insights into individuals' lives, together with the author's own standpoint in relation to these considerations. It raises and discusses the areas of: ontology, epistemology, methodology and how validity and reliability within qualitative research, in general, should be addressed. These are all areas that researchers involved in 'disciplined enquiry' need to consider (Guba, 1990).

The chapter moves on to describe how this particular research was designed and implemented. It covers details about: the research questions, the choice of methodologies, the research phases, the research sample, as well as how the data was gathered and analysed. The choices and difficulties encountered when designing and conducting the research are also discussed, including how these were resolved.

### **3.2 Broader methodological considerations addressed in the research design**

Guba (1990) argues that all individuals involved in 'disciplined inquiry' need to address three basic questions at the start of their research journey:

**Ontology** : What is the nature of the "knowable"? Or, what is the nature of "reality"?

**Epistemology** : What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?

**Methodology** : How should an inquirer set about inquiring about knowledge?

For this particular area of investigation the author (i.e. the inquirer) is faced with having to consider her own standpoint in relation to each of these questions. With respect to ontology, should a positivist paradigm be adopted i.e. based on the assumption that there is a reality out there and the role of the inquirer is to discover what that reality is? Or should the inquirer adopt a constructivist paradigm i.e. one that is based on the assumption that the nature of what there is to know is relative? As Guba (1990) points out "*... realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions,*

*socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them ...the findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two."* (Guba, 1990, p27).

The constructivist paradigm, as argued by Guba (1990), is based on an assumption that the world and reality are not objective, but instead are relative i.e. realities exist in the form of multiple mental construction, that is socially and experientially based, and are dependent for their form and content on the person who holds them. The role of the inquirer, therefore, is to reconstruct the world at the point at which it exists i.e. in the minds of the constructors (i.e. the inquired upon). Guba (1990) argues that an appropriate methodology for research based on the constructivist paradigm is that of Hermeneutic Dialogue. This enables individual constructions to be elicited and refined hermeneutically, compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating a few constructions, on which there is substantial consensus. The findings from this type of research would thus be subjectivist - the creation of the interaction between the inquirer and inquired into.

Other writers (Young and Borgen, 1999; Easterby-Smith et al, 1991) also argue for adopting a subjectivist approach when conducting research that is concerned with studying phenomena as complex as individuals' lives. Henry et al (1997) argue that Psychology has a history of avoiding the area of 'subjective experience' and that it is timely for this imbalance to be redressed. They argue for a psychology of experience which is broad based and involves pluralistic methodologies (both existing and new methodologies) where the goal is "*... not simply to explain, but to interpret, and enhance possibility as well.*"

In the area of careers' research, several writers (Roberts, 1980; Young and Borgen 1990; Collin and Young, 1992) argue for the need to take into account the subjective experiences of individuals in relation to their careers. Young and Borgen (1990) suggest adopting a narrative approach, enabling a dialogue to take place between the individual and the inquirer, that allows an individual's career experience to be understood within a specific contextual framework over time (past, present and future orientated).



Collin and Young (1992) also argue for adopting a subjectivist approach when researching individuals and their careers. They argue that *“No longer could careers be adequately conceptualised solely in terms of objective and intra-individual factors; its context and the individual’s subjective experience of it had to be taken into account.”* (Collin and Young, 1992, p1). Their perspective then seems to reflect the key components of career theory advocated by the Chicago School of Sociology (Barley, 1989; Denzin, 1989) which addresses the situational (i.e. social context), relational (i.e. interaction with different strands of an individuals' live as well as other social actors) and chronological (i.e. changes over time).

Given the above arguments, it would seem logical that this particular piece of research, aimed at discovering how a particular group of self-employed professionals are managing their careers in the broadest sense (their work, family and learning careers), be based on the constructivist paradigm where the methodological approach encompasses a hermeneutic dialogue between the inquirer and inquired upon.

### **3.2.1 Addressing the areas of reliability and validity**

When adopting a constructivist paradigm, a key area of consideration is how to still address the areas of validity and reliability. Kirk and Miller (1986) argue that the terms validity and reliability were originally developed from research based on the positivist paradigm. Under the positivist paradigm, validity is defined as *‘Does the instrument measure what it is supposed to measure?’* and reliability as *‘Will the measure yield the same results on different occasions?’* (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991).

However, it would seem that the meaning of the terms validity and reliability differ depending on the ontological standpoint. Other definitions of validity, not based on the positivist standpoint, include *“... the design of research to provide credible conclusions: whether the evidence which the research offers can bear the weight of the interpretations that is put on it.”* (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996, p2), and *“Has the researcher gained full access to the knowledge and meanings of informants?”* (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991, p41) and *“Validity, then, is a matter of trade-offs: between procedural and personal reactivity and between reliable and less reliable*

*methods. Whichever method of data collection is chosen, attention needs to be paid to the objectives of the research, and the methods adopted must be evaluated in this light*" (Wilson, 1996).

Despite the different perspectives held on the concept of validity, a common element is that of demonstrating the academic rigour of a piece of research that allows for credible conclusions. Sapsford and Jupp (1996) argue that when endeavouring to collect certain phenomena (i.e. beliefs, opinions, facts) from subjects, and when interpreting and reporting on these phenomena, these activities can be distorted, or biased, by poor methodological technique.

The different approaches adopted by other writers for demonstrating the academic rigour of their research, thus ensuring its validity, are discussed below.

Kirk and Miller (1986) argue that asking the wrong questions results in research of low validity. To counteract this difficulty, they suggest adopting a research approach which involves multiple methods, arguing that "*... the more diffuse and less focused the method, the wider the net it casts. This, too, is a basic argument for the value of qualitative research.*" (Kirk and Miller, 1986, p30). They also argue that valid research amongst human groups takes into account members' meanings. Another way of ensuring the right research questions get asked is to formulate them with reference to existing theoretical and empirical data about the phenomenon being investigated.

Torbett (1981) argues that one way of ensuring that as researchers we ask 'fruitful questions' i.e. questions that avoid confusion and transcend the obvious, or trivial, is to adopt a Co-operative Inquiry approach where "*The structures and variables to be studied are not merely pre-defined, but rather may change through dialogue between the initiating actor-researcher and others*" (Torbett, 1981, p147) and where 'researcher' and 'subjects' work together to formulate relevant lines of questioning.

However even if, as researchers, we ask the right questions, there may still be problems with the reliability of the research findings due to factors such as: personal reactivity (i.e. the effect of the researcher's interaction with the subjects); the contextual setting within which the research is

conducted; the subjects' willingness to participate in the research and to give an open response to the researcher's questions, as well as the methodological approaches used for gathering and recording data.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) point out that one of the other challenges for qualitative researchers is that of transforming and interpreting qualitative data in a rigorous and scholarly way whilst at the same time, still capturing the complexities of the social worlds that participating individuals belong to. Some of the ways in which other writers deal with the issues associated with interpreting qualitative data are discussed below.

Marshall (1995) sought new ways of sense-making when analysing the data gathered for her book about women managers who move on from their managerial career. She was concerned that "*The issues addressed in this research seem to defy clear interpretation. They need to be viewed from multiple perspectives.*" (Marshall, 1995, p18). Marshall addressed the issue of sense-making in her research in two ways. First, by seeing sense-making as a creative process "*... it [sense-making] is a creative, active process we live by ... My image is that I have been turning things - ideas and interpretations - in the light, revealing different facets ... The 'things' appear as crystals or prisms, reflecting and contrasting light, always offering new impressions.*" (Marshall, 1995, p7). Second, by inviting her readers (i.e. those who directly participated in the research, as well as those less closely involved) to engage with the process of sense making for themselves. Marshall (1995) provided questions and pointers to help the reader with this process.

Other writers stress the importance of addressing the concept of 'trustworthiness' in the interpretive process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Robson, 1993). 'Trustworthiness', in this context, constitutes credibility, dependability and transferability of the research findings. Johnson (1999) argues that the issue of 'trustworthiness' can be addressed by "*... providing enough details of the methodological aspects (including the sample, situations and settings), linking the data to the theoretical framework, and using a multi-methods approach, the study need not stay in isolation. These measures enable connections to be made with other studies that involve different situations*

*and settings.*" (Johnson, 1999, p187). In her study of how mature women students coped with the transition to professional higher education she addressed the notion of 'trustworthiness' by:

- a) making explicit the situation and context within which her research was carried out;
- b) setting the research within a theoretical framework;
- c) using a clear, well documented systematic approach to the data collection and analysis phases of her research, which she did through maintaining a research diary;
- d) conducting an initial study which enabled general issues to be explored, out of which key themes for the main study were identified;
- e) use of 'triangulation' i.e. gathering data from multiple sources, comparing the findings with those from similar areas of research, as well as providing opportunities for others to comment on the interpretations being drawn;
- f) making explicit her own interpretative process, research agenda and background.

Many of these points referred to by Johnson (1999), as we shall see later in this chapter, have been addressed within this particular research.

A final point about how to ensure the validity of qualitative research findings relates to the area of the generalizability of the research findings. Some qualitative researchers (Schofield, 1993; Hammersley, 1993) have discounted generalizability as a goal of qualitative research. Instead they argue that the goal of qualitative research should be to "*...produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with a detailed study of a situation*" (Schofield, 1993, p93).

This shift in emphasis with regard to the overall goal of qualitative research has led some researchers to focus their attention on the concept of 'fittingness' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). 'Fittingness' is the degree to which the situation being studied matches other similar situations. In addressing the notion of 'fittingness', Schofield (1993) argues that researchers should focus on

'thick descriptions'. These would provide sufficiently detailed descriptions of the area under investigation to allow similarities and differences to be drawn out, thereby enabling other researchers to make 'working hypotheses' for other similar studies.

Hammersley (1993) also questions the notion of generalizability as a goal of qualitative research. Instead he sees the goal of qualitative research as being "*Producing a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with a detailed study of a situation*" (Hammersley, 1993, p93).

For researchers using the biographical methodological approach (such as the Life History Methodology), the choices made with regard to the number of individuals to include in the research, together with the scope of the lives to be covered, can affect the validity and reliability of the findings. Plummer (1983) provides a framework for choosing an appropriate sample when using the Life History Methodology. In essence, Plummer's framework consists of two dimensions. The first dimension relates to choices relating to the number of people to include in the study i.e. concentration on a single individual, or a number of individuals. The second dimension relates to the scope of the lives covered. This could either be the whole of the life-span, or a focus on a particular time period, or aspect, of an individual's life (Farnes, 1992). For the researcher, this framework suggests a number of possible options as illustrated in Figure 5.

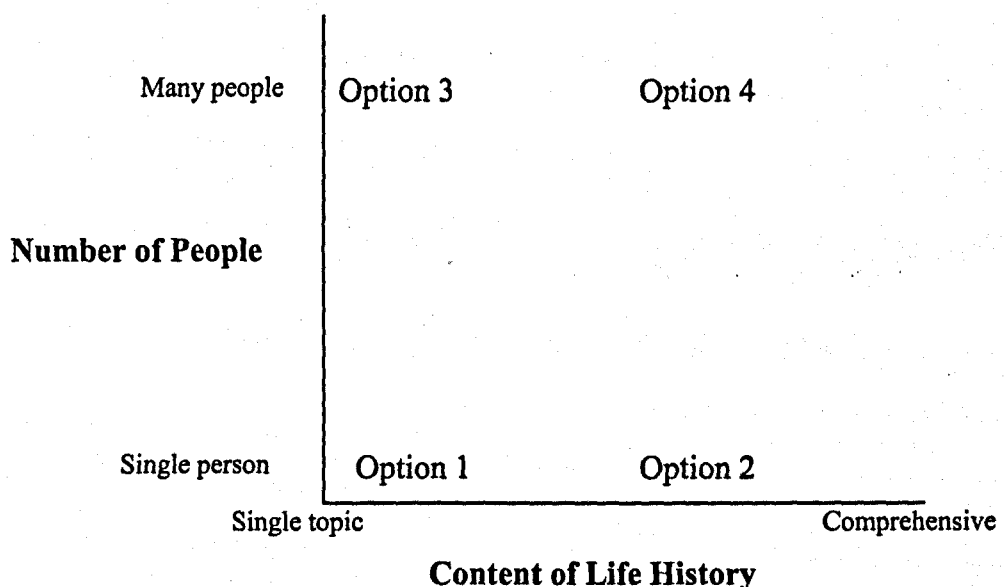


Figure 5: Framework for Life-history options based on Plummer's (1983) typology

In Option 1, the researcher would focus on a single topic within a single individual's life. The topic for example might be a particular time of change within the individual's life. Whilst of interest to the researcher, this option would provide data that is of an ideographic nature as opposed to demographic i.e. insights into the extent to which the individuals experience matches that of others in similar social settings.

Option 3, on the other hand, would allow for a research design which focused on a particular topic but involved more people. The research by Mallon (1998), summarised in Chapter 1, which explored the transition from managerial career to portfolio worker, is an example of this option.

In Option 2, the researcher would obtain a wider and more comprehensive view of a single individual's life history. However, as with Option, 1 it would be difficult to make any generalisations from these findings.

In Option 4, a comprehensive view of many individuals' lives would be explored in the research. This option would seem most fruitful in terms of producing findings that are rich in data and which can also be linked to changes within a broader contextual framework.

### **3.3 Research design**

Having discussed some of the broader methodological considerations that have been taken into account when designing this research, this section sets out the specific design and implementation details relating to this particular research. These include:

- a) the research questions and how they were derived;
- b) the methodological options considered, together with the justification for the specific methodologies chosen;
- c) selecting the research sample;
- d) the overall research approach taken, including the research phases, the fieldwork conducted, and

- e) the difficulties encountered during both the design and implementation stages of the research and how these were resolved.

### **3.3.1 Research questions**

The aim of this research was to discover how self-employed professionals, working in the field of Human Resources, are managing their lives, learning and knowledge. The research has been set within the changing context of work, employment and careers in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain. It is this contextual background that has informed the overall research.

The research questions were derived from the background literature review which covered the areas of changing theoretical perspectives on careers, the knowledge-creation process and the implications for individuals following non-organisational careers, as well as theories relating to adult learning (as detailed in Chapters 1 and 2). They were designed to address the gaps within existing theoretical and empirical work relating to area of research. The specific questions addressed include:

- a) What factors influence individuals' decision to become self-employed at a particular point in their lives?
- b) Why is learning and knowledge-creation so important to those who are self-employed? What strategies do these individuals adopt for developing their knowledge assets? What difficulties do they encounter and how do they manage these?
- c) How do they mobilise different forms of support once self-employed?
- d) How do individuals plan and organise their work career, in relation to their other life-areas, once self-employed? To what extent are the decisions that individuals make about their work career informed and/or affected by the needs/demands from other life-areas e.g. their learning career and family career?
- e) What are the tensions and opportunities associated with the self-employed way of living and how do individuals manage these?

### 3.3.2 Methodological options and chosen methodologies

The methodologies considered for this research included: structured questionnaires, administered to participants in a face-to-face setting; survey questionnaire to be completed by participants on their own; participant observation, and group interviews.

Whilst each of these methodologies can bring fruitful data for certain types of research, they were felt inappropriate for this particular research for several reasons. Although adopting a survey questionnaire approach would have possibly enabled a larger sample to have been included in the research, it was felt that this would not yield sufficiently detailed responses about individuals' background career histories, or the interaction between their work career and their other life-areas. To capture this type of subjective data in a survey questionnaire would have required formulating divergent questioning techniques that are often problematic for respondents to complete, as well as for the researcher to analyse. Unlike in a face-to-face interview situation, the survey questionnaire approach doesn't provide the researcher with an opportunity to seek clarification about the responses given, probe deeper about specific responses, or seek further clarification.

The group interviewing technique, often used in market research and organisational research, although a rich source of data was also felt to have a number of drawbacks for this particular research. Some of the more common drawbacks of the group interview approach include: the need for skilled facilitation; additional time to create the right climate within which participants are willing to have an open exchange of information, as well as the potential for social pressure/acceptability influencing the responses gained (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). For the purposes of this research, it would have also made it difficult to collect historical data about individuals' lives, as well as sufficient data about their separate life-areas, data which other writers (Barley 1989; Dex 1991) argue is important when conducting careers research. In addition it was felt that there would be practical difficulties in trying to bring a group of independent Human Resource consultants together for a group discussion given that, as we have seen, they live and work in different geographical locations.



Taking into account the arguments made earlier regarding how to address the areas of reliability in qualitative research, a multiple methodological approach was chosen for the research, with the main methodology being the Life History Methodology. This was supplemented with Social Network Analysis and Documentary Analysis to capture more specific types of data. The justification for the specific methodologies chosen follows below.

### **Life History Methodology**

The Life History Methodology is an established methodology within the Social Sciences for gaining an understanding of individuals' life experiences set within a broader context framework, acknowledging that "*... life, employment, and work experiences are all bound tightly together and that it is impossible to understand life without work experiences and vice versa.*" (Dex, 1991, p10). It encapsulates the three key components relating to the notion of careers defined by the Chicago School of Sociology (Barley, 1989) - the situational (social context), the relational (interactions with different strands of own life, as well as with other social actors/institutions), together with the chronology (i.e. moving perspective over time).

The Life History Methodology reflects the importance of time, notably how the past is crucial to our understanding of the present. It also enables the chronology between individuals' lives and social structures, as well as between related individuals, to be drawn out (Dex, 1991). It also takes into consideration the effects of timing and sequencing of events in a person's life.

In addition, the Life History Methodology enables objective data (i.e. relatively factual data about events and transition points in individuals' lives) and subjective data (i.e. individuals' feelings about particular events/situations) to be juxta-positioned during the data-gathering, analysis and presentation of the research findings.

Given these factors, it was felt to be an appropriate methodology for this research for the following reasons.

- a) The life-history framework offers a comprehensive and integrative approach within which to interpret individual and familial transitions within a context of historical change (Bertaux,

1982). The methodology provides a multi-disciplinary approach to studying complex social phenomenon, combining psychological, sociological and demographic traditions.

- b) Recent developments in the Life History Methodology, for example the development of Life Course Analysis, enables key events and patterns in each separate life-area to be analysed and discussed before focusing on the often more complex inter-relationships across life-areas. This analytical approach enables the richness of individuals' lives to unfold gradually "*... the overlaps between individuals' experiences and those coincidental in chronological (or historical time), be they other individuals, family members, structural changes, policy changes ... it also focuses on transitions over time between various states.*" (Dex, 1991, p4) and also "*... emphasises the importance of the changing socio-economic context and how opportunities and constraints affect and have affected options and activities over time.*" (Farnes, 1996, p341).
- c) Contemporary career theory, as we saw in Chapter 1, suggests that we need to think of careers in a much more integrative way, viewing careers as consisting of all of a person's varied life experience i.e. education, training and work in several organisations (Hall, 1991), rather than confined purely to individuals' work. The Life History Methodology, when combined with Life Course Analysis, would seem an appropriate methodology for researching these areas as, as has already been argued. It enables the gathering and analysis of wider contextual information as well as the interactions both within and across life-areas.
- d) The Life History methodology, which is based on biographical interviewing techniques, is a particularly well-suited methodology for empirical research where the goal is discovery, or exploratorion, as opposed to verification (Crowbach, 1975).

Despite its suitability for the chosen area of research, the Life-History Methodology does have limitations. First, collecting comprehensive life histories using open-ended biographical methods generates large amounts of unstructured data where actual events, evaluative judgements and objective facts can be intermingled (Dailey, 1971). To overcome this difficulty, other researchers have used a combined biographical and questionnaire approach. Johnson et al (1981), for example,

used this combined methodology in their study to evaluate a meals-on-wheels service amongst elderly people. Farnes (1996) used a similar approach in his research investigating the impact of the Open University Community Education courses on students' lives. In both of these studies the researchers used an Interview Document that included both qualitative and quantitative questioning techniques. The Interview Document contained open-ended starter questions covering the individuals' main life areas as well as questions to gather specific information about key aspects of individuals' lives. The use of an Interview Document allows individual responses to be recorded directly onto the document form thus eliminating the need for recording and transcribing the interview data.

A further limitation of biographical methodologies such as the Life History Methodology relates to the reliability of data gathered from retrospective personal accounts. Here then we are dealing with some of the known difficulties associated with autobiographical memory, these include:

- a) data being a reconstruction of events, rather than actual events (Bartlett, 1932);
- b) data being partial, either because individuals are selective about the information provided e.g. a tendency to forget less pleasant incidents more rapidly than others, or because the timescales are such that the individual forgets key information (Linton, 1975), or social desirability and association with success of the subject matter (Himmelweit, 1978);
- c) expectations and assumptions affecting various aspects of memory (Bartlett, 1932), and
- d) distortions i.e. disruption from misleading questions, trying to recall detailed information from an inadequate base and social factors such as the desire to please the interviewer (Baddeley, 1990).

Given that data gathered using the Life History Methodology is drawn from autobiographical memory, how reliable is it? Barclay (1988) argues that we need to distinguish between the 'truth' of a recollection and its 'accuracy'. A recollection, he argues, can be considered as true if it represents an individual's general experience of a situation and a person's attitude towards it. In other words it can be considered accurate if it conveys the gist of an individual's experience. These

known difficulties with autobiographical memory were thus taken into account when planning the data gathering through building in opportunities for repeat interviews and also providing opportunities for individuals to review the interview transcripts to reflect on their responses.

Several of Johnson's (1999) criteria for addressing 'trustworthiness' (see 3.2.1) were taken into consideration at different times during the research as a way of ensuring the reliability of the research findings and also as a way of managing the potential biases that can occur in research where the researcher is an insider. First, consideration was given to setting the research within both a theoretical framework (i.e. theories relating to learning and knowledge creation) and a contextual framework (i.e. details about changes in work, employment and careers). Second, data was gathered through multiple methodologies (Life History Methodology and Social Network Analysis). Third, the research was designed as two phases to enable the research area to be more clearly defined before conducting all of the interviews.

In addition opportunities were sought for other researchers to offer feedback on the research approach and the interpretations being drawn from the findings. These included:

- a) presenting at a 'Work in Progress' seminar within the University. Here feedback was obtained on the sampling approach, underpinning research assumptions, as well as addressing the difficulties associated with the researcher being part of the community being researched;
- b) presenting emerging findings at a workshop at a women's career networking conference;
- c) participating in peer review sessions with other post-graduate research students to expose my ideas and gain their feedback;
- d) linking the findings to other empirical research that has been concerned with developing an understanding of the lives of those who are self-employed, and
- e) being open about my own interest and involvement with the Human Resource profession and in particular as someone who is part of the world of self-employment.

## **Social Network Analysis**

The background literature review identified the important role that relationship networks play in individuals' lives. First, the availability of appropriate social support is seen as being an important factor in making successful life transitions (Fielden & Davidson, 1998;) and in managing change (Egan, 1998). As social support is seen as providing an important coping mechanism during periods of change (Sugarman 1986), social support activities are often heightened during times of transition (Minor, Slade and Myers, 1991; Fielden and Davidson, 1998).

Second, more recent developments in the field of knowledge management indicate that social networks are important to the knowledge creation process (Nonaka, 1991a; Bird, 1994; Davenport and Prusack, 1998).

Given this background literature, it was felt that there may be some parallel observations in terms of the experience and behaviours of individuals experiencing a transition into self-employment. It was for these reasons that a structured methodology for capturing and analysing information about individuals' social support networks was felt important.

Social Network Analysis provides a structured methodology for gathering and analysing data relating to individuals' social support networks, enabling common characteristics such as: the range or size of the network, density of the network, and multiplexity and symmetry within the network. (Scott, 1991), together with an understanding of the type(s) of support needed and received (e.g. emotional, informational, instrumental or companionship) and how these different forms of support are mobilised (Eckenrode & Wethington, 1990).

## **Documentary Analysis**

Documentary sources, in the form of official statistics, government publications, social surveys, as well as newspapers and journals, can all form useful sources of data for the researcher at different stages of their research (Finnegan, 1996).

Some of the documentary sources that were reviewed for this research included information relating to employment trends, particularly those relating to flexible forms of employment, such as

self-employment. One of the key information sources referenced was statistics on employment and employment trends provided by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).

However, as the information reported by the DfEE is not sufficiently detailed to identify the number of Human Resource professionals that are self-employed, due to the way that the statistics are aggregated, other sources had to be consulted. This involved gaining access to data held on the membership databases of two organisations that HR professionals can choose to become members of: the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) and the Association of Management Education and Development (AMED). As membership of these organisations is voluntary, the membership data only gives a general indication of the extent of self-employment within this profession. A further difficulty encountered was that the information being sought was not part of the standard reports produced by these membership organisations, thus special reports had to be negotiated with the membership secretaries. In addition neither of these organisations kept historical data about their members and their career backgrounds. This made it difficult to establish the extent of growth of self-employment amongst HR professionals over the past decade.

As well as gathering data using these structured data gathering approaches, additional data was gathered during the life-cycle of this research. This occurred through informal conversations with other self-employed HR professionals either at careers conferences or through the course of my work as an independent HR consultant. These conversations focused on specific topics, for example, the types of networks individuals belong to and why; specific learning strategies adopted since becoming self-employed; as well as how individuals manage the tensions and opportunities associated with the self-employed lifestyle. The data from these conversations have been helpful when making interpretations from the research findings.

### **3.3.4 Selecting and identifying an appropriate sample and sample size**

Some of the questions that had to be addressed when designing this research were What would make an appropriate sample size? and How would I gain access to individuals willing to share their experience of self-employment? To help determine an appropriate sample size, I reviewed other empirical work that involved gaining insights into individuals' lives.

Marshall (1995) included 16 case studies in her study of women managers who had moved out of management into other careers. Cohen (1997) included 24 women in his PhD research that investigated the transition from traditional employment to small business owner. Mallon (1998) included 25 individuals in her research investigating the transition from managerial career to portfolio career.

Bertaux (1982) collected the life-histories of fifteen bread-makers in his research aimed at developing an understanding of the working lives of French bread-makers. Instead of using a random sampling approach, Bertaux (1982) moved from one baker to the next until such time as he found that “... *the proportion of new versus the already known was getting smaller with each interview.*” After collecting 15 life-histories, Bertaux (1982) felt that he had developed a sufficiently clear picture of the basic structure of the working lives of these bread-makers to be able to make generalisations about bread-makers as a whole.

In addition, Plummer's (1983) framework for determining an appropriate sample size when using the Life History Methodology, including addressing the issue of reliability (see 3.2.1), was also taken into account. This framework indicates that having a smaller sample size allows for a more in-depth dialogue to be held with participating individuals thereby enabling a more comprehensive view of their lives to be captured.

Banister et al (1994) argue that sampling in a qualitative study is different from statistical sampling in quantitative research. They too argue that although the sample size needs to be sufficient to support generalisations, with large samples, the detail and importance of individual accounts can get lost. They advocate the use of smaller samples enabling a more in-depth study.

Another factor that had to be taken into account when selecting an appropriate sample size was the practicalities of gaining access to self-employed professionals. Unlike when conducting research into organisational careers, there wasn't a single reference point that could be approached to gain agreement for access. This had to be discussed and agreed separately with each participant. In addition, there was the added constraint of finding a convenient location and time to interview participants, given that the nature of their work means that they often work in different locations.

Hence locational and time constraints had to be taken into account when planning and conducting the fieldwork.

One final consideration that had to be considered when choosing an appropriate sample was that of whether to include a single, or mixed gender sample. A mixed gender sample was included for several reasons. Whilst the original interest in this topic area arose from anecdotal data about women who had 'given up' on organisational careers because of the conflict that this created with their family lives, the background literature review suggested that the issue of work-life balance was becoming a source of tension for men too. Chapter 1 reviewed other research that indicates that some men are now choosing to work atypically (New Ways to Work study, 1996). Given this contextual background, it seemed that there was an opportunity to explore whether self-employment, which is one form of atypical working, enables men to gain a more satisfactory balance between their work and other life-areas (e.g. family, learning, leisure). Some gender-related questions considered in the research include:

- a) are the factors that influence an individual's decision to become self-employed similar for men and women?
- b) does self-employment present similar tension and opportunities for men and women?
- c) are there differences in the way that men and women manage the relationship between work and other areas of their lives when self-employed?

Taking all of these points into consideration, a sample size of twenty was considered reasonable for this particular piece of research. However, the actual number of participating individuals was twenty-six: a comparable number to that in other research aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of individuals' lives.

### **3.4 Research implementation**

#### **3.4.2 Overall research approach**

A two-phased approach was adopted when planning the research implementation for several reasons. This enabled me to:



- a) gradually develop my experience of collecting data using the Life History Methodology and analysing the data using Life Course Analysis;
- b) develop a graphical format for representing life-history data;
- c) sharpen up the focus of the research i.e. becoming clearer about the scope of the research, together with the target group to be included in the main research phase, and
- d) test out and refine the research questions with a small group of individuals prior to including a larger sample.

The initial research phase was conducted during 1996. It involved interviewing a small group of individuals (six in total) who had experienced a recent transition in their work career. The main research phase built on the methodological approach and findings from this initial research phase, with the interviews taking place over a sixteen-month time period in 1997/1998.

### **3.4.3 Initial research phase**

Six individuals were interviewed for the initial research stage: four men and two women.

Biographical details about each of these individuals can be found in Appendix 3.

Five of these were identified through personal networking so they were either personal friends or work colleagues, or had been recommended to me by friends. A further individual was identified from a letter that he had written for Sesame, the Open University Student Union Newsletter, where he described the impact of studying for an MBA on his career. All of the interviews in this initial research phase were conducted face-to-face. The initial contact, briefing and interview arrangements were made over the telephone. The interviews took place either within an individual's home, their workplace, or in a public space (e.g. café).

A combined open-ended biographical method and structured questionnaire approach was designed to gather the data. This was refined and modified during this initial research phase. The interview questions were designed to gather specific information about individual's life (e.g. their work, education, family, health and community careers) across three time periods: pre self-employment,

the transition into self-employment, followed by post self-employment. Both factual and experiential data about individuals' work, familial situation, as well as their learning experiences was gathered for each of these time periods. Some of this factual information was gathered during the interviews and some was gathered at a later point through a separate questionnaire that individuals completed when they reviewed the interview transcript. Appendix 2 sets out the opening questions and probe questions that guided the interview process.

After the interviews a multiple life-line diagram was produced using the data gathered from participants during the interviews. An example is shown in Figure 6.

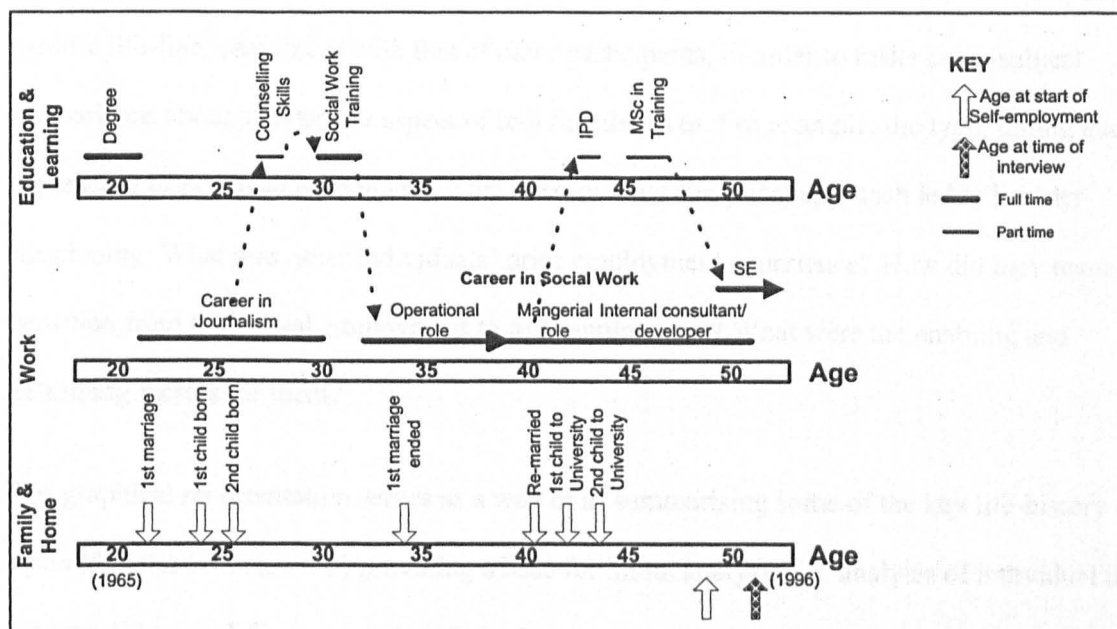


Figure 6: Example of a multiple life-line diagram developed and used during the research

This multiple life-line diagram sets out key events and patterns within each life-area (e.g. formal learning, work, family), together with the inter-relationships across life-areas.

This graphical representation of life-history data was influenced by the work of Farnes (1992) from his work on Life Course Analysis of Students' Lives. It enables the reader to see, at a glance, key life-events, such as attending University, starting a first job, getting married, as well as instances where individuals have experienced dis-continuities in their lives. So in the example life-line diagram above, we can see how this particular individual, who was male, had had a two-year break in his work career in his early thirties to study full-time for a social work qualification. The inter-relationships across life-areas are indicated by the dotted lines between life-areas.

Mapping out individual's lives in this graphical way provided a basis for initial analytical questioning. Having key events and/or changes in an individual's life laid out in a graphical format draws attention to specific periods of change in an individual's life, for example a break in employment, familial move or career transitions. Then drawing on further data from the interviews it is possible to identify answers to related questions such as: What prompted a particular change at that particular point in time in an individual's life? What was happening in other life-areas during this period of change? What difficulties were encountered and how were these overcome? and What support and/or other resources did the individual draw on?

Having produced a multiple life-line diagram for each participant, it was then possible to extract a specific life-line, combine it with that of other participants, in order to make cross-subject comparisons about a particular aspect of individuals' lives. For example, the type, timing and sequencing of events in individuals' work careers. This analytical approach led to broader questioning: What was other individuals' prior employment experience? How did they manage the transition from traditional employment to self-employment? What were the enabling and restraining factors for them?

This graphical representation serves as a way of a) summarising some of the key life-history data captured in the interviews, b) providing a base for initial analysis e.g. analysis of individual inter and intra life-area differences and c) for making cross-subject comparisons.

Completing this initial research phase enabled the scope of the overall research to be narrowed down to the study of the lives of one particular group of individuals following an atypical career i.e. self-employed human resource professionals, with a particular focus on how they are managing their learning and knowledge.

The research scope was narrowed down to individuals drawn from this professional discipline for several reasons. First, I myself am part of the self-employed human resource community therefore have a personal interest in gaining a greater understanding of how self-employment impacts on the lives of other individuals in a similar situation to myself. Second, the structural changes within organisations, outlined in Chapter 1, have created opportunities for individuals in this profession to

work on different contractual arrangement with organisations. Whilst the benefits of these structural changes, from an organisational perspective, have been researched and documented, the dynamics of the careers of those who are self-employed is an under-researched area (Kidd, 1996).

However conducting research where the researcher is part of the community being investigated does present difficulties. One of the main difficulties is that of the researcher remaining objective and not letting his/or her personal experience interfere with (i.e. bias) the research process and outcomes. Some of the steps taken to address this tension have been discussed earlier in this chapter.

#### **3.4.4 Main research phase**

A further twenty individuals were included during the main research phase (thirteen male and seven female). Their biographical details can be found in Appendix 3. In addition, half of the individuals who participated in the initial research phase were interviewed a second time.

Participating individuals were identified on the basis of 'non-probability' sampling (Hornby and Symon, 1994). This means that they were included on the basis that they had information about the process, rather than being selected from a random sample.

Although participating individuals worked within the broad field of Human Resources their work largely fell within the developmental areas of Human Resources (i.e. it involved addressing the developmental needs of organisations and individuals) as opposed to the operational areas (i.e. policy making and the general administrative tasks associated with managing employees). Some were consultants, some trainers, and some worked on a one-to-one basis with clients (e.g. as coaches, mentors, or counsellors). Some, as we shall see in the findings that follow, performed a combination of these roles.

As with the initial research phase, nine individuals were identified through personal networking. However, as this resource began to dry up, I looked for alternate sources. Initially I turned to the University as a resource to draw on in order to identify additional participants. However, having gained the relevant approval to conduct research amongst Open University students, I discovered

that the data held in the main student database did not contain the occupation codes that I needed to access. Similar difficulties were encountered when trying to gain details about Alumni members from the Open University Business School.

Thus having not been able to make use of these information sources, I decided to look elsewhere to identify additional participants. The remaining eleven, were identified through letters placed in Sesame (The Open University Student Union Newsletter) and in Open Eye (The monthly magazine of the Open University Alumni Community). Broadening the search for participants, beyond those within my own network, was also seen as a way of reducing any potential bias in the research approach, because of my prior knowledge of participating individuals' backgrounds and experience.

With participants identified through other sources the only prior information that I had about them was that they were either currently studying with the Open University, had studied with the Open University in the past, or were associated with the Open University in some other way. In practice it also brought greater diversity in terms of individuals' backgrounds and experiences. Initial contact was made either via the telephone, or email (Appendix 1 provides details of background information made available to participants).

As with the initial research phase, a combined open-ended biographical method and structured questionnaire approach was used during the interviews. The interviews lasted for up to an hour and half. In some cases, an additional shorter interview took place to gather further details about a particular aspect of an individual's life. Where this was not possible, participants were invited to add further thoughts/insights when reviewing the interview transcript.

The majority of interviews (twelve out of the twenty) were conducted face-to-face. However when the search for participants was broadened, not all of those who responded lived within close proximity to my home; a situation that meant that it wasn't always feasible to meet face-to-face. In these cases, with the consent of participants, the interviews were conducted over the telephone.

The same process was followed for both the face-to-face and the telephone interviews. The same interview questions were used to guide the interview process. The interviews were still recorded (using the loud speaker option on my telephone). The recordings were transcribed and a copy of the transcript sent to participants for comments/additions and then a multiple life-line diagram was produced.

The use of telephone interviewing provided a legitimate and pragmatic approach, particularly given these individuals' professional backgrounds and their experience of both face-to-face and telephone interviewing techniques. However, one of the downsides of conducting interviews in this way is that it can be more difficult to build up a rapport with the interviewee. To overcome this potential difficulty I spent more time talking with participants, or communicating with them via e-mail, before conducting the interviews. This additional contact enabled me to give individuals more information about the research (see Appendix 1). I was also able to gather some initial background information about them, for example, their connection with the Open University, how long they had been self-employed, and also identify what type of work they do.

### **3.4.5 Data analysis and presentation of the findings**

One of the difficulties encountered in conducting this research was that of how to present the research findings in a coherent and logical way and yet still give a detailed picture of the complexity of these individual's lives.

The Life History Methodology, combined with Life Course Analysis (which as argued earlier provides a structured methodology for the analysis of life history data (Haraven and Adams, 1982; Dex, 1991)), and Social Network Analysis, formed the main data collection and analytical tools used during the research.

However, other analytical tools that were found to be useful at different stages of the research were Strauss and Corbin's (1990) techniques for enhancing theoretical sensitivity, drawn from their Grounded Theory Approach to Qualitative Research. These techniques are designed to help open up the researcher's thinking and stimulate the inductive process, as well help minimise the assumptions and biases that can creep into the research process.

The analysis was planned as two distinct phases. The first phase of the analysis (i.e. Initial data analysis) was designed to enable the key events and patterns relating to each separate life-area (i.e. formal learning, work and family careers) to be identified, presented and analysed separately and for the complex inter-relationships across life-areas, to unfold gradually. This analytical approach is one adopted by other writers that have used Life Course Analysis (see Farnes 1996). The output from this initial analysis forms the basis of the three findings chapters that follow.

The second phase of the analysis was designed to draw together the different strategies that individuals adopt for managing the complex interactions and inter-relationships across life-areas set out in the findings chapters. This level of analysis focuses on higher-level comparisons, cutting across the categories in the initial data analysis. The output from this level of analysis forms the basis of Chapter 7 (Integration). Further details of these two stages of analysis are set out below.

#### **3.4.5.1 Initial data analysis**

The first area of analysis in this initial data analysis phase was individuals' **Educational and Learning Career**. Several writers (Cross, 1981; Edwards, 1993), as we saw in Chapter 2, have pointed out that there is a direct relationship between an individual's past educational experience and future participation in learning. Given this theoretical background, it was felt important to look at how individuals' actual learning experiences mapped against this. The analysis focused on identifying common experiences in individuals' formal learning careers as a way of addressing the questions relating to the learning history component of the tentative model *Understanding Learning Amongst Self-employed Professionals*, introduced in Chapter 2; these include:

- a) What have been the formal learning experiences of the individuals who have participated in this research?
- b) Has formal learning been a significant part of individuals' lives, both before and after self-employment?
- c) What factors have influenced individuals' decision to participate in formal learning at particular times in their lives?

The second area of analysis was individuals' **Work Career**. This involved analysing their earlier career histories, drawing out similarities and differences relating to: how long individuals had been in employment (overall); the types of jobs individuals had had since beginning their work career; whether they had experienced any breaks in their work career and, if so, for what reasons, and also how long they had been self-employed.

The analysis also focused on the inter-relationship between individuals' work career and their learning career (both formal and informal) addressing other questions in the tentative model *Understanding Learning Amongst Self-employed Professionals* including:

- a) To what extent is individuals' learning directed at developing specific skills and knowledge, or more generic skills such as Hall's (1991) 'metaskills'?
- b) What resources do individuals draw on and consume when managing their learning (e.g. time, money, technology)?
- c) What support do individuals draw on to help with their learning? Do they learn on their own or with others as part of a learning community?
- d) What barriers to learning do they experience?

The third area of analysis focused on individuals' **Family Career** identifying similarities and differences in people's familial situations, both at the time of the interviews and also when they became self-employed. It then considered the inter-relationship between individuals' family career and their work and learning careers.

Analysing the inter-relationship between these three main life-areas enabled the tensions, opportunities and challenges associated with the self-employed lifestyle to be drawn out, together with the different managing strategies that individuals adopt for dealing with these.

### **3.4.5.2 Higher-level data analysis (Integration)**

This higher-level analysis was felt necessary as a way of answering the overarching research question 'How do self-employed professionals manage their lives, learning and knowledge?'. It



goes beyond the categories identified in the initial data analysis thereby enabling different sorts of cross-subject comparisons. For this level of analysis, a tentative life-management model, based on a resource-based approach to managing, was designed and applied.

The rationale for designing the model was to find a way of representing the complexity of the managing task that these individuals face and to provide a medium through which to discuss the different managing strategies adopted. Focusing on the resources that individuals have to draw on and also how they choose to use these enables us get a purchase on how the availability of certain resources affects individuals' life-choices. Having the model enables us to:

- a) draw out the structural changes that occur in individuals' lives when they become self-employed, and
- b) focus on the strategies adopted for managing the tensions, challenges and opportunities associated with the self-employed lifestyle, and how individuals use the resources that they have available to manage these in order to stay successful.

One of the difficulties encountered when drawing wider interpretations from this research relates to the difficulty, discussed earlier, of gaining a clear picture of the extent of self-employment amongst this professional group due to the lack of comprehensive documentary evidence. Thus a picture has had to be deduced from fragmented sources.

On the supply side, during the 1990s there was an increase in the number of organisations contracting out some, or part, of their operations, with training being one of these contracted out services (Labour Market & Skill Trends 2000). The trend towards outsourcing is a global phenomenon. A survey conducted by the American Management Association amongst 600 global organisations, identified that 75% of these companies had outsourced one or more of their HR activities (Davidson, 1998). One explanation for this growth in outsourcing of certain Human Resources services relates to the shift towards the HR function becoming more strategic (Ulrich, 1998). For HR to take on a more strategic role they have had to divest/delegate some of their operational tasks, either within the organisation, or to external providers, through outsourcing.

On the demand side, statistics obtained from two HR membership organisations, the CIPD and AMED give some indication of the extent of their membership that are self-employed.

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the broader methodological considerations that need to be considered when conducting research aimed at gaining an understanding of individuals' lives, set with a changing social context. It has presented arguments for why the chosen methodologies, based upon the constructivist paradigm (Guba, 1990), were the most appropriate. In adopting a constructivist approach, this does not free the researcher from having to address the areas of validity and reliability; both of these have been given careful consideration in the overall methodological approach adopted.

Specific approaches to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, drawn from the work of other writers, include: adopting multiple methodologies (Kirk and Miller, 1986); addressing the topic of 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Johnson, 1999) and 'fittingness' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Hammersley, 1993).

The main methodology, the Life History Methodology, was chosen as it encapsulates the three key components of career theory advocated by the Chicago School of Sociology (Barley, 1989): situational (i.e. social context), relational (i.e. interactions with different strands of own life, as well as with other social actors/institutions) and chronological (i.e. moving perspective over time). In addition, it provides a way of overcoming some of the difficulties associated with qualitative research (e.g. validity and reliability), as it enables both factual and subjective data about individuals' lives to be collected and systematically analysed for inter and intra differences. This main methodology was supplemented with Social Network Analysis and Documentary Analysis.

Life history data was collected from twenty-six participants: seventeen male and nine female. This sample size has been informed by other research aimed at gaining insights into the lives of individuals pursuing atypical careers (Cohen, 1997; Mallon, 1998; Dex, 2000). Participants were identified through the 'non-probability' sampling approach (Hornby and Symon, 1994), proceeding until the point of saturation had been reached (Bertaux, 1982).

One of the possible limitations of this sample size is that it makes it difficult to make generalisations, or draw firm conclusions. However, some writers (Schofield 1993; Hammersley; 1993) argue that generalizability is not a valid goal for qualitative research. Instead, researchers should aim to produce a sufficiently detailed and illuminating description of the phenomenon under investigation to allow similarities and differences to be readily drawn out so that other researchers can produce working hypotheses for future research.

The findings that follow hopefully provide a sufficiently rich picture of each individual's life (i.e. his/her learning, work and family careers), as well drawing out similarities and differences between individuals' lives, for these working hypotheses to be formulated.

## Chapter 4: The formal learning career of participating individuals

### 4.1 Introduction

As a reminder to the reader, the findings chapters (of which there are three) are presented in the same format. Each chapter contains:

- a) factual data relating to a specific life-area, presented in the life-history diagrammatic format introduced in Chapter 3 (Methodology).
- b) subjective data about a specific life-area supported by specific quotations taken from the interviews, as a way of emphasising particular aspects of an individual's life, for example, a specific transition/decision point, or to provide more information about a particular area of tension.

The findings have been presented in this way for a number of reasons. First, the life-history diagrammatic format enables 'on-time' life-events, as well as any deviations, to be more readily identifiable. Second, presenting factual data alongside subjective data can help overcome some of the known limitations of qualitative research (discussed in Chapter 3). Third, it makes it easier to see the relationship between past and current life-experiences (thus incorporating one of the key components of career theory proposed by the Chicago School of Sociology (Barley, 1989)).

This first chapter sets out the findings relating to individuals' formal learning experiences. Formal learning here being defined as learning that has led to an externally recognised qualification. Typically these learning activities have involved a time investment of at least six months, although some have been of a shorter duration.

The self-directed learning experiences of individuals, together with details about specific knowledge-creating activities, are included in *Chapter 5 – The combined work and learning careers of participating individuals*. The decision to separate out formal and informal learning experiences in the findings chapters was taken given the underpinning theoretical perspectives on learning and knowledge, discussed in Chapter 2. As informal learning is less clearly definable than

as formal learning, as it needs to be seen in context, it seemed more appropriate to discuss individuals' informal learning experiences alongside their work experiences.

The findings in this chapter provide answers to questions relating to the learning history component of the tentative model for understanding how self-employed professionals manage their learning and knowledge, introduced in Chapter 2, these include:

- a) What have been the formal learning experiences of individuals who have participated in this research?
- b) Has formal learning played a significant part in their lives, both before and since becoming self-employed?
- c) What factors have influenced their decision to participate in formal learning at particular times in their lives?

In the findings that follow, individuals have been grouped according to their formal learning experiences; six main categories were identified, which are summarised in Table 7.

<b>Individuals' formal learning experiences</b>	<b>Number of individuals</b>
Degree level only	5
Degree level only (mature student)	2
Degree, combined with formal professional learning	4
First degree followed by a higher degree	9
First degree, combined with a higher degree and formal professional learning	2
Formal professional learning followed by academic learning	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

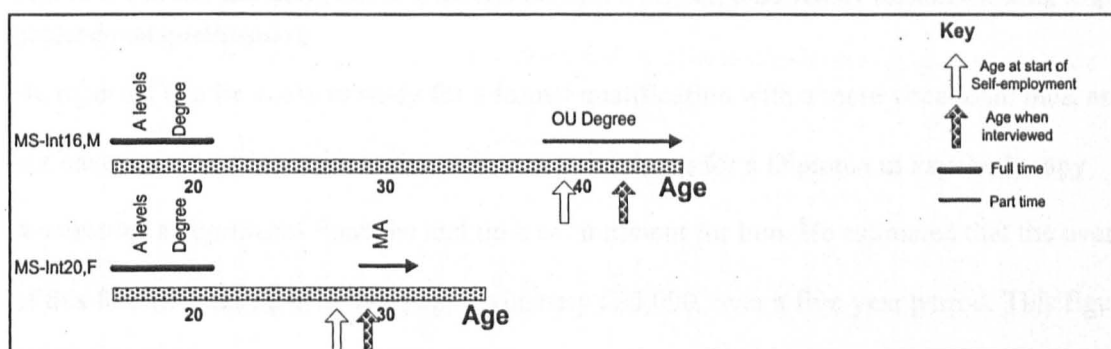
**Table 7: Summary of individual's formal learning experiences**

## 4.2 Detailed findings of participating individuals' formal learning experiences

### 4.2.1 Degree level

Six individuals had followed an expected 'on-time' educational career of 'A' levels, followed by University. The types of degrees that they had completed varied. One had completed a degree in Management Studies. Two had a degree in Economics. The others had degrees in Accountancy, Geology, or History.

Two of these six had participated in additional formal learning activities, since becoming self-employed. One (MS-Int16) had begun studying for a further degree, part-time, when he was in his late thirties. Another (MS-Int20) had begun an MA in Higher and Professional Education when she was in her late twenties. The timing of their formal learning careers can be seen in Figure 7.



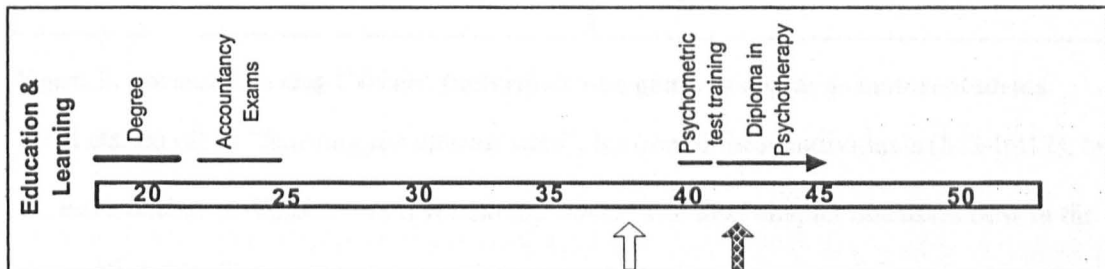
**Figure 7: Formal Learning Career: Individuals with a first degree followed by additional formal learning**

As Figure 7 shows, one individual (MS-Int16) had had a gap of seventeen years in his formal learning career before starting a part-time degree with the Open University (OU), in his late thirties. The second individual (MS-Int20) had had a much shorter gap in her formal learning career, starting a part-time Masters degree in her later thirties.

