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BEST CAREER MEMORIES OF RETIRED PEOPLE: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Best Career Memories of Retired People: A Retrospective Study

In the Human Resources field, it has been understood that stories can place value on career research. This thesis aims to explore the best memories retired people invoke when asked about their career stories. The literature abounds with studies regarding career, but the contributors are mainly on the job or about to. It was conducted thirty semi-structured interviews and the main conclusions were related with three dimensions: work, impact on others, and personal growth. The study found that the relationship between work, and impact on others and personal growth is moderated by the responsibility associated with employee's job.

Keywords: retired people; work; impact; personal development.

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Introduction

For a job to be considered interesting, it should: give responsibility and variety, represent a challenge, permit employees to see the result of their work, and have a significant impact on others. These factors contribute to work that is intrinsically motivating (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Intrinsic motivation is characterized by an inherent propensity to seek interesting tasks that challenge people's skills and promote growth (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Nevertheless, many jobs are not designed to promote intrinsic motivation. When this happens, instead of focusing on the monotonous aspects of the job, employees can find meaning giving attention on how the outcomes of their work align with their personal values (Menges, Tussing, Wihler, and Grant, 2016).

According to Kenrick et al. (2010), each individual is unique, which justifies that the motivation for self-actualization directs people through different paths, including the professional one. Since each person is unique, each employee has a unique career (Harris et al., 2015) which we can learn from.

All over the world, we are assisting to a "tsunami of retirements" (Lewis & Cho, 2011). It was reported that a group of 700 retirements would turn in a loss of more than 27,000 years of experience (Leonard et al., 2014). These years of experience translate to a sum of numerous careers that can be a valuable research tool. The research question of this thesis is centered on what are the most meaningful career memories of retired people. The retrospective perspective will be used as a tool to understand what mattered the most to them when asked to look back on time while pursuing their career story.

In the following section, a literature review on the main topics composing the subject of study will be exposed. Later, the methodology will be presented, along with the main findings and its discussion. The final conclusions are then presented at the end of this work. It will

include theoretical and managerial implications, as well as limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Job Motivation. The literature defines a job as a group of tasks arranged to be performed by an employee, and tasks as the pieces of work designated to employees complete (Griffin, 1987; Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992; Wong & Campion, 1991). Accordingly, job performance is the effectiveness of employees' contributions in the direction of the goals of their organization (Motowidlo, 2003), and job satisfaction a positive emotional state that derives from the appraisal of employee's job experiences (Locke, 1976). Conforming to the job characteristics model, enriched (or complex) jobs are linked to higher job satisfaction, motivation, and work performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976).

The literature on motivation suggests that intrinsic motivation is associated with higher job performance. When employees are intrinsically motivated, they feel a desire to invest effort by virtue of the enjoyment and interest in work itself. When they are not intrinsically motivated, they appraise their work more negatively (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This intrinsic motivation leads employees to work longer, harder and more productively, making effort less aversive (Amabile, 1993; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Nonetheless, a great number of jobs are not designed to facilitate intrinsic motivation. There are some sectors (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, and service) in which is common employees neglecting work methods, schedules, and decision making (Davis, 2010; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Furthermore, the significance of the routine associated with repetitive tasks contributes to little skill variety and few opportunities to promote a sense of competence, which is key to cultivate intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). The literature has been recognizing that, when work is not intrinsically motivating, the value given to the outcomes of that work can represent a substitute (Vroom, 1964). Employees can be able to find meaning

focusing on how the outcomes of their work align with their personal values (Menges et al., 2016).

Impact. Motivation is defined as a group of psychological processes associated with direction, energy, and action (Mitchell & Daniels, 2003). When employees focus on how their actions generate positive outcomes for others, the likelihood of them to direct their attention to a negative task or self-evaluation reduces, protecting them against emotional exhaustion (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010). One example of a positive outcome is prosocial impact. The motivation to make a prosocial difference in others' lives can derive from two psychological states: (1) perceived impact on beneficiaries (consciousness that employee's actions can affect others), and (2) commitment to beneficiaries (interest about the welfare of these people) (Grant, 2007). Research suggests that many employees characterize work as a way of making a positive difference in the lives of others (Ruiz-Quintanilla & England, 1996), which make them feel more energy and positive affect (Saavedra & Kwun, 2000). Positive affect is an emotional state characterized by a pleasant valence (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988). This experience of helping others can push feelings of competence as defended by Grant (2007) and Penner et al. (2005). Perceived competence is a very important motive not only at work (Spreitzer, 1995) but also in life (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Impact Beneficiaries. Job impact on beneficiaries can be defined as the degree to which a job provides opportunities for employees to affect the lives of beneficiaries (Grant, 2007). Beneficiaries encompass social collectives that can be internal or external to the organization. Some examples are coworkers, subordinates, supervisors, communities, customer, clients, and patients (Grant, 2007). Family can also be a beneficiary. It has been proved that the desire to support the family is one of the values that drive individuals at work (Bernard, 1981; Brief, Brett, Raskas, and Stein, 1997; Brief & Nord, 1990; George & Brief, 1996; Wrzesniewski,

McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz, 1997). Menges, Tussing, Wihler, and Grant (2016) created the term “family motivation” as the desire to invest effort to benefit the family.

Along similar lines, Greenhaus and Powell (2006) argued that working to support the family is a way to employees psychologically integrate their families into work. Family motivation has two particularities: (1) it can be strong even when the job itself does not have a meaningful impact on others (Menges, Tussing, Wihler, and Grant, 2016), and (2) contrary to other forms of prosocial motivation, family motivation should not be dependent on job or organization because employees can take their family with them when changing job or organization (Grant, 2007). The available evidence suggests that family motivation and job orientation toward work share similarities. Both perceive work as a mean to an end, for example, leisure time, lifestyle or supporting family (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Job Crafting. Meaning can be found when work is aligned with employee’s personal values (Vroom, 1964), but it can be also influenced by the design of employees’ jobs (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Grant, 2007). The concept of job crafting is defined as a process through which employees redefine and reimagine the design of their jobs in personally meaningful forms (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This concept has been connected with (1) higher job performance (Leana, Appelbaum, and Shevchuk, 2009), (2) higher levels of resilience at work (Ghitulescu, 2007), and (3) emotional well-being (French, 2009). There are three types of job crafting techniques: task, relational, and cognitive crafting. Task crafting suggests alterations in the responsibilities that are included in employees’ job description. Relational crafting comprises changes on how, when, or with whom employees relate. And cognitive crafting implicates modifications on how employees perceive the tasks and relationships that constitute their jobs (Berg et al., 2013). A very important aspect of job crafting is that it allows employees to take advantage of their knowledge (about themselves and their job) to craft their jobs as a way to generate more meaningfulness (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting is not an

isolated event, it implies a continuous process that can be influenced by two factors: the social context in which employees work (Berg et al., 2010), and where employees are in their career path (Fried et al., 2007).

Career Uniqueness. Each singular person engaged in a profession has a career (Harris et al., 2015), as well as each singular career is unique and comprises value on human capital (Mayrhofer et al., 2004). The definition of career as a sequence of work experiences throughout a professional life (Arthur et al., 1989) suggests that a career follows a path (Inkson, 2004). This path metaphor entails two components: a set of moves and progression over time (Cappellen & Janssens, 2005), and a direction that connects successive moves (Adamson et al., 1998).

Aligned with the career path reasoning, Cohen and Mallon (2011) argued that stories can be a valuable research instrument in analyzing individual's career path. They elaborated on the benefits of stories in career research suggesting that: (1) stories enact a sequence, (2) when creating narratives, participants expose inconsistencies and contradictions present in their career experiences, and (3) stories facilitate insight related to how people view their relationship to the features of the social structure.

Methodology

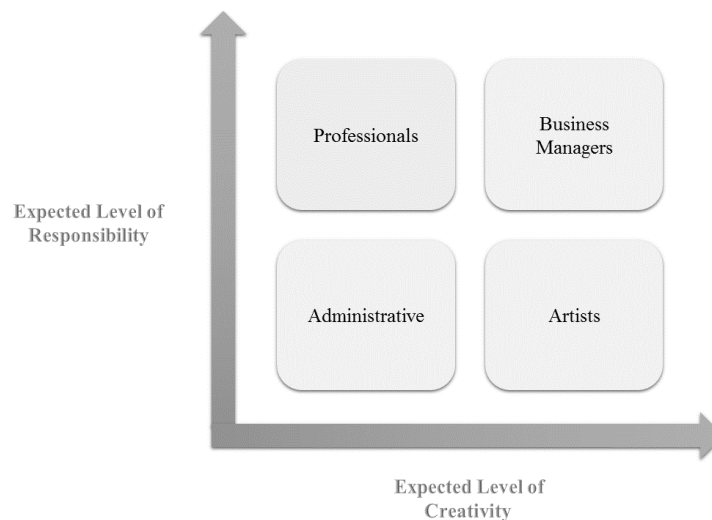
Research Context

It was chosen to study retired professionals because they are the only group of people who can look back in time and reflect on what had a real importance in their careers. According to Erik Erikson (1963), the human personality is developed in eight stages that take place throughout an individual's lifetime. The old age is the period when people start reflecting on their life, which complies with the retrospective valence of this study.

