



CREATE

Canterbury Research and Theses Environment

Canterbury Christ Church University's repository of research outputs

<http://create.canterbury.ac.uk>

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s. The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given e.g. King, I. (2012) Disentangling professional careers: an auto/biographic investigation into the occupational histories and aspirations of professional business workers in the third-age of their employment. Ph.D. thesis, Canterbury Christ Church University.

Contact: create.library@canterbury.ac.uk



DISENTANGLING PROFESSIONAL CAREERS

An auto/biographic investigation into
the occupational histories and aspirations
of professional business workers
in the third-age of their employment

Ian King

Canterbury Christ Church University

Thesis submitted for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to the following supporters of my research – Canterbury Christ Church University who awarded a bursary to facilitate this research programme, my research supervisors, Professor Linden West and Dr Hazel Reid, for their diligent support and encouragement, and my research collaborators, who generously gave of their time by recollecting memories of their occupational experiences. I also acknowledge the assistance given by librarians at the Hayloft Library (Salomons Campus, Tunbridge Wells) and the Learning Resource Centre (Roffey Park Institute, Horsham) for providing professional research and enquiry services.

I wish to express special thanks to my wife and family, whose patience and support enabled me to focus on my studies and encouraged me in another challenging phase of my life course transition. In this study I have valued an opportunity to reflect on the occupational excursions that I and my collaborators have navigated, adventures embracing, as Whyte observes, ‘a hidden journey, a secret code, deciphered in fits and starts’ (2001, p. 8) which, although unknown at the outset, have endured and, through narrative testimony, become an affirmation of our occupational transitions.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Canterbury Christ Church University. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the thesis has been submitted to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of Canterbury Christ Church University.

Signed

Dated

14 December 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	3
DECLARATION	3
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES.....	6
ABSTRACT.....	7
PREFACE	9
CHAPTER 1: MY RESEARCH RATIONALE: The emergence of a professional pathway and workplace disengagement.....	13
Locating occupational evolution	13
The value of professional credence	16
Setting out on this research venture.....	19
Emergent occupational existence	20
CHAPTER 2: MY CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION: A critical review of occupational identity and its implications for future self.....	27
Mid-life occupational transitions	27
Exploring working identity.....	29
Identity in transition.....	32
The primary characteristics of identity.....	37
Unfolding occupational stories.....	39
The road to fulfilment	43
Constructing future selves.....	48
Envisioning alternative careers	58
CHAPTER 3: MY LITERATURE REVIEW: Employment, the third-age, disengagement, narrative and gender	67
Primary literature research.....	67
The foundations of work	70
Career development theory	74
The third-age as a contemporary phenomena.....	83
Choice and disengagement	88
Antecedents of narrative exposition	91
Time in narrative composition	94
Gender socialisation and occupational emergence	97
CHAPTER 4: MY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: An auto/biographic exploration of professional careers in business consulting.....	103
Designing a collaborative approach	103
Narrative recollection of experience.....	104

Participation in this occupational research	108
Gathering occupational narratives	116
Deconstructing occupational texts	122
Narrative analysis and interpretation.....	126
CHAPTER 5: A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT of Charles Jackson: Presenting the deterministic career of a commercial solicitor	137
CHAPTER 6: A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT of Jack Sparrow: Exploring the opportunistic career of a public health consultant	155
CHAPTER 7: MY RESEARCH FINDINGS: The nature of occupational emergence.....	173
T1 ECC: Early career choice – Identifying career possibilities.....	175
T2 DEA: Drivers of early adulthood – Engaging life adventures	182
T3 PRD: Professional development – Attaining professional status.....	192
T4 OCE: Occupational evolution – Tracking occupational direction.....	199
T5 MAC: Middle adulthood challenges – Sustaining career purpose	209
T6 TAC: Third-age challenges – Encountering life realities.....	224
T7 WPD: Workplace disengagement – Managing occupational withdrawal.....	244
CHAPTER 8: MY RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS: Embracing themes for older workers pending workplace disengagement.....	263
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	269
APPENDIX A: Disentangling Professional Careers: A research invitation	285
APPENDIX B: Disentangling Professional Careers: A research introduction.....	287
APPENDIX C: A Collection of Occupational Artefacts	289
APPENDIX D: Letter of Informed Consent.....	291
APPENDIX E: Commentary Analysis of an Approved Text – Charles Jackson, Commercial Property Solicitor	293
APPENDIX F: Commentary Analysis of an Approved Text – Jack Sparrow, Health & Safety Consultant	319

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

FIGURE 1: A conceptual model for investigating occupational experience 14
 FIGURE 2: Identities in transition (Ibarra, 2003, p.12)..... 32
 FIGURE 3: Four primary literature research domains..... 68
 FIGURE 4: Traversing narrative landscapes (Speedy, 2008, p. 82) 122
 FIGURE 5: 'Stargate' narrative analysis model (adapted from Leiblich et al, 1998)..... 135
 FIGURE 6: Jack Sparrow's occupational profile..... 160
 FIGURE 7: Narrative 'Happily-ever-after' and 'Heroic saga' profiles (Gergen, 1999) ... 185
 FIGURE 8: Occupational evolution matrix..... 201
 FIGURE 9: Occupational evolution profile map 205
 FIGURE 10: Occupational harmony..... 215
 FIGURE 11: Narrative 'As lived and fragmented' profile..... 218

Tables

TABLE 1: Contrasting views of working identity (Ibarra, 2003, p. 39) 59
 TABLE 2: Current job as step in career/promotion ladder (Rose, 2005, p. 266) 73
 TABLE 3: Sources for third-age professional workers in business consulting 111
 TABLE 4: Opportunistic research breakdown 113
 TABLE 5: Top down analysis of three occupational stories 174
 TABLE 6: Age discrimination awareness (ADA) continuum 239

Word Count 103,482 excluding preamble, bibliography and appendices.

ABSTRACT

In an evolving professional services market, the structure of career is changing; this research asks older professional practitioners in business consulting about their occupational histories and career aspirations for the period leading towards their occupational disengagement. In their ‘third-age’ of employment – the life transition between career maturity and withdrawal (ages 50 to 65) – professional workers often consider their employment options as they move toward occupational withdrawal. With demographics showing an ageing population, employers can expect to find that ‘third-age’ workers represent a greater proportion of their workforce. As they reflect on their circumstances, these older professional workers often decide to adjust working practice to complement their lifestyle choices, taking account of family responsibilities, financial obligations, occupational values and possibly personal health. Through the lens of narrative inquiry, I reflexively review my occupational experiences and those of 12 research collaborators over a working trajectory of up to 45 years, as each person progresses through the concluding episode/s of their occupational transition. This auto/biographic bricolage represents occupational lives spent working within financial, legal and management consulting roles in professional firms within the United Kingdom.

By embracing their occupational histories, this research investigates whether older professional practitioners can better determine their occupational futurity and benefit from the opportunity to accommodate other considerations – career preferences, life obligations, family relationships – as they conclude their occupational trajectory. In ‘Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing Your Career’, Herminia Ibarra (2004) presents a model for career change and argues that people determine their occupational directions by experimenting with different possibilities rather than deciding on a clearly defined career identity. This research investigation extends the inquiry into a later stage of the life course, the ‘third-age’, and helps older professional workers develop a coherent understanding of their occupational history as they approach workplace departure, contemporarily known as ‘retirement’.

PREFACE

Occupational narrative is a documented form of story that creates an account of a person's working history through auto/biographic insight – in this research a text that reflects the career experiences of my collaborator's occupational trajectory. Auto/biographic writing is the process of constructing a historical representation of a person's life, perhaps restricted to a discrete area of their experience, as in this research by writing within an occupational boundary. However, its limitations, as Stanley recognises, are that 'autobiography is at least as much the imaginary possession of a past that is as unreal as any photograph, and the 'self' it creates is at least as 'unreal'...as the image in a photograph' (1992, p. 54). Auto/biographic writing is a genre of discourse that aims to embrace the experience and meaning of a person's life captured by self (autobiography) or on behalf of self by another (auto/biography) through textual composition. As Stanley (1992) observes, it is an illusory recollection of a past representation constrained by the frame and process of re-creation as illustrated by her metaphor of a photograph and the accuracy of the depiction shown.

This research uses narrative inquiry to address three research questions considering career history, occupational influences and narrative value; it shows why auto/biographic reflexions can help older professional worker navigate their way through the myriad of life choices that impinge as they continue their occupational journey and seek a satisfying workplace exit. Contemporary professional landscapes are complex and changing, presenting the older third-age worker with a greater range of career decisions, whilst they also respond to the reality of an optimised and now declining career profile. Whilst the egotistical drivers of early career have faded, the older professional worker now encounters a new and different range of occupational considerations which reflect the anticipations of self, family and society.

Chapter 1: My research rationale sets the scene of this occupational study by looking at my occupational experiences, recollected through autobiographic narrative, showing how they influenced my ideas for pursuing an occupational destiny through the third-age of my life existence. I present an overview of business consulting, the occupational context for both myself and my research participants, an opportunistic group of professional practitioners and locate the rationale for my research. I also consider the notions of social constructivism, authorial participation, research reflexivity, occupational coherence and review the impact of 'status' on a professional practitioner's occupational identity.

To illuminate some of the concepts underpinning my research, in **Chapter 2: My conceptual foundation**, I have critiqued an occupational research initiative conducted by Herminia Ibarra (2003) who explored the transitional experiences of managers and professionals undergoing career change after a period of occupational participation and reported her findings in 'Working identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing your career'. In her work she considers

‘possible selves’ and the notion of the ‘true-self’ model i.e. one that encapsulates an individual’s personality structure and so, arguably, forms a basis on which to ground a career search. In her work she ‘asserts that we are not one true self, but many selves and that those identities exist not only in the past and present, but also, and most importantly, in the future’ (Ibarra, 2003, p. 37).

Chapter 3: My literature review opens with a historical review of employment and the emerging concept of career development during the 20th century. It presents an overview of the organisational challenges impacting on the labour market, challenges that have impacted on the traditions of career as global economic, social and technological influences have emerged. It continues with an exploration of UK social policy and its implications for ‘retirement’, a concept which is provoking policy makers as population demographics indicate a rapidly increasing ‘ageing society’ and the economy struggles to meet the financial and social expectations of older workers. In this chapter there is also a summary of the current legislation as it affects retirement from the workplace, the policy for which has changed several times during the writing of this thesis. The concept of the ‘third-age’ is introduced as a life-stage during which individuals embrace a different set of aspirations and obligations, that ultimately affect their expectations for occupational continuance pending workplace disengagement. The ‘third-age’ is a contested notion that has emerged as a consequence of social evolution and increasing longevity, but is now recognised as a significant career frontier for older workers.

Chapter 4: My research methodology focuses on the approach that I adopted to investigate the careers of professional workers in their third-age of employment; it includes the process for selecting the research population, how the narrative interviews were prepared and conducted, and key issues regarding the collection of the auto/biographic data generated in the research interviews. Once documented, the approved interview transcripts became my principal research documents and the chapter discusses the process for safeguarding the authenticity of the occupational stories told; it also showcases auto/biography as the primary tool for exploring historical accounts of career and illustrates how to use the narrative method to capture preferred career practice and release potential career possibilities. The chapter concludes with a review of some key ethical considerations to protect the authenticity and veracity of occupational storytelling – and maintain the boundaries which distinguish the verisimilitude of occupational narrative as compared to the imagination of a fictional story which has been invented.

Charles Jackson was a highly successful legal practitioner and his story is recounted **in Chapter 5: A narrative account**, the story of a commercial property solicitor who advised business and charitable organisations on the conveyance of commercial properties. Charles’s occupational experiences reflect the traditional concept of an ‘ascendant career’ moving from articled clerk to senior partner. To achieve this degree of advancement, Charles had to move to new employment on several occasions, often following an organisational disagreement with a colleague/fellow partner. I have denoted his trajectory as a ‘deterministic’ career that involved selective career

moves determined by personal choice and/or opportunity within professional networks. Charles had just reached his normal retirement age and, having resigned his partnership, was continuing as a senior legal consultant; his was the longest career of all my research collaborators. His narrative presents a different perspective on the aspirations of an older professional practitioner, especially regarding alternative career opportunities and family obligations; Charles continues an active portfolio of assignments comprising both personal and professional interests.

In **chapter 6: A narrative account** I present an occupational portrait that represents the story of Jack Sparrow, a quality assurance/public safety consultant advising government and their agencies on product design and safety. Jack's story tells how he entered the workplace and describes his search for a coherent strand that linked his experiences working within public and governmental agencies; in addition, he avidly describes his third-age occupational participation which continued at an active pace even after he was out-placed from government service. His occupational experience includes what appeared to be a never-ending spiral of consulting assignments which, at the time he told his story, generated a high degree of occupational satisfaction for Jack. His occupational profile illustrates an 'opportunistic' career that involved multi career moves usually determined by personal values and/or opportunity within government agency and personal networks.

Chapter 7: My research findings review the primary and secondary occupational themes that I had located through thematic analysis. In this chapter I have looked at each of my collaborators' occupational texts to discover what each of them have said about the themes emerging – early career choice, drivers of early adulthood, professional development, occupational evolution, middle adulthood challenges, third-age challenges and workplace disengagement. I embrace the messages emanating from my collaborators' stories seeking to capture their meaning within the context of emergent professional careers. Derived from the findings of this research, I include prototype models on occupational evolution and harmony that illustrate how professional business workers construct their occupational trajectories and determine career transference in the latter stages of their occupational transition.

In the closing **Chapter 8: My research conclusions**, I reflect on my research objectives and summarise my research discoveries outlining the main ideas and concepts surfacing from this narrative investigation. Within this chapter I make recommendations for professional workers engaged in their third-age of occupational employment, looking at the value of auto/biographic inquiry to illuminate their occupational progression and help them facilitate their occupational withdrawal. In addition, I present some suggestions for employers to identify career strategies that they might adopt to help their older workers progress toward workplace disengagement in a way that embraces their life obligations and concluding occupational aspirations. Concurrently, I comment on four observed sub themes – occupational endeavour, workplace harmony, new pathways and complementary life challenges – emanating from my research.

CHAPTER 1: MY RESEARCH RATIONALE: The emergence of a professional pathway and workplace disengagement

This chapter locates the foundations on which my research is grounded. It identifies the primary objective for conducting this research – to explore the occupational trajectories and aspirations of third-age professional workers – and considers why it is important for an older professional to embrace their occupational history and learn from these experiential reflections when determining their occupational direction pending workplace disengagement. In addition to explaining the rationale underpinning this research, I consider why the research is important for both individuals and society in the knowledge economy of the 21st century.

Locating occupational evolution

Emergent working pathways

The primary premise for this research investigation is that older professional workers in business consulting firms, who are currently in the third-age (aged 50–65) of their employment experience i.e. between career maturity and disengagement, can illuminate their career destiny by acknowledging their occupational history and interpreting what it means for them as they move towards detachment from the workplace. The term ‘third-age’ can hold negative implications of declining capability and ill health, but some authors (Baltes & Smith, 2003; Bower & Sadler, 2009) contend that it is a transforming period enabling older people to grow their creative aptitudes and sustain their professional contribution. An older worker’s emergent pathway may be unclear and will be obscured by both future uncertainties and past occupational experiences, as noted by Ibarra who recognised that:

‘...outdated though they may be, our past working identities are not dislodged so easily. Their persistence confronts us with taken-for-granted priorities and assumptions about how the world works. These need to be re-examined before we can go any further’

(2003, p. 14)

The idea for this research originated from earlier research into my own occupational trajectory and an emanant belief that a person’s occupational future can be enhanced by understanding their career history and, as Ibarra (2004) suggests in the above citation, by re-examining ‘our past working identities’ (p. 14). My fundamental concept, therefore, is that a professional worker’s career history contains elements of occupational experience, which, following analysis and interpretation, result in the identification of occupational themes. These manifestations of occupational experience – either differentiated or clustered experiences – give meaning to past

professional employment and possibly also to future occupational engagement. This notion of occupational meaning, gathered from an analysis of occupational narratives, is, for this research population of older workers, interwoven within other ‘secondary’ concepts of ‘professional identity’ and ‘occupational withdrawal’. These primary and secondary ideas present a conceptual model which projects a mental image or framework of my research intentions; I have attempted to capture my conceptual model in Figure1:

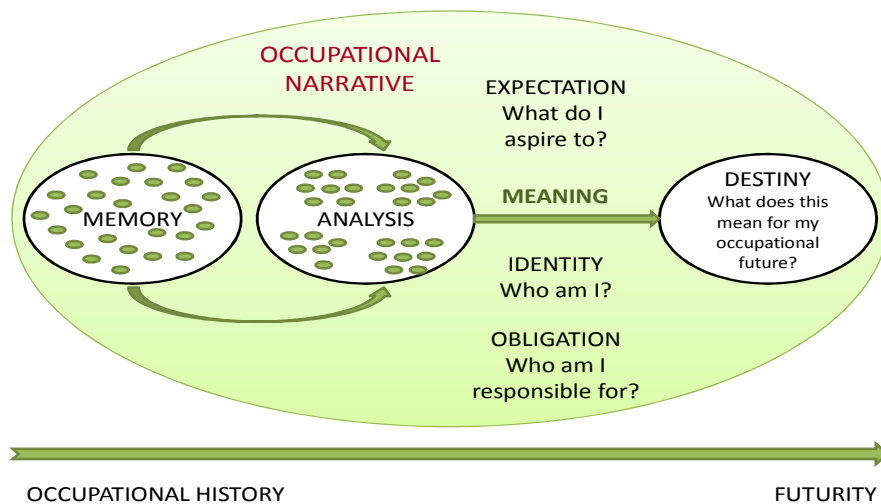


FIGURE 1: A conceptual model for investigating occupational experience

This model helps to illustrate the primary foci of my research initiative and to embrace some sense of reality into an otherwise obtuse idea. It presents a conceptual framework which brings together a collection of ideas or concepts and presents them in a way which brings a degree of coherence to my research proposition. Cohen et al acknowledge that:

‘...concepts enable us to impose some sense of meaning on the world; through them reality is given sense, order and coherence. They are the means by which we are able to come to terms with our experience’

(2000, p. 13)

This conceptual framework generates a representation of my research approach and outlines the principal ideas that I have investigated; it acts as a blueprint offering coherence to my inquiry. In this framework I portray my thinking of what constitutes occupational futurity – identity, history, obligations and aspiration – and, in so doing set out a link between occupational experience before and after a point in time (the ‘present’) at which a person embraces their occupational narrative.

Knowledge claims in this narrative study

In considering what is important for research design, Cresswell (2003) identifies ‘three elements of inquiry i.e. knowledge claims, strategies, and methods’ (p. 5). The second two elements – strategies of inquiry, and data collection and analysis methods – are written about in depth in a later chapter on research methodology, but the first – knowledge claims – lies at the centre of the research argument – what are the philosophical assumptions being made about the knowledge constituents of my inquiry? I have indicated that it is the professional worker’s occupational history that contains the raw knowledge that I seek to extract – an excavation of personal data (Thompson, 1988), held by the research participant in the depths of their occupational memory. This knowledge is, in its raw state, like a rough boulder, yet to be cut or crafted to produce a future identity which is sculpted and reinforced by its past experience.

To extract these personal memories, both the participant and researcher need to locate a research tool that can be used to modify this primary knowledge into a secondary form that can be examined by the researcher. The research tool that I am using is ‘narrative inquiry’ which enables the researcher and participant to co-construct an occupational narrative telling the story of the research collaborator’s occupational history; my aims in this research were to address the following principal research questions:

1. What have been the career histories of older professional workers, now in their ‘third-age’ of employment, pending workplace disengagement (also known as ‘retirement’)?
2. What are the issues that influence older professional workers as they navigate toward retirement, taking account of their aspirations, intentions and obligations?
3. How does a narrative approach to occupational story-telling help older professional workers embrace their occupational history and destiny?

The narrative approach results in a story which is a social construction of reality: that is it is a reconstitution of the story as recalled by the participant, not necessarily as lived by them. The extracted knowledge, the occupational story told, is a representation of the research participant’s recollections from their occupational memory. In this way the research participant seeks meaning for the occupational world in which they have lived/are living, but in so doing they attach subjective meanings to the occupational events or developments that they actually experienced. My ontological assumption is that the individual can assert that the knowledge extracted is the truth in so far as it represents their understanding and experience of reality in the occupational world in which they have lived/are living. A criticism of constructivist approaches is that it cannot tell an authentic story because the truth cannot be verified, but, in my earlier

research (King, 2007), I contended that ‘the social reality is that it is the truth in so far as it is the expression of one’s self perception of what has happened’ (p. 16) and so I argue that narrative accounts are a valuable source of personal knowledge. The value, according to Burr (1998), is that socially constructed stories focus on the subjective nature of the story being told and are, therefore, a rich source of knowledge about the individual whose story is recounted.

Reflections on career transition

In this research, I have investigated the occupational histories of third-age professional practitioners, who have worked for nearly 30 years before entering the ‘third-age’ of their life span; Ford describes the ‘third-age’ as:

‘...starting at 45+, because 45 is now the approximate point at which age can begin to present both men and women with significant (and for many, acute) problems in securing suitable employment’

(1996, p. 1)

The socially constructed outputs, occupational narratives, of my research collaborators, represent a reflection of the career trajectories that each practitioner has experienced and an image of their occupational identities – in this sense, a portrait that describes their impression of self-image and locates their personality as a distinct and lasting entity. Their occupational identity is a mix of their personal characteristics, professional allegiance and organisational culture and, for many older workers, the principal framework that captures who and what they are in an occupational context. People, when asked what they do, often respond with a label that describes their occupational role – accountant, lawyer, management consultant and so on. When considering career emergence and trajectory, it is therefore, important to consider the ‘working identity’ that older workers adopt when describing their occupational purpose.

The value of professional credence

Contemporary professional markets

Business consulting firms are typically represented in those organisations offering consulting services to other corporate businesses and sometimes wealthy individuals. The primary product offered by these firms is the specialist knowledge of their professional workers (e.g. accountants, lawyers and management consultants) who have acquired their expertise through qualification and practice. As Donaldson (2001) notes, these ‘knowledge-intensive organisations depend upon the generation, utilization and uniqueness of their knowledge base’

(p. 956). This knowledge depository is a business consulting firm's principal asset, sustained through the capabilities of its professional workers; Alvesson acknowledges that:

‘...the category of knowledge-intensive companies... refers to firms where most work is said to be of an intellectual nature and where well-educated, qualified employees form the major part of the work force’

(2001, p. 863)

This research focuses on these ‘well-educated, qualified employees’ and investigates their occupational preferences at a later stage in their working lives, often in an organisational landscape which has changed significantly since they first entered. I acknowledge that the professional practitioners who constitute my opportunistic research group may have greater freedom and choice in older age as they hold a differentiated ‘occupational class’ to the majority of older workers, as reflected in the socioeconomic position they hold based on the professional characteristics of their occupational appointment. Amongst these characteristics, according to Mulvey (1999), are ‘the existence of structures for training, a body of knowledge that the profession can call its own, and existence of an identifiable group of clients’ (p. 24). Organisational growth resulted in expanded client capabilities and markets and, as a consequence of realignment, led to leaner leadership and management structures. From a career perspective these larger, now increasingly global, business consulting firms required fewer people in executive positions and, as they moved to incorporated (limited liability) governance structures, fewer senior employees to share the financial risks; this has led to a reorientation of career structures and a reduction in the roles open to senior professional practitioners.

In many cases a qualified business services practitioner would have pursued their occupational progression in a trajectory, along the lines of the professional career model presented by Dalton et al (1977). This identified four distinct phases of professional development, each directed by the organisation with whom they were employed and influenced by their membership of a professional institution. This classic perspective on career is embraced by Wilensky, who recognised the systematised nature of occupational progression:

‘...let us define career in structural terms. A career is a succession of related jobs arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which people move in ordered (more or less predictable) sequence’

(1961, p. 523)

This perspective positions career as a framework or progression which is formulated in advance of an individual's participation in it and suggests that a person's career path is predetermined by the organisational or professional structure within which the individual is located. However, in contemporary labour markets, the patterns of professional advancement have fragmented and

are being replaced by what Arthur describes as the ‘boundaryless career...’ (1994, p. 296) i.e. one that transitions across organisational boundaries; Arthur and Rousseau (1996) define career as ‘the unfolding sequence of a person’s work experiences over time’ (p. 4) which projects the responsibility for career on to the individual rather than the organisation. By acknowledging this contrast between ‘old’ and ‘new’ careers, there is affirmation that, for business professionals, the centrality of their career experience has moved from an organisational to individual focus. Sommerlund and Boutaiba argue that this ‘contrast’ is contested and, in their reported research within a scientific community, conclude that:

‘...a rigid distinction between old and new types of career is problematic because first, both old and new careers are still present and secondly, the new and old career types are each other’s prerequisites rather than contrast’

(2007, p. 525)

This perspective certainly reflects the requirement, in business consulting, to qualify first as a professional practitioner before pursuing a ‘boundaryless’ career and perhaps the two approaches are complementary, mutually supportive rather than exclusive as suggested by Sommerlund and Boutaiba. This emergent career landscape suggests one in which the business consultant is able to pursue their chosen ‘zig-zag or boundaryless’ route within a professional context rather than being dependent on the consulting organisation which employs them. Professional careers have become more flexible – the anticipated scripts of professional workers have been liberated, leaving them more able to oversee their life course in the new economy; as MacMillan acknowledges:

‘...while cultures may construct the life course differently by regulating the pace and process of human development in any given society, it is also the case that economic realities and social constraints may alter cultural connections’

(2005, p. 9)

The influence of an individual’s professional culture, whilst moderating the pace of professional development and sustaining specialist credence, is, in contemporary organisations, attenuated through interaction with economic and social realities. This may diminish the strength of their professional connection and mean that they are enabled to sculpt their own career story instead of it being sculpted for them by their employing organisation and/or professional body.

Setting out on this research venture

The value of autobiographic reflexivity

Whilst establishing this investigation I struggled with my ideas and thoughts questioning the usefulness of this research and its relevance to current career thinking in contemporary society. My concerns centred on the reality of the investigation that I had proposed and the validity of the research methodology and outcomes that I anticipated. In an early stage of my inquiry, I was encouraged to place ‘self’ in the research, locating myself as a co-author in this auto/biographical investigation. As an agent in the inquiry process, I realised that I needed to take a reflexive approach to my research, defined by Etherington as:

‘...the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry’

(2004, p. 31)

I realised that I needed to embrace my involvement when I accepted that my own occupational transition was the main reason that I had embarked on this occupational investigation. My principal research instrument, auto/biographic narrative, is the primary inquiry tool that I have chosen to extract the core elements of my research participants’ stories. In recording these occupational stories, I have utilised an approach known as biographical analysis, which is a narrative type requiring the researcher to document the encounters of another’s life (Cresswell, 2007). This type of study has a contextual focus which centres on a prescribed element of the life of the key actor, i.e. the person/s about whom the narrative is being recorded, within that story – examples include ‘adults moving into higher education’ (West, 1996), ‘children’s narrative capacities in the classroom’ (Gallas, 1994) and ‘families and changing family structures’ (Bertaux and Delcroix, 2000; Bornat et al, 2000). Although each of these research studies has a differentiated context, the focus of the narrative inquiry is the principal player/s within the story; in this investigation, older professional practitioners in business consulting.

Occupational reflexions on self

As my research centres on the occupational stories of a group of professional workers, I think it relevant to explain my rationale for developing this research approach. Having worked in professional consulting organisations for over 35 years, I had an opportunity to reflect on my occupational existence by authoring an occupational narrative ‘Out of the Mists’ (King, 2007), that recollects my career experiences and describes my occupational journey from a professional trainee through to senior manager. For the first 22 years, I followed a traditional ascendant career progressing to a high organisational position, but as a consequence of a takeover,

transferred to another organisation where I continued to promote a learning environment for professional practitioners in a consulting partnership. During the next 11 years, I strived for occupational advancement, eventually achieving a senior appointment that reflected the role I had previously attained. However, this was short-lived as the professional partnership was acquired by a global consulting organisation that did not adhere to its promises of job growth and opportunities within its European operations. This merged organisation started to retract on its assurances and, as a result of a programme of occupational release, I was made redundant. So, from 2005, I changed to a role as a portfolio educator embracing self-employed work and postgraduate studies in career education, which rekindled my interest in researching the occupational lives of other professional practitioners.