The factors that influenced each of these individuals decision to resume formal learning career when they did varied. One of these (MS-Int16) he wanted to satisfy his interest in the subject of psychology. However, what he did not explain was why he had chosen to study for another first degree, rather than studying for a higher degree. Two factors had influenced the other individuals' decision to embark on a Masters degree, at the time when she did. She reported that she had not taken part in any formal work-based learning for two years (i.e. since becoming self-employed) and thus she felt that she needed to bring her knowledge up-to-date. The other factor, and not entirely

unrelated, related to her perception of clients' expectations regarding the level of formal qualifications that Trainers ought to have.

One of the other individuals in this category (MS-Int1) started a part-time Diploma in Psychotherapy after being self-employed for about three years. The sequence and timing of his formal learning career can be seen in Figure 8.

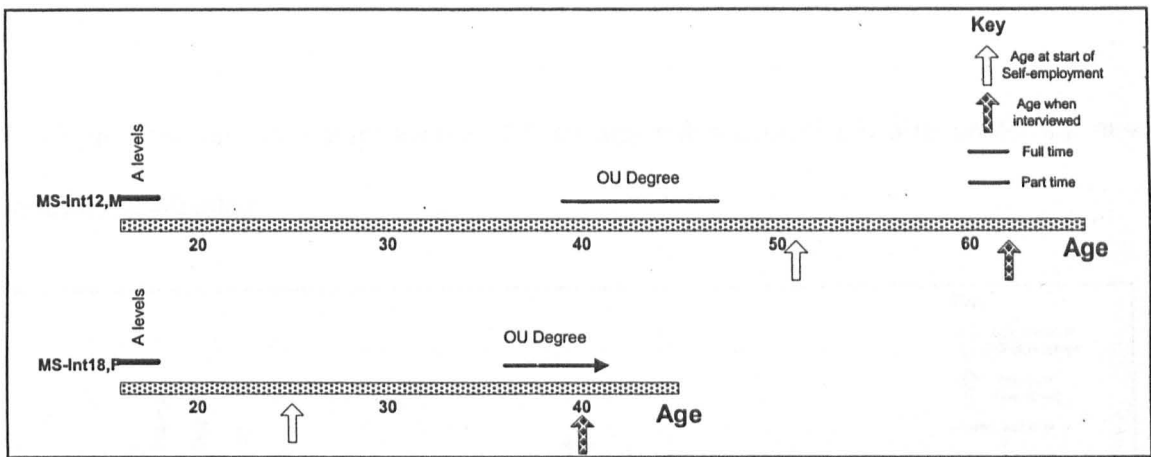


**Figure 8: Formal Learning Career: Individual with a degree, followed by formal learning to gain a professional qualification**

He reported that he chose to study for a formal qualification with a more vocational bias, as he did not have a strong interest in academic learning. Studying for a Diploma in Psychotherapy represented a significant financial and time commitment for him. He estimated that the overall cost of this formal learning activity as approximately £25,000, over a five-year period. This figure included: the course fees, anticipated loss of earnings whilst studying, as well the supervision costs incurred in this type of learning activity. Prior to starting the Diploma qualification he had also completed three short formal professional learning programmes. These included a Facilitation Skills course, as well as training needed to gain the British Psychological Society Level A and Level B Psychometric Testing Certification (necessary for administering psychometric tests to clients).

#### 4.2.2 Degree level only (mature student)

Two individuals had studied for a degree as mature students. One of these (MS-Int12) had had a break of twenty-one years in his formal learning career before studying for an OU degree in his late forties. The other one had had a break of eighteen years in her formal learning career prior to starting an OU degree in her mid-thirties. The timing of their formal learning experiences can be seen in Figure 9 below.



**Figure 9: Formal Learning Career: Individuals who gained a degree as mature students**

What started off as “*learning for interest sake*”, for one of these individuals (MS-Int12), became “... *more and more focused into a vocational base.*” The next chapter discusses how in the latter years of his OU studies, parallel changes occurred his work career.

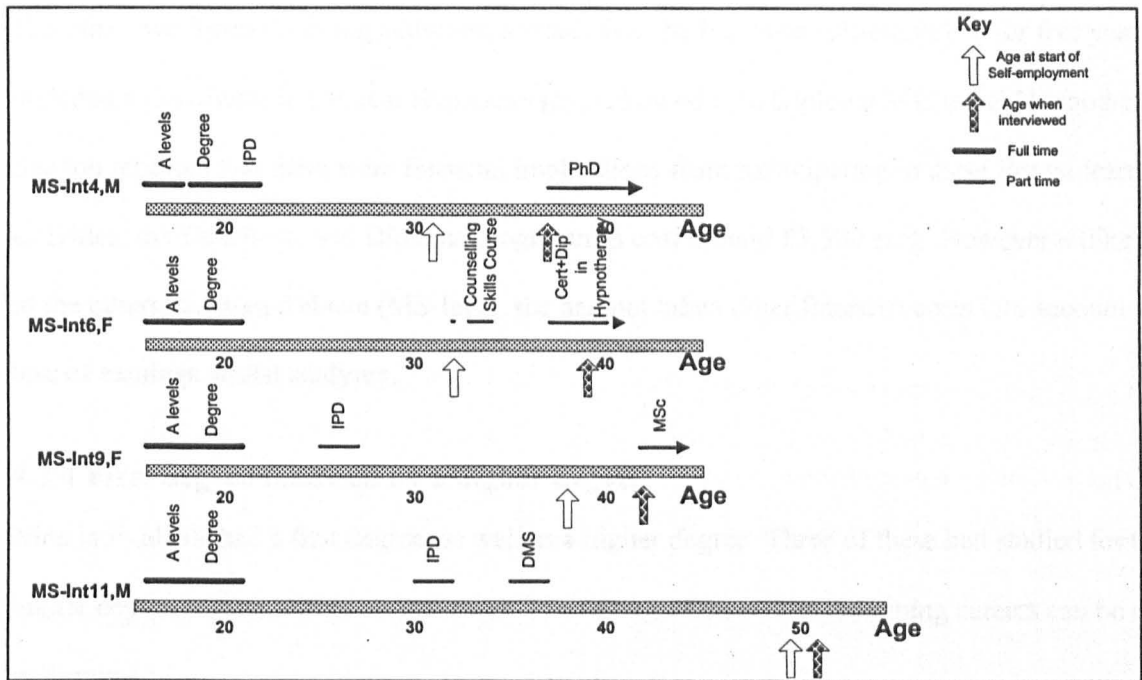
The second individual in this category (MS-Int18) was studying for an OU degree at the time of the interviews. She too began studying for a degree out of interest, rather than to gain a specific qualification and it was the breadth of courses available with the OU that influenced her decision to study with them.

### 4.2.3 First degree combined with formal professional learning

Four individuals with a first degree also studied for additional professional qualifications, at a later point in their careers. Three had completed the necessary training to become full members of the Institute of Personnel and Development (now known as the CIPD) and the other one (MS-Int11) had completed a Diploma in Management Studies (DMS). The timing of their formal learning activities can be seen in Figure 10.



As Figure 10 shows, two completed their IPD training either immediately after graduating, or very soon after graduating.



**Figure 10: Formal Learning Career: Individuals with a first degree, combined with formal professional training**

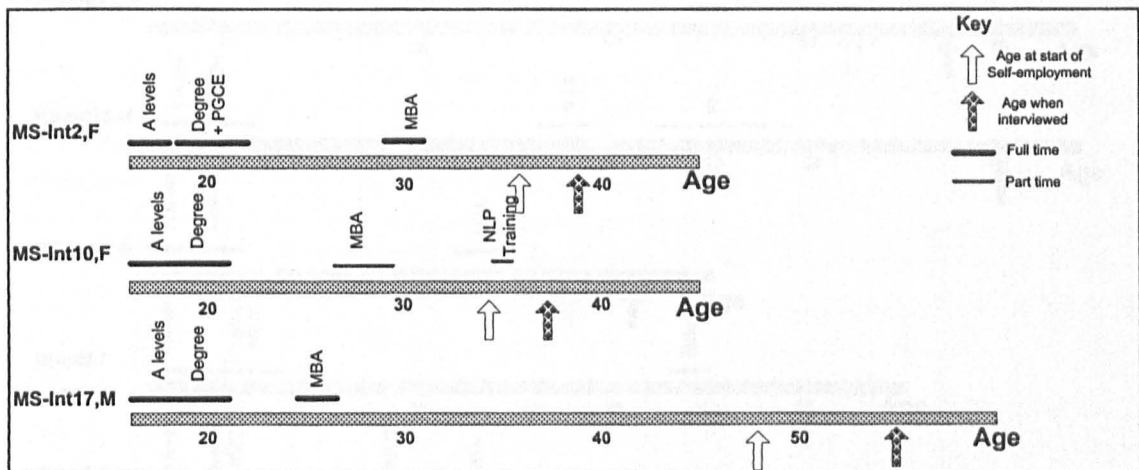
One (MS-Int4) chose to study full-time for his IPD qualification, after graduating, as this fitted with his work career plans. He then had a break of around fourteen years in his formal learning career before beginning a PhD, part-time. His reasons for embarking on this learning activity, at this particular point in his career, were multi-factored. He explained *“I recognise that the timing [for the PhD] is good. It is something which I have thought about previously but not really seriously and now it is opportune in terms of where I am now in my own development ... having a doctorate will really help the business and it will help me with having specialist knowledge in a particular area.”* The second individual (MS-Int9) completed her IPD qualification within five years of graduating, choosing to study part-time alongside her first Personnel job.

Another individual (MS-Int11) had experienced a gap of around ten years in his formal learning career before participating in two formal learning activities in his early to mid-thirties. The first of these formal learning activities involved studying for an IPD qualification and the second a Diploma in Management Studies.

Another individual (MS-Int6) had participated in three formal learning activities since becoming self-employed. Prior to this time period she had not participated in any formal learning since completing her degree, some ten years previously. The first of these formal learning activities was a part-time Counselling Skills course, something that she started in her first year of self-employment. The other two formal learning activities, started after she had been self-employed for five years, included a Certificate in Clinical Hypnotherapy, followed by a Diploma in Clinical Hypnotherapy. She too reported that there were financial implications from participating in these formal learning activities; the Certificate and Diploma programmes cost around £3,500 each. However unlike one of the others, discussed above (MS-Int1), she had not taken other financial costs into account i.e. loss of earnings whilst studying.

#### 4.2.4 First degree followed by a higher degree

Nine individuals had a first degree, as well as a higher degree. Three of these had studied for their higher degree in their mid to late twenties. The timing of their formal learning careers can be seen in Figure 11.



**Figure 11: Formal Learning Career: Individuals with a first degree and higher degree**

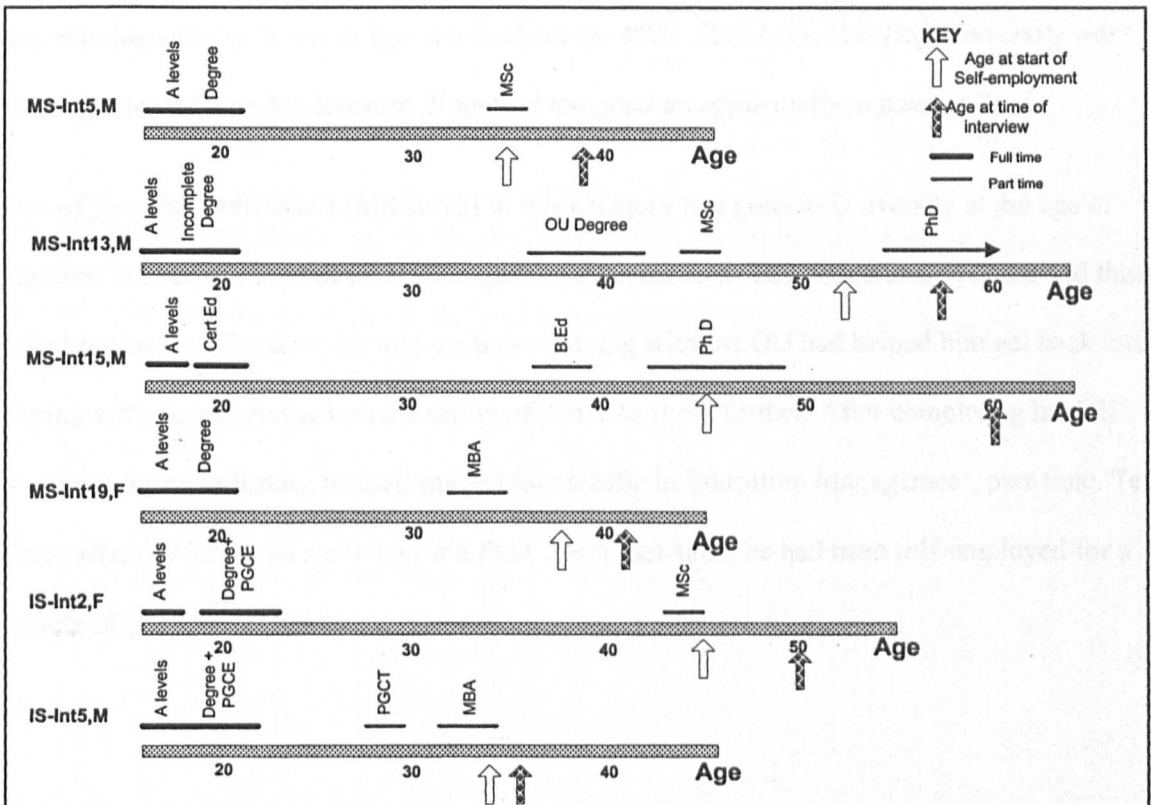
One individual (MS-Int10) had studied for her MBA, part-time, when she was in her late twenties, thus combining formal learning with her work career. The other two (MS-Int2 and MS-Int17) had chosen to study for their MBA, full-time.

One (MS-Int10) reported how she had had studied for an MBA to gain a qualification that would give her credibility in the eyes of the business world “My first degree was in Sociology, which I

loved and which I still think is a jolly useful background, but it doesn't have credibility [in the business world]. Because I had done many different jobs I felt that an MBA would at least give me credibility and bring me up to the level I felt I was at".

She had also participated in other formal learning activities, since becoming self-employed. One of these involved completing a nine month Practitioner Certificate in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) course, which she completed shortly after becoming self-employed. Chapter 5 shows how her transition into self-employment involved a change in career discipline, as well as employment status; changes which required a considerable amount of work-related learning.

The other six individuals in this sub-category had had a larger gap in their formal learning careers after graduating, as we can see in Figure 12.



**Figure 12: Formal Learning Career: Individuals with a first degree and higher degree completed after a larger gap in their formal learning career**

As Figure 12 shows, four individuals had completed, or were in the process of completing, a higher degree in the immediate time period prior to self-employment. One of the key motivational factors for gaining a higher degree at this particular stage in their lives related to their plans for their future work career.

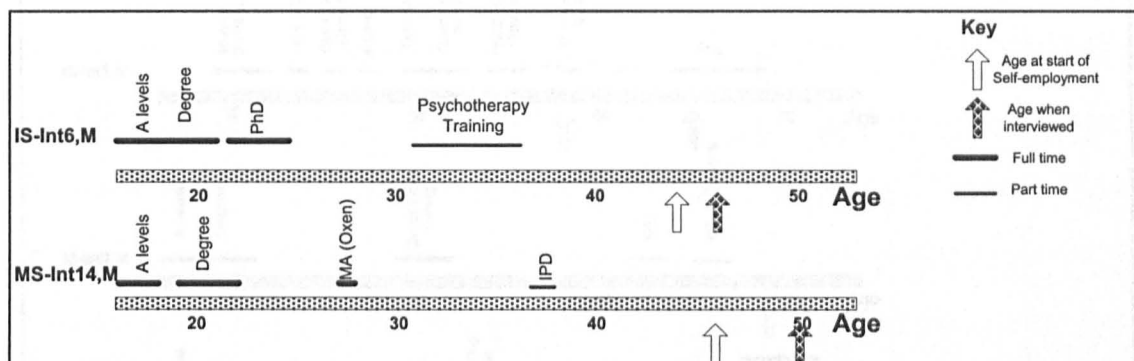
One individual (MS-Int5) reported *"I had no qualifications in training and development although I had been in the role for a number of years. I had a first degree in Theology, which was not relevant to my work"*. So there were similarities here then with his learning experience and that of others, discussed earlier (MS-Int10 and MS-Int20), whereby one of the drivers for participating in additional formal learning is to gain a qualification that has credibility within the business world that they operate in, and to bring their own qualifications up to the same level as those held by their clients.

A particular dilemma for him was deciding whether to study for an MSc in Management Development, a subject that was closely aligned to his work at that time, or studying for an MBA, which would have a broader application. His decision to study for an MSc in Management Development was influenced by other factors, one of which was the availability and accessibility of this learning activity *"I was in two minds about the MSc. Then I saw that [xx] University was offering one, right on my doorstep. It seemed too good an opportunity to pass up."*

One of the other individuals (MS-Int13) in this category had gone to University at the age of eighteen but had not been successful in gaining a degree as he developed exam phobia and thus failed his last set of exams. He told me how studying with the OU had helped him get back into coping with exams, giving him the self-confidence to study further. After completing his OU degree in his early forties, he then studied for an MSc in Education Management, part-time. Ten years after that he began studying for a PhD, again part-time; he had been self-employed for a couple of years at this point.

#### 4.2.5 First degree combined with a higher degree and professional learning

Two individuals who had completed a higher degree in their twenties, went on to study for formal professional qualifications in their thirties. The timing of these formal learning activities can be seen Figure 13.



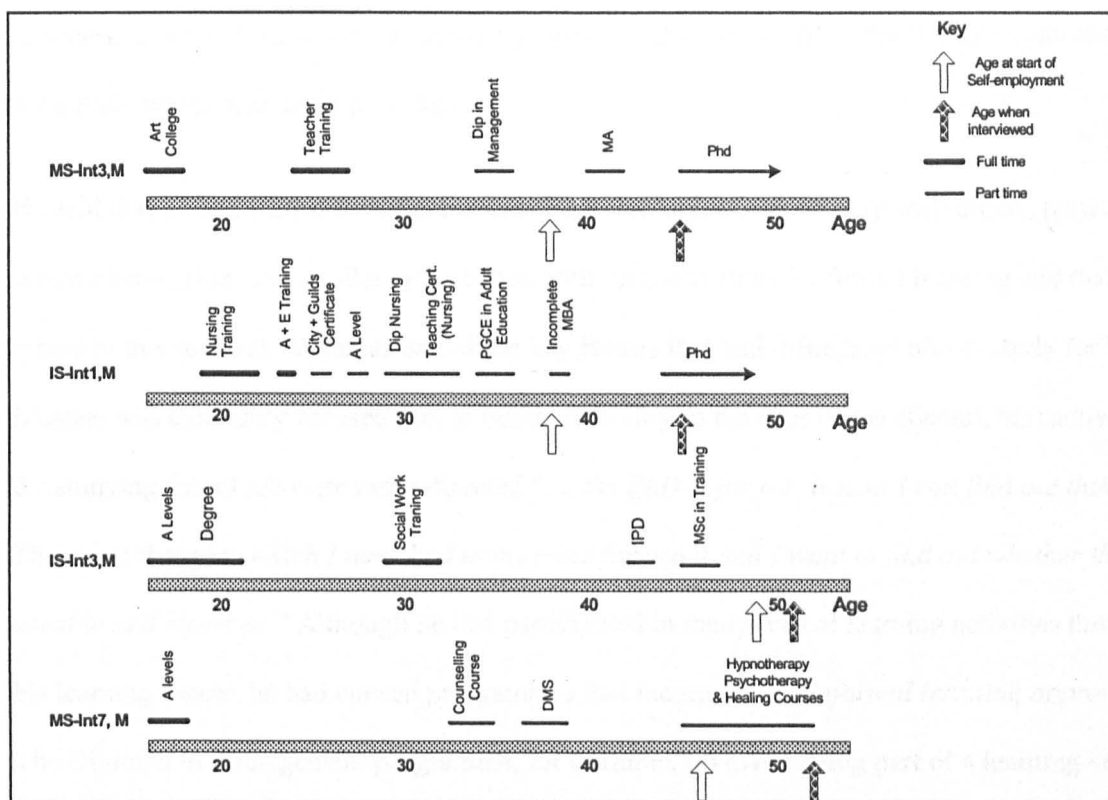
**Figure 13: Formal Learning Career: Individuals with a first degree, higher degree and formal professional development**

One of these individuals (MS-Int14) had studied for his Institute of Personnel & Development qualifications, on a part-time basis, in his late thirties.

The other one (IS-Int6) trained to be a Psychotherapist, part-time, in his early thirties. There were many factors that had influenced his decision to start the psychotherapy training at that time. As some of these are related to changes in his other life-areas these will be discussed in Chapter 6 (The combined family, work and learning careers of participating individuals).

#### 4.2.6 Formal professional training followed by academic learning

Four individuals had participated in several different types of formal learning activities throughout their careers. These include a combination of professional development, followed by more academic learning. The timing of their formal learning activities can be seen Figure 14 below.



**Figure 14: Formal Learning Careers: Individuals who had completed professional training, followed by academic learning**

Only one (IS-Int3) of the individuals in this category had followed what might be considered a conventional learning career i.e. 'A' levels, followed by University. Of the others, one (IS-Int1) had left school at the age of fifteen without any formal qualifications, another (MS-Int3) left school at the age of sixteen to go to Art College and the other (MS-Int7) left school after 'A' levels

Figure 14 shows how one individual (IS-Int1) had experienced a continuous stream of formal learning activities, having initially left school at the age of fifteen without any formal qualifications. When he left school he wanted to go to Technical College to study Graphic Design, but was dissuaded from doing this by his parents. When he was nineteen he trained to be a nurse, full-time. The rest of his formal learning, since then has been part-time, studying whilst working full-time. The biggest gap in his learning career occurred after he gave up the MBA he was studying and before starting a PhD, after he had been self-employed for around five years.

Another individual (MS-Int3) had participated in four separate formal learning activities since leaving Art College at the age of eighteen. In his mid-twenties, after a gap of around six years in his formal learning career, he trained full-time to be a teacher. Six years later, he completed a part-time Diploma in Management and four years after that he completed an MA in Management

Learning, again part-time; he was self-employed at that time. Shortly after that he began studying for a PhD; which was again part-time.

He said that he had started the Masters in order to increase his credibility with others, particularly senior clients; there is a similarity here then with his motivation for formal learning and that of others in this research. Whereas one of the key factors that had influenced him to study for his Masters was externally focused (i.e. to build credibility in the eyes of his clients), his motivation for studying for a PhD were inner-directed “... *the PhD is for me. It is so I can find out things. There are thoughts which I have had in my mind for years and I want to find out whether they are useable and rigorous.*” Although he had participated in many formal learning activities throughout his learning career, he had chosen programmes that incorporated “*informal learning approaches*”. The Diploma in Management programme, for example, involved being part of a learning-set, as did the MA in Management Learning. The methodology that he has chosen for his PhD also involves the Action Learning model; so again he is learning with and alongside other PhD students.

The third individual in this category (IS-Int3) resumed his formal learning career when he was in his late twenties, after a gap of eight years. It was at this point that he trained full-time, to gain a social work qualification. His next two formal learning activities took place when he was in his early to mid-forties. The first involved studying for his IPD qualification and the second involved studying for an MSc in Training. Both of these learning activities were part-time.

The final individual in this category (MS-Int7) had had a gap of twelve years in his formal learning career prior to participating in additional formal learning at the age of thirty. Figure 14, above, shows that he did not go to University at the expected ‘on-time’, but instead he took a year out. However, this turned into taking two years out and in the end he chose not to go to University. His formal learning experiences, since the age of eighteen, had involved periods of part-time studying incorporating what he described as “... *living, working and studying in a whole variety of different ways.*”

### 4.3 Summary

The findings in this chapter have set out the range, and timings, of the formal learning experiences of participating individuals, both prior to, and since self-employment.

Their level of educational achievement overall is high; twenty-three had a first degree and fourteen also had a higher degree. In addition ten were participating in some form of formal learning activity, at the time when the fieldwork was carried out. These formal learning activities included studying for: a degree, a Masters, a PhD, or a formal professional development qualification.

This level of participation in formal learning suggests that these individuals have made a significant investment in their formal learning, both prior to and since becoming self-employed. This chapter has shown the level of financial investment that some have made in their learning. Their experience is consistent with Edwards' (1993) assertion that those with the largest capital investment, i.e. previous investment in learning, are likely to be the biggest buyers in the future.

For the majority of those with a first degree their educational career had followed a fairly typical pattern of 'A' levels, followed by University. However, some had completed their degree as mature students, thus combining work and formal learning. In terms of their higher educational experience four had completed an MBA in the five-year period prior to self-employment and four had completed a higher degree in the immediate period prior to self-employment.

This chapter has also highlighted some of the factors that influenced these individuals' decision to participate in formal learning. These include: accessibility of formal learning programmes; the range of choices with regard to learning topics; the desire to ensure future employability or 'in-demand factor' through the enhancement of their knowledge assets; to address personal and/or business growth needs, and to gain credibility within the business community within which they are now working.

However, other factors that influenced their decision to participate in formal learning have also been alluded to. As these relate to events and/or changes in their other life-areas (e.g. work and family careers) these will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.



Whilst this chapter has set out the findings with regard to individuals' formal learning careers, we do not yet know what place informal learning has played in their lives. This will be covered in the next chapter, which sets out the findings about individuals' work careers, together with the inter-relationship with their learning career.

## Chapter 5: The combined work and learning careers of participating individuals

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings about a second life-area, individuals' working lives, as well as drawing out the inter-relationships between their work and learning careers, with a particular focus on individuals' informal learning experiences so that these can be seen in context with their work career.

The chapter includes factual data about each individual's work career (e.g. length of time in particular jobs, together with the timing and sequencing of key events/changes), as well as subjective data i.e. individuals' experiences of these events/changes, as told during the interviews.

Although data was collected about the whole of each individual's working life the findings presented in this chapter focus on three main time periods: the transition period from organisational career to self-employed career; the initial years of self-employment (up to year three), followed by subsequent years of self-employment, where applicable.

Individuals have been grouped into five categories according to the length of time that they had been self-employed, as shown in Table 8 below.

<b>Length of time in self-employment</b>	<b>Number of individuals</b>
Individuals who had been self-employed for 2 years or less	5
Individuals who had been self-employed for 3 years	4
Individuals who had been self-employed for 4 or 5 years	6
Individuals who had been self-employed for 6 to 10 years	8
Individuals who had been self-employed for more than 10 years	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

Table 8: Length of time participating individuals had been self-employed

Within the five categories in Table 8, individuals have been further ranked according to the length of time that they had worked in traditional employment. This enables us to see more clearly:

- a) how long individuals had worked in traditional employment;
- b) what proportion of their overall work career is in self-employment;
- c) the types of work experience individuals had had prior to self-employment, and
- d) the extent of change that had occurred in their work career.

Details about individuals' work career histories, together with the inter-relationships with their learning career, follows below.

## 5.2 Detailed findings of individuals' combined work and learning careers

### 5.2.1 Participants who had been self-employed for 2 years or less

Five individuals had been self-employed for a period of up to two years at the time when the fieldwork was conducted. Their work career histories are summarised in Figure 15.

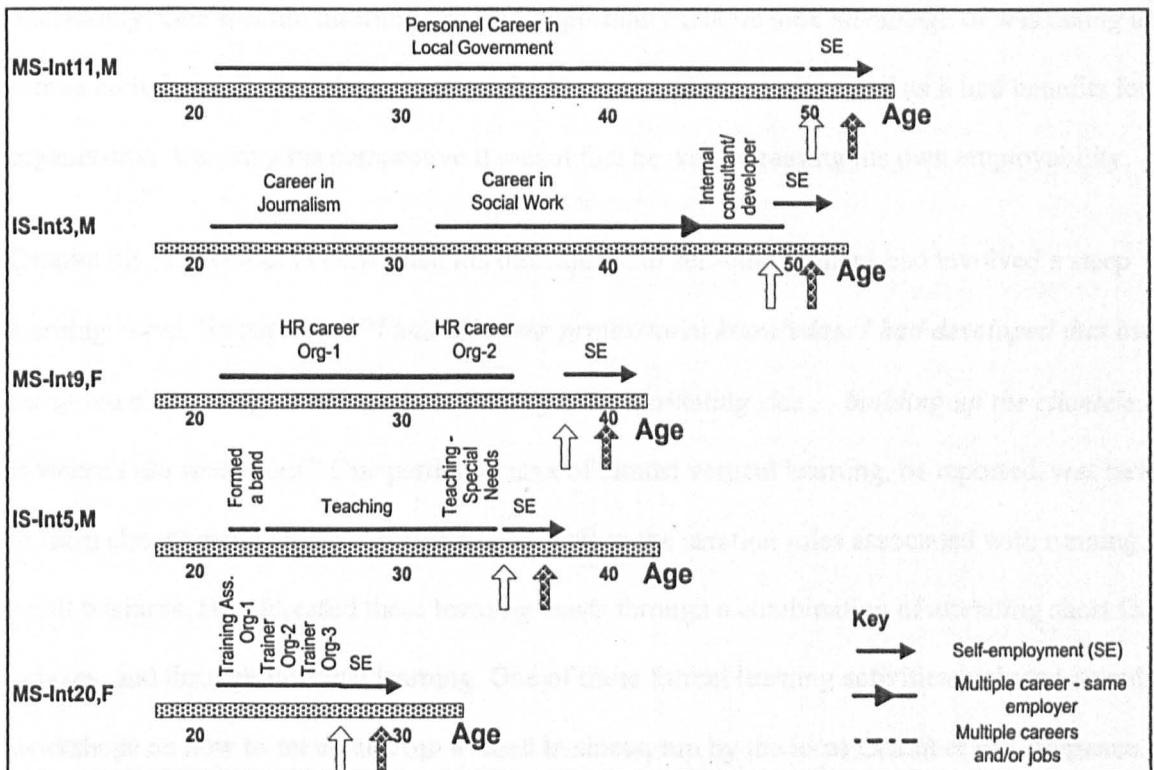


Figure 15: Work career histories- individuals self-employed for 2 years or less

The overall length of time individuals, within this category, had worked in traditional employment ranged from eight to twenty-seven years. They had had varied work experiences. Three had experienced a single career in Human Resources, prior to self-employment. The other two had experienced multiple careers.

The first individual in this category (MS-Int11) had experienced a long traditional career within the personnel function in local government before becoming self-employed at the age of fifty, having taken a redundancy/early retirement package. The last years of his employment within local government had been a time of great uncertainty. He had been working in a Local Authority tipped for Unitary status; a change which involves a Local Authority ceasing to exist at a particular point in time (normally at the end of the financial year) and then being re-formed under a new leadership. When this change occurs individuals normally have to reapply for their jobs

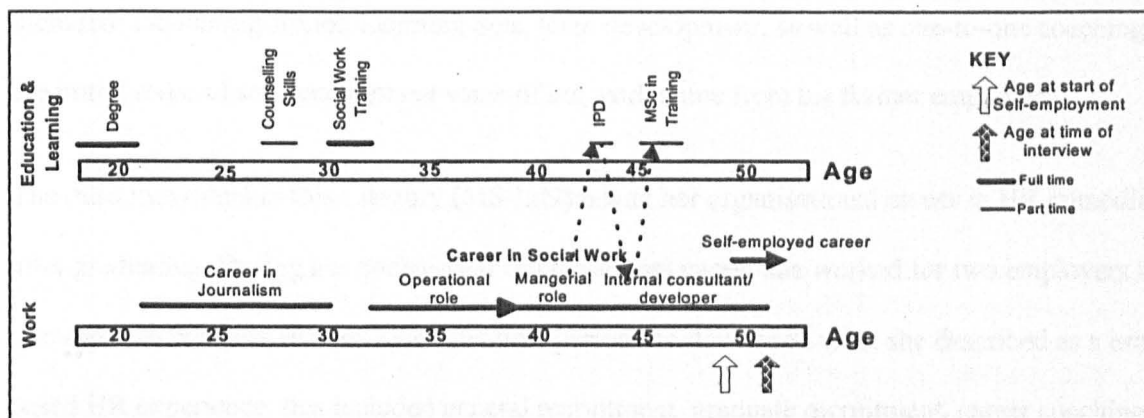
During this period of uncertainty he had given some thought to his future career. One option that he considered was self-employment. With this in mind, he actively sought out new work-based learning opportunities as a way of broadening his skills and knowledge during this period of uncertainty. One specific informal learning opportunity that he took advantage of was taking up a role as an industrial tribunal member; a role that his employer encouraged as it had benefits for the organisation. But from his perspective it meant that he was increasing his own employability.

Despite his long career in personnel, his transition into self-employment had involved a steep learning curve. He explained "*I had all of the professional knowledge. I had developed that over thirty years. The biggest change I am finding is the marketing side ... building up the clientele that is where I am struggling.*" One particular area of almost vertical learning, he reported, was having to learn about keeping business accounts, as well as the taxation rules associated with running a small business. He addressed these learning needs through a combination of attending short formal courses, and through informal learning. One of these formal learning activities included attending workshops on how to set up and run a small business, run by the local Chamber of Commerce. His informal learning came from working closely with other professionals within his network, on certain projects, so that he could learn directly from their experience.

Since becoming self-employed he had experienced difficulties in gaining access to certain types of training, in particular training run by government training bodies for Local Authorities. This was training that he had been able to access to previously when he had been employed. He felt that the reason for being excluded, once self-employed, was that as an independent consultant he was to some extent in competition with these government training bodies.

The second individual (IS-Int3) in this category also became self-employed at the age of fifty, having decided to take early-retirement from his public sector employer. However, unlike the first individual in this category, he had experienced several different work careers prior to becoming self-employed. His first career was in journalism, which he began after finishing college. At that time he did not have a clear idea of the type of career that he wanted to follow, as we can see in the following interview quote *“I left college with some notion of wanting to run my own business. I thought I would pick up experience wherever I could.”*

The timing, sequencing and key events in his work career, together with the inter-relationship with his formal learning career, are summarised in Figure 16.



**Figure 16: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (IS-Int3)**

After working as a journalist for about nine years he trained, full-time, to become a Social Worker at the age of thirty. His interest in Social Work arose when, as a Journalist, he had had to produce a feature about health and young people. Before committing himself to a career in Social Work he participated in a part-time counselling skills training course and then he gained some counselling experience working as a volunteer counsellor. He reported how that period of learning was very

important to him, as he hadn't really enjoyed his earlier education. Learning in later life he said helped him " *...learn about life and what was important about it.*"

After qualifying as a Social Worker worked for six years in an operational role. He then moved into a managerial role (for five years), followed by five years working as an internal consultant/trainer. It was during this time period that he embarked upon two formal learning activities, training to gain his IPD qualification, followed by an MSc in Training.

As with the first individual in this category, his move into self-employment came at a time when the public sector organisation that was working in was undergoing significant change, thus his future within the organisation was uncertain. As there were familial factors that influenced his decision to become self-employed at that time too, his transition experience will be discussed in the next Chapter (see 6.2.6).

His work since becoming self-employed had been varied. As he had not long completed an MSc he sought work that enabled him to apply the knowledge gained on this learning activity; thus he found work tutoring on MSc and MBA programmes in a management college. His other work included: facilitating Action Learning Sets, team development, as well as one-to-one coaching. In the initial stage of self-employment some of his work came from his former employer

The third individual in this category (MS-Int9) began her organisational career in HR immediately after graduating. During her twelve-year organisational career she worked for two employers in two separate business sectors. Over this time period she developed what she described as a broad-based HR experience, this included general recruitment, graduate recruitment, career coaching and organisational development. In addition she had worked as a line manager.

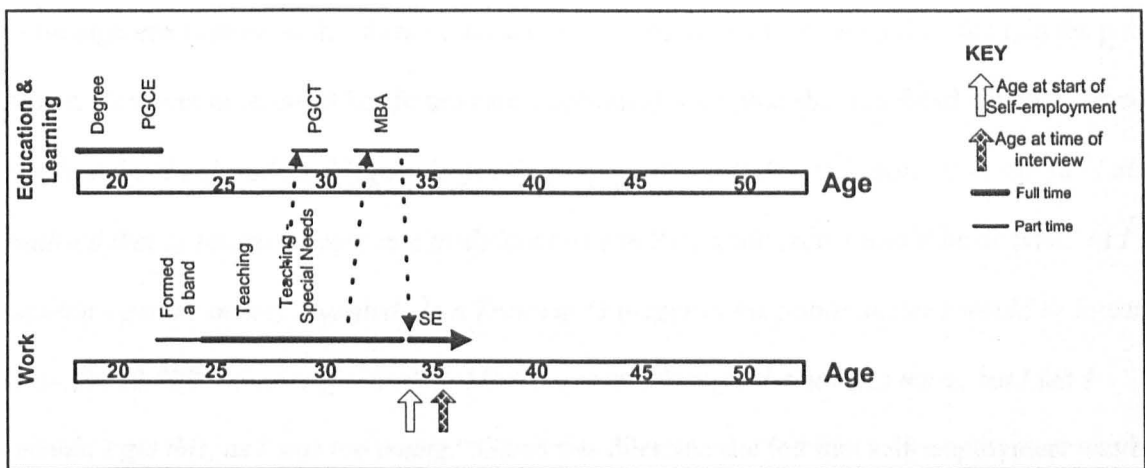
Unlike most of the others in this research she hadn't moved directly from an organisational career into self-employment; she had had a two-year break in her work career. She started her self-employed career working on a six-month contract with a career- counselling consultancy, providing one-to-one career counselling to clients. She chose this area of work because it matched the 'softer skills' that she had developed in her earlier work career. Despite her former work

experience she had had to acquire new skills and knowledge in order to be fully functional in this new role, something that she did by adopting the '*sitting next to nellie approach*'. The consultancy that she was working with, were prepared to work with her on this basis because of the mutual learning benefits to be gained from this arrangement. For example she was able to introduce them to psychometric testing tools and demonstrate how these could enhance the service they offered to their clients.

Other work that she developed in this early period of self-employment involved providing HR operational support for a company that was not big enough to need a full-time HR professional. Here then she spotted and acted on a gap in the market for people with her general HR background and experience.

A further learning need that she had had to address in the early stage of self-employment included developing her business skills, something that she addressed through informal learning approaches "*I joined a small business club and met up with a computer trainer. She came 'shopping' with me and helped me choose the equipment I needed to buy ... I met with the bank who helped me produce a business plan*". This example indicates the importance of building an appropriate support infrastructure when developing a self-employed career, as this can provide an important resource for learning. However, one learning need that she referred to, but was less easy for her to address through learning collaboratively with others, was that of "*... learning what it is like to work from home and what it is like not really switching off.*"

The fourth individual (IS-Int5) in this category had experienced two different careers prior to becoming self-employed in his mid-thirties. After graduating and completing a PGCE he didn't immediately start a career in teaching. Instead he formed a band with his brother. When the band folded, he then began his teaching career. He worked as a supply teacher initially, until he was able to find a permanent teaching post. After teaching for three years in mainstream schools, he began teaching in a school for visually impaired children. He made this career move in order to combine his interests in music, technology and teaching. It was during this time period that he embarked on an additional formal learning, as we can see in Figure 17.



**Figure 17: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (IS-Int5)**

Despite already having a PGCE he studied for a further post-graduate qualification in teaching; choosing to study through a distance-learning option. The focus of this particular learning activity was to learn more about teaching children with special educational needs. Shortly after completing the PGCT he started an MBA, again part-time. One of the factors that influenced his decision to study for a management qualification at that particular time in his career was because his friends, who were all working in the business world, introduced him to various management theories. He became interested in how he might apply management theories to his teaching role. However, despite this being one of his original learning goals, he gave up teaching to set up his own consultancy business six months prior to completing his MBA. He told me that studying for the MBA had helped him see different career possibilities.

As he did not have any prior HR experience it was his formal educational and learning career that provided him with a bridge between his earlier career in teaching and his self-employed career, providing him with the knowledge to work in the area of organisational change.

The final individual in this category (MS-Int20) had had a relatively short organisational career prior to becoming self-employed at the age of twenty-seven. Over a six-year period she had worked for three different organisations. She started her HR career immediately after graduating, working as a training assistant in a public sector organisation. Her next move, also in the public sector, enabled her to gain hands-on training experience. She then moved to a private sector company where she gained managerial experience.



After eighteen months in this third organisation she realised that she missed working in the public sector. However in terms of her future career options she felt that she was faced with a dilemma “*I realised that I enjoyed working in the public sector and that that was important to me. But I also realised that to return to work in a traditional way in the public sector would be an issue, as I wouldn't get the money I wanted. As a Training Manager in the public sector I would be looking at around £22,000. As an Organisational Development Manager I could get more, but I felt I wouldn't get this, as I was too young.*” Given this dilemma she felt that self-employment was her only option, as it would enable her to continue working in the public sector, something that she enjoyed, but with an income level comparable to that of working within the private sector.

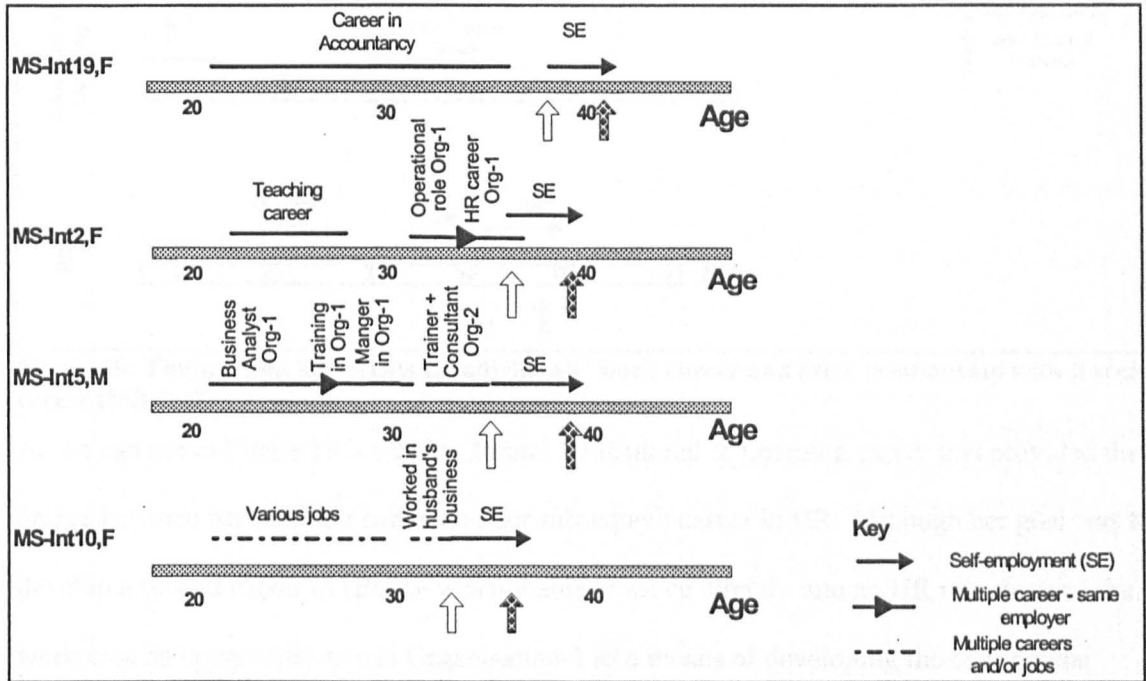
Her learning needs, once self-employed, were similar to others in this research. She had had to develop business skills (e.g. marketing and financial planning); IT skills (e.g. desk-top publishing), as well as building up her knowledge of issues affecting commercial organisations. She addressed these through various informal learning approaches. The business skills she developed through a combination of attending workshops run by her local Chamber of Commerce, as well as reading books on running a small business. The IT skills she learnt by attending workshops run by a local Training & Enterprise Council. She then enlisted the help of a friend who was good with computers and computer packages who was willing to share his knowledge with her. To develop her knowledge of issues affecting private sector organisations she volunteered to work on special interest groups run within the CIPD. In this way she was able to learn directly from the experience of other HR practitioners working in the private sector.

### **5.2.2 Participants who had been self-employed for 3 years**

Four individuals had been self-employed for three years at the time when the fieldwork was conducted. The amount of time that they had worked in traditional employment, prior to self-employment, ranged from twelve to fifteen years. As a group they were of a similar age profile, ranging from mid-thirties to early forties.

Each of these individuals had experienced several changes in their work career prior to becoming self-employed. Two had changed career direction at an early stage of their work-careers (MS-Int2

and MS-Int5). Three out of the four had experienced a career break. Only one (MS-Int19) had experienced a continuous career in the same occupation prior to self-employment. Their work-career histories are summarised in Figure 18.



**Figure 18: Work career histories - individuals self-employed for 3 years**

The first individual in this category (MS-Int19) had followed a career in Accountancy for a period of fifteen years, prior to being made redundant in her mid-thirties. She had worked as a management accountant in several large multi-national organisations, all within the same business sector. After she had been made redundant she applied for many different jobs, however none had come to fruition. This was despite having access to Outplacement Counselling, provided as part of the redundancy package from her employer. Figure 18 shows how she experienced a break of around two and half years in her work career, immediately before becoming self-employed. As she was in a dual-career family situation the discussion about her transition into self-employment will be discussed in the next Chapter (See 6.2.1).

The other three individuals in this category had all experienced several changes in their work careers prior to becoming self-employed. One (MS-Int2) began a career in teaching immediately after graduating. She taught for seven years before deciding that she wanted to do something different with her life, she was aged twenty-eight at the time. She did not move directly from her career in teaching into a career in HR; instead she took a career break for a period of three years.

During this time period she travelled abroad for a year and then studied for an MBA, full-time. The inter-relationships between her work and formal learning career are shown in Figure 19.

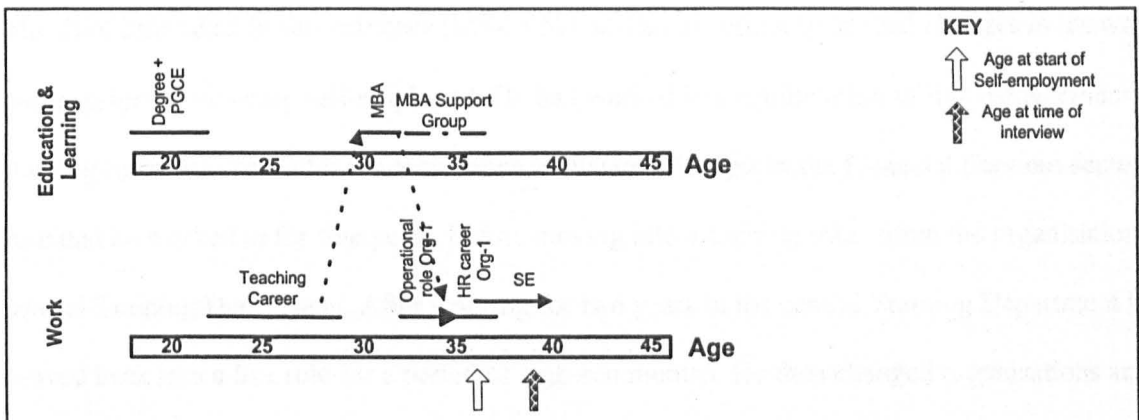


Figure 19: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int2)

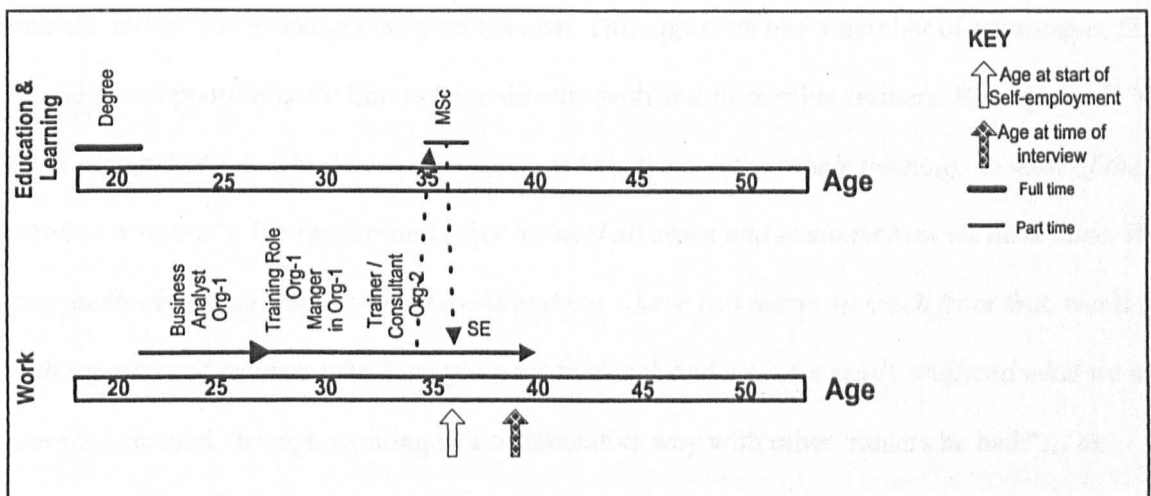
As we can see in Figure 19 it was her formal Educational & Learning career that provided the bridge between her teaching career and her subsequent career in HR. Although her goal was to develop a second career in HR she was not able to move directly into an HR role. Instead she worked in an operational role in Organisation-1 as a means of developing the commercial experience that the organisation felt she needed to have. Her move into HR, working in a management development role, took place two years later.

She worked in this role for about three years before becoming self-employed. She built up her self-employed career gradually. As we can see in Figure 19 in her first year in self-employment there was an overlap in her organisational career and her self-employed career, with around 80% of her work coming from her former employer. This transition approach had a number of benefits for her. First, it provided financial security as she had a regular source of income. Second, it gave her time to start building up other clients gradually. Third, it helped her build up her self-confidence with regard to working independently. Her experience of the transition into self-employment was similar to that of one of the individuals discussed earlier (IS-Int3).