The criteria to decide which type of former professionals should participate in this study focused on two axes, Expected Level of Responsibility and Expected Level of Creativity.

Combining the previously mentioned axes with Professional Categories, it is framed a matrix present in *Figure 1*. In the first quadrant of the matrix, there are Professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers, and teachers), in the second quadrant, Business Managers, in the third quadrant, Administrative, and in the fourth quadrant, Artists.

Figure 1 – Professional Categories Matrix



Data Collection

Sampling. The sample was constituted of professionals who retired more than one year ago and it was used two strategies to reach them. First, I used my personal network, and second - to enlarge the sample and reduce possible sampling bias – I drew on 6 pensioners associations located in the Lisbon area. It was used snowball sampling. An intermediary from each association was contacted and the purpose of this work project was explained. The intermediary allowed the connection with association members who were interviewed by myself. It is defended in the literature that it is necessary to have a large number of participants (between 30 and 60) to obtain the richness of data required for this qualitative analysis (Morse, 2000). Overall, it was interviewed 30 individuals. Data collection stopped when it was achieved a stable interpretation of data, meaning that consecutive interviews were not adding relevant information to the study. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), this phenomenon is entitled

theoretical saturation. In this topic, it is important to add that 73% of the second order themes were identified after 2/5 of interviews.

The majority of the participants were female (66,67%), with mean age of 70,03 years (standard deviation = 9,28), and mean career duration of 34,4 years (standard deviation = 7,86). See *Appendix A* for a detailed demographic analysis of the sample.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by myself using an interview protocol that followed participants' career story (*Appendix B*). I guided the narrative inciting for more information when the responses were incomplete or when there were particularly interesting ones. Interviews had a duration of 30-90 minutes and all were recorded and then transcribed, resulting in 70 pages of data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved two objectives: (1) identify the most remarkable memories of each individual, and (2) develop a theoretical model that explains what was more meaningful for them and the incorporated relationships. The details of the analytical steps will be presented later in this section.

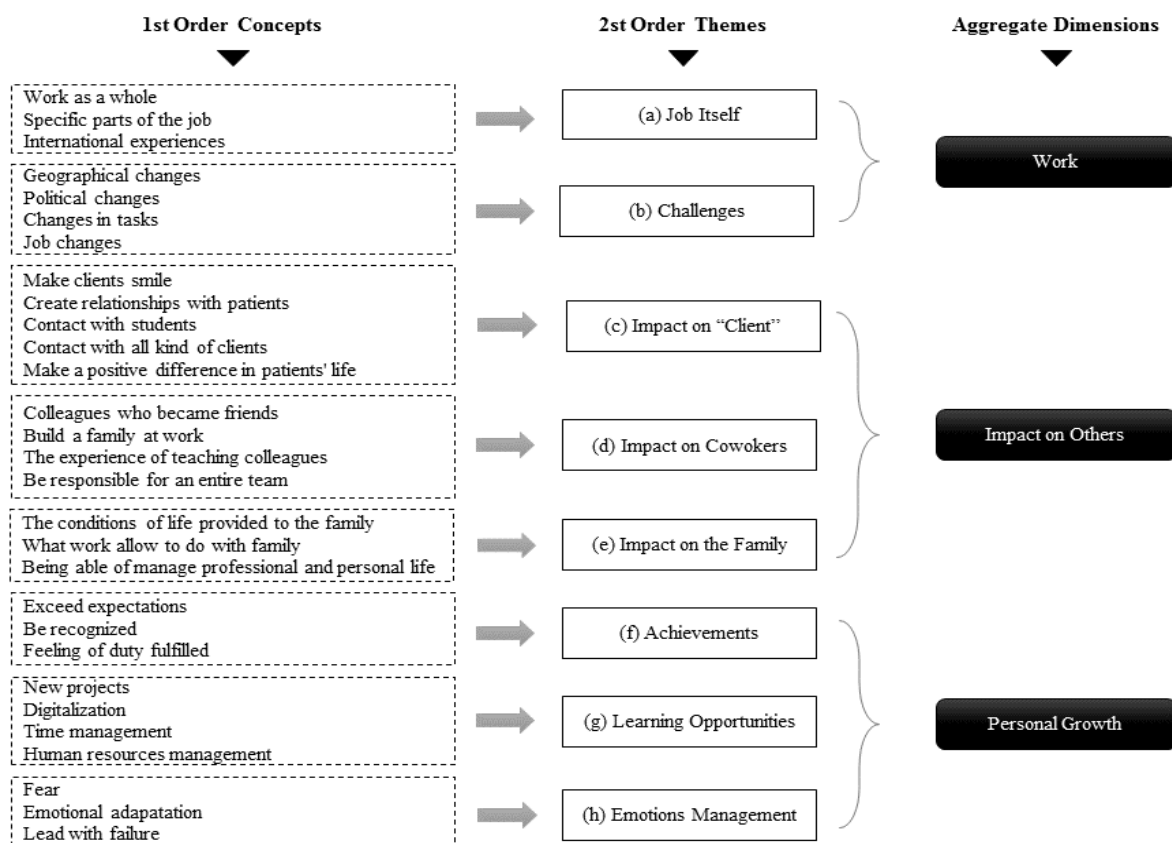
Both feelings and perceptions are difficult to access other than through self-reported information (Kim et al., 2012), that is why it was used self-reported data. This use of this type of data aligned with semiotic clustering analysis makes possible to access to implicit and rich deep understandings behind the stories people tell. Semiotic clustering represents a way of exploring successively deep layers of meaning that can be represented in a three-column table (Feldman et al., 2004).