Accordingly, I researched the professional lives of my collaborators who, having acquired a professional identity – a profile determined by personal capabilities and characteristics framed by their professional institution – continued to progress through their occupational trajectory. From time to time family interruptions (e.g. death, illness or relationship breakdown) and/or occupational turbulence (e.g. restructuring and/or redundancy) initiated periods of fragmentation or even disengagement from the occupational landscape. For many professional workers their occupational existence is governed by their professional associations and their progress is expected to continue in a linear motion until it ceases as a consequence of retirement, ill health, redundancy or death. This is a generic description of 20th century anticipated and, in many cases, realised occupational emergence, but contemporary reality indicates alternative ‘meandering’ profiles for the 21st century professional worker. These careers are governed, not by ascendant professional pathways designed from the cradle to grave of an individual’s occupational being, but by fragmented occupational trails thrown together by the uncertainties of 21st century social, technological, economic and political environments.

Emergent occupational existence

Placing self in the research

To ground this research, the foundations for my occupational trajectory were the emergent social and economic optimism of the mid-20th century, a secure family environment and an enjoyable, successful educational transition through adolescence. These favourable societal and psychological conditions encouraged my early participation in academia through first degree studies, which, proved to be short-lived. After a year studying chemical engineering, I decided to disengage from advanced study and start my life ventures – an enduring relationship with my

wife and family, a challenging occupational trajectory and a secure faith – which combined, continue to provide assurance in a complex world.

Initially I was uncertain about an occupational direction and sought advice from a vocational guidance unit, who identified my preference for administration. Armed with this insight, I identified two possibilities – banking and insurance; although attracted to banking, I decided to accept employment as a ‘professional trainee’ with a local life assurance company primarily because my father knew the personnel manager; like many of my research collaborators, I had chosen an occupation based on ‘opportunity structures theory’ (Roberts, 1968) whereby I had made my early career choice as a direct result of my father’s social contact and the local labour economy. I did not enjoy the theoretical disposition of my early professional studies, and, although I passed some exams, decided that I did not want to become an insurance practitioner.

After a few years, I was encouraged to apply for a training role that I accepted and enjoyed for a short period before I was made redundant as a consequence of financial limitations within the company. Through support from my employer and local knowledge, I obtained an appointment at another life assurance company, where I received excellent mentoring and professional guidance, but, because of a lack of progressive opportunity, I sought advancement and accepted an appointment at an employee benefit consulting firm. I stayed with this firm for a significant period until it was taken over and I moved to an actuarial consulting firm; my occupational experiences in these firms are documented in my occupational narrative (King, 2007). I thrived on the new development challenges, career prospects and opportunities to travel overseas as the company grew and expanded their territorial operations. These knowledge intensive firms, dependent on the expertise of professional workers, belong to a business classification known as professional service firms (PSFs); as Morris notes:

‘PSFs had two core characteristics in their purest form: a partnership form of ownership and producers who had a formal professional accreditation’

(2008, p. 145)

Thus for approximately 30 years I worked in a professional services environment where I had responsibility for creating corporate and personal development programmes – business planning, career coaching, leadership development, qualification sponsorship, systems management, skill enhancement and team building initiatives – for all levels of professionals from trainee to partner/ director. Although comparatively stable in the mid-20th century, the conceptual foundations of the PSF have become blurred, as Morris notes in the areas of:

‘...ownership and governance ...which occupations qualify as professions ...[and] the ways occupations seek to monopolize particular areas of work by claims to expertise’

(2008, pp. 146-147)

Changing perceptions of professional practice have, in the 21st century, led to some confusion when defining the boundaries of professionalism; in my research, this is most relevant in the area of management consulting where the emergence of new professional occupations, particularly in the media and technology industries, have generated different professional organisations. Although my other two main research occupations, accountancy and law, still retain many traditional characteristics of PSFs, they too are changing, globally and nationally, as a consequence of economic activity, financial accountability and compliance regulation. The distinctive nature of the PSF is adapting as firms strive to retain competitive advantage and grow in an increasingly challenging and often hostile market place; they are no longer the strong and secure business environments that they traditionally have been with consequent repercussions on the financial and mental well-being of the professional practitioners working within them.

Although satisfying and relatively stable for 30 years, my occupational certainty was replaced by ambiguity and change as a result of organisational restructuring and economic faltering in the opening years of the 21st century. Following an enforced exit from my occupational existence, this onset of uncertainty led to a reappraisal and readjustment of my occupational endeavours. Although I had experienced redundancy earlier in my career, this time I realised some key differences; now approaching mid-50s, I encountered tensions and frustrations that I had not been exposed to when first made supernumerary. My principal obstacles centred on my attitudes toward occupational hegemony – I no longer desired power and influence in the way that I had strived for when younger. My transitional experience, with negligible response to my multiple job applications, proved difficult and I decided to seek a new direction for my continuing occupational traverse that was to migrate to a different working environment. Ibarra (2003) suggests that, to reinvent career, we need to acknowledge a turning point, a defining moment in our career journey, but most importantly, she notes that

‘...the end point helps determine the beginning and the low point [of a good occupational story, and that] ... only when the end is in sight can we recognize a turning point’

(pp. 140-141)

Following my organisational disembarkation, I had searched for alternative employment, but finally acknowledged that I had arrived at a crossroads – a defining moment; I couldn’t turn into familiar territory, but only forward along an unknown route leading to an unclear future. As a rational person, I had always strived to manage my own career progression, changing jobs and seeking advancement as my occupational trajectory emerged, but now, in my mid-fifties, I was left with no clear direction ...but had I arrived at the end of the road? I knew the answer was no, but didn’t know which alternative route to take. During my temporary withdrawal from

permanent employment, I remained busy in a variety of voluntary roles, including company secretary for a church trust, legal executor for a number of family assignments and postgraduate student studying for a second master's degree. In the first two roles I explored the possibility of employment, but, although initially optimistic, both avenues ultimately ended without success. I had arrived at a 'turning point' in my career journey, but only recognised it as a defining moment two years later having commenced my occupational studies.

Engaging with occupational history

As a consequence of earlier academic endeavours, I had enrolled on a master's degree studying 'career education'. After a year of study I had to choose a topic for my dissertation, but, because I no longer had an occupational context within which to ground my research, struggled to decide on a dissertation topic. One of my tutors had been on an academic sabbatical and returned to present an elective on 'biographical perspectives' that I asked to attend on a voluntary basis. The outcome of this fortuitous series of events was that I wrote my occupational story, which explored my career trajectory up to and including 2005 – recorded in my occupational narrative 'Out of The Mists' (King, 2007). In retrospect, I have realised that this narrative experience proved to be a turning point; for as Ibarra suggests:

'...to reinvent oneself is to rework one's story, revising it frequently, trying out different versions on others. Events punctuate continuous experience, giving us some pegs on which to hang our reinvention stories'

(2004, p. 141)

Many narrative studies tell the story of an individual's total life experiences (life history), whilst others focus on a specific dimension of life experience e.g. interaction with ethnicity, illness or socialisation. I wrote my occupational autobiography – a story composed by the actor at the centre of the inquiry Ellis (2004) – to capture my career experiences in a story format that I could interrogate through narrative analysis and interpretation. In this account of my career journey, I recalled episodes of my trajectory that illustrated significant time-frames during my occupational experience and described my overall perception of that period in terms of its effect on my occupational emergence. I constructed my story though what Crites (1971) describes as 'consulting our memory' (p. 299) and penned a chronicle of my occupational experiences over 40 years. In addition to the satisfaction of writing my career autobiography, I extracted more understanding of my career preferences particularly the 'realisation that academic activity might influence [my] future career direction' (King, 2007, p. 27) and decided to pursue a scholarly orientation through continuing postgraduate study and research.

My role as author and story-teller

What are the influences of my authorship? Has my construction of this autobiographical narrative directed the outcome of my story, for example have I only selected episodes that I wanted to recall, dismissing others? In my original research, I acknowledged that a disadvantage of my constructed story (King, 2007) was that ‘it recollects what I, the author, remembered not necessarily what actually happened, and, therefore, may produce an incomplete narrative’ (p. 16). Burr (1998) and Lejeune (1989) argue that this is an advantage as it validates the subjectivity of the author’s experience; indeed Lejeune (1989) presents the concept of the ‘autobiographical pact’, an implied assertion that the author, narrator and central character are the same person, validating the authenticity of the story told. They argue that narrative credibility derives from authorial participation i.e. the author’s presence in the story endorses the authenticity of the constructed story. However, Foucault disputes this position and argues for the removal or displacement of the author from the narrative discourse:

‘[we must] locate the space left empty by the author’s disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the opening this disappearance uncovers’

(1998, p. 209)

He diminishes the importance of the individual and self, releasing the text to generate meaning unimpeded by the identity and participation of an author, who, he argues, obstructs the composition of a story by choosing, omitting and restricting its potential meaning. Quoting Spence (1982), Gergen concludes that ‘the construction not only shapes the past – it becomes the past’ (1999, p. 72) and suggests that narrative is often successful because it includes inaccurate recollection (fuzziness) and targeted recollection (selectivity) despite influencing the narrative objectivity. My authorial involvement resulted in a feeling of achievement and inspiration, having reconstructed a story representing a significant proportion of my working life. Complete objectivity is, I believe, impossible to acquire and reality at least offers the opportunity to write a subjective recollection of an individual occupational experience – the past will always be a remodelling never a restoration of what actually happened. It is, as Bruner, citing Bartlett (1932), describes in his account of memory:

‘...the past is a reconstruction rather than a recovery, each reconstruction also containing the mark of what had been reconstructed before. The secret of history is forever lost’

(1983, p. 5)

The author should remain in the story in differing roles as the principal actor, researcher and story teller, each enabling them to add to the richness of the narrative constructed. My personal

autobiographic exploration encouraged me to see my emergent self as refraction but not a reflection of my occupational existence. By refraction I mean that my emergent narrative was a deflection of my actual occupational experience, that is to say one interpretation of what I actually experienced rather than a true reflection (mirror image) of my ‘lived’ experience. This optical metaphor displays the wealth of alternative interpretations that are showcased when an original source, that is occupational trajectory, is refracted through the lens of narrative inquiry.

Auto/biographic narration present ‘storied’ accounts of occupational experience and may lead to a subjective interpretation of the actual ‘lived’ experience of the person about whom the narration is composed. However, I concur with Etherington, who, in justifying her stance on ‘reflexivity’, suggests that readers are more able to understand a narrative text if they are also ‘informed about the position we adopt in relation to the study and by our explicit questioning of our own involvement’ (2004, p. 32). If, therefore, an understanding of the author/s’ role in writing the text is helpful to the reader, then it is important that the role of every author involved is clarified; the professional worker’s role is transparent for they are the principal career actor, but what of the co-author, the other person involved in constructing the occupational story? I finally had no doubts that it was important for my occupational self to be identified and located within this research study as an active agent in the narrative process.

Continuing toward occupational destiny

My autobiographic narration helped me to appreciate what my continuing occupational destiny might look like – a roving business educator or, in the words of Fenwick:

‘[a] portfolio educator... a term adopted to represent people engaged in adult education activities, who create portfolios of self-employed work arrangements to contract their skills in a variety of contexts’

(2003, p. 165)

This clarification of my new role harmonised with an internal self-perception; having worked in commercial education for over three decades, it gave me an image of my occupational destiny – a visualisation of my future occupational existence. A significant feature of this newly discovered role was the realisation that it presented an opportunity to continue my former role as a business educator – it gave me a sense of continuity and coherence, an appreciation of something consistent and connected between my occupational selves. In her work Linde asserts:

‘in order to exist in the social world with a comfortable sense of being a good, socially proper and stable person, an individual needs to have a coherent, acceptable, and constantly revised life story’

(1993, p. 1)

Although not critical, some people make sense of their occupational lives by detecting a common thread or theme that permeates their occupational existence, a link that presents a degree, however marginal, of shared meaning between their completed and anticipated occupational purpose. I had observed and started to embrace a different occupational identity, one evolving from and reflecting my earlier occupational activities. My experience of constructing, analysing and interpreting my occupational narrative, a positive and satisfying engagement, led me to question the value of embracing the occupational experience of other third-age professional workers. If my occupational research had located a possible new self, that of 'portfolio educator', what value might occupational narrative have for others? I worked in conversation with my professional practitioners for over 15 months, during which I extracted a set of meaningful dialogues documenting their occupational memories as a narrative account. A criticism of such narratives is that they are subjective and lack authenticity, but I contend that the occupational stories generated are a rich interpretation of the actual career experienced by the person whose memories have been documented. Indeed Burr suggests that the constructivist approach is valid and can be acknowledged as an advantage:

'...for part of the power of social constructionist accounts is that they deconstruct categories and classifications and urge us to recognise the diversity, fragmentariness and localness of experience and subjectivity'

(1998, p. 17)

These glimpses of occupational life are a representation of the actual lives lived and establish a portfolio of occupational sketches illustrating the experiences of several career protagonists.

CHAPTER 2: MY CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION: A critical review of occupational identity and its implications for future self

In this chapter, I have reviewed the occupational research conducted by Herminia Ibarra, Professor of Organizational Behavior at INSEAD in Fontainebleau, France, who explored the transitional experiences of managers and professionals undergoing career change after a period of occupational participation. Her research illuminates the processes involved in changing career in mid-life and I have reflected on her findings as a critical lens for introducing and critiquing my approach to investigating the occupational histories of third-age professional practitioners. This reflective writing highlights the importance of occupational identity and how a person can rediscover an occupational role in the middle phase of their working life; the lessons uncovered are transferable to the later phase/s of a professional practitioner's career as they conclude their occupational existence.

Mid-life occupational transitions

Discovering career possibilities

Customarily, careers guidance and advice has been prescribed around what an individual wants to be, often based on their personality and capabilities, assuming that it is possible to know one's occupational lifetime choice prior to experiencing it, but Ibarra argues that:

'...we learn who we are – in practice, not in theory – by testing reality, not by looking inside. We discover the true possibilities by doing – trying out new activities, reaching out to new groups, finding new role models, and reworking our story as we tell it to those around us'

(2003, p. xii)

Within this insight, is the suggestion that an individual's career choice is determined by the story that a person tells about them self and that this story becomes the framework within which an individual makes their occupational choices, certainly for those who have long term occupational experience. In my own situation, I found that my emergent career as a portfolio educator, evolved from and was supported by my self-perception of what I had been (King, 2007) and that this reflection became what Ibarra describes as a 'possible self', one of 'many selves' that constitute the full range of our occupational possibilities. It seemed, on reading Ibarra's text, that her writing shared many of the constructs that I had identified as being at the core of my research initiative – career emergence, narrative reflection, work identity and

occupational stories, and I, therefore, decided to review it in greater depth, as I believed it had a lot of ideas and insights that I might usefully assimilate and reflect on.

Her primary aim was to explore individuals' career stories and see what they could tell us about how best to rediscover our occupational priorities and purpose; consequently she identified ways in which career changers might craft their future career direction, i.e. their occupational futurity. These aims are similar to my research foci in seeking to understand the occupational histories of third-age professional practitioners working in the knowledge economy. In setting the scene for her work, Ibarra suggests that:

‘our working identity is not a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered ...rather, it is made up of many possibilities; some tangible and concrete, defined by the things we do, the company we keep, and the stories we tell about our work and lives: others existing only in the realm of future potential and private dreams’

(2003, p. xi)

This research enables my research participants to articulate their occupational history by constructing a narrative representation of their working experiences and to illuminate their occupational possibilities by exploring their narrative testimony seeking implications for their vocational practice and occupational future.

My evolving pathway

In my story, the ‘possibility’ of my current career episode – an academic pathway involving research, teaching and writing – emerged out of my narrative composition (King, 2007). In this sense my current identity was, I argue, a ‘hidden treasure’ waiting to be discovered, but, as Ibarra contends, it emerged as a possibility that evolved out of my occupational story. A key insight from her research is the idea of ‘possible selves’ – the suggestion that a person has a number of alternative career options, often grounded in earlier occupational experiences that, if embraced, could lead to a future working identity. A primary difference in our thinking is that of the value of the concepts and ideas presented – in her preface, Ibarra notes that:

‘...this book is not ...for the person ‘downshifting’ or easing his or her way out of a fully engaged career’

(2003, p. xiii)

Whilst her research focused on mid-career professionals encountering a mid-life transition, which mainly involved a complete change of occupational direction, my research concentrates on professionals who are pursuing a route toward occupational engagement in an evolutionary

not revolutionary way. She does retrospectively acknowledge the older worker when she refers to the:

‘...fifty-year-olds experiencing new degrees of freedom who seek a different way of spending the next fifteen working years’

(Ibarra, 2003, p. xiii)

So the focus of transition appears to be the active engagement of the person involved in their career change experience, not their chronological age. I found her ideas and thinking equally relevant to the occupational focus of my research participants as they morphed from the status of fully engaged, often through partially engaged, to totally disengaged worker. However, this raises the issue of when occupational disengagement or withdrawal actually takes place, as many older workers do continue an occupational existence, albeit often part-time, post formal retirement.

The remainder of this chapter examines, espouses, and, on occasions, extrapolates Ibarra’s arguments and findings as she investigates professionals and managers in transition, as illuminated in ‘Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing Your Career’ (2003/2004). A key difference in my research is that the objects of the research, an opportunistic group of professional practitioners, are not seeking career transition by moving to a new role, but, through a process of career emergence, have actually changed their occupational context by morphing to a different role within their existing employment. This said the similarities of research intent, career exploration and transition of professional workers, are clearly a shared focus of both research initiatives.

Exploring working identity

What is the value of embracing a positive and clear self-image for determining possible career destinies? This section explores the notion of ‘self’ and what this means for our occupational identity – if self is in a confident relationship with others then there may be little reason to consider alternative identities, but is this anticipated confidence always to be assumed for professional workers? Are professionals in alignment with their professional identities or is there an alternative identity that they would aspire to, given the opportunity to change their occupational trajectory during the concluding years of their working life?

Representing self in the world

So how does a person project their identity, their character, to the world? An individual’s representation of self is, Ibarra argues, a reflection of their reality; she contends that:

‘...we learn who we are—in practice, not in theory—by testing reality not by looking inside. We discover the true possibilities by doing—trying out new activities, reaching out to new groups, finding new role models, and reworking our story as we tell it to those around us. What we want clarifies with experience and validation from others along the way’

(2004, p. xii)

This insight proposes that we become clearer as we understand our experiences and interpret the meaning for our future occupational direction, but how many people actually learn from past experience unless they are able to capture and embrace it? The intended meaning of this reflection is commendable, but is it practicable for workers undertaking a career transition? Many people make their career choice as a result of opportunistic interventions – sight of a job advertisement, introduction from family or friendship networks or even a call from an agency head-hunter. I acknowledge that, whilst this may be representative for professional occupations, it is not necessarily so for all social classes, within which people covet a job more than a career extension. It seems that occupational choice is often event driven rather than inspired by clearer meaning gained from understanding an individual’s occupational experiences. To encourage occupational reflection, a primary purpose of this research is to enable older workers to capture their occupational experiences and enfold its occupational meaning for future career choice. Early in her deliberations, Ibarra recognises that, for most people:

‘...working identity changes so gradually and naturally that we don’t even notice how much we have changed. But sometimes we hit a period when the desire for change imposes itself with great urgency’

(2003, p. 1)

Generally, I believe this to be a true observation of many people’s working experiences – they gradually change, often entrapped in a beguiling world of occupational satisfaction that leaves them immune to the reality of life’s experience until that is radically challenged, as is the case where a person in close relationship dies, they face deteriorating health or their occupational bubble bursts as a consequence of organisational restructuring. The shared emotion in each of these encounters is dissociation or disconnection from a stable experience – whether a strong relationship, good health or satisfying employment; in this context dissociation is an unanticipated interruption of an individual’s conscious functioning. For many people the disconnecting or severing incident is enforced on them, but for some it is sought often through a reflexive exploration into their personal values and aspirations for life, cf. the story of ‘Pierre: Psychiatrist becomes Buddhist Monk’ (Ibarra, 2003, pp. 2-6) and the later career choice of John, one of my research participants who gave up a well-paid and high status position to work for a charity.

The change may not be a consequence of imposed ‘urgency’, but merely a result of reflexive ‘choice’. However the common script in this career transition is the disconnection or severance from an individual’s former occupational stability either through disruption or determination, depending on the circumstances initiating the change. In terms of working identity, the trigger for change, whether external or internal, is manifested as a separation from a person’s physiological and psychological well-being and an estrangement, an alienation from their former occupational identity. The stability of occupational self is consequent on the strength of association that an individual sustains with their environment; when this falters, or is completely extinguished, as in occupational exclusion then their self-image is at risk. My premise is that a positive self-image is dependent on the strength and stability of the occupational relationships that a person holds and that, if these are threatened or destroyed, working identity is compromised.

The contingency of self-perception

This idea of relationship dissonance is the primary focus of Ronald Laing (1990), who made a study into ‘sanity and madness’ in which he proposed that perception of self is contingent on relationship with the outside world; the degree to which a person is at ease with them self is a reflection of the confidence experienced in that relationship – if this is in disjunction, then a person may move to a state of madness where self in relation to others is alienated or disassociated from inner self. In developing an integrated sense of self, Laing posits that:

‘...the sense of identity requires the existence of another by whom one is known; and a conjunction of this other person’s recognition of one’s self with self-recognition’

(1990, p. 139)

He proposes that many cases of mental illness are primarily a lack of a sense of self-worth caused by dissonance between the inner and outer selves i.e. there is a lack of ontological security between inner self and experience of being in the world (outer self). Taking his premise that ‘self’ is an expression of two dimensions of personal experience, namely inner being – personal psyche or psychological makeup – and experience of being within the world i.e. a person’s perception of what others think, then, to remain sane, a person needs to hold these two domains in balance or in a state of equivalency. This is the essence of sanity or normative psychological well-being, namely that a person holds a positive view of self and that this perception is synchronised with experience or sense of being (within the world).

Personal existence is centred on identity, as an individual can be represented in a number of different forms – self-perception, others’ perception, state identity as recorded (from birth through to death) and working identity conferred by association with the professional

organisation to which an individual belongs. Assuming a stable state of psychological well-being, the mental identity of my research group is not in question; by this I mean that the practitioners who constitute my research population are sane, that is their self-identity is not called into doubt by any indication of schizoid or other psychological disorder. I see the value of Laing’s representation of sanity and madness as the distinction he makes between the inner and outer self; in a psychologically balanced person, there is conjunction between the two selves and they experience a state of mutual symbiosis. I find this concept useful, although I acknowledge that his work has been subject to criticism primarily due to his anti-psychiatric challenges regarding the nature of mental illness.

Identity in transition

In her exposition of ‘identities in transition’ (Figure 2), Ibarra suggests that, as a person considers making a career change, they ‘linger between identities’ as this phase is ‘indispensable because we do not give up a career path in which we have invested so much of ourselves unless we have a good sense of the alternatives’ (Ibarra, 2003, p. 12) ...and she acknowledges that, in this process of ‘lingering’:

‘change always takes much longer than we expect because to make room for the new, we have to get rid of some of the old selves we are still dragging around and, unconsciously, still invested in becoming’

(2003, p. 13)

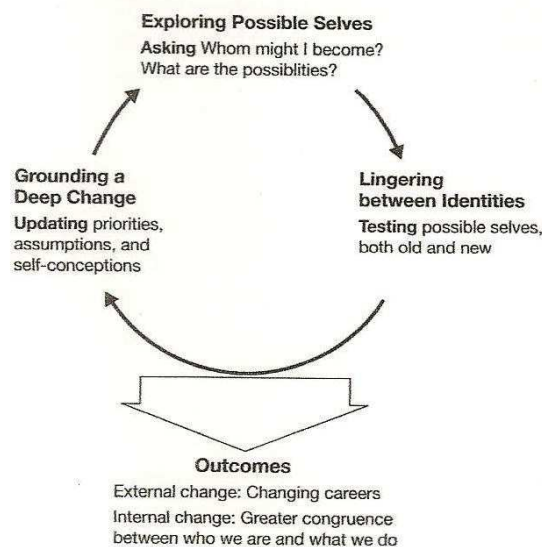


FIGURE 2: Identities in transition (Ibarra, 2003, p.12)

In Figure 2 the ‘between’ phase is labelled as ‘lingering’, a transition that might be described as the act of progressing slowly, a state of tardiness, but is this a reasonable interpretation of what professionals are doing when they change career later in their occupational trajectory? I suggest that what all career changers do is vacillate between their old and new identity, that is waver between the different courses of action open to them and that this may be a slow or quick transition, in which case perhaps the act of moving from career exploration to enactment might be better labelled as ‘wavering’, a description of the career choice process as noted by Cochran & Laub (1994). This allows the professional a period of time to check out and evaluate the various future career options open to them taking into account their role opportunities and life obligations. This observation, regarding the pace of transition, argues against Ibarra’s contention that:

‘...long before the transition is completed, different versions of our selves battle it out in a long and anguished middle period’

(2003, p. 14)

Although the transition may be ‘anguished’ it need not necessarily be ‘long’. Indeed, most of my research participants realigned their occupational focus fairly quickly, albeit not without a degree of anxiousness (e.g. James who regularly accepted overseas assignments for months or occasionally years at a time). However, a principal difference between my research population and Ibarra’s is the nature of the career change – for Ibarra’s it was a total change of occupation whereas, for my research participants, it has been mainly a realignment of their existing identity, an adjustment from one role to another often with the same employer or in a similar professional environment.

Whatever the length of time involved, every career actor has to consider the construct of ‘self’ – the qualities that distinguish one person from another – and how this is affected by a change to a new career. This idea of one-self is challenged by Ibarra who suggests instead that people have multiple-selves, existing and possible, adopted, often in a state of co-existence, to form an entity, the true-self, that is the person whom we ultimately would like to be. This discussion about the humanity of self, bares similarity to Laing’s arguments about the importance of alignment between a person’s inner and outer being – in an occupational sense, the degree of correlation between occupational identity and occupational context.

Professional selves and allegiance

Ibarra (2003) argues that the true-self approach to identity is flawed and suggests instead that people are a bricolage of multiple-selves interwoven and interleaved within the various subsets of personal existence – familial, occupational and psychological; these multiple-selves

incorporate the myriad of possible-selves that may also be embraced as individuals search for a clear meaning of occupational being. She asserts that:

‘[the] possible-selves model reveals that we all carry around ...a whole cast of characters, the selves we hope to become, think we should become, or even fear becoming in the future’

(Ibarra, 2003, p. 37)

This perspective might suggest a state of anxiety, never satisfied with one occupational identity, but constantly searching for a new one. Whilst this may be true for those seeking a total career change, for most of my research collaborators it was not a true reflection of how they perceived their self-identity as they were satisfied with their occupational being. In Gary’s story, reported by Ibarra (2003, pp. 24-29), re-identifying self, took time:

‘finding a new identity was not simply a matter of dropping one self in favor of another but a process of tinkering with a whole set of possibilities: imagining new ones, trying them on for size, elaborating on some, dropping others, getting rid of outdated images, coming to grips with the fact that some might languish’

(Ibarra, 2003, p. 38)

This observation clearly illustrates what happens for those career changers who need to find a new occupational identity as a consequence of occupational disenfranchisement. Reflecting on my experience following redundancy, I tinkered with a few roles and started a new postgraduate qualification. This led to a new identity as a ‘portfolio educator’, an experience that channelled me into a new occupational pathway. Ibarra’s description of the process of occupational re/discovery helped to refocus my working identity with a strong educational link to my past career trajectory as an organisational learning consultant. My experience and others, including Gary, supports the ‘possible-selves’ model espoused by Ibarra, but, in contrast, her ‘true-self’ model probably more adequately illustrates the occupational experiences of the majority of my research participants who retained a working identity rooted in their professional allegiance. Despite this clear alignment to the construct of true-self, all professional practitioners actually do possess and exhibit a spectrum of multiple selves, originating from the myriad roles that they adopt – family member, network friend, professional expert and workplace colleague – all interdependent when creating a coherent identity.

Interwoven professional identities

This idea of mutual dependency leads to a different perspective in terms of the occupational identity that an individual holds through professional allegiance and that s/he holds through personal preference and values – Jenkins refers to these as collective (shared with others) and

individual (unique to self) identity and argues that they should be examined as two interwoven phenomena, not ‘different psychological conditions or constructs’ (2008, p. 37). As discussed in my earlier review of professional credence, once embedded within a profession, an individual often assumes the mantle of professionalism and their identities become absorbed within socially constructed frameworks of professional existence or identity, that is to say they act, behave and communicate in a way acceptable and distinctive to the profession of which they hold membership. Ibarra acknowledges that sense of self can remain encapsulated in the past when she notes that:

‘...our old identities, even when they are out of whack with our core values and fundamental preferences, remain entrenched because they are anchored in our daily activities, strong relationships, and life stories’

(2003, p. 16)

After years of working, many professional practitioners probably hold a perception of their existence and identity which is, in practice, an integrated sense of their personal and professional selves – this interwoven frame of identities is possibly influenced and guided more by their professional allegiance than their personal persuasion. So how is occupational identity determined? ...and what does this mean for an individual’s perception of their occupational existence? In search of their ‘true’ occupational identity I suggest that the professional practitioner has two occupational selves – one aligned to their professional allegiance, using Laing’s terminology, their outer occupational self and one directly in tune with their personal preferences, their inner occupational self. This perspective on occupational identity presents a dual concept i.e. the notion that a professional worker has two interfacing and integrating identity profiles, one framed through their profession and the other formed from their psychological makeup, namely their innermost ‘being’ – their innate characteristics, personality and psyche.