Some of her learning needs in the early period of self-employment were addressed through the Learning Set that she was already a member of (this consisted of individuals whom she had met whilst studying for her MBA). She reported the benefits of working in a learning as being "...it provides me with peer support and challenge, helping me focus more [on my learning] and

*prioritise things ... having something arranged makes me more conscious of the things that I said I was going to work on.”*

The third individual in this category (MS-Int5) had also experienced several changes in his work career prior to becoming self-employed; He had worked in a combination of line management and training roles. He started his work career as a Business Analyst in the Financial Services sector, a role that he worked in for five years, before moving into a training role within the organisation’s central Training Department. After working for two years in the central Training Department he moved back into a line role for a period of eighteen months. He then changed organisations and went to work for a small Management Centre, working as a Training Consultant. This role involved hands-on training (both design and delivery), as well as responsibility for developing Client Services. It was while working at the Management Centre that he studied for an MSc in Management Development and Training, as indicated in Figure 20.



**Figure 20: Timings and key events in individuals’ work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int5)**

His move into self-employment came before completing his MSc. There were a number of factors that influenced his decision to become self-employed at that time *“As is often the case when you go through a post-graduate qualification like that [MSc], it was stoking up frustrations in me about the way in which my own organisation was being run. I was getting stale and I was frustrated with the organisation ... so I thought I was ready for a change. I was virtually faced with the choice that having done training for five years I really didn’t have any other technical skills. So the choice was*

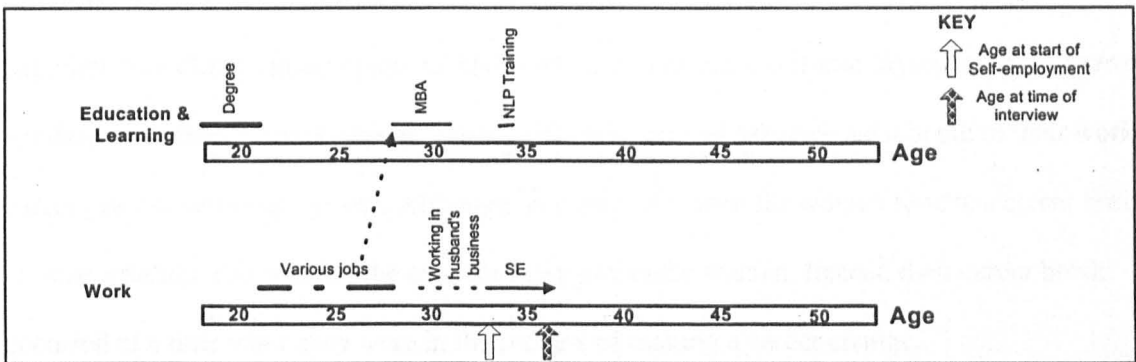
*if I was going to stay in the world of training, it was either training management, or going self-employed”.*

Despite being in the process of completing a formal learning activity there were other learning needs that he had to address, when he became self-employed, particularly developing his knowledge about sales and marketing. He addressed these through informal learning approaches, such as reading around the subject area of marketing and also talking to other self-employed professionals about how they market their business and “... *modelling myself to a certain extent on other people whom I respect.*” Indeed most of his learning since, becoming self-employed, had been addressed through informal learning approaches. One of the main reasons for this was largely cost related. He reported how some of the learning events run by the CIPD were often too expensive for those like himself who are self-employed.

After being self-employed for a couple of years he sought work that involved working with other trainers, rather than working purely on his own. This approach had a number of advantages. First, it provided an opportunity for him to learn directly with and from other trainers. He explained “*One of my clients has a hundred or so Associates to help them deliver their training. So most of the training is in two's. We [myself and other trainer] sit down and evaluate how we have done. We give feedback to each other on how we have done. I have just learnt so much from that, working with experienced trainers who have given me feedback and we have really analysed what we are learning.* Second, through working in a collaborative way with other trainers he had “... *an incredible amount of learning, but it is not formal. I don't have to pay for it.*”

The final individual in this category (MS-Int10) had worked for a period of ten years prior to becoming self-employed at the age of thirty-three. Up until this point in her life she had not considered herself as having a career “*I can never say that I have had a career up until now [self-employment] because career implies some form of continuity and I haven't had that. For me it has been largely a process of, to start with, it was a matter of doing something, don't like it, try something else. It was me, fitting in to jobs.*”

The key events in her work career, together with the inter-relationships with her learning career, are shown in Figure 21.



**Figure 21: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int10)**

In the five-year period prior to becoming self-employed she had experienced a number of changes in her work career, as well as in her formal learning career. In her formal learning career she studied for an MBA, part-time. It was whilst studying for her MBA that she experienced a break, of about a year, in her work career. She divided her time during this time period between studying for her MBA, helping her husband out in his small business and running the home. After completing her MBA she worked part-time in her husband's business for about a year.

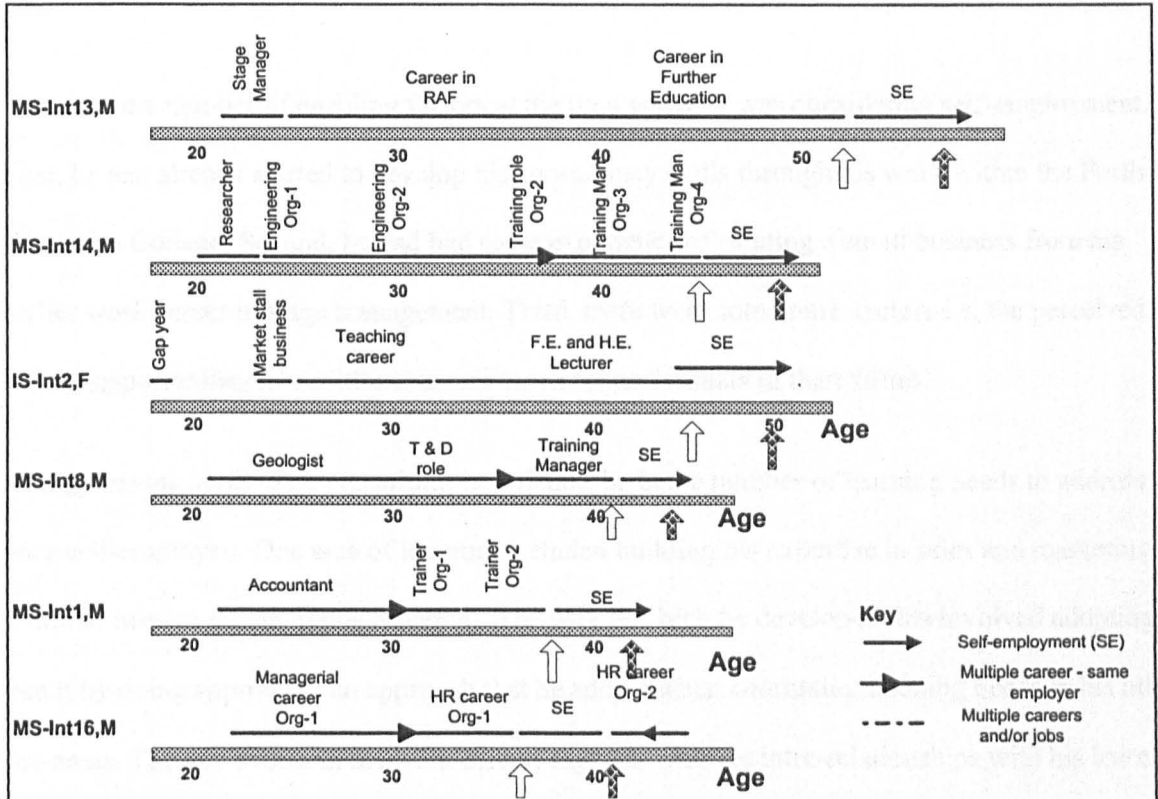
Her self-employed career began gradually. Initially she worked on short-term assignments for individuals whom she had met on her MBA. This approach gave her time to identify a niche market for her work; something which she eventually narrowed down to providing one-to-one mentoring, as well as running in-company mentoring workshops. At the time of the interviews she had continued to focus in these two areas, rather than develop additional areas of business.

Despite having recently completed an MBA, she had participated in additional learning in order to get her business established, which included: a Train the Trainer course and a Master Practitioner in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) course. Both of these formal learning programmes provided her with the skills and knowledge needed for the work that she was selling to clients. However, she found that attending these formal learning programmes brought other benefits too. One was the opportunity to learn by observing the trainers running these learning programmes; this helped her build up her self-confidence in delivering training programmes to clients herself.

Each of the four individuals in this category had experienced several changes in their earlier careers prior to becoming self-employed. Two (MS-Int2 and MS-Int5) had moved into a Human Resources role several years before becoming self-employed and the other two (MS-Int10 and MS-Int19) experienced a change in occupational status when they became self-employment. There were other similarities in their career histories. Three of the women had experienced a break in their work career prior to self-employment. Although an expected reason for women to take a career break is to raise a family, this was not the case for these particular women. Instead their career break occurred at a time when they were in the process of making a career change.

### 5.2.3 Participants who had been self-employed for 4 to 5 years

Six individuals had been self-employed for four or five years at the time when the fieldwork was carried out. Their ages ranged from early forties to late fifties. The length of time that they had each worked in traditional employment ranged from twelve to thirty years. Within these time periods they had each experienced several changes in their work career; none were in the same career discipline as when they started their work careers. Their work career histories are summarised in Figure 22.



**Figure 22: Work career histories - individuals self-employed for 4 or 5 years**

The first individual in this category (MS-Int13) had experienced two other work careers before developing a career in Further Education in his late thirties. He began his work career after University (although he did not graduate) working for himself. He set up a business providing stage management services to theatres. After three years he gave up this business to join the RAF. Throughout his fifteen-year career within the RAF he worked both as a pilot and as an instructor. When he left the RAF he developed a third career within Further Education, working with adult learners.



During his career within Further Education he held several different roles. Initially he was lecturing and developing open-learning materials for use in the aviation industry. Here then he was applying his teaching skills and managerial skills, developed in the RAF, to a new learning environment. Later on in his career within Further Education he moved into a combined consultancy and managerial role. His career move into self-employment came at a time when he was looking to progress his career from Vice-Principal to Principal level yet, despite being short-listed for several Principal's jobs he was not appointed. He put this down to his age, as he was about fifty at that time.

There were a number of enabling factors at the time when he was considering self-employment. First, he had already started to develop his consultancy skills through his work within the Further Education College. Second, he had had some experience of running a small business from his earlier work career in stage management. Third, there were some push factors i.e. the perceived lack of opportunities in traditional career terms for individuals in their fifties.

Despite having some prior consulting experience, he had a number of learning needs to address once self-employed. One area of learning included building his expertise in sales and marketing (so a similar need to others in this research). The way in which he developed this involved adopting a 'learn by doing approach'; an approach that he adopts when addressing learning needs in his other life-areas. The key events in his work career, together with the inter-relationships with his learning career are shown in Figure 23 below.

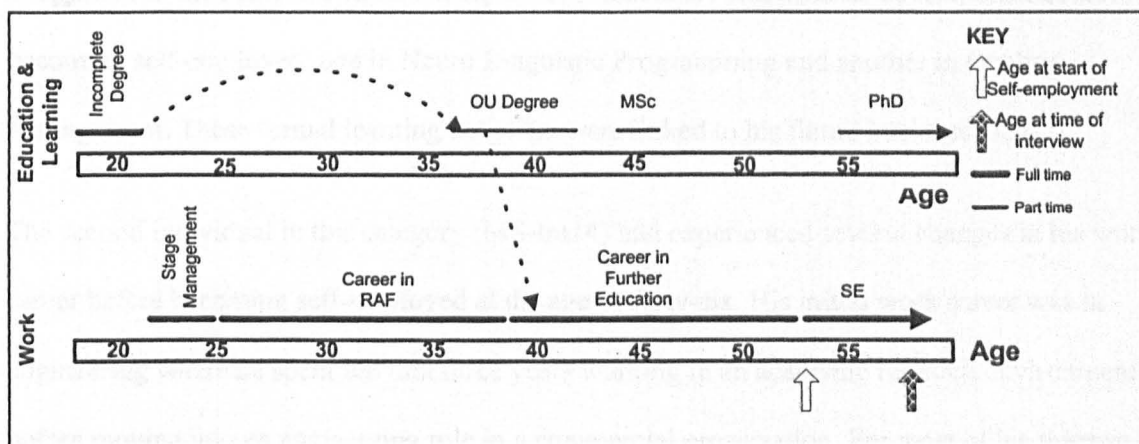


Figure 23: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int13)

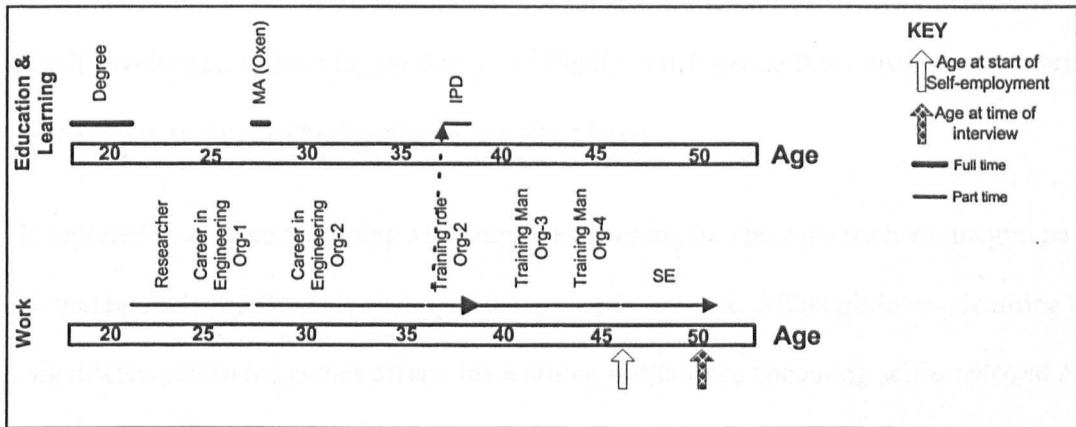
Despite his stated preference for informal learning, he started a PhD shortly after becoming self-employed; a learning activity that he thought would give him further academic stretch. However, in practice this has helped him develop new skills, such as using the internet as a learning and a business resource. Through the use of conferencing tools and dialogue groups, for example, he has been able to link up with other professionals with an interest in Coaching (one of the services he offers clients). He uses these resources to build and share his knowledge on this subject. When asked whether networking in this way caused him any tensions he responded that it did not, for a number of reasons. One was that many of the individuals in these dialogue groups have similar career histories. Second, they are all at different stages in the development of their knowledge about coaching. Third, they are all from different geographical areas, so direct competition is highly unlikely. One of the dialogue groups that he belongs to is in New Zealand.

Paradoxically, although self-employment has enabled him to have greater freedom in terms of when he works, it has experienced tensions between his work and formal learning career, he explained *“When I started doing my PhD it was difficult to apportion my time for research, so running around libraries and all the rest of it and working. When I got the business going I had one or two big contracts which when I was working on them I forgot I needed to market, so that when the contracts finished I had something else [to work on]. Eventually it got to the stage where I pulled out of the PhD for a year to re-establish the business. I now schedule myself so that I only work three weeks a month. So every fourth week is for me, for holiday, research or whatever.”*

In addition to the PhD, he had also completed several short professional development courses since becoming self-employed, one in Neuro Linguistic Programming and another in Quality Management. These formal learning activities were linked to his future business plans.

The second individual in this category (MS-Int14) had experienced several changes in his work career before becoming self-employed at the age of forty-six. His initial work career was in engineering where he spent the first three years working in an academic research environment before moving into an engineering role in a commercial organisation. For most of his thirteen-year career in engineering he worked abroad on large-scale engineering projects in places like Africa

and India. The key events in his formal learning career and work career, together with the inter-relationships across life-areas, are shown in Figure 24.



**Figure 24: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int14)**

As we can see in Figure 24 he changed career direction when he was in his mid-thirties, moving away from a hands-on engineering role into a training role within the organisation that he was working for at that time. Four years later he moved to another organisation, in a different business sector, to take up the role of Training Manager. In this role he had a much broader remit than the training role in his previous organisation, as he was tasked with developing the organisation into a 'learning organisation'. Under this remit he initiated systems and practices such as: management development programmes, a continuing professional development scheme, as well as quality assurance systems (e.g. ISO900 and Investors In People).

His move into self-employment came at a time when the construction industry, which he was then working in, was affected by the recession (this was in the mid-nineties). He was in his mid-forties at this time. The Staff Development Centre that he was managing, at that time, was tasked with generating income through the selling of its services to external clients; a change that he was uncomfortable with as it created a clash between his own personal values and those of the organisation. It was this clash in values that had been a key influencing factor in his decision to become self-employed.

Unlike others in this research, he did not seem to experience such a steep learning curve when he became self-employed. In his former Training Manager role he gained experience of designing and managing projects, producing client proposals, as well as developing client relationships. In

addition, he had an extensive network of contacts within the construction industry, as well as with various training institutions. However like others he did have to learn about how to set up and run a small business, in particular completing VAT and tax returns. His learning strategy included a) initially avoidance, b) learning by doing and finally c) delegating these tasks to an experienced book-keeper, whom he employed on a part-time basis.

He reported how since becoming self-employed learning had become such an integral part of his life that he finds it difficult to distinguish learning from work. Although formal learning had played a significant part in his earlier career, his learning needs since becoming self-employed had been addressed in more informal ways. After having been self-employed for three years he helped establish a learning group consisting of other independent consultants/trainers, all of whom were known to him through his work. This learning forum provided him with an opportunity to work on his own professional development, as well as keep his knowledge about changes within the business world up to date. Although this learning activity had a minimal direct financial cost, it did involve a time commitment of one day a month.

The third individual (IS-Int2) in this category had followed a career in teaching and lecturing for nearly twenty years before becoming self-employed in her mid-forties. Despite completing a PGCE immediately after graduating, she did not start a career in teaching straight away. Instead she set up a market stall business in partnership with a friend. When the market stall business ended after two years, she began her teaching career. She worked as a teacher for around ten years before becoming a lecturer, initially in a Further Education College and then in a Higher Education Institution.

During her career in Higher Education she worked in three separate institutions. It was whilst working in her third Higher Education institution that she became involved in designing and delivering short courses that came under the umbrella of Human Resource Management. It was this particular work that triggered her interest in psychology and led her to study for an MSc in Occupational Psychology, part-time. She told me *"The course appealed as it rubber stamped something I already knew about. I'd taught myself a lot about psychology. I'd beavered away at it."*

*The course covered theories in group dynamics and organisational psychology, topics that I was using on the short course”.*

Her decision to become self-employed was taken at the time when her three-year contract with the Higher Education institution came up for renewal. There had been tensions in the relationship between her and the management team in the department, for some time. She wanted to increase her work that involved running short professional development courses and reduce her traditional lecturing and research work. However, this was not what the management team wanted Her decision to become self-employed was related to this source of tension. However rather than break her ties altogether with the University she negotiated a way forward that enabled to her to continue working with them on a short-term contract basis. This provided her with an opportunity to build up other work opportunities gradually, whilst still having some continuity of income.

The fourth individual in this sub-category (MS-Int8) had followed a traditional organisational career for nearly twenty years prior to becoming self-employed at the age of forty-one. During this time period he had experienced two different careers, first as a Geologist, and then a career in Training and Development (initially as a trainer, followed by a Training Manager role).

His move into self-employment came at a time when the organisation was re-structuring. He had been feeling disillusioned with the way in which his organisational career was developing. There were similarities with this individual's feelings towards his organisational career and that of others; these were also male, in their mid to late thirties.

He told me *“I had cornered myself in Training and Development. I was a sort of Training Manager but I realised that most of a Training Manager's work was high-class administrative stuff and the only bits I enjoyed about it was when I was strutting my stuff, interacting with others [in the training room]”*. It was because of this disillusionment that he took the voluntary redundancy option being offered as part of the organisation's restructuring programme. Having this sum of money provided him with a financial buffer, providing a safety net for the initial period of self-employment.

When he became self-employed the type of work that he sought out involved hands-on training. Initially he took any work that he could get. However once he had been self-employed for a couple of years he became more selective about both the type of work that he was prepared to do, and the type of clients that he was prepared to work for. This change in the relationship with clients arose because of the bad experiences that he had had with some of his initial clients, whom he found to be very late payers; a situation that led him to distance himself from them over time, as he established more client contacts. Other clients he found were very restrictive in the way that they wanted him to deliver training programmes; a situation that conflicted with his desire to “... *have a free hand in what I do. So you can see the enjoyment and achieving values coming through*”.

Unlike others in this research he did not seem to participate in as much learning (either formal or informal); a point that will be returned to later in the next chapter (see 6.2.4). His learning needs since becoming self-employed related to developing the relationship side of his business. He addressed this learning need through informal learning, in the form of seeking out feedback from clients, evaluating their feedback and then adapting his behaviour appropriately and reviewing the outcome.

The fifth individual in this category (MS-Int1) had followed a traditional organisational career for seventeen years before becoming self-employed in his late thirties. He began his career as an Accountant working for one of the major accounting firms. After working as an Accountant for about seven years he applied for a two-year secondment to the organisation's internal training department. When the secondment period was over he requested a transfer as he had enjoyed the work so much. He said that it had given him energy. However others were not so positive about his career move “*Others [colleagues and the management] thought it was a strange move. Most people's goal was to become a Partner. That didn't interest me. What I wanted was to learn and develop... other people found that strange ... it didn't fit with their model of success, which was outward focused, not inward focused*”.

Three years after changing career direction and becoming a trainer, he moved to an organisation that specialised in management development. Here he worked as a trainer/consultant, applying his

combined business and training experience gained in his previous organisation. Four years after that he became self-employed.

In the early years of self-employment he took almost any work that came his way, as he did not have a financial buffer to fall back on. After a couple of years of self-employment he felt that he had lost his focus, so much so that he briefly considered going back into traditional employment. It was at this point that he embarked on what he described as an investment programme in himself. This involved participating in three short formal learning programmes, followed by a more extensive formal learning programme. The inter-relationships between his work career and his formal learning career are shown in Figure 25.

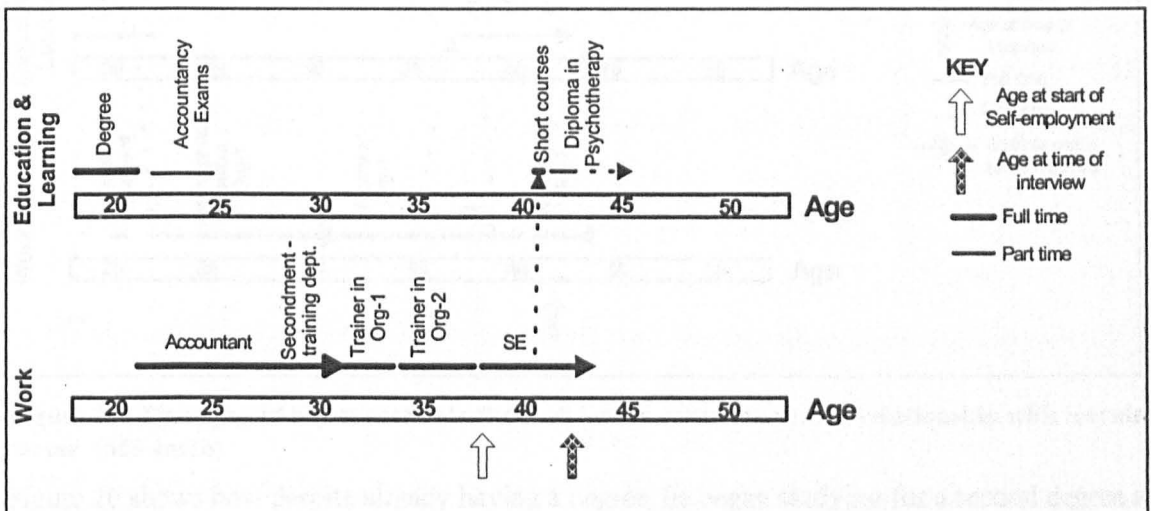
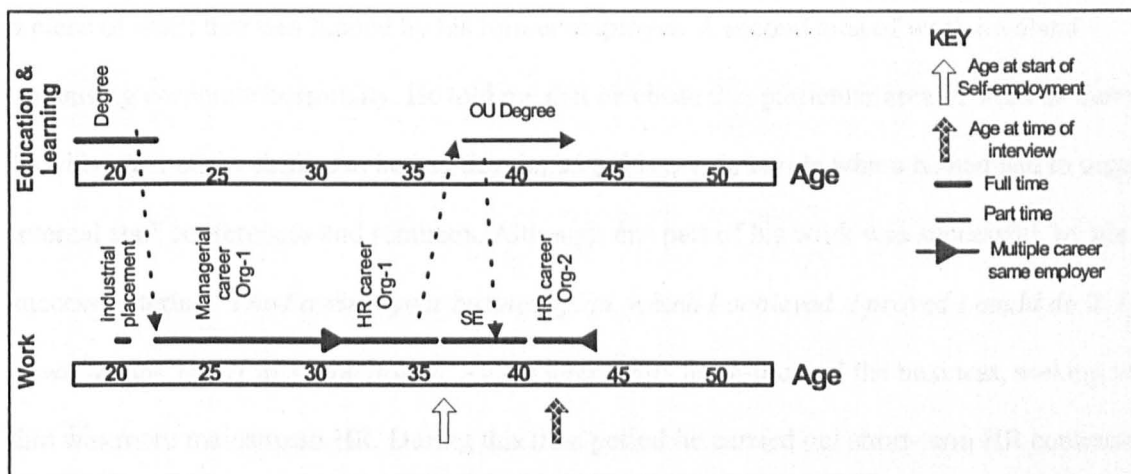


Figure 25: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int1)

Figure 25 shows how he had experienced a large gap in his formal learning career. Having completed his accountancy exams, in his early twenties, he had not participated in any formal learning until after becoming self-employed. He was concerned that the Diploma in Psychotherapy course that he had chosen to study had more of a vocational bias, than an academic bias. This worried him because he thought that he might get left behind. He said that he is an experiential person, rather than an academic, with not much interest in reading management textbooks. However, he did not elaborate as to why he perceived this to be problematic. Given the experience of others in this research it could be that he was concerned about not having the same academic qualifications as other independent consultants, or clients.

The final individual in this category (MS-Int16) described himself as having had a conventional career background. He started his work career as a management trainee in the manufacturing company where he had spent his industrial placement year, whilst at University. He worked for this organisation for around fourteen years before becoming self-employed in his mid-thirties. For nine of those fourteen years he worked in a front-line operations role, in three separate manufacturing centres. In the rest of his career he worked in HR, dealing in areas such as Employee and Industrial Relations. The sequencing, timing and key events in his work career, together with the inter-relationships with his formal learning career are shown in Figure 26.



**Figure 26: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int16)**

Figure 26 shows how despite already having a degree, he began studying for a second degree at the time when he became self-employed. There seemed to be several factors that influenced his decision to study for a further degree at this particular time. One was that his work had fuelled an interest in psychology, which he wanted to learn more about. Second he seemed to want to study again out of pure interest sake *"The OU is for a hobby. I am not under any pressure. If it has no effect on my career then that isn't a problem"*. However despite this reported learning objective he was selective about the courses that he chose to study, ensuring that he studied courses that would enable him to become a member of the British Psychological Society; something that could be useful for his future work career.

His move into self-employment came at a time when the organisation was down-sizing; this was in the early 1990s. This organisational change coincided with a period in his own life where he had



been experiencing ill health (he had had a period of extended sick leave at that time). Because of this he decided to request a move out of HR, back into an operational role. However when the organisation had not facilitated this move after a year he took the decision to leave and set up his own business. He did not sever his links with the organisation altogether; instead he left with what he described as a contract to *“Soften the transition into self-employment”*. This gave him more financial stability in the initial phase of self-employment.

During the early period of self-employment his work involved two diverse business activities. One involved working on a joint research project with a University department on Quality Management; a piece of work that was funded by his former employer. A second area of work involved organising corporate hospitality. He told me that he chose this particular area of work as there was fit with some of the skills that he had developed in his previous role where he had had to organise internal staff conferences and seminars. Although this part of his work was successful, by his own success criteria - *“I had a three year business plan, which I achieved. I proved I could do it. I found it was ageing me. It was long hours.”* - after three years he re-focused the business, seeking work that was more mainstream HR. During this time period he carried out short-term HR contracts working for some of the larger management consultancies.

Having worked independently for around five years he decided to return to traditional employment. At the time of the interviews he had been working in a Human Resources Management role for about a year. However he didn't see this role as being a long-term career position for him, neither had he ruled out the possibility of becoming self-employed again at some point in the future.

Having made the transition from traditional employment to self-employment and back to traditional employment, he had a different perspective of the employer-employee relationship *“I am conscious of it being a last-in, first-out, situation. I have made a commitment to myself to look after myself. I enjoyed my time being self-employed. I learnt a lot about myself and feel happier about myself. I have more self-confidence.”*

### 5.2.4 Participants who had been self-employed for 6 to 10 years

Eight individuals had been self-employed for between six to ten years; six male and two female. Their ages ranged from late thirties to late fifties. The length of time that they had each spent in traditional employment varied. Half had been in traditional employment for more than twenty years. Most had experienced multiple changes in their earlier work career; only one was in the same professional discipline as at the start of his work career. Because of the broad time-span that individuals in this category had been self-employed, the findings are presented as two sub-categories: a) individuals whose earlier work career was less than twenty years and b) individuals whose earlier work career was greater than twenty years.

#### 5.2.4.2 Self-employed for 6-10 years, but with less than 20 years in traditional employment

Four participants, who had been self-employed for 6-10 years, had worked in traditional employment for less than twenty years previously. Their work career histories are summarised in Figure 27 below.

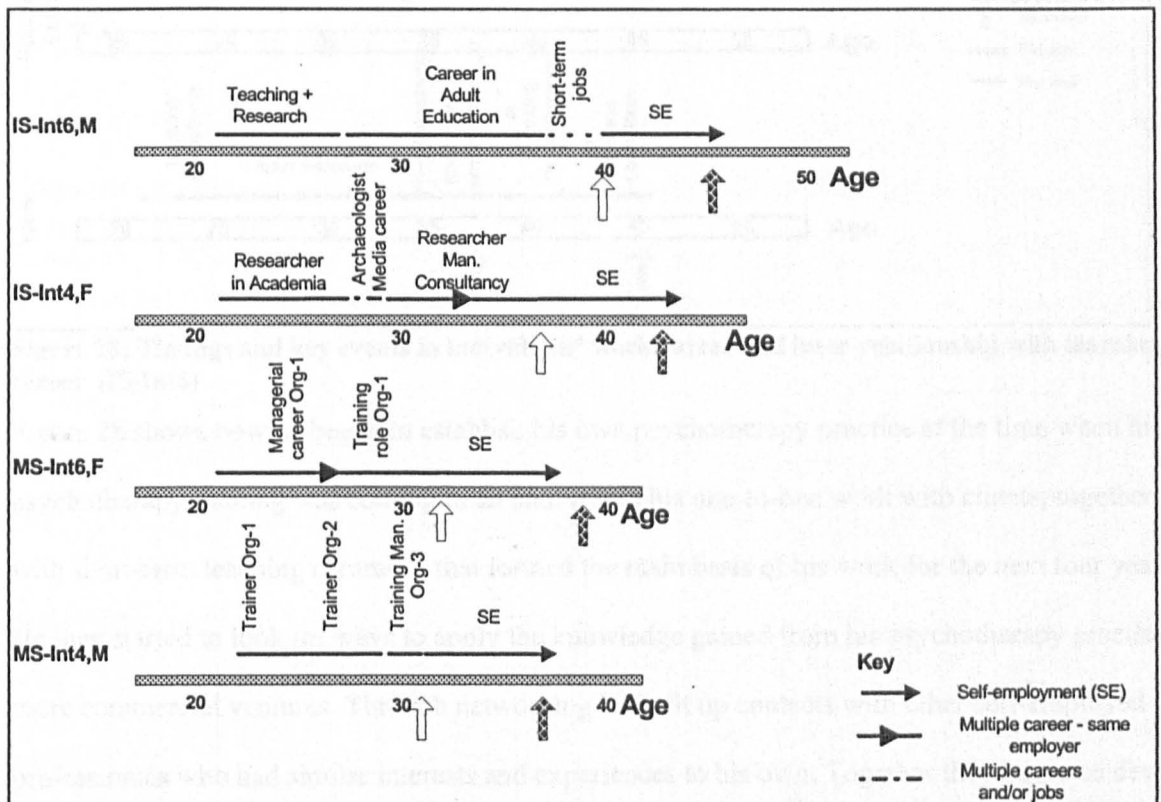
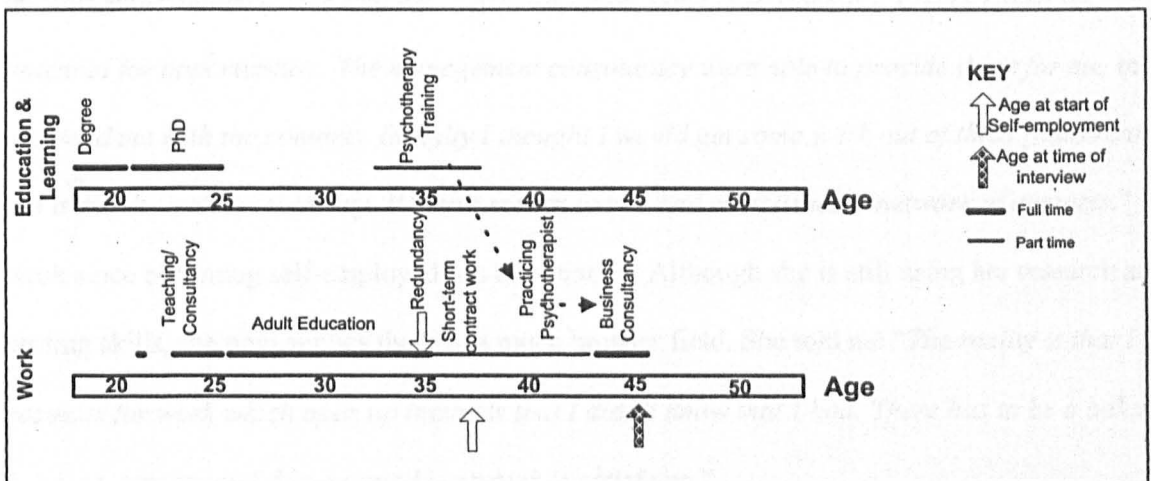


Figure 27: Work career histories - individuals self-employed for 6 to 10 years, but with less than twenty years in traditional employment

The first individual in this sub-category (IS-Int6) began his work career at the age of twenty-five, after finishing his PhD. His primary work career, which spanned ten years, was in adult education

where he worked mainly with young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds. Over this time period he moved from a hands-on teaching role into a managerial role. When he was in his mid-thirties he was made redundant from the adult education institution where he was working at that time. For the next eighteen months, after being made redundant, he worked on a number of short-term teaching contracts as he was unable to get another full-time job in an equivalent role. As one of the other factors that had influenced his decision to become self-employed was familial, his transition into self-employment will be discussed in Chapter 6 (see 6.2.6).

It was the formal professional training, started three years prior to being made redundant and ongoing at the time when he was made redundant, that provided a bridge into self-employment. The key events in his work career together with the inter-relationships between his work and formal learning career are shown in Figure 28.



**Figure 28: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (IS-Int6)**

Figure 28 shows how he began to establish his own psychotherapy practice at the time when his psychotherapy training was coming to an end. It was his one-to-one work with clients, together with short-term teaching contracts, that formed the main basis of his work for the next four years. He then started to look for ways to apply the knowledge gained from his psychotherapy practice to more commercial ventures. Through networking he built up contacts with other self-employed professionals who had similar interests and experiences to his own. Together they began to develop joint business ventures, particularly in the area of Executive Coaching.

The second individual in this sub-category (IS-Int4) had experienced several changes in her work career prior to becoming self-employed in her late thirties. After graduating she began a career as a researcher in a University. She worked as a researcher for about seven years, before experimenting with other work careers. The first of these was training to become an Archaeological Excavator; a job that she embarked on because she wanted to develop a craft and do something with her hands. Five months into her training, however, she gave it up. She then tried to develop her career as a journalist. She had been interested in journalism at University but had not taken this interest any further. After applying for many jobs in journalism, she eventually found a job as a researcher and writer for a consumer research organisation.

Her next career move, three years later, involved research and writing for a management consultancy. After working for the management consultancy for about three years she decided to become self-employed. She told me *"I wouldn't have gone independent if I hadn't seen the potential for opportunities. The management consultancy were able to provide these for me, they provided me with the contacts. Initially I thought I would get some work out of them [consultancy], but it didn't work out that way. It didn't matter once I had established a network of contacts."* Her work since becoming self-employed has been varied. Although she is still using her research and writing skills, she now applies these to a much broader field. She told me *"The reality is that I get requests for work which open up interests that I didn't know that I had. There has to be a balance between earning and doing something which is satisfying."*

Since finishing University she had not participated in any formal learning activities. Most of her learning was addressed through informal learning approaches. Given her research background any new knowledge that she needs for her work is acquired by applying her research skills.

The third individual (MS-Int6) in this category began her work career in retail management immediately after graduating. It was while working in a managerial role that she became interested in training, which she tried to pursue as a second career. However, it took some time for her to manoeuvre herself into a full-time training role. She encountered the difficulty of *"You cannot be a*

trainer because you are not a trainer”. Eventually she was offered a training administrator’s role within a particular business area; a role which she then grew into a hands-on training role.

Her move into self-employment came at the time when the organisation was planning to re-structure; this was in the early-nineties. During this period of uncertainty she began to discuss her future career options with others. She also participated in a number of learning activities as a way of helping her with the decision making process *“I went on one of XX’s courses on delivery skills during that time [when redundancies were being muted]. When the company actually came up to its redundancies I was half way convinced that I was able to go freelance ... I took a risk on voluntary redundancy”*.

To help ease the transition into self-employment she drew on the support provided by an Outplacement Consultancy; this was part of the redundancy package provided by her employer. With the support of the Outplacement Consultancy she identified two distinct areas of work that she wanted to develop in her business; one involved providing in-house training for organisations and the other was providing career counselling. However at that time she did not have any formal qualifications in counselling. So despite having just been made redundant and starting up her self-employed business, she began a part-time counselling skills course. The key events in her work career, together with the inter-relationships with her learning career are shown in Figure 29.

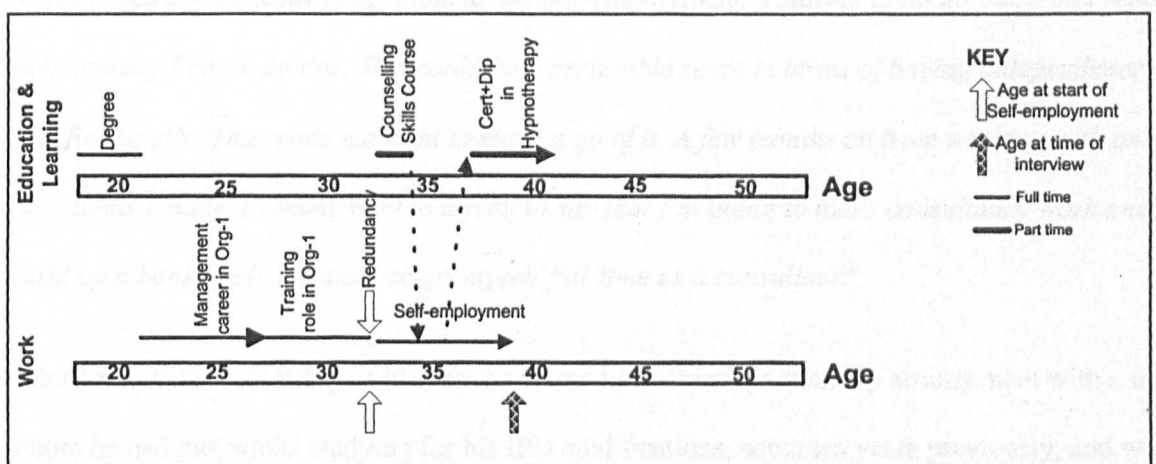


Figure 29: Timings and key events in individuals’ work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int6)

Her work in the first two to three years of self-employment consisted of a combination of hands-on training, as well as one-to-one career counselling. However, after being self-employed for about

three years she felt that she was in a bit of a rut with regard to her career development. It was at this point, as Figure 29 shows, that she started a Certificate in Hypnotherapy course. As with other individuals in this research, once she started this formal learning activity, she began to see other possibilities for her future career *"I wanted mental stimulation. I was beginning to feel stale. That [course in Hypnotherapy] started and I kind of liked it. Then I began to see it as a way of taking my career forward ... I was taking a longer-term view. I am going to be forty this year, so the game plan is that I do not want to be hurtling around the country doing training all the time. I want something that I will be able to fold in with my training work, growing into a fuller career at some point. The hypnotherapy course was commenced really with that in mind."*

The final individual in this sub-category (MS-Int4) had followed a traditional career in HR, working in various Training & Development roles, up until he was made redundant at the age of thirty-one. He started his HR career working in the voluntary sector. After a year he moved to become a trainer in a private sector organisation. After six years with his first private sector organisation he moved to a third organisation, to take up a managerial role. A couple of years later he was made redundant.

After being made redundant he planned to continue in traditional employment and find another Training Manager's job. However whilst unemployed he was offered some interim consultancy work, which sowed seeds in his mind about self-employment *"I started to do my sums and realised well actually I could do this. This could be a preferable route in terms of having independence and also financially. This made me want to make a go of it. A few months on from working with one or two clients I made a commitment to myself to say that I'm going to make consultancy work and build up a bank of clients and occupy myself full-time as a consultant."*

After four years of working on his own he formed a business partnership arrangement with a friend whom he had met whilst studying for his IPD qualifications, some ten years previously, and whom he had worked with on an informal basis in the early period of self-employment. In addition to the business benefits of this arrangement there were personal benefits too, particularly that of helping address the issue of social isolation *"One of the things we both [self and business partner]*

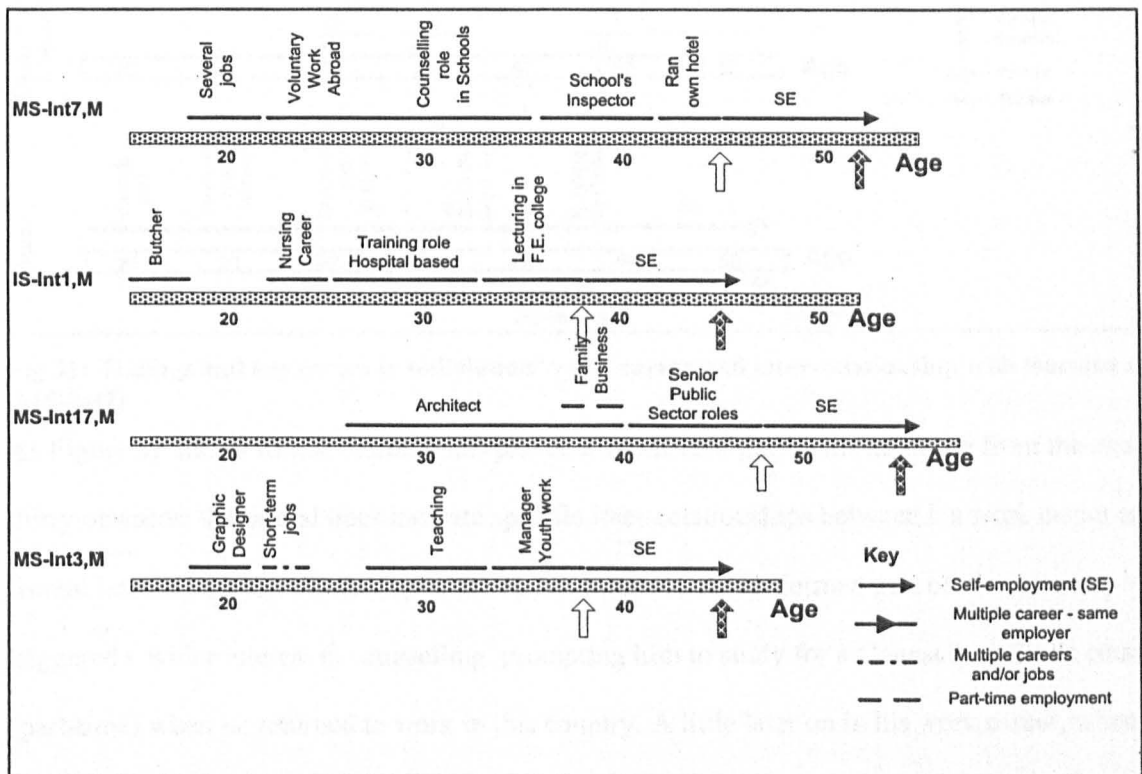
*recognised was that when we were working on our own it was a pretty isolating experience ... The whole thing of well you think of doing something and it would be useful just to bounce it off somebody and get some feedback on it just to verify your own judgement."*

Most of his development needs, since becoming self-employed, were addressed through informal learning approaches, such as research and writing, as we can see from the following interview quote *"The writing serves a purpose in terms of personal development. What I would do, on any writing project, is to do some literature searches, work up a case study and get my head around the new subject ... this helps in terms of keeping ahead of the field, something which we try and pride ourselves in. This is naturally important for the kind of business we are in."*

At the time of the interviews he was in the process of starting a PhD. He felt that this formal learning activity would benefit him, as well as the business, because of the specialist knowledge that he would develop. When calculating the cost-benefit of this formal learning activity he took into account the anticipated future business that he could get *"I have only to pick up one new client from the research and a new project, and that will pay for the cost of the PhD. That is the way of kind of rationalising in terms of cost benefit."*

### 5.2.4.2 Self-employed for 6-10 years, but with greater than 20 years in traditional employment

Four participants, who had been self-employed for six to ten years, had experienced a traditional work career spanning over twenty years. Their work career histories are summarised in Figure 30.

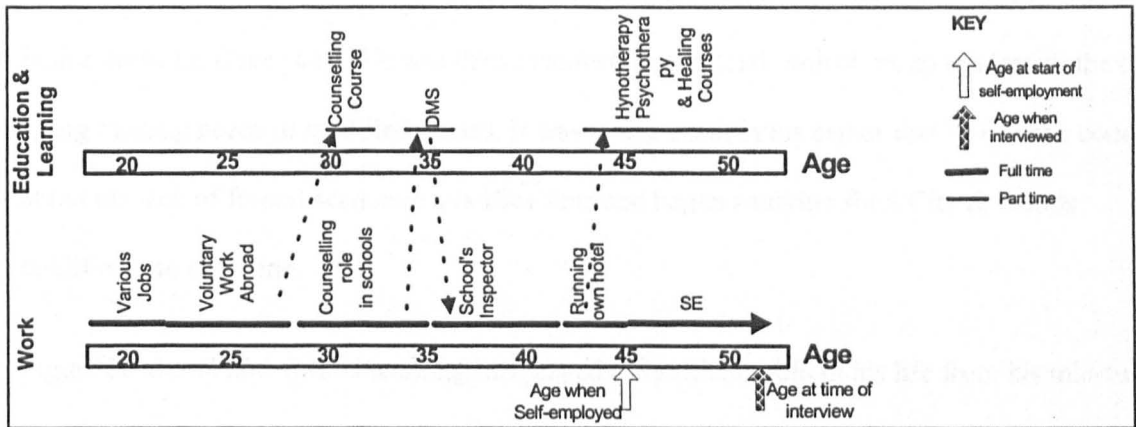


**Figure 30: Work career histories - individuals self-employed for 6 to 10 years, but with more than twenty years in traditional employment**

The first individual in this sub-category (MS-Int7) had been in traditional employment for twenty-eight years prior to becoming self-employed in his mid-forties. He started his work career at the age of eighteen after ‘A’ levels, choosing not to go to University like most of his peers. He described his early work career as consisting of a number of un-related jobs, one of which involved a period of voluntary work abroad; a period of time that he described as being his University education “*I was learning about life while I was out there [working abroad]. I was doing a bit of studying. When I came back here, my way of going through life was to incorporate living and working and studying in a variety of ways ... So since my early twenties, until my late thirties, I have taken an approach to working of being an opportunist and studying lots of courses*”.



The key events in his work career, together with the inter-relationships with his learning career are shown in Figure 31 below.



**Fig 31: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int7)**

As Figure 31 shows formal learning has played a significant part in his adult life from the age of thirty onwards; the dotted lines indicate specific inter-relationships between his work career and his formal learning career. For example, the counselling which had formed part of his voluntary work triggered a wider interest in counselling, prompting him to study for a Counselling Skills course (part-time) when he returned to work in this country. A little later on in his work career, when he was thinking about making a career move into management, he completed a Diploma in Management Studies. After having worked in a managerial role for about six years he changed career direction yet again. At this point he stepped off the organisational career ladder and set up a hotel business in partnership with a friend. He told me that looking back over his managerial career within the educational sector what he had come to realise was that most of his time had been spent “*breaking all the rules*” as he had been frustrated by the structural constraints.

In his mid-forties he decided that he wanted to develop the counselling aspects of his work further. It was at this transition point, as we can see in Figure 31, that he engaged in a lengthy period of formal learning, studying part-time for a qualification in Hypnotherapy, Psychotherapy and Healing.

The second individual in this sub-category (IS-Int1) had also experienced several work careers, over a twenty-three year period, prior to becoming self-employed at the age of thirty-eight. He left school at the age of fifteen without any qualifications and started work as a butcher. After three

years he went to Theology College for a year. It was during this time period that he identified that he wanted to build a career working with people. A friend suggested that he train to be a nurse and at the age of twenty he trained full-time for a nursing qualification. After qualifying he worked as a junior nurse for three years. He was then seconded to a special project set up to identify the on-going training needs of qualified nurses. It was at this point in his career that he became concerned about his lack of formal academic qualifications and began studying for a City & Guilds qualification, part-time.

Figure 32 shows how formal learning has played a significant role in his life from his mid-twenties onwards, with his adult life consisting of a continuous parallel stream of learning and working.

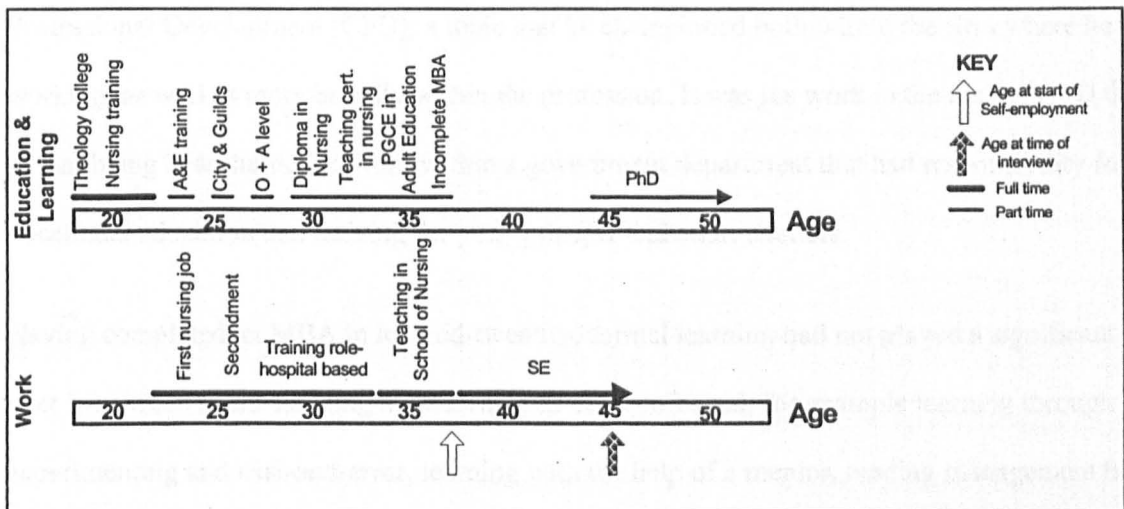


Figure 32: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (IS-Int1)

When he was in his early thirties he changed career direction again, moving into an educational role, where he became a lecturer of nursing in a Higher Education college; a role that he performed for a period of around four years before reaching a point in his life that he described as needing to re-focus. It was at this point that he decided to become self-employed. As one of the key influencing factors for becoming self-employed at that time was familial, his experience of the transition into self-employment will be discussed in the next chapter (see 6.2.4).