In the **first phase**, I started by gathering data to construct the first column where the first order concepts appear (see *Figure 2*). The concepts emerged directly from the data. In this case, it emerged from the interview's transcript, representing unrefined expressions and opinions (Silva et al., 2014).

In the **second phase**, I transformed the first order concepts into more thematic categories, obtaining 8 second order themes. To elaborate the second column, it was used thematic association which allowed me to capture deeper meanings that were not evident in the first order concepts (Clark et al., 2010). This column was constructed through interpretation of data and existing literature.

In the **third phase**, it was attained 3 aggregate dimensions that imply a higher level of abstraction. It was a process of moving from thematic categories to conceptual abstraction (Suddaby, 2006).

Figure 2 – Data Structure



In the **fourth phase**, the focus was to develop a theoretical model that “shows the dynamic relationships among the emergent concepts that describe or explain the phenomenon of interest and... that makes clear all relevant data-to-theory connections” (Gioia et al., 2013: 22). This phase included two distinct elements. First, the identification of a component that

seemed to have a moderator effect. And second, the analysis of the effect relationships that take place between the three components. Here it was made use of existing literature that was consistent with the data analysis. The theoretical model is presented in *Figure 3*.

Findings

The treatment of the 30 semi-structured interviews resulted in 8 second order themes. These themes were not attained straightforward (Clark et al., 2010). I moved back and forth when coding data to build theory while consulting literature to ground the coding conceptually (Weston et al., 2000). As the familiarity with data increased, the idea that participants keep in their memory the work itself, the impact on others, and the personal growth started to be present in all the interviews.

Work

Two second order themes emerging from data referred to the importance of work, including specific tasks, work as a whole, challenges, and other experiences job-related.

Second order theme (a): Job itself. According to Grant (2007), the design of employees' jobs can influence how they experience work meaningfulness. When asked about their memories, some participants invoked their work as a whole. For example: "The best part [of my day] was all my routine as a doctor. I loved what I did. Since I was little I liked medicine. My mother was a very sick person and I always had the curiosity of listening to her complaints and I even did some work of nurse because I gave her injections" stated a doctor. Furthermore, there were people referring specific parts of their job. An accountant declared that "Curiously, when I moved up in the hierarchical ladder my favorite part of the work to do was the hard and pure accounting as it was back in the days, even though my responsibilities got broader, of course". International experiences were also mentioned, "Every year I traveled three or four times and I really enjoyed it. What I liked was not to travel by itself, but the international work

because we had to deal with many different perspectives. Most of the times I traveled alone, and I loved it”.