I contend that these two ‘occupational selves’ remain in harmony for the emerging years of a professional worker’s career trajectory, but, as one matures and life experiences become more enduring, the harmonic relationship between the two ‘occupational selves’ can become strained or fragmented. Some professional practitioners welcome an opportunity to reflect on their inner core beliefs and values and search for an occupational destiny that more closely matches their career aspirations. This differing approach to occupational identity supports the emerging view that, whether through free choice or forced disengagement, many third-age professional workers would welcome the opportunity to search for and engage with an alternative career trajectory. This transformational process requires the career actor to bring to life their desired occupational identity, a process described by Ibarra as:

‘...giving form and order to our possible selves, making them tangible, bringing them into the world, is hard work—both cognitively and emotionally’

(2003, p. 43)

Narrative inquiry, my chosen research methodology, creates appreciable form through the iterative and illustrative process of occupational story-telling; this approach engages the career actor in ‘making tangible’ the alternative multiple-selves they have experienced and the myriad possible-selves that they may consider in determining a future occupational destiny.

Professional identity and metamorphosis

In the transitional state that Ibarra (2003) describes as the ‘*in-between period*’ (p. 45, *italics original*), a person metamorphoses from one identity to another, gradually letting go of their past identities whilst reforming or transfiguring into new ones, the future representations of their occupational being. This period, as Ibarra aptly describes, is:

‘...the crucible in which we bring our possible selves tentatively into the world’

(2003, p. 45)

In Figure 2, she refers to this transitional phase as ‘lingering between identities’: metamorphosis is a term used to explain the emerging change of an entity from one state to another, e.g. as in the case of a larva changing into a butterfly, a complete transformation of that larva into an adult form with a corresponding change in its appearance and form. This biological process of metamorphosis is symbolic of the transitional process that a career changer experiences when moving from one job or work identity to another, or, as Ibarra describes it, using the analogy of a voyage:

‘...there is a departure, a disorienting time of travel and, finally, a destination’

(2003, p. 53)

I contest this analogy, since I believe that, unlike a simple voyage, the final destination for a career actor contemplating an occupational change is often unknown; this implies that the ‘in between period’ is extended, whereas, in practice it is absorbed and integrated with the emerging identity of a person when they adopt a new occupational role. In addition, this representation as a journey suggests linearity between two points, departure and destination, whereas career transitions are nearly always iterative or circular moving in random, often disconnected, ways between different non-linear points on the journey’s original itinerary. This randomness creates a disjointed, often contorted, flow from one place to another and leaves the career actor uncertain where to go next as compared to the clarity of a clearly identified destination. Although challenging this specific analogy, I agree with her acknowledgement that:

‘...the psychology of this in-between period has been described as ambivalence: we oscillate between ‘holding on’ and ‘letting go’, between our desire to rigidly clutch the past and the impulse to rush exuberantly into the future’

(Ibarra, 2003, p. 54)

This reminds me of a childhood experience when riding a roundabout at speed, to clutch, hold on and experience the safer option of staying on board or to let go and be thrown wildly in a tangential direction until coming to rest in, what I hoped to be, a safe position. Like a career transition, most people prefer to hold on to what they have, that is to remain in an occupational role with which they are comfortable rather than be flung in a new direction with little or no idea of the final destination. For most people, particularly men, the preferred occupational identity is the one that they are and have been comfortable with for the past years, even decades of their occupational existence, not the one that they might discover in the unknown, at the end of a tangential trajectory!

The primary characteristics of identity

These analogical comparisons present a visual image of the career transition process, but say little about the primary characteristics of identity, which distinguish one person’s self-perception from another. Jenkins (2008) suggests that:

‘...from either angle, the notion of identity involves two criteria of comparison between persons or things: *similarity and difference*’

(p. 17, *italics original*)

Reflecting on this position, a professional worker’s identity can be considered from these two dimensions – ‘similarity’ which locates identity within a definitive group sharing common goals and codes of practice, such as a professional association, and ‘difference’ which acknowledges identity to be distinctive and dependent on and/or reflective of the individual professional practitioner. This reflection highlights the significance of the terms referred to in this study, profession – a vocation that employs specialist or expert knowledge, professional – a person engaged in a profession, and professionalisation – the process of acquiring/imposing a professional status, contemporaneously ‘important in the analysis of newly emerging [consulting] occupations’ (Evetts, 2011, p. 8). So why is this distinction important?

By the third-age of their employment, many professional workers have embraced an occupational identity which typically reflects their outer or collective identity i.e. the profession of which they are a member, and, whilst their professional status remains their primary identity

driver, some will acknowledge, and all will be sensitive to, their inner or personal identity which reflects them as a unique individual. Through interaction between our inner and outer being, individuals are continually redefining themselves with reference to other social connections – self, other colleagues and networks – which result in a refreshed identity embracing the redefinitions of the moment, including occupational and professional dimensions.

Disconnecting from commercialism

Ibarra recognises this propensity to ‘refresh’ in her discussion about becoming an ‘ex’, where she notes that:

‘...long before we start exploring alternatives, we also begin to disconnect socially and psychologically. A slow and gradual shift in reference groups–relevant points of comparison–starts to take place’

(2003, p. 55)

My own experience seems to have been the reverse of Ibarra’s research participant June, who left academia to work in the business world (2003, pp. 46-53); I left the business world to build relationships with academics, students and administrators. Accordingly, I have become an ‘ex’ business practitioner reinventing myself as an associate lecturer participating in research, teaching and writing with a parallel disassociation from the commercial world. This change over process involved me in refreshing my reference groups and reorienting my working identity – a self-portrait of who I am in an occupational sense. I had, unknowingly, adopted what Ibarra describes as ‘reinvention practices’, which she explains represent the process of ‘creating and testing possible selves’, but how do we achieve this? Ibarra explains that:

‘...we bring them to life by doing new things, making new connections, and retelling our stories’

(2003, p. 58)

This describes how I refreshed my occupational identity over a transitional period of approximately two years, especially by retelling my occupational story expressed in narrative form (King, 2007). In addition to the therapeutic element of writing a narrative, it gave me an illuminating opportunity within which to refresh my perception of self-identity and focussed my attention on those activities that I had particularly valued during my career trajectory.

Unfolding occupational stories

My academic supervisors guided me through a maze of literature which showed how to write and interrogate occupational narrative, and ultimately to locate a new working identity which reflected my future occupational aspirations. Ibarra talks about ‘trial narratives’, recognising that:

‘...a working identity ...lies also in the unfolding story of our lives. Throughout a career transition, the narratives we craft to describe why we are changing (and what remains the same) also help us try on possibilities’

(2003, p. 60)

My narrative writing presented an opportunity to sculpt a new identity out of the boulders of my earlier occupational experiences and to tell a story that resonated with my recollection of what had happened throughout my career trajectory over decades of commercial servitude. In retelling my story, I found, as Ibarra records, that:

‘another reason the between-selves period is difficult is that ...we are juggling lots of different things – not necessarily with great coherence or consistency ...[and that] in evolutionary terms, we are ‘increasing variety’

(2003, p. 61)

By this she means that, as an individual expounds their possible-selves, they may begin to fragment their perception of working identity and become confused about where their occupational preferences are leading. Jenkins, citing Mead (1934) and Cooley (1962, 1964), acknowledges that:

‘from their work, an understanding emerges of selfhood as an on-going and, in practice, simultaneous synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others’

(2008, p. 40)

For the older professional worker seeking to balance responsibilities (family, finance, health and so on), this process of ‘simultaneous synthesis’ may become more challenging as a person’s unique individual identity seeks to reassert itself following an occupational period during which professional identity has been the main driving force in directing career. By challenging, I mean embracing, as individual identity questions future being and occupational presence in the light of emerging obligations, interests and preferences. Hollis describes this process as:

‘...an opportunity to re-examine our lives ...an opportunity to revision our sense of self’

(1993, p. 7)

This approach to understanding self indicates that the process of determining who we are is a continual psychological interaction which is dependent on our life context in all the domains of our personal experience, and is not a static reflection linked to one point in time. This is particularly apposite for older workers who, after many years of occupational working, have a wealth of experience from which to extract and formulate their preferred identity, but, with impending changes within their lifestyle – family relationships, health deterioration and financial obligations, find that they are not always able to continue along their preferred career route and need to adjust to accommodate their changing life circumstances. This discovery of a need to consider life changes is similar to that noted by Ibarra who recorded the thoughts of one of her participants expressing his feelings of stress when handling competing possibilities:

‘Then began a whole period of trying to compartmentalize my life and keep things going—to be a teacher, an artist, a lover, a husband, and father, and they were all kind of separate worlds ...I was faced with trying to bring it all together or simplify it by throwing some of them out ...My life exploded in a number of directions, a number of fragments, all of them contending for equal status’

(2003, p. 61)

Although this sentiment was expressed by a research participant undertaking a mid-life career transition, it replicates the feelings of many older workers, who, after decades of a stable and successful occupational journey, are faced with the conflicting demands of other roles which require them to reconsider their lifestyle priorities and perhaps retract from the occupation that has given them a confident working identity and occupational security. It is no surprise that older workers, as they contemplate workplace disengagement, often sense that their life is fragmenting into a number of unknown roles that are temporary and uncertain.

A myriad of evolving possibilities

Although my myriad of possibilities has grown, it remains temporary and evolving – it is still uncertain as to where I will disembark in the final years of my occupational engagement. By this I mean that I have no clarity on what I will be doing in the years preceding my final withdrawal from all forms of paid employment. I concur with Ibarra’s observation where she describes the middle period as:

‘the incubator in which provisional identities are brought tentatively, into the world via the projects we start, the people we meet, and the meaning we lend to the events of that period’

(2003, p. 64)

The point regarding ‘meaning’ is an important issue for older professional workers – for if, for whatever reason, they disengage from their former occupational path ways, they will be seeking to sustain a sense of occupational coherence between their former and future working identities; this can be achieved through the meaning that we attach to our life experiences. In a life-stage that manifests the temporality of life itself, meaning helps preserve self with the acknowledgement that it is starting to fade from the world stage, an issue examined by Hollis (1993) in his exposition of the middle stage of life’s journey. In his preface, Hollis commends the ‘middle passage’ as:

‘...an occasion for redefining and reorienting the personality, a necessary rite of passage between the extended adolescence of the first adulthood and our inevitable appointment with old age and mortality’

(1993, p. 7)

In his reflections he considers the shifting identities associated with childhood, first adulthood (to age 40), second adulthood and mortality or ‘learning to live with the mysteries of death’ (Hollis, 1993, p. 26). Adopting his model of evolving sub-phases or passages of life, my research is firmly located within the period that Hollis describes as the third passage – the second adulthood – a period during which, having struggled to project our conscious being (our ego) into the world during our first adulthood, we seek to reconnect self and ego or as Hollis suggests:

‘...when its hegemony is overthrown, the humbled ego then begins the dialogue with the Self’

(1993, p. 27)

This would seem to be a retreating stance from the exuberance of early adulthood, but is perhaps realistic for the older professional (and privileged) worker who, having progressed through years of occupational stability with fortitude, finds them-self facing an age of uncertainty and possible dependence, pending their ultimate exit from this temporal realm. This challenge to the preservation of self and the working identity so closely associated with a person’s total self requires the older professional worker to ensure a link between their past and continuing identity. Ibarra argues that:

‘people who can tolerate the painful discrepancies of the between-identities period, which reflect underlying ambivalence about letting go of the old or embracing the new, end up in a better position to make informed choices’

(2003, p. 65)

It is, perhaps, this quest for meaning in life that inspires the older professional practitioner to sustain a continuing sense of identity, whether they remain included or excluded from their occupational community.

Revising self-perceptions

Ibarra (2003) considers the construct of what she calls ‘deep change’ in the transition process, suggesting that it is necessary for people wishing to make informed decisions about a change in career direction and that, through it, they are more likely to discover a satisfying occupational existence. Although this may be true for the ‘type’ of research participants that she engaged with, namely professionals and managers, it is not, I suggest, accordant for other workers who engage in mid or later life career transitions. In other industrial sectors, many make pragmatic decisions to transfer to any type of work that provides them with an adequate income and do not spend time contemplating the meaning of their occupational transference.

However, as with my research population, all of whom hold a professional qualification, I recognise that, in changing or reinventing their career possibilities, professional practitioners do have a preference to hold on to some aspects of their identity, especially those derived from, and promoted by, their professional standing – credibility, expertise, professionalism and reputation. I accept therefore, that, for older professional practitioners, there is a clear desire to retain a ‘self’ that recognises the value of their former occupational identities. However, it is perhaps apposite to note Hollis’ interpretation of the evolving nature of self and identity during the passages of one’s life, particularly when he suggests that, to ‘revision our sense of self’ (1993, p. 7) during our second adulthood, we need to move on from the projections – occupational, professional and societal identities – that we have strived to create in our first adulthood and acknowledge the frustration/sense of loss resulting from occupational diminution or even loss of office. This observation parallels Ibarra’s contention that, to successfully transition, a person needs:

‘[to] learn the next batch of relevant self-knowledge ...not rely on historical self-reflection only, on sifting through [the] past’

(2003, p. 73)

However, it is difficult to forego corporate trappings and the associated mantle of professional credibility that occupational life promulgates, but worth noting that occupational status and recognition is fragile – the rise to a position of authority and power can be slow and arduous but the fall is often quick, or as Bacon phrased it when commenting on men (sic) in great place:

‘...the rising unto place is laborious ...the standing is slippery, and the regress is either a downfall, or at least an eclipse’

(c. 1960a, p. 44)

In contemporary society this regress may occur as a consequence of organisational turbulence or personal fragmentation; whatever the cause, the outcome is loss of occupational identity. In his essay 'Of Great Place' Bacon reflects that:

'...it is a strange desire ...to seek power over others, and to lose power over a man's self'

(c. 1960a, p. 44)

This is a truism that transcends the centuries – why do we strive for occupational status which, as soon as it is achieved, becomes unstable and unsustainable? Is it, as Hollis (1993) suggests to 'create a world within the world' (p. 27) – a microcosm that acknowledges our ego's craving for position and recognition, perhaps a male (sic) gendered orientation; a world which, in time, becomes illusory and misshapen, a world which the emerging identity of the second adulthood no longer aspires to as it hastens to reconnect to self.

The road to fulfilment

In his consideration of 'the middle passage', Hollis notes that:

'one's career, like marriage and parenting, is a prime vehicle for the projection of 1) identity, which is thought to be confirmed through the visible mastery of a body of expertise; 2) nurturance, that one will be fed by being productive; and 3) transcendence, that one will overcome the pettiness of the spirit through successive achievements'

(1993, p. 30)

For a professional practitioner in their third-age – or, according to Hollis, third passage of life – their earlier ego centred achievements (professional qualification, position and status) may have seemed necessary attainments to secure career fulfilment, but do they remain a priority as the reality of life obligations affect them? Their professional identity, forged through career advancement, represents credible and visible acknowledgement of their occupational standing, but does it continue to drive their life purpose and reason for existence? Recognising that life is more than occupational permanence, Ibarra acknowledges that our career aspirations may be constrained by the 'practicalities of life' (p. 75) and suggests that:

'...a time comes when long-ignored values, priorities and passions reassert themselves –or the inconsistencies in our lives grow too blatant to ignore'

(2003, p. 75)

It is perhaps, at this point – whenever it may be in our evolving life pattern – that a person should take stock of their life and realign it to their revised perception of self, namely those activities, connections and relationships that are important to their continued well-being. A life is unique to the person whose existence it sustains, but an occupation may be shared by many – Ibarra’s suggestion that there is a time to reevaluate is especially poignant for those in the ‘third-age’ with changing economic, occupational and social priorities. My research collaborators willingly discussed their life obligations and acknowledged that they would ultimately impact on their occupational continuance in different ways, dependent on the nature of the obligation. It is in these life encounters that a person is encouraged, even directed, to address with consequent implications for their personal identity and occupational self – a revision or adaptation is, or at least should be, a recurring feature of a person’s continuing identity profile. Perhaps as Bruner suggests, we should not look so much at the observable self, but at:

‘...the notion of a conceptual Self, self as a concept created by reflection, a concept constructed much as we construct other concepts’

(1990, p. 100)

Certainly this is the principal output of a career narrative, a constructed portrayal of self in an occupational setting, but equally a valid reflection of how an individual’s occupational self has emerged – a valuable and informative means of acquiring an image of self with an attendant opportunity to revise their perception of total self.

Locating true-self

Ibarra’s notion of ‘true-self’ is about striking a balance between personal and occupational life, an individual’s private and professional and identities. This is a dilemma for many third-age professional practitioners, who, after a satisfying and often successful occupational experience, encounter new realities in life which direct them away from the one thing, occupational status that has focused and inspired their imagination over the period of their occupational existence. In commenting on the story of Dan, one of her research participants, Ibarra noted that his withdrawal from the workplace caused him to experience a number of episodes which:

‘...drove home how much he relied on his title for a sense of self-worth. ‘Who am I, if not my job title?’ was an open question’

(2003, p. 78)

Her discernment can be contested as it implies that we can find a core self by removing layers that arguably make us who we are, the unified self-representing all facets of cognitive constitution, but I believe the notion remains valid for many professionals held firmly in the embrace of their occupational community. Their anticipation, and strongly held belief, is that

their occupational sinecure is the key to their self-worth, failing to realise that actually this life-stage will shortly be evaporating as they move from an existence, where occupational character prevailed, to one in which ‘true-self’ embraces the reality of the later transitions of the life-cycle. As Ibarra observes:

‘one of the reasons it is so hard to change careers ...is that we can so fully internalize our institutional identities, relying on them to convey our worth and accomplishments to the outside world’

(2003, p. 84)

A significant contribution from Ibarra is her interpretation and exposition of self in all its forms – multiple, possible and ‘true’ – and their interdependency when formulating career decisions, and the part they play in helping a career changer determine their occupational direction. Hollis suggests that career is a vehicle for projecting self and achieving the aspirations of the ego; if so, do professional workers value their ego achievements in the later years of their working life? ...or do they aspire to spend their time achieving in other areas such as charitable works, social care (both family and community) or personal interests (for example the arts, history, music)? In other words to reconnect with ‘true-self’ and achieve those things that are important to their innermost being; this is a worthy aspiration, but is it achievable in an uncertain world that questions and sometimes derides the traditional interpretations of truth, including the character of self. Gergen (2000) argues that:

‘...both the romantic (*characteristics of personal depth: passion, soul, creativity and moral fiber*) and modern (*characteristics reside in our ability to reason – in our beliefs, opinions and conscious intentions*) beliefs about the self are falling into disuse and the social arrangements that they support are eroding. This is largely a result of the forces of social saturation’

(p. 6, *italics original*)

In this liberated, and yet fragmentary, world he argues that society is hurtling towards an uncertain future represented by important new shifts in ‘insularity, bewilderment, techno-being and organization/disorganization’ (2000, p. xxii). Gergen presents these as new examples of the saturation process and posits that:

‘...social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self’

(2000, p. 6)

Faced with a plethora of vociferations, all claiming to represent reality and truth – is it surprising that humankind struggles to discover ‘true-self’? I agree with Gergen in relation to

his notion of the saturated self and the impossibility of locating a ‘true-self’ amongst the varied interpretations of self available for consumption.

Exemplars of professionalism

However, self has not always been at the centre of personal identity; Gergen notes that, prior to the late 18th century:

‘...people tended to view themselves as exemplars of more general categories – members of a religion, class, profession , or the like’

(2000, p. 11)

It appears that the concept of ‘professional identity’ has been valued for a long time and professional practitioners, presented with a definitive identity and crafted within their professional space, are less likely to look for an alternate occupational identity that mirrors the reality of the obligations encountered. They, at least, appear to have some certainty in locating their ‘true-self’, but does it remain in harmony with their updated lifestyle and future occupational aspirations. There is no doubt that, for many, it would require less energy to ‘leave things be’ and remain in their contemporary professional space enjoying the benefits of that privileged existence, but does this reflect personal aspirations or is it simply easier to stay in an occupation that a person can demonstrate expertise in and be generously rewarded for?

The challenge may lie in an individual’s ability to capture and accommodate their occupational trajectory up to the present, in order to evaluate how this chronicle of the past can influence their occupational direction. The ability to embrace self within personal history may hold a clue to future career and insight into preservation of the self; albeit in a different arena of professional practice, Young (1989), reflecting on the psychological threats to the embodied self through intimate medical examination, suggests that:

‘embodying the self in a narrative enclave respects the conventions of the realm of medicine and at the same time manages the presentation of a self, but of one who is sealed within a story’

(p. 153)

I contend, therefore, that a re-construction of occupational-self through narrative inquiry will provide a visual lens through which a person can explore a possible expression of their future career. A challenge will be to unseal self from the story and investigate what this means for personal transition as they move forward towards the time of their occupational disengagement.

The permanency of retirement

Permanent retirement, as opposed to semi-retirement, enables the retiree to work out their own lifestyle balance, a state that Ibarra notes is especially important for many career changers and, I suggest, for older workers in anticipation of their occupational withdrawal. Work-life balance is, Ibarra explains, about:

‘...correcting the encroachment of work on personal life ...[and] is a pressing concern for most professionals seeking change, whether or not they are conscious of it at the start’

(2003, p. 86)

Therefore, reflections centring on self and work-life balance are a worthy consideration for all career changers and especially for those making the ultimate career transition – an exit from the stage of life that has predominated their behaviour and thinking. In the case of many professional practitioners, self has actually embraced their ‘true-self’ transposing it into an occupational-self and focusing it, almost exclusively, on the workplace from which it is now to be extracted. Although written with career changers in mind, Ibarra’s concluding comment in her ‘deep change’ chapter is especially pertinent for third-age professionals:

‘...practice makes perfect, eventually allowing us to reaffirm certain fundamental truths about ourselves and to anchor those with new premises that will guide us in the next phase of our professional life’

(2003, p. 87)

On first reading, who can argue with Ibarra’s comment? She makes this reflection in the context of a career changer seeking ‘deep change’ through continual re-working of their identity and implies that through this re-working an individual will achieve a clearer grasp of who they are and want to be in a professional sense. Although altruistic in its intent, as anyone knows who has tried to change their working identity, the process of crafting occupational purpose often leads to more ambivalence and less clarity. So perfection, is, I suggest, a falsehood that continues to block attempts to unmask an individual’s ‘true’ identity – perhaps this is even more so for the older worker seeking a best route into full retirement, whilst reluctantly releasing their grip on an occupation that has given them job satisfaction and financial security over many years.

Ibarra’s reflection takes, as given, that frequent and consistent practice leads to improved capability. I believe that, whilst not conjuring up perfection, continual questioning of occupational preferences can help illuminate an individual’s lifestyle choice and lead to a better informed response to the decisions that older professional practitioners are required to make. Workers in their ‘third-age’ do, however, need to react to a different range of life-style

influences and determine a self that reflects on, responds to and accommodates, or at least adjusts to, the various challenges that it encounters. So what ideas are presented, through Ibarra's investigation into career change that may assist the 'third-age' worker considering workplace withdrawal?

Constructing future selves

In her discussion about developing a new career, Ibarra notes that people often start a new one by trying out different areas of specialism in parallel with their existing jobs and acknowledges:

'...we don't, as a rule, leap into the unknown. Instead, most of us build a new working identity by developing the girders and spans as 'side projects' – extracurricular ventures that allow us to test possible selves without compromising our current jobs'

(2003, p. 91)

If this is true for the career changers that she observed, then is it not equally appropriate for those embarking on one of the most significant career changes that all workers ultimately have to make, namely to exit from a zone of occupational comfort to one of recreational uncertainty? The following sections consider how Ibarra's research may have lessons to be learnt by the 'third-age' professional practitioner seeking to escape or parole from their occupational tenure.

The identity of alternative-self

In the second part of her book titled 'identity in practice', Ibarra (2003) suggests that, to discover new possible selves, individuals should 'craft experiments ...that allow us to try out new professional roles on a limited but tangible scale without committing to a particular direction' (p. 91). She also suggests that:

'...experimenting is ...a method of inquiry, one we use to confirm or disconfirm our hunches about what options are feasible or appealing'

(Ibarra, 2003, p. 91)

For the professional worker, their occupational identity has been formed through their professional allegiance/s and, for many, this will have been the principal guiding influence in determining their sense of worth in the world. When asked, on social occasions, what they do, most will respond by identifying the role (accountant, lawyer, management consultant) they have been appointed to rather than the area of specialism they practise or the non-business roles they hold such as husband, father, or even carer to a family member. The face they present is

that of their professional identity acquired through qualification and years of experience rather than the non-business roles that they also claim.

Interestingly, in ‘The Created Self’, Webber (2000) considers the art of ‘trying on faces’ (p. 39) where he talks about the various ways that people have, throughout history, attempted to transform their physical self. Although not an attempt at projecting physical self, I suggest that the underlying idea is similar to that of the professional practitioner, who, in seeking possible selves, is continually seeking to try out new ‘professional faces’ as a tried and trusting approach to sustaining the occupational role that has, for so long, represented the mask of their identity. I use the term mask, instead of face, as in the physical, it is possible to frequently put on and take off different masks, allowing the career actor to experiment with possible-selves pending withdrawal from the workplace – for now, in the diminishing years of their occupational existence they are being asked to try out new masks to locate a self with whom they can co-exist post retirement. In the process of crafting or experimenting the professional practitioner is synthesising different perceptions about self in an attempt to locate the self to whom he or she is content to remain in harmony for the remainder of their life. Ibarra’s imperative to craft experiments is, it seems, a practical way to realise the complexities of self, to reason and synthesise ideas and perceptions of self and, as a consequence, to arrive at a clearer, crisper understanding of future occupational and/or recreational preferences.

Exploring occupational options

In Ibarra’s story of Ben (2003, pp. 92-95), he tried a variety of different roles and assignments in order to extract himself from the confines of an academic role that had subsumed his energies and aspirations. In exploring options, he designed a number of small projects which gave him opportunities to test different ideas, whilst continuing to leverage his academic knowledge and personal networks. These assignments, including setting up a non-profit consulting practice, offered him a raft of possibilities that he could try at the same time as he contemplated his exit from academia. Ibarra (2003) adopts the analogy of scientific experimentation to show how a career explorer can test different occupational options – she describes:

‘an *exploratory experiment* ...[as] a probing, playful activity by which we get a feel for things ...to formulate more specific questions, or when they lead us to a hypothesis ...[and] a *confirmatory experiment*, in which the objective is to learn whether the hypothesis is supported or refuted by the evidence’

(p. 96, *italics original*)

In a similar way to Ben, I experimented with different possibilities that would allow me to transfer to a new occupational possibility. As Ibarra commended, I explored possible directions,

tested for hypotheses, but, following negative feedback, was not able to confirm an occupational destiny. During one of my engagements, I had been offered some short term assignments to help build the business infrastructure of a charity, including personnel and technology initiatives, and so I registered as a self-employed consultant centring on business education and advice. In addition to these charitable assignments, I was offered several family commissions that employed my administrative capabilities. Although our occupational contexts are different (Ben was employed as an academic and I was self-employed as a consultant) we shared a similar conclusion to our experimentation – Ibarra reports that:

‘...thanks to the comparative method, Ben was able to refine his hypotheses about what was more and less appealing to him. For example, he realized that he preferred the short time frames and immediate feedback of his consulting work’

(2003, p. 97)

I embraced this realisation and appreciated the freedom of choice and flexibility that my role as a self-employed business consultant allowed and so decided to continue looking for opportunities to increase my portfolio of business and educational assignments. Shortly after making this decision, and just as I was starting to develop some business connections, I was encouraged to apply for a research scholarship: in addition to this research study, I accepted some teaching assignments, including opportunities to facilitate a series of lectures on change management and a masters module for groups of school leaders. What Ibarra describes as ‘side projects’ were becoming a key component of my educational portfolio, and as noted by Ibarra, I experienced:

‘...a deepening commitment to the new area ...and [found myself] devoting more and more time to that realm’

(2003, p. 101)

My emerging pathway, adopting the challenges of an academic lifestyle on a part-time basis, was the reverse of Ben’s experience as he left academia to pursue a role in industry. Ibarra’s analogy of scientific experimentation appears to present a rational basis for the decision-making process that a career changer needs to undertake, but is it reasonable to employ a rational frame to make sense of what, for many people undertaking a career transition, is mainly opportunistic? Although her analogy attempts to explain career transition as an objective, rational process, it fails, I believe, to account for the vagaries, the ups and down, of diverse thinking that most career changers actually experience in their attempts to determine their occupational relevance. In her metaphor, she uses phrases, including natural experimentation, hypotheses, comparative method, which are descriptions of objectivity, denying the subjectivity of the ‘career determination’ process – so what alternative analogies might exist?