His work since becoming self-employed has consisted of a combination of running management development programmes, as well as providing one-to-one coaching to executive directors. It was

his work developing managers that triggered an interest in the area of Director Development which has formed the area of enquiry for his PhD.

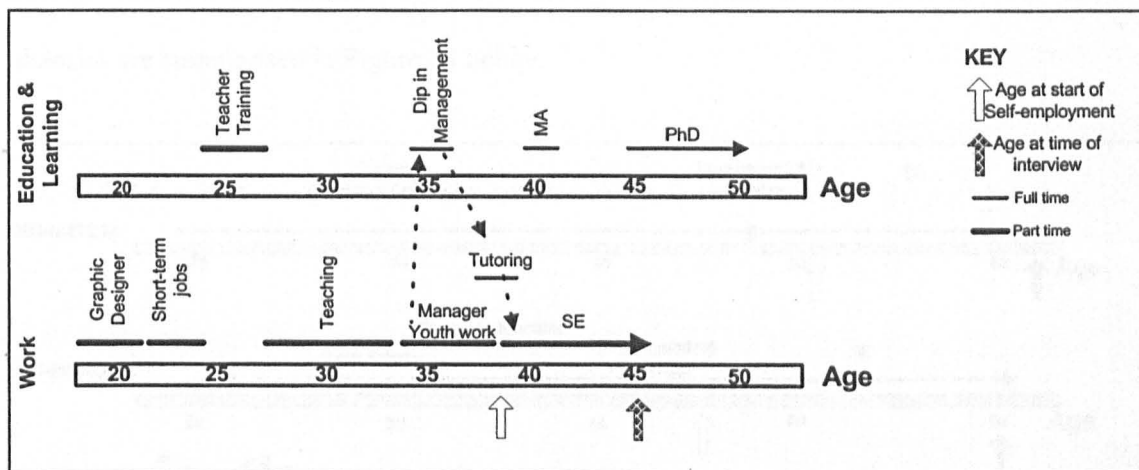
The third individual in this sub-category (MS-Int17) had had a very different career experience to the other three. He described his earlier career as "being a professional student" as having completed his degree in Architecture and Town Planning, he spent a short period of time working in a number of un-related jobs, before studying full-time for an MBA. After completing his MBA he developed his career as an architect, progressing to Head of Department in a reasonably large firm of Architects.

It was in his Head of Department role that he developed an interest in the area of Continuing Professional Development (CPD); a topic that he championed both within the firm where he was working, as well as more broadly within the profession. It was his work in the area of CPD that led to him being head-hunted to work within a government department that had responsibility for vocational education and training for young people and adult learners.

Having completed an MBA in his mid-twenties, formal learning had not played a significant part in later life. Much of his learning he described as being informal, for example learning through experimenting and trial-and-error, learning with the help of a mentor, reading management books, attending conferences, carrying out research, as well as participating in a learning group consisting of other self-employed professionals. He found the learning group approach a particularly valuable resource for his continuing professional development.

The fourth individual in this category (MS-Int3) began his work career at the age of eighteen working for around six years in what he described as "*a number of un-related jobs*". He had left school at sixteen, to go Art College rather than study for 'A' levels. In his mid-twenties he felt that he needed to gain some qualifications and as he wanted to combine his interest in art, with gaining a qualification, he decided to train to become a teacher. His teaching career however was relatively short (around six years).

He moved from teaching to become a manager on a Youth Work Project. It was at this stage of his life that he embarked on a series of formal learning activities that led him towards self-employment. The sequencing of events in his work career, together with the inter-relationships with his formal learning career, is shown in Figure 33 below.

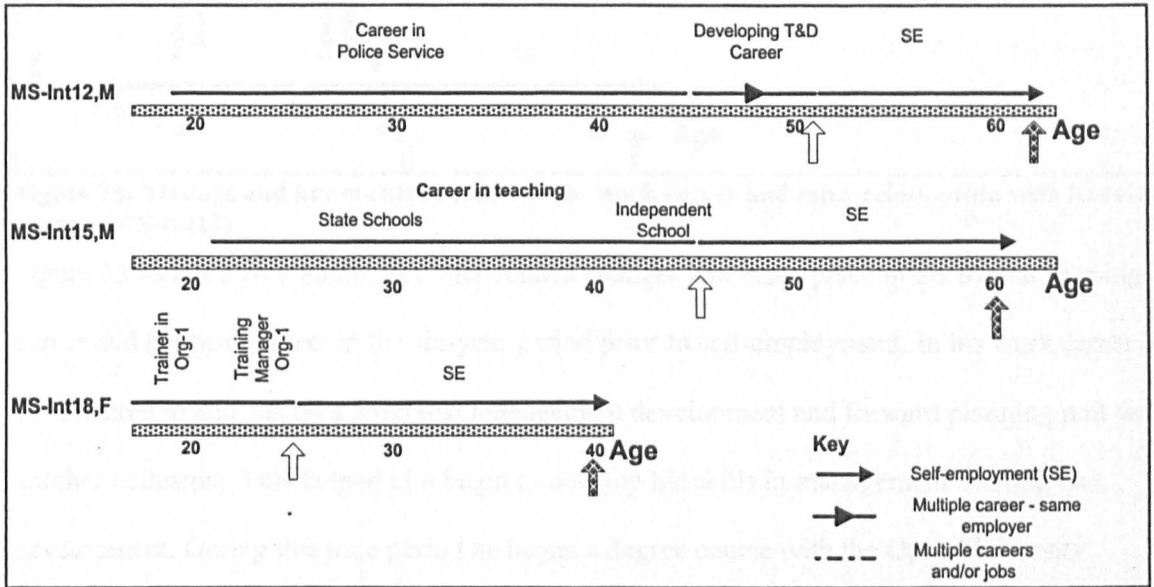


**Figure 33: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int3)**

If we look at both his work and his learning career in the four-year period prior to self-employment we can see a number of inter-related changes. First his management role had fuelled an interest in learning more about management theory; this led him to study for a Postgraduate Diploma in Management. However, this learning activity also helped to broaden his thinking about his future career options *"The people who were teaching me [on the course] they had never managed. They were not fantastic teachers but they knew things that I didn't know ... They introduced me to the world of self-development, together with a whole range of things that I hadn't come into contact with before. So I figured if I could learn those things then I could earn a living like they could and it seemed a lot more attractive than where I was ... so I spent my second year just looking at my teachers and learning as much about myself and about being a consultant, as I learnt about management"*. Here again we have an example of where formal learning can help individuals see different possibilities for their career; his experience being similar to that of others in this research (MS-Int6, MS-Int19).

### 5.2.5 Participants who had been self-employed for more than 10 years

Three of the individuals in this research had been self-employed for more than ten years, two male and one female. The length of time that they had each worked in traditional employment ranged from seven to thirty years. They had had fairly stable work careers prior to self-employment, having worked in the same business sector throughout their earlier careers. Their work career histories are summarised in Figure 34 below.



**Figure 34: Work career histories - individuals self-employed for more than ten years**

The first individual (MS-Int12) had worked in the police service for thirty-one years before becoming self-employed at the age of fifty-one. His move to self-employment had been part of a long-term career plan for himself, one that would enable him to continue working after the age at which he could take retirement from the service. This long-term career plan involved several incremental changes in both his work career and his formal learning career.

The sequencing of events in his work career, together with the inter-relationships with his formal learning career, around this period of change, is shown in Figure 35.

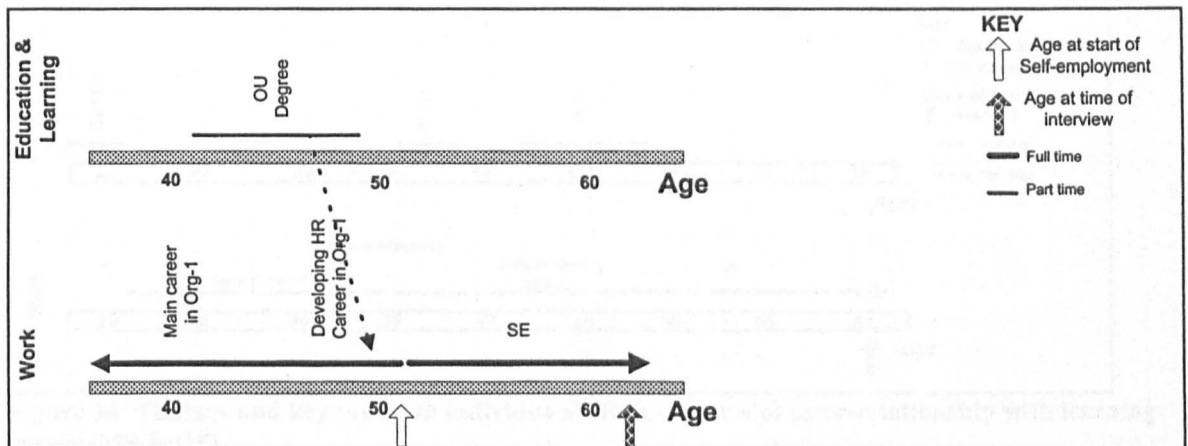


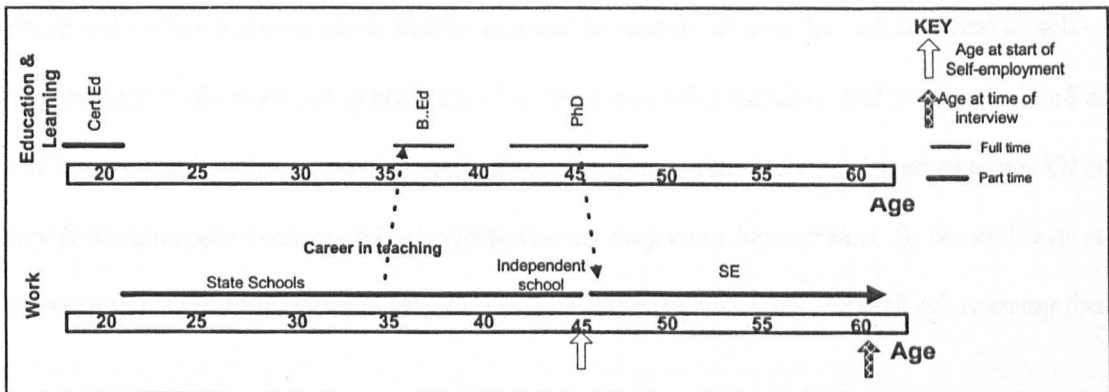
Figure 35: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int12)

Figure 35 shows how a number of inter-related changes had taken place in his formal learning career and his work career in the six-year period prior to self-employment. In his work career he volunteered to help set up a specialist management development and forward planning unit with another colleague. This helped him begin to develop his skills in management training and development. During this time period he began a degree course with the Open University.

As a result of his work in the management development unit he was asked to go on a two-year secondment to a central training unit. He described this secondment as an important career move for him enabling him to broaden his tutoring skills into other HR areas. He saw it as the learning arena for his self-employed career; a period of learning that he described as 'his apprenticeship period', where he was building up the skills and knowledge needed for his future self-employed career. His experience provides a good example of the dynamism of individuals' careers, showing how changes in one life-area can have a direct impact, or influence, on other life-areas. In his case the skills and knowledge that he was developing in his formal learning career (studying for an Open University degree) were immediately transferable to his work career. The next chapter (see 6.2.5) describes the changes in his familial career during this time period, which acted as another enabler for his move into self-employment.

One of the other individuals (MS-Int15) in this category had worked as a teacher for twenty-five years before being made redundant at the age of forty-five (this was in the early 1980s). He started

his career in teaching immediately after finishing Teacher Training College. Figure 36 shows the key events in his work career, as well as the inter-relationships with his formal learning career.



**Figure 36: Timings and key events in individuals' work career and inter-relationship with learning career (MS-Int15)**

As Figure 36 shows, for the majority of his teaching career he had taught in state schools.

However, in the latter part of his teaching career, he taught in the private sector, it was from here that he was made redundant. He had never considered self-employment as a career option, up until this point, nor had he considered that as a teacher he would ever be out of work. However after being made redundant he found it difficult to get another full-time teaching post. The only work that he was able to get was supply teaching, part-time, which did not provide the same level of income that he had been used to.

It was his formal learning career, i.e. his PhD, which provided a bridge between his teaching and self-employed career. He explained *“At the time when I was made redundant I was well into my PhD and this provided a kind of buffer, a cushion, if you like. As soon as I was made redundant I was a potential PhD. I was almost there. Therefore I could move swiftly into industry as an Occupational Psychologist.”* His PhD provided him with some continuity and stability during the period of change in his work career, in addition the specialist knowledge gained enabled him to develop a new area of work.

In the initial stage of self-employment he worked for an organisation that developed and published psychometric tests. He was employed initially to administer psychometric tests to clients. To perform this work, he had to complete several short psychometric testing courses, necessary to meet the regulatory requirements for administering psychometric tests; the cost of these learning

activities being met by the client. His role with this particular client was later expanded to include helping develop new products.

There were other learning needs that he had had to address during the initial period of self-employment *“The main set of skills I had to learn was what industry and training was all about. I had been a teacher for twenty-five years and when I went into industry I used to teach. Of course they [HR managers I was training] rejected me as they were beyond that. So the skill was in learning the difference between teaching and training, particularly the skill of receiving feedback.”*

The final individual in this sub-category (MS-Int18) had had a relatively short organisational career before becoming self-employed at the age of twenty-five. After finishing her ‘A levels’ she began a career in training, working for a large hotel group. During her seven-year career with this employer she worked her way up to Training Manager. It was a combination of factors that led to her decision to give up her Training Manager job at the time when she did. The long working hours, combined with the extensive travel, meant that she was making sacrifices in her home-life; this will be discussed further in Chapter 8 (see section 8.2.4).

Over the fifteen-year period that she had been self-employed she had maintained a narrow product offering to her clients. Two key criteria influenced the decisions that she made about what client work to take on. One was Will the work enable her to continue to meet her non-work commitments? and the second criteria being Will the work be enjoyable?

Throughout her self-employed career her learning needs have been addressed largely through informal ways. These include networking (although she told me that she doesn’t do as much of this as she would like), as well as reading key business journals (so that she is able to speak knowledgably about current business issues with clients). In the early stage of self-employment she attended a number of short courses run by her Local Chamber of Commerce, to help her develop her knowledge of how to run a small business.

However she had participated in a couple of formal learning activities since becoming self-employed. One of these activities involved training to become an accredited trainer of a particular



Self-Development Training approach, so that she could become one of the company's accredited trainers. She had also started an OU degree (see 4.3.2). However, she reported that this learning activity was for interest sake only and that the course she was taking were not linked to her work.

### 5.3 Summary

The findings in this chapter have set out the varied work careers that participating individuals have experienced. There were a number of similarities in their career histories. First, several had followed a traditional career pattern of 'A' Levels, then University, followed by employment. Where this was not the case, individuals had invested considerable amounts of time in formal learning in their adult lives, combining work and formal learning. Second many had experienced multiple career transitions prior to self-employment. The types of transitions that they had experienced include: a) employment followed by self-employment b) employment, unemployment followed by self-employment c) employment, self-employment, followed by employment d) employment, self-employment, employment, followed by a return to self-employment, and e) self-employment, employment, followed by a return to self-employment. Third some (both male and female) had experienced discontinuities in their work careers i.e. they had had a break in their work career, often to participate in a formal learning activity, full-time.

The age range at which individuals became self-employed is summarised in Table 9.

<b>Age at which individuals became self-employed</b>	<b>Number</b>
Age 25 to 30	2
Age 31 to 35	5
Age 36 to 40	8
Age 41 to 45	5
Age 46 to 50	4
Age 51 to 55	2

**Table 9: Age range at which participating individuals became self-employed**

Table 9 shows that more individuals became self-employed between the ages of 36 to 40, than in any of the other age range. Of the twenty-six participant only five had followed a single career in Human Resources, prior to self-employment; their earlier work career histories are summarised below.

<b>Individuals' work career histories prior to self-employment</b>	<b>Number</b>
Individuals who had followed a single career in Human Resources	5
Individuals who had made a career change into Human Resources	10
Individuals whose earlier careers had been in other disciplines other than in Human Resources	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

**Table 10: Summary of participating individuals' earlier work career histories**

As table 10 shows ten individuals had made a career change into Human Resources, prior to becoming self-employed. For eight of these, their change in career direction followed on from a managerial career within the same organisation. The other two had followed a career in other disciplines before developing a career in Human Resources.

Eleven had established a career in other professional disciplines prior to becoming self-employed. For these individuals, their move to self-employment had involved a change in professional discipline, as well as a status change (i.e. from employed to self-employed). Eight of these had previously worked in teaching, or adult education. They thus had a background in facilitating the development of others.

Where an individual's move into self-employment coincided with a change in career discipline, it was often their formal learning career (either a Masters, PhD or a recognised professional qualification) that provided a bridge between their former work career and their self-employed career. Their work, in the early period of self-employment, thus being linked to the specialist knowledge gained on these formal learning programmes.

Despite the overall number of years that individuals had been in traditional employment (which ranged from six, to thirty years) their move into self-employment had involved some form of additional learning. The steepness of the learning curve varied depending upon individuals' former work experience and/or the amount of preparation that he, or she, had been able to do beforehand.

However, irrespective of individuals' former work careers there were some common areas of learning to address in the early period of self-employment. These include: learning about sales and marketing, learning how to manage client relationships, familiarisation with the use of ICT, as well as understanding the tax and legal aspects of running a small business. Each of these learning needs was addressed through a combination of formal and informal learning approaches.

This chapter has highlighted some of the tensions associated with self-employment, particularly with regard to their learning. Whereas when working within an organisation the cost of learning, together with other resources to support learning, is normally met by the employer, individuals have to resource their own learning. A second tension is that individuals do not necessarily have the same opportunities for replenishing their knowledge through the daily routines of organisational life. One individual summarised this as "*One of the things you definitely miss out on with this way of life is conversations in the corridor.*" A third source of tension relates to the financial uncertainty associated with the flow of income from self-employment. The different strategies that individuals adopt for managing these tensions will be discussed in Chapter 7 (Integration).

Some of the opportunities associated with this lifestyle, have been highlighted in this chapter. One opportunity being that of having more control over their working life and another being having a broader scope for learning and development, because of the variety of client work that they can get exposed to.

The next chapter sets out the findings about individuals combined family, work and learning careers, making the inter-relationships across all each of these life-areas are made more explicit.

## Chapter 6: The combined family, work and learning careers of participating individuals

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter adds another life-area to those discussed separately in the previous two chapters, adding in the findings about individuals' familial/home-life situation. It also draws together the inter-relationships across the three main life-areas: learning, work and family.

It contains factual information about each individual's familial situation e.g. their marital status, whether or not they had children, together with the employment status of their wife/partner. It also includes subjective data e.g. the effect that self-employment has had on individuals' lives. Thus we start to see more of the tensions and opportunities that self-employment can have on individuals' lives overall, together with some insights into the different strategies that they adopt for managing these.

Individuals have been grouped into six familial categories, summarised in Table 11.

<b>Familial situation</b>	<b>Number in Combined Sample</b>
Single (No children)	2
Living with partner (No children)	7
Living with partner (Children, pre-school age)	2
Living with partner (Children, aged 5 to 18)	8
Living with partner (Children, aged 18+)	3
Separated (With children)	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

**Table 11: Summary of participating individuals' familial situation**

Further details about each individual's familial/home-life situation, in relation to their work and learning careers, follows below.

## **6.2 Detailed findings about individuals' combined family, work and learning careers**

### **6.2.1 Participants who were single**

Two participants were single without any dependent children; one male and one female. One (MS-Int20) of these was in her late twenties when she became self-employed, having previously worked for six years in traditional employment. Since beginning her work career she had lived in a different geographical location to her parents' home. As she is single the location of where she works is not a particular source of tension for her. She reported that she is free to travel to different geographical locations to work with clients and had in fact actively sought International work since becoming self-employed.

Despite not having any immediate familial responsibilities, she tried to plan her face-to-face work with clients into three days a week so that she was free to visit her parents for long weekends, should she choose to, or to allocate the remaining time to other activities, such as learning, or leisure.

She reported how a particular benefit for her, of self-employment, is being able to go to the cinema in the afternoons when she is not working with clients. One of the other benefits of self-employment was having more control over her working hours, she explained *"The main thing for me is that I have never been a morning person. I try not to have meetings with clients at 9.00 am. I don't like that. When clients ask to meet at this time I point out that it will be cheaper for them if we meet later."* However one of the downsides for her, of this career option, is that her home-office, where she carries out all of the administrative work associated with her business, is in her living room. She finds this situation frustrating at times, as it means that she is not always able to physically separate work from the rest of her life, leaving her feeling that there is no escape from work.

Chapter 4 (see 4.2.1) showed how she had started a part-time MA in Higher and Professional Education shortly after becoming self-employed. When selecting both the course and the University, one option that she considered was studying at a University close to her parent's home; thus giving her an option to combine studying with her weekend visits home. However, in practice

she found this difficult to arrange. She found that the course offered by the University, closest to her parent's home, was inflexible, as students were expected to attend tutorials every weekend; a requirement that she felt was too restrictive for those whose work, like hers, is unpredictable. In the end she chose to study at a University closer to her own home.

In order to make time for this formal learning activity she had had to make adjustments to her work routine, because of the requirement to attend the evening tutorials. Up until this point a large amount of her work had involved running week-long training programmes; something that was not really compatible with a learning activity that involved evening attendance. She found that she was not able to be as flexible with clients as she has been; a situation that she had had to manage carefully so as not to damage the relationship with clients (and hence her income). Given these tensions she had decided to study more intensively, aiming to complete the course in a shorter time-period than the expected norm.

The other individual in this category (MS-Int7) was in his mid-forties when he became self-employed, having worked for twenty-six years in traditional employment. Chapter 5 (see 5.4.2.1) showed how he had had a varied work career. He had lived and worked abroad when he was in his twenties. He had also spent some time running his own hotel when he was in his early forties. So he had experienced a lot of change in both his work and his home-life situation.

It was a combination of factors that led him to become self-employed at the time when he did.

First, he realised that the work he enjoyed doing most involved working in a developmental way with others. Second, other people (i.e. Training & Development consultants who used to stay at his hotel) commented on his ability to work with people in a developmental way. Third, he had personal reasons for moving out of the hotel business at that particular time in his life (which he did not want to elaborate on).

Much of his work is based local to where he lives. However, as he does not have any immediate family commitments he travels to different geographical locations to work with certain clients. The nature of the work that he does locally presents him with difficulties at times *"Because of the type of work I do [therapy and counselling] and it is a small community I have to be very strict. Because*

*of what I do I have been to functions where there has been no let up in the people who come up to me ... I recognise my boundaries. It is very important for me to be able to come back to somewhere to let off steam.*" Unlike the other individual, who was single, he had set aside a separate room in his house for work. He found that this helped him manage the boundaries between his work and home-life.

### **6.2.2 Participants living with a partner but no children**

Seven participating individuals were living with a partner, but without children; three female and four male.

One (MS-Int6), who became self-employed in her early thirties, had since experienced several changes in her home-life situation. Three years after becoming self-employed she moved house, moving away from the city to live in a small rural village. A decision that she reported as being for lifestyle reasons *"I used to come up here as my sister lives here. I loved the tranquillity and loved the people and I used to go back to the city and think about when I could go back to the country again. At the time when I set up the business I didn't want the upset of moving house too ... So it was about Year-3 and the cottage next door to my sister became free. I rented it for six months, to see whether my fantasies about country living were rather more than fantasies. I have now bought it [cottage]"* However, having decided to move to the country, her actual choice of location was influenced by other factors, other than proximity to her sister, these included proximity to motorway networks, and ease of access to London by train, so that she could maintain her relationship with existing clients.

Since becoming self-employed she had also met a new partner who had moved in with her (this was in the year prior to the fieldwork). The key events in her familial career, together with the inter-relationship with her other life-areas are shown in Figure 37 below.

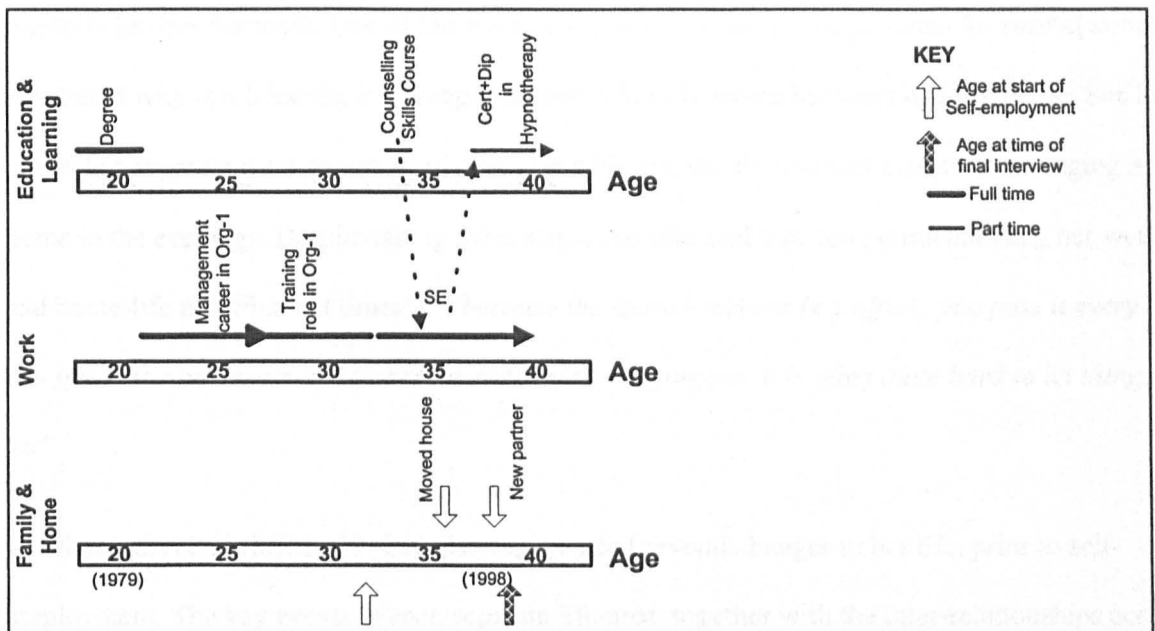


Figure 37: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (MS-Int6)

Figure 37 shows how in addition to starting a new relationship and developing her self-employed career, she was also studying part-time. These combined commitments were creating tensions for her in terms of apportioning her time across all three life-areas *“Over the past eight years I had been on my own and I had been able to flit here, there and everywhere, work wise. I am still free to do this, but I want to give more time to the relationship. I am sensitised to the need to have more downtime now”*.

She was intending to tackle this tension by varying the type and amount of client work that she takes on, as well as being more assertive with clients regarding the contractual arrangements *“I want to have a balance, projects which interest me, have enough work, but not too much workflow. My aim is to churn out low paying clients. The aim is to say ‘Well if you want me to make some availability in my diary for you, this is the fee rate and these are the conditions’.* This is something I would never have had the confidence to do before I had this flow of business.” This shift in attitude with regard to the relationship with clients was linked to the general health of her business. Having been self-employed for six years at this point, she had built up a large pool of clients and was thus less dependent on any one particular client.

However it wasn’t just having the time to allocate to the relationship with her new partner and her formal learning, that was of concern to her. Since becoming self-employed she had become aware of the need to pay more attention to her health, ensuring that she kept herself physically and



mentally healthy for work. One of the ways in which she manages the potential for mental stress, associated with this lifestyle, is to keep clear boundaries between her work and home life. She had set aside a separate room to use as an office. In addition, she discourages clients from ringing her at home in the evenings. Despite taking these steps, she admitted that compartmentalising her work and home-life is difficult at times “... because the spare bedroom [my office] you pass it every time you got to the bathroom and if there is something nagging you it is often quite hard to let things go”.

Another individual (MS-Int19) had also experienced several changes in her life, prior to self-employment. The key events in each separate life-area, together with the inter-relationships across life-areas, are shown in Figure 38.

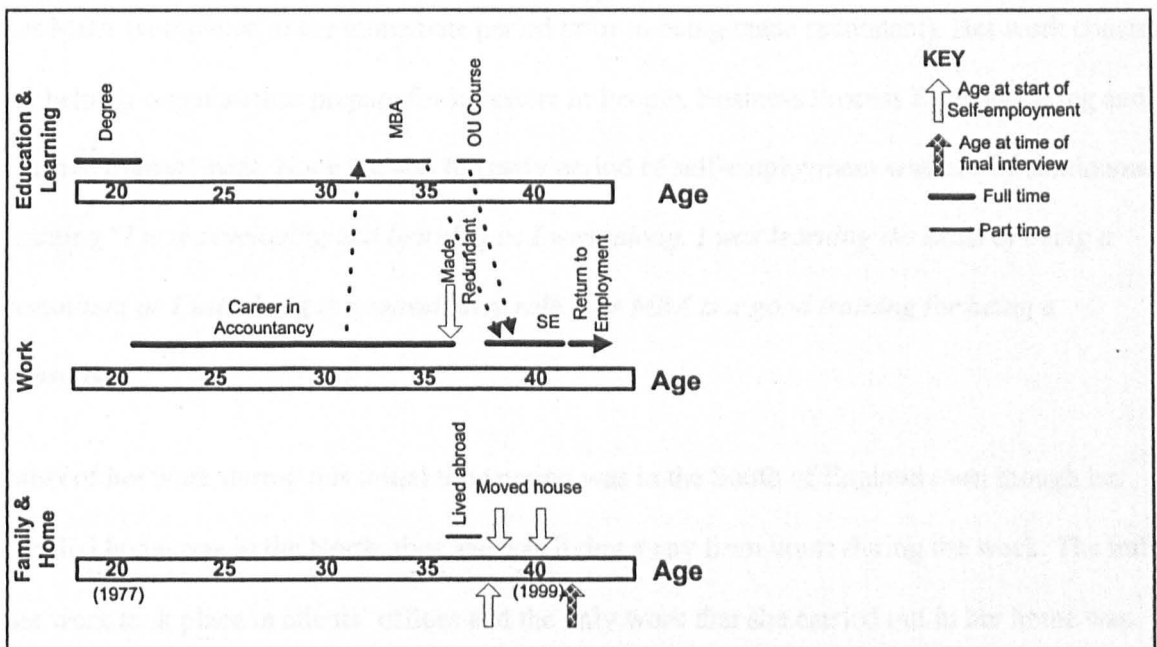


Figure 38: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (MS-Int19)

As Figure 38 shows that she was made redundant from the work career she had followed since graduating, in her mid-thirties. Despite having recently completed an MBA she had experienced difficulties in gaining further employment. Being in a dual-career family situation put constraints on the type, and location, of jobs that she was able to apply for.

Shortly after being made redundant, she and her husband went to live abroad for two years; a change that was related to her husband’s career. During this time period she did not engage in any paid work, but instead used this time for additional learning. One area of learning, as Figure 38

shows, involved completing an OU short course on Performance Management (a topic which she felt would be useful in her work in the future). The other learning activity, this time informal, involved some background research into how to become self-employed.

When she and her husband returned to the UK, they went to live in the North of England, a change that was again related to his career. It was at this point that she decided to become self-employed. She felt that this would be a more practicable career option given her changing familial situation, combined with the overall state of employment in the North.

Her move into self-employment involved a status change, from employee to self-employed, and a change in career discipline i.e. from a management accountant to a consultant. In the early stage of her self-employed career she sought work where she could apply the knowledge she had gained on her MBA (completed in the immediate period prior to being made redundant). Her work consisted of: helping organisations prepare for Investors in People, Business Process Re-engineering and Change Management. None the less the early period of self-employment was one of continuous learning *“I was developing and learning as I went along. I was learning the skills of being a consultant as I was doing the consultancy role. The MBA is a good training for being a consultant.”*

Most of her work during this initial time period was in the South of England even though her familial home was in the North; thus she was living away from home during the week. The bulk of her work took place in clients' offices and the only work that she carried out in her home was research activities and administrative work (e.g. invoicing, tax returns). For this type of work she had access to a room that was slightly cut off from the main body of the house. The type of work that she did i.e. short fixed-term contracts with individual clients, as opposed to having several short-term assignments running in parallel with multiple clients, combined with her familial situation, meant that she followed a more traditional work pattern.

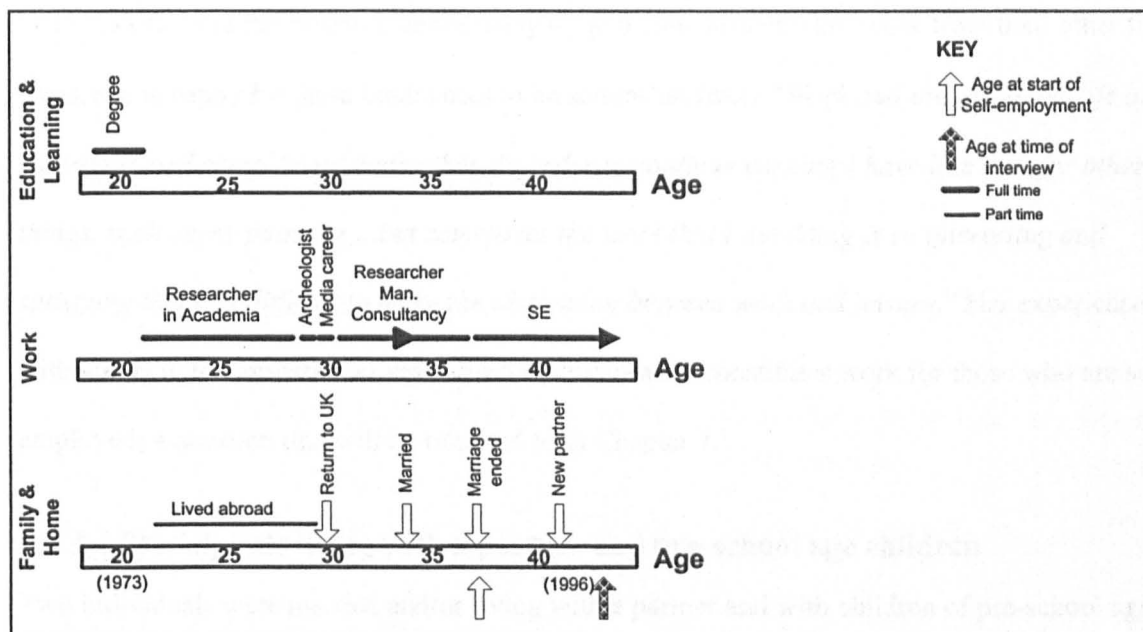
When we first met she had not worked much for nearly six months, as she had chosen to focus her energy on managing the building work that was taking place on their new house (she and her husband had moved house again in the previous year and were both living and working in the

South of England). She chose to stop working for a while because she felt that *“You cannot sit in someone else’s office making calls. If you do then someone is going to start making comments. Now that the building work is coming to an end, it is time to start thinking about work again. I needed the break though. When you work for yourself as a consultant there is always this presence, you cannot get away from it ... You need to look after yourself.”* Here again we have a reference to the need for self-employed professionals to manage their health. However, after taking this break from work she did not resume her self-employed career, but instead returned to traditional employment, working for a small consultancy.

It was lifestyle factors that had influenced another individual’s (MS-Int17) decision to become self-employed in his late forties. Prior to this he had had a varied work career. After completing an MBA in his mid-twenties he worked as an Architect for around fifteen years. During this time period he had also helped run a family business in his spare time. He then changed career direction working in various senior roles in public sector organisations that were training related, for a period of seven years.

In his late forties he and his wife jointly reviewed their future plans. They decided to move to the country and for him to start his own consultancy business. At that time his wife had multiple career interests of her own, which meant that she would be able to continue with some of these once they had moved. As well as pursuing their own separate careers they felt that from their new home they would be able to work together on certain projects. There is a similarity here then with his experience and that of others in this research of a similar age. (MS-Int13, Ms-Int12 and Ms-Int15).

The final individual in this category (IS-Int4) had experienced several changes in her familial career before becoming self-employed at the age of thirty-seven. The key events and changes in her Family life, together with the inter-relationships with other life-areas, are shown in Figure 39.



**Figure 39: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (IS-Int4)**

Figure 39 shows how she lived abroad for around seven years after graduating, when she was working as a researcher in a German University. On her return to England she experimented with a number of different work careers, before applying her research skills to a commercial role. She married when she was in her mid-thirties. However, the marriage ended after four years. She now lives with a new partner, met since becoming self-employed.

It was familial factors that had influenced her decision to become self-employed at the time when she did; she was still married to her former husband at that time. She told me *“My husband, who was a film cameraman, was about to go off travelling. I thought to myself why do I want to be stuck here commuting when there is a possibility of doing some travelling too. So I decided to go freelance. That year we split up so I never got to go travelling.”* However, despite the break-up in her marriage she decided to go ahead with her decision to become self-employed.

She reported how although work is, and always has been, an important aspect of her life it is not all consuming *“I suppose I am a bit unusual to some extent, for a woman, as I don’t have any children. So work has always been big for me, but never 90% ... It is between 50% and 75%.”*

Lifestyle factors continue to influence how she makes decisions about her work now. One of the things that she enjoys about her lifestyle now is having the option not to work on Fridays, or Mondays.

Whereas others in this research deliberately try and compartmentalise work from their other life-areas, she is happy for these boundaries to be somewhat fuzzy "*Work and the rest of my life both contradict and complement each other. In order to continue earning I have less time for other things, such as my painting ...but sometimes the work that I am doing is so interesting and satisfying that it is difficult to make the distinction between work and leisure.*" Her experience, as with others in this research, raises a question about what constitutes work for those who are self-employed; a question that will be returned to in Chapter 7.

### **6.2.3 Participants living with a partner and pre-school age children**

Two individuals were married and/or living with a partner and with children of pre-school age. Both of these were in their mid-thirties; one male and one female.

The first of these (MS-Int4) had been self-employed for six years, having previously worked in traditional employment for nine years. He became self-employment shortly after being made redundant from his Training and Development Management role in his third organisation. Chapter 5 (see 5.2.4.1) discussed how he had not envisaged self-employed at that stage in his work career and how it was the interim consultancy work, offered to him after being made redundant, that sowed the seeds in his mind, even though he had two young children and a wife to support.

The key events and changes in his familial career, together with the inter-relationships with other life-areas, are shown in Figure 40 below.

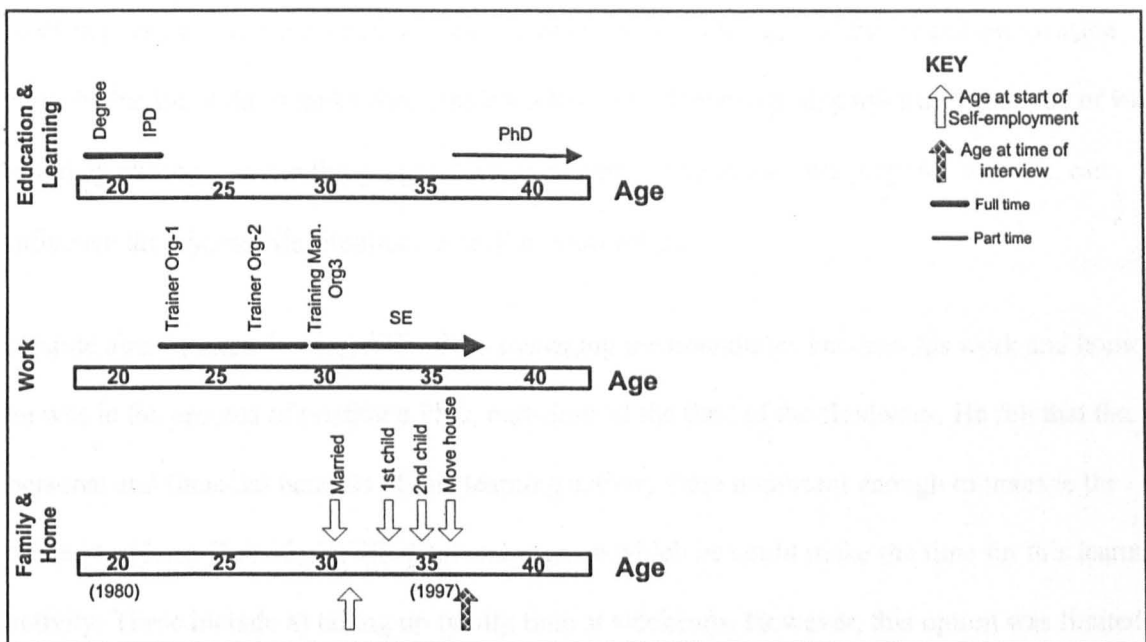


Figure 40: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (MS-Int4)

As Figure 40 shows a number of parallel changes had occurred in his familial career and his work career from the age of thirty onwards. He became self-employed shortly after getting married. A couple of years later his first child was born, followed by his second child, eighteen months after that. Shortly after the birth of his second child the family moved out of London, to live closer to his parents. This decision was based on a combination of family and business needs. From a familial perspective living closer to his parents means that his wife has more support when he works away.

Since starting a family, his wife has not undertaken any paid work. However she does support him with his business in a number of ways. She acts as a sounding board for ideas relating to his business. As she is often the only other adult whom he has contact with on the days when working from home he finds this type of support invaluable. Since forming a business partnership with a former colleague his wife has become a named partner, which means that she also gets involved in the longer-term business planning.

Having such a young family has created tensions for him in terms of getting the balance right between his work and home-life *"It [self-employment] is all I have known all of my married life. Having said that it is still quite a challenge to balance. There is this constant role conflict. I am a father, husband and I am also running a business. It causes friction and it is difficult to manage. I wouldn't say I have got it right. I tend to be very focused on the business. I know other people who do the same thing, but they make a conscious decision to spend more time with their family. They*

work in particular areas so that they can be home in the evenings". Here we can see how the choices that individuals make about their work when self-employed, particularly the type of work that they chose to do and the geographical locations of where they are prepared to work, can influence their home-life situation, as well as vice-versa.

Despite already experiencing difficulties managing the boundaries between his work and home-life he was in the process of starting a PhD, part-time, at the time of the fieldwork. He felt that the personal and financial benefits of this learning activity were important enough to manage the related tensions. He had identified several ways in which he could make the time for this learning activity. These include a) taking up family time at weekends. However, this option was limited as his Sunday evenings are often taken up preparing for the following week's work b) using some of the days in his diary, not charged out to clients, rather than using this time for writing article and books, for commercial gains. Both of these options involved some trade-offs, either personally, or financially.

The other individual with pre-school age children was female (MS-Int10). She had been self-employed for three years, having previously worked in traditional employment for ten years. Chapter 4 (see 4.2.2) showed how she described herself as not having had a career, until self-employment. The key events and changes in each life-area, together with the inter-relationships across each life-area, are shown in Figure 41 below.

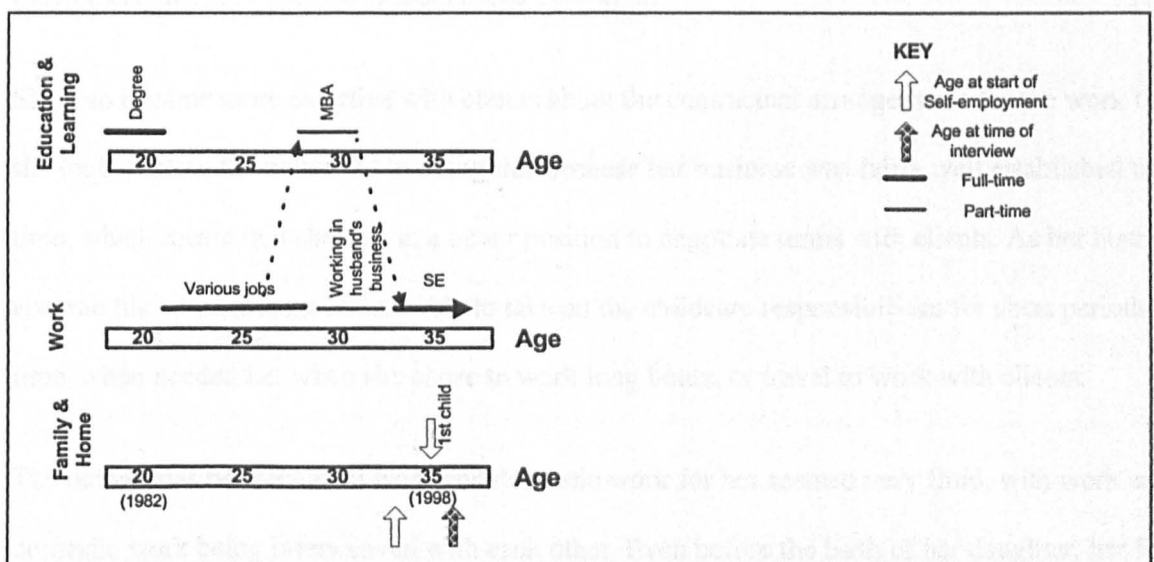


Figure 41: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (MS-Int10)

Figure 41 shows how in the immediate time period before becoming self-employment she had worked in her husband's business. This period of employment coincided with the time when she was studying for her MBA, part-time.

The main factor that influenced her decision to become self-employed when she did was familial reasons. Although she did not have children at that time, she was planning a family. Thus she was looking for an area of work that would enable her to have a balance between family life and work. She felt that self-employment would offer her that flexibility. She was aware of how her female friends, with children, felt about their career options. They either had a job that kept them away from their families, or had given up work to look after the children, but felt dis-satisfied with this arrangement. She felt that by having an established business she would find it easier to carry on working after starting a family, as self-employment would enable her to plan her work around the needs of the family, rather than the other way around.

Her daughter (who was seven months old at the time of the fieldwork) was born after she had been self-employed for a couple of years, at which point she made changes to both the type of work that she sought, as well as how she planned and organised her work. Instead of running training courses, she sought more one-to-one work with clients, as this involved less intense periods of work, thus providing her with greater flexibility over her time. Some of these one-to-one sessions took place in her home. This work arrangement had the advantage that she did not have to do so much travelling, or being away from home overnight.

She also became more assertive with clients about the contractual arrangements for the work that she took on. She felt confident in doing this because her business was fairly well established by this time, which meant that she was in a better position to negotiate terms with clients. As her husband also ran his own business he was able to take on the childcare responsibilities for short periods of time, when needed i.e. when she chose to work long hours, or travel to work with clients.

The boundaries between paid work and domestic work for her seemed very fluid, with work and domestic work being interweaved with each other. Even before the birth of her daughter, her fee-earning work and domestic work were not kept totally separate. For example, when she did not



have any pressing deadlines she took time out during the working day to walk the dog, or prepare the evening meal. This inter-weaving of work and domestic work continued after the birth of her daughter “... when she [daughter] falls asleep then I do some work and within a minute or so I can be in work mode ... once you have children you don't have the same luxury of thinking you have the whole day stretching ahead of you. If you get two hours to spare to do something, say like your VAT returns, you get on do it, otherwise they go in late.”

This way of living was not without its tensions. She felt that, without children, she would be better off financially as she could work more. However, she had to come to terms with the fact that self-employment, as a career option, was not going to make her rich, but recognised that it had other advantages, particularly greater flexibility and control over when and how much she works. She has also experienced difficulties keeping her knowledge up-to-date “... people send me bits of information, such as articles they think I might be interested in. I do quite a bit of reading, but not as much as I should do. It is difficult I think. One of the things you definitely miss out on with this way of life is conversations in the corridor.” Creating the time for learning, as well as the opportunities and resources for learning, are areas that self-employed professionals have to actively manage for themselves.

#### **6.2.4 Participants living with a partner and school-age children**

Eight individuals were either married, or living with a partner, and had school age children; six male and two female. Life-style/familial reasons had influenced four of the men's decision to become self-employed.

One (IS-Int1) became self-employed at a time when he as he was experiencing conflicting priorities in his life and felt he “needed to re-focus his priorities”. Prior to self-employment he had experienced many changes in each of his separate life-areas. The key events and changes in each life-area, together with the inter-relationships across life-areas, are shown in Figure 42.

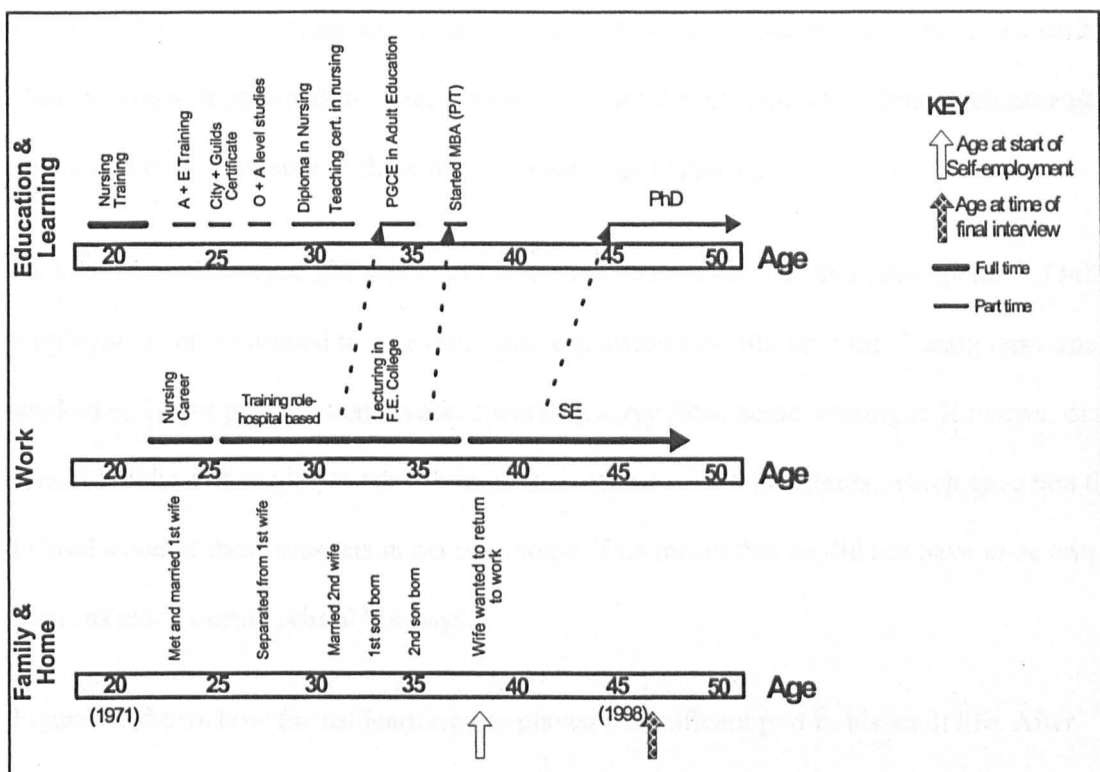


Figure 42: Key events and inter-relationships across main life-areas (IS-Int1)

He had been married twice. He met and married his first wife in his early twenties, but this ended three years later. He married his second wife in his early thirties. His two sons were born within four years of this second marriage.