Second order theme (b): Challenges. A job that is considered interesting and offers challenges can represent a job that is intrinsically motivating (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Curiously, challenges at work were highly related to changes. Geographical, and political changes aligned with changes in tasks, and changes in the job were pointed out. Participants referred that: “It was very difficult because Africa was completely different and I had to adapt to Portugal, although what I did in Mozambique was much more hardworking than what I did here in Portugal”, “Changing from the public to the private sector was a critical moment. I was going to earn double the money in a small association that gave me the opportunity to travel and do the work I liked, so I accepted the challenge.”, “When the scholar programs changed and the exterior was evolving, I had to adapt myself and it was a huge challenge, but I think I was always able to do that. I always tried to keep up with all the evolutions, I never stop studied”. Adding to that, challenges were also associated with recurred events. A flight attendant referred his unusual routine as a challenge (“We had a different life from the ordinary people. Our routine was pack and unpack baggage, always sleeping in different beds, the weather always changing. It is not easy, I can even say that this represented a daily challenge”); a professor focused on motivating students year after year (“a recurrent challenge was get motivated the students we called the rebels. Students who wanted to block the classes, who wanted to pretend to be superior, who did not listen anything”); and a nurse remembering her night shifts (“Over time, doing night shifts was a huge challenge for me. I had to search for motivation because I knew that I would go home very tired).

Impact on Others

Impact was a prevalent theme in the majority of the interviews. Aligned with that Grant and Sonnentag (2010) declared that even when employees are not intrinsically motivated, the

perceived prosocial impact can generate beneficial outcomes. In the interviews it was specified three types of impact that were categorized as relevant second order themes.

Second order theme (c): Impact on “client”. In this study context, “client” refers to the beneficiary of the work that is done by the study participant. Interestingly, a great number of the participants who mentioned the impact on “client” were Professionals. A professor declared that “A few years ago, I was in a shopping mall with my husband and unexpectedly a young man, very well dressed, came in my direction, hugged and elevated me saying «It is so good to see you, so good!». I was not recognizing who he was, and when he said «The professor is not recognizing me», I listened to his voice and I remembered. When I was his professor, he was living in a social institution, and he was not an example in terms of class behavior... But it was so good to see that the boy grew up and, by that time, he was very well in personal and professional terms. You cannot imagine how good it is to understand that kids without family and many times with a lot of problems can have a good life. This, knowing that we contributed to it, even if little, is fantastic”.

Second order theme (d): Impact on coworkers. Colleagues were referred numerous times. 17 out of 30 participants pointed out not only people in the same hierarchical level but also supervisors and subordinates. The contact with coworkers generates many positive and rewarding aspects mainly associated with social support (Beehr et al., 2000). “All of those women I met throughout my career who I could have never found somewhere else. The people and the meaning they have for me, even after all these years, is one of the things I am most thankful for”; “as my responsibilities of managing people increased, my tasks included teaching and monitoring others’ performance. I thought I would not like it, but that was the best part of them all. The opportunity to teach what I knew the best about was priceless”; “I remember the excellent relationship I built with my two last supervisors because we developed a team spirit I

never felt throughout my entire career. I was able to apply my knowledge and teach them some particularities”. These are some examples of references to colleagues.

Second order theme (e): Impact on the family. The motivation to have an impact on the family can be strong even when the job does not offer a meaningful impact on others (Menges et al., 2016). “I remember my first salary and the happiness of giving it to my mother. I was 13 years old and my father died when I was only 11, so me and my sister needed to start working for us to survive.” referred an Administrative. “I also have very good memories about what my work allowed me to do with my two sons: the trips to Zoo, the matches of «Belenenses», and the quick runs to «Pastéis de Belém». What mattered the most was what I could do with the ones I loved the most using the income I received from my work. It is not about the job making me happy or something like that, it is what the job allowed me to do. Those were the happy moments.” declared a Business Manager. The theme “family” was predominant, it was almost inseparable from work. Participants always ended up mentioning it.

Personal Growth

The final group of second order themes refers to personal growth promoted through work. Challenges were highly mentioned as one of the participants’ best memories because of what these challenges produced, growth. According to Sheldon, Kasser, Smith, and Share (2002), personal development occurs, to a great extent, in reaction to challenging circumstances. These challenges resulted in achievements that were highly referred, learning opportunities and abilities to manage emotions.