Alternative researcher metaphors

My first alternative metaphor is that of the artist who creates a picture, a representation of a mental image, by the physical application of their brush on the canvas. The effect of this brush stroke is determined by a number of factors – the paint (its constituency and density), the canvas (its dimensions and texture), and the artist (their artistic training and imagery) – all of these factors interact to create the final image presented. Perhaps the ‘career determination’ process is artistic in the sense that the career actor, the ‘artist’, is constructing their future occupational destiny, the ‘picture’ through a series of career decisions, the ‘brush strokes, each of which adds a new or different dimension as they are applied to the occupational landscape, the ‘canvas’. In this analogy, an individual’s occupational choice is made through the combined actions of the three factors – the artist, their canvas and paint, ultimately determining their future occupational direction.

Another metaphor, the origins of which arose following a sea excursion on a replica of the ‘Santa Maria’, is that of the navigator, who, in past times, would have faced the uncertainties of the vast oceans with the ambiguities of an unknown destination. In 1492 Columbus, although not the first to reach the Americas, would have experienced a nautical journey that literally presented the ‘ups and downs’ of life at sea, as he sailed toward his ultimate destination, discovery of the New World – a fact attributed to him through the recordings of history. His experiences, like those of most sailors, are represented by Hollis, who describes midlife transitions as being:

‘...not unlike awakening to find that one is alone on a pitching ship, with no port in sight. One can only go back to sleep, jump ship or grab the wheel and sail on ...In grabbing the wheel we take responsibility for the journey ...in not grabbing the wheel, we stay stuck in the first adulthood, stuck in the neurotic aversions which constitute our operant personality and, therefore, our self-estrangement’

(1993, p. 94)

Hollis is talking about transition through middle age, but this analogy could also be applied to the experiences of career changers or third-age workers who need to ‘grab the wheel’ to re/correct their course and navigate their way through the ever changing situations that affect their occupational journey. Hollis suggests that failure to take action means that a person becomes stuck in their former life-stage and hence disassociated from their present ‘true-self’. This approach to career change acknowledges the need for positive action by the career actor in determining the direction of their occupational journey, but negates some of the subtleties of the transition represented in the metaphor of artistry; perhaps the choice of materials and direction, intensity of the brushstroke, represent a lighter touch than that of the navigator who requires greater physical dexterity in traversing a ship’s wheel. The final aim for the person in career

transition, at whatever stage in life, is to discover a new occupational destiny whether achieved through scientific experimentation, artistic creation, or nautical navigation.

Whatever the approach adopted, the third-age job changer will never find one clear course to their final occupational journey. Although perhaps apparent at the beginning of this life-stage, and no doubt closely reflected in their former occupational identity, most third-age professional practitioners start to encounter other demands or expectations in their non-business life. I term these as ‘obligations’, that is responsibilities and requirements that impact on the individual outside of their occupational existence – these may be family (for example care, relationships), financial or even personal health. Sometimes these ‘obligations’ do necessitate an occupational change and the professional worker decides to locate a new occupational destiny or adjust to an earlier occupational departure. For, as Hollis, observes:

‘The self has sought growth by exhausting the tired strategies of the ego. The ego structure which one worked so hard to create is now revealed to be petty, frightened and out of answers. At midlife the Self maneuvers the ego assemblage into crisis in order to bring about a correction of course’

(1993, p. 95)

His suggestion is that, despite the self that a person has invested in creating an occupational appointment and its associated trappings, a career actor will continue to encounter distractions and diversions that will continue to draw them off course. Although people hope for occupational stability, many in the third-age actually experience occupational insecurity, with the consequent need to continually adjust course resulting in a different occupational journey to the one originally imagined. In my own occupational existence, I envisaged a positive image of occupational withdrawal, backed up by financial security; this anticipation was reinforced through my employment with one of the UK’s largest pension consultancies. However, although a realistic expectation in the relative prosperity of the 1980s economic condition, the reality proved very different at the close of the first decade of the 21st century as a consequence of changing economic, social and technological conditions. My third-age occupational emergence has been clouded by the effects of organisational globalisation and economic insecurity (objective realities) and social discrimination against older workers (subjective suspicions). This has required a continual reevaluation of my ego inspired self and, through the crises presented, to adjust and bring about a correction in the course of my occupational journey with an emerging alternative self-identity as a ‘portfolio educator’. This transference of occupational-self has taken place within the confines of temporality, both in the historical and life-stage sense of ‘timeliness’.

Embedding future-self

Having identified alternative self, Ibarra suggests that we need social support to enable us to ground our new working identity and sustain it as we grow and develop in our new occupational world. She argues that:

‘...we cannot regenerate ourselves in isolation. We develop in and through our relationships with others ...Changing careers is not merely a matter of changing the work we do. It is as much about changing the relationships that matter in our professional life’

(Ibarra, 2003, p. 113)

In one of my early attempts to reinvent self, I experienced, as Harris explains in his story (Ibarra, 2003, pp. 114-118), the need to distance myself from the core of my former networks ‘while building up contacts at the periphery’. This meant developing new connections in academia, the occupational discipline that inspired me and presented opportunities to find my preferred possible-self, and I started to appreciate the sense underpinning Ibarra’s comment that:

‘...emotionally it is hard to get validation for a new self without making shifts in our social relationships. When change entails rethinking our very identity, we need substitutes for the people and groups we have to leave behind and role models for whom we might become’

(2003, p. 122)

In this context, I found my relationships flourishing within the core academic and flexible learning communities that I had forged connections with; as Ibarra recognised:

‘...these people and groups provide a ‘safe base’ that enables us to take risks with our new selves and a professional community in which we can develop a sense of belonging’

(2003, p. 122)

As Maslow (1943) suggested in his ‘hierarchy of needs’ model, social needs are the third level that motivates human behaviour as a person progresses towards psychological maturation. These social needs include a ‘sense of belonging’ that we associate with being part of or integrated with a group or community that share a common purpose or vision. Referring to the process of ‘shifting connections’ Ibarra notes that:

‘psychologically, a process of identification is at work: As we encounter people whom we see as sharing something fundamental with us, even if only in our aspirations, we flesh out our ideas (and ideals) of what we are becoming’

(2003, p. 122)

In 'shifting connections' it seems that a person must also transfer their psychological need for belonging to a new group of like-minded collaborators who are willing to include and encourage them as they seek out their new occupational self.

A sense of organisational belonging

For many of my research participants, their social need to belong derived from both their employing organisation and their professional affiliation. This particularly applied to those who were members of the traditional (sic) professions, namely accountants and lawyers, rather than the management consultants whose professional agency has emerged from nascent professional bodies such as 'The Institute of Business Consulting'. Throughout the duration of my occupational emergence, there has not been one professional community representing the interests of organisational learning specialists and hence my sense of belonging has been strongly reflected within the professional organisations that I worked for rather than any professional institution. When I withdrew from organisational employment, my professional affiliations dispersed and I lost any sense of organisational belonging – I felt nomadic in my occupational wanderings. This feeling of disassociation started to evaporate as I began to meet individuals, whom Levinson (1985) denotes as 'transitional figures' and Ibarra describes as:

'guiding figures ...people from whom the person in transition gets encouragement and learns new ways to live and work ...[who] help us to endure the ambiguity of the in-between period'

(2003, p. 124)

These 'transitional' or 'guiding' figures definitely helped to focus my emerging identity as a researcher, teacher and writer and reassured me that my aspirations were plausible. As Ibarra suggests their role is:

'...to convey that what we are contemplating is not only reasonable but totally consistent with a wise assessment of our potential'

(2003, p.125)

This relationship between self and others creates a safe zone in which a person is able to progress their identity from a 'possible' to a 'probable' self. I use the adjective 'probable' in its strict meaning of likely, but not certain to become actual, in other words as a transitional phase between possibility and permanence to describe the temporary nature of the transitional state or condition. Developing Ibarra's model, I suggest that this condition of probable-self is one that describes a greater degree of certainty that the chosen occupation will ultimately materialise as the preferred occupational choice, but, for the time being, remains of temporary status pending other career decisions that have yet to be concluded.

The two constructs, social connections and transitional figures, lead Ibarra to a consideration of the term ‘community of practice’ which Wenger (1998) describes as a form of social interaction that enhances the learning capabilities of both groups and their members. At this stage in her deliberations Ibarra borrows from the social thinking of others, including Etienne Wenger (1985) and William Bridges (1980), who focused their research on the practice of others in forming groups of shared interest, known as communities of practice. She argues that trainees do not learn through the abstraction of textual knowledge only, but through the socialisation embraced by participation in these learning communities, or, as she argues, we:

‘...learn to function as part of a community in which their initial participation is legitimate but peripheral’

(Ibarra, 2003, p. 127)

As an academic ‘apprentice’, I am extending my occupational profile through the acquisition of new skills and mind sets which are enabling me to expand my educational portfolio. Although I have extensive commercial teaching experience, this transitional experience is encouraging me to refocus my approach to instructional pedagogy and to learn, through socialisation, what Ibarra describes as:

‘...a process of becoming an insider to that world, learning its subjective viewpoint, language, demeanour, and outlook’

(2003, p. 129)

This process is common for younger people embarking on a new career, but problematic for the older worker who is expected to assimilate the tacit knowledge of a new work group without the support of a defined mentoring group. For any older worker seeking to enter a new occupational world, the process of socialisation is critical to their integration within that world, and they are not full members of that group for, as Ibarra notes, their:

‘...desired identity remains incomplete and tentative without the stamp of approval of a new peer group, mentor, or community’

(2003, p. 130)

Older workers, including myself, need a transitional space, an idea developed by Winnicott (1971), in which to relocate from an uncertain to an assured affinity for their chosen occupational existence. As Ibarra suggests:

‘[to] come up with a creative solution for a next career, we have to be able to test unformed, even risky, identities in a relatively safe and secure environment, an incubator of sorts in which premature identities can be nurtured until a viable possibility emerges’

(2003, p. 130)

As a professional working in a new sphere of occupational endeavour, I have, during my advanced postgraduate research and scholarship, been given a range of different academic assignments enabling me to test the viability of my preferred new working identity. As noted by Reid & West (2011), this process ‘to think and feel differently towards self, ‘reality’, and future possibilities [has been augmented] because of the capacity of significant others ...to contain anxiety, to encourage and challenge in ways that legitimised risk taking’ (p. 177). My fledgling identity has been cultivated with the help of aphoristic guidance.

Nurturing premature identities

In her metaphor of an incubator, Ibarra implies an environment within which certain conditions, such as temperature, can be maintained at a constant setting, but, for older workers, their contextual environment is in a continual state of flux. For the older worker, this incubator has several chambers – inner self, learning communities and family network – all of which function under different conditions, but regulate themselves and operate symbiotically. Although this expanded analogy detracts from the simplicity of Ibarra’s model, I contend that it is a more valid representation of what is happening within the reality of older professional workers’ lives. To stabilise their future self, a person needs to create a self-identity that makes sense for that individual, grasp a coherent understanding of self and reinvent, re-project it into a future occupational environment that they can sustain and enjoy for the remainder of their occupational life. In the third-age, this may be from up to 20 years or longer for those wishing and able to pursue their occupational careers beyond age 70. Citing Weick (1979), Ibarra explains that:

‘...*making sense* refers to the practice of putting a frame around experience: interpreting what is happening today, reinterpreting past events, and creating compelling stories that link the two’

(2003, p. 133, *italics original*)

I have argued in this study, that the rationale for creating an occupational narrative is to create a vehicle that offers the career ‘actor’ an opportunity to embrace their past occupational history and so determine a future occupational destiny, thereby embedding their future self within an occupational identity constructed out of the ‘boulders’ (Thompson, 1988) of their former occupational experiences. In my research context self is created and viewed as the primary actor in an auto/biographical chronicle, but surely self is, as presented by Bruner:

‘...a way of framing one’s consciousness, one’s position, one’s identity, one’s commitment with respect to another’

(1990, p. 101)

I believe it is, as Bruner suggests, ‘dialogue dependent’ (p. 101) in so far as the story told is extracted through a conversation, dialogue with oneself and others authored by self, but, in the case of my research collaborators, a self-portrayal written by another, namely myself as the researcher. To use Ibarra’s analogy, the ‘frame(s) around experience’ are the parameters outlined in my research introduction (Appendix B) and the restrictions constructed by my collaborators’ reluctance or inability to craft an authentic occupational reflection. The process of ‘making sense’ is a creative experiment, a dialogue that generates meaning – a verifiable and coherent interpretation of self – for a person’s occupational existence pre and post the point of time at which the occupational narrative is constructed, is produced through co-authorship. It is, as Ibarra proposes, citing McAdams (1988, 1997), only possible to ‘really know someone ...when we know their stories – the underlying narratives that lend meaning, unity and purpose to their lives’ (2003, p. 133).

Knowing, either self or others, arises through a process of continual reflection of self, a process through which a person gains a greater, but not necessarily complete, picture of ‘true-self’ within the constraints of their released story. In my research this continual reflection on self, took place through dialogic conversation between the researcher (myself) and the researched (my collaborators) producing the narrative of an occupational life, as told and constructed through auto/biographic co-construction. The first part of my own occupational narrative (King, 2007), was created purely through a process of continual conversation with self in two roles, namely the research object and the research facilitator, which may mean that my created occupational story is a representation of my ideal, as opposed to actual, self. In the second part of my autobiographical reflections (as woven into this thesis) I have generated further occupational insights, but this time have had an opportunity to consider and test them with reference to academic readings and research, particularly Ibarra’s (2003/2004) treatise on ‘working identity’.

In an autobiographical context, ‘making sense’ is a period of rhetorical questioning during which one slowly engages the self, interrogates its experiences and is eventually able to create a self-portrayal of occupational existence in written form. This portrayal is like an artist’s canvas, an impression; a representation of the image generated in the artist’s mind, a creation of the artist, not necessarily an authentic copy of the occupational life actually lived. Ibarra uses her research participants’ stories as the vehicle for gathering an interpretation of their career transition experiences, but, whose story is it? Is it the artist’s or their model, the person who is the subject of the story? Is it a true story as told by the subject or a created story as presented by the artist, or, in the case of autobiographic writing, the author? As Plummer suggests, the answer is probably neither, for:

‘we can start to sense that ‘acts of writing’ help us to see that lives are always ‘composed’ and that it may be the very act of composition itself which lies at the heart of the auto/biographical mode. It is not the real life, but the composed life’

(2001, p. 88)

In my research the occupational stories, or biographic representations, created are compositions comprising the recollected memories of my research participants presented in response to my narrative interview questions and made sense of through my interpretation of the transcribed interview recording. They are a construction generated through the iterative dialogue and interpretation of researcher and respondent – a composition that illustrates my research collaborators’ memories of their occupational experience not an actual reflection of an occupational life as lived. As Bruner (1993) puts it:

‘...an autobiography is not and never can be a way of simply signifying or referring to a ‘life as lived’... a life is created or constructed by an act of autobiography. It is a way of construing experience – and reconstruing and reconstruing till our breath or our pen fails us’

(1993, p. 38)

A ‘biography’ is a historical recollection of an individual’s total life experience, composed by another person, but my collaborators’ stories are a restricted form of the biographic genre, telling a story within the boundaries of occupational existence and presenting an account that can be evaluated to determine future expressions of occupational self.

Envisioning alternative careers

Professional practitioners often find it difficult to envision alternative careers and, because of strong allegiance to their professional identity, may create barriers to thinking about and connecting with any alternative career proposition. In her authentic text, Ibarra (2003) reflects on ‘how different groups of people might experience career reinvention differently’ (p. 164) and notes that:

‘professionals – consultants, lawyers, financial services professionals, academics, and, to a lesser degree, physicians – are much more likely to continue in their jobs until the new identity is close to fully formed, or at least to withhold quitting until a possible avenue is fairly well defined’

(2003, p.164)

Insights to reinventing career

The principal insight of Ibarra’s exposition is her interpretation of the concept of ‘self’; in her writing, based on interviews with career changers in mid-life, Ibarra contrasts ‘views of working identity – [the] ‘true self’ and ‘possible selves’ models’ (2003, p. 39) as outlined in Table 1:

	Definition of Identity	Career Change Process
True-self model	<p>One self:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully formed by adulthood Resides inside, at the core of our being Is rooted in the past, in family background and formative experiences 	<p>Plan-and-implement process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using introspection to find an inner truth that can help identify the desired end goal Devising and implementing an action plan to get to that goal
Possible-selves model	<p>Many selves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always changing, with some selves more developed or appealing than others Reside in both our minds and our acts Exist as images of the future 	<p>Test-and-learn process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shaping and revealing the self through testing Learning from direct experience to recombine old and new skills, interests, and ways of thinking about oneself, and to create opportunities that correspond to that evolving self

TABLE 1: Contrasting views of working identity (Ibarra, 2003, p. 39)

She contends that if a person adopts a ‘true-self definition of identity’ (p. 39) then they are likely to assume that their career identity and options are predetermined and difficult to change and that such a person will try to plan their career transition by identifying one alternative career destiny and planning how to achieve that desired career goal. She contrasts this with the ‘possible-selves model of identity’ (p. 39) in which an individual is prepared to experiment with different possible career options and determine a future career goal by connecting with and learning from different occupational experiences. In this model, Ibarra (2003) proposes that career changers should not be limited in their options by restricting their sights on occupations that conform with their assessment of the(ir) ‘true-self’ model, but should be challenged by the opportunities generated by their interpretation of the(ir) ‘possible-selves’ model. She also suggests that:

‘...our ‘true identity’ is inside, deep within ourselves, (*and*) only introspection can lead to the right action steps and a better-fitting career’

(p. 16, *italics original*)

Both approaches require an individual to conduct a reflective search, but whilst the ‘true-self’ model implies a search into a person’s own mind (introspection) and one ideal outcome, the ‘possible-selves’ model promotes a search through both the individual’s mind and the activities that they are involved in (experiential); this approach encourages a person to think of them self

in new ways and to look for emerging possibilities, that may define their occupational destiny. At the foundations of my research is the idea that older professional practitioners can look at themselves in a new way – through biographic narrative – and, by so doing, either discover a new self or at least recognise when they have adopted a different self within their third-age of occupational experience.

One of the principal benefits, of this construct of ‘possible selves’, is the idea that a person always has a number of alternative self-identities that they might adopt to locate a future career and their occupational destiny. However, for my group of professional practitioners, this idea may create dilemmas and tensions, since there is evidence to suggest that qualified business consultants often associate their working identity with their professional identity, which may restrict their ability to explore the idea that their total life comprises multiple selves. According to Ibarra’s (2003) thinking, the ‘possible-selves’ model entertains the possibility that an individual has many selves, which are ‘always changing, with some selves more developed or appealing than others’ (p. 39). My premise is that, like Ibarra, who encouraged her research participants to write a story illuminating their career possibilities, my research collaborators have enriched self-understanding and its potential through a re/discovery of their occupational adventures. This research aspiration is supported by Polkinghorne who contends that:

‘narrative enrichment occurs when one retrospectively revises, selects, and orders past details in such a way as to create a self-narrative that is coherent and satisfying and that will serve as a justification for one’s present condition and situation’

(1988, p. 106)

In my first autobiographic review of working life (King, 2007), I reflected on past occupational ventures and presented my present condition, one that had evolved through a long occupational trajectory; although primarily progressive, it involved episodes of regressive activity. My narrative enrichment materialised when I located an alternative self, that of a portfolio educator, that resulted from the clarity emerging from the narrative coherence that I detected in my story. Like Ibarra’s research participants, I found that narrating my story, and writing it down, revealed a number of personal attributes and preferences that had lain dormant for decades. My recollected occupational self, and the coherence of the narrative it generated, highlighted some ‘possible-selves’. Ibarra’s architecture for career exploration encourages an individual to reflect on ‘historical-self’, locate a number of ‘possible-selves’, connect into a comprehensible story of who they wish to become and then construct their alternative occupational-self.

Utilising occupational metaphors

However, a critique of Ibarra's approach (pp. 31-73) is that the objectivity that underpins her proposition that a person can turnaround career through a process of scientific experimentation is erroneous. My observation is that the career change process is more reliant on subjective approaches such as artistic creativity and nautical navigation. Despite my concerns about her focus on the objectivity of the process rather than the subjectivity of the career actor, Ibarra's exposition of the experimentation metaphor does show how the career changer, including older professional workers, can utilise their capabilities, interests and preferences to imagine future career destinies through an evolving process of self-determination. She describes this career transition process as a continual circle, an iterative transition towards capturing and embracing a new occupational identity by 'exploring possible selves, lingering between identities, grounding a deep change' (Ibarra, 2003, p. 162). Whilst commenting on the objectivism of Ibarra's selected metaphor, it is worth noting that she does acknowledge the subjectivity of the process in different commentaries of her research practice and participant's stories – these include the:

- **idiosyncratic nature of experimentation** – 'the experimental method does not necessarily entail an orderly sequence of steps in which one side project leads logically to the next. Instead, small probes are often fragmentary and spontaneous, driven by unexpected opportunities and dynamic situations'

(2003, p. 103)
- **intuitive tendency of self-response** – 'Our biases can lead us astray at many different points along the way ...counterbalancing our natural biases requires a partnership of emotion and intellect–working with our subjective and emotional responses (our gut) as part of the analysis, yet submitting those responses to thoughtful challenge and criticism'

(2003, p. 106)
- **illusory falsehood of rational decisions** – citing Damasio (1995) 'we like to think that good decisions in complex situations–like tough gambling moves and vexing career choices–are founded on a solid rational process (get the facts, define the options, make an action plan). Damasio's studies show that emotional biases, the compass of the gut, guide behaviour long before conscious knowledge sets in'

(2003, p. 107)

In these reflections Ibarra (2003) also considers human sentiments, such as bias and emotions, to be an accepted component of the career transition process, but returning to her analogy of scientific experimentation, she suggests that:

‘the hard work of making a career transition includes finding reasons behind the emotions, digging deeper to understand our intuitions so that we can use them as data, and, if still confused, crafting additional experiments’

(Ibarra, 2003, p. 108)

I think it is unnecessary to convert these expressions of humanity into discrete units of scientific input and that in my experience it is often difficult for career actors to qualify what they actually mean when they express this type of human sentiment. Whilst valuing Ibarra’s acceptance of the subjectivity of human interaction, I disagree with her attempt to describe them as units of objective experimentation. The interplay of human objectivity and subjectivity is not, in my opinion, a matter for scientific explanation, but rather for humanistic interpretation; occupational narrative is a model instrument as it allows the author to express their occupational adventures and diversions in a way that creates meaning for them.

Emergent occupational pathways

Ibarra’s application of scientific reasoning to the process of biographic interpretation suggests a rational linear process to working out the best way to progress a career transition, but, as reality informs us, there can be no one indubitable way of changing careers. In my occupational excursions, and those of my research participants, reality dictates an ever-changing route to an occupational pathway, one that emerges from occupational experience and intervention, rather than one prescribed at the outset of a person’s working trajectory. Towards the end of her exposition, she acknowledges this weakness in her metaphorical illustration, when she comments that ‘one of the most interesting things about reinvention stories is how much they change along the way’ (Ibarra, 2003, p. 140) and, adducing Gergen (1997), she notes that:

‘...a good story is defined by a narrative structure—a beginning, a low point, a climax, and an ending—the end point helps determine the beginning and the low point’

(Ibarra, 2003, p. 140)

As represented in the working world, the ‘low point... [and] climax’ that she refers to may be of a more frequent occurrence within an occupational story. In my career biography (King, 2007), I recount the low points of organisational downturns (e.g. restructuring and redundancy) and highpoints (e.g. advancement and promotion) that indicate, as Ibarra acknowledges, a ‘change along the way’ or a turning point that reorient an individual’s occupational itinerary. For the older professional worker these turning points may be a progressive continuation in their upward career mobility or a regressive discontinuance resulting in a backward or sideways career transition. An example of ‘progressive continuation’ is the trajectory of one of my former bosses who, in the concluding years of his occupational engagement, was assigned board

responsibility for the operations of the firm's Australian business. An illustration of 'regressive discontinuance' is the entrenchment of an individual's occupational trajectory, such as that ultimately experienced by one of my research participants in his late 50s.

I believe that, through techniques of narrative enrichment such as career plotting – a variation of the 'life line' technique described by Cochran (1997), an individual can locate turning points within the graphical representation created by the act of plotting career milestones (as positive or negative points) on a career line that shows a person's occupational evolution within a chronological sequence. As Cochran suggests:

'...completing the life line sensitizes a person to past memories and provides a chronological outline of his or her life'

(1997, p. 74)

This discernible process helps a person visualise those turning points, or as Ibarra describes them 'defining moments' (2003, p. 143) which may be dramatic, problematic, traumatic or simply symbolic, and may materialise at any stage of the transition process.

Defining life moments

Another reflection is that incidents in an individual's private life can also act as a defining moment, alerting them to the criticality of their current circumstance; whilst writing this thesis I encountered two significant events that impacted on my ability to sustain a coherent story, both involving the death of an immediate family member. As Ibarra records:

'people in transition often tell stories of jolts and losses in their personal lives that remind them of ignored possible selves or warn them of the harmful consequences of current identities'

(2003, p. 145)

These personal life encounters become increasingly significant for older workers as they experience increasing fragility in the lives of their senior family members and possibly also their own. Life's ability to endure and sustain the ego-centric drives and aspirations of early occupational awakenings, wane as the older worker moves inexorably toward occupational extinction and a possible future self of dependency. An occupational life extinguished can generate a vacuum in the totality of a person's life continuum, and brings to an end, an individual's occupational narrative as one of many embodiments of self. Life continues temporarily for an indeterminate period, but their occupational existence lies dormant in their memories and recollections, as told in their auto/biographic artefacts.

Ibarra's illumination of the career transition process shows parallels to my research approach in that my method – auto/biographical narrative inquiry – encourages introspection, and, through a process of iterative reflection, enables respondents to explore their 'possible selves'. This search for occupational self in the third-age is an integral stage in the life-cycle and a critical one for older professional workers, who, separated from their professional identity, and possibly meaning, are faced with new decisions about their concluding career options. A difficulty in the search for occupational meaning is how to write about and comprehend one's historical account; another predicament is how to interrogate it to determine the best options to accommodate their preferences, in this closing phase of their occupational involvement. The narrative approach, I believe, creates a technique for experimentation, that is one in which an individual can search, both inwardly and outwardly, for alternative occupational identities that may represent their future self. Story telling is an age old tradition, but one that older workers may find challenging when seeking to adjust to the vagaries of their third-age experiences; as Plummer (2001) reminds us, life stories:

'...perform their work for the life of the *self*. Indeed, people who tell the story of their lives usually find it has given them some coherence, some sense of their developmental path, an understanding perhaps of how some key life crises have developed, a sense of who is important in their life, a story of the meaning of a life itself!'

(p. 243, *italics original*)

Although his comments are presented as an observation of the value of story-telling for the totality of a person's life experience, they equally apply in contexts where there is a boundary drawn around the life dimension being reported on – as in the case of third-age career actors, who recollect their occupational memories, assemble them into a coherent structure and experiment with them to elicit their occupational preferences for a continuing career. Indeed, although the life circumscribed is an individual's occupational life, dimensions of personal life are also woven into the story told where they have a significant influence on the evolution of the occupational story told. Ibarra, citing Gergen (1997), acknowledges that:

'...people devote considerable energy to developing their stories—what key experiences marked their path; what meanings they attribute to those experiences, and, more importantly, what common thread links old and new'

(2003, p. 156)

Ibarra's (2003) text on 'working identity' and 'career reinvention' highlights important principles for any person seeking to understand strategies for career transition whatever stage of their occupational life they are encountering. It presents strong parallels with my occupational research initiative securing a critical foundation on which to develop my arguments and provide key insights for this investigation into the occupational aspirations of third-age professional

workers. Her work embraces an insightful exploration into the improvisational character of self and its influence on a person's occupational development and evolution. The key reason for telling an occupational story is, Ibarra argues, to present a coherent identity 'that links the old and new self' (2003, p. 156); this bridge between the past and present occupational self is the principal reason that I chose 'auto/biographic narrative inquiry' as my research method. As Cochran suggests, the main purpose of narrative is to help an individual to envision the future through reflecting on and disentangling the past:

'The basic function of a representation of the future is to create a meaningful narrative of the future that a person can live out. A decision situation is one in which the future is in doubt. One's path has become entangled, and the way is no longer clear. The task of the decider is to pierce through the tangled present to envision a path ahead ...either way, piercing through the tangled present is a matter of straightening out a future narrative'

(1997, p. 9)

Auto/biographic inquiry is a process for constructing an historical narrative representing occupational life, both mine through autobiography (internal reflexion by self) and others through auto/biography (external reflexion on self by another). Whilst auto/biography is a genre of writing, narrative is the product of a documented occupational life (the story) enabling inquiry (or examination) of the occupational life as told. This process enables third-age professional workers to manifest their occupational experience and examine it for occupational meaning that is to disentangle their professional career as they straighten their future narrative (Cochran, 1997).