His move into self-employment came when his eldest son had just started school. There were a number of factors that influenced his decision to become self-employed at that time. First, his job involved working long hours. This was partly the nature of the job itself and partly due to the amount of time he had to spend commuting. Second, his wife wanted to return to work as their eldest son had started school and the other son was due to start shortly afterwards. In order for her to return to work she needed more support in looking after the children, both after school and in the holidays. Third, the MBA that he had been studying part-time at that time, was impacting on his family life. Having already experienced one failed marriage, family life was very important to him, thus he wanted to ensure that he protected that at all costs. Given all of these factors, self-employment seemed the best career option for him at that time, providing him with the flexibility over when and how much he worked, so that he could take on more of the childcare responsibilities.

For the first two years of his self-employed career he taught nursing, part-time, at a local Nursing College. His wife returned to work, part-time, during this time-period. These work arrangements meant that they were able to share the childcare responsibilities.

As he expanded the type and amount of work that he took on after this initial period of self-employment, he continued to take childcare responsibilities into account. During term-time he worked on larger projects that involved working away from home overnight. However, during school holidays he tended to take on more one-to-one work with clients, which gave him the option to hold some of these sessions in his own home. This meant that he did not have to be away from home as much during school holidays.

Figure 42 shows how formal learning has played a significant part in his adult life. After completing his nursing training, in his early twenties, he has participated in a continuous stream of part-time formal learning activities. The biggest gap in his formal learning career was a period of seven years, which occurred after withdrawing from the MBA programme and starting his PhD. His children were at secondary school at this stage. However, despite the children being more independent at this time, he had experienced difficulties in finding the time to work on his PhD, particularly during the weekends when he saw most of his children.

Another of the individuals in this category (MS-Int8) also took family considerations into account when making decisions about his work. His transition into self-employment came at time when, as we saw in Chapter 5 (see 5.2.3) he was feeling disillusioned with the way in which his work career was developing. Despite his financial and family commitments at that time (he had three children, two mortgages, two cars, and a wife on a low income) he chose to take voluntary redundancy when the organisation he was working for was re-structuring.

His family situation was different to that of the first individual in this category. First his children were older. He had twin sons aged twelve and a half, and another son, aged fifteen. Second, his wife was working, but wanted to reduce the hours she worked so that she had more time to allocate to her other interests, such as working on her allotments. He reported how Family happiness was a top personal value for him *"I see myself as being here to support all of them [family] in achieving*

*their objectives. As a result I take on quite a lot of the work in the house while trying to make as much money as I can". He took this into account when planning and organising his work "I consider part of my career as spending a lot of my time cycling, hopefully with my family. So last year we cycled as a family to Holland ... From mid-June until September I was cycling with the family and working on my wife's allotment. I wasn't earning anything in those months. That was not because I couldn't get work but because that was the way I wanted it to be". It seems that the money that he earns during the months of the year when he does work, combined with his wife's income (despite this being low), is sufficient to meet the family's needs.*

When not working on client-based work, much of his time is spent on activities related to his family, or leisure activities. A situation that may account for why he does not seem to allocate as much time to learning activities, or networking, as others in this research. This was something that his wife, on several occasions, had pointed out to him that he ought to pay more attention to. With his wife's encouragement he had just become involved in an informal learning activity, that involved becoming a member of a learning-set consisting of other independent consultants. When he volunteered for the learning-set he was not sure what was involved, or what the benefits would be. He simply saw it as an opportunity to talk to more people like himself. In practice participating in the learning-set has helped him think more strategically about his work, focusing in particular on factors other than pure enjoyment when seeking out work assignments.

Lifestyle factors had been an important consideration for another individual (MS-Int5), again male, when deciding to become self-employed, in his mid-thirties. There were parallel changes in both his family career and his work career at that time. The key events and changes in each of his separate life-areas, together with the inter-relationships across life-areas, are shown in Figure 43.

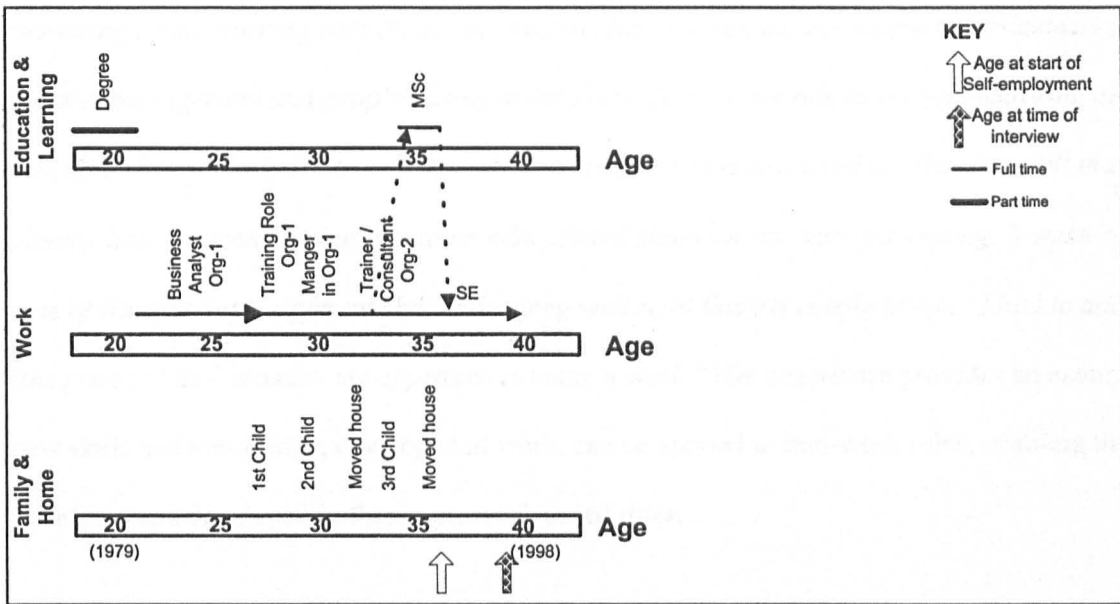


Figure 43: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (MS-Int5)

One of the factors that had influenced his decision to become self-employed was his desire to earn more money so that the family could have a bigger house; something that they had before when he had worked for his previous organisation, based in a different geographical location. Whereas others in this research had had some form of financial buffer when they became self-employed, buying them time to build up their business gradually, his financial situation and goals meant that he had to get his business established very quickly. He explained *“I wasn’t going to earn the money I needed in current my role to move house, and I also knew if I went freelance, which would solve the money problems, we would need a bigger house ... So we found another house. I doubled the size of my mortgage to get it. That was a very crucial factor because I was taking an enormous risk. But that was part of the stimulus to make it work. I had to make it work if we were going to survive. Three years on and I have managed to pay the mortgage every month so far.”*

Despite the financial risks of self-employment, this way of living has brought a number of positive benefits for him and his family. First, they have been able to buy the bigger family home that they wanted. Second, he has greater flexibility over his working time, enabling him to take on some of the domestic responsibilities, for example taking/collecting the children from school and decorating their new house. Third, he has had more time to allocate to other interests, such as working as a parent-governor at his eldest child’s school; a role which has helped him with his continuing professional development too *“I was forgetting that [my parent-governor role] as a major part of my development ... the skills I have developed, chairing formal meetings. I have developed my*

*mentoring skills, working with the Head Teacher. He required a lot of support, particularly in broader management and people management skills. So I see my role as one of mentoring and coaching. Just recently I was involved in the recruitment of a new teacher. That is a skill that I already had, but transferring that to an educational situation was very interesting. It wasn't just a case of transferring a different skill and saying well right this fits comfortably ... I had to adapt it [the process] and broaden my approach to make it work."* His experience provides an example of how skills and knowledge, developed at work, can be applied to non-work roles, enabling them to be refined and developed in these non-work based roles. .

However, the self-employed lifestyle has caused some tensions for his wife, as well as between himself and his wife. His wife, for example, has found it more difficult than him to adjust to the irregular income of self-employment, even though the overall family income is higher than when he had been in traditional employment. In addition, as his wife does not work, he has to take her needs into account when planning his day, particularly when working at home. It is almost as though he has to negotiate working time with her *"I have an office which is on the second floor of the house, so it is quite remote from the rest of the house. When I am working up there I tend not to be disturbed by the family. Again I try and negotiate that a little bit with my wife. So I will say to her 'I have got this work to do and I am going to go up to the office so I won't be available for such and such today'."*

Another of the men with school age children (MS-Int1) also referred to the benefits that self-employment has had on his family life *"I enjoy this lifestyle now. I have more time with the family. There is not so much travelling or being away from home. I am able to take the children to school and pick them up"*. However, his irregular income has meant that his wife has had to increase the hours that she works. To counter-balance this, he has taken on more of the domestic responsibilities, such as doing the shopping and the washing; domestic tasks that he had not carried out before, due to the combination of his long working hours and his work taking him away from home.

The decision to become self-employed for the two women in this category was largely influenced by their familial situation. One (MS-Int9) became self-employed after the birth of her third child. However, it wasn't just this event that influenced her decision to become self-employed at the time there were other familial considerations too. The key events in each of her separate life-areas, together with the inter-relationships across all three life-areas, are shown in Figure 44.

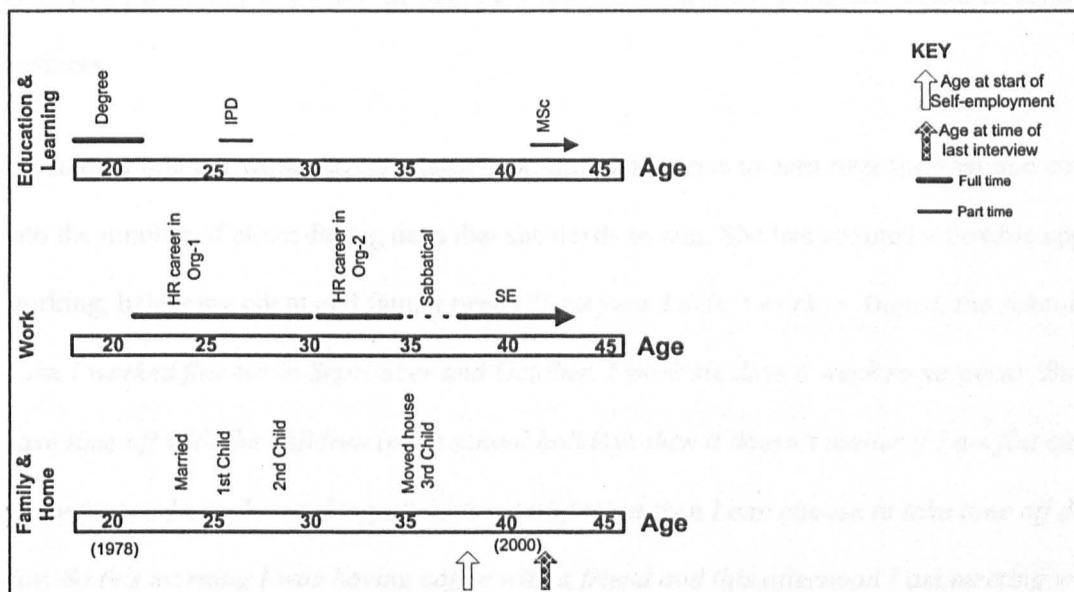


Figure 44: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (MS-Int9)

At the time when she was expecting her third child the family were living in different parts of the country. She was living in Scotland with the two children and her husband was working and living in London during the week and coming home at weekends.

When she was expecting her third child she gave some thought to her own and her family's needs. She felt that she had reached a plateau in her work career as, in order to progress her career, she needed to spend a period of time working abroad. This was something that she was not prepared to do given her family commitments. Instead of taking maternity leave, as she had with her the two older children, she decided to give up work and take what she described as a sabbatical. She and the children moved to the South of England, at this point, so that the family could live together again. Shortly after, her third child was born. When he was 14 months old, she felt ready to think about returning to work

She used the time and space whilst on sabbatical to reconsider her next career move "*Again I had some choices to make. Did I want to go back into traditional full-time employment as I had done*

*with the two other children? I didn't really want to do that though. I thought well I have got fifteen years experience, which is broad based ... I ought to be able to make a go of working for myself."*

*She also used this time to "... test my ideas out [about self-employment] and information gathering. I networked a lot with people who had supplied services to me in my old company. I told them what I was planning and asked if they knew of anyone who might need my services." It was through networking, as we saw in Chapter 4 (see 4.2.1), that she gradually began to build up her business.*

*When planning her work she calculates how much she wants to earn over the year and converts this into the number of client-facing days that she needs to win. She has adopted a flexible approach to working, balancing client and family needs "Last year I didn't work in August, the school holidays. Then I worked flat out in September and October. I work six days a week some weeks. But if I can have time off with the children in the school holidays then it doesn't matter if I am flat out the rest of the time ... I may be working at eleven at night, but then I can choose to take time off during the day. So this morning I was having coffee with a friend and this afternoon I am meeting with you."*

*One of the tensions that she has experienced since becoming self-employed is managing the cost of her learning. When considering how much to invest in her learning she takes her overall financial situation into account "There are more things I would like to do [for my development]. I have thought about doing an MBA with a human resources content. All of these things require investment in time and money. I have just taken on some other heavy investment commitments, my daughter now goes to private school." Most of her learning, since becoming self-employed, has largely involved informal learning approaches, for example through networking, volunteering and adopting the 'sitting next to nellie' approach (see 5.2.1). In addition her learning has involved applying skills developed at work, to roles outside of work e.g. community-based roles.*

*Despite her concerns over the cost of learning, she started an MSc in Careers Counselling, part-time, after having been self-employed for just under three years. To make time for this learning activity she has had to cut back on some of her networking activities (which provided informal learning opportunities).*



The other female in this category (MS-Int18) had experienced a relatively short organisational career (seven years in total) prior to becoming self-employed in her mid-twenties. Her decision to become self-employed was influenced by her need to develop a career that would enable her to combine her work and family career, at some future point. Her son was born after she had been self-employed for eight years.

In the early stage of self-employment (prior to the birth of her son) she followed a very traditional model of working, working virtually full-time. However after her son was born she chose to work fewer hours. She also sought work that enabled her to have more flexible over when she worked, so that she could balance her work, family and income needs. When her son started school she changed her work patterns yet again. On the days when not working with clients she works intensively between 09:00 and 15:00. She then stops work to collect her son from school. The next few hours are allocated to familial/domestic activities. Then when her son is in bed, she does a couple more hours work, if necessary.

One of the difficulties she has encountered since becoming self-employed is dealing with the social isolation of working on her own. Although a member of a number of professional networks, for example the CIPD, she does not attend their networking events on a regular basis. She finds the timing of these events are restrictive as they are mainly in the evenings, thus clashing with family time. To counter-balance her feeling of social isolation she has invested more time in leisure, health and social activities (unconnected with her work) and more recently a formal learning activity. She reported how she plays tennis regularly, gets involved in events at her son's school, as well as helping run a local scout group. At the time of the fieldwork she was in her third year of studying for an OU degree. Through this learning activity she has regular contact with other adults, through the tutorial system, as well as through the informal study group that she belongs to. This provides her with another way of managing the social isolation experienced with self-employment.

### **6.2.5 Participants living with a partner and with grown-up children**

Three individuals were living with a partner and/or were married with grown up children, no longer living at home. They were all male in their fifties/sixties. One became self-employed after having

been made redundant in his mid-forties. The other two became self-employed after taking early-retirement at the age of fifty.

The first individual (MS-Int15) became self-employed after being made redundant from his teaching post in a private school; a situation that came as a shock to him as he thought that teaching was a secure profession. His children were of school age when he was made redundant, so he still had significant familial responsibilities. After being made redundant he tried to get another teaching job, however this proved difficult. During this period he started doing some interim consultancy work, drawing on the skills and knowledge developed whilst doing his PhD. As reported in Chapter 5 (see 5.2.5) he quickly discovered that he could earn more from this type of work, than from the part-time teaching jobs that he offered. His transition into self-employment was eased financially by the availability of a government start-up grant *“What helped me in the 1980s was a government scheme, it was £2000 for one/two years, a business start-up grant. That paid the mortgage. So that gave me confidence to get out there on my own”*.

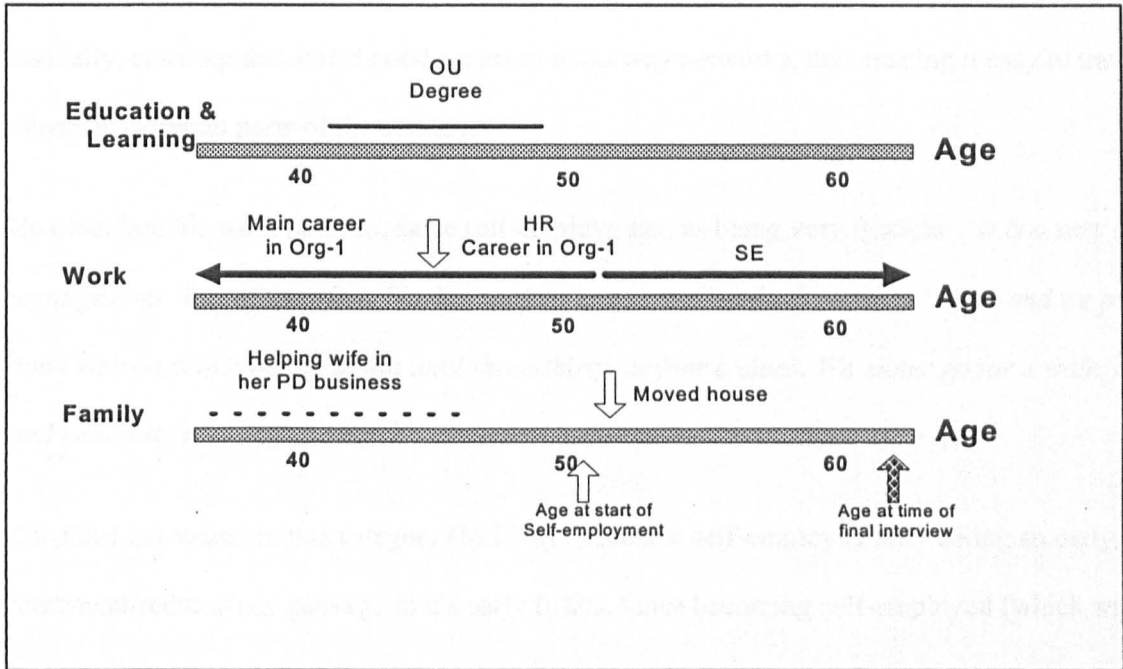
His wife was also self-employed (she was an accountant) and had been since their children started junior school. She became self-employed so that she could have more flexibility over her working hours. In addition to running their own separate businesses, they also worked together on certain client projects. His wife also took responsibility for most of the financial management associated with the running of his business.

Although he described himself as a life-long learner he reported that, since completing his PhD in his late forties, he has adopted a more casual approach to learning. He does not have a development budget for himself, although he felt that this is something that he should have.

He finds the cost of certain learning activities, such as attending professional development conferences, expensive and thus he does not attend as many of these now as when employed. When making decisions about which learning events to attend he considers the direct cost of the learning event, as well as the indirect cost i.e. loss of earnings. Because of his concerns over the cost of learning, much of his continuing professional development since becoming self-employed has been addressed through informal learning approaches, such as researching and writing papers for

publication in the British Psychological Society (BPS) journals, or networking with other professionals within the BPS. Some of his work also contributes to his continuing development, particularly his work tutoring MSc students. This role has a dual purpose, it brings in income and it provides a source of intellectual challenge and development.

One of the other individuals (MS-Int12) in this category became self-employed at the age of fifty having spent several years planning this career move. During this planning period he initiated a number of parallel changes in each of his separate life-areas as shown in Figure 45.



**Figure 45: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (MS-Int12)**

In his work career he moved out of his operational role into Human Resources, to work in a development role. His interest in working in a development way with others stemmed from this involvement with his wife’s Personal Development Business that he helped her with, in his spare time. In addition to working full-time and helping his wife with her business, he was studying for an OU degree. He reported how each of these parallel activities had helped him develop the skills and knowledge needed for his future self-employed career.

When he approached the age at which he was able to take retirement from the police service, where he had worked for all of his career, self-employment was the only career option that he considered  
*"We [myself and wife] had interests in the development of people and organisations, which we*

*shared. We discovered by virtue of me working with her that we could work together. So we set about planning a career path for me which would take me away from what I was doing in the right sort of way and to start our own business together."*

When he started his self-employed he and his wife moved house. There were several factors that influenced this decision. One was financial. By moving house he was able to free up equity in the family home, which provided additional money, on top of his pension, to get the business established. The second was more personal. His wife wanted to move back to her hometown, and he wanted to live closer to his parents and sister. They chose the exact location of their new home carefully, ensuring that it had good access to motorway networks, thus making it easy to travel to clients in different parts of the country.

He described his work patterns, since self-employment, as being very flexible *"It is a very loose arrangement. Yes, nine to five. Having said that, we have lunch about one o'clock and we probably don't kick back into action again until three-thirty, or four o'clock. We either go for a walk, or read and generally take things easy. Then we do another two or three hours after that."*

The third individual in this category (MS-Int11) became self-employed after taking an early retirement/redundancy package in his early fifties. Since becoming self-employed (which was just under two years) he had only been working two to three days a week. This was partly by choice, and partly because he had not established a large enough client base to ensure a greater supply of work.

He uses this time, when not working with clients, to develop other interests *"I have been able to develop other sides of my life. I go to the gym regularly. I have lost a quarter of a stone. I am feeling fitter than I have done for years. I have taken up more activities in the local church. I am involved in village activities, to a greater extent, and I am doing a lot of decorating and things around the house, all of which I wouldn't have done before, or I would have paid someone else to do. That side of things I have found a much happier lifestyle, much more relaxed lifestyle."*

Although, as we can see, that he is enjoying the self-employed lifestyle he is concerned about his financial situation, both immediate and longer term. He explained how in one way he is lucky as he

has a pension, from his former employment, to supplement his irregular self-employed income. Without this he felt that he would be very anxious about how he would pay the mortgage and support his wife and family.

The experience of the three individuals in this category has indicated some of the additional benefits of self-employment for those at a later stage in their career. For those aged fifty and above, self-employment has enabled them to develop a new career beyond the age at which they had been expected to retire from traditional employment. There were other benefits too. The greater flexibility over their working time enabled them to have more choice over how they apportion time between work, leisure and domestic work. In addition, with their children grown-up and no longer living at home, self-employment seems to have created an opportunity for some individuals to move into a new phase in their relationship with their wife/partner, through working together on joint business projects. This arrangement could be seen as another way of managing the 'empty nest' syndrome, often experienced when children grow up and leave home.

#### **6.2.6 Participants who were separated but with continuing childcare responsibilities**

Four participants were separated but with continuing childcare responsibilities; three male and one female. In two of these individuals' cases (MS-Int2 and IS-Int6) their children lived with them permanently and in the other two cases, the children lived with them on a part-time basis. However, childcare responsibilities influenced how each of them made decisions about their work.

One (MS-Int2) had been working in a Management Development role within a multi-national organisation prior to becoming self-employed. She found this role difficult to balance with her childcare responsibilities, particularly when her children were approaching school age. Her work involved long hours, sometimes twelve hours a day, and it also involved being away from home too at certain times.

Figure 46 below shows how she had experienced parallel changes in her learning, work and family careers in the five-year period prior to self-employment. These changes include: completing an MBA (full-time), starting a new work career, as well as having her two daughters.

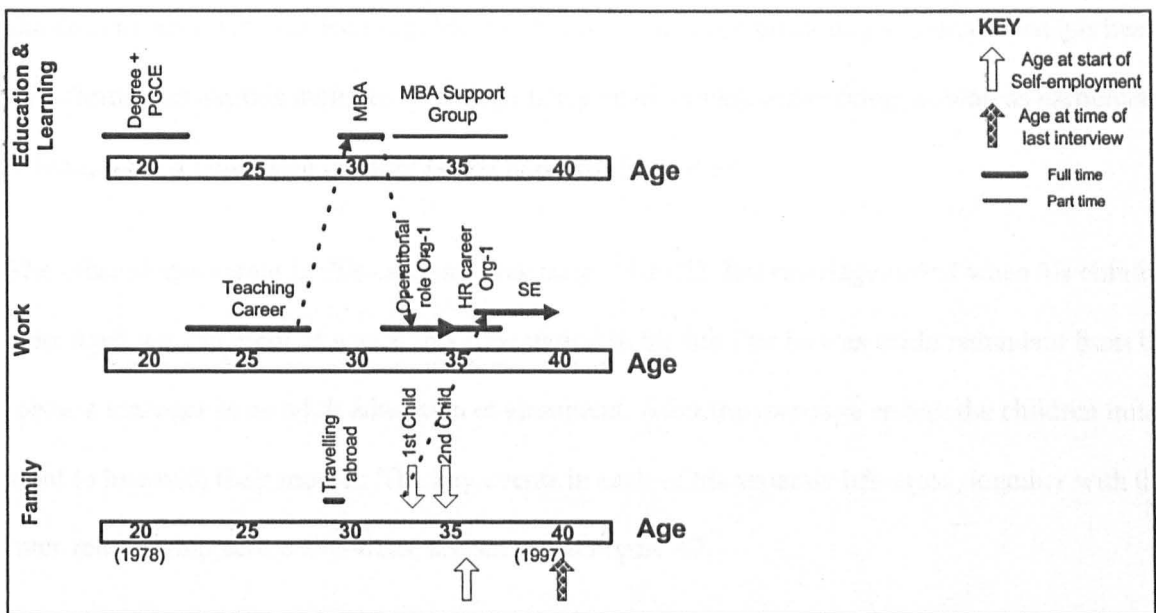


Figure 46: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (MS-Int2)

One of the key influencing factors in her decision to become self-employed was to enable her to develop her career in a way that would give her more flexibility over her working hours, so that she could spend more time with the children. However there were other influencing factors too, one of which was to enable her to have a greater variety of work.

When planning her work now she takes a number of different criteria into account, familial as well as her own development needs. She told me *“I am looking for a balance over time, being able to choose work which fits in with my lifestyle and my view of success (i.e. doesn't take me away from home for long periods of time). I have been looking forward to taking the summer off with the girls. I agreed to do some work in the North of England over the summer, back in January. I thought well, we will be going to visit my parents at some stage over the holidays, so I will do it. The girls can stay with my parents while I do the work. I would have refused the work otherwise.”* There is a similarity here with her experience of self-employment and that of another individual, again female, where the decisions that they make about their work are based around the availability of different forms of childcare support, not just the financial return (i.e. fee earned).

Her responsibilities, as main breadwinner and primary childcare provider, mean that she does not have much spare time, or indeed other resources e.g. money, to allocate to learning activities. She follows a rule of thumb whereby if a learning activity costs more than £500 she thinks very carefully about whether it is a good investment. Although she does not have a budget for learning,

she does allocate time for learning. Most of her learning since becoming self-employed has been of an informal nature, this includes: reading management books; networking; as well as participating in learning sets consisting of other independent professionals.

The other single parent in this category was male (IS-Int6). His marriage ended when his children were aged ten and eight. It was at this time period in his life that he was made redundant from his job as a manager in an adult education environment. After the marriage ended, the children initially went to live with their mother. The key events in each of his separate life-areas, together with the inter-relationship across life-areas, are shown in Figure 47.

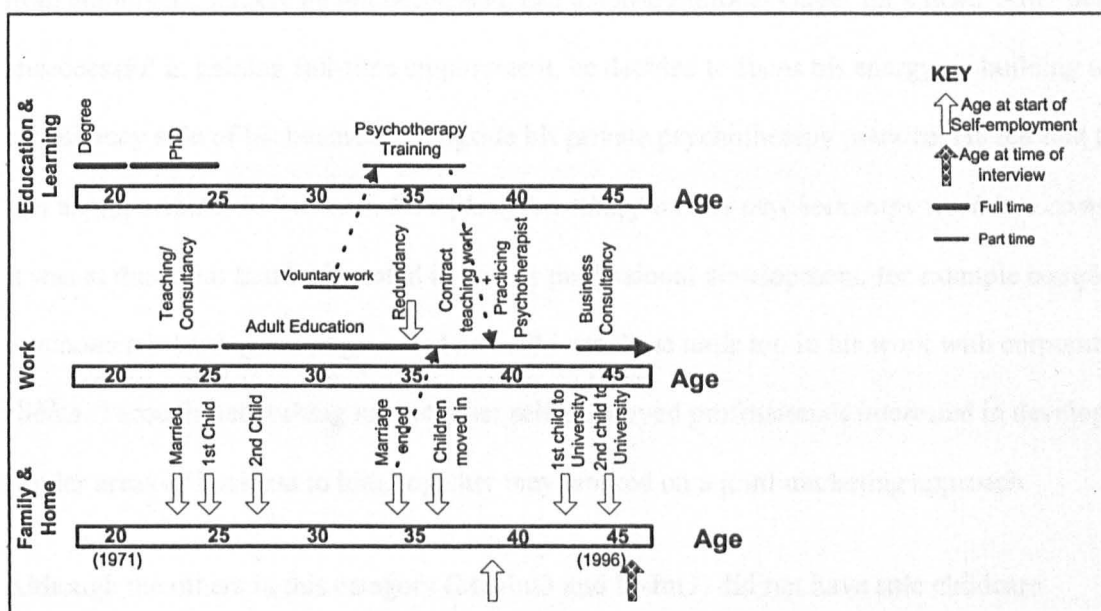


Figure 47: Key events and inter-relationships across the main life-areas (IS-Int6)

After being made redundant he tried to find a comparable management role, but this proved difficult. He was offered one job but as this would have involved relocating to a different part of the country he decided not to take it, as it would have made it difficult for him to share the childcare responsibilities with his estranged wife. Instead he worked on a number of short-term teaching contracts, for a period of two to three years after being made redundant. This work arrangement provided the flexibility that he needed for his joint childcare responsibilities, even though his earnings were considerably lower. The need for flexibility over his working hours became even greater when, after eighteen months of living with their mother, the children asked to live with him permanently.

As Figure 47 shows there was a period of two to three years, when he was in his late thirties, where his time was divided between his part-time teaching work, completing his psychotherapy training, and bringing up his children. When his psychotherapy training was nearing completion he started to build up his private psychotherapy practice. For the next couple of years his work consisted of one-to-one counselling, together with contract teaching work. He described this time period, where his primary role was caring for his children, as one of the best periods of his life.

When his eldest child went to University he tried to return to traditional employment. However, having been out of traditional employment for around eight years, he experienced some resistance from employers, largely he felt because he had a non-traditional career for a male. After being unsuccessful in gaining full-time employment, he decided to focus his energy on building up the consultancy side of his business, alongside his private psychotherapy practice. He felt that there was an opportunity to " ... *take the style of learning from my psychotherapy work into companies*". It was at this point that he invested in further professional development, for example completing psychometric testing training, so that he could use these tools too in his work with corporate clients. Through networking he met other self-employed professionals interested in developing similar areas of business to him, together they worked on a joint marketing approach.

Although the others in this category (MS-Int3 and IS-Int3) did not have sole childcare responsibility after separating from their wife/partner, they still took familial considerations into account when making decisions about their work.

One of these (MS-Int3) had experienced several changes in each separate life-area, prior to becoming self-employed. The key events in each separate life-area, together with the inter-relationships across life-areas, are shown in Figure 48 below.



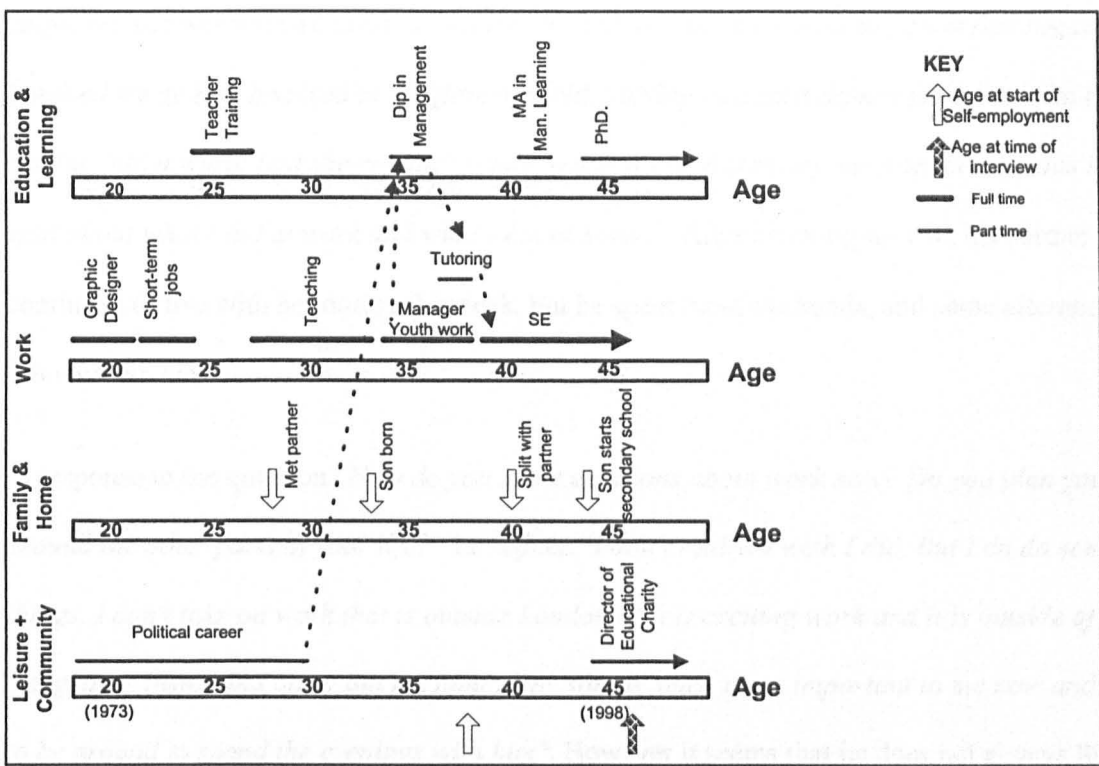


Figure 48: Key events and inter-relationships across main life-areas (MS-Int3)

He described himself as having had many different careers. In his early twenties he worked as a 'political activist'. He continued with this role for around three years after starting his teaching career. It was the void created after giving up his political career that led him to start an additional formal learning activity, which was a part-time Diploma in Management; a learning activity that set him off down the path to self-employment.

His transition into self-employment took around two years. During this time period he developed the skills and knowledge needed to build his self-confidence to work independently. After completing the Diploma in Management he started to apply the knowledge gained co-tutoring on self-development courses with consultants whom he had met on the Diploma programme. There was a period of time then, as we can see in Figure 48, where he was working full-time in his managerial role in the Youth Service and tutoring in the evenings on self-development programmes. After a couple of years working in this way a colleague suggested to him that he give up his managerial career and become a full-time independent trainer/consultant. It was this same colleague who offered him his first piece of work.

Shortly after becoming self-employed he split up from his partner (his son was aged seven at the time). He explained that although his partner was generally supportive of him becoming self-

employed she was worried about it *"I think she had very good reasons to be worried because it involved me getting involved in a different world. Moving into consultancy felt to her like I was moving into a world that she couldn't relate to and it was distancing me from her. So this led to a split about what I did at work and what I did at home."* After breaking up with his partner his son continued to live with her during the week, but he spent most weekends, and some afternoons after school, with him.

In response to the question *"How do you make decisions about work now? Do you plan your work around the other parts of your life?"* he replied *"I don't really. I wish I did. But I do do some things. I don't take on work that is outside London. If it is exciting work and it is outside of Britain altogether, then I will do it. But my family, my son, is much more important to me now and I want to be around to spend the evenings with him"*. However it seems that he does not always find it easy to keep the boundaries between his work and family separate *"Work is almost programmable. I can stay successful at that. I am much less successful at being a father. When I am with my son, for example, I am often thinking I could be doing some work now. When we go out cycling together, I am often thinking about putting my next proposal together. So I am not that good at switching off... the more I get into this business the more I find it difficult to switch off... over the past year though I have actually spent more time with my son"*.

It was a change in his son's educational needs, at secondary school age, which led to his involvement in setting up a school for children of Afro-Caribbean origin, of which he is now a Director. This additional role has caused tensions for him in terms of how he allocates time to his other commitments i.e. his work with clients, as well as his PhD.

Some of the ways in which he has been managing this tension is by a) diversifying his income source, through investing in property which he rents out to bring in an additional source of income and b) being more selective about the type of client work that he takes on *"Before I went after any bits of work. I would do almost anything when I first started just so I could say I was working. Now I work on things that I am good at, or I know I will enjoy, or which pay more and leave me spaces of time when I am not working to do other things."*

The final individual in this category (IS-Int3), again male, also took familial considerations into account when planning his work. His first marriage ended when his children were at junior school. He was in the early stage of his second career as a Social Worker, at that time. When the marriage ended he was determined to be around to take an active role in bringing up the children; a decision that has had implications for his own work career, as it has affected his choices regarding the type of work that he takes on and also where he works. It has also had implications for his second wife's career too. At the time when he was thinking about self-employment there were a number of changes occurring in each of his separate life-areas, as we can see in Figure 49, which were steering him towards self-employment at that particular stage of his life.

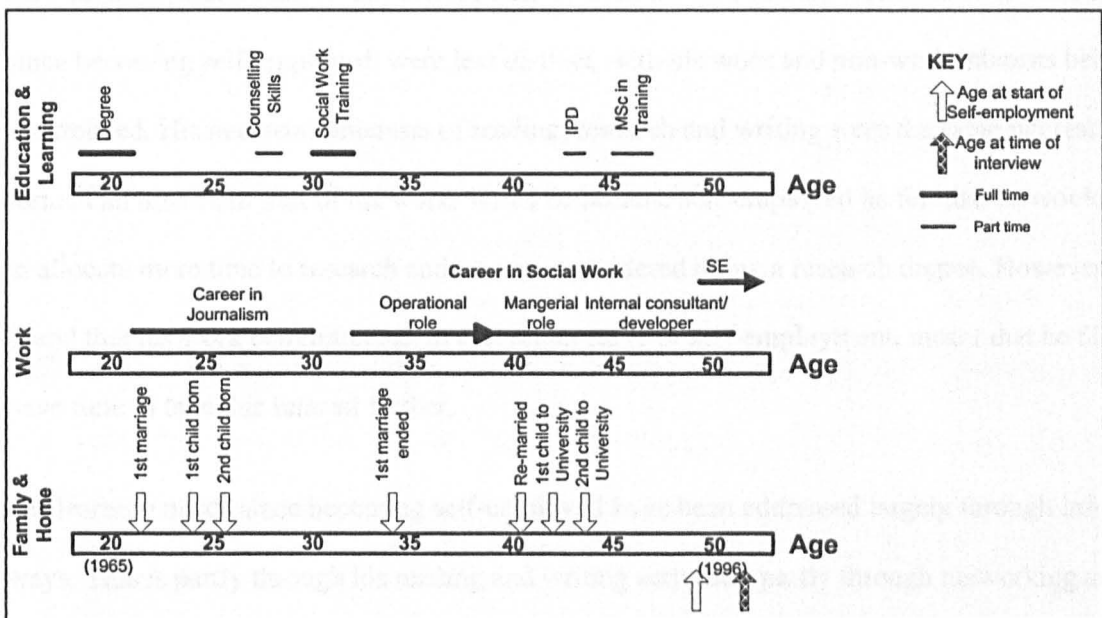


Figure 49: Key events and inter-relationships across main life-areas (IS-Int3)

In his work career he was approaching fifty, which meant that he was able to take early retirement. In the five-year period prior to this he had worked in an internal consultant role; a role that had enabled him to develop his consultancy skills, as well as establish links with external consultancies who purchased the services of independent consultants. Thus at the time when he was thinking about self-employment he already had the beginnings of a client network who could act as suppliers of work. He also had prior experience of being self-employed, as this was how he started his work career after finishing college.

In his formal learning career, he had recently gained several qualifications (i.e. his IPD and MSc in Training); this provided him with credibility in the external marketplace.

In his family career, his children were less financially dependent on him as they had both finished University. He told me "*I am fifty now. I have worked continuously without any time out. My children were talking about taking a year off. I couldn't see myself doing the same role for the next five to ten years. I felt I had achieved what I was going to achieve there. I thought lets have a go at doing this [working for myself].*"

The combined income from his consultancy work, some of which was with his former employer, and his pension, provided him with a financial buffer helping to ease the financial transition until he had established other regular income sources.

As with other individuals in this research the boundaries between his work and other interests, since becoming self-employed, were less distinct, with his work and non-work interests being more interrelated. His non-work interests of reading, research and writing were the same interests that formed an important part of his work. When he became self-employed he felt that he would be able to allocate more time to research and he even considered doing a research degree. However he found that his work commitments, in that initial stage of self-employment, meant that he did not have time to take this interest further.

His learning needs since becoming self-employed have been addressed largely through informal ways. This is partly through his reading and writing activities, partly through networking and partly through the type of work that he does. Like others in this research some of his work involves tutoring and running learning sets for adults on Masters programmes; a role that provides him with academic stretch. He described himself as being very opportunistic in terms of his approach to life "*I have a broad sense of where I am going but prepared to be flexible within that,*" thus he actively sought out opportunities that mapped against his own success criteria of enjoyment and growth.

### **6.3 Summary**

This chapter has set out the familial situations of participating individuals together with the inter-relationships with their other life-areas i.e. their work and learning careers, thus providing a fuller picture of their lives overall. The majority of individuals (twenty out of the twenty-six) were either

married, or living with a partner. Thirteen out of the twenty had children and four of these were in single parent households.

This chapter has also provided further details about the factors that influenced these individuals' decision to become self-employed, highlighting how career decisions are informed by events and changes in other life-areas, not just those relating to the work domain. 'Lifestyle factors' had been an important consideration in the decision to become self-employed for thirteen out of the twenty-six; six female and seven male. However, what this meant in practice differed according to each individual's personal situation.

Even where lifestyle factors had not been a key influencing-factor in an individual's decision to become self-employed, some found this way of living opened up new opportunities that they had not anticipated. These include: being able to get more involved in looking after their children; free time to get involved in community projects, as well as more time to allocate to DIY and leisure.

This chapter has added further insights into the tensions associated with the self-employed lifestyle. These include: having to live with an irregular income and the effect that this has on family life; how living and working in the familial home can create tensions for individuals and other family members; the difficulties of balancing work commitments with other activities, particularly learning, as well as the social isolation experienced when working independently.

It has also provided examples of the different types of work that these individuals do, some of which is paid and some not, which has provided a different perspective on what constitutes work for self-employed professionals.

The next chapter (Integration Chapter) draws together the findings from these last three chapters, focusing on the strategies that individuals adopt for managing their lives overall once self-employed.

# **Chapter 7: How self-employed professionals manage their lives, learning and knowledge**

## **7.1 Introduction**

The last three chapters have provided examples of the different aspects of participating individuals' lives, such as the timing and sequencing of key events in each separate life-area i.e. their learning, work and family careers, as well as the inter-relationships across these life-areas. In addition, some of the similarities and differences in their experience of self-employment were drawn out, such the opportunities and tensions that this lifestyle can create for individuals and their families. Some of the structural changes that occurred in these individuals' lives once self-employed also began to emerge, together with some of the ways in which individuals manage these.

This chapter starts off by exploring these structural changes in more detail. It then moves on to consider the strategies that individuals adopt for managing their lives in the broadest sense. For this level of analysis, a tentative resource-based life-management model is introduced and applied. The model consists of a number of managing activities e.g. Managing Resources, Planning & Organising and Managing Change, together with the resources that feed into these managing activities e.g. Learning & Knowledge Assets, Support Networks, Time. Focusing on the resources that individuals draw on and consume, provides a fuller understanding of the strategies adopted for managing their lives in the broadest sense.

## **7.2 Self-employment and structural change**

### **7.2.1 The changing nature of work**

Since the Industrial Revolution, work has taken place, by and large, outside the familial home, either in a factory or office environment. In these work environments employees have set hours of work, determined by their employer, which are normally non-negotiable. The introduction of flexible working practices, discussed in Chapter 1, has enabled some individuals to have more flexibility over the number of hours spent at work and, in some cases, where they work too - home-working is an example of this.

Although there are some similarities in the experiences of individuals in this research and home-workers, there are notable differences. First, not all of the work that these self-employed

professionals do is carried out from their home. Second, they have more latitude over the overall number of hours that they work, as well as when they work. Third, they have more control over the type, flow and quantity of work that they do. These are variables that, in traditional employment, are controlled by the organisation.

The individuals who participated in this research provide exemplars of the new knowledge-based businesses in contemporary society, given that what they are selling to clients is their 'know how'. In structural terms knowledge workers can be less bounded by some of the work environments and time-windows within which traditional work takes place. This can influence the choices that they have. The earlier chapters showed how these individuals' work consists of different tasks. Not all of these tasks generate direct income (i.e. they engage in what Pahl (1984) refers to as non-market work). The range of work that they do consists of a) client-facing work (which involves working directly with clients providing training, one-to-one coaching, or consultancy) and b) non client-facing work (which involves preparation for client meetings, preparing proposals, writing client reports, preparing materials for training courses, as well as administrative work associated with running a small business).

Although a large part of their client-facing work takes place within clients' offices or training facilities, this is not necessarily the case for all client work. For those who offer one-to-one coaching/mentoring, or counselling services, there is the option for this type of work to take place within their own home, the client's home, or a public space (e.g. a hotel meeting room).

One of the implications of the change in the nature of these individuals' work is that they have to redefine the physical boundaries and time boundaries associated with their work. The majority of them (twenty-four out of the twenty-six) had set aside a room within their home for carrying out non-client facing work. The other two worked from a space in their main living room. However, individuals have other choices too with regard to where to carry out non-client facing work, for example making use of public spaces such as libraries, coffee shops, or hotel meeting rooms.

Several individuals reported how allocating a separate room for their work was important in helping to create a physical separation between work and home-life. Of the men with

wives/partners who did not work, or who had young children, this was particularly important as when they take themselves off to their home-office, this acts as a signal to other family members that they are working and do not want to be disturbed. However this is not always the case. Two of the men reported that they have to negotiate work-time with their wife/partner on a day-by-day basis. For example they negotiate when they will be available for domestic work such as doing the shopping or collecting the children from school. However, as the next sub-section shows, others particularly those in their fifties and sixties as well as the women with young children, reported that they are happy for their work and domestic lives to be "*blended in together*".

Despite maintaining a physical separation between work and family life, some individuals reported that they found it difficult to separate their work and home-life at a psychological level. Seven reported how working from home meant that work was ever-present. A situation that makes it difficult at times for them to switch off as we can see from the following examples:

*"It is quite hard at times because the spare bedroom, my office, you pass it every time you go to the bathroom and if there is something nagging it is quite hard to let go at times."*

(Female, living with a partner)

*"When I am with my son, for example, I am often thinking I could be doing some work now. When we go out cycling together, I am often thinking about my next proposal ... the more I get into this business the more I find it difficult to switch off."* (Male, separated but with continuing childcare responsibilities)

*"When I first started doing this work and I was based at home, it got to a stage when things got so bad I dreaded picking up the phone ... I thought is this going to be more hassle."*

(Female, married, no children)

*"It is difficult when your office is in the home. I find myself running to pick up the business phone in the evening. I then question myself about why I am doing that."* (Male, married, with children)



The concept of spill-over between work and home life, in relation to traditional careers, was discussed in Chapter 1 (Evans and Bartolomé, 1980). Their study showed how professional men, following a traditional career, were often unable to totally switch off from work when at home, with work issues continuing to occupy their thoughts. This was despite the fact that they saw their homes as being a place to unwind and recharge their batteries.

Spill-over was identified as an issue for individuals in this research too. However, this was of a different form to that in the Evans and Bartolomé (1980) study. First it applied to both men and women. Second, the spill-over effect experienced was different due to the effect of living and working from home where individuals are more proximal in time and space to their family and domestic life. Where individuals commute to work, there is at least a physical separation between their work and family life. This can provide individuals with the time to prepare for the switch between these two aspects of their lives. When working from home, however, the time available to switch between work and family/domestic responsibilities is often limited by the small amount of time it takes to walk down a flight of stairs. For those who do not have a separate home-office, there is an even smaller separation in time between their work and family life.

The research findings indicate that clients can compound the effects of spill-over if they do not respect the fact that an individual's place of work is also his/her home. Thus there are times when it is inappropriate to contact them. Some individuals reported how managing the time-boundaries for client contact is one of the many areas that they had to learn about when they became self-employed.

The type of work that individuals do can compound the difficulties associated with spill-over between work and family-life. For example those who provide a one-to-one coaching/counselling service, or who work with international clients, find that they have to be flexible about the contact hours that they offer clients. Where one-to-one sessions with clients take place within their familial home they also have to take familial considerations into account too when planning this type of work.

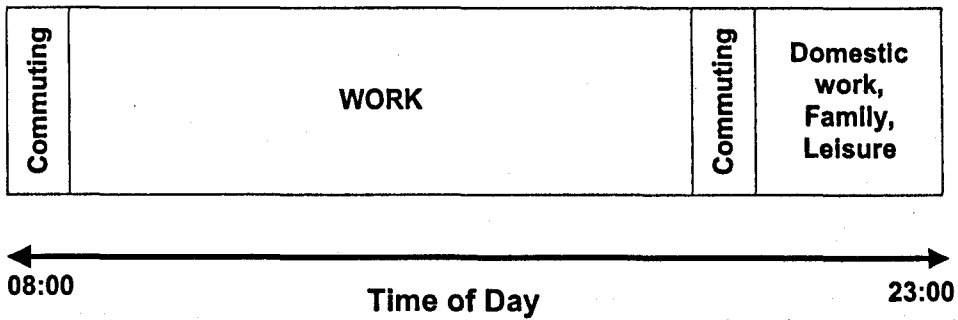
Paradoxically individuals can experience a different form of spill-over when working from home i.e. where domestic work spills-over into their client work. Examples here include: interruptions from trades-people who call at domestic properties during the day; distractions from domestic work, or distractions from friends who drop by for coffee. Interruptions of a different kind to those experienced in a traditional work environment.