Second order theme (f): Achievements. Exceed expectations, recognition, and feeling of duty fulfilled were included in the achievements theme. Regarding exceeding expectations, it was transversal to all professional categories. “I did an operetta. I was a lyric singer without noticing and the show was very appreciated, everyone was surprised about my voice” mentioned an Artist. “I did my public health internship in a hospital near the suburbs of Lisbon

with a very demanding doctor who was the director of the hospital. (...) Someone told me that the director of that hospital was very demanding and I would have to work a lot, so I decided that I will do my internship exactly there. For six months, I spent all day in the hospital. After two months, I did everything myself without anyone supervising” specified a Professional. “I remember the beginning and how well it went. I started working when I was 19 years old as accounting intern at «Hospital de Santa Maria» for 3 months. Since I was achieving good results at the customer care function, I moved up in the hierarchical ladder and became effective instantly” commented an Administrative. Recognition of the achievements was another predominant topic. “After three months, my chief abandoned the company and, because of the good work I did with him, I was invited to be secretary of the administrator who was my chief’s boss. This was very good for me and a signal of recognition.” informed an administrative technician. The feeling of duty fulfilled was also mentioned, mainly associated with a sensation of relief (“I felt really good when I arrived at work, turned on my computer, and understood that all the programs went well during the night. It was a fantastic sensation” affirmed a systems analyst).

Second order theme (g): Learning opportunities. During the process of work, we are exposed to numerous opportunities for personal development each of which may refer to different aspects of the employee’s personal characteristics (Rau, 2006). The referred learning opportunities include a big range of themes as new projects (“I remember when they gave us a project in the area of European Funds, an area that I did not dominate at all. It very challenging, but fantastic at the same time because we learned so much. I had to learn to deal with the stress we were exposed to, but it was very compensator.”), digitalization (“when the digital world invaded the company... the first reaction was resistance, but I understood that the technology was very good. The machine did the boring stuff and the results of our work could be seen there, which was very good”), time management (“I taught myself to be organized, because I had a

lot of work to do and little time”), and human resources management (“I was trying to be a leader, not a boss and my colleagues were not able to understand it. It was difficult for me, but I learned a lot with this situation. I tried to give them some training and courses, but they did not have an open mind.”).

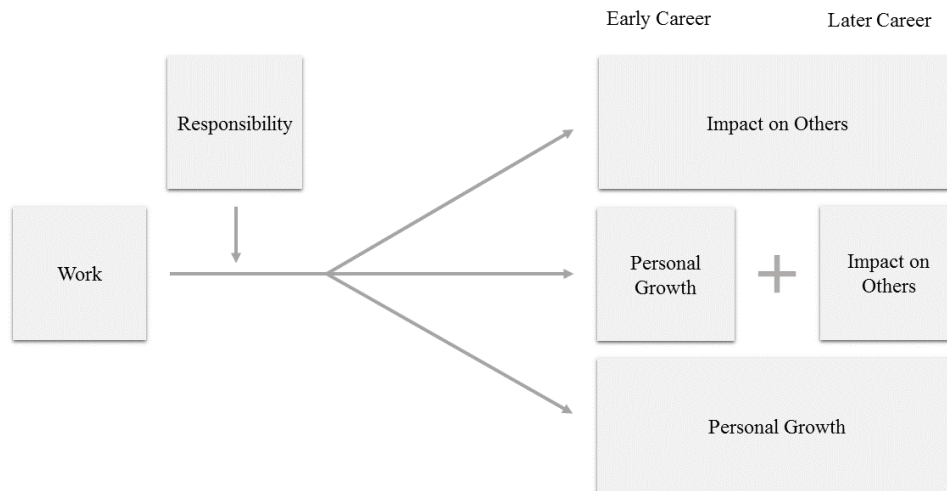
Second order theme (h): Emotions management. For employees is not only necessary to work on tasks and spend mental and physical effort on their job. They are also required to manage their emotions as a part of their job (Zapf, 2002). Participants associated emotions at the workplace with painful or bad moments. “I am seeing a young girl, very inexperienced, who was not used to go to Lisbon, to the capital. (...) I felt so tiny near those men in suits, I was very ashamed”; “Our day-to-day was passed contacting with money and a failure could represent something very serious. It was difficult when we had some mistake to overcome because many times it had consequences that did not involve only the employees.”; “organize a psychological structure that allowed me to survive in a hostile environment like the one we lived in my workplace. Many times, we had to deal with hierarchies who were not qualified to be leaders”; “We dealt with the death almost every day, so we needed to build mechanisms to manage our emotions. Every time I arrived at the hospital and did not see some patient in his/her bed I thought he/she had a medical release, but there were sometimes when it was not true, unfortunately. This was my mechanism to protect myself.” are some examples. Throughout participants’ career, they had to learn how to deal with specific situations and construct a psychological structure to support it, which represents another way of growing.