CHAPTER 3: MY LITERATURE REVIEW: Employment, the third-age, disengagement, narrative and gender

This chapter opens with a historical review of occupational employment and the challenges that have influenced career development as global economic and social influences have evolved; it gives an overview of the organisational challenges affecting the labour market and considers the concepts of ‘full employment’ and ‘occupational identity’. An introduction to ‘the practice of business consulting’ frames the occupational context of the professional workers who constitute the research group of this study. It continues with an exploration of UK social policy and its implications for ‘retirement’, a concept which is challenging policy makers as population demographics result in an ‘ageing society’. It includes a summary of the current legislation as it affects retirement, or disengagement, from the workplace and an introduction to the ‘third-age’, a contested notion that has emerged as a consequence of social evolution and the reality of people living longer with changing financial constraints – specifically it identifies the third-age as a significant career frontier. In terms of methodology, the chapter includes an evaluation of the narrative genre and the impact of time on narrative exposition, and closes with a synopsis of gender issues and their consequences for occupational participation.

Primary literature research

My research is located within three sociological contexts – professional employment, the practice of business consulting and the phenomena of the ‘third-age’. The focus throughout is on the occupational careers of professional business consultants; social policy on retirement is also reviewed as it represents the social framework within which older workers and their employers make decisions about occupational disengagement, also known as retirement. I consider the occupational choice that older professional workers have when deciding on their future career options and review the concept of the ‘third-age’ a contested notion emerging from the social and demographic challenges emerging in the late 20th century. For my literature review I located four primary research domains as illustrated in Figure 3. In the first domain ‘professionalism’ I consider the concept of professional working, including sustaining professional credibility through qualification and competence, and position the professional context of business consulting firms, illustrating why they are an appropriate focus for contemporaneous research.

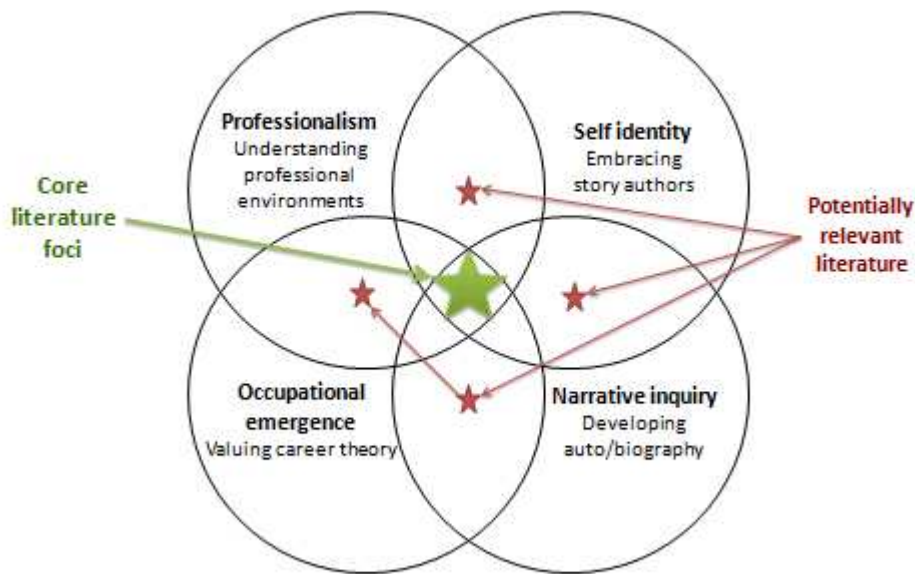


FIGURE 3: Four primary literature research domains

Having reflected on the professional environment of my research collaborators’ occupational settings, I embrace the individual notion of ‘self- identity’ and what this means for a person’s occupational existence and perception; I review literature that posits self at the centre of knowledge i.e. personal knowledge and the relationship that individual self has to the organisational world. My third literature domain ‘occupational emergence’ considers the different interpretations of contemporary career theory with particular regard to their implications for the closing careers of older workers in the third-age of employment. In the fourth literature domain ‘narrative inquiry’ I look at an approach to constructing auto/biographic accounts and explain how it can help an individual extract and capture their past career experience in an attempt to frame an identity that they can project to locate their occupational futurity.

Key occupational readings

Throughout my literature review, I have interrogated a comprehensive range of texts that have influenced my deliberations and generated evidence to support my argument. As to be anticipated in scholarly research writing, my citations are fully referenced in my bibliography at the end of this thesis, but there are some texts that I would specifically like to record as primary contributors to the emergence of my thinking and consequent writing:

AUTHOR	TITLE	CONTRIBUTION
Professionalism		
Løwendahl, B.R. (1997)	<i>Strategic Management of Professional Service Firms</i> (2 nd ed.). Copenhagen: Handelshøjskolens Forlag.	Insights into the market context and professional practice of Professional Service Firms (PSFs) – a generic term embracing organisations offering business services.
Morris, T. (2008)	Professional Service Firms: The Challenges of Innovation. In Dopson, S., Earl, M. and Snow P. (Eds.). <i>Mapping the Management Journey: Practice, Theory and Context</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press.	These organisations demonstrate the characteristics of professionalism – a vocation focused on the application of a body of knowledge, accreditation to that vocation and regulated by a shared code of ethics.
Self identity		
* Ibarra, H. (2003/2004)	<i>Working Identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing you career</i> . Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.	Reflections on the experience of mid-life career changers and the suggestion that a person's occupational choice is determined by the story that s/he tells about them self.
Laing, R.D. (1990)	<i>The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness</i> . London: Penguin.	The idea that a person's identity can be located by the degree of congruence that a person has between their inner and outer self.
Occupational emergence		
Hollis, J. (1993)	<i>The Middle Passage, From Misery to Meaning in Midlife</i> . Toronto: Inner City Books.	A review of the challenges facing a person in their middle years and the effect that these may have on the person's sense of self.
Levinson, D.J. et al (1978/1985)	<i>The Seasons of a Man's Life</i> . New York: Ballantine Books.	A focus on the life-stage labelled the 'second adulthood' or 'third passage' and the idea that, having strived to project 'ego' during our first adulthood, a person in the 'third passage' is seeking to reconnect with self.
Savickas, M.L. (2011)	<i>Career Counseling</i> . Washington DC: American Psychological Association.	The practice of career reflexivity through narrative construction and the implications of contemporary organisational change on the structure of career.

AUTHOR	TITLE	CONTRIBUTION
Narrative inquiry		
Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. and Zilber, T. (1998)	<i>Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis and Interpretation.</i> Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.	Explanation of approaches to narrative research, specifically how to analyse and interpret narrative compositions. Their exposition of the ‘holistic-categorical-content-form’ models of narrative analysis influenced my choice of narrative inquiry method.
Riessman, C.K. (2008)	<i>Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences.</i> Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.	Considerations on the context of the narrative – interactions between the story, story catalyst and story teller and discussion on narrative cohesion/coherence.

Note: The text marked with an asterisk *, Working Identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing you career (Ibarra, 2003 in hardback and 2004 in paperback), is the seminal text on which my critical reflection (Chapter 2) is grounded.

I chose to critically review Ibarra’s work in order to identify and understand lessons that I could apply to my own research. A difference in our research aims is that she inquired into the occupational transitions of individuals, mainly at a younger life stage, possibly what Levinson et al (1978) would describe as the ‘first adulthood’ and those seeking a significant change in occupational direction, namely from one career to another. In contrast this research focuses on individuals in their ‘second adulthood’ (Levinson et al, 1978) who are seeking to sustain their occupational direction, maybe tweaking their career to accommodate emerging interests/values as they progress through their third-age of life transition. Despite these differences in occupational stage and aspiration, the concepts and central philosophies underpinning our research initiatives are congruent and identify the psychological aspects of occupational emergence and transference. Ibarra’s work also illustrates how to facilitate a career transition having established and held a professional appointment. The similarities of our research programmes complement my investigative endeavours whilst the differences in research population – ‘mid-career’ transitions and ‘end career’ transitions – only serve to locate attitudinal differences in occupational anticipation at a different stage in the life course.

The foundations of work

Historical patterns of employment

In preceding centuries workers (persons engaged in waged labour) continued in employment, if they were fortunate to hold a position, until they died or ceased their undertaking due to ill

health or forced lay-off. Leading to the industrialisation of society, the concept of work became ingrained as a fundamental building block of man's (sic) obligation to the community that he belonged to – a pre requirement that gave a man (sic) purpose, determined his identity and proved his usefulness. My reference to 'man' is a historical one, since at this stage in societal emergence, the construct of 'work' was a phenomena mainly preserved for a gendered demographic, namely male members of the community – please refer to my later discussion for a consideration of the implications of gender on occupational emergence. In the 21st century, 'work' has become a myth for large numbers of people, who, believing that they had a right to employment, find that they are excluded from and/or restricted in their access to occupational engagement due to the realities of economic life – downturn, globalisation, recession, restructuring – all leading to a reallocation of or reduction in the jobs available in their local community. Reflecting on rights to existence, Forrester comments that:

'...to deserve life, therefore or rather to have a right to live depends on the 'duty' of working, of being employed'

(1999, p. 7)

However, is this premise equitable or realistic when contemporary society is unable to effectuate the requirements – fiscal stability, economic growth, political consensus and social inclusion – for full employment? This concept of the obligation to work applied to men (sic), but, in the latter part of the 20th century, the expectation of the right, perhaps not the obligation, to work extended to include women and now applies equally to men and women. Women worked continuously in earlier centuries primarily in the home and on family land, but their contribution was not recognised; it is only since the 1950s that they have increasingly participated in labour markets and contributed to the active paid workforce. This position is a turnaround from the perspective referenced by Rubery who, citing Beveridge (1942), described full employment as:

'...having always more vacant jobs than unemployed men, not slightly fewer jobs. It means that the jobs are at fair wages, of such a kind, and so located that the unemployed men can reasonably be expected to take them'

(1997, p. 81)

His explicit reference to men (sic) in discussing full employment is a reflection of the established roles that men and women had adopted, or had been socially encouraged to accommodate, up to the period preceding the Second World War. Since then patterns of work have changed and, as Hewitt (1997) argues, 'with a majority of women working part-time for part of their lives – and a growing minority of men doing the same – full employment must include part-time as well as full-time employment' (p. 81). These changes in the social organisation of work mean that an increasing number of people are now experiencing

fragmented occupational continuums; the idea of a stable or continuous career is a reflection of a past notion of occupational continuity grounded in a prosperous economy and constructed in the second half of the 20th century.

Job creation and financing

The availability of work has been dependent on the creation of jobs by industry, championed by business entrepreneurs who saw the opportunity to build businesses which, in addition to granting personal and (through taxation) national wealth, provided employment and prosperity for the individual and their community. The structure and financing of business changed little until upheavals caused first by the agricultural revolution and then by the mechanisation of the industrial age – during these periods society changed the way it worked to adjust to new working practices and procedures, but jobs were still available for people prepared to move to where the work was located. Financing for such industry was mainly sourced from national financial institutions, but current reengineering of business, brought about by the globalisation of technology, has changed the way in which products and services are produced and financed – today businesses are funded by an array of financial institutions distributed trans nationally.

This network of interwoven financial obligations, together with globalised access to labour, has caused a paradigm shift in employers' attitudes towards their workers employability – from a paternalistic concern for people i.e. their workers' general well-being and a desire to enable continuity of employment (wherever possible) to an organisational concern for profit. Although necessary for business continuity, this fiscal focus often appears to preclude any authentic concern for workers' well-being resulting in temporary working or even permanent layoff and the consequent trials for the worker disengaged from their occupational usefulness. In 'The Economic Horror', Forrester (1999) deplores the savagery of a society where the power brokers persist in the failing notion of full employment; she argues that this results in 'so many stifled, crushed, cornered, beaten, and falling apart lives, merely tangential to a shrinking society' (p. 9). Although written at the end of the 20th century, Forrester (1999) points to the reality of experience for an increasing number of people that is, arguably, even more relevant ten years on. As a result of the economic climate and society's inability to offer even temporary, let alone full, employment, people are excluded from their assumed right to a useful existence and should, according to Forrester:

‘...stop basing (*their*) identities, individually and communally around the idea of employment’

(1999, rear cover, *italics original*)

This current economic downturn is not an isolated occurrence and UK governments have continuously endeavoured to engage with the injustice presented by increases in unemployment, as reported by Britton (1997) who reviewed the fluctuations of unemployment since 1970 in his article on ‘Full Employment in a Market Economy’. So if full employment is unobtainable, a premise disputed by some economists, what are the prospects for the older worker in an age of fragmented work and discontinuous employment?

Occupational belongingness and identity

Many people have focused their identity on their occupational usefulness which engendered perceptions of value and belongingness in the workplace; this notion implies the concept of continuing employment, often recognised as a career trajectory. Although the term ‘career’ is common in contemporary terminology, Rose points out that it:

‘has become more widely used in the last 20 or so years ...[and was originally] reserved for those patterns of job holding, exhibited most clearly in managerial and professional levels, characterised by success in achieving a number of significant promotions, either in an organisational hierarchy or in a series of well-judged moves between employers’

(2005, pp. 250-251)

So this interpretation of career has clearly denoted characteristics – ‘managerial and professional’, ‘success ...in organisational hierarchy’ and ‘well-judged moves’ – which limits its application to a constricted population of higher level achievers in business and the professions rather than the majority of white and blue collar workers. In this latter category of worker, many face uncertain job security, limited opportunities for promotion and few have a concept of sustained employment – in fact most would probably see their occupational participation as a series of disconnected, rather than coherent and meaningful job experiences. In Table 2, Rose presents the results of a survey on career/promotion prospects:

	Employment in Britain (1992) %	Working in Britain (2001) %	Change %
Managers/administrators	67	64	-5
Professional occupations	87	68**	-22
Associate professional/technical occupations	80	65**	-19
Clerical/secretarial occupations	61	43**	-30
Craft and related occupations	41	30*	-22
Personal/protective service occupations	54	40*	-26
Sales occupations	50	48	-4
Plant/machine operatives	32	33	+3
Other occupations	31	26	-16
Total	58	47**	-16
n	3,445	2,125	

Notes:

* Difference significant with $CL_{0.5}$ (one-tail).

** Difference significant with $CL_{0.05}$ (two-tail).

Source: Employment in Britain Survey, 1992; Working in Britain Survey 2001.

TABLE 2: Current job as step in career/promotion ladder (Rose, 2005, p. 266)

Over the ten year period of the comparison years (1992-2001), there was a reduction of 22% in the percentage of professional workers believing that their current job was a step on a 'career or promotion ladder', although 'a very clear majority of people (2 out of 3) ...still reported that they had career opportunities in 2001' (Rose, 2005, p. 266). In his article Rose reports that, in response to the statement 'current job is a step in a recognised career ladder or promotion ladder':

'...the reported contraction of such career opportunities in terms of percentage points is most evident for professional, technical, clerical and service occupations'

(2005, p. 265)

These figures illustrate the fragility of the career concept even for those with the highest expectation of a traditional career experience, those in the professions who had, in earlier decades, anticipated four stages of professional development as profiled by Dalton et al (1977). Until the late 20th century, this pattern of progressive advancement typified the career trajectory that a qualified business consulting practitioner would have aspired to. Traditional career pathways reinforced the concept of an ascendant career representing gradual progression through a consulting organisation as illustrated by Collin and Watts, who acknowledging Kanter (1989), noted that the archetypical career 'comprised upward progression within a hierarchical organisation' (1996, p. 385).

Career development theory

The notion of occupational matching

Early thinking on career development centred on the idea that an individual could be matched to the requirements of a job; an early proponent, Parsons (1909), proposed 'that optimal career choices required three steps: knowledge of self, knowledge of work environments and some method of matching the characteristics of one's self to those of the work environment' (cited in Betz et al, 1989, p. 27). This led to a quest to find consonance between the requirements of a job and the predilections of individuals by measuring their individual characteristics or traits. Matching individuals by using trait theory resulted in the development of career interest inventories that located an individual's personality patterns and their preferences for different roles. One of these, Holland's 'Career Typology Theory of Vocational Behaviour' (1973, 1985) looks at the relative match between an individual's personality type and their occupational environment. Betz et al (1989) note that 'the central postulate of Holland's theory is that vocational satisfaction, stability, and achievement depend on the congruence between one's personality and the environment in which one works' (p. 33). The premise of these trait-based

approaches is that congruent individuals will be more contented in their occupational roles and less likely to change than incongruent ones. Whilst comprehensive research has been conducted around Holland's theory and its many derivatives, there remain questions about its validity and application within a workplace environment – whilst identifying preference, they do not give an indication of an individuals' ability to do a job.

Earlier, concerns about ability had persuaded some theorists (Buehler, 1933; Super, 1942; Rogers 1942, 1951 and Ginzberg et al., 1951) to focus on the 'life stage' approach as a schema for their interpretation of an individual's development through the life-cycle. Evolving from this original work Super (1951) derived his self-concept developmental theory based on the notion, as commented on by Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996), that:

'...people strive to implement their self-concept by choosing to enter the occupation seen most likely to permit self-expression. Furthermore, Super suggests that the particular behaviours a person engages in to implement the self-concept vocationally are a function of the individual's stage of life development'

(p. 111)

The 'life stage' approach suggests that people progress by achieving developmental tasks required within the stage that they are currently engaging with, but life does not progress in a linear mode with frequent deviations consequent on the realities of life. Whilst this postulation presents a useful insight into how people could cultivate/have cultivated their occupational progression, it offers limited perspectives on how to make effective career decisions or to enable organisational career facilitation. Whilst still placing the spotlight on 'self-concept', Gottfredson (1981) explains that young people make their career decisions using two processes, defined by Sharf (2006) as:

'*Circumscription* is a process in which young people eliminate alternatives that they feel will not be appropriate to them [and] *Compromise* is a process in which young people give up alternatives that they may like for ones that may be more accessible to them'

(pp. 156-157, *italics original*)

Gottfredson (1981) acknowledges that individuals make occupational choices based on both their preferences and the social influences – culture, labour market and competition – that constitute their outside world. Whilst focusing on the importance of 'social influence' on individual career decisions, it offers little for organisations wanting to facilitate their employees' occupational inclinations. The 'self-concept' approach affirms the significance of individual aspiration, but deprecates the social context from within which an individual assembles their occupational preferences. Whilst 'trait theory' and 'self-concept' are psychological constructs,

other theoretical approaches to understanding career centre on sociological perspectives that take account of an individual's social environment and strongly influence their occupational choice. As Greenhaus et al (2000) acknowledge, 'the choices we make are reflections of our personal characteristics and the environment in which we live ...career decisions are not made in a vacuum' (p. 135). So what are the sociological considerations that influence occupational career decisions?

Social influence on early career choice

Although 'upward progression' represents the career anticipation of many professional workers during the early stage of their occupational emergence, actual experience is influenced by considerations including decisions made when selecting early careers, engaging with life excursions and consolidating professional credence and status. Choosing an early career is affected by our social environment, what Roberts (1977) refers to as 'opportunity structures' and Bourdieu (1984) as 'habitus' – both of these notions are embraced by Burkitt (2008) who presents the construct of 'cultural capital', that is the social disposition and aspirations that a person inherits from their conditioning backgrounds within their communal, educational and familial contexts. This condition enables a young person to determine their early career route or as Burkitt (2008) suggests 'angles them in a biographical trajectory towards certain positions in the social structure' (p.149). These early occupational choices are described in Super's (1957) model of vocational development and his consequent application to career education (Super, 1990) but are focused on the pre-digital organisational world. As Savickas notes:

'...as corporations changed shape at the dawn of the 21st century, the nexus of career moved from the organization to the individual ...this shift in responsibility ...posed the new question of how individuals may negotiate a lifetime of job changes'

(2011, p. 5)

In addition to socialisation and digitisation, another primary factor is a person's preferred style of occupational decision making; Arnold (1997) proposes three styles – rational, intuitive and dependent – to explain the degree of decisiveness that a person employs when deciding on their occupational direction, embracing the legitimacy of individualised decision making.

Whilst establishing an occupational direction is a significant event in a person's life, the reality of living in contemporary society necessitates engagement with life excursions – independence, relationships, responsibilities and possibly parenthood, in addition to strengthening occupational commitment and achievement. This life stage, often labelled early/young adulthood (Levinson et al, 1978; Newman and Newman, 1995) engages an individual in living life to its potential and in handling its contingencies. For those entering the professions this life stage can result in

significant career progression with its associated rewards (Sugarman, 2001), but may have conflicting demands on their personal life with conflicting priorities. Sugarman's observation of 'considerable career advancement' (2001, p. 60) can encourage a young professional to pursue occupational advancement, but may result in fractures between professional and private, sometimes damaging personal integrity and relationships.

Dalton et al.'s approach to professional career evolution – 'apprentice, colleague, mentor and sponsor' (1977, p. 23) is represented by Gergen (1999) as a 'happily-ever-after' narrative with a continually rising (ascendant) profile over a person's occupational emergence. However, the reality of contemporary occupational existence is a fragmentary profile – what Gergen (1999) labels a 'heroic saga' narrative and portrays as a fluctuating profile with satisfying (ascendant) and dissatisfying (descendant) periods of occupational experience. This oscillating profile endorses the concept of the 'protean career' (Hall, 1996) in which it is the individual that shapes contemporary career and not their employing organisation, leading to the individualisation of working life and the need for people to navigate emergent occupational transitions. Whilst typical of the experience of many professionals working in the stable occupational environments of the late 20th century, Dalton et al.'s (1977) ascendant model has weakened with the volatility (economic, technological and structural) experienced by 21st century professional workers. In professional services, firms realised the need for operational efficiencies including financial optimisation and service enhancement which necessitated structural change and weakened the employee/employer bond resulting in occupational disenfranchisement. Set aside from this stabilising construct, people have adapted to the organisational turbulence of the late 20th/early 21st century by searching for their own interpretations of occupational coherence and identity.

A significant landmark in the life of a professional worker is the attainment of their professional status; in Dalton et al.'s (1977) model this results in a move from apprentice to colleague that is a qualified practitioner with professional recognition. Eraut (1994) suggests that there are three features of a professional enterprise – specialist knowledge, autonomic accountability and a service orientation – that define professional businesses. Professionalism, the aspiration of business consulting practitioners, is the foundation on which a person builds their expert knowledge-base, acquires professional independence and focuses their client deliverables. As Evetts (2011) suggests, professional membership is the way for a person to attain occupational status and reward and for their employing organisation to regulate operational control. This discourse could impose two conflicting demands on a professional, namely personal independence versus organisational control, which according to Harries-Jenkins (1970), represent 'two distinct, irreconcilable systems ...the profession and the organisation, each [attempting] to control his occupational activities' (p. 53). Within professional consulting, the

acquisition and maintenance of professional credence is a primary contributor to a practitioner's occupational evolution, but may restrict inter-professional sharing as professionals may regard themselves as elite (Quinn et al, 1996). The codification and regulation of professional standards is leading to what Hansen et al (1999) suggest is 'reuse economics' (p. 109) which commoditises the utilisation of frequently applied knowledge.

The 'boundaryless' (Arthur, 1994) and 'protean' (Hall, 1996) career are two metaphors that locate the flexibility and versatility associated with contemporary career practice; individuals cannot rely on their organisation to determine their occupational progression for contemporary career narratives are ambiguous and fragmented (Kalleberg, 2009). The anticipated occupational emergence of a professional worker now reflects the uncertainty and insecurity experienced by all workers in contemporary organisations. One of the principal attributes of professional status 'autonomy', a professional's freedom to choose how they conduct business, is dissipating as contemporary society (including both business and the public) rethink their understanding of how professional practice and service should function (Evetts, 2011).

The emergence of career constructionist frameworks (Savickas, 2011) enables a person to actively participate in the construction of their occupational narrative, so fulfilling Super's aspiration that career counselling should empower an individual:

'to develop and accept an integrated and adequate picture of himself [sic] and his [sic] role in the world of work, to test this concept against reality, and to convert it into reality, with satisfaction to himself [sic] and benefit to society'

(1951, p. 92)

This construction of a visible representation of self helps a person to reveal the depth of their metamorphosis illustrating the difference between career change/reinvention and reduces the dissimilitude between imagined self, existing in the mind and alternative self, enacted through doing (Ibarra, 2003). Visualisation techniques encourage a person to construct a coherent narrative that reflects on the experiences that a person needs to build their self-awareness since:

'...a self is built from the outside in, not from the inside out ...through self-conscious awareness, the self recognizes itself. This self-consciously created idea of self is constituted by stories about experience'

(Savickas, 2011, p. 17)

In postulates about career construction, the notion of identity is a reflection of a person's perception of self with regard to the social functions that they engage with – self is a perception located within a shared communal, whether societal or organisational, context (Markus, 1977).

As a person constructs their occupational reality, through conversation, dialogue or stories, they may adopt a different occupational trajectory that indicates their preferred approach to occupational sustainability. Career construction theory suggests that occupational narrative is composed through auto/biographic reasoning, a process integrating the shared authorship of career actor and mentor to concentrate on sense making and meaning in the developing creation of self (Savickas, 2011). Where predictability once determined occupational progress, variability now regulates the emergence of a person's occupational quest in their search for vocational vindication; constructivist occupational narrative is a textual artefact that facilitates an individual's articulation of their occupational choices and intentions.

Mid-life occupational continuation

In their transition to middle adulthood, the principal aim of many workers is to sustain their career purpose and retain occupational tenure. According to Super's (1957) life span theory, a person is maintaining their work status and seeking to procure occupational continuance until the time when they are ready to disengage. In this and subsequent expositions he propounds three sub stages – holding, updating and innovating – to enable a person to nurture their occupational endeavours (Super, 1990) and continue economic participation. Two other influential exponents (Erikson, 1959 and Levinson et al, 1978) use the life stage approach to explain adult development, but, whilst their theories may support career thinking, they do not reflect what happens in reality. Kidd suggests that their main contribution is:

‘to *anticipatory socialisation*, helping individuals look ahead to the issues and transitions they may have to face in the future and enhancing the capacity for dealing with development in an autonomous way’

(2006, p. 38, *italics original*)

This age, sometimes referred to as ‘middle age’ (sic), is a period of the life span in which a person seeks to conserve the past and envisage the future – it is a notional and subliminal lacuna that resists exploration (Hamilton, 2009). Whilst resistant to inquiry, the mid-life transition is, according to Hollis (1993) a time to restore a person to ‘a humble but dignified relationship to the universe’ (p. 22). The aspirations of youth, overcome by reflections on reality, rebalance a person's connection to humanity and re-establish a sense of belonging and hope for altruistic endeavour. This is a period of life in which a person, grounded in the reality of life's experiences, seeks to optimise their time and secure beneficial outcomes – what Biggs (2010) labels as ‘productive ageing’ (p. 359). Initially an energising motivation, this drive for productivity dissipates as a person approaches old age (sic) – located by Super (1990) as the

transition between 60 and 65, and gradually becomes enervating, a drain on volitional undertakings, as occupational withdrawal invites consideration.

In their desire to attain a satisfying experience in their life, people strive for significance and value in all that they do; in an occupational environment Sharf (2006) suggests that this means that individuals believe that their work activities induce affinity by connecting with their interests and values. The autonomy and operational freedom to make business decisions are thought to be key determinants of harmony within professional practice (Porter, 2010), but does this satisfy a professional practitioner who, after years of enduring occupational application, senses that they are not being recognised for their contribution to organisational attainment? Congruity exists when an individual's presenting character (personality) matches their working environment and they feel that there is compatibility between them and their occupational context (Gottfredson, 2002).

Two theoretical contributions from Ibarra (2004) and Super (1990) advocate the need to recycle through the career exploration phase when an individual changes their occupational circumstances, what Ibarra describes as 'strategies for reworking identity' (p. 18). Having invested many years of personal endeavour, through application, participation and probably qualification, older workers are often reluctant to disengage from their occupational landscapes unless pressurised to do so through forced disengagement. In occupational terms, mid-life is a life stage where the central focus is self-sustainability, including questions about work capability, tenure and value – a period of increased awareness of self within a complex world of ever-changing organisational demands (Biggs, 2010). This can be a disassociating experience as a person realises the illusory nature of life participation (Levinson et al, 1978) encompassing the emerging nature of organisational attainment and membership. In this period of life, an intersection between the historical reality of past accomplishment and the imagined realisation of future possibilities, a person begins to surrender to the uncertainties of life for the older person, in an increasingly ambiguous and equivocal society. However, as an alternative to abandoning their earlier attainments, they may decide to refocus their work to embrace the identity they have formerly secured (Capelli and Novelli, 2010); so patterns of occupational working are changing as individuals adjust to accommodate organisational agility and economic demands.