Another structural change that can occur in these individuals' lives is the freedom to move to live in a different geographical location, thus not being tied to living in a particular commuter location. Chapter 6 showed four had chosen to live in a different geographical location when they became self-employed; a decision that they made partly for lifestyle reasons (e.g. slower pace of life, or to live closer to relatives) and partly for financial reasons (e.g. lower property prices). Their experience may help explain the geographical differences in the distribution of self-employment reported by other writers (Unwin and Alpin, 1996).

### **7.2.2 Changes relating to the allocation of time**

As discussed above self-employment can free individuals from some of the time boundaries associated with traditional work, enabling them to have more flexibility over how they allocate time between the different aspects of their lives in any given day/week/month. An example of the options that individuals have is represented in Figure 50.

## Allocation of Time : Traditional Employment



## Allocation of Time : Self-employment

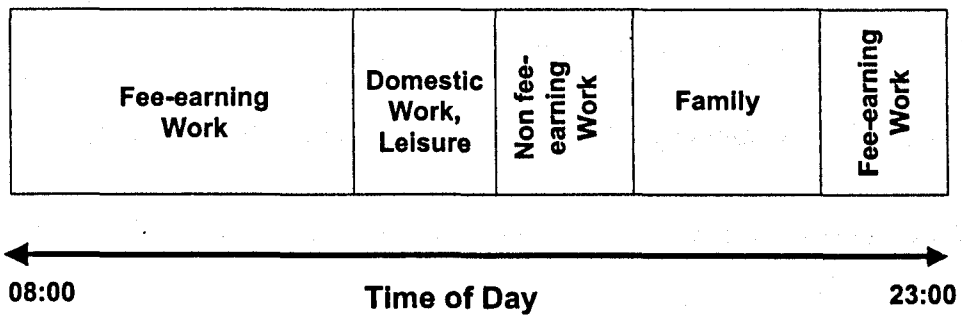


Figure 50: Comparison of the allocation of time - traditional employment vs self-employment

In traditional employment, as illustrated in the top half of Figure 50, work occupies a contiguous amount of time in any one day. This is because work normally takes place away from the home, either in offices, or other business premises. Because of this time for domestic work, family life and leisure are squeezed in once the working day has ended. Once self-employed time does not need to be compartmentalised in such a rigid way. Individuals can choose to weave in fee-earning work alongside non fee-earning work and domestic work depending on a) the type of work that they are doing b) their own needs, as well as those of their family and c) how much income they need to generate. One individual, who was in his early sixties, described his working time as “... a very loose arrangement. Yes, nine to five. Having said that, we have lunch at about one o'clock and we probably don't kick back into action again until three-thirty or four o'clock. We either go for a walk, or read, or generally take things easy. Then we do another two or three hours work.” The approaches that others adopted for managing their time will be discussed further in this chapter (see section 7.5).

For the women with childcare responsibilities, the ability to have more flexibility over their working hours to enable them to balance work and family responsibilities was cited as an important factor when deciding to become self-employed. However, even where this had not been a key influencing factor in the decision to become self-employed some, in particular the men, had subsequently made adjustments to the way in which they apportion time between fee-earning and non fee-earning work. There are several possible explanations for this. First, the type of work that these individuals do is subject to fluctuations in demand from clients. This means there are times when they find themselves without any fee-earning work, or at least any face-to-face work with clients, needing to be completed within a particular time-window. This situation leaves individuals with decisions to make about how to manage their time overall. Although this caused individuals some degree of stress initially, most learnt to adjust to the peaks and troughs inherent in the self-employed lifestyle, seeing the opportunities that this lifestyle option can bring, for example:

*“I go to the gym regularly. I have taken up more activities in the local church and I am doing a lot of decorating and things around the house, all of which I wouldn't have done before.”* (Male, married, in his early fifties)

*“Part of the reasons why we were able to afford such a large house is that it is old and run down and so I am doing a lot of the refurbishment myself. I have been able to do this because of the free-time that I now have.”* (Male, married, in his late thirties)

Second, the structural changes referred to above regarding the different categories of work that these individuals do, can create opportunities for re-thinking how to apportion time between fee-earning and non fee-earning work. Third, the availability of certain technologies, such as e-mail, has added to individuals' flexibility over work time. Two reported how through e-mail they are able to keep in touch with clients without being restricted to doing so during traditional working hours since emails to and from clients can be dealt with in the evenings, or early mornings, leaving the rest of the day free for other activities, should they choose so.

However having greater freedom over their work time does have its downsides. Several reported that they can find themselves working an extended day at times where they have chosen to allocate time to leisure, or learning activities, during the traditional working day, rather than working.

Only two out of the twenty-six continued to follow a more traditional approach to working when they became self-employed. Their work took place by and large during traditional office hours, with family commitments fitting in around this.

### **7.2.3 Changes in the roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis family life**

One of the other structural changes that emerged in Chapter 6 is a change in the division of labour within households where one family member becomes self-employed. Some of the men, for example, began to take on more responsibilities for domestic work. Three took on the responsibility for taking and/or collecting the children to/from school on the days when working at home. This was something that they had not been able to do before because of the long hours that they had worked previously.

The decision to become self-employed for two of the men had been influenced by their need to play a significant role in looking after their children. One of these was separated and yet he wanted to play a significant part in bringing up his two children who were in their early teens at that time. The ability to have flexibility over his working time became even more critical when the children asked to come and live with him permanently, rather than live with their mother. The other individual's decision to become self-employed was taken when his wife was looking to return to work when the children started school. By each of them agreeing to work flexible hours they were able to share the childcare arrangements.

Self-employment, for these two men, had provided them with the flexibility they wanted to combine paid work with their childcare responsibilities and at the same time achieve the level of income they wanted to support their families. Chapter 1 discussed how despite significant changes in the availability of flexible working practices within organisations, the percentage of men who work part-time is still relatively small compared with the number of women who work part-time (Dex and McCulloch, 1995). One of the reported difficulties with more traditional flexible working

practices, particularly part-time working, is the financial penalty of a reduced pro-rated salary. Self-employment, however, seems to offer an alternative flexibility option where the financial penalties are not as severe as other flexible work arrangements.

A further change in the roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis family life identified in this research is a change in the role-relationship between husband and wife. When individuals work from home they can find that they have less opportunities for talking through business related ideas and problems with others. Two of the men reported how their wives had taken on the role of 'sounding board' for work-related problems and ideas. This was particularly the case where their wives were at home during the day. In another individual's case his wife had taken on a more substantive role in his business, by taking on the task of managing his accounts.

However, one of the tensions of working from home, from a familial perspective, is that this is not always perceived as work by other family members particularly an individual's husband and/or wife. This situation can create tensions with regard to the allocation of responsibilities for domestic work. One individual reported how his wife is critical of the time he spends on knowledge-creating activities, such as networking with clients, or learning activities. These are seen as getting in the way of him earning money.

For the women in this research, there were less noticeable changes in the allocation of domestic roles and responsibilities since becoming self-employed.

#### **7.2.4 Changes in the relationship with organisations**

The research conducted by Cohen and Mallon (1999) amongst individuals pursuing a 'Portfolio Career' suggests that portfolio working, instead of freeing individuals from existing organisational boundaries, is more a case of reconstructing these boundaries (see Chapter 1). The findings from this research, however suggests that this is not necessarily the case. One area of change is the nature of the relationship between individuals and organisations. Instead of organisations providing long-term employment for these professionals they become suppliers of work providing them with contracts for specific projects/assignments. The duration of these projects/assignments, and their economic value, vary from project to project.

However, organisations are not the only suppliers of work for these individuals. Other sources include: work from private clients (in the form of one-to-one coaching, mentoring or counselling); consultancies, who sub-contract their services to organisations, as well as other self-employed professionals looking to fill a gap in their own knowledge for a particular client project. Each of these supplier relationships, as we shall see later in this chapter, has different advantages and disadvantages from a resource management perspective.

The relationship between organisations and self-employed professionals is somewhat unusual in that organisations are both suppliers and customers. They are suppliers in that they provide a supply of work from which these individuals derive their income. They are customers too since, if they are not happy with the work carried out by these individuals, they can withdraw their custom. As suppliers of work, organisations control the economic value of projects/assignments they offer these individuals.

Throughout their self-employed career individuals enter into many different customer-supplier relationships, each with separate contractual arrangements. One of the tensions associated with this change in relationship with employers is having to negotiate the contractual arrangements of their work separately with each organisation. Nine individuals reported how they feel uncomfortable with this aspect of their work.

The findings also show how the nature of the relationship between these professionals and organisations changes over time. Initially the relationship with organisations is more of a dependency relationship, with individuals being dependent on organisations to supply them with work, for example "*Initially we [self and business partner] were very dependent on them [client]. We needed them and they were core in financial terms ...it was high profile work and they were helping us get known*". However, over time, this relationship changes from dependency to independence, for example "*We got to a stage where we realised that we could stand on our own two feet. Once we realised that, our whole bargaining position changed*". A similar pattern was identified for others too as they built up their experience of self-employment and their client base.

This situation enables these individuals to have more choice with regard to the type of work that they do and the contractual arrangements with employers.

For six out of the twenty-six their first client was their former employer. This arrangement seemed to have several benefits. First, individuals did not have to negotiate a contract with a client whom they were less familiar. Second, working in an environment that they were familiar with helped build their self-confidence in their ability to work independently. Third, this arrangement helped ease the financial transition into self-employment by minimising the financial uncertainty.

However, despite these changes in the relationship with employers, as individuals gain more experience of self-employment, they can still remain dependent on organisations for certain resources. The next section discusses, can influence the decisions individuals make about the type of work that they seek out, as well as the type of clients that they prefer to work with.

### **7.3 Introduction of a tentative resource-based life-management model**

The findings in chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide examples of the different situations, changes and decisions that these individuals have to manage. Decision-making was found to be a key managing activity for these individuals. Some of the decisions that they are faced with include: How much income do I need to generate? How much should I charge clients? How should I allocate time between fee-earning work, non fee-earning work and domestic work? How much time do I need to allocate to resource-building activities, such as learning and knowledge-creating activities? Each of these decisions is of a different kind to those that individuals had been used to making in their earlier careers.

A further managing activity involves Planning and Organising their work. This activity encompasses allocating time to: specific client projects; marketing their services to clients; developing client relationships, as well as working on administrative tasks associated with running their business, such as invoicing and VAT returns.

The background chapters show how the world in which these individuals operate is not static, but is constantly changing. These changes include: changes in technology, changes in legislation, new



types of businesses, as well as changes in business practices. Part of the managing task for these individuals is keeping abreast of these macro level changes so that they can relate these to their future plans. A further managing task then is that of Managing Change. This involves gathering information about changes in the economy more broadly, and about specific businesses, so that they can take these into account when making longer-term plans for their own business, as well as their family.

The research findings suggest that in the process of managing their lives these individuals draw on and consume different resources, for example money, time, knowledge. Thus another key managing task for these individuals is Managing Resources, ensuring that they are kept in plentiful supply, relevant and up-to-date, in much the same way that organisations have to manage key resources to ensure their competitive advantage and on-going sustainability (Mueller, 1998). In addition, as these individuals are also part of a separate economic unit i.e. households, they also have to manage other resources in order to get work done, which is influenced by the need to generate income (Pahl and Wallace, 1985).

The research findings indicate that the main resources that these individuals draw on as part of their everyday lives include:

**a) Physical resources, which include:**

**Financial Assets:** There are a number of resources that come under the category of *Financial Assets* (both fixed and variable). Fixed assets include: an individual's home - which can double as an office, or ICT equipment. Variable assets include: financial reserves, or income from sources other than self-employment.

**Time:** Although time is a given resource in so far as the hours in any day, week or month are fixed, when individuals work for themselves, as we saw earlier the time boundaries that exist in traditional work environments do not necessarily apply. Both the working day and the working week can be re-defined when self-employed enabling individuals to have more choice over how they allocate time between fee-earning work, non fee-earning work, domestic work and learning and knowledge creating activities.

**Work environment:** In traditional employment the work environment, including the equipment to perform certain jobs, is provided by the employer. Once self-employed individuals have to provide their own office, ICT equipment, as well as other materials needed to carry out their work.

**b) Social resources, which include:**

**Support Networks:** Here we are dealing with two key forms of networks. One being business networks essential for the supply of work. This includes clients (e.g. organisations, private clients, or other self-employed professionals) who provide a supply of work from which these individuals derive their income. To ensure their future livelihood these individuals have to invest time, and other resources, in building and maintaining their client networks.

Another form of network is an individual's social support network. Social support can be crucial for making successful life-changes, providing the necessary emotional, informational and instrumental support to manage these transitions (Sugarman, 1986; Fielden and Davidson, 1998). Social support networks can also be important resource when building *Learning & Knowledge Assets*.

**Family:** Whilst the family can also appear as an entity in an individual's Social Support Network, it needs to be considered as a separate resource too. An individual's familial situation can be an enabling and restraining resource. The presence of children, for example, can restrict the time-windows that individuals are available to work, as well as the geographical locations of where they work.

**c) Personal resources, which include:**

**Employment and Life Experience:** Employment experience is an individual's accumulated employment history gained throughout their working lives. It has a quantitative and qualitative dimension to it. The quantitative dimension is the time period that an individual has been employed and the qualitative dimension the different types of employment experiences that an individual has.

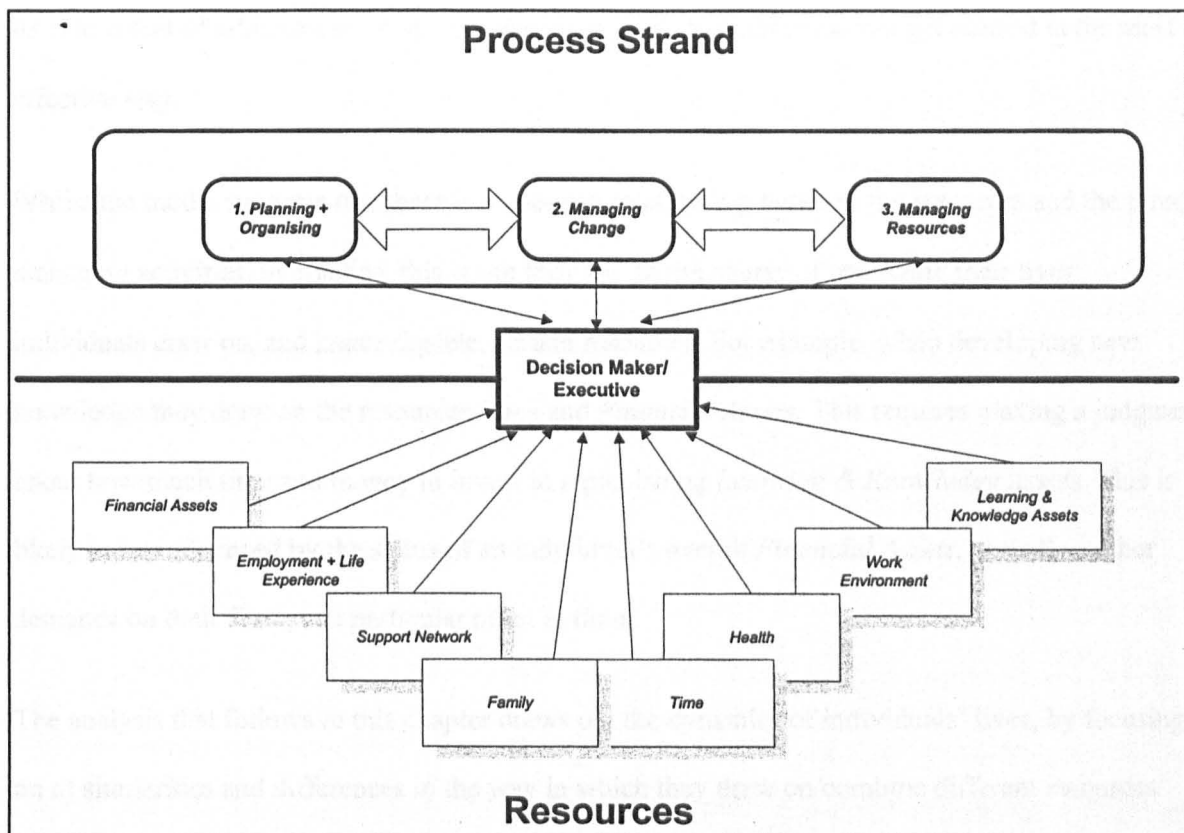
In addition to employment experience individuals also have other life experiences that they can draw on. This comes from their leisure interests, travel, experience of living in different cultures, community work, as well as the relationships they have with others.

**Learning and Knowledge Assets:** Like the resource *Employment History*, *Learning & Knowledge Assets* are cumulative. However as knowledge assets can quickly become out of date, particularly in times of rapid change, individuals need to engage in continuous learning to prevent their knowledge deteriorating, or become obsolescent. This learning can come through formal and informal learning approaches, both within and outside the workplace. Knowledge Assets are closely linked to learning, in that through learning individuals acquire new knowledge. For the purposes of this research, they have been considered jointly and separately given that knowledge encompasses 'knowing about' as well as 'know how' (Davenport and Prusack, 1996; Boydell, 1999).

**Health:** Whilst being and staying healthy is clearly an important factor in the lives of all individuals, for the self-employed it is particularly important as any periods of ill-health could affect an individual's ability to work, which in turn could affect their livelihood. Health, in the context of this research, is assumed to encompass physical health as well as mental health. The social isolation experienced by some self-employed professionals can affect their mental health. Staying healthy is something that can be affected by the availability of other resources such as the availability of social support (Sugarman, 1986; Duck 1992).

### **The managing activities incorporated in the model**

The managing activities outlined above together with the resources that feed into them, are represented in a tentative resource-based life-management model set out in Figure 51. The model consists of a 'Process Strand' consisting of three managing activities: Managing Resources, Planning & Organising and Managing Change. At its core is a Decision Maker/Executive that links these three managing activities with the resources that feed into them.



**Figure 51: Resource-based Life-Management Model as Applied to Self-employment**

The model is intended to act as a representation of the managing processes adopted by participating individuals providing a way to make further comparisons about how they manage their lives, both day-to-day and longer term. Focusing on the resources that these individuals draw on enables a fuller understanding of the strategies they adopt for managing these in the context of their whole lives, not just their working lives. This will enable broader interpretations to be drawn from the research findings.

The model, as is the case with many models, cannot be used to represent the full complexity of the decisions taken by these individuals. The task of managing is an active process (Mueller, 1998). It involves utilising different resources to achieve the desired outcome within a specific context.

The findings in the previous three chapters indicate that the decisions that these individuals make about their lives are affected by a number of factors: the resources they have available to them; their prior decision-making experience; personal values; expected outcomes; personal success criteria, as well as information and stimuli taken in from the wider environment. It is for this reason that a **Decision Maker/Executive** has been included as an over-arching central, or ‘meta-process’.

Its role is that of arbitrator of 'real time' decisions, ensuring that resources get utilised in the most effective way.

Whilst the model suggests that there is a one-way relationship between the resources and the three managing activities, in practice, this is not the case. In the course of managing their lives individuals draw on, and hence deplete, certain resources. For example, when developing new knowledge they draw on the resources *Time* and *Financial Assets*. This requires making a judgment about how much time and money to invest in replenishing *Learning & Knowledge Assets*. This is likely to be influenced by the status of an individual's overall *Financial Assets*, as well as other demands on their *Time*, at a particular point in time.

The analysis that follows in this chapter draws out the dynamics of individuals' lives, by focusing on a) similarities and differences in the way in which they draw on/combine different resources when managing different aspects of their lives, b) the way in which access to and/or availability of certain resources impacts the decisions that they make about their lives and c) the different managing strategies adopted at different times/stages in their self-employed career.

#### **7.4 Managing process - 1: Managing Resources**

The previous three chapters showed how as individuals go about their daily lives, be this carrying out fee-earning work, or other forms of work they draw on certain resources. Some of these resources, for example, *Financial Assets*, *Learning & Knowledge Assets*, and *Support Network* are drawn on more frequently than others. Whilst some resources are replenished as a by-product of individuals' day-to-day work, others have to be actively replenished.

In replenishing certain resources individuals can deplete other resources too. For example, when developing their *Support Networks*, which are crucial to their livelihood, individuals draw on the resources *Time* and *Financial Assets*. This then affects how much of these resources can be allocated to other life-areas e.g. the family, or learning. Yet if individuals do not invest in developing and replenishing their *Support Networks*, this can affect their future business and their psychological health.

The next two sub-sections draw together the approaches that participating individuals adopt for replenishing key resources i.e. *Learning & Knowledge Assets*, *Support Networks* and *Health*. Chapters 1 and 2 showed how these particular resources form an integral part of contemporary career theory, as well as being critical resources for economic growth and social well-being.

#### **7.4.1 Developing and replenishing the resource *Learning & Knowledge Assets***

##### **The types of knowledge requiring development**

As a group, these individuals had already made a significant investment in their learning careers. Twenty-two (i.e. 85%) had a first degree and fourteen (i.e. 54%) had a higher degree, either a Masters or PhD. In addition, six had also completed the formal professional development necessary to become accredited members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD). This finding is significant given that the more qualified an individual is the more likely that he or she is to seek further learning opportunities (Edwards, 1993; DfEE National Skills Task Force, 2000). In addition their learning seems to have added to their general (i.e. developing skills and knowledge which enhances a workers overall performance) and specific (i.e. skills which can only be predominantly used in current employment) human capital (Calder and McCollum, 1998).

They were also rich in employment experience. The length of time each had spent in traditional employment ranged from eight, to twenty-seven, years. In addition, the majority (twenty-one) had experienced more than one career prior to self-employment. Only five had pursued a single career in Human Resources prior to self-employment. Of the twenty-one whose earlier work career had not been in Human Resources, half had moved into Human Resources at the point when they became self-employed. Whilst on the surface this finding seems surprising, it makes more sense when set alongside the findings from a survey amongst Human Resource practitioners which concluded that practitioners with a business background are more effective in their role (Personnel Today, 2001).

##### **7.4.1.1 Strategies for developing *Learning & Knowledge Assets* during the transition and early period of self-employment**

Despite being highly educated as well as employment rich, almost all reported how their prior experience (both employment and learning) had not equipped them with all of the knowledge

needed to launch their self-employed career. Thus at the point of self-employment, they found themselves having to invest in additional learning and knowledge-building activities. Learning, for the majority of individuals at this stage, seemed to be linked to developing the knowledge needed to carry out their non fee-earning work i.e. work that had to be done in order to secure and process client work.

One of the more common gaps in individuals' skills and knowledge at this stage was in the area of sales and marketing, for example:

*"Marketing and sales. I have really had to push that I side. I think I am like a lot of trainers in that marketing and sales doesn't come naturally to them."* (Male aged 39, self-employed for three years).

*"Definitely self-presentation and marketing. When I started off I thought I had no credibility. I thought who is going to believe me."* (Female aged 36, self-employed for three years).

*"The biggest change I am finding is the marketing side. At the moment I could do with more work, so a) I am not very good at it or b) I am not sure how effective sending mail-shots actually are in producing work."* (Male aged 51, self-employed for less than two years).

This latter example indicates that even those with the most *Employment Experience* (i.e. quantity) still had certain learning needs to address in the early stage of self-employment. This particular individual, who had thirty years Human Resources experience, identified the main gaps in his knowledge as: writing successful client proposals; designing and running training courses for large numbers of delegates, as well as specific training techniques. He addressed these learning needs by working collaboratively with others in his network. Had he not been resource-rich in terms of his *Support Network*, it would have taken him much longer to develop the gaps in his *Learning & Knowledge Assets* at this point in time.

Other common knowledge gaps that individuals reported that they had had to develop include: finding out about how to set up and run a home-office, including all of the associated Information and Communications Technology infrastructure; familiarisation with technologies such as e-mail and the internet as a business tool, and general consultancy skills including how to build effective relationships with clients.

Some individuals emphasised additional learning needs. Three of the men, for example, reported one big area of learning for them was coming to see themselves as businessmen who needed to develop their entrepreneurial skills. These included: becoming more self-reliant, taking initiative, spotting business opportunities, as well as creating opportunities, being single-minded and not letting problems dog, or hound them. These three seemed to have adopted a different philosophy to others in this research about their career. They saw themselves first and foremost as businessmen and, although their current business was in Training and Development, they did not feel that this would always be the case. This perspective seemed to affect their managing philosophy in that they were always open to new business opportunities.

One individual, who was in her mid-thirties when she became self-employed, reported one big area of learning for her was developing her ability to read organisations. Prior to becoming self-employed she had only worked for one organisation. Thus she had not had an opportunity to develop her understanding of working in different organisational cultures.

Several individuals reported how a key issue for them at the early stage of their self-employed career was keeping the direct cost of their learning low so as not to deplete their *Financial Assets*. This was a particular concern for those who had not had an opportunity to build up a 'financial reservoir' prior to self-employment. The strategies adopted for meeting their learning needs, whilst keeping the costs down, included:

- a) making use some of the free training/advice, or low-cost training, provided by organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Training & Enterprise Councils, Business Clubs, or Small Business Adviser at their bank;



- b) utilising the 'incubation period of change' to develop job-specific knowledge whilst still being paid by their former employer. These were individuals who had planned their transition into self-employment. During the transition period they attended various professional development courses, or volunteered to get involved in different work projects as a way of building up their professional 'toolkit';
- c) drawing on the support of people in their *Social Network* or *Family* to help with the development of specific of knowledge, as well as gain more general insights into how to run a small business, and
- d) delegating certain tasks associated with the running of their business to other *Family* members thus deferring the task of having to develop certain knowledge at that point in time. One individual, for example, whose wife was a qualified accountant left the management of the tax, VAT, invoicing and monetary side of the business to his wife. Adopting this managing approach his left him with *Time* to focus on other, more critical, aspects of running his business, such as gaining work. However, unlike when working in traditional employment, these individuals have less people around whom they can delegate work to.

However, even where individuals were able to satisfy their learning needs with minimal financial expenditure, they still had to allocate *Time* for learning which then wasn't available to allocate to other work.

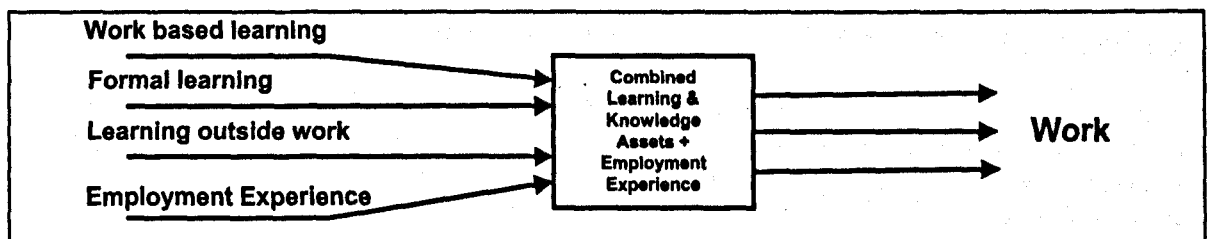
In addition to these common learning needs some individuals, because of their prior *Employment Experience*, had had to invest in developing a 'niche product' that they could sell to clients. These were individuals whose move into self-employment had either involved a change in career discipline (as they hadn't worked in an HR role previously), or had not worked in HR for very long before becoming self-employed. In these cases their learning was more formal. This involved drawing down on the resources *Financial Assets* and *Time*.

Just as individuals found that their *Employment Experience* had not fully prepared them with all of the knowledge needed to launch their self-employed career some, despite having completed a

formal learning activity in the immediate period prior to self-employment, found that they still had gaps in their knowledge. One individual, for example, who had completed an MBA in the year prior to becoming self-employed, participated in two further formal learning programmes in the first six months of self-employment to develop her skills as a trainer. Whilst the MBA had provided her with the external credibility that she was looking for to develop her career, she felt that it hadn't equipped her with all of the knowledge needed for the type of work she wanted to do.

Two others, who had been participating in a formal learning activity at the time when they became self-employed, also engaged in other formal learning programmes. These too were individuals whose earlier *Employment Experience* had not been in Human Resources. Whilst they had been able to transfer some of their former work-related knowledge to their self-employed career, they had had to invest in building new knowledge to establish a niche business area.

These examples indicate that direct *Employment Experience* alone is often not enough for these individuals to secure client work and that, at times, they need to combine their *Learning & Knowledge Assets* with their *Employment Experience*, as represented in Figure 52.



**Figure 52: Combining *Learning & Knowledge Assets* with *Employment Experience* to gain client work**

For eight individuals in this research, it was their formal learning experience (gained from either an MBA, MSc, PhD, or professional development) that had provided a bridge between their former work careers and their self-employed career. However, whilst these formal learning programmes provided them with some of the knowledge needed for their self-employed career, this was not necessarily enough, or of the right type, to apply directly to their client work. They found then that they had to invest in further learning to build a niche product to sell to clients.

#### **7.4.1.2 Strategies for developing *Learning & Knowledge Assets* as individuals develop their experience of self-employment**

Having looked at some of the similarities and differences in the strategies adopted for developing and replenishing their *Learning & Knowledge Assets* during the transition and early period of self-employment, this sub-section draws together the strategies adopted once individuals had gained more experience of self-employment.

Chapter 2 discussed some of the general factors that influence adult participation in learning. This theoretical background led to the formulation of specific questions to be considered during the data gathering and analysis phases of this research, these include:

- a) How do self-employed professionals identify what they need to learn? What reference points do they draw on?
- b) How much of their learning is directed at developing specific knowledge, or towards the development of 'metaskills' (Hall, 1986a)?
- c) To what extent does the context-dependent nature of knowledge (i.e. the extent to which knowledge can be easily transferred between client assignments), affect their motivation for learning?
- d) What resources do individuals draw on, as well as deplete, when they engage in learning activities e.g. time, money, technology, access to other professionals with whom they can exchange knowledge?
- e) What opportunities and barriers to learning and knowledge development do they experience?

These same questions have helped shape the discussion that follows about the strategies these individuals adopt for building and replenishing their *Learning & Knowledge Assets*.

As an employee, individuals often have access to various systems and resources to help them identify, plan and manage their learning, these include: appraisal systems; mentoring schemes; supervisory meetings; development centres, or formal training programmes (Mabey and Isles,

1994). Once self-employed, however, these resources are not necessarily available, so what alternative resources and managing strategies do individuals use to replenish their *Learning & Knowledge Assets*? Is their learning self-identified, or other identified? Do they, as Marsick and Watkins (1990) argue, take their reference points from the professional body that they belong to? Do they follow a planned, or emergent approach, to developing their learning and knowledge?

Chapter 1 discussed how these individuals fall into the category of 'professionalized occupations' (Marsick and Watkins, 1990). Although their work involves applying specialized knowledge and providing solutions, based on judgement, they do not have to belong to a specific professional body in order to practice, as is the case with doctors, nurses, solicitors.

Only six were members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), the professional body that represents Human Resource professionals. A further two were members of the British Psychological Society (BPS), the professional body that represents and accredits psychologists. They had each gained membership of these two professional bodies prior to self-employment. One individual pointed out that there are difficulties for those who are self-employed to become full members of the CIPD, because of the cost of the training.

However, there are potential business implications of not having full membership of these two professional bodies. First, some organisations, particularly those in the public sector, only award contracts to practitioners that are full members of the CIPD. Second, non-membership means that individuals do not have easy access to all of the knowledge available from these professional bodies, for example their resource libraries, publications, seminars, conferences and working groups, or they have to pay more to gain access to this knowledge.

The research findings indicate that these individuals use a number of reference points when planning their learning. These include:

- a) the development of specific knowledge linked to the delivery of a particular piece of client work;

- b) the development of specialist knowledge that could form the basis of future work with clients. Here the knowledge developed is of a more speculative nature;
- c) to meet the level of professional qualifications that clients assume and/or expect from their suppliers (i.e. consultants). What seemed important is not just the type of qualification gained but the reputation of the awarding academic institution. So does it have credibility in the area of management learning?;
- d) to fit in with an individual's future plans for their business;
- e) to address gaps in an individual's knowledge identified from having worked with other self-employed professionals, and
- f) to meet personal development plans. However, it was difficult to tease apart learning linked to personal development as opposed to business growth. Clearly learning enhances the knowledge that individuals have resulting in enhanced Human Capital, and additional Human Capital can add to the economic value and sustainability of an individual's business.

Having considered some of the general reference points that inform these individuals' decision to participate in learning and knowledge-creating activities, the rest of this section addresses the strategies adopted for managing their learning and knowledge on a day-to-day. Longer term needs are addressed later in this chapter, in the section *Managing Change*.

The findings in the previous three chapters have provided different examples of the learning approaches adopted by participating individuals. Further analysis of these examples indicate that their learning can be classified in terms of six different approaches:

- a) learning with and from other professionals through specific work assignments;
- b) learning by observing other professionals at work;
- c) learning with and from other professionals through networking;

- d) learning through 'explicit' knowledge generating activities, such as reading management books and professional journals;
- e) learning through non work related projects/activities, and
- f) learning through critical reflection.

Each of these strategies, together with the impact that these have on individuals' overall resources, is discussed below.

**a) Learning with and from other professionals through specific work assignments**

Many of these individuals reported how working alongside other professionals was an important source of learning for them. Opportunities for learning in this way occurred either by direct collaboration with others in their network, or through their work as an Associate.

Some explained how, having worked mainly on their own for a number of years, they reached a point where they actively sought work that involved working with other professionals. One individual, for example, became an Associate Trainer for a public sector organisation where the training gets delivered through Associates rather than in-house trainers. A key factor in taking up this Associate role was to minimise the effects of social isolation that he was beginning to experience, having worked largely on his own since becoming self-employed. However, he discovered that this work arrangement had benefits for his development too.

This particular Associate arrangement involved trainers working in pairs; an arrangement that provides opportunities for him to enhance his knowledge and skills as a trainer. This arose through the review process that he and fellow trainers conduct at the end of training programmes. In addition to reviewing the training programme to meet the formal evaluation process (as specified by the client), the trainers often allocate time to reviewing their own contribution and learning. As he explained, this work arrangement provides him with an incredible amount of learning, none of it formal, and it does not deplete his *Financial Assets*. His learning then is facilitated by the informal arrangement between himself and fellow professionals through the giving and receiving of feedback.

## **b) Learning by observing other professionals at work**

The process of learning by observing 'experts in action', often referred to as the apprenticeship model (Bird, 1994; Fuller and Unwin, 1999), is an approach that several individuals adopted as a valuable learning model. One individual, for example, developed the skills needed to work as a careers counsellor by adopting what she described as the 'sitting next to nellie approach'. The learning process involved working alongside an experienced careers counsellor, learning firsthand from this 'subject expert'.

However, in her case the 'sitting next to nellie' approach had mutual benefits for her and the 'subject expert' (who in this case was one of her clients). She was able to build the knowledge needed to develop a new area of business without depleting her *Financial Assets*. In fact quite the reverse, since she was being paid by the client for the work that she could do. Thus in this one client assignment she was replenishing her *Employment Experience, Learning & Knowledge Assets* and her *Financial Assets*. The client benefited too as she introduced tools and techniques, developed in her earlier Human Resources career, in the period whilst working with this particular client.

The type of client work that an individual does, however, can affect the opportunities that he or she has for learning through the 'sitting next to nellie' model. An example here is where individuals work one-to-one with clients. Where this is the case, individuals use opportunities for learning through observing other professionals at work, as and when they arise. One individual, for example, reported how she had learnt by observing the trainers on the formal learning programmes that she had attended since becoming self-employed. Through the process of observation and critical reflection she was able to develop her tacit knowledge. Other learning for her came through engaging a 'knowledge expert' to work alongside her on some of the training programmes she delivered to clients. However, this learning approach did have a direct financial impact as she has to pay for the 'knowledge expert'.

Others whose work involved working one-to-one with clients reported that they learn through engaging in a coaching/counselling arrangement with other professionals who help them with the process of critical reflection.

### **c) Learning with and from other professionals through networking**

Eight participants reported that one way in which they build their *Learning & Knowledge Assets*, in a cost-effective way, is through participating in a learning set. The learning set model, similar to Revan's (1983) Action Learning Model, involves a group of people contracting with other set members to provide support and challenge for each other's personal development. Participation in a learning set helps them prioritise their learning needs, review the progress being made, as well as gaining support and challenge from others in the set on how to address the issues encountered with their learning plan. One individual described the benefits of participating in this learning process as *"It helps me focus more and prioritise things [to do with learning] ... having something arranged makes me more conscious of the things I said I was going to work on. It acts as a kick, so I actually get something done."*

Another individual who had only recently become a member of a learning set after being self-employed for four years, reported several benefits for him of this particular learning approach. First, listening to others in the set talk about their own learning experiences had helped him think more objectively about his own development in terms of the gaps that he needed to consider addressing. Second, it had helped him take a longer-term view of his career, providing the space and time to consider questions such as *'What do I think I will be doing I five years time?'* and *'Because as a family we need a lot of money now, it doesn't mean we will need the same amount in the future, so what might that mean for me?'* Questions which he found difficult to unpack on his own.

However, in order to participate in this particular learning approach, individuals need to have built up the right contacts in their *Support Networks*. The right contacts being other self-employed professionals (although this need not necessarily be the case), where a relationship of trust has been



established. Trust, as argued in Chapter 2, is an important component of knowledge-creating cultures (Davenport and Prusack, 1998; Leadbeater, 1999).

One of the other benefits of networking, from a learning perspective, is that individuals can collaborate with others in their network to address other learning needs in a cost-effective way. One individual reported how, by getting together with other independent trainers in his network, he had been able to participate in a training programme leading to accreditation to use a specific psychometric instrument at about half the price of a public course. However, he would not have been able to make this type of cost-saving had he not already invested in developing his *Support Networks*.

#### **d) Learning through 'explicit' knowledge generating activities**

A number of individuals reported how reading professional journals and management books, as well as attending conferences, provided valuable learning resources, for example:

*"At the moment I am not terribly strong on negotiating skills and I am going to be doing a course on this quite soon, so this afternoon I am off to the bookshop to buy some books on negotiating. I spend at least a £100 a month on books."* (Female, self-employed for 7 years)

*"I do a lot of reading. I probably read a book every couple of days. I have got a study with about 4000 books in it, but that doesn't stop me buying more."* (Male, self-employed for 5 years)

*"I like new ideas and I do a lot of reading as a way of getting new ideas. I do tend to flit about a bit though. I read something and I think that sounds interesting, but then I move on to something else."* (Female, self-employed for 3 years)

Despite the amount that individuals invest in these particular learning resources, several reported that they do not invest as much of their *Financial Assets* and *Time* on developing their knowledge through reading professional journals and management texts as they should. Here then we have an example of one of the other tensions that these individuals experience when building their

knowledge assets. In traditional employment, employees often have access to a wide range of professional journals through the organisation's library and/or learning resources facilities. In addition, individuals are able to benefit from colleagues circulating information/cuttings from professional journals around the department. However, when working independently, these same practices no longer apply. Thus individuals find that they have to pay for journals that they once had free access to, or they have to take time out to access them in public libraries. Some rely on the goodwill of others in their network to pass on articles that they feel may be of interest. However this goodwill takes time to nurture and it also requires a reciprocal arrangement which can be a drain on time.

Five individuals reported how their learning comes from carrying out research and/or writing articles. However, there are other benefits from this form of learning activity. First, publishing articles helps to enhance their reputation within their field. Second, it can lead to new clients. Third, it can also generate additional income, either directly (i.e. as payment from a publisher), or indirectly (i.e. from new client business generated on the back of a published article).

Although these individuals find conferences a valuable learning resource they have to be selective about which of these learning forums they attend, selecting out those that seem to offer best value. Several reported that if there are conferences that they really want to attend, but cost is an issue, they volunteer to speak, or run a facilitated discussion. Adopting this strategy means that the conference fee and travel expenses are met by the conference organisers, which makes this particular knowledge-building activity more attractive. The benefits, as with writing articles, often outweighs the costs.

#### **e) Learning through non-work related projects/activities**

Some individuals used their non-work related interests as opportunities to develop their knowledge. One reported how his role as Chair of Governors had been a significant source of learning for him. His learning came from applying his existing knowledge about recruitment, mentoring and managing people, to a new contextual environment. Another reported how through volunteering to help her local Tennis Club with their staff recruitment she added to her development, as well as

gaining a client willing to act as a referee. In both these cases individuals were building their *Learning and Knowledge Assets* without drawing directly on their *Financial Assets*, although they did have to invest *Time*.

#### **f) Learning through critical reflection**

Learning through critical reflection was an important source of learning for many individuals in this research. One captured this approach in this description of how he learns as “*A lot of it [what I need to know] I am picking up as I go along. Learning for me is about doing it for myself, reading about it, deciding what is important and trying things out ... all you need is a strategy for trying things out and working out where you are going wrong.*” Another individual had developed his training style by applying Kolb’s (1984) ‘learning cycle’ he took feedback from course participants, reflected on it, changed his style of delivery and then further reflected on the impact of the changes made.

Another individual reported that a pattern that he has noticed about his learning, since becoming self-employed, is that of whenever he wants to learn something new he seeks out client work in the area that he wants to learn about. He gave an example of how he had used this approach to learn about Project Management; and area that he thought he would be able to add to his portfolio of services to clients. His actual learning came in several ways: reading books on Project Management and then applying what he had learnt to his work with clients and also through observing a colleague whom he brought in to work alongside him on a specific client project. In adopting this approach he was able to build his *Learning & Knowledge Assets*, *Employment Experience* and *Financial Assets* in a single piece of client work.

However, not all of these individuals adopted this same self-confident approach. Two of the women, for example, reported how they only sought work that was within their existing capabilities, as they worked on the assumption that clients expect them to ‘turn up with the knowledge’. One pointed out how holding on to this assumption causes her difficulties at times as she does not always seek work that is stretching enough.

## **7.4.2 Developing and maintaining the resource *Support Networks***

The background literature showed how networking is crucial for knowledge-based businesses as it is the means by which they acquire and develop business-critical knowledge (Nonaka, 1991a; Bird, 1994; Davenport and Prusak, 1998). The findings in the previous chapters indicate how networking, for these individuals, is also important to secure a regular supply of work, and for building intellectual and social capital. Through networking individuals build the contacts needed to secure future work. These contacts include employers, consultancies who sub-contract independent professionals, as well as other self-employed professionals. However, these contacts can also provide an invaluable learning resource, something that is particularly important given that these individuals no longer have the same opportunities to learn with, and from others, as part of the daily routines of organisational life. This was something that several individuals reported that they had missed since becoming self-employed.

As well as helping to build human capital, networking is also important for the development of social capital. Through networking individuals build appropriate support structures, that are seen as being important for ensuring continuing psychological health, particularly when experiencing career transitions (Minor, Slade and Myers, 1991). However the type of support individuals' receive, can be limited by the size, density, levels of connectivity, as well as the nature of the relationship with others within their support network (Scott, 1991).

This sub-section draws together the different types of networks that participating individuals belong to, the strategies adopted for building and maintaining the resource *Support Network*, together with the tensions and opportunities associated with networking and how individuals resolve these.

### **7.4.2.1 Types of networks participating individuals belong to**

a) **Professional networks** – thirteen individuals reported that they belong to one or more professional networks, which involve paying an annual fee to be a member. The range of professional networks they belong to include the: Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, British Psychological Society, Institute of Management Consultants, Institute of Management,

Institute of Directors, Association of Management Education and Development and International Association of Career Management Professionals.

Through these membership organisations individuals receive informational support (through regular newsletters and professional journals); instrumental support (through access to other professionals with whom they can share specific knowledge associated with their work) and, in some cases, companionship (important for dealing with the social isolation experienced when working independently).

One of the tensions associated with membership of these organisations for the self-employed is that other members, drawn from traditional employment, are not always supportive. This is because they see these individuals as sales people, rather than fellow-learners, who are only attending networking events to try and gain business.

**b) Networks connected to academic institutions** – nine individuals were participating in a formal learning activity at the time of the fieldwork. Through this learning activity individuals automatically became members of a network of fellow learners (some of whom are self-employed), who provided them with informational, instrumental and emotional support.

Others were members of Alumni Associations, from previous formal learning experiences. Again this resource provides a source of informational support (through regular newsletters) and in some cases, instrumental support (opportunities to attend knowledge-building conferences, as well building contacts who may become suppliers of work).

**c) Associate networks** – these are networks that individuals automatically become members of through their work as an Associate of a particular consultancy, or learning institution. One of the key benefits of being part of an Associate Network is that it can provide a ready-made source of fellow professionals to learn with and from. These learning opportunities arise at different times: through the formal learning events that the consultancies run for their own employees, which Associates are sometimes invited to attend; working directly with other consultants on client projects and in less formal ways, such as participating in a learning set (see previous sub-section).

**d) Small business network forums** - these forums included the local Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise Councils, as well other local business networking forums. The extent to which individuals benefited from membership/affiliation to these types of networks varied. Whilst affiliation to these organisations seemed to provide a valuable source of informational and instrumental support in the early stage of self-employment, when individuals were developing their knowledge of running a small business, the on-going value of these forums was less clear.

**e) Personal networks** – the personal networks that these individuals belong to are an important resource for each of the four types of social support referred to in Chapter 2, but particularly emotional support and companionship. When working independently individuals do not always get an opportunity to develop the same sorts of friendships through their work, as when following a traditional career; a situation that can leave them feeling socially isolated.

The contacts that individuals have in their personal network are thus important resource to help manage their social isolation, as well as providing other forms of support. Three individuals reported how it was particularly important for them to have access to a small number of trusted friends/colleagues, who lived locally, whom they could use to bounce ideas off and also gain a different perspective on any problems that they are grappling with. Being local to each other made it easy to pop in and see them, or arrange to meet up in a local coffee shop at short notice. In this way individuals gain the support they need without it being too much of a drain on their *Time*.

In addition to the emotional support and companionship gained from personal networks, these contacts were also an important resource in terms of providing a supply of work. It was often these personal contacts, built up prior to self-employment, which enabled some individuals to get their first piece of work, for example:

*“So far all of the work that I have done has come either from people who have known me, or as a result of personal recommendation ... I have got a lot of contacts and professional colleagues, built up over the years, who are a good source of work.”* (Male, early fifties, self-employed for less than two years).

“So he was a friend, as well as someone I had met through the CIPD. When I was building up a bank of clients [when I was made redundant] I started doing some work sub-contracted to him.” (Male, mid-thirties, self-employed for six years)

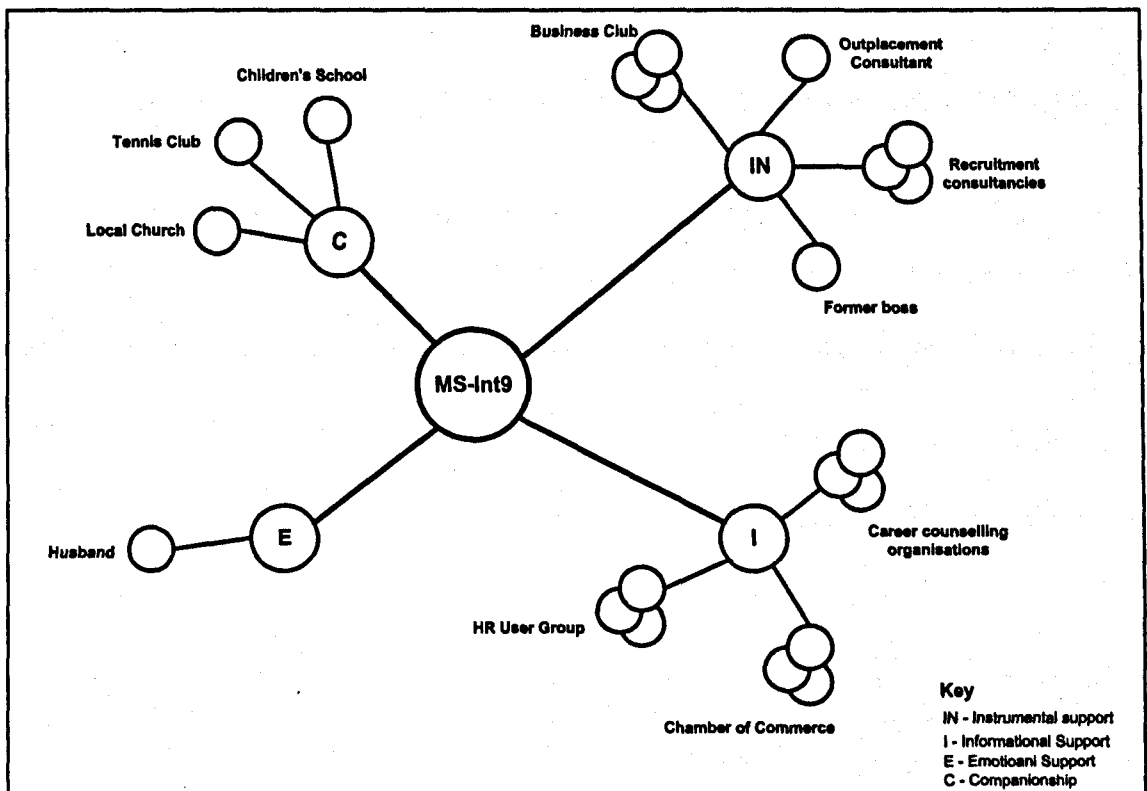
f) **Special interest groups** – these are groups that individuals join as way of helping them develop and maintain specific knowledge linked to a key area of their business. One individual had joined a networking forum for professionals working in the area of coaching. This was primarily a virtual networking forum with members having regular contact through e-mail, supported with some monthly face-to-face meetings. Another individual belonged to a special interest group associated with a particular psychometric test that she used regularly in her work. Another worked as a member of a special-interest group as a retired member of the Society of Chief Personnel Officers.

Whilst a primary factor in becoming a member of these special interest groups is to build *Learning & Knowledge Assets*, other motivators include developing social capital.

#### **7.4.2.2 Strategies adopted for building and maintaining the resource *Support Networks***

The research findings show how individuals adopted different strategies for building their *Support Networks* and invested different amounts of resources (e.g. *Time* and *Financial Assets*) in building and maintaining their *Support Networks* at different stages of their self-employed career. During the transition, and initial stage of self-employment, most invested a lot of *Time* in building up the resource *Support Networks*.

However, some individuals were in a more fortunate position than others in terms of the amount of *Time* that they had available to allocate to building their *Support Networks*, prior to self-employment. These were individuals who had planned their transition into self-employment rather than this being a career move forced on them, as a result of redundancy. An example of how one individual built up her *Support Networks* during the transition into self-employment is shown in Figure 53.



**Figure 53: Development of Support Network during the transition into self-employment**

Part of her networking strategy to meet her changing support needs during the transition into self-employment involved renewing old contacts (indicated by the un-shaded nodes in Figure 53), as well as building new contacts (indicated by the shaded nodes in Figure 53). Her objective in renewing old contacts was twofold. One was to update her contacts on her future plans. Second she wanted to use them as a resource to connect her to organisations that may have a need for her expertise.

Figure 53 shows how the type of support she received from the different contacts in her network varied (indicated by the capital letters in each of the network nodes). As she was no longer in traditional employment (as she was on sabbatical), she invested *Time* in building up contacts in her local community to meet her companionship needs. She joined a local tennis club and became more involved in activities with her local church and her children's school.

A similar strategy for building the support needed during the transition into self-employment was observed amongst others in this research. Four of the men reported how, when planning to become self-employed they contacted people in their personal network, particularly those already self-employed. Their objective being first to let these contacts know what they were planning and



second to gain insights into what self-employment is really like. So they were looking primarily for Informational Support, followed by Instrumental Support (What do I need to be doing?).

During the transition into self-employment, and in the early period of self-employment, most individuals' networking strategy involved joining a number of networking forums (so effectively casting their net wide). However, once their business was established, they revisited their membership of networking forums.

One of the tensions relating to networking during the transition into self-employment that two individuals referred to related to the extent to which they felt comfortable informing existing clients/suppliers about their future plans. These were individuals already working in a consultancy role, but as an employee. Thus there was a potential clash of interest between themselves and their employer. This meant that they had to be careful about how they approached this type of networking. However, in practice, individuals found that clients were generally very receptive and supportive of their plans. This helped build individuals' self-confidence.

The findings show that individuals face a similar dichotomy when building and maintaining their *Support Networks* as that encountered when building their *Employment Experience* (see 7.6.2) in that they have to decide whether to go for breadth (i.e. develop a range of contacts in each of the different network forums), or depth (i.e. develop a limited number of contacts in a limited number of network forums).

Breadth has advantages in that it can help alleviate the problem associated with the lead-times in new business contacts becoming fruitful in terms of a supply of work. One individual pointed out an offer of work, from a new contact, can sometimes take up to a year, sometimes longer, after the initial contact has been made. Because of this lead-time his strategy involved a) casting his net wide when networking, in this way improving his chances of having an on-going supply of work, b) building contacts in different geographical locations and c) becoming an Associate of a small consultancy. Each of these strategies helped to enhance his chances of having a more regular flow of work.

In addition to breadth, individuals also have to consider the level of inter-connectivity between contacts within their network. Where network contacts overlap this can bring additional benefits. First, it enhances the flow of information, as this can be directed through multiple sources, thus ensuring individuals remain in the information-sharing loop. Second, where individuals are connected through multiple networks nodes this increases their chances of gaining information about and/or being contacted about potential work. However, one of the drawbacks of having a broader set of contacts in ones network is that it takes more *Time* to maintain the relationships; *Time* that then is not available for other work.

Despite the benefits of being part of a well-connected network, four individuals reported that they were cautious about whom they shared specific types of knowledge with. The type of knowledge that we are talking about here relates to confidential information about their existing clients, as well as ideas that could generate future business. Their fear being that other self-employed professionals might use this information unethically for their own commercial gains.

It is for this reason that these individuals are often cautious about whom they share information with and also how much information they share. One individual pointed out "*There are one or two close contacts who I am happy to talk with about anything, or share ideas with, even though we work in the same areas as I feel we are not competing. There are others I am less comfortable doing that with. Occasionally people I haven't heard anything from in two years will ring me up and say I am thinking about doing something on X, have you got any ideas. I will give them some ideas but not all of them.*" She pointed out how it isn't just other independent consultants whom she has to be cautious of. Clients too (i.e. organisations) can sometimes seek information, in the form of ideas, which are borderline between a reciprocal information exchange and free consultancy.

Where other independent consultants, within one's network, abuse a relationship of trust this can have financial implications (both immediate and longer-term). Situations where this relationship of trust can break down include a) having introduced a colleague to a client through a sub-contracting arrangement, the colleague then markets him/herself directly to the client and b) having

recommended a colleague to a client, the colleague doesn't meet client's expectations. Either of these situations can damage the relationship an individual has with a client, something which could have implications for their future income.

As with the other decisions that these individuals make about their lives, the decisions that they make about building the resource *Support Networks* is affected by the status of other resources. First they have to consider the financial costs associated with networking. This includes the membership fees for joining professional networks and small business network forums, as well the cost of attending networking meetings and conferences organised by these organisations. They also have to take indirect costs into account too such as the *Time* required to read information disseminated by the networking organisations that they belong to, as well as the *Time* required to attend networking events.

As an employee, professional membership fees are often met by the employer. In addition, individuals are paid for their *Time* whilst attending networking events. Once self-employed, this is no longer the case. As one individual pointed out "*You have to make investment decisions [about membership]. You need to look at this critically and ask yourself 'What am I getting from this?'*" In her case, she reduced her membership of networking forums from four to two after being self-employed for a couple of years. The two professional organisations that she chose to retain membership of were those that gave most support to members with their Continuing Professional Development, as she found this particularly valuable for her on-going knowledge development. A similar pattern was identified amongst others in this research.

Second, an individual's familial situation can affect the *Time* that they have for networking. Two of the women with childcare responsibilities reported that they did not have as much *Time* to invest in networking events organised by the Professional Networks that they belong to, because the timing of these events (i.e. evenings) clashed with family commitments. The *Family* then, for these individuals was a restraining factor when it comes to finding *Time* to network with other professionals. As a way of overcoming this tension, these women sought opportunities to join Professional Networks that met during the daytime, or on Saturdays. Access to childcare was less

problematic during these times, either because the children are at school, or their husband is available to take on this responsibility.

Although women with childcare responsibilities can be excluded from certain professional networking forums because of the timing of the meetings, they often have more opportunities for social interaction during the working day. This is something that can help address the social isolation experienced when working independently. These opportunities come when taking, or collecting, the children to school, or through the links they build within the local community.

The men who worked in partnership with their wives, or where their wives did not work, also had more opportunities for social interaction with another adult during the working day. In each of these cases, they reported that they did not feel a need to invest as much *Time* in building their network to satisfy a social need.

Those developing their formal learning career, in parallel with their self-employed career, reported that *Time for networking* was something they found particularly difficult to manage. Whilst formal learning programmes can create opportunities for building new contacts (to generate new business and to facilitate knowledge development), this has to be balanced with the *Time* that this takes up: *Time* which then cannot be allocated to maintaining relationships with existing contacts.

As with other businesses, the increased usage and accessibility of ICT, as a communications vehicle, has eased the task of networking for self-employed professionals. Through the appropriate use of ICT, individuals can keep in regular contact with clients and other professionals without always having to allocate *Time* to meet face-to-face.

To summarise, there are a number of factors that influence the decisions that these individuals make about building their network resources. These include: the direct costs of membership; accessibility of networking meetings; perceived value of the knowledge acquired at networking events; opportunities to make contacts that lead to future work or form friendships, as well as the availability of time for networking.

### 7.4.3 Replenishing the resource *Health*

Several individuals reported how, for their lifestyle to be sustainable, they have to pay attention to their physical and mental health. One reported "*I think it is very important to protect your health when you are self-employed. I am very aware that in this business you are only as good as your last movie and therefore the job has to be done well. Thus I need to rest in my downtime. I also need to protect against the mental stress of work invading my home ... that means not taking calls [from clients] at ten at night*". The way in which she manages her health is by ensuring that she schedules in downtime, between client assignments, particularly where a client assignment involves working long hours. During these periods of downtime she either does not work at all, or uses this time to catch up on administrative tasks, thus enabling her to have a less pressurised work schedule.

Two of the men reported that they incorporate time for physical exercise into their work schedule. One explained "*The way I organise my work, is I prioritise it with the things I like to do. For instance this is winter, but let's say it was summer, this morning was a bit like that. The dilemma I had this morning was that this is the first day this year when it has been warm enough for me to go out for a cycle ride ... I recognise the need to have a really fit body, the weather was really good this morning so I went out for a cycle ride.*" This particular case highlights one of the dilemmas these individuals can face when planning their use of *Time*. Whilst they have more flexibility and control over how they allocate *Time* to different aspects of their lives, they find that there are trade-offs to be made, such as having to balance *Time*, allocated during the working day, between client work, other work and leisure activities, to maintain the resource *Health*. Another individual reported how he had developed other aspects of his life, since becoming self-employed. He had joined a gym as well as developing links within the local community. These combined activities have helped him feel fitter, and had helped him alleviate the stresses that he had previously experienced in traditional employment.

Another of the men reported how he often allocates *Time*, during the working day, to working on his boat. Although he did not refer to this activity as being specifically about building up the resource *Health*, it did provide him with a way of escaping from client work. This could be construed as another way of managing the '*ever present nature of work*' that others reported as one

of the tensions associated with this lifestyle. What these examples illustrate is how self-employment creates time-windows which individuals' can then chose to allocate to activities linked to managing their *Health*.

## **7.5 Managing process -2: Planning and Organising**

The findings in the previous three chapters show how self-employment can enable individuals to have more control over how they apportion time between their working lives and other life-areas. One of their managing tasks involves making decisions about how best to apportion this finite resource between different life-areas. This sub-section discusses the different strategies that they adopt when planning and organising their lives.

If we step back slightly to consider how individuals in traditional employment plan their time, we find that this activity is linked to departmental/organisational plans, operational deadlines, as well as organisational routines and rituals. Some of the routines that add structure to individuals' working lives include: management briefings; team meetings; training sessions; management meetings; planning meetings, as well as client meetings. Once self-employed, however, individuals have to establish new work routines and rituals for themselves. This involves having to revisit the different parameters and assumptions about how time should be managed. As discussed earlier (section 7.2.1), knowledge workers can be less bounded by some of the time-windows within which traditional work takes place.

Once self-employed, individuals find that not only do they have to organise their own supply of work, they also have to plan and organise each of the processes involved in producing it. The range of tasks that this involves is indicated in the following example "*I am responsible for everything to do with running the business, from buying the paper clips to sending out invoices and chasing up clients who do not pay*". Since these individuals can no longer call on the help of a manager, or office administrator, to support them with these administrative tasks they have to schedule these in alongside work that generates income.

Whilst these individuals had been used to making decisions about their own work in their former work roles, the decisions they have to make once self-employed are of a different nature, these include:

- a) How much do I need and/or want to be working?
- b) How and where will I find work? What geographical locations do I want/can I work in?
- c) What type(s) of work do I want to be doing?
- d) How and where will I carry out my work? How should I allocate my time between fee-earning work, non fee-earning work and other work?

In addressing '*How much do I need and/or want to be working?*', individuals have to take their overall status of their *Financial Assets* into consideration, including regular financial commitments, as well as their familial situation. The level of income needed, which determines how much an individual needs to work, is affected by the availability of other sources of income (e.g. partner's earnings, other sources of income other than from self-employment), as well as their regular financial commitments (e.g. business expenses, mortgage commitments, children's school fees).

The financial impact of self-employment for six individuals had been cushioned by what they described as a 'financial buffer'. This was in the form of a redundancy package, or early retirement package. One individual had received financial support in the form of a business start-up grant, part of a government initiative in the 1980s to support new businesses. Whilst not a large sum of money in comparison to a redundancy package, he said that it provided him with a 'financial cushion' that helped pay the mortgage. This took some of the financial pressure off him in the initial period of self-employment.

Those with a 'financial buffer' had more choice over how they planned their working lives. Thus instead of working five days a week they were able to make choices about how many days a week they wanted to work. This opened up the option of only working two/three days a week, and allocating the other days of the week to non fee-earning work, domestic work, leisure activities, or

to build up other resources, such as their *Support Networks* and their *Learning & Knowledge Assets*.

Having determined their income requirements, individuals can determine what this means in terms of the amount of fee-earning work that they have to win. Whilst on paper this calculation looks fairly straightforward, in practice this is not necessarily the case. One individual described the calculation process as, *"There are 220 possible working days a year, if you take out Bank Holidays, your own holidays and weekends. I decide how much I want to earn ... I then divide the days by the amount I want to earn to give me a day rate to charge clients."*

However, the reality of finding a regular supply of work is not so straightforward. First, as individuals discover, gaining 220 fee-earning days work in a year is difficult. Even if this were possible, it would not leave enough time for them to carry out all of the 'other work' that needs to be done to process that work, for example, client preparation time and follow-up work, invoicing, attending client meetings, as well as networking to build contacts for future supplies of work. All of these types of work need to be taken into account when calculating the actual number of fee-earning days that can be carried out in a year. Individuals also have to take other factors into consideration, for example familial or formal learning activities that can restrict their availability to work on certain days of the week an/or times of the year. The women with school age children, for example, planned most of their client-facing work to coincide with the school term-time, keeping the school holidays free to spend with their children.

In addressing the question *'How and where will I find work?'*, individuals are faced with other choices and decisions. These include: Are there opportunities to work on a different contractual basis with my current employer? Should I contract my services directly to clients, or through a third party? Are there other independent consultants whom I can collaborate with to win client work?

Each of these work options has its advantages and disadvantages. Contracting through a third-party e.g. a consultancy, management and/or academic institution, has the advantage that it provides a supply of work without the overhead of having to find it for oneself. As sales and marketing is an



aspect of these individuals' work that many reported that they did not enjoy, this was a key influencing factor in seeking work through an Associate arrangement. In addition, by working as an Associate, individuals find that they are able to work on bigger projects than when contracting directly with clients. This can have additional advantages for building their *Employment Experience and Learning & Knowledge Assets*.

However individuals reported a number of disadvantages with this contractual arrangement. First, some consultancies expect their Associates to sign a contract preventing them from working for a competitor organisation, or from marketing their services directly to their clients. The contractual arrangements with the consultancy (with whom they have the Associate arrangement), means that even if a client, met originally through Associate work, approaches them directly to do a further piece of work they are contractually unable to accept this offer of work.

Second, when working as an Associate, individuals have to be very clear about where they draw the boundaries around their own marketing activities in order to avoid any potential clash of interest with the consultancies that they are working with.

Third, working on an Associate basis normally means that individuals received a lower day-rate than when contracting their services directly to clients. This is because the consultancy/institution takes a percentage of the client fees as mark-up.

Fourth, there is an issue to do with intellectual capital, particularly where the contractual arrangements with consultancies/institutions requires individuals to sign over the intellectual property rights for ideas/materials developed whilst working on projects on their behalf.

Fifth, it can add another layer of complexity to their working relationships which requires managing. As an Associate, individuals have to manage the relationship with the consultancy/institution (i.e. who are the purchasers of their professional services), the employees of the consultancy/institution whom they work with for specific client projects, as well as the end client who has commissioned the work. Each of these interactions needs managing, which can represent a drain on individuals' *Time*. Time that may not always get costed into the project.

When making a decision as to whether to contract their services through third-parties, individuals have to balance the advantages of this type of work arrangement with the disadvantages. This requires making a judgement as to whether the gains, in terms of opportunities to build their *Employment Experience* and *Learning & Knowledge Assets*, together with the *Time* gained from not having to market their services directly, balances with the costs and risks.

The decision regarding '*What type of work do I want to be doing?*,' is influenced by an individual's previous *Employment Experience*, the status of his/her *Learning & Knowledge Assets* as well as his/her personal success criteria.

Chapter 5 showed how these individuals had had different career experiences prior to self-employment. Only five had followed a single work-career in Human Resources prior to self-employment. Eleven had made a career change into Human Resources prior to becoming self-employed. The rest (ten in total) had had an established career in other professional disciplines. The majority of these had been teachers, or had worked in adult education.

Those who had not previously worked in Human Resources found that they had less direct *Employment Experience* and *Knowledge Assets* to sell to clients initially. Thus the services that they were able to offer clients in the initial phase of self-employment were more restricted. They were faced with the dilemma of 'What transferable skills and knowledge do I have to sell to clients?'

Individuals also had a number of considerations to take into account when addressing the questions '*How and where will I carry out my work? and How should I apportion my time between fee-earning work, non fee-earning work and other work?*'. Earlier in this chapter we saw how these individuals have multiple demands on their time given that they are responsible for organising their own supply of work, as well as all of the processes involved in producing it. These tasks have to be planned in alongside other work (domestic work), together with time for learning and leisure activities, as well as maintaining their health. Despite this one of the advantages of self-employment is that it can free individuals from some of the time boundaries associated with traditional work which, in turn, can lead to more choice

Each of the women with primary childcare responsibilities took familial needs into account when planning their work. Even though their familial situations were different, they took similar considerations into account when making decisions about their work. These include: confining their work activities to specific geographical locations to limit the amount of time spent travelling, or working away from home overnight; organising their working day around school-hours wherever possible; taking extended periods of time off during school holidays, as well as combining work with visits to stay with relatives who took on the childcare responsibilities temporarily.

What was difficult to ascertain however was the impact that these decisions had on these women's resources, particularly their *Financial Assets*. One of the women reported that if it wasn't for her young daughter she would be better off financially as she would work more. However, she also reported how she had come to terms with the fact that self-employment, even without her daughter, would never make her rich, just comfortable. In contrast, one of the other women with school-age children reported how she had chosen self-employment because she had worked out that this would be a better financial option for her than traditional part-time employment.

An example of how women with school-age children managed their time on the days when working from home, is illustrated in Figure 54 below.

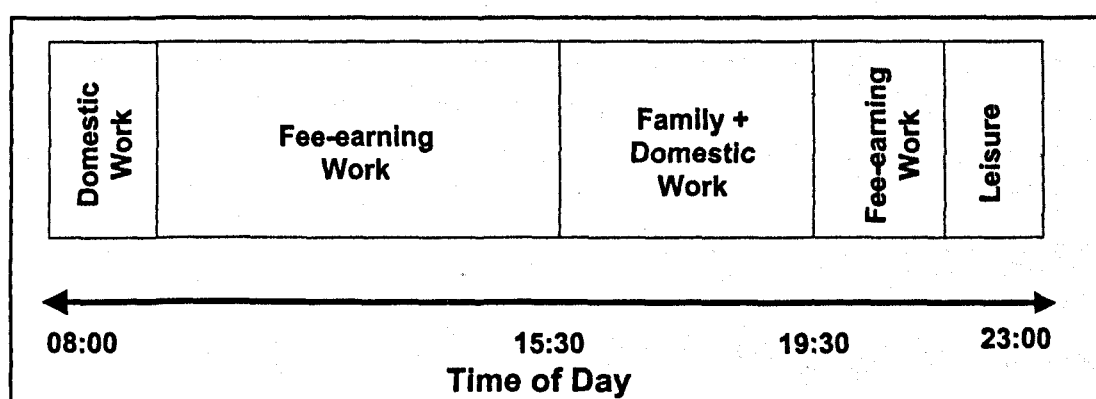
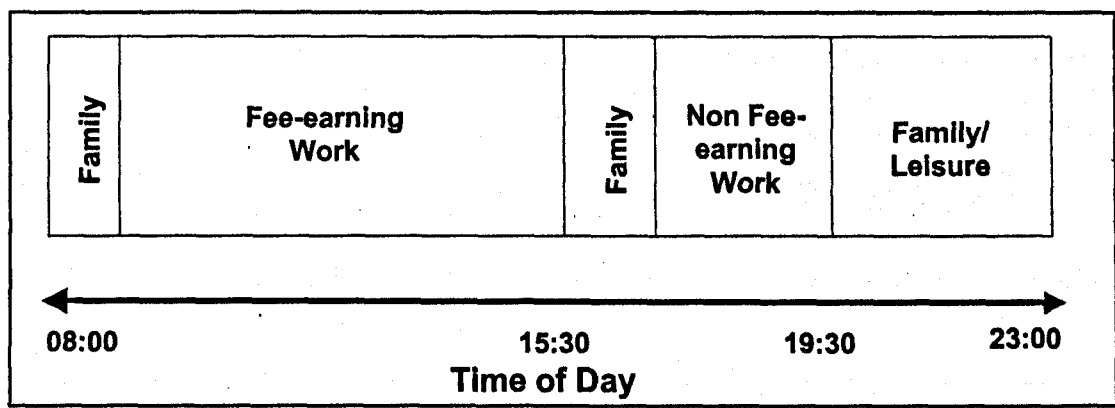


Figure 54: Example of how women with school-age children might structure their working day

As Figure 54 shows the start of the day is taken up with domestic work, such as getting the children ready for school, followed by taking them to school. On the way back from school they then might do other domestic work such as the shopping. Their time up until mid-afternoon is then allocated either to fee-earning work, or non fee-earning work such as doing their accounts or preparing

invoices. In the mid-afternoon they then take a break from work to collect the children from school. Their time, up until early evening, is then taken up with domestic work e.g. looking after the children, preparing the evening meal, helping the children with their homework, or taking/collecting their children to after-school activities. Once the children are in bed, or their husband/partner returns from work, they then do a couple more hours work before breaking for some leisure time.

A similar pattern of breaking up the working day on days when working from home, was identified amongst men with school-age children, as show in Figure 55 below.



**Figure 55: Example of how men with school-age children might structure their working day**

In contrast with the women's experience, although the men took time out during the working day to carry out some domestic work e.g. taking/collecting the children to/from school, they allocated less time to other domestic tasks e.g. shopping, washing. These tasks were left to their wives, who either did not work, or only worked part-time. A couple of the men with school-age children also allocated time to work associated with their children's school. One allocated time during the working day to tasks associated with his role as Chair of Governors at his daughters' school.

The findings show how investing in developing their *Learning & Knowledge Assets* is crucial to these individuals' livelihood. Whilst much of their learning is informal there are times when individuals need and/or want to allocate time to formal learning. Despite the gaps in their diaries, due to the peaks and troughs in the self-employed workflow, some find it difficult to make regular commitments to formal learning. A combination of the type of work that they do (running residential learning programmes, or travel to work with different clients), together with the type of

formal learning that they choose, can make this type of learning particularly difficult for these individuals.

For those studying for a research degree, getting the balance right between work and learning was something that they struggled with, for example *“When I started off doing my PhD it was difficult to apportion my time doing research, running around libraries, and the rest of my work. Then when I got the business going I had one or two big contracts that I was working on, forgetting that I needed to market so that when these contracts finished I had something else. Because of the nature of this work it is not like selling, where you can have something next week. It might take time. I eventually got to the stage where I decided to pull out of the PhD for a year to re-establish the business.”* When he resumed his PhD after taking a year’s break, he adopted a different strategy for apportioning his time between work and learning. He chose to schedule his work activities into three weeks out of each month, leaving the fourth week free for learning.

In summary, although these individuals do have certain choices regarding how much they work, and also when and where they work, their choices are affected by the status of their resources at any given point in time. In exercising these choices, individuals have to balance the benefits of this lifestyle with the downsides. This can involve making trade-offs in order to ensure that their resources do not get too depleted.

The next sub-section discusses how these individuals approach and manage change, including the subjective criteria that they use when making decisions, as well as when judging their overall success.

## 7.6 Managing process - 3: Managing Change

Chapter 1 summarised the changes that have occurred in the world of work and employment over the past couple of decades largely due to changes in technology which have affected social structures, organisational structures, as well as the nature of individual's work (Castells, 1989; Allen, 1992). In societies undergoing continuous and rapid change survival requires companies and individuals to be able to adapt, change and learn (de Gues, 1988; Coolahan, 1998).

These broader structural changes have had implications for the skills and knowledge that individuals, in general, need for managing their careers. These include: the ability to manage multiple transitions (Herriot, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998); the development of certain 'meta-skills' (Hall, 1986a), as well as building a strong self-view (Schein, 1996).

When following an organisational career, there are often structures, processes and support systems in place to help individuals plan and manage their careers (Mabey and Isles, 1994). But those following a more independent career have to create these structures, processes and systems for themselves. Kidd (1996) suggests that a satisfactory model of individual career management needs to reflect six elements: a) an individual's aspirations within a framework of personal values, life-style and life-roles; b) consideration to the skills for life-long planning and dealing with change; c) contextualised; d) reflect differing relationships; e) have a temporal perspective (a lifetime perspective) and f) resilience i.e. a capacity to cope with uncertainty and to challenge exploitative practices.

Whilst the previous two sub-sections have set out the strategies that these individuals adopt for managing their lives on a day-to-day basis, this sub-section draws together the strategies they adopt for managing their lives over a longer-term timeframe. It covers the areas of: individuals' experience of change, including how they identify the signs for change; the approaches adopted for managing transitions, as well as the success criteria that they apply to managing their careers now that they are no longer following a traditional career. These areas that map onto some of the elements in Kidd's (1996) career management model.

### **7.6.1 Individuals experience and attitude towards change**

Change had been a significant feature of most of these individuals' lives prior to self-employment.

In some cases these changes were self-initiated, in others they were in response to external changes/plans. Twenty-one had experienced changes in their work careers; only five were in the same profession as when they started their work career. However, it wasn't just in their work careers that individuals' had experienced change. Several had experienced changes in other life-areas too. These include:

- a) **Divorce and/or separation from a partner** – ten individuals had been divorced and/or separated from a partner. Nine of these had subsequently either remarried, or were living with a new partner.
- b) **Living and working abroad** - four individuals had chosen to live and work abroad for periods of between three and ten years at an earlier point in their adult lives. Another had lived abroad for a period of two years to fit in with her husband's career development plans.
- c) **Relocating the family home** – eight had relocated their family home. In four individuals' cases this coincided with the time period when they became self-employed, or shortly afterwards.
- d) **Career break** – seven individuals had experienced a break in their work career at an earlier point in their lives: three of these were female and four male. For five of these, this career break was to enable them participate in formal learning, full-time.

As a group, these individuals seem to demonstrate some of the 'meta-skills' that Hall (1986a) argues are essential for managing one's own career.

Change for some of these individuals came after picking up cues from their environment to indicate a need to make changes to their career. One example of this is the experience of individuals who had been working in business sectors that were in decline and thus offered limited future employment opportunities. By recognising and accepting that these changes were happening individuals were able to develop their career (through self-employment) in a planned way. They

were able to build up the resources *Learning & Knowledge Assets, Employment Experience* and *Support Networks* over a period of time, thus preparing gradually for the transition into self-employment.

Spotting the signs of change within one's environment is an important career management task (Law, 1996). By applying the cognitive processes of sensing and sifting information, individuals are able to identify future career options and carry out some 'What if?' type thinking in order to make more informed decisions.

### **7.6.2 Building plans for growth**

We saw in the earlier chapters how, in the initial stage of self-employment, individuals' main priority was to generate income in whatever way they could, as the following examples show:

*"For the first two years I was so busy. I took almost any work that came my way, even though it wasn't connected with my overall plan."*

*"I would do almost anything when I first started, just so I could say that I was working."*

*"I first of all found work that paid as much as possible and I couldn't give a damn what the work was, as long as it was training and development of course. I just took whatever anybody could offer."*

However, as individuals developed more experience of self-employment, and built up their resources, their attitude and approach to how they managed their working lives in relation to the rest of the lives, changed. Of the eleven individuals who had been self-employed more than six years, eight reported that they had moved into a phase where they felt able to take more control over the a) type of work that they were doing and b) the conditions associated with their work.

By this stage, individuals had built up their client base, having established their reputation as an independent consultant/trainer, and they had learnt to become good business administrators. One individual defined a good business administrator as someone who: ensures invoices go out on



time; produces good quality materials; responds promptly to client phone calls; writes good quality proposals and also invests *Time* in developing client relationships.

A first step in moving their businesses forward involved asking themselves some strategic questions, for example:

- a) What clients do I have now and which do I want to be working with in the future?
- b) How can I influence where the demand is coming from? Is the demand coming from clients where the rate that the client is prepared to pay matches what I want to be earning?
- c) What type of work do I want to be doing?
- d) Do I need to broaden the range of products/services that I offer? If so, how should I set about doing this?

A key consideration for these individuals, linked to their future livelihood, is that of ensuring that they develop their *Employment Experience* not just from a quantity dimension (i.e. amount) but also from a quality dimension (i.e. breadth, or difference) too. As one individual pointed out one of the paradoxes of self-employment is that *“On the one hand self-employment can increase your employability as it can help you broaden, but it can also decrease your employability if you are seen as too narrow.”*

Another individual reported how, having been self-employed for three years, he began to feel trapped as he was still doing the same type of work as when he had started of his self-employed career. He was concerned that, unlike some of his contemporaries who had broadened their work with clients to include consultancy and training, he was still specialising in training.

Another, who had developed his reputation as a consultant and trainer in the area of Equal Opportunities in the early period of his self-employed career, reported how after four years he put a plan in place to broaden the services he offered clients. He wanted his business to grow, but he didn't want to get trapped in one area of specialism. He too was concerned about what this would mean for his future business and also his own development. His strategy for managing his way out

of this niche area involved a combination of: turning work away, charging a higher rate for the work that he did agree to do, as well as passing certain types of work on to selected contacts in his network. This latter managing strategy brought additional benefits in that these contacts then reciprocated by offering work back to him when they had a surplus, or did not have the expertise needed for a particular client assignment.

These examples raise an important source of tension for self-employed professionals, this being the generalist-specialist dichotomy. By specialising, individuals can leave themselves vulnerable should there be a significant fall in demand from clients for a particular area of expertise. However by having a broader product base, individuals have more options should the demand for a particular area of expertise decline. As with all of the decisions that these individuals are faced with, resolving the generalist-specialist dichotomy is not a simple one. Developing new products (which for these individuals involves developing their knowledge) takes time and money and can involve having to make adjustments in other life-areas.

Further strategic questions individuals have to address after being self-employed for some time are 'What is my capacity for business growth? And also 'How much do I want the business to grow?' Although the bigger the client base the greater the chances of achieving financial security, those who had been self-employed for more than four years found that they reached a point where they had reached their maximum capacity. To grow the business further they have to consider alternative ways of delivering, for example "*The choice I think I might have to face and I was facing it a bit last year, is if I really go out and market myself I have then got to deliver and how do I do that. To deliver I am going to have to start bringing in other people to deliver for me and that would change the nature of what I am about. I am not sure I want that. I am not sure that I want to become an employer of other people.*" This example highlights one of the dilemmas that these individuals face when making decisions about their business, that of having to balance logical/rational decision-making criteria with subjective criteria e.g. personal feelings/emotions relating to a given situation.

Other individuals' approaches for addressing this strategic dilemma of how to expand their business included entering into a more formal collaborative work relationship with a select number of self-employed professionals within their network or entering into a formal partnership arrangement. Both of these work arrangements enabled individuals to extend their product and client base, but still operate within their own personal success criteria.

In addition to adopting a strategic approach to change, individuals were also opportunist in their approach, so acting on opportunities that arose serendipitously as they went about their day-to-day work. One individual, for example, who had been studying for a certificate and diploma in hypnotherapy, was asked whether she would like to do some lecturing on this subject. When she started these learning programmes, adding lecturing to her portfolio of work wasn't something that she had considered. Another individual, through his client contacts, was asked to run some programmes on consultancy skills and managing conflict, even though he hadn't delivered these types of programmes before. This work opportunity arose because he had invested his *Time* in nurturing a particular client. Another individual, who had invested in developing his knowledge in a specialist area was regularly asked to speak at conferences; a situation that gave him the opportunity to network with and learn from the other conference speakers and delegates. Here then we can observe a pattern whereby the more an individual invests in building certain resources, such as their *Learning & Knowledge Assets*, the bigger the opportunities for a subsequent return on their investment.

### **7.6.3 Managing transitions**

An important factor in being able to cope with life-transitions is that of building appropriate forms of support (Sugarman, 1986). During life-transition individuals often experience a '*Depression phase*' (Hopson and Adams, 1975), whereby they feel "... *a dip in feelings*" which leads to "... *individuals becoming frustrated because they find it difficult to know how to cope with the changes they are experiencing.*" The support available in their *Support Network* during this transition phase can help them cope more effectively. It is for this reason that an increase in socialization activities is often observed when individuals make career transitions (Minor, Slade and Myers, 1991), or make deliberate changes in their lives (Calder, 1989). The findings of this research reinforce this

observation. As individuals' described their experience of the transition into self-employment, invariably they referred to others within their *Support Network* who had provided different forms of support at different points in time. The key forms of support sought during this period by all participating individuals (both male and female) was Informational, Instrumental and Emotional Support.

However, the circumstances surrounding an individual's transition into self-employment affected the *Time* available to draw on, or build, the resources in their support networks. This applied in cases where individuals had been made redundant and hence had not had *Time* to plan their transition into self-employment.

Whilst Emotional Support wasn't necessarily something that individuals requested outright, the conversations that they had with certain people in their network helped build their self-confidence. One individual reported that friends at work had helped reassure her that "*You can do this, because you are good at it*". This support that had helped her address her own self-doubts. A couple of individuals who were already working with external suppliers reported how their self-confidence was boosted from the conversations that they had had with some of these suppliers, particularly where they indicated that they would be interested in purchasing their services.

Despite investing their network resources during the transition into self-employment, some of the men reported how they had not invested as much *Time* for networking to meet companionship needs, since becoming self-employed. Previous research by Tannen (1991) and Calder (1989) provide some clues as to why this might be the case. In her research into the different communication strategies adopted by men and women, Tannen (1991) identified that men seem more comfortable with "report talk" i.e. demonstrating their knowledge and skills by imparting information, whereas women are more comfortable with "rapport talk" i.e. establishing connections and building relationships in order to identify similarities in experience. Calder's (1989) research into the relationship between deliberate change in adults and learning identified that adults draw on a number of resources and adopt different strategies for managing change. However, the men in her

sample differed from the women in that they had fewer intimates whom they drew on as a resource to help them manage change.

#### **7.6.4 Defining personal success criteria**

Chapter 1 showed how career success in traditional career theory is typically associated with a position within a hierarchy (Wilensky, 1960). However, when individuals are no longer follow a traditional career model this raises a question with regard to what constitutes career success. Some writers (Hall, 1986a; Schein 1996) argue that when working in unstructured environments career success needs to focus on internal, i.e. subjective, criteria.

The final part of this chapter sets out the success criteria that these individuals applied to their own careers, once self-employed. These include:

##### **a) A more satisfactory work-life balance**

The phenomenon of work-life balance is a complex one. It has different meanings for different people and it is something that can change over time too. Some examples, drawn from the research data, to indicate the different perspectives of work-life balance include:

*“Sometimes it is good because if I am not doing something in the afternoon I might go off and do something on my boat, or do some writing of my own”.* (Male, early fifties with grown-up children)

*“Lifestyle is important. I need to earn enough for the basics, after that I am looking for free time to enjoy life. I like being able to take Mondays and Fridays off when I want to.”* (Female, living with a partner, in her early forties)

*“I enjoy the lifestyle now. I have more time with the family. There is not so much travelling, or being away from home. I am able to take the children to school and pick them up. I wouldn't change that now.”* (Male, early forties, with school age children)

*“I look for balance over time, being able to choose work which fits in with my lifestyle and pass on work which doesn't fit with my view of success.”* (Female, late thirties, with school-age children)

As these examples indicate although a satisfactory work-life balance, for some individuals, involves having more time to spend with their family, for others it is about not having to work long hours and/or work every day of the week, as they had previously experienced when they had been in traditional employment. For others, work-life balance meant having greater flexibility over how they managed their time rather than necessarily reducing the overall number of hours worked, for example *"I could be at my desk thinking about something and then I would go off and cut the grass, or we [self and wife] go for a walk ... We [self and wife] have lunch about one and we probably don't kick back into action again until three thirty or four. We either go for a walk, or read, or generally take it easy. Then we do another two or three hours after that."* So, as this example illustrates, work-life balance can mean having the choice to break-up the traditional working day, allocating some time to 'work' and some to leisure, depending on work needs and priorities. Underpinning each of these examples of work-life balance is a sense of individuals' feeling that they are in control. Control occurring through having choices about how they make decisions about their working lives in relation to their other life-areas.

Whilst it is often assumed that having a more satisfactory work-life balance is of greater relevance to women with children, because of their multiple roles of wife, mother, and employee, the findings from this research show how achieving a satisfactory work-life balance is just as important for others too e.g. women without children, men with school-age children, as well as those in semi-retirement.

Where achieving a more satisfactory work-life balance had been a key factor when deciding to become self-employed, this criterion informed the decisions that individuals made about their lives, both day-to-day and longer-term. This was particularly the case for three of the women with primary childcare responsibilities, and also for two of the men with children. For others, the benefits of having a more satisfactory work-life balance evolved once self-employed.

Despite having work-life balance as a success-criterion, individuals reported that they had to work at ensuring that they maintained the balance they wanted. Two of the men with young children, for example, reported how achieving a satisfactory work-life balance was something that they had to

continually work at as they experienced tensions between the needs of the family and their need to achieve in their work career. These were individuals who described themselves as businessmen. However, although their business was currently Human Resource Consultancy and Development, they were open to other possible business opportunities.

### **b) Enjoyable and challenging work**

Eleven individuals reported how, at the time when they became self-employed, they were feeling dissatisfied with their career. They reported that this sense of dissatisfaction related to feeling trapped within organisational career structures where career success is constructed by position within a hierarchy. One individual reported that whereas his colleagues associated career success with becoming a Director, he associated career success with *“having the scope to learn and develop”*. Another individual, again male, reported how he had felt *“... cornered in a managerial role”* and another reported how he did not want to work within a (organizational) structure.

One of the indicators that these individuals use to assess their success relates to the level of enjoyment and personal satisfaction gained from their work. Indeed this is one of the ‘soft’ criterion that individuals take into account when making decisions about what work to seek out and/or accept from clients. This approach is encapsulated in the example given by one individual *“How I make decisions about my work is based on the need to enjoy what I am doing. There is no point being self-employed otherwise. If I am asked to do team development programmes, although I can do them, I have this internal dialogue about whether I want to do them”*. The option to choose to turn work away, should the individual choose to do so, wasn’t one that this particular individual, or indeed others, felt was one that they had when they were employees.

Six others also reported how ‘enjoyment factor’ was a criterion that they used to judge their overall success, and hence informed the decisions they made about the type of work that they wanted to do, for example *“... knowing that there is somebody who is going to want me to do work with them and it is the things that I enjoy doing and they are going to pay me for doing it and it keeps us in the life that we enjoy, then we have cracked it.”* (Male in his early sixties)

Three individuals reported that success for them was being in a situation where there was a strong overlap between their areas of interests outside work and within work. This was something which meant that the line between what they consider work, and what is not, becomes somewhat grey at times.

### **c) Personal growth and development**

Five individuals reported how the extent to which they felt that they were learning and growing, at a personal level, was a factor that they associated with success. This drive for personal growth, then informed individuals' approach and attitude to their work, for example *"In any situation I try and get out of it what I can learn from it"* (Male in his mid forties) and *"I don't believe any longer in 'This is the career for me', I do have a purpose, but I don't believe in careers. To me the jobs, that I am doing at the moment, are stepping stones towards my development, rather than towards being a Director of whatever."* (Male in his early fifties)

### **d) Reputation within the field**

Five individuals reported how establishing a credible reputation with clients was an important success criterion for them. This credibility came in a number of ways: being recognised as an authority in a particular area, or being seen as professional in their approach. The outcomes of having a credible reputation are a) gaining repeat business with clients, b) referrals to other clients and c) enhanced view of self (i.e. self-confidence and self-worth).

Four individuals reported how one measure of success for them was linked to the sense of satisfaction that they gained from knowing that they have helped others grow and develop. These were individuals whose work involved working one-to-one with clients.

Individuals referred to a combination of these four 'soft criteria', described above, when reporting on how they judged their overall success once self-employed. These criteria also influenced the decisions that individuals' made as they went about their daily lives. However, as with other decisions that these individuals make about their lives in practice, they have to take multiple criteria into account. They thus find themselves having to balance these 'soft success criteria' with



'hard success criteria'. So whilst these individuals can choose the type of work that want to be doing to fit in with their 'soft success criteria', in practice they balance this with other criteria, These criteria include the need to achieve a particular level of income to support themselves, their families and their business, together with the status of other resources at any given point in time: *"So there is a quality of life decision which gets priority over the actual must do for work. Which is a dilemma. In terms of total life I need to be able to do those things like cycling with the family and working on the allotment. Of course that equates to money. I could only do all of those things if there was enough money".* (Male in his mid forties) and *"For me it [ success] is about receiving enjoyment for the work that I do, while maintaining the level of income that I have at the moment."* (Female in her late thirties)

When gathering details about how individuals constructed success, financial security was reported as being an important over-riding criterion by most of the men with young families, as well as by two of the individuals who were single parents. However, as the status of individuals' *Financial Assets* varied, what constituted financial security differed.

But there were other ways in which individuals judged the financial success of their business as the following example indicates *"Before we turned the corner we had gone down in the red to the tune of around £10,000. So we probably cushioned the start of the business to the best part of £30,000, before it started coming up again. Once it started coming up again, it has gone nicely, sometimes very pleasantly, but nicely pretty much ever since. The measure we use for this, is that there has only been two, maybe three quarters over ten years, in which we were claiming back VAT, rather than paying it in."*

Depending upon the factors that influenced individuals' decision to become self-employed, financial security did not necessarily mean earning more money than when in traditional employment. One individual, who became self-employed at the age of fifty, reported how he and his wife had sat down and worked out how much less they could afford to live on. They used this calculation as a basis for calculating future earnings target.

Three of the men who were investing in their formal learning career at the time the fieldwork was conducted reported how this had put a strain on their ability to keep their *Financial Assets* topped up. The difficulty they encountered was not having sufficient *Time* to allocate to their learning and network to win new business. Two reported how they had had to put their formal learning on hold for a time to enable them to get their business back under control and start bringing in more income. Faced with this situation, their priority was to find more work, irrespective of whether it met their criteria for enjoyment, challenge, or personal development.

## 7.7 Summary

This chapter introduced and applied a tentative resource-based management model as a way of drawing together the key managing activities and strategies that these professionals apply when managing their lives, in the broadest sense. A key managing activity discussed was decision-making given that, once self-employed, individuals discover that they have to make decisions about their lives that they had not had to make previously. One reason for this relates to the structural changes that occur in their lives, for example the changing nature of their work.

This chapter has shown how the type of work that these individuals do can free them from some of the time boundaries associated with traditional work, enabling them to have more flexibility over how they apportion their time between work and their other life-areas. They can choose to weave fee-earning work, and other work, related to the running of their business, alongside domestic work, learning and leisure activities. This avoids these activities having to be squeezed into the gap when the working day is over, as is often the case with traditional employment.

The freedom to have more control over how to apportion time between different life-areas was reported as being an important factor in achieving a more satisfactory work-life balance. It helps to alleviate some of stresses associated with the long hours that many had been used to working in traditional employment. Whilst this may not come as a surprise when considering women's career experience, this finding reinforces what seems to be an emerging trend in careers research relating to men's career expectations.

Some of the threats associated with the self-employed lifestyle have also been discussed. These include: having a volatile flow of income; the ever-present nature of work; the potential for social isolation, leading to psychological stress; the responsibility for resourcing their own learning, but with fewer opportunities for learning as part of the routines of traditional work environments, together with the threat of their intellectual capital being drained by clients and other professionals, without appropriate payments and/or rewards.

The application of the tentative resource-based life-management model has shown how the decisions that these individuals make about their lives are influenced by the status of certain resources e.g. *Financial Assets, Employment Experience, Learning & Knowledge Assets*, as well as their *Support Networks*, at any given point in time. Managing these resources was identified as another key managing activity. Given that these individuals' businesses are knowledge-based, one of the key resources that they have to manage is their *Learning & Knowledge Assets*. Some referred to learning and knowledge-building activities as being so crucial to their livelihood, that they find it difficult to compartmentalise work and learning. This finding seems consistent with Wenger's (1998) assertion that learning should be considered an integral part of individuals' lives, not a separate entity.

The knowledge-building strategies adopted by individuals at different phases of their self-employed career have been drawn together. These include: learning with other professionals through specific work assignments; learning by observing other professionals at work; learning with and from other professionals through networking; learning through explicit knowledge-creating activities; learning through non-work related projects, as well as learning through critical reflection.

Whilst much of these individuals' learning falls into the category of 'informal learning' (Marsick and Watkins, 1990), formal learning was found to be important at different phases of individuals' self-employed career. Despite the cost of resourcing their own learning, eight were participating in a formal learning activity at the time when the fieldwork was carried out. Their motivation for engaging in this form of learning included: learning linked to future plans for their business; to

enhance their formal qualifications in order to meet client expectations regarding the level of qualifications held by consultants.

One of the other key resources that these individuals have to manage discussed in this chapter, is the resource *Support Networks*. Networking has been identified as a key activity for knowledge-based businesses; through networking individuals acquire and develop business critical knowledge (Nonaka, 1991a; Bird, 1994; Davenport and Prusak, 1998), as well as build the necessary contacts to generate future supplies of work. In addition to building intellectual capital, networking was found to be important for building social capital too. Having an appropriate social support network, as other writers have pointed out (Sugarman, 1986; Calder, 1989; Minor, Slade and Myers, 1991; Duck, 1992), is important for the successful management of personal change. The types of networks that these individuals belong to were discussed. These include: professional networks; networks connected to academic institutions; associate networks; small business forums; special interest groups; community groups, as well as personal networks.

Despite networking being critical to the success of their businesses, individuals found a number of associated tensions and threats with this. These include: the cost of networking (as it is a drain on other resources, for example *Time* and *Financial Assets*); the potential threat to intellectual capital through the unethical practices of other self-employed consultants, and clients, as well as the threat of clients being poached by other self-employed consultants. To protect themselves from these threats, some were selective about whom they chose to share certain aspects of their work with, limiting this to a small number of trusted friends and/or colleagues.

Whilst it is difficult to make any broad generalisations, with regard to the success with which individuals managed the threats associated with networking, it seemed that the women in this research found this less problematic. This is possibly because the women perceived networking in a different way to the men. Networking was perceived by the women as a way of developing personal friendships that could possibly lead to a business relationship at some future point. In addition, the women worked on an assumption that there is plenty of work to go around, and thus seemed less cautious about developing collaborative working relationships.

Finally, another key managing activity for these individuals discussed in this chapter is managing change. The ability to manage personal change is an area that several writers in the field of contemporary career theory have argued is an essential skill given the ever-changing world that we now live in (Hall, 1991; Schein, 1996). Prior to self-employment, these individuals had been able to draw on range of resources from within their respective organisations, to help them manage their career. Once self-employed, however, they no longer had access to these resources, leaving them wholly responsible for managing their own careers. A task, as this chapter has shown, requires monitoring and observing the signs for change; developing plans for growth (both for themselves and their business); managing transitions; building and maintaining certain resources, as well as establishing criteria for judging their own career success.

The next chapter sets out the main conclusions from this research, together with the key areas of contribution.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusions and contribution**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This final chapter begins by setting out the main conclusions of this research. It then moves on to discuss the key areas of contribution, limitations and an evaluation of the research. The main areas of contribution of this research fall into three broad categories:

- a) **Methodology:** the application of the Life History Methodology to the study of the careers of one category of flexible workers i.e. self-employed professionals working in the field of Human Resources.
- b) **Literature:** adding to the existing body of knowledge in the field of careers, adult learning (particularly how professionals manage their learning), as well as knowledge management at the individual level.
- c) **Policy making:** raising the implications and opportunities for policy makers. First, the policy implications of adopting flexible working practices as an enabler of work-life-balance are highlighted. Second, the implications and opportunities for providers of learning resources directed at professionals are set out.

The chapter concludes by summarising the key outcomes of the research, together with areas that could be considered for future research.

### **8.2 General conclusions**

#### **The self-employed lifestyle and structural change**

This research has provided insights into how a particular group of individuals, following non-organisational careers, are managing their lives in the broadest sense. They provide exemplars of more recent career models, for example the 'portfolio career' (Handy, 1989); 'boundaryless career' or 'protean career' (Mirvis and Hall, 1994); 'careers as repositories of knowledge' (Bird, 1994) and 'careers as a whole life system' (Schein, 1996); career models that emphasise the subjective experiences of individuals and their careers.

In addition, by taking a broader perspective on what constitutes a career, this research has provided an illustration of Giddens's (1981) notion of the 'duality of structures', drawn from changes within contemporary society. On the one hand, these individuals' career choices have been informed by macro level changes, such as globalisation and changes in technology, and the effect that these have had on the way that organisations structure and manage their businesses. However, there is evidence to suggest that, by choosing more fluid career options, individuals are helping to give shape to these structures too; structural change being brought about by the interactions and negotiations between organisations and individuals.

The research findings also show how freed from some of the existing structures associated with traditional work (both physical and temporal), individuals are able to structure their time in more fluid ways. This enables them to offer a more responsive service to clients, whilst still addressing the needs of their family and other commitments.

A further structural change that accompanies the self-employed lifestyle for these individuals is a change in the categorisation of work. Their work consists of fee-earning work i.e. work that brings in direct income, and non fee-earning work i.e. work which needs to be done to sustain the business, but which does not generate direct income. Examples of this non-fee earning work include: invoicing; completing tax and VAT returns; sales and marketing activities; networking and learning and knowledge-creating activities.

### **Strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with the self-employed lifestyle**

The structural changes discussed above can create both opportunities and tensions for individuals, adding to the complexity of the decisions that they have to make about their lives as a whole. The research has shown how the self-employed lifestyle can have a number of benefits for individuals and their families, for example it can enable individuals to gain a more satisfactory balance between their work and home life. But it has also shown how this lifestyle has a number of associated weaknesses and threats. These are summarised in Table 12 below.

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhanced work-life balance enabling work and home-life to co-exist in a more satisfactory way</li> <li>▪ Greater freedom and control over the way in which time is allocated between the different types of work</li> <li>▪ Individuals can manage their careers using own criteria for success - <i>"It can be what you make of it"</i>.</li> <li>▪ Space to develop other interests e.g. learning, community activities, health management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Peaks and troughs in the supply of work, resulting in volatile income</li> <li>▪ Sole responsibility for managing and resourcing own learning and knowledge assets</li> <li>▪ Less opportunities for learning by 'sitting next to nellie'</li> <li>▪ Ever-present nature of work causing psychological stress</li> <li>▪ Social isolation from working on one's own and not being part of a team</li> <li>▪ Family commitments can restrict the type and location of individuals' work</li> </ul>
<u>Threats</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Possibility of knowledge being depleted and/or becoming obsolete, which can affect future supply of work</li> <li>▪ Competition from other self-employed professionals</li> <li>▪ Networking, whilst important for building contacts and developing knowledge, has number of associated risks which need managing e.g. the issue of protecting one's intellectual property</li> <li>▪ Macro level changes leading to a reduction in supply of work (e.g. changes in the economy and/or in organisational practices)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The breadth of work opportunities that individuals are exposed to can create rich learning ground, for which there is no direct cost</li> <li>▪ Differing personal and familial benefits at different life-stages</li> <li>▪ Opportunities to work in areas that individuals enjoy and find self-actualising</li> </ul>

**Table 12: Strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with the self-employed lifestyle**

If we look more closely at the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with the self-employed lifestyle, set out in Table 12, we can see that they contain a number of paradoxes. First, the self-employed lifestyle can enable individuals to have a more satisfactory balance between their work and home life because of the freedom that this lifestyle can bring. But this needs to be balanced against the volatility of earnings, as well as the possibilities of experiencing psychological stress due to the 'ever present nature of work', particularly where a large percentage



of an individual's work is conducted in their home. In addition, an individual's familial situation can affect the type of work that he, or she, is able to get. This situation can affect their financial assets, employment experience, as well as their learning and knowledge assets.

Second, although individuals have sole responsibility for resourcing their own learning, the nature of their work, as well as the different environments that they are exposed to, can provide rich learning ground. A key managing task however, is choosing which client assignments are likely to be the most fruitful from a learning and knowledge building perspective.

Third, networking, whilst crucial to ensuring a future supply of work and for building intellectual and social capital, can deplete other resources e.g. time, financial assets, even existing knowledge assets. Depending on how much, and with whom, individuals share their 'know how' they can leave their knowledge assets vulnerable to unethical practices, for example plagiarism of their ideas by clients and fellow professionals (thus diminishing their Unique Selling Point), as well as direct poaching of clients by other self-employed professions, whom they have previously collaborated with. On the other hand individuals can find that they are excluded from certain networking forums because of their consultant label. For example some seminars and/or networking forums, targeted at HR practitioners, can exclude consultants to prevent these forums being used as a 'sales platform'.

Although it might appear that the threats associated with the self-employed lifestyle (set out in Table 12) outweigh the opportunities, this is not the case in practice. The research has highlighted the opportunity value of self-employment at different life-stages for both men and women. For those in dual-career families, self-employment can provide an alternative career model at certain phases in an individual's family career. The flexibility of self-employment can make it possible for one partner to continue with his/her career in situations where one of the partner's careers requires them to be mobile.

For those with childcare responsibilities, both male and female, self-employment can enable them to find a more satisfactory balance between their work and family career. The structural changes associated with self-employment (discussed in Chapter 7) can enable individuals to have more control over when and where they work, thus making it easier to combine work and familial roles

for those who want this. However, those with primary childcare responsibilities reported how these responsibilities did influence the decisions that they make about the type of work that they are prepared to take on. This included placing physical boundaries around the locations that they are prepared to work, because of the travel time involved and/or having to be away from home for long periods of time.

For those in later life (aged fifty and above), self-employment can provide an alternative career option to retirement. Three individuals in this research began their self-employed career after taking early retirement. Two had used this opportunity to work in a partnership arrangement with their wives. They reported how self-employment enabled their work and family life to be 'blended in together' rather than these two aspects of their lives being compartmentalised, as had been the case when they had worked in traditional employment. This work arrangement also provided a way, for them, of addressing the social isolation that can be experienced when working independently.

In conclusion, despite the tensions and risks associated with the self-employed lifestyle, these individuals were prepared to make trade-offs because of the broader benefits and opportunities that this lifestyle can offer. This finding is consistent with the conclusion drawn by Mallon (1998) from her research conducted amongst portfolio workers where portfolio working was felt to be sufficiently rewarding to persevere, despite the difficulties and drawbacks encountered. However, it is slightly different to that from the Granger et al (1995) study that categorised the self-employed into one of four types, one of which was 'Trade-offs' i.e. individuals with a need to accommodate the constraints of non-work activities, such as raising a family. Whilst the decision to become self-employed, for some of these individuals, was to enable them to balance work and family needs, this was not the only influencing factor. As we have seen, self-employment can bring different benefits, opportunities and threats at different stages. When making judgements about how to manage these, individuals apply a number of success criteria, both extrinsic and intrinsic.

## **Broader benefits for family life and communities**

In addition to identifying the personal benefits from the self-employed lifestyle, the research has also provided insights into some of the broader benefits for family and community life. A combination of the changing nature of individuals' work, together with where work physically takes place, can bring opportunities for how they structure and manage their time. In the same way as the physical boundaries between work and home can be re-defined when self-employed, so it is with how time can be allocated between fee-earning work and other work, such as domestic work. This situation can lead to changes within familial roles and responsibilities. Some of the men, for example, had chosen to take on more of the familial/domestic responsibilities once self-employed. For example taking/collecting the children to/from school, looking after the children in the school holidays, as well as other domestic work such as the shopping and ironing.

This research has also shown how the nature of self-employed work can create time-spaces within which individuals can choose to allocate to community roles. Some examples include working as a parent-governor at their children's school, helping run a local scout group, or through greater involvement with a local church, or community group. These are all activities that individuals reported that they did not have time for in their previous jobs, because of the long hours and lack of flexibility over their working hours.

Having set out some general conclusions of this research, the next sub-section sets out the key areas of contribution.

### **8.3 Key areas of contribution**

#### **8.3.1 Methodology - application of the Life History Methodology to the study of the lives of self-employed human resource professionals**

Applying the Life History Methodology to the study of the careers of self-employed professionals has enabled the three key components of career theory advocated by the Chicago School of Sociology (Barley, 1989) to be incorporated into the research design. These include: the situational, the relational, as well as chronology. This methodological approach has addressed the limitations of other life/careers research that focuses purely on the point of transition (Granger et al, 1995).

During the research, data was gathered about individuals' background career histories (i.e. their formal learning career, as well as their work and family careers), the transition into self-employment, together with subsequent life transitions. Studying individuals' work career within the context of their whole lives has brought out the complexities and dynamism of their lives, showing how decisions made about one life-area are informed by, as well as inform, those in other life-areas.

Although the Life History Methodology is an established methodology within the Social Sciences for gaining an understanding of individual's lives, set within a broader contextual framework, there is no common way of representing life-history data. The multiple life-line representation used in this research has built on the format used by Farnes (1990) in his research that investigated the place and influence of community education in people's lives. The format developed makes it easy to see: key events in each separate life-area (education and learning career, work and familial career); identify events and/or changes in each separate life-area at the time of certain life-transitions (e.g. the transition into self-employment); identify linkages and inter-relationships across life-areas; illustrate where individuals have experienced dis-continuities in their lives (Marshall, 1987), or have experienced un-conventional career patterns (Super, 1957; Fitzgerald, 1987). In addition, including biographical data in the graphical representation, such as the age at which an individual became self-employed and also how long an individual had been self-employed, makes it easier for the reader to make cross-subject comparisons across different chronological time periods.

One of the possible limitations of this research, already commented on in Chapter 3, is that the sample size (twenty-six) makes it difficult to draw generalisations amongst the wider population. The sample size, however, is comparable to that in other research aimed at building a picture of the life-experiences of a particular social group (Bertaux 1982; Cohen, 1997; Mallon 1999). The data gathering phase of the research continued until it approached a point which Bertaux describes as saturation, whereby "*... the interviews bring again and again the same elements of a recognizable pattern, when subsequent interviews with new persons confirm its presence in everyday life, then*

*the pattern may be considered not merely a fantasy of the researcher but a structuring feature of the actual process.*" Bertaux, 1982, p134).

A further consideration, linked to the potential limitation of the sample size, is the actual gender composition of the sample. Whilst the research design incorporated a mixed gender sample, in practice a larger number of men volunteered to participate in the research than women. This situation ran counter to the researcher's expectations, particularly given Tannen's (1991) observation that men often seem less comfortable with "rapport talk" (i.e. establishing connections and building relationships in order to identify similarities in experience) and Calders' (1989) finding, in her research investigating the relationship between deliberate change in adults and learning, of men having fewer intimates, than women, to draw on as a resource when managing change. The extent to which participating men willingly shared their life experiences, the good parts as well as the downsides, was surprising too in the light of these other writers' observations. My sense was that some were surfacing and voicing thoughts about their careers in a way that they had not done in other contexts.

What effect then, if any, might this imbalance in the gender composition of the sample have had on the overall findings? The findings in Chapter 7, as well as those summarised at the start of this chapter, indicate that there were minimal gender differences in terms of the managing strategies adopted by the men and women in this research, or in terms of the tensions that they experienced. The research has indicated that there are a number of associated benefits, threats and opportunities associated with the self-employed lifestyle, for men and women, and that these can vary at different stages of individuals' lives. Despite these findings, it could be beneficial for the phenomenon of volunteering and disclosure to be explored further in future research, particularly where the research involves a mixed gender sample. This could involve exploring the different motivational factors associated with volunteering to participate in research, for example, volunteers' expected outcomes. In addition, the area of gender-differences in disclosure could be explored further when analysing how men and women utilise the resources in their social networks to help them resolve specific life-issue.

As also argued in Chapter 3, other writers suggest that the goal of qualitative research should be *“To produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation, that is based on, and consistent with, a detailed study of a situation”* (Hammersley, 1993, p93), rather than address the notion of generalizability.

The question remains then of whether a sufficiently coherent, illuminating and trustworthy description of the lives of these self-employed professionals has been given for a) others to be able to draw similar conclusions from the research findings, b) for other researchers to use the findings to make ‘working hypotheses’ for future research of a similar nature (Schofield, 1993) and c) for those who are a part of this world of self-employment to identify with the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with this lifestyle.

In this research the notion of ‘trustworthiness’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Johnson, 1999) has been addressed by a) setting out the contextual background to the research, b) positioning the research within a theoretical framework, c) adopting a systematic approach for the data collection and analysis, using well established methodologies, and d) applying ‘triangulation’ techniques.

### **8.3.2 Contribution to the literature on careers, learning and knowledge**

#### **8.3.2.1 Careers literature**

As background to this research, different theoretical perspectives on careers drawn from the disciplines of Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, as well as Business and Management, have been reviewed. Adopting this multi-disciplinary approach has exposed some of the limitations of existing career theory because of a tendency to adopt a narrow perspective of what constitutes a career. For example in some disciplines (Psychology and Business and Management), the term career has been more narrowly constructed as something that relates to an individual’s working life. Whereas in other disciplines (Sociology), a career is constructed in a much broader sense i.e. as being part of a whole life system.

In addition, much of focus of careers research has been directed at organisational careers, in particular identifying what organisations are doing to support individuals with their career development in the light of the structural changes taking place in the nature of work and

employment (Castells, 1989). This focus has remained despite the criticism that little is still known about the careers of individuals who are working atypically with organisations (Stanworth & Stanworth, 1995; Granger, et al 1995; Mallon, 1998: Employment & Social Affairs, 2000).

This research has gone some way to addressing the existing gap in the literature. In addition, by drawing on different perspectives from other disciplines (such as the literature on learning and knowledge management), it has illuminated the tensions that individuals experience when *managing their careers in today's ever-changing society*.

The experience of individuals in this research indicate that they adopt a holistic approach when making decisions about their career, taking into account needs/requirements in other life-areas, as well as reflecting broader contextual factors. They tend not to confine their decision-making to factors within the work domain. This was evident from the analysis of the factors that had influenced these individuals' decision to become self-employed. Here we saw that they took a wide range of factors into account both macro, meso and micro level.

Macro level factors provided the overall context for change in individuals' lives, these include the general state of the economy, as well as the relationship with employment opportunities. Meso level factors included: organisational plans, structures and working practices. Micro level factors included: familial situation, life-stage, as well as feelings towards current career. These different influencing factors are summarised in Table 13 below.

Level	Domain area	Factors influencing decision to become self-employed
Macro	Employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of employment opportunities in business sector relating to individuals' experience</li> <li>• Opportunities in the employment market for older workers</li> <li>• Longer-term employment trends</li> </ul>
	Health of the economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the economy buoyant, or in recession?</li> </ul>
	Political agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies on deregulation</li> <li>• Extent to which Government policies support entrepreneurship</li> </ul>
Meso	Organisational structures, plans and working practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy re outsourcing of certain services/functions</li> <li>• Existing career structures</li> <li>• Future organisational plans and link with future career opportunities</li> </ul>
Micro	Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of satisfaction with current job</li> <li>• Perception of future career opportunities within current organisation e.g. broadening, or constraining,</li> </ul>
	Education/learning/skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning and knowledge assets</li> <li>• Demand for skills</li> </ul>
	Familial situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age of children/stage of children's education</li> <li>• Husband/wife/partner's career plans</li> <li>• Extent of domestic/familial responsibilities</li> <li>• Location and type of family home</li> <li>• Amount of time wanted/needed with family</li> </ul>
	Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amount of leisure, or non paid work time an individual desires</li> </ul>
	Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Status of current health and link with working conditions/environment</li> </ul>
	Financial circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income needed to support self and/or family</li> <li>• Partner's employment and income</li> <li>• Availability and extent of 'financial buffer' to ease transition</li> </ul>

**Table 13: Multi-level factors influencing individuals' decision to become self-employed**

Table 13 shows how an individual's thoughts about his/her current work situation is only one of a number of factors taken into account when making career decisions. Although some of these factors will be of more relevance to some than others, what they indicate is the breadth of influencing factors that inform career decisions.



Even where individuals are enjoying the work that they do, changes at the macro level, such as a decline in the long-term job opportunities in a particular business sector, can lead them to review their longer-term career plans. Equally, the career options and opportunities provided by organisations can lead to a sense of dis-satisfaction for individuals. Twelve individuals in this research expressed how they felt frustrated and disillusioned with the structures that they had to work within. The findings suggest that this dis-satisfaction went much deeper than simply being dis-satisfied with their current job role. What they seemed to be experiencing was a general dis-satisfaction with the career options offered by organisations.

Several individuals in this research, male and female, described themselves as not being ambitious in the traditional career sense. In other words they were not interested in a career that involved climbing the corporate ladder where success is measured by extrinsic factors such as a position within a hierarchy, or job title. Their reported career preference seems congruent with what Hayes and Hough's (1978) refer to as a boundary activity whereby "... individuals wish to cross an organisational boundary in order to move towards some attractive position or away from an unattractive one." (p92), but where the individual finds him or herself 'Blocked' as they do not want to fit into expected 'career timetabling' stages. So whilst the order and predictability associated with traditional career structures can be motivating for some individuals, for others it can have the opposite effect.

It is not surprising then that when individuals become self-employed they manage their lives in ways that are more consistent with their own model of success. Thus instead of linking career success to purely extrinsic factors (e.g. status, financial rewards) they take intrinsic factors into account (e.g. personal values, meanings and experience, knowledge acquired and utilised).

The criteria that these individuals drew on to assess their career success include: achieving a more satisfactory balance between their work and home-life, so enhanced quality of life; greater personal satisfaction from their work; opportunities for learning, self-development and personal challenge; satisfaction of knowing that they have done a good job; recognition for making a useful

contribution to clients' businesses; feeling of being in control and of being able to live their lives in a way which is congruent with their own personal values.

These intrinsic success criteria are balanced against extrinsic success criteria, such as earning enough money to support themselves and their family. This provides a different perspective to the area of work-life balance with individuals aiming to earn a reasonable income (extrinsic rewards), balanced with opportunities for growth (intrinsic rewards).

The second key area of contribution to the careers literature is the development of a Resource-based Life-Management model to help illuminate the dynamics of these individuals' lives. These include how they make decisions about their working lives, the resources that they draw on and consume, as well as the similarities and differences in the ways in which individuals combine resources to achieve the outcome that they are looking for. An example is that of how in order to develop and/or enhance an existing service for clients, individuals may have to invest in building their learning and knowledge assets. This is something that consumes other resources (e.g. time, money) which then cannot be allocated to other work and/or other life-areas.

Whilst this Resource-based Life-Management model provides a way of representing the complexity and dynamics of the decisions that these individuals make about their lives, day-to-day and longer-term, it does have its limitations. One is that, as it is based on a rational cognitive approach to decision-making, it doesn't readily reflect other criteria that individuals draw on when making decisions e.g. their intuition, their own personal success criteria, or the fact that they actively respond to opportunities that present themselves as they go about their daily lives.

The research findings also bring into question the assertion by other writers (Herriot, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998) that more and more people, in the future, will experience multiple career transitions e.g. a period of organisational employment, followed by a period of self-employment, followed by a return to organisational employment.

Whilst two individuals had returned to traditional employment, having been self-employed for around three years, the majority of the others could not envisage a time when they would want to

return to traditional employment. When asked the direct question '*Do you see self-employment as a long-term career option, or can you see yourself wanting to work for a single organisation again in the future?*', of those who had been self-employed for five years and above (65% of participating individuals), the majority responded that this would not be a career option that they would actively seek out. Two reported that they had been offered a full-time job at different points in their self-employed career but that after considering what this would mean for themselves and their families, had turned the offer down.

The findings from this research suggest that the longer an individual remains self-employed the more attached they become to the lifestyle. Such a situation could make the transition back into traditional employment less attractive. Personal preferences aside, however, changes at the macro level (i.e. economic, political, technology) and at the meso level (i.e. organisational practices) could mean that individuals find themselves in a situation where they have to return to traditional employment in order to protect their livelihood. A change in organisational policy on outsourcing, for example, could affect future supplies of work. Equally a downturn in the economy could affect the money that organisations are willing to invest in developing their staff. This might then affect the supply of work for self-employed human resource professionals. One suggested area for future research, discussed later, would be to investigate the criteria that individuals adopt when considering a career transition back into traditional employment.

### **8.3.2.2 Learning and knowledge literature**

A key focus of this research has been to gain an understanding of how self-employed professionals manage their learning and knowledge. Managing knowledge is perceived as crucial to the success of knowledge-based businesses (de Geus, 1988; Davenport and Prusack, 1998).

Whilst there is an abundance of Knowledge Management literature on the knowledge creation process within organisations setting out the strategies needed for capturing, disseminating and building knowledge assets, there is less available on knowledge management at the individual level. As a way of building an understanding of how self-employed professionals manage their learning and knowledge, a tentative model was developed to help draw out relevant questions to be

asked. The model was informed by different theoretical perspectives on adult participation in learning more broadly, as well as amongst professionals. It helped formulate specific questions to be addressed in the data gathering and analysis phases of the research. The model reflects the importance placed on proactivity in adult learning emphasised by other writers (Knowles, 1975; Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Tough, 1993). It incorporates critical components from Marsick and Watkins (1990) 'Learning Loop', Revans (1982) Action Learning Model and O'Conner and McDermott's 'generative learning' model. The model also makes the link between learning and self-efficacy proposed by other writers (Rogers, 1951; Makin, Cooper and Cox 1996) and it also reflects more recent theoretical perspectives on the relationship between learning and knowledge, particularly the social context for learning (Nonaka 1991a; Bird, 1994; Wenger 1998; Kilpatrick et al 1998).

The research has addressed the questions of a) What types of knowledge do self-employed professionals need and b) What strategies do they adopt for managing their knowledge? The findings indicate that the types of knowledge that these individuals have to acquire, varies in relation to the different categories of work that they do (i.e. fee-earning work versus non fee-earning work), and over time. Individuals reported how one area of 'vertical learning' occurred when they first became self-employed related to the non fee-earning aspect of their work. The more common gaps in individuals' knowledge, during this transition period, included: how to market their business; how to prepare client proposals; how to develop client relationships; how to manage the legal requirements of running a small business (e.g. tax and VAT), and how to set up and run a home-office, including the information and communications technology infrastructure.

The need to continuously develop their knowledge throughout their self-employed career is equally evident in the research findings. Building and replenishing their knowledge assets is crucial for ensuring a continuous supply of work. However, how individuals set about managing their *Learning and Knowledge Assets* is far more dynamic than might be assumed. The findings show that they utilise both formal and informal learning approaches at different times depending upon their learning needs. The decisions that these individuals make when and how much to invest in

their learning are closely tied to events and priorities in other life-areas, as well as the status of certain resources, at any given point in time.

The informal learning approaches adopted by individuals fall into six categories:

- a) Learning by observing other professionals at work.
- b) Learning with other professionals through specific work assignments.
- c) Learning with, and from, other professionals through networking e.g. attending both formal and informal network events.
- d) Learning through 'explicit' knowledge-generating activities e.g. seeking out a piece of work where the individual has limited existing knowledge and hence requires some background research, or reading Human Resources or Management journals.
- e) Learning through non-work related projects/activities e.g. through volunteering for work on community related projects.
- f) Learning through critical reflection.

Whilst many did not set aside a separate budget for building their *Learning and Knowledge Assets*, they were prepared to allocate time to learning. Indeed the volatile nature of their work means that they often have periods of time when they are without fee-earning work. This is time which can then be allocated to learning and knowledge-creating activities, should the individual choose to.

Formal learning also has its place to play in these individuals' lives at strategic points. Having reported that the cost of learning can be a barrier for these individuals, ten were participating in a formal learning activity at the time when the fieldwork was carried out. These include: a further degree, a higher degree, or vocational level qualifications. Each of these learning activities involves a considerable investment in both time and money. In financial terms, the costs ranged from £3,500 to £25,000. Other formal learning activities that they had participated in included short professional

development courses aimed at developing specialist knowledge linked to their work with clients, or to gain accreditation to use certain tools in their work e.g. psychometric tests.

For eight of the individuals in this research it was their formal learning career that had provided a bridge between their earlier work career (which hadn't been in Human Resources) and their self-employed career.

Whilst other writers (Marsick and Watkins, 1990) argue that the learning content for professionals is shaped/directed by the requirements of their professional body, this research suggests that the reference points for these individuals are much broader. They include:

- a) 'Self-identified' learning needs. These is learning identified through critical reflection, strategic planning (including learning that is linked to their observations of changes in the world of business and/or work), as well as direct comparison of their own knowledge relative to that of other self-employed professionals.
- b) 'Other-identified' learning needs. This is learning linked to meeting the legal requirements of running a small business (e.g. taxation and company law), or clients expectations of the level of qualifications the consultants whom they engage should have.

Another important consideration that individuals took into account when making decisions about whether and when to invest in formal learning related to the expected goals and outcomes of a particular learning activity. A key anticipated benefit from their investment in formal learning was that of gaining more client work, as a result of the specialist knowledge acquired.

### **8.3.3 Implications for policy making**

#### **Policies on flexible working as an enabler of work-life-balance**

This research has been set within the context of the changing nature of organisational forms and structures, and ways of working, in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain. The documentary sources drawn on for this research have indicated how organisations have adopted new structures and ways of working to survive in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. These new ways of working have included the introduction of different forms of flexible working practices, for example part-

time working, teleworking, fixed-term contracts, Associate Schemes, as well as outsourcing. These documentary sources indicate that organisations haven't always introduced flexible working practices for economic reasons, or to enhance organisational flexibility and efficiency but, in some instances, have done so in response to requests from employees to reduce their working hours and introduce family-friendly flexible working practices (Wedderburn, 1995; DfEE, 1997).

Chapter 1 discussed how in the latter part of the 1990s, organisations, and the Government, have come under increasing pressure to introduce policies to address the long-hours culture that many consider to be dominating business life. In March 2000 the Government launched its Work-Life Balance Challenge Project aimed at raising awareness of the cost to industry and society of the long-hours culture. In addition practical support, in the form of funding for organisations wanting to introduce changes under the work-life balance umbrella, has been provided through the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund.

The need to address the issue of work-life balance has become a strategic priority particularly in organisations struggling to attract and retain skilled employees. As there is no easy solution, a number of leading organisations have begun working in partnership in this area and have formed the Employers Forum for Work-Life Balance as a way of pooling their knowledge on ways of delivering solutions to the tensions of work-life-balance.

The findings of this research are thus timely because of the insights that they provide about how individuals construct work-life balance. They show that individuals hold different perspectives on what constitutes work-life balance. These include: having more control over how they manage their working time, choosing to inter-weave paid work, domestic work, leisure and learning, during the traditional working day; being able to make choices about when and where they work; having more choice over the type of work that they do, for example balancing routine work with work that is more challenging and stretching, as well as balancing work that can be done in the home with work that takes place outside the home. All of these examples provide a broader perspective on how individuals construct work-life balance.

One of the lessons for organisations is that if they want to ensure that their policies are really effective, they need to embrace the different perspectives of work-life-balance captured by this research. This suggests that the policies they introduce need to go much further than the introduction of Family Friendly Policies and more traditional forms of flexible working as these may not necessarily lead to a more satisfactory work-life balance. They will need to think more creatively about the types of policies and practices that will enable individuals achieve the sort of balance that they are looking for rather than adopting 'a one size fits all' approach. This will involve combining different forms of flexible working practices to allow people to have similar choices over where, when and how much they work, as those open to the professionals who have participated in this research, as well as paying attention to the content of individuals' work.

The introduction of more flexible work options may not necessarily lead to a reduction in the number of hours worked. Instead it may enable a redistribution of time between work and non-work activities thereby helping individual achieve the balance that they are seeking at different phases in their lives. As this research has shown, self-employed professionals can chose to apportion time between domestic work, leisure, community work and learning during what is considered the traditional working day. The downside of having this kind of choice, however, is that individuals can find that there are no boundaries between work and home-life, depending on how they organise and manage their time. This type of situation requires careful management in order not to create tensions of a different nature.

Another key finding from this research, which could prove of value to organisations striving to enhance their flexibility, is the insights into why individuals chose self-employment as a career option. Despite the increasing availability of part-time work in organisations, discussed in Chapter 1, individuals in this research had discounted this option for several reasons.

First, those who were trainers felt that as their work did not fit with traditional part-time work patterns as it often involved working long hours in the training room, often combined with working away from home. For these individuals traditional part-time working did not meet the level of flexibility that they sought. One individual (female) summed up the level of flexibility that she



sought as being "... *it [work] fits in around me, rather than me around it.*" She was not untypical in her needs. Even though the hours spent in the training room, once self-employed, can still be long, individuals can choose to take time off between training assignments, or to work shorter hours at other times, as they make the overall decisions about how much and when to work.

Second, the financial penalties associated with part-time working were seen as too restrictive. The women in particular had calculated how self-employment would be more financially viable than traditional part-time work. This was despite the known volatility of earnings from self-employment.

The research findings suggest that self-employment is also more financially viable for men who are looking for greater flexibility over their working time. One individual reported how after being made redundant from his teaching role after twenty-five years, he was offered a part-time teaching job with a salary that was less than the £20,000 he had earned in his first year of self-employment.

Third, individuals were concerned about the lack of career development opportunities should they choose traditional part-time work and of being overlooked for assignments that would enhance their overall skills and knowledge.

Fourth, the gender segregation of the part-time workforce means that there are limited options for men who want to work part-time to combine work and family roles. Although on the increase, the number of men working part-time in organisations is still relatively low compared with the number of women who work part-time (Dex and McCulloch, 1995).

These insights could help organisations struggling to recruit and retain skilled employees in today's increasingly competitive marketplace to revise their HR policies in the areas of: working practices; reward and remuneration; career management, and training and development. In addition they could be valuable when trying to attract individuals with different employment backgrounds and experiences.

Finally the research findings also indicate that the terms full-time and part-time, used by organisations and other institutions (e.g. government departments) to categorise workers and report

on employment statistics, have little meaning for self-employed professionals. The way in which they structure and plan their use of time is far more fluid than the full-time/part-time distinction.

### **Policies relating to the provision of learning resources for those following independent careers**

One of the key themes of this research has been about learning. At a personal level, one area of learning has been about investigating and making sense of changes that have occurred in the world of work and employment, over the past ten to twenty years, and the impact that these changes are having on the lives of a particular group of individuals (i.e. self-employed HR professionals).

Despite being part of the self-employed HR community when I started this doctoral research my experience and knowledge of this field was limited, as I had only been self-employed for about a year at that time. Prior to this time period I had worked for fifteen years in the IT sector, with the majority of those years being spent working for one organisation. When the organisation re-structured, at the beginning of the 1990s, I took voluntary redundancy and used this as an opportunity to return to full-time education. My career move into self-employment had not been planned; instead it arose in response to opportunities presented to me after graduating.

There were, however, similarities in my own career background to that of participating individuals. First, I had become self-employed in my mid-thirties – the age at which the majority of participants had become self-employed. Second, like some of the participants, my career move had involved a change in career discipline (from a managerial career to HR professional) and occupational status (from employee to self-employed). Third, like eight of the participants in this research, it was my recent formal educational experience that had provided a bridge between my previous work career and self-employed career.

Having come to end of this doctoral research one area for me to reflect on is in what way might my own career background and situation have influenced the research approach and outcomes. Like other researchers, one of the areas that I have had to pay attention to is the issue of objectivity (i.e. not allowing my own personal experience and values to interfere with the inquiry). Objectivity is something that is considered to be potentially more problematic for researchers who, like myself,

are considered insiders. However, in terms of my own experience, it could be argued that I was not really an insider when I started this research given that I had limited personal experience of self-employment, or indeed of working in the field of HR. In effect, I was learning about the self-employed lifestyle from participants, as well as experientially. An important question to reflect on is at what point did I become an insider. Certainly when I started this research I was not particularly attached to the self-employed career model. It was a combination of family circumstances (my daughter was pre-school age) and personal career needs that steered me to take up this career option. However, over the seven years that I have been self-employed my attachment to this lifestyle has grown and I would now categorise myself as the career type 'self-employed convert' (Granger et al, 1995). What I have come to value, over this time period, is the flexibility that this career option can offer. It has enabled me to balance my changing work and family needs, and develop a career where the different strands of my life (i.e. work, family, education, and community work) can more easily co-exist.

Given my own personal situation at the start of this research journey I did not perceive the area of objectivity as being particularly problematic, however as the research journey evolved, as well as my own experience of self-employment, I have become more aware of the need to attend to this. In Chapter 3, for example, I reported how it was feedback from fellow researchers at a 'Work in Progress' seminar that led me to re-visit the way in which I identified participants. It was suggested that by removing the reliance on contacts within my own personal network that this could minimise any potential biases in the research sample. Feedback from my Supervisor, and other post-graduate researchers, during the analysis phase of the research helped me to question whether I was presenting an over-optimistic (i.e. one-sided) view of self-employment. By this stage of the research I had been self-employed for around four years and was thus more experienced, and attached, to working and living in this way myself. It was at this point that I had to revisit whether my analysis was providing a balanced view of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with the self-employed lifestyle. One of the lessons learnt from this experience then is that the issue of objectivity is something that needs re-visiting as part of the 'research cycling process' (Heron, 1996).

Another area of personal learning has been in developing the skills associated with conducting academic research. I have been through what in the knowledge discourse could be termed an 'apprenticeship period' which has involved me developing my research skills, supported by the critical questioning and helpful steer from my supervisor, as well as other post-graduate research students.

The individuals who have participated in this research have learnt too. Those interviewed more than once, or with whom I have discussed specific findings, have told me how beneficial these 'learning conversations' have been. As the findings show, learning from the experience of others is one of the key ways in which professionals learn. The opportunity to read how others in similar life-situations are managing their lives could provide a valuable learning resource, providing a similar learning resource to other biographical work. In addition I have learnt from the life-experiences that participants have shared with me.

The tensions, reported in this research, that self-employed professionals encounter when managing their learning could provide useful pointers for learning institutions. This could help them rethink the learning resources and products aimed at self-employed professionals.

One reported tension is that even though much of these individuals' learning falls into the category of informal learning there are times, as shown in this research, when they have a need to participate in formal learning. However the volatile nature of their work means that they look for flexible learning solutions (both in time, location and cost) where they can have control over the learning content and outcomes, as well as provide opportunities to learn from other professionals. Whilst open and distance learning solutions do provide a flexible learning resource, these do not always offer is the opportunity for learning directly with and from other professionals or to build social capital. As the research findings indicate, one of the tensions experienced by those following an independent career is the lack of opportunities for gaining detailed feedback on their performance. Often the only feedback that they get, to indicate that they have done a good job, is being asked back by a client to do a further piece of work. However, this type of feedback has its limitations, as it does not provide the qualitative data on which to plan future development.

Several individuals reported how the Learning Set approach has been a particularly useful learning medium for them. It has enabled them to maintain control over the learning content and outcomes, but at the same time gain both support and challenge from their peers. This learning approach has the potential to help individuals review and gain feedback on their performance. This is something that is often not possible in their day-to-day interactions with clients.

Given the current interest in learning as a social phenomenon (Wenger, 1998), traditional learning providers could perhaps consider how to combine the development of human and social capital within a single learning programme aimed at those following independent careers. Given that the self-employed can be excluded from organisational learning communities, and they do not seem to come into the target market of the University for Industry (Robertson, 1998), this leaves a gap in the resources that they can easily draw on to facilitate their learning. With the preference for informal learning, cited by most of the professionals in this research, it may be that this type of learning resource could be offered separately to that already available on existing qualifications' programmes. This type of learning support could create opportunities for self-employed professionals to reflect, with the challenge and support of other professionals, on the learning associated with a 'live' client project, thereby making a direct contribution to the quality of their work. Learning institutions could perhaps also consider offering the flexibility to take forward the learning from these informal learning groups by providing a means to accredit this learning towards a formal qualification at a future point in time.

The question remains, however, of how much would self-employed professionals be prepared to pay for this type of learning provision given that the cost of learning can be a restraining factor for them. A related question is to what extent should these individuals be expected to resource their own learning. Other writers (Hyland and Matlay, 1997) argue that despite small businesses playing an important role in the economy their needs seem to have been overlooked in government policy on vocational education and training. Should their learning be subsidised in some way, either directly through the provision of learning grants or reduced fee structures, or indirectly, through larger tax breaks to help fund the cost of their learning, or even tax credits where individuals subsequently apply their knowledge through some form of voluntary work in the community. This

research has highlighted the mutual benefits of volunteering for communities and individuals, as this results in the mutual development of intellectual capital. Is there, as Hyland and Matlay (1997) argue, a need to provide selective financial support and incentives for educational institutions and training providers who provide training that will appeal to the small firm/self-employed?

In addition, to what extent should employers be expected to subsidise and/or support these individuals' learning, as is currently the case for other categories of flexible workers such as part-time workers. A final consideration for policy makers is that of the longer-term implications of the self-employed lifestyle for individual, corporate and societal learning and knowledge.

#### **8.4 Recommendations for future research**

Although this research has gone some way to filling the gap, highlighted by others writers (Stanworth & Stanworth, 1995; Granger, et al 1995; Mallon, 1998: Employment & Social Affairs, 2000), regarding how little is known about the lives of individuals following more independent careers, particularly the self-employed, the research could be further developed in a number of ways.

##### **a) Longitudinal research with the same sample**

One area for further research would be to re-interview individuals from the original sample, at some future point in time, possibly five and/or ten years on. This could provide an opportunity to identify the impact of self-employment on their lives, and their resources, over time. Some specific questions to consider could include: Are they still self-employed? Are there any changes in the type of work that they do? What specific investments have they made in their learning and knowledge development? What impact, if any, has the latest global recession had on their lives? What threats and opportunities has this presented?

Additional research with the same sample could perhaps provide empirical data to support the transitioning theory proposed by other writers (Herriot, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998), i.e. where self-employment is one of a number of possible career transitions that individuals in the future can expect to make. If this were found to be the case, then this could help provide answers to questions such as: What factors influence individuals' return to traditional employment at a particular point in

time? Are these similar or different to the factors that informed their decision to become self-employed? What criteria do they apply when selecting a future employer, following a period of self-employment? What are their expectations regarding the psychological contract of employment? What learning was required to make the transition back into traditional employment?

### **b) Additional research with a different sample, drawn from the same professional discipline**

Extending the inquiry to a larger sample, drawn from the same professional discipline, could provide further examples of the changing distribution of time between fee-earning work, non fee-earning work and other work (e.g. domestic and community work), uncovered in this research.

An additional methodological approach that could be considered for this extended enquiry would be to ask participants to keep a diary indicating the actual amount of time allocated to different forms of work over a defined time period. This could include the overall number of hours worked in any given week, broken down into the amount of time spent working at home and the amount of time spent working outside the home, together with a breakdown of the tasks carried out.

To gain further insights into the tensions and opportunities of the self-employed lifestyle, consideration could be given to including other family members in the research, gaining their input and perspective.

### **c) Additional research using the same methodologies, but drawn from a sample from other professional disciplines**

One way of establishing the generalizability of the research findings would be to apply the same methodological approach, but to a different sample, for example self-employed professionals working in the IT industry, or in the media (e.g. advertising, public relations). Some questions to be considered in this additional research include: To what extent do self-employed professionals, working in these other sectors, have the same scope for flexibility over how they apportion their time between fee-earning work and other work? Do they experience similar tensions and opportunities in their lives? How do they manage their resources, in particular their learning and knowledge assets?

#### **d) Additional research to identify the broader benefits of self-employment for those in later life**

Over the past twenty years there has been a general decline in the activity rates amongst men and women aged fifty and above, within the labour market (Disney et al 1995). The Disney et al study found that older workers can experience many labour market transitions before retirement, at state pension age. However, the practice of discriminating against older workers in the employment market means that those aged fifty and above can experience barriers to re-entry (Worsley, 1996).

This research has indicated how self-employment can provide an alternative career option, other than early retirement for individuals in a later stage of their career, enhancing their quality of life. However, as the number of individuals in this research who fall into the category of older workers was small, five in total, future research could consider including a larger sample drawn from this age cohort to establish further benefits of this career choice.

### **8.5 Summary**

This chapter has set out the main conclusions and contribution of this research. The conclusions have drawn together the main strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with the self-employed lifestyle. One of the key benefits of the self-employed lifestyle is being able to have a more satisfactory balance between their work and other life-areas, where this is important to them. Whilst it could be assumed that this would be more important for women, given their multiple roles of wives, mothers and workers, this does not reflect the actual picture. Having flexibility over when, how much and where they work was reported as being equally important for some of the men in this research, particularly those with children. For some, this had been an important influencing factor when deciding to become self-employed.

The threats and opportunities associated with the self-employed lifestyle have also been discussed, including some of the inherent paradoxes. An example is that, despite the fact that individuals have to resource their own learning, the nature of their work, combined with the different environments that they are exposed to, can provide rich learning ground, often at minimal cost. The more individuals invest in certain resources, particularly their learning and knowledge, the more it seems that they are able to shape and influence future work opportunities.



The main areas of contribution, discussed in this chapter, fall into three areas. First, the application of the Life History Methodology to the study of the lives of self-employed Human Resource Professionals, enabling factual and subjective data about their lifestyle to be collected and presented in a sufficiently detailed way for those inhabiting the world of self-employment to identify with, and for those conducting future research in this area to develop further enquiries. This methodological approach has encapsulated the three critical components of careers theory identified by the Chicago School of Sociology (Barley, 1989), which includes: the situational, the relational, as well as chronological.

Second, contribution to the literature on careers, learning and knowledge creation, at the individual level, drawing attention in particular to the strategies that self-employed professionals draw on when building their *Learning & Knowledge Assets*.

Third, setting out the implications and opportunities of the research findings for policy makers. First by providing a different perspective on the phenomenon of work-life-balance, something that is currently very topical within organisations and Government, the findings could help policy makers rethink the policies and support available to help address the tensions of work-life-balance within the workplace. The second area of contribution to policy making relates to suggestions for the provision of learning resources aimed at professionals following independent careers.

Despite the weaknesses and threats, associated with the self-employed lifestyle, an unanswered question from this research is whether the opportunity value of this lifestyle is likely to deter individuals from returning to traditional employment at a future point. The whole area of career transitioning between self-employment and traditional employment, a career pattern that other writers (Carter and Cannon, 1988; Herriot, Hirsch and Reilly, 1998) argue that we will see more of in the future, is one that would be worthy of further in-depth and wider research. Other suggested areas for further research include: carrying out longitudinal research with the same sample; additional research with a larger sample drawn from the same professional discipline; additional research with a sample drawn from other professional disciplines, using the same methodologies

and finally further research to ascertain the broader benefits of self-employment for those in later life.

In conclusion, when studying the lives of individuals following more independent careers, there are a number of possible dimensions and outcomes that the researcher might consider. These include a) illuminating the subjective experience of individuals' lives b) the household characteristics of individuals working atypically c) the implications for communities and society more broadly and d) the impact on individuals' intellectual and social capital.

Whilst this research has not been able to address all of these areas in equal depth, it has contributed something to the existing body of knowledge in each of these areas. Its particular strength has been in drawing out the complexity and dynamics of the lives of a group of self-employed professionals, who provide exemplars of new knowledge-based businesses. By taking a broader perspective of the term career the research has illuminated how the decisions that individuals make about their work career is balanced with the needs and demands from other life-areas e.g. family and learning, together with the availability of key resources. It has presented a balanced view of the opportunities and the downsides associated with this career option.

However, as the research was based on a relatively small sample (twenty-six participants) this could lead to questions regarding the reliability of the findings, in particular the generalizability of the findings. Recognising this as a possible limitation, steps were taken during the research design to address the known limitations of research based on the constructivist approach. These include: situating the research in a contextual framework; applying triangulation techniques, as well as providing a sufficiently detailed account of the findings for other researchers to make working hypotheses for future research. Finally, despite the possible limitations of this research due to its scale the benefits from a learning perspective for the researcher, participating individuals, as well as policy makers, have been considerable.

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## **Appendix 1: Introductory letter for participants**

### **Ph.D Research Project**

**The changing nature of employment: How Self-employed professionals manage their lives, learning and knowledge**

#### **Why am I writing to you?**

I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to participate in a piece of research that I am conducting for my Ph.D. I am studying part-time for a PhD with the Open University.

The research is concerned with finding out how self-employed professionals are managing their careers. I am interested in uncovering what it feels like to be part of the world of self-employment, including your transition into self-employment, how you manage the relationship between work and other aspects of your life, and your approach to learning and knowledge development.

Structural changes within organisations in the 1980s and 1990s have created different career opportunities for individuals, including the opportunity for individuals to work independently through self-employment, or other flexible work contracts. While there has been much interest in studying the impact of these structural changes on organisational careers I feel that the interests of those who have chosen a more independent career is largely unexplored territory.

The theme of my research has struck a chord with self-employed professionals whom I have spoken with informally. This has helped them surface some of their own thoughts about how they see their lives now. Although adopting a more independent work career is a time of great enjoyment for individuals. This enjoyment can be coupled with uncertainty and feelings of self-doubt. When working within organisations there are often systems in place that individuals can hook into to help them address similar tensions, however when working for oneself individuals often have to re-create these systems for themselves. This raises questions such as 'Who acts as the 'third pair of eyes' to provide feedback? and 'What replaces the support provided by the coffee-lounge conversations, or the chance conversations in corridors which can lead to knowledge development?'

#### **Who am I?**

I am Christina Evans. I work for myself and have been doing so since I graduated with a degree in psychology three years ago. My work career now includes research, consultancy, and some training in areas relating to personal and career development. So I am interested in connecting with individuals in related fields. In addition to being a student I am a wife, mother and daughter.

Six years ago I gave up a career working within the IT division of a large retail organisation. After 13 years I felt that my career wasn't going in the direction that I wanted it to go. My chosen area of study is thus very important to me in my own life right now.

## **What would participating in this research involve?**

I would like for us to be able to agree to meet to talk a few times so that we can explore in some depth your responses to my research questions, some of which I have outlined above. I would imagine an initial interview of around an hour and a half. From this I would write up what have discussed and then send this back to you to you for comments. We may then need to meet or talk again to explore some points further.

When I get to the stage of my research when I will be trying to make sense of the data then I would like to be able to meet with you again, as a way of checking out my interpretations. I would envisage that this discussion would be of benefit to you too as I would then be in a position to share some of my material with you (subject to constraints re confidentiality). Gaining insights into how others are making sense of their lives may help you think differently about your own.

At the initial meeting I would want to discuss and agree with you the extent to which the information that you share with me will remain confidential. As I will be asking you to talk about your life in some detail I feel that it is important that we should have a discussion about this.

## **Next steps?**

If you feel that you can help me with my research, then please would you contact me by telephone on 0181-891 3679, or write to me at 59, Cole Park Road, Twickenham, Middlesex, TW1 1HT.

If you know of someone else who could help me then please pass this letter of invitation on. Like your, they would need to be someone who is a self-employed professional working as a Human Resources consultant, or trainer. I am keen to hear about the experiences of men and women.

I hope we get an opportunity to meet in person.

Christina Evans  
April 1997



## **Appendix 2: Interview questions used in the main research phase**

### **The changing nature of employment: How self-employed professionals manage their lives, learning and knowledge**

#### **Interview Questions**

- 1. I am interested in how you are managing your life as a self-employed ( ) but first I would like to hear about how you became self-employed.**
  - 1a** What was happening in your life at the time when you made the change? (Interested in planned vs forced choice and incubation period)
  - 1b** What were some of the options that you considered and then discounted? How did you decide?
  - 1c** Who helped you decide? (Beginnings of support network) Were these the same people who have helped you make other major life decisions?
  
- 2. What new skills, knowledge or behaviours have you had to develop since becoming self-employed? How have you learned these?**
  
- 3. How do you make decisions about your work now? What factors do you take into account? For example, what type, how much, degree of stretch, where and when?**
  - 3a** How do you divide your time between work, family, leisure, learning? Are you happy with this division as it stands right now?
  - 3b** Do you try and compartmentalise your work career from the other parts of your life? How, in what ways?
  
- 4. How do you decide when and how much to invest in your own development?**
  - 4a** Are you taking part in any formal learning activity at the moment? If so, what is this and how important is this to you?
  - 4b** What prompted you to learn this?
  - 4c** What impact is this learning activity having on the other strands of your life?
  - 4d** What are some of the other ways in which you continue to develop yourself?
  - 4e** Do you have a development budget for yourself? How do you decide what this should be?
  
- 5. Are you a member of any formal networks? If so what are these?**
  - 5a** Are these the same/different to those that you belonged to when you were working for an organisation?
  - 5b** What are the different forms of support that you receive from the individuals within these networks?

**5c** Does the support received from these networks replace the support which you had when you were working within an organisation?

**5d** Are there support systems, mechanisms that you miss as a result of not working within one organisation? If so, what are these? (Collaboration vs rivalry)  
Have you sought out alternative ways of getting this type of support?

**6. What changes or adjustments have you had to make in the rest of your life as a result of being self-employed?**

**6a** How has it affected family, friends, finances, hobbies etc?

**7. What does success mean for you now?**

**7a** What sort of things are important to you? (Sources of enjoyment, challenge, rewards?) **7b** Have these always been as important to you?

**7c** What sort of things help you to remain successful at what you do? (Self-regeneration cycle)

**7d** Do you use others to help you remain successful at what you do? How, in what ways? (Add to picture of their social support network).

**8. What plans do you have for your work career going forward?**

**8a** What is the picture looking like?

**8b** Do you see self-employment as a long-term option, or can you see yourself wanting to work for a single organisation again at some stage in the future?

**8c** How will you notice the signs that it is time to make a change?

**Personal and family details**

- 1 Date of birth and age
- 2 Family information  
Married/partner? If Yes, for how long?  
If children, gender and ages
- 3 Education  
Early educational background  
Higher educational achievements
  - date completed first degree and subject
  - date completed higher degree and subject
- 4 Summary of previous traditional employment i.e. types of organisation and how long with each
- 5 Since becoming self-employed have you developed associations with any community groups? If so in what way?
- 6 Since becoming self-employed have you extended your leisure activities? If so what are these?

### Biographical Details of Participating Individuals - Initial Research Phase

No.	Gender	Age	Familial situation <sup>1</sup>	No. of years self-employed	Age when self-employed	Self-emp Career - choice or forced?	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Further formal learning	Currently studying?	Professional association
1	M	45	M, C (2)	7	38	Choice	No	Diploma in Nursing Post-grad Cert in Adult Ed Diploma in Humanistic Psych	PhD	Institute of Directors
2	F	50	M	5	45	Choice	Combined Studies	MSc Occupational Psychology		
3	M	51	S, C (2)	2	49	Choice	No	MSc in Training		MIPD
4	F	43	P	6	37	Choice	Economics			
5	M	35	M	1	34	Choice	Biology	PGCE, MBA		
6	M	45	S, C (2)	7	44	Choice	Economics	PhD		Psychotherapy

#### Notes

1. Familial situation codes : M (married), P (lives with partner), S (separated from wife or partner), Si (Single) C (children, number of in brackets)

**Biographical Details of Participating Individuals - Main Research Phase**

No.	Gender	Age	Familial situation	No. of years Self-employed	Age when self-employed	Self-emp Career - Choice or forced?	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Further formal learning	Currently studying?	Professional association
1	M	42	M, C (2)	4	38	Choice	Accountancy		Dip in Psychotherapy	
2	F	39	Si, C (2)	3.5	35	Choice	Psychology	MBA		
3	M	45	S, C (1)	7	38	Choice	Teacher Training	Dip in Man. MA in Man. Learning	PhD	
4	M	37	M, C (2)	6	31	Redundant	Combined Studies		PhD	MIPD
5	M	39	M, C (3)	3	36	Choice	Theology	MSc in Man Dev + Training		
6	F	39	P	7	32	Redundant	Economics	Counselling Skills + Cert in Hypnotherapy	Dip in Hypnotherapy	AIPD
7	M	52	S	8	42	Choice	No	Cert. in Counselling DMS, DipNLP		
8	M	45	M, C (3)	4	41	Redundant	Geology			
9	F	40	M, C (3)	2	38	Choice	History		MSc in Career Counselling	MIPD
10	F	36	M, C (1)	3	33	Choice	Sociology	MBA (OU)		
11	M	51	M, C (2)	1	50	Redundant	Sociology	DMS		FIPD

**Biographical Details of Participating Individuals - Initial Research Phase**

No.	Gender	Age	Familial situation <sup>1</sup>	No. of years self-employed	Age when self-employed	Self-emp Career - choice or forced?	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Further formal learning	Currently studying?	Professional association
1	M	45	M, C (2)	7	38	Choice	No	Diploma in Nursing Post-grad Cert in Adult Ed Diploma in Humanistic Psych	PhD	Institute of Directors
2	F	50	M	5	45	Choice	Combined Studies	MSc Occupational Psychology		
3	M	51	S, C (2)	2	49	Choice	No	MSc in Training		MIPD
4	F	43	P	6	37	Choice	Economics			
5	M	35	M	1	34	Choice	Biology	PGCE, MBA		
6	M	45	S, C (2)	7	44	Choice	Economics	PhD		Psychotherapy

**Notes**

1. Familial situation codes: M (married), P (lives with partner), S (separated from wife or partner), Si (Single) C (children, number of in brackets)

No.	Gender	Age	Familial situation	No. of years self-employed	Age when self-employed	Self-emp Career - Choice or forced?	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Further formal learning	Currently studying?	Professional association
12	M	62	M, C (2)	11	51	Choice	OU (Psych)			BPS - Chartered Psychologist
13	M	58	P, C (2)	5	53	Choice	OU	MSc - Education Management	PhD	
14	M	50	M, C (2)	4	46	Choice	Engineering + Economics	MA (Oxen)		FICE, FIPD
15	M	60	M, C (3)	15	45	Redundant	BSc Education	PhD (OU)		BPS - Chartered Psychologist
16	M	42	M	5	39	Choice	BSc Management Studies		OU degree - Psychology	
17	M	55	M	7	48	Choice	BSc Architecture	MBA		
18	F	40	M, C (1)	15	25	Choice			OU degree - general	AIPD
19	F	41	M	3	38	Redundant	Accountancy	MBA		AIPD
20	F	29	Single	1.5	27	Choice	Unknown		MA in Higher + Profess Ed.	AIPD

### Notes

1. Familial situation codes: M (married), P (lives with partner), S (separated from wife or partner), Si (Single), C (children, numbers of in brackets)