Discussion

Even though job enrichment benefits are extensively promoted in the management literature, little is known about why enriched jobs can lead to positive outcomes for employees and their organizations (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Findings suggest that work can be enriched by adding responsibility to employees’ jobs which can generate both perceived

personal growth and perceived impact on others. When work is not enriched, people felt only one of those, or impact on others or personal growth.

Figure 3 – Theoretical Model



Considering that perceived personal growth can be treated as the impact on the employee himself/herself, it was possible to conclude that in the early stage of participants' career, they valued more the impact on themselves (personal growth). Over time, the radius of impact increase and they start to value their impact on others. In the beginning of the career, employees valued more the perceived impact on themselves, but in mid and mature stage of career they start to value the perceived impact on others, increasing the radius of impact around them in order to reach other people.

In the same line of reasoning, it was possible to conclude that everyone felt some kind of impact, but not everyone perceived an impact on others and felt personal growth at the same time. Data did not allow to identify which of the two dimensions prevails, but regarding the Administrative professional category it as possible to observe that the majority of Administratives felt only one type of impact throughout their careers. Additionally, in the category of Artists, a significant number also recognized only one type of impact, predominantly personal growth. Concerning Professionals and Business Managers, the conclusion was unambiguous, all felt the two types of perceived impact. These conclusions led

us to take a closer look to the Professional Categories Matrix (*Appendix A*), and detect that jobs with higher Expected Level of Responsibility have a higher probability of perceive both types of impact. Accordingly, it was observed that an Administrative who have higher responsibilities felt the two types of impact as well as an Artist. Which make possible to conclude that it does not depend on the profession, but on responsibility.

As defended by Griffin (1982), job enrichment draws in increasing the level of responsibility and control that employees have over their jobs in order to increase their intrinsic motivation. When work richness is high, responsibility is high as well, and personal growth and impact on others is attained. When employees are not intrinsically motivated, they focus on the perceived impact on others or on their perceived personal growth as a form of compensation. The findings are in line with what research has shown. When work is not interesting, it does not provide variety, responsibility, and challenges (Deci & Ryan, 2000), thus employees direct their attention to valued outcomes of their job (Vroom, 1964). In this case, the outcomes can assume two forms, impact on the employee himself/herself or impact on others.

Conclusion

This thesis was motivated by the aim to understand what are the most meaningful memories of retired people regarding their professional careers. It was an attempt to listen to the stories of these people and extract what was most meaningful and worthwhile for them. The storytellers of this research were all different and their contribution generated a theoretical model that explains the relationships between work, how it can be enriched, and the outcomes of this enrichment.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The main implication of this work to the theory is centered on responsibility and how an increase in this dimension can generate both impacts on the employees themselves and

impact on others. Task crafting - which implies modifications in employees' responsibilities - can influence employees' perceived impact, and it is one of the main contributions of the study. Another contribution is related to the time frame in which employees perceive the two types of impact. In the beginning of the career, the personal growth (impact on employee himself/herself) is more recognized, and as the time goes by and the career evolves, the impact on others start to be more valued.

This work also offers meaningful insights for managers and employees about how to improve employees' experience at work. It is important to give them the necessary tools for them to be able to find their work meaning. Work meaning is composed by their understandings of what they do and its significance, and it can be achieved through job enrichment (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Job enrichment involves new tasks that require greater responsibility and difficulty (Griffin, 1982). Examples of job enrichment practices are: redistribution of authority (which can be attainable if managers start to delegate more), job rotation (because employees can use different skills according to the type of work), involvement in the decision-making process (it will accentuate their responsibility), and incentivization of feedback (because the more aware employees are about their performance, the more control they will have about it).

Regarding the impact on others, it has been proved that helping others have positive effects, not only in the beneficiaries but also in helpers (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010). Design human resources strategies to make employees conscious of their impact can boost their motivation. Even jobs that are not very attractive can have a meaning. The meaning of a job is not fixed, it varies according to the person and her/his perceptions. Thus, managers can play a crucial role in that search, guiding employees to focus on the impact their job has on others, for example. Many times, the interactions with people are full of meaning and it can be the recipe.