At this stage of life, family obligations become important – senior family members may require care or other support, younger family members may still expect/require domiciliary assistance and there is also the possibility of personal infirmity. Depending on their views about societal responsibility, individuals will have different perspectives and responses when handling these situations (Wilson, 2000) and this will influence their occupational decision to sustain, suspend or stop their occupational passage and the economic consequences of their conclusion.

Balancing the demands of work and obligational (sic) undertakings will probably become a more frequent consideration for older workers as people live longer with potentially negative outcomes for both men and women (Baltes and Young, 2007). Limited research has been conducted to evaluate this contemporary issue, but it is clear that responsibility for any obligational (sic) commitment does restrict a person's occupational freedom by determining the suspension or closure of their career. Apart from social infringements on occupational continuity, another significant influence is economic dependency that is the extent to which an older worker can afford to retire/cease their occupational participation – Cory (2012) reports that:

‘...poor economic conditions reduce the value of pensions savings ...left with a smaller pension pot than anticipated, some people chose to stay in the workplace to bolster their savings’

(2012, p. 15)

With limited retirement provision, some people will opt to extend their working experience for a period longer than that currently anticipated by social policy. The affordability of living post occupational withdrawal will influence a person's closing career decisions and determine when they actually depart from the workplace.

Whilst established career theory suggests that there is a specified age at which an individual should expect to retire, contemporary economic, social and familial considerations are determining alternative interpretations for the meaning and timing of the act of occupational withdrawal, commonly known as ‘retirement’. As Savickas (2002) suggests there are increasingly discordant stories being told about the anticipation for and experience of retirement – older workers are determining their own accounts, recounted through occupational narrative and historiographical instruments such as biography, dialogue, journals and memoirs. The recollection of third-age occupational experience is sparse leaving space for further research into the decisions surrounding the closedown of occupational inhabitancy; workplace withdrawal ultimately becomes inevitable and surfaces when social and economic imperatives mandate (Barnes-Farrell and Matthews, 2007). The predictable retirement outcomes of the 20th century are being superseded by a plethora of alternative retirement scenarios embracing the social and economic drivers of contemporary occupational life.

The closedown of career

An emerging aspiration, noted by Capelli and Novelli (2010), is the intent to work for as long as possible, but with the option to work part-time allowing flexibility in their occupational endeavours. This discretionary working allows a person to rebalance their work/life equilibrium

enabling them to focus on restoring/strengthening their relationships within social groupings rather than accumulating additional specialist accreditations and/or attainments (Baltes and Graf, 1996). For some, this transitory state of pre-retirement flexibility is considered to be ‘the cliff-edge’ between work and retirement (Humphrey et al, 2003, p. 151) and Bimrose and Brown (2010) caution that the effects of fractional withdrawal from the workplace may become progressively obscured by the abstraction of partial disengagement. Conjointly, systematised approaches to occupational emergence suggest a prescriptive composition for how a career should emanate, whilst 21st occupational experience necessitates an agential approach that enables the jobholder to construct their own story. As Kidd observes the work of social constructionists, such as Cochran (1997):

‘...focus on how work fits into people’s lives, rather than assessing ‘fit’ between individuals and jobs. The constructivist approach also emphasises the importance of individuals gaining understanding of the context in which their careers develop’

(2006, p. 47)

The opportunity to co-construct an occupational narrative, that embraces a person’s career history, will enable a person to evaluate their occupational preferences without compromising their unique working characteristics. The increasing usance of semi-retirement to assuage a person’s financial and social obligations is obscuring the practice of occupational withdrawal (Bimrose and Brown, 2010). This discontinuous approach to retirement is reflected in the emerging practice of career maintenance in the 21st century – a happenstance or opportunistic response to occupational stimuli rather than the programmed interventions previously designed; as Pryor and Bright suggest, when modifying their occupational flow, people need ‘to capitalize on chance’ (2011, p. 11). Transferring to a different occupational space is challenging (Ibarra, 2004) and so too is retirement, an unknown alternative to working with which people have no familiarity. With this ambivalence toward immutable retirement and new occupational trajectories emerging, there is a need for more flexible approaches to retirement, enabling people to choose when and how to disengage from the workplace based on their obligations (Taylor, 2008a).

When to withdraw from occupational participation is a challenging deliberation; customarily chronologic existence determines when a person is expected to retire (Merchant, 2003; Wilson, 2000), but with changing social policy, the precise age of anticipated retirement, within the UK pension system, is nebulous and dependent on a person’s actual age and gender. Whilst many people retired on the specified age for state retirement, this is now changing because of the adjustments to state pension policy, occupational disruptions due to outsourcing/restructuring and personal circumstances and preferences. As a result people now cease occupational engagement at different ages with the consequence that long standing career theories

inadequately explain the notion of workplace withdrawal. This emergent social condition suggests that occupational theories of career should be reviewed to see whether they can be adapted to accommodate the occupational reality of 21st century working or that new frameworks/models are required to appropriately explain what is now happening in people's careers, specifically regarding the period leading toward closure of occupational tenure.

The third-age as a contemporary phenomena

Social policy and retirement

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the construct of retirement was not known; the majority of people worked until they were no longer able to do so and were obliged, through ill health or death, to cease working. Midwinter reviews the hours of work of men (sic) between the mid-19th and late 20th centuries pointing out that:

‘the 1850s part-mythical toiler would have worked one-in-three of the hours of his life, the 1900s man one-in-five, the 1950s man one-in-six and the 1990s man one-in-fourteen ...[and notes that] the 1900s man worked just as the first stirrings of retirement and pensions concerned British politicians’

(2005, p. 14)

This meant that, until the early 20th century, a person who was unable to work would become dependent on ‘aged pauper’ relief or support from family members; there was no recognised activity after work, that is to say no opportunity to spend time enjoying a gradual slowdown in a person's level of activity until the inevitable cessation of life. Consequently society had no need to refer to retirement as there was no such life-stage to be acknowledged; however, by the end of the 20th century the concepts of pensions and retirement were well established. Midwinter reviews the work of Peter Laslett (1991):

‘...who introduced the ‘stage’ method ...the First Age of socialisation, the Second Age of work and child rearing, and the Third Age of independent post-work ...and a Fourth Age or dependent older age’

(Midwinter, 2005, p. 12)

For most people, a financially secure independent old age was not possible until the introduction of the state pension and, for some, occupational pensions provided by their employer. Very few employees aged 50-60 were able to contemplate alternative careers as they would have had to continue working until they died or became incapacitated and dependent on others. For this reason few British workers would have taken the opportunity to explore their occupational

values and aspirations, as retirement, or permanent occupational disengagement, was not an option for them. Today, however, that position has changed and most people are likely to concur with the findings of Vickerstaff et al which, in a summary, notes that:

‘a small number of respondents were not looking forward to retirement; however, the great majority articulated strong cultural assumptions about retirement as a deserved right and presented a common vision of what retirement should ideally entail: a period of freedom and choice’

(2008, p. 85)

This shows that most people have an expectation of what they believe retirement should be, but increasing economic and social pressures mean that, for many, the state of retirement arrives earlier than anticipated – from 50 onwards rather than the presumed retirement at ‘state pension age’ (SPA). Formerly 60 for women and 65 for men, more recent pensions legislation (HMSO, 2007) has introduced a gradual SPA change for women from 2010 taking the SPA to 65 by April 2020, but further government announcements, made in November 2011, now mean that for both men and women there is an equalised SPA at 67 taking effect between 2026 and 2028. The government’s prescribed retirement age, as defined through state pension policy, is based on chronological age, which, although relevant for earlier generations, is arguably inappropriate today when people retire at varying ages dependent on their family, financial and personal obligations. The act of retiring is not so much a matter of reaching this prescribed age, but more, as van der Heijden et al, referring to Feldman (1989), note:

‘...withdrawal from an organisational position or career path of considerable duration, taken by individuals after middle age, and taken with the intention of reduced psychological commitment to work hereafter’

(2008, p. 90)

It seems, therefore, that, whether through choice or forced disengagement, the actual age at which people retire may be opportunistic, based on individual circumstances, including economic and social constraints, rather than government prescription. So this locates the age at which people expect to enter the ‘retirement’ stage of their life, namely a socially engineered chronological age or a variable age based on opportunistic reaction to individual circumstances, but who, in postmodern society, is regarded as an older worker?

Older workers in the third-age

In this investigation, it is important to be clear about this construct, and so I identify the older worker, from a biological perspective, as someone aged 50+, which matches closely the age range, 45 to 50 plus, described by some writers (Macnicol, 2005; Spencer and Fredman, 2003). The identity of the older worker is discussed further by Rocco et al who, quoting several writers (Ekerdt et al, 2000; Forte and Hansvick, 1999), note that:

‘there is a trend to move the definitions of who is an older worker from a chronological age to a more subjective definition of age across the lifespan based on individual capabilities and organizational needs’

(2003, p. 165)

This leads to the concept of the ‘third age’, a period in (working) life when a person, whilst having achieved their main career goals, is looking to sustain or even develop further their career, but, simultaneously, is beginning to acknowledge the implications of occupational disengagement from the active workforce. Contrasted to a person’s earlier life stages – childhood/adolescence and early adult – this is a different stage in life, where, for many professional workers, there is a greater degree of freedom and occupational choice, due to reducing family and financial commitments. This is dependent on an individual’s financial propensity, some needing to remain in employment to sustain a basic standard of living to support them-self and their family. Barham acknowledges that:

‘for those contemplating their move towards retirement ...individual factors such as health, domestic circumstances and caring responsibilities, financial security and pension arrangements interact with organisational pressures, such as job change, restructuring, redundancy and discrimination, leading to the circumstances in which individuals leave, remain or return to work’

(2008, p. 8)

This observation details some of the life considerations that older workers engage with when determining their continuing occupational options. In employment terms, Ford defines the third age as:

‘...starting at 45+, because 45 is now the approximate point at which age can begin to present both men and women with significant (and for many, acute) problems in securing suitable employment’

(1996, p. 1)

This definition, whilst acknowledging the employment reality for many, is arguably too prescriptive and so others (Curnow and Fox, 1994; Withnall, 2000) are less precise in their

chronological determination. They suggest that the third age is a period post economic activity where the older worker is less dependent on producing income, but not yet transitioning to the fourth age – for many an age of failing health, increasing dependence on others and, ultimately, death. There is, therefore, no definitive agreement on a chronological interpretation of the third age, but the UK government has determined one of their statistical breakpoints to be age 50 and has produced reports focused on this biographical life point.

The importance of the ‘third-age’ is also reflected in public policy as determined by political administrations over the years. In the 1980s and early 1990s there was concern about the ability of young people to enter the labour market and, as a consequence, policy makers focused on enabling young workers to secure employment, possibly at the expense of the older worker. This period was one of recession and high unemployment, similar to the period that the British economy is currently moving through in the 21st century. However, this time the role of the older worker is more critical as acknowledged by Taylor who notes that:

‘...older workers have been revealed by policy makers as critical to Britain’s future economic success. Once viewed as career blockers as labour markets contracted, they have now undergone a metamorphosis in the policymaker’s mind, being keepers of valuable knowledge and wisdom, filling the gaps left by the dwindling numbers of young labour market entrants’

(2008b, p. 93-94)

The reasons for this change in attitude by the politicians are published in statistics which show that the demography of the population is changing; according to statistics released (ONS, 2008) there are now ‘more pensioners than under-16’s for the first time ever’ and, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), this demographic change is projected to continue to 2031 which means that the relative number (i.e. percentage within the working population) of older workers will continue to be greater than younger workers, and it is possible that state pensions will not be adequate to support them. In a stable economic market this would have meant that employers would have become increasingly dependent on retaining their older workers – indeed Hotopp recognised that:

‘...after a long period of decline the employment rate for people aged 50 and over has begun to increase’

(2005, p. 73)

However, with the UK economy moving into recession, McNair describes this as ‘a time of particular economic and social volatility ...[after] a very long period of economic growth’ (2009, introduction). This analysis may change as increasing numbers of workers of all ages

(especially young people) become/remain unemployed and public service cuts escalate. In his paper on demography and lifelong learning, McNair notes that a key issue requiring attention is:

‘the growing ‘third age’ – to support people in finding new identities and constructive roles for the much longer period they will spend in active retired life’

(2009, p. 43)

His analysis of society’s challenges also suggests that this period of active retirement may exceed the total years that workers actually spend in permanent employment. This investigation acknowledges that the British population is ageing and the course of life is changing for many workers aged over 50 – changed work circumstances and associated financial security, possible family responsibilities (both for children/step-children and older dependent family members) and changing life attitudes and values. It, therefore, seeks to understand the occupational aspirations of one group of professional workers – qualified practitioners who provide business consulting services. The third-age of a person’s life course transition is a phenomenon that has emerged over the past 30-40 years. Before 1970 the concept was not recognised and, until the introduction of a state contributory pension scheme for all British workers – designed by the Beveridge Committee and enacted through Parliament in 1946 – few would have had the opportunity to stop working due to economic insecurity. Prior to the beginning of the 20th century and up to the late 1940s, when some workers (identified through means testing and by age) benefited from earlier British pension systems introduced in 1908 and 1925, most British workers would have expected to carry on working until they died or were obliged to cease through ill health.

Today, changing demographic patterns in ageing, economics, employment, population and social mobility mean that the ‘third-age’ is now an acknowledged social construct that government, and other policy makers, recognise and address as social and economic challenges facing UK society evolve up to the mid-21st century. The policy makers have previously focused on the economic and welfare aspects of ageing, but contemporary commentators reflect on the increasing transitional period of post occupational experience that many workers now have prior to advancing to a fourth age – noted by McNair (2009) to be persons aged 75 and over – of physical decline and possible dependence. The third-age of a worker’s occupational transition is, therefore, potentially a period of opportunity and adventure, which can be enhanced if they learn how to embrace their capabilities in determining a new occupational destiny, which reflects their preferences and lifestyle choices.

Choice and disengagement

Current provision for state pensions

Earlier, I identified the ‘state pension age’ (SPA) as the age at which, according to UK legislation, most workers are expected to have retired and the age at which employers could enforce retirement in accordance with UK legislation. This position was considered discriminatory and ‘Age Concern England’ (ACE) contested the lawful right of the UK government to allow employers to enforce retirement at age 65 or after, claiming that the regulations set out in equality legislation (HMSO, 2006 – EE(A)R 2006) were in contravention of a European directive (OJEC, 2000 – CD 2000/78/EC) on establishing an equal treatment framework for all employees in occupational employment. ACE presented their case to the High Court of Justice of England who referred the matter to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) for a preliminary ruling. On 5 March 2009, the ECJ Court (Third Chamber) ruled that:

1. National rules such as those set out in EE(A)R 2006 do fall within the scope of European CD 2000/78/EC, and
2. Article 6(1) of CD 2000/78 allows member states the option to derogate from the principle prohibiting discrimination on grounds of age only in respect of measures justified by legitimate social policy objectives, such as those related to employment policy, the labour market or vocational training, and
3. It is for the national court to ascertain whether the legislation at issue (regulations allowing employers to enforce retirement at age 65 or later) are consonant with such legitimate social policy objectives such as those described in the ruling 2 preceding, and
4. Article 6(1) of CD 2000/78 gives member states the option to provide, within the context of national law, for certain kinds of differences in treatment on grounds of age if they are ‘objectively and reasonably’ justified by such a legitimate aim.

Note: This summary has been précised from a press release (ECJ, 2009) for Case C-388/07.

This judgement meant that it became the responsibility of the High Court of Justice of England to make their final ruling on the matter and to determine whether the ‘default retirement age’ (DRA) actually did meet a legitimate social policy objective as defined and interpreted by the European Court of Justice. Commenting on this ruling, Lishman (2009), director general of Age Concern expressed his disappointment suggesting that the judgement ‘sends the message that ageism is less important than other forms of discrimination’ and Cann (2009), director of policy for ‘Help the Aged’, noted a contemporary concern namely that ‘given the difficult economic climate, the case had become even more important for pensioners who wanted to continue working so they could be more comfortable’. These two reactions typify two of the concerns

that older workers currently have – age discrimination in the workplace and the flexibility to continue working – both of which impact on the older worker’s ability to remain economically active beyond ‘retirement’. In a society encountering economic uncertainty, many older workers may be facing a financially insecure future which will constrain their career aspirations and limit their choice when determining their occupational destiny up to and beyond retirement age.

Following the decision by the European Court of Justice, the High Court of Justice of England ruled that ‘the UK’s default retirement age of 65 does not breach European law’ (Out-Law, 2009, p. 1); this ruling removed the uncertainty facing older UK workers, but continued to limit their choice when looking to continue in employment beyond age 65. For some older workers this might have had implications for their continued financial security and impact on their well-being as they moved towards their final life stage, acknowledged to be a ‘fourth-age’ of declining health and possibly dependency on others (e.g. family, care/nursing homes and social agencies) for their daily living requirements. However, ‘Out-Law’ reported that in determining this ruling:

‘...the Court was strongly influenced by the fact that the Government has brought forward its review of the default retirement age from 2011 to next year [2010]’

(2009, p. 2)

The implication of this ruling was that most older workers would not have been able to work beyond age 65 unless their employers agreed to them doing so, but groups representing older people, such as Age UK (formerly Age Concern England), decided not to appeal the judgement as they expected it to be abolished after the Government completed its review in 2010. Immediately following the ruling Butterworth (2009a) reported that Dame Joan Bakewell said ‘the current mandatory retirement age of 65 ...should be abolished, with health and attitude determining when people stop working (p. 1); she also reported that the Government had announced that ‘senior civil servants can no longer be forced to retire when they reach 65’ (Butterworth, 2009b, p. 1). The foregoing political commentary summarised the campaigning that occurred during the first half of this research programme, but, subsequently in 2010, the UK Government abolished the DRA from April 2011, allowing an older person to work to an age of their choice or one determined by their employer subject to objective justification.

The impact of defined ages

This study, whilst focusing on the occupational histories and aspirations of older professional workers, is interwoven with the emerging social policy on retirement – an individual decides when to retire taking account of, but not controlled by, the SPA and now the abolishment of the DRA. In an age when social policy funding is under pressure, it is preferable that an older

worker should be enabled to manage their own financial affairs and to decide at what age they retire; this allows more flexibility in determining their retirement age and gives them greater occupational choice when deciding how long they continue to work for. Contemporary debates on the topic of retirement age include a comment by David Norgrove, Chairman of the Pensions Regulator, who suggests that ‘given recent legislation is increasing the retirement age progressively to 68 ...I think it will end up higher than that’ (Jamieson, 2009). Even Lord Turner, who wrote a report helping the then Government to reshape their pension policy in 2007, admitted ‘if I was redoing my report I would be more radical, arguing for an even faster increase in the state pension age’ (Butterworth, 2009c). It appears that the experts agree that there is a continuing need to reconsider what the SPA should be, so what is the appropriate chronological age that would be deemed acceptable, by any government for economic and political reasons and by individuals enabling them to meet their social and financial needs? The determination of SPA should also provide the older worker with greater freedom of choice and the ability to gradually transfer to permanent retirement.

Occupational choice within employment

Why is this discussion about retirement ages important? This investigation anticipates that the participants in this research group have a freedom of choice when articulating and determining the age at which they opt to remove themselves from occupational employment. However, contemporary social policy does not guarantee this freedom of choice which may influence an older worker’s attitude toward disengagement from the workplace. Arguably professional workers inhabit an occupational class that allow them independence and the flexibility to determine their occupational continuity, a freedom denied the majority of older workers. Hughes (1976) suggests that the concept of ‘social class’:

‘offers a rule, a grid, even though vague at times, to use in talking about certain sorts of experience that have to do with economic position, life-style, life chances and so on. It serves to identify aspects of experience, and by relating the concept to other concepts we are able to construct theories about experience in a particular order or sphere’

(1976, p. 34)

This concept when transferred to the notion of ‘occupational class’ may mean that professional workers, as a result of this presumed ‘occupational class’, have greater freedoms and, therefore, more flexibility in determining their occupational destiny as a consequence of socio-economic factors such as stronger financial and life-style options. If social identity does impact on a professional worker’s occupational freedoms, then I commend ‘occupational narrative’ as a way to present a map enabling older workers, in different professional settings, to talk about their occupational experiences in a positive way. In so doing I trust that the process of capturing,

interpreting and embracing occupational narrative links to other occupational concepts (e.g. socialisation, progression and disengagement) and enables older workers to construct their own personal theory of career emergence or evolution which recognises and endorses their occupational experience as they engage in the concluding stages of their employment transition.

This transition may continue with little change as the professional worker sustains their existing employment pattern and slowly unwinds as they approach ‘retirement’ or may proceed with significant change as the individual decides, either through personal choice or forced disengagement, to adopt a very different employment pattern. The former transition is unlikely to necessitate a change in professional identity or practice, but the latter will require the individual to adjust their professional practice and possibly their occupational identity as they learn to accommodate new ways of working – a state of transition that will ultimately impact on all professional workers when they finally disengage from the workplace. This move to a new identity can cause personal challenge as the individual struggles to make the adjustment. Ibarra recognises this challenge, acknowledging that:

‘...our old identities, even when they are out of whack with our core values and fundamental preferences, remain entrenched because they are anchored in our daily activities, strong relationships, and life stories’

(2004, p. 16)

According to Ibarra, a person needs to accommodate or adjust to this change through a number of learning activities, including ‘reinterpreting our life stories through the lens of the emerging possibilities’ (2004, p. 16). This process of story construction enables the participant to locate and make sense of personal occupational knowledge which, although held in memory for many years, has probably never been extracted or interpreted.

Antecedents of narrative exposition

Recounting history in society

One of my research propositions is that older professional workers can use their recalled occupational history to identify their principal career attributes and help them to determine their career futurity. The first step is to recount their career story and make sense of it in an attempt to understand how it might help determine the way forward. Since earliest times individuals have recounted stories about their life experiences; the importance of chronicling and recording experience was acknowledged by Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD), who commented that:

‘this chronicle does not need to be recollected strictly, but merely to be recalled: I need only to call up again the succession of images which stand awaiting in memory in the order in which I experienced them’

(Crites, 1971, p. 299)

Augustine’s reflection suggests that the record does not need to be accurately recollected, but only to be recounted as a series of experienced incidents and that an individual’s memory is simply waiting to be triggered before releasing the image of that experience. This would suggest that the process of experiential recollection is a relatively straightforward one that can be activated by most people. The concept of story is at the foundation of narrative construction whether in audible or textual form. Stories have been told and listened to throughout human existence – communities have traditionally sustained their cohesiveness, practice and values through storytelling as acknowledged by Myers who notes that:

‘...oral cultures repeat the traditions of their people many times over. It is only in the telling of the tale that the tradition of the people can be kept alive. The storyteller, therefore, helps to conserve tradition’

(2007, p. 81)

These community stories have only been recorded since the advent of character/language systems (for example in ancient cave drawings and the Egyptian pyramids), and textualised since the invention of writing materials (pen, pencil and papyrus/paper). The history of the written word has been extensively documented, for example by Gaur (1984) and Fischer (2003); in recent human history stories have been increasingly documented, initially in book format and, latterly, in electronic forms of textual transmission. In the 20th century, international societies witnessed the emergence of ‘life histories’ (e.g. Thomas and Znaniecki, 1996; Catani, 1973; Sparkes, 2004), written biographic accounts of individual life experiences, and now, in the 21st century, there are biographic accounts i.e. biographies in many bookshops.

There has been an explosion of storytelling covering a rich diversity of life experiences ranging from classical reflections on indigenous peoples in Africa and the Americas, celebratory biographies of famous people, sports persons and war heroes, and therapeutic narratives of persons experiencing illness and social disaffection. Each of the stories told is distinctive for as Borenstein remarks:

‘...life histories, like snowflakes, are never of the same design ...in inner life each of us is solitary ...wherever one begins, the task is always the same: to follow the labyrinthine corridors between inner and outer reality, without losing one’s integrity, one’s selfhood, in either’

(1978, p. 30)

The stories told are, therefore, unique to the person about whom the story is told and reflect the actual life experiences of that person, or, in the case of ethnographic studies, the collective community at the centre of the observed group.

The richness of social narrative

Social narrative embraces all stories that represent different forms of social and historical knowledge; the profusion and diffusion of recollected stories throughout humankind is reflected in the following passage by Barthes acknowledging the omnipresence of narrative:

‘The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances ... narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, paintings ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative ... Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural’

(1977, p. 79)

Narrative is a rich form of social communication and prevalent in all of human society; it offers an opportunity to embrace social history in both collective and personal forms and provides a vehicle for recounting and recording historical incidents, and, if interpreted appropriately, for helping policy makers determine social policy. In the introduction to ‘The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science’, Chamberlayne et al suggest that:

‘...perhaps policy makers were at last responding to the requirements of a more differentiated and reflexive society and the need to realign policy with realities and strategies of everyday lives’

(2000, p. 2)

If true, then narrative has a powerful contribution to make to the emergence and design of contemporary social policy and practice that increasingly reflects the actual experience of people living every day, but not ordinary, lives. For these reasons – prevalence of approach, historical recollection and policy change potential – I propose that narrative accounts of occupational lives are also a valuable source of knowledge, both for the individual looking to appreciate their career transition history/futurity and for the institution (employer, government or professional association) desiring to understand how best to support and guide older workers as they make the transition toward occupational disengagement.

The value of the narrative approach in career counselling is the focus of Larry Cochran's (1997) seminal work on constructivist career counselling and the importance of adding subjective methods to complement the traditional objective approaches (inventories, questionnaires, tests) to career guidance. Subjectivity in this context means introducing innovative methods that encourage the participant that is the career actor to reflexively review their occupational attributes and practice, not to rely only on hard data generated by psychometric profiling and other career assessment tools. Cochran suggests that one of these subjective methods is to use a narrative approach and that:

‘...the task of career counselling is to help persons tell richer, more continuous, coherent, plausible, and productive stories. Striving to tell well-informed stories is an exercise of practical wisdom’

(1997, p. 24)

His declared aim to promote the telling of occupational stories, introduces the requirement that to compose a narrative involves practical application, i.e. there are activities that need to be implemented in a useful way if they are to offer common sense insights to their reader.

Time in narrative composition

The actual nature of time

For the whole of civilisation, the debate around time has centred around its nature – is it an objective, discrete unit of physical existence or a subjective experience of consciousness related to us through our perception of the changing environment in which we live? In ‘The Problem of Time’, Gunn explores a range of philosophical explications about the nature of time; in it he argues that:

‘...our experience of time is based on an awareness of events, their duration and succession ...every event we experience in relation to apperception. That is to say, it comes to us as part of a scheme and is fitted into our totality of experience’

(1929, p. 184)

Our experience of time is remembered in terms of events or episodes, a sequential collection of events, which has been formed as part of our occupational scheme or history, an individual's career experience. In the present our experience of an event is very real and our understanding of time may seem objective, but as Gunn points out:

‘the present is the event actually occurring, happening, the past and future deal with events that are not now happening, and which are, in relation to that present, unreal.... This past is known to us by historical record, the past which we remember is only *our past*, purely subjective experience. The future has not happened, it is only possible, and our expectations in this connection are likewise subjective.’

(1929, p. 186, *italics original*)

A person’s knowledge of occupational experience is, therefore, a subjective reflection on past actuality (viewed through the lens of the present) or a recollection of a recovered history when revived in narrative format. Experience of occupational emergence and evolution is temporal to the extent that it is located within our awareness of the existence of a change continuum known as time; in this continuum we experience portions of time, and, according to Gunn ‘we come to notice that such portions have a beginning and end’ (1929, p. 188). In my research, I reflect on the notion of the ‘career episode’, which is, using Gunn’s terminology, a portion of occupational time with ‘a beginning and end’.

Narrative sequencing and temporality

Temporality is the framing of our experiences in terms of the relativity of time – in narrative terms it is the anticipation that an individual can recall their past in a structured or chronological sequence of events that they have experienced and now hold in memory. Although this is the most commonly held view of what temporality means, I contend that this is a false conception, for, as Gunn has noted, our past is a subjective historical experience and, therefore, has no objective basis. Indeed, Frow, in reflecting on the structure of a story by Borges, suggests that:

‘it is predicated on the non-existence of the past, with the consequence that memory, rather than being the repetition of the physical traces of the past, is a construction of it under conditions and constraints determined by the present’

(2007, p.153)

This temporal perspective on the extraction of narrative reinforces the view of social constructivism that story is a revisualisation of past memories in the present, a contemporary reconstruction of historical images of past occupational events. In developing narrative accounts, the traditional approach is to look at story in terms of chronological order that is the sequence of events as they occurred, but is the structure of time portrayed in narrative equivalent to this chronological time? In ‘Time and Narrative’, Ricoeur (1990) investigates the relationship between ‘the writing of history and the operation of emplotment’ (p. 227). Amongst the issues he investigates is whether the story, as told in historical narrative, equates to or is confronted by that told in fictional time; he argues that a story told as fiction is affected by the

emplotment – the creation of a narrative plot constructed through the assembly of a series of past events, that is narrative time is different to historical time in so far as it is influenced by the context within which it is ordered. This concurs with Frow's (2007) suggestion that narrative construction is under present conditions and constraints not those determined at the point of time when the actual historical event was initiated. Does this have any significance for occupational narrative, for example, does it lessen the authenticity of the narrative as told?

I suggest not if it is accepted that nearly all narrative, as a recollection of historical events, is told after the event, in most cases many years after, and, therefore, is always influenced by the author's interpretation of history within a contemporary context. All narrative, except perhaps that written by persons actually present at the time the event takes place, is subject to this possible distortion of historical accuracy and so conflict with narrative veracity. Berger and Luckmann acknowledge that:

‘...temporality is an intrinsic property of consciousness ...[and that] the same temporal structure provides the historicity that determines my situation in the world of everyday life’

(1966, pp. 40-41)

Taking this literally, if consciousness is structured temporally, a person should accept that their past history will always be located in a temporal framework, and that, when they recount it, their narratives will always be represented as a reflection of their interaction with time for, as Berger and Luckmann recognise:

‘...existence in this world is continuously ordered by its time, is indeed enveloped by it. My own life is an episode in the externally factitious stream of time’

(1966, p. 41)

Existence – our being, our presence in this world, including our occupational constancy – is arranged and organised by our participation within a continuum of time and time is, therefore, one of the measures through which a person recollects their occupational history. However, Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggest that a life is an instalment within time, a system established to measure the transit of sequential events, and that it is a contrived notion, thereby distorting an individual's recollection of past events. Therefore, although a person may recall past events within the context of their chronological experience, the timing of their recollection, that is when they recall in the present – in many cases years after the event took place – will affect the verisimilitude of the narrative recounted.

Gender socialisation and occupational emergence

In studies of work, researchers traditionally reflected on the role of men and, if extant, women were often depicted in terms of the role – mother, daughter and/or wife – that they held within the family unit. The connection to sex-role theory, which positions role as the active constituent of status, was the opening for a serious consideration of gender as a legitimate focus for sociological research. In her treatise on the reciprocity between sex and gender, Delphy locates the connection between role and sociology when she declares that:

‘...each status had roles which the individuals who held that status had to fulfil. This perspective is clearly sociological in the true sense of the word. Thus people’s situations and activities are held to derive from their social structure, rather than from either nature or their particular capacities’

(1996, p. 31)

In her commentary, she asserts that a person’s role is derived from their social structure not as a consequence of their natural origin or abilities to accomplish or perform a task. The term gender refers to the characteristics that distinguish people on the basis of their reproductive capacity and to the socially composed attributes, behaviours and roles that society assigns to men and women. Gender is, therefore, the sociological nomenclature for a biological origin that has traditionally determined the expected societal roles for men and women. Until the Second World War, it was expected that women would remain as ‘homemaker’ whilst men would seek employment as the ‘worker’, but this anticipation is, as Truman suggests, a subject of contention:

‘a major difference between men’s work and women’s work is around what actually constitutes ‘work’...for women, the term ‘work’ includes waged labour and also [various] forms of unwaged labour associated with households ...domestic labour, care of young and elderly dependents are features of many women’s working lives’

(1996, p. 36)

In this commentary, Truman (1996) locates a perceived difference between men and women’s work, but, arguably, women have always ‘worked’ if ‘work’ means to exert or direct effort to produce or accomplish something, unless it means to be in employment earning one’s livelihood. This perception of the role of women’s work started to be challenged after the Second World War, and by the 1970s was slowly being eroded as, for social and economic reasons, women began to participate in the labour market in greater numbers. As an accredited professional, an individual is primarily governed by their professional capabilities and integrity, not as a consequence of their genetic constitution. However, I appreciate that this is an ingenuous perspective as a person is continuously influenced by the limitations imposed by a

gendered society and also that the analysis, observation and interpretation of my research collaborators' occupational narratives is circumscribed as a consequence of my own gendered and cultured configuration, namely a 'white Anglo Saxon protestant' male. This does not preclude the authenticity of my research, but may have influenced my research design and interpretation, and for, these reasons, needs to be understood, that is clarified and recognised as a factor in my research process.

Gender role typing

All of my research collaborators confirmed indirectly, through conversations about the retirement expectations of individuals in close relationship that they were, or had been, in a partner relationship, except one man who disclosed that he was single. Interestingly, when talking about their occupational histories the men rarely referred to the fact that they had children, until they started to talk about their plans for occupational disengagement and then several advised that they would schedule their available time around the needs of their adult children and/or their grandchildren. Two of the women acknowledged the fact that their occupational choices and evolution had been influenced throughout their trajectories by their need to look after children and they had adjusted their working practice to accommodate this need. From this small group it appeared evident that the presence of children within a relationship had different implications for men and women. Perhaps this is not surprising since, as noted by Tindall et al:

'(women's) gender roles are acquired through the process of socialization; such socialization, coupled with women's relatively weak structural position, gives rise to some of the unique problems women face'

(2010, p. 218, *italics original*)

In terms of occupational continuity, the problems (sic) transpire as a consequence of role typing that is inherent from birth – a woman's biological predisposition means that she is more likely to accept full time responsibility for child rearing. This is strengthened by the customary role expectations for men and women prevalent at the time (1960/70s) that most of my research collaborators established their marital relationship, and reinforced the anticipation that, in a family with children, it would be the woman who remained at home to look after the children. However, gender-specific roles have not always been differentiated in this way, for women (that is working class women) have always worked – in agriculture, in the fisheries, in the mills and so on – not just in domestic labour. They also did men's work (sic) during the two world wars by working in factories producing ammunition, equipment and supplies for the war effort. This description of working practice and roles portrays women's participation in UK labour markets during the 20th and preceding centuries.

The impact of socialisation

Although contemporary society has different expectations about the relative roles of men and women, my research collaborators would have been strongly influenced by the prevailing social norms of those times, now nearly 50 years distant. Certainly this has been my experience, with my wife taking full time responsibility for caring for our children leaving me to immerse myself in my occupational attainment and development. Socialisation – the process by which children and adults learn from others – begins from an early age and continues all through life; it impacts both men and women who learn what is expected of them through societal conditioning which is based on the anticipations that society has for them, dependent on their gender. So perhaps a man is also at a disadvantage if he would prefer to adopt the roles associated with caring for his children, although, in the 21st century, he is more likely to take on these responsibilities as social attitudes towards role stereotyping are changing significantly.

This societal change enables both men and women to share home and family obligations on an equal or mutually agreed basis, although Gatrell (2008) questions whether much has changed, suggesting that women in employment hold fewer positions of authority and that, in the home, women still engage with the majority of domiciliary labour; this perspective is shared by Bimrose who noted that:

‘...women continue to take the primary responsibility for domestic and care responsibilities. Even where gender role attitudes have become less traditional, little change has occurred in the gendered allocation of domestic duties’

(2008, p. 378)

My research collaborators did not appear to digress from the antecedent social mores prevalent during their young adulthood life stage; gender role anticipations are strong in adolescence and young adulthood with a young person adopting those gender images appropriate for either male or female within the culture of which they are a part. Levinson et al comment that:

‘a slow reduction in the ancient gender distinctions ...a considerable splitting between masculine and feminine still exists in our social institutions and our individual lives’

(1978, p. 229)

Social attitudes may have implications for future professionals who find them-self having to balance the obligations of their private and professional lives, particularly for women who find, despite increasing participation in labour markets, that their working arrangements are complex and growing in diverseness (Bimrose, 2001). This predisposed socialisation of my collaborators possibly explains their willingness or, in the case of most of the men, their reluctance to talk about the impact of family responsibilities on their occupational mobility. Their inherent attitudes had limited them, both men and women, to an accepted social order within which their

occupational emergence was constrained. Occupational choice is subject to the freedoms of availability and mobility – the discretion to choose to change employment and consequent decisions regarding residential location and business travel. As Folbre notes, in her discussion on the economics of the home:

‘...the way that individuals define and pursue their self-interest is also relevant to the sexual division of labor in the home ...family life is a shifting and somewhat unpredictable mixture of selfishness and altruism’

(1994, p. 21-23)

Since men are generally able to realise more income than women, as acknowledged by Charles (2002) in her discussion on the ‘gender pay gap’ (p. 29), they tend to have more prerogative to seek out, locate and develop an occupational presence that endures, subject, if they are in a relationship, to the amiable and economic collaboration of their partner. Whilst this imbalance in workplace economics did not prevent the women in my research group from pursuing a professional occupation, it did limit or detour their freedom to expand their occupational commitments due to their need to care for young or invalid dependants, a storyline that did not appear in the occupational narratives of the men within my research group.

Discovering role convergence

In the middle adulthood life-stage of their occupational progression, men often refer to their children and grandchildren as they consider what their life might become after retirement. This tendency to acknowledge familial responsibilities is illustrated by Biggs’ recognition that:

‘...men discover their nurturant inner selves ...until the mid-thirties gender roles increasingly diverge, and then come together again in the late 50s’

(2010, p. 361)

I affirm the point made about a self, devoted to caring and nourishment, for, during my young adulthood, I was defensive during any conversation that alluded to the conceptualisation of masculinity or manhood, and remained firmly focussed towards my andric characteristics. However, in the past decade, I have released some of my former beliefs and adopted Biggs’ axiom that gender attributes coalesce:

‘...around this period [in the late 50s], women and men become more like each other, with a tendency for men to take on traditionally female attributes’

(2010, p. 361)

This reappraisal of mid-life preference encourages a review of the character of self and its meaning within the relationships, both private and occupational, that an individual experiences

at this point in their life-course transition. Maturation, the state of completed psychological development, seems to bring the differentiated attributes of gender more closely together in accordant harmony. Whilst antithetical during the earlier stages of the life course, gender dispositions of young adulthood seem to ameliorate as a person approaches dissociation from their working life and start to consider the life ahead, a private life removed from the economic and political tensions of the workplace. However, this polemic continues, as Levinson et al record:

‘...scientists have not yet clearly established the degree to which the various social-psychological meanings of gender coincide with basic biological differences between males and females’

(1978, p. 229)

Throughout the span of my research collaborators’ occupational trajectories, nearly 40 years in most cases, the search for discrete social-psychological and biological meanings to differentiate the terms sex and gender remains unresolved, even though it is over 30 years since Levinson et al recorded their observation. In occupational studies, the question remains as to what, if any, differences exist between men and women; in her consideration of ‘orientations to work’, Charles notes that there is a collective argument to suggest that:

‘the gender patterning of paid work derives from choices made by individuals and in this context there has been considerable debate about the extent to which women’s and men’s commitment and orientation to paid work differs’

(2002, p. 38)

It appears that a person’s gender does impinge their occupational manifestation, that is the way in which they commit to work and balance their employment and home responsibilities, but I return to this issue of the influence of gender socialisation on vocational determination when I analyse my findings later in this study.

CHAPTER 4: MY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: An auto/biographic exploration of professional careers in business consulting

In the first three chapters, I explained my rationale for conducting this study, critiqued a key text on the concept of ‘working identity’ and reviewed some relevant texts on employment, career theory, the third-age, disengagement and narrative inquiry. I now progress from this foundational work to present my methodology for organising this investigation.

This chapter explores my research methodology, ‘auto/biographic narrative inquiry’, for investigating occupational lives; in it I describe my research design and implementation together with the rationale for my chosen approach. I outline how I selected and investigated my research topic, by capturing the occupational histories of my research collaborators and exploring the narrative data co-created. By ‘auto/biographic narrative inquiry’ I mean:

- **Autobiographic narrative** – an ‘autobiography’ previously self-authored (King, 2007) and current recollections to create a ‘narrative’ of my occupational experiences, that is a story of my career trajectory narrated by myself
- **Auto/biographic narrative** – a ‘biography’ created through dialogue with each of my professional research collaborators to generate a ‘narrative’ bounded by their occupational experiences, and co-constructed, that is their career story narrated through joint authorship
- **Narrative inquiry** – the process of understanding and making sense of the narratives documented (both self and others) and the occupational experiences contained therein.

The auto/biographic nature of my study emanates as a consequence of my entry into my collaborators’ stories as they relived and retold their working experiences embraced within the context of my own working history enduring over 40 years. In this chapter, I outline how I conducted my research, involving the recollection, analysis and interpretation of a collection of occupational stories, and critique the philosophical underpinnings of my method, known as ‘narrative inquiry’. In this research study I define ‘occupation’ as the vocation of my research collaborators as represented by their professional accreditation – whilst exclusive, it does locate their primary working contribution as a ‘professional’ practitioner.

Designing a collaborative approach

In order to address my research questions, I needed to develop a collaborative research approach which enabled me to construct a representation of the occupational lives that my research

respondents had experienced over the duration of their working history. As Barton et al acknowledge:

‘...research itself is a practice that is situated in the lives of all those involved. It is not a disembodied, or situation-less action, which produces untainted ‘universal knowledge’ of people’s lives. It is co-constructed, negotiated, dynamic and partial. The researcher is always part of the research that is taking place’

(2007, p. 39)

Barton et al (2007) suggest that, in addition to establishing a procedure for carrying out narrative inquiry, a researcher must also consider the part they have played within the investigation process. I, therefore, sought to ensure that my participation in the research process was accounted for, through reflexive analysis, at each stage of the research process. Two examples of my participation in this research included my preparation and facilitation of a semi-structured occupational interview, and my search for a congruent thematic analysis.

As a rational, logical being I coveted some structure in our occupational conversations, but, recognising that this could mean that that my collaborators left out important episode/s or incident/s in their narrative as told, I opted for an unstructured interview with options for targeted questions that I introduced towards the end of each conversation. Regarding the thematic analysis I found my search impossible with no clear approach to adopt and ultimately decided to adopt a ‘messy’ approach that resulted, through a process of clustering and filtering, in seven occupational themes. I think that my chosen approach meant that the stories told, as captured in a transcript, were more intense, more meaningful and presented greater richness in their narrative integrity. Before I explicate my methodology, I review some of the philosophical issues arising from the use of this approach.

Narrative recollection of experience

Giving expression to experience

The older worker has, within the duration of their career trajectory, an extensive portfolio of occupational experience ranging over many years of professional achievement, but how can the individual practitioner recollect that experience? As previously noted Augustine of Hippo believed that it was a straightforward process to recall events or a series of incidents in the order in which they took place; reflecting on this comment, Crites refers to the narrative recall process as one of ‘consulting our memory’ (1971, p. 299). Consulting is the act of looking up information and/or giving advice to, which, in this occupational context means, locating and

extracting information that is held in our memory, but is it possible to accurately recount events that took place 25-40 years in the past?

Stanley (1992) refers to ‘the writing of a history, an account of the past by a particular kind of historian known as an auto/biographer’ (p. 101). In this research I am the auto/biographer of my collaborators’ occupational narratives capturing and interpreting their occupational lives and reflexively examining my own occupational emergence as auto biographer. By interviewing my collaborators, I obtained a narrative transcript of my collaborator’s occupational experiences, but these only generated a fractional representation of their actual occupational emergence due to the partial nature of auto/biographic writing. Epistemologically, these narrative accounts were deficient in historical accuracy, since they were subject to a number of constraints as recognised by Stanley concerning:

‘the interpretive role of the historian, the fragmentary and incomplete nature of available sources, and the role of writing in the creation of, not a slice of the past, but rather an account of what this might have been’

(1992, p. 102)

My attempts at auto/biographic composition were, as a consequence, restricted to a present comprehension of my collaborators’ occupational stories, bounded by their capability in remembering past experiences, my own occupational exposure and the limitations of textual documentation that removed opportunities for interrogative assimilation. These limitations do not detract from the occupational stories told, but do suggest that caution should be applied when considering the verisimilitude of occupational recollections. How can the process of writing narrative help to bring order to a life that has experienced complexity and fragmentation, interwoven within the web of emotions, feelings and aspirations of the individual professional practitioner? Plummer argues that:

‘...narrative structures enable us to speak, and the multitude of fragmenting experiences that constitute our lives come to be patterned into some seeming sense of order’

(2001, p. 185)

He suggests that writing narrative enables us to bring order to a life within which chaos may otherwise reign; this indicates a degree of coherence emerging out of a life crammed with multifarious experiences, events and incidents that might otherwise appear devoid of structure and meaning. Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that narrative is a blueprint for connecting human agency and experience in a way that can be comprehensibly interpreted. This infers that narrative construction leads to a story linking the diversity of human activity into a coherent whole bringing order and meaning to the principal career player in the story, but where is this knowledge of an individual’s occupational activity and experience stored?

A depository of occupational experience

The answer introduces the notion of ‘occupational memory’; adopting the metaphor of a quarry Thompson (1988) compares memory to a natural repository, from which it is possible to extract ‘boulders’ of life experiences. This locates two significant elements of narratology, the notion of ‘narrative structure’ (the sequencing of life events into meaningful order) and the process of converting experiential data into meaningful narrative. Looking first at the issue of memory, it is the physiological space within our brain in which we store our experiences and, in the case of our occupations, the events, emotions, feelings that we associate with the principal episodes within our occupational history. It also represents ‘our being’, the focus of our psychological existence that brings continuity and cohesiveness to our past, present and future lives. Marita Sturken records the functions of memory:

‘Memory forms the fabric of human life, affecting everything from the ability to perform simple, everyday tasks to the recognition of the self. Memory establishes life’s continuity; it gives meaning to the present, as each moment is constituted by the past. As the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core of identity’

(1997, p. 1)

The constituent areas of memory are, therefore, two spaces – one a physiological space in which our objective experiences are stored, the other a psychosocial space which gives us a subjective infrastructure in which to hang the core components of our being (such as capability, coherence, identity and life meaning). Memory is defined as ‘a person’s power to remember things; the power of the mind to remember things’ (NODE, 1998). It is a faculty of the brain; rather than being located in a person’s mind, it is one dimension of the brain’s behaviour; it is the faculty within which our experiences and memories are retained awaiting the time when we decide to recall and recount them for the purpose of making sense of our temporal lives. Frow (2007) reminds us that:

‘the ancients and their mediaeval heirs thought that each ‘bit’ of knowledge was remembered in a particular place in the memory, which it occupied as a letter occupies space on a writing surface ...a version of this conception is still the predominant metaphor in contemporary cognitive psychology, although it is now based more explicitly in the model of the electronic storage and random-access retrieval of coded information’

(pp. 152-153)

A difficulty with this imagery of memory as an electronic system is that it infers the recall of information in the same form as it was originally stored; we know that the data reassembled in

narrative studies is not a direct repetition of the events and incidents as they originally occurred – they are, as discussed, a social reconstruction of the actual reality. This should not limit our attempts to recollect our previous occupational experiences in the form of story, for as Kenyon and Randall (1997) suggest the term story is one adaptation of narrative:

‘...our life is essentially a set of stories we tell ourselves about our past, present and future. However, these stories are far from fixed, direct accounts of what happens in our lives, but products of the inveterate fictionalizing of our memory and imagination. That is, we ‘story’ our lives. Moreover, we *re-story* them too. In fact, restorying continually goes on within us’

(p. 2, *italics original*)

The suggestion here is that an individual is in a continual, iterative process of telling their life story; this doesn’t always mean literally, but, probably within their mind, they are always looking for meaning and/or justification for the occupational decisions (role, advancement, disengagement etc.) that they have made during their career. This desire to make sense of occupational existence is at the foundation of this research initiative; ‘meaning’ is the primary reason why individuals seek to tell their occupational story and, as Krumboltz et al (1994) recognised, it is:

‘...the power of stories to capture attention and convey meaning [*that*] is re-emerging as an important component in career counselling’

(p.60, *italics original*)

The opportunity to create meaning and make sense of a person’s occupational existence is the primary factor behind the recognition that ‘narrative inquiry’, a constructivist methodology, has become an increasingly important tool in the career adviser’s repertoire. However, although now accepted as a valid approach to career counselling, there remains discussion about how best to encourage clients to co/construct their occupational narrative. Reid and West, writing about one of their research projects, suggest that a key task for them was:

‘...to consider how a practitioner might move towards assisting the person to ‘tell their story’, to the point where both can identify patterns and life themes within the story, and then to translate this into some clearer sense of career possibility’

(2011, p. 177)

Narrative inquiry is a valid approach to enabling all workers, including older ones, to embrace their occupational history and determine patterns and themes that might facilitate their on-going occupational emergence. My first research activity was to select a group of older third-age professional workers who were willing to recount their experiences and converse with me about

their professional careers. However, let me first locate myself in the research process – why did I decide to research the occupational stories of older professional workers?

Participation in this occupational research

Choosing the research focus

As previously explained, I chose my research topic as a response to my own working experiences as an older worker in the early part of the 21st century, as documented in my autobiographic story ‘Out of the Mists’ (King, 2007). This visual illustration reminded me of the feelings of obscurity that I had experienced whilst trying to determine my next occupational moves following my career disengagement as a consequence of organisational turbulence. As discussed in my narrative, I had sought to make sense of my past career landscape and its interaction with my future scenario, but found the mental processes unclear and confusing. This led me to research my own occupational experiences and I wondered about the journeys of other older professional workers as they moved toward occupational withdrawal. But is this too simplified to justify my engagement with this form of occupational research? Riesmann, extending on Barthes’ premise that narrative is everywhere, observes that in practice:

‘most investigators tend to work with one kind of text’ ...while everywhere ...there still must be some boundaries around the concept’

(2008, p. 4)

Whilst contemporary media presents many forms of narrative that encourage people to tell their ‘story’, the primary purpose of these stories is to feed the media frenzy for new stories and experiences which illumine their readers’ predilection for cultural gossip – an exchange medium in social currency that enables a person to participate within social interactions in the home and workplace. Although this form of narrative conversation represents a postmodern approach to social discourse, it doesn’t embrace the concept of contingent sequences or what Salmon and Riessman (2008) argue for as meaningful objectivity – they suggest that narratives require sequential linking and ordering to make sense of them:

‘...storytelling happens relationally, collaboratively between speaker and listener in a cultural context where at least some meanings and conventions are shared. Without some degree of ordering work on the part of the narrator, a listener or reader cannot begin to make sense of another’s words’

(2008, p. 81)

My concern with narrative dilution and the consequences of social narrative – chat forums, magazines and popular biography – was reassured by their acknowledgement that objective narrative embraces some form of meaning for the story’s author and reader. In my research these objective narratives were represented by the occupational texts, which captured the career episodes and trajectories, of my research collaborators. My boundaries, partially imposed through semi-structured interviews, focused my respondents on their occupational experiences and those personal interventions, social obligations – family, financial or societal – that had impacted their career pathways within their professional domain; these stories were also bounded in terms of the date, time and location of their telling.

The stories, presented as an occupational narrative, told of their career experiences over a trajectory of 30 to 45 years, and, although mainly recounted in a chronological sequence, are sometimes interrupted by occupational turbulence – organisational change and/or career moves – and often by social intervention, including family transitions and tragedies. This is to be expected, an individual’s life experience comprises a puzzle of fragmentary episodes, both encouraging and frustrating, connected through a coherent exposition constructed by an individual to give meaning to their life existence; as De Fina notes occupational stories can also be described as:

‘...texts that include some kind of rupture or disturbance in the normal course of events, some kind of unexpected action that provokes a reaction and/or adjustment’

(2003, p.13)

Occupational narrative is an emerging genre, especially valued in therapeutic contexts to facilitate and encourage client interaction – Clouston (2003) and Goldstein et al (2004) expound the benefits of clients’ occupational narratives as a vehicle for exploring their lived experience and present it as an approach to occupational therapy intervention. In career counselling, the concept has been promulgated by many writers, including Cochran (1997), Reid (2005) and Savickas (2005), who present it as an approach to constructing career that enables the career actor to represent their career within the context of occupational reality – their experience rather than a representation formulated by psychological construct. In their fourth presupposition, Savickas et al (2009) argue that career counsellors should:

‘...focus on client’s ongoing construction and re-construction of subjective and multiple realities. Rather than relying on group norms and abstract terms, they should engage in activities and meaning-making that enable them to build some new view of themselves.’

(2009, p. 243)

This presents occupational narrative as a complementary approach to career counselling: with a practical and theoretical background in psychometric profiling, I concur with this perspective,

whilst recognising that this research is focused within the methodological stance of social constructivism. Having located my research positioning, I turned to a search for occupational texts – documents of career experiences – that I could deconstruct and interrogate; in the human sciences, narratives are created, sometimes in partnership with a researcher, not discovered (Riessman, 2008). I commenced my search for occupational texts by thinking about who might participate in my research, so that I could locate a group of collaborators willing to co-create a narrative of their occupational trajectory.

Locating the research context

My research focus illuminates the occupational encounters, escapades and existences of a selected group of professional business workers who started their occupational traverses in the latter part of the 20th century (before the dawn of the technological era) and are beginning to disengage from the workplace as the world's economic order metamorphoses in the early 21st century. This has been a 45 year period of exponential change that has significantly influenced the energising – some may say privileged – occupational contexts of my research respondents. Our career trajectories are an illustration of occupational experiences encountered whilst participating in an emergent world order corrupted by economic and environmental desolation.

This research centred on a group of third-age professional workers (aged 50–65) employed by business consulting firms in the United Kingdom. Recognising that many firms identify and promote their organisation as a business consultancy, my first step was to identify a selection of firms, but what type of organisation constitutes itself as a business consultancy? A business consulting firm is one that offers an area of specialist expertise to its clients by helping organisations improve their business performance (e.g. process change) or by providing organisations with a business support service (e.g. financial audit). At this stage in my deliberations, I obtained ethical approval (from the university), which was clear and explicit as my research only involved adults, who were regarded as 'no risk' in terms of vulnerability.

My preliminary challenge was to identify business consultancies staffed by practitioners who had achieved their professional status through qualification and, as a consequence of a continuing work trajectory, had significant career experience. I decided initially to centre my research focus on 'professional service firms', but this phraseology proved difficult to 'ring fence', since many organisations deliver professional services if they employ specialists who hold qualified status and deliver to a specified professional standard, no matter how stringent that standard is in terms of its specification and monitoring. The term 'professional' can, therefore, be interpreted in a variety of ways to reflect 'professional allegiance' (i.e. adherence to a professional institution), 'professional employee' (i.e. practitioners holding professional status) or a 'professional service' (i.e. the standard to which service is delivered). I, therefore,

decided to refine my definition of business professionalism and targeted those organisations offering specialist expertise direct to corporate business.

Immediately this presented an additional source of uncertainty, since, whilst acknowledging that there are many different types of business consultancy – including employee benefit, governance, human resource, legal, marketing, mergers and acquisitions and share taxation – I had to determine relevant groups of business consultancies, that I wanted to attract practitioners from, to participate in this research programme. I selected financial, legal and management consultancies, as these three professional classifications represent the main professional disciplines (accountants, solicitors and managers) offering commercial and private services. I sent a ‘research invitation’ letter (Appendix A) to the HR Director/Head of Human Resources of 30 professional organisations within each of three business service arenas – financial, legal and management consulting, as identified in Table 3:

BUSINESS SERVICE ARENA	SOURCE REFERENCE	RATIONALE
Financial Consulting – providing auditing , due diligence and taxation etc.	Top 50 Accountancy Firms (Accountancy Age, 2009)	It is the main consultancy service that businesses use, mainly through annual accounts and audits.
Legal Consulting – providing commercial, governance and legal services etc.	Top 50 Law Firms (Legal Week, 2009)	As a self-employed consultant I liaised with solicitors on governance and property transactions.
Management Consulting – providing human resource, process improvement and technology solutions etc.	MCA Members List (Management Consultancies Association, 2009)	My primary occupational experience was gained working in several of these organisations including actuarial and employee benefit consultancies.

TABLE 3: Sources for third-age professional workers in business consulting

This represented a total of 90 organisations that I asked to circulate my research introduction (Appendix B) to potential research participants. This research activity proved to be of limited value, as, despite an email follow-up, only three organisations (two accountancy firms and one legal practice) responded with one potential participant each. Of these voluntary research participants two proceeded with my research, but one did not as he subsequently declared that he had no professional qualification. Although disappointed by this response, I was not surprised as few commercial organisations are willing to participate in academic research unless they can quantify a financial (or perhaps promotional) return on their research investment.

Rynes et al suggest that this reluctance to participate in academic research is to be expected since:

‘...a substantial body of evidence suggests that executives typically do not turn to academics or academic research findings in developing management strategies and practices’

(2001, p. 340)

They cite, as examples of their ‘evidence’, the writings of Abrahamson (1996), Mowday (1997) and Susman and Evered (1978) who suggest that, as research techniques have improved, they have also become less beneficial for solving the problems that organisations encounter. I found this indifferent response an initial setback, failing to see any research benefit for the time and effort I had expended. However, following a review, I realised that I had gained some benefits from this process – namely my research briefing documents, insights into challenges facing researchers seeking collaboration with commercial organisations and the realisation that there is probably a better, that is a more conducive way, to establish a research relationship. So how might I achieve this? Hagedoorn et al:

‘...define a research partnership broadly as an innovation-based relationship that involves, at least partly, a significant effort in research and development (R & D)’

(2000, p. 567)

They acknowledge the work of the Council on Competitiveness in recognising that partnerships are ‘in various combinations to pool resources in pursuit of a shared R&D objective’ (Hagedoorn et al, 2000, p. 567). Following this insight, I realised that, although I had a clear research objective, I did not have a ‘shared’ one and that there was no apparent benefit to these professional organisations. I had, by offering to distribute a summary of my research findings and make a presentation within their organisation, sought to offer some benefit, but this proved insufficient to allow research access to their professional practitioners.

Having identified only two research participants, my attempt to locate a research group had resulted in a setback and I questioned how to proceed. My concern was centred on my intent to find a ‘representative sample’ of professionals, but would they have been typical of the professional group that I was researching? Cresswell (2007) argues that this approach works when all research participants have experienced the same phenomenon, but this was not possible as each professional’s occupational experience is distinctive and I recognised that my approach was problematic. Seeking to explore a particular kind of person in depth, I realised that I could select an ‘opportunistic group’ of research associates identified from within my extensive network of family, friends and business acquaintances that I had connections with during my occupational transition. Merrill and West (2009) report that sociological studies are often based

on ‘opportunistic encounters’ giving as an example the collaboration between Thomas and Znaniecki (1996), who co-authored ‘The Polish Peasant in Europe and America’. This illumination refocused my research effort and I determined to locate an opportunistic research group. My concern about establishing a ‘valid’ sample dissolved and I started to locate a group of individuals who met my research criteria and were willing to share their occupational story.

Extending the research group

I extended my invitation to an ‘opportunistic’ group of research participants – described by Cohen et al (2000) as ‘convenience sampling – or as it is sometimes called, accidental or opportunity sampling – [that] involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents’ (p. 102). In selecting my ‘opportunistic’ group, I drew on the immediacy of our relationship, through business, family or friendship, and contacted potential research participants who I believed met the research criteria (see Appendix A) and with whom I had had contact during the preceding three years. From a potential opportunistic group of 30 research participants, I reduced (through non eligibility and self-selection) my group to 10 people comprising one woman and nine men, but still required two participants, preferably women to offset the gender imbalance. Through academic connections, I recruited two women (an accountant and a solicitor) and had located an opportunistic group of 12 older professional practitioners – an adequate number that offered potential narrative insight and richness. After commencing this study one person withdrew and, as consequence, I had to find a new participant, but, subject to this early change, the research group remained constant and involved.

My research drew on the collaboration of this small group, as outlined in Table 4; it reports, therefore, only on those findings pertinent to this research group rather than to a wider population.

ALLEGIANCE		AGE			GENDER		FAMILIARITY	
Profession	No	50-54	55-59	60-64	F	M	Known	Unknown
Accountants	6	1	4	1	2	4	3	3
Lawyers	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Consultants	4	2	2	0	0	4	4	0
TOTALS	12	3	7	2	3	9	8	4

TABLE 4: Opportunistic research breakdown

Following my early difficulties in finding older workers willing to participate, I was initially troubled by the idea of relying on an opportunistic group, but reassured by reading Merrill and West who recognised the reality of the approach:

‘Opportunistic sampling is when researchers take advantage of situations to interview individuals ...sociologists frequently claim to have found their participants through opportunistic encounters’

(2009, p. 107)

I resolved my earlier concerns and embraced the research opportunity that this group of enthusiastic and willing respondents represented, an opportunity to explore the occupational memories of a privileged group of older professional workers within the knowledge economy. I found that my research respondents were actively interested in participating within the research process, mainly due to their anticipation of reflecting on their occupational experiences; this group is identified, by pseudonym only (Appendix C). Although I was satisfied with the integrity of the group formed, I reflected on the group breakdown (Table 4):

- half were accountants – ideally I would have liked two additional lawyers giving a 4/4/4 split across the professional groups,
- over half were in the 55-59 age group, but these may be the people who are most interested in reflecting on their future occupational transition, and
- a quarter were women – ideally I would have liked fewer men, but this may reflect the gender imbalance (at older ages) within business consulting firms.

I believed this group included an adequate number of older professional workers within each of the business consulting arenas that I had decided to investigate. In qualitative research, any group will find it difficult to justify its validity in positivistic terms, but my selected group had the potential to generate quality outputs in terms of illumination, insight, reflexivity and verisimilitude, and I believed it was more than adequate for my research purposes. In fact I had empathy with Merrill and West, who, alluding to Rustin (2000), argue that:

‘...the validity of individual cases rests in their capacity to generate understanding of how people make their worlds in interaction with others, in diverse ways’

(2009, p. 167)

Considering my constituent membership, I could see capability for developing understanding from the potential richness of the occupational stories to be told as my research participants recounted how their career journey had evolved during their occupational emergence. I anticipated a range of diverse stories reflecting distinctive occupational trajectories, situated within my collaborators’ memory. Having previously interrogated my own occupational

memory, I was interested to understand how other professionals recollected their experiences over an enduring working career.

Embracing my research collaborators

Whilst preparing for this investigation, I changed the upper age for my research collaborators from 60 to 64 leaving an age range of 50 to 64; my reason for this adjustment was my reflection on McNair's (2009) paper on 'demography and lifelong learning' in which he notes that:

‘there are far more people in the ‘third age’: with most people spending a much larger share of their lives in potentially healthy and active retirement, which lasts for much longer ...[and acknowledges] the growing ‘third age’ – to support people in establishing identity and finding constructive roles for the much longer period they will spend in active retired life’

(2009, p. 9 and 13)

Having read McNair's paper (2009) and met with him at the Centre for Research into Older Workers (CROW), I decided that there was a case for extending my research group to this revised upper age limit of 64, as it embraced a 5-year period which, for some people, is the start of retirement and also an integral phase within the 'third-age'. However, for the purposes of my research, I did not believe it appropriate to extend the upper age to 75, the age at which McNair suggests people enter their 'fourth age of dependency'. In addition, demographic projections recognise the 50-64 age group as a discrete classification, as reported by Taylor, who notes that:

‘by 2010, the proportion of working age people between 50 and 64 years old will be greater than at any time since the mid-1970s ...[and] roughly one-third of the labour force will be aged 50 or over by the year 2020’

(2008b, p. 85)

These demographic changes in the British working population offered a timely opportunity to investigate how one group of professional workers valued their experience and contemplated their future destiny. As I commenced this study the world economy became entangled in the most significant downturn that it had encountered in the modern era. This collapse resulted in disruption to the world's banking systems, and, as a consequence, severe recession for key business sectors – including financial, housing, motoring and retailing – both nationally and globally, leading to an increase in unemployment. At the start of my investigation, I was unclear as to how this economic turmoil might affect my research collaborators, but, it became evident that it did not affect them with only two individuals leaving the labour market to engage with active retirement.

Gathering occupational narratives

Briefing research collaborators

Having confirmed with my research collaborators that they were willing to participate, I sent them a briefing to explain the purpose of my research, the research interview process, confidentiality and ethical issues. I also included some elementary activities (plotting career profile, describing career episodes and identifying career markers) to prepare my research collaborators for the occupational interview by directing them to their occupational memories and locating events, episodes, incidents and turning points that constituted their past career trajectory. My preference for a facilitative approach had influenced the design of my briefing with the inclusion of these enhancing activities as acknowledged by Webster and Mertova:

‘Data-gathering techniques which inform the narrative sketches or critical events may include surveys, observations, interviews, documentation and conversations that can enhance the time, scene and plot structures of the critical events’

(2007, p.22)

I believe these activities helped my research collaborators rediscover their narrative, a chronicle of their occupational trajectory, and, by identifying their career episodes, enabled them to embrace a structure for their occupational recollections. Whilst qualitative in their output, these activities located critical incidents in the occupational lives of my collaborators and enabled deeper discussion and narrative insight by visually empowering our appreciation of the critical incident that had been located by my research collaborator. At the start of each interview, I explained that I was conducting my research confidentially and ethically by complying with the revised guidelines for educational research endorsed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004). To accede to these guidelines I decided to adopt a transparent ethical approach as commended by Merrill and West (2009):

‘Doing research is not value neutral ...it is important to think about this and adopt a considered ethical stance in relation to the subject and subjects of our work’

(2009, p. 168)

As highlighted by Merrill and West’s (2009) advocacy, I believed that it was important to show respect for the psychological well-being of my research respondent in terms of their responses which, if open and honest, would possibly include incidents that the individual would prefer to forget, e.g. organisational displacement, promotion overlooked and private life issues such as illness, disability and even death. For this reason, in addition to complete confidentiality, I advised them of their rights to decline to answer any of my questions or to withdraw from the research programme at any time, without giving any justification for their decision. A further safeguard was that I gave my collaborators an opportunity to review their draft narrative

transcript, make amendments or corrections and remove any references to private information which might identify them as the author.

Another issue that I recognised was ‘anonymity’, that is whether or not they wished to be identified with the contributions they had made to this research. They all wished to remain anonymous and agreed with me a pseudonym that I could use in this thesis to mask their identity. However, as Clandinin and Connelly acknowledge:

‘even when we guarantee anonymity, it is not at all clear that we can do so in any meaningful way ...concerns of anonymity as part of ethics often shift in other ways as participants take on roles in other parts of the inquiry process’

(2000, p. 174)

Realising that I had frequent social contact with three of my research collaborators (through community interaction) and there was, therefore, a risk of identifying them, I agreed that I would only discuss their research narrative within the confines of a private conversation. To embrace all of these ethical issues and ensure that they understood them, I asked all of my collaborators to sign a letter of informed consent (Appendix D) which confirmed that they had been briefed, given an opportunity to ask questions and confirmed that they were agreeing, of their own volition, to participate in this research programme.

Facilitating occupational interviews

In preparation for the occupational interviews I prepared a narrative outline adapted from the work of Ali and Graham (1996); it involved three steps – clarifying the brief, exploring occupational experiences and evaluating career possibilities. I appreciate that their work focused on using counselling skills within a career interview, but still thought it presented a reasonable approach to facilitating an occupational conversation that helped my collaborators locate their occupational memories. Without a schema, there was a risk that the interviews might dissipate into a pleasant, but poorly informed, conversation rather than a focussed dialogue; my concern is endorsed by Ali and Graham, who argue that:

‘[a] model ...provides a firm structure designed to achieve the desired outcome ...without this firm base, the interview will resemble a cosy chat’

(1996, p. 44)

I designed a framework to enable a continuous flow through the different steps of the interview process, but realised, after a pilot interview, that there was a danger that my outline was too prescriptive and that, rather than enhancing the interview process, it might endanger the process by constraining it. I, therefore, simplified my model, by focussing on one key question at the

beginning and that was ‘what have been (or tell me about) your occupational experiences and transitions to date?’ This open question uncovered a wealth of responses and precipitated a free-flowing exposure of occupational memories. This phase of the interview lasted from 30 to 50 minutes with minimal intervention to uncover deeper information about a particular incident. The conversation generated a diffuse range of narrative incidents and embraced a rich vein of occupational experience, that realised the objective of the interview, namely to locate and extract my collaborators’ occupational history. As Gillham notes:

‘Research is about discovery, for the individual researcher even if not for the discipline as a whole. It is not about demonstrating what you believe to be the case ...what we have to learn to do is to observe this familiar territory as if it were a foreign country’

(2005, p. 71)

To this point, the interview was largely unstructured for, other than my initial question, I only made limited interventions to probe into specific events or incidents as they surfaced. In this stage, my research collaborators highlighted tracts of occupational experiences and illuminated them in terms of what they had meant, but they left some areas of my research interest uncovered e.g. professional allegiance, life obligations, retirement expectations, the notion of the third-age and anticipations for occupational continuity. To focus on these areas I moved to asking closed (direct) questions that encouraged my respondents to explain their thoughts and observations about these topics. In this sense my interview moved from an unstructured to a semi-structured form – what I term a flexi-structured format – and achieved what Gillham argues to be one of the advantages of this approach, namely:

‘[a] way of conducting a research interview because of its flexibility balanced by structure, and the quality of the data so obtained’

(2005, p. 70)

My shift to focused questions disclosed more specific narrative data about the issues encircling my collaborators’ occupational progression and so added to the total richness of my research by embracing topics of a professional and private nature. In practical terms, these further questions extended the duration of my occupational interviews by up to a further 30 minutes which meant that overall my interviews lasted 1hr to 1hr 20 min. I believe that my occupational interviews/conversations achieved their purpose – in quantitative terms they generated 12 digital voice recordings which, after transcription, resulted in approximately 250 pages of raw narrative text.

Having conducted a pilot, I realised that a few of my collaborators were finding it difficult to actively talk about their career attributes (abilities, values and strengths) – their responses were inconsequential and unfocused. Whilst they found it comparatively easy to talk about their strengths, they were less able to clearly express their weaknesses, possibly as they did not have

any defined reference points or scales against which to measure their relative capabilities. I discerned that an individual's response to this type of question is likely to be biased to present them self in the best possible light. I also comprehended that, without a measurable frame, I was finding it problematic to analyse and interpret the data generated. For these reasons, I decided to abandon the questions relating to this topic for the rest of my occupational interviews.

On finishing an occupational interview, I copied the digital voice recording for backup and, after completing 2 or 3 interviews, uploaded the digital files to a professional bureau for transcribing to a written form. Having transliterated career interviews in the past, I knew that it would take a long time to transcribe my recorded conversations and that I did not have the skills to do this accurately. A drawback to my decision was, as recognised by Gillham, that a researcher risks losing some of the meaning through the transcription process, since:

‘The most obvious loss is in the semantic properties of the human voice: those dimensions of speech (emphasis, pace, tone) which can radically alter what the words mean ...when the qualification of meaning is very clear, then some observation on the way the words were said (as in a play script) will be necessary’

(2005, p. 121)

I acknowledged this potential loss of meaning that I missed by not doing the transcription myself, and decided that I would carefully listen and re-listen to the original digital voice recordings when I came to analyse each occupational text. The other issue that emanated from my decision concerned the confidentiality of the interview process that I had agreed with my interviewees. To ensure this confidentiality was maintained through the third party transcription service, I selected a professional firm, with a lot of academic transcription experience, who were willing to sign a confidentiality agreement, thereby safeguarding the confidentiality of my collaborators' occupational narratives.

Reflexivity and the implications of my involvement

Another area that I became sensitive to was my influence as researcher on the interaction between my research collaborators and self. As the facilitator of the interview I made a direct contribution which could affect both the interviewee and the qualitative data co-constructed; on occasions, I was sensitised to this issue when talking with my respondents on topics of mutual interest or shared experience, for example family experiences of caring for dependants (both child and elder care), educational selection and emergence (postgraduate studies) and common occupational experiences (advancement, promotion and displacement). Jorgenson recognises that for interviewers:

‘...who rely on face-to-face interviews in conducting our research, it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid reflecting on our personal relationship in the research process, or to ignore our role in the construction of the ‘facts’ we set out to collect’

(1991, p. 210)

I have acknowledged my awareness of the need to refrain from resonating with my interviewee on personal issues of common exposure (Jorgenson, 1991), that is where I had encountered a similar incident or experience. I also recognised that I needed to minimise, or omit entirely, any comments or observations that might influence my collaborator’s recollection of their memory. However, there was another dimension to this issue with respect to my prior familiarity with some of my research collaborators – I was already known by eight of my collaborators through community and business connections. Whilst enabling the interview process by establishing early rapport, this meant that I needed to remain focused and sensitive to the affect that this might have on my collaborators’ capacity to tell an authentic and unprejudiced narrative. In addition, I remained cognisant to the fact that my contribution within the research process might influence the construction of the occupational stories that my collaborators were telling. In their discussion ‘on being a biographical researcher’ Merrill and West note the contribution of Liz Stanley (1992) by acknowledging that:

‘[she] draws persuasive attention to the dynamic inter-relationship between the constructions of our lives through autobiography and the construction of the life of others through biography. We write stories, she insisted, about ourselves by reference to, and by constructing, others’ lives and selves, and we construct others via our own histories and experience. Yet the presence of the researcher, more often than not, remains uninterrogated’

(2009, p. 181)

Their reference highlights the tendency that we have to construct other’s stories through the lens of our own experience. I noted that my occupational experiences and insights could become the lens through which I located, analysed and interpreted my collaborators’ occupational narratives, especially those with whom I had worked at different stages of their career emergence. This meant that, at different times in the past, our occupational stories had run in parallel and had intertwined for some of that time as we had been influenced by an identical set of organisational, if not occupational, factors such as culture, financing and policy. To a lesser degree this also applied to my other research collaborators, for I had worked with and in similar professional working environments to most of them. I had, therefore, to be careful that I didn’t co-construct their recollection of their occupational experiences to align to my own experiences, or, in Merrill and West’s (2009) words, to ‘construct others [stories] via our own histories and experience’ (p. 181).

Earlier I acknowledged my identity as a white Anglo Saxon protestant (sic) male, but this terminology, popularised in the mid-20th century, locates my social origins and religious preferences, rather than identifying my credentials as a social researcher. Leaving aside the associations of culture and religion, I focus on the properties that distinguish my gendered identity and its possible implications for my research study, analysis and interpretation since it affects the way that I co-construct and interpret my collaborators' stories. In the theatre of occupational emergence, I have lived a career trajectory that has been typical, that is archetypal or conventional, for a large number of white males in western society who have aspired to the traditional anticipation of an ascendant career. My social identity has been closely assimilated with that of my research population in terms of both the highs (advancement, promotion and recognition) and lows (displacement, demotion and disapproval) of their occupational experiences.

At other turning points in my career, I have shared some of their occupational experiences and hold a portfolio of academic credentials recognising the professional status of my chosen educational role. Whilst acknowledging my former occupational roles as male orientated in the sense of being driven (through ambition and achievement) towards holding a senior position, I now feel that, in my current 'portfolio educator' role, I am more aligned to the flexible and vicarious occupational profiles that women, and increasingly men, are experiencing in their efforts to accommodate the requirements of childcare, domestics, income, relationship and personal aspiration. I have discussed the issue of gender and occupational emergence earlier in this study, and now acknowledge that, although I can never assimilate the principles and values associated with feminism, I can concur with Gatrell when she notes the limitations that still exist regarding the occupational choices available to women:

'If the boundaries between different forms of women's work are hard to define (but are set by others) and if women's reproductive and productive labour is measured using systems designed around men's work, the extent of women's 'choice', in comparison to what is available for men, is brought into question'

(2008, p. 13)

My main reason for attesting to this inequitable position arises from my research observations that, as noted earlier, the men in my study did not mention any effects of childcare or housework on their occupational emergence whilst two of the women clearly identified it as being one of the factors that had influenced their occupational choice. The third woman referred to an incident where she had been made redundant on the basis of a decision by her fellow partners who had opted to dispense with the services of all female partners – in a contemporary interpretation of the incident this would probably have been denoted as a case of gender discrimination. It is probable that my involvement in this research process has affected the co-

construction of my collaborators’ narratives, but I have strived to compensate for this through transparency and so optimise the authenticity of the stories told. As Etherington recognises:

‘our interpretations can be better understood and validated by readers who are informed about the position we adopt in relation to the study and by our explicit questioning of our own involvement’

(2004, p. 32)

In this commentary she suggests that our interpretations of the narratives emanating from our research will be ‘better understood’ by our readers if our position in the research is clearly presented and questioned in terms of its effect on the process of narrative construction.

Deconstructing occupational texts

Uncovering the occupational story

Having obtained a participant’s approval to use their occupational story in my research, I ‘edited’ their raw interview text to take account of their amendments and to remove all references to both themselves and family members. My research interview had delivered a set of narrative responses which partially reflected the lived experience of the participant and the anticipation of a future transitional space as each participant continued their journey toward occupational disengagement. This process is illustrated in Figure 4, which represents the process of capturing meaning from the past and releasing action for the future:

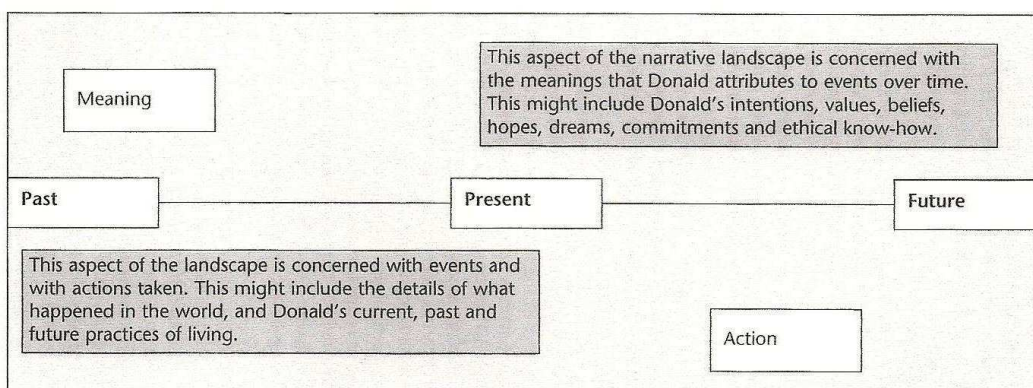


FIGURE 4: Traversing narrative landscapes (Speedy, 2008, p. 82)

The reference to Donald is to a research participant, whose story Speedy was recounting, but the name could equally represent any of my research participants whose occupational story I was recollecting in three dimensions of time – the past, present and future. Having recollecting participants’ interview responses – a raw set of data that needed embracing – by digitally

recording our interview conversation, I decided to analyse the approved text within the transcribed version. This adaptation was literally a transcription, not a transformation of the participant's narrative which explored their past occupational trajectory and anticipated their future one. Some authors (Mishler, 1991; Riessman, 1993 and Denzin, 1997) regard the process of transcription as involving a reinterpretation or reconstruction of the original text, but I believed that the actual transcription process had little influence on the transcribed text, and that the edited version of the transcript was an authentic recollection of each participant's occupational narrative. I progressed through the following four adaptations of the occupational memories evoked, with the resultant degrees of distortion indicated:

- **1 (spoken word)** – a literal recollection of the collaborators memories, recorded digitally – no distortion possible.
- **2 (transcribed text)** – a figurative translation of the recorded conversation; few changes other than those made by the transcriber whilst clarifying the recording – negligible distortion, if any.
- **3 (approved text):** an edited transcription of the transcribed conversation; some changes made by the collaborator, and possibly the researcher, to remove names or other identifiable information – limited distortion possible.
- **4 (analysed text):** a written interpretation of the edited transcription; some shift in the meaning/inferences of the occupational narrative – greater possibility for distortion.

These adaptations show how the occupational story metamorphosed from a 'spoken to an analysed' recollection and the consequent implications for distortion of the story's authenticity as it emerged from the recollections of the story teller, my research collaborator, and was co-authored/co-constructed by self as the researcher. As Riessman concludes:

'By our interviewing and transcription practices, we play a major part in constituting the narrative data that we then analyze ...by displaying text in particular ways and by making decisions about the boundaries of narrative segments, we provide grounds for our arguments, just as the photographer guides the viewer's eye with lenses and cropping'

(2008, p. 50)

In summary, I wanted to explore the stories of self, manifested by my research participants, that is stories that reflected the occupational existence specific to them as an individual rather than any dominant discourse that may have applied to them as a member of a collective group, for example that of a professional practitioner and those exhibited characteristics of accountability, credibility and expertise that are anticipated of qualified professional workers. My overriding intent had been to understand the meaning of the individual's story and to see how it might influence their occupational futurity rather than demonstrating or challenging any espoused

characteristics of a collective group, in this instance the professional institution to which they subscribed. However, I acknowledge that, as noted by Riessman (2008) in the previous citation, I have filtered the meaning of my collaborators' stories by the way in which I foraged for, harvested and allotted their narrative testimony.

Examining the occupational story

Having discovered the story through occupational conversation, I then proceeded to analyse the occupational texts that I had harvested in my approved texts (adaptation 3). As my first step I listened to each digital recording highlighting those parts of the story that I thought were relevant to the research questions, using the following denotation:

Code	Research Question
TRA	What have been the career trajectories of older professional workers who are now in their 'third-age' of employment?
ASP	How does this career history influence their career aspirations as they continue on their occupational pathway?
INT	What other obligations impact on an older worker's career intentions as they navigate toward 'retirement'?
SUP	What support do older professional workers receive (from their employers or professional body) to help determine their continuing career in their 'third-age' of employment?

As a result, I started to locate the principal areas of each interview transcript and made notes on occupational issues that I detected within the 'approved text' – issues such as how a career had been chosen (opportunity), what had encouraged a change in career (trigger), and what issues were impacting future career (obligations). In addition to helping me think about the primary themes running through each occupational text, this process started to give some articulation to my collaborator's reflection on their occupational career, both in terms of past actuality and future possibility. This approach allowed me to interrogate the text in a robust and relevant way, enabling me to analyse the chosen approved text into a form that I could use as my basis for writing an occupational case study.

Initially I started to write what I termed a 'translated occupational story', that is a version of a narrative that retold the story in terms of the agency and influences that had affected each of my

collaborator's career trajectory, but I became aware of the risk of interpretive distortion, a risk noted by Clandinin and Connelly, who cautioned that:

‘...because data tend to carry with them the idea of objective representation of research experience, it is important to note how imbued field texts are with interpretation’

(2000, p. 93)

I believed that the objectivity of my research lay in the occupational experiences that I had extracted from my research participants in the form of an ‘approved text’. To this point the text remained objective as it was a representation of what had been said at the occupational interview, but, as soon as I started to translate the ‘approved text’, I introduced layers of ‘overtones and associations’, that is to say my rewriting (translation) of the edited transcription had involved an interpretive process which probably changed the intended meaning of the original story, for example commenting on part of the narrative text to reflect something that I wanted to say or draw attention to rather than what the research collaborator had said or meant. This approach, whilst illustrating different perspectives on occupational progression, proved time consuming and, although offering a lot of individual occupational insights, presented little new data that could be rigorously analysed. Therefore, I searched for an approach that would enable me to interrogate my research texts and extract some shared occupational themes for the older professional worker in the knowledge economy.

I revisited my writing and decided to present some case studies or histories of two of my research collaborators – the stories of Charles and Jack. To minimise any potential risk of distortion, I listened to the digital recording twice, sometimes three times, and iteratively re-read each section of the story as I created it in an attempt to ensure that my occupational case study reflected the actual story as presented at the original occupational interview. However, I remained wary, sensitive to the risk of placing undue or inappropriate interpretation on my ‘field text’, a term that Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 92) employ to embrace all types of artefacts that the researcher may investigate whilst working on their research. In my research, these artefacts included digital recordings, interview transcriptions (raw and approved) and occupational case studies. These occupational case studies present comprehensive illustrations of two of my research population – in-depth reviews of the occupational journeys experienced by the career actors portrayed. I review these in Chapter 5, Charles’ story representing a deterministic (or ‘ascendant’) trajectory, and in Chapter 6, Jack’s story representing an opportunistic (or ‘contemporary’) trajectory. I chose these two illustrations as they symbolise different perspectives on aspirational careers, one presenting an image of ‘progression’ and a coveted retirement outcome, the other in ‘regression’ and a less satisfying workplace disengagement.

Narrative analysis and interpretation

Interpreting the occupational story

In this section I review the processing, i.e. the analysis and interpretation, of my narrative texts; ‘meaning making’ requires that the narrative be interpreted, but first it must be analysed. I acquired a collection of occupational narratives through a series of occupational interviews – for these narratives to be of any value, I had to make sense of them. Firstly what is the nature of the narrative that I had acquired? Phoenix, citing Georgakopolou (2006), questions:

‘...whether it is more productive to focus on ‘big’ or ‘small’ stories. Big stories take as their unit of analysis the content of the (auto) biographical story ...[whilst] small stories focus on the stories ‘we tell in passing, in our everyday encounters with each other’

(2008, p. 64)

Small narratives allow conversation and discourse analysts to undertake a more comprehensive analysis of their selected texts and to focus on incidents that might otherwise be forgotten in the pursuit of ‘big’ stories. In the occupational narratives that I hold as my raw research data, I collected some ‘big’ stories that represent the biographical foundations of my collaborators’ occupational experiences. These narratives are auto/biographical in that they have been partially completed by the individual them self in partnership with myself as the researcher. They represent the ‘big’ story approach as they focus on the diachronic aspects of each narrative by embracing the story as claimed through experience. The stories gathered are a representation of historical significance and can be investigated structurally in the temporal order in which they have been recounted – this suggests, with reference to Phoenix (2008), ‘a temporal ordering of a plot ...or perhaps an analysis looking at episodes’