The personal development is more valued in the beginning but it should be promoted throughout the career. Develop growth plans to help employees establish personal objectives and provide support in the achievement of this objectives, provide training to make employees develop their hard and soft skills, congratulate them when they do a good job because it will promote their self-confidence, train managers to coach their employees, incentivize knowledge sharing, and encourage employees to express their feelings are ways to promoting personal growth.

Limitations and Future Research

The major limitation of a qualitative research is that findings cannot be expanded to broader populations with certainty. It occurs because results are not tested to verify if they are statistically significant (Maxwell, 2005). Accordingly, it would be interesting to make use of this work findings to construct a quantitative analysis, not only because the sample size would be ideally bigger, but also because it could be replicated in different countries.

As for participants, the restricted professional categories represent a limitation because there were a lot of professions not contemplated. In future studies, professional categories can be changed or the number of categories can be increased. It can also be studied if there are significant differences within each professional category and if it is related to the hierarchical level because higher the hierarchical level, higher the responsibility.

Moreover, the number of individuals fitting in each professional category was not equal, which means that the sample for each category was not equally represented. The country where the participants were employed can be also referred as a limitation since all participants worked in Portugal. It is known that the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers (who constitute the sample) were influenced by Salazar dictatorship, World War II, and Portuguese Colonies and these may influence their perceptions and how participants describe their careers. In fact, all the three themes were mentioned.

It would be also interesting to abandon the retrospective perspective, asking the same questions to employees in early and mid stages of career to understand if the results suffer alterations when compared with retired people.

Additional research is needed to investigate if and how the impact on others generate personal growth because the results were not conclusive. An extra and curious factor that I was not able to study due to space constraints was the evolution of the concept “career” throughout time. It was evident that some participants did not have a clear definition of the word, and it was also denoted some kind of evolution regarding the concept. Older participants view career as their profession and the younger ones view career as a path aligned with personal development.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participants Inventory

ID	Gender	Year of Birth	Education	Professional Category	Occupation	Career Duration (Years)
1	F	1926	Primary School	Artist	Radio Artist	11
2	F	1931	Primary School	Artist	Wardrobe Master	39
3	F	1934	Primary School	Artist	Actress and Singer	20
4	F	1933	High School	Artist	Pianist and Professor	38
5	M	1937	High School	Artist	"Ponto de Teatro"(Scene Assistant)	48
6	M	1933	High School	Artist	Musician and Artistic Director	30
7	M	1933	Bachelors	Artist	Television Director	44
8	F	1948	Graduate	Administrative	Public Employee	39
9	M	1947	Primary School	Business Manager	Financial Manager	43
10	M	1945	Bachelors	Administrative	Flight Attendant	40
11	M	1945	Bachelors	Business Manager	Human Resources Director	34

12	F	1947	Primary School	Administrative	Boutique Assistant	25
13	M	1946	Bachelors	Professional	Professor	32
14	F	1957	Bachelors	Administrative	Bank Clerk	22
15	F	1944	Bachelors	Professional	Jurist	23
16	M	1944	Bachelors	Professional	Doctor	35
17	F	1946	Bachelors	Professional	Professor	36
18	F	1957	Bachelors	Professional	Professor	40
19	F	1946	Primary School	Business Manager	Cafe Owner	37
20	F	1960	High School	Administrative	Bank Clerk	34
21	F	1953	Bachelors	Professional	Professor	34
22	F	1930	Primary School	Professional	Nurse	31
23	M	1960	High School	Administrative	Bank Clerk	34
24	M	1935	Primary School	Business Manager	Entrepreneur	42
25	F	1935	High School	Professional	Accountant	40
26	F	1949	High School	Administrative	Health Administrative	39
27	F	1951	Primary School	Administrative	Administrative Technician	40
28	F	1947	High School	Business Manager	Systems Analyst	32
29	F	1950	Bachelors	Administrative	Administrative	36
30	F	1950	High School	Administrative	Administrative Technician	34

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Part I: Participant Background

1. When was your birthday?
2. What is your educational level?
3. What was the duration of your professional career?
4. What was your profession?
5. Where did you work?

Part II: Career Path

6. Why did you choose the career path you described?
7. What is your first memory regarding your work?
8. Considering your daily work routine, what was the best part of the day?
9. What are the three best memories you have concerning your professional career?

Part III: Self Reflection

10. How would you characterize yourself?
11. What were the main challenges you faced in your professional life?
12. Have there been times when you felt demotivated?

Part IV: Career Concept

13. How would you define the word “career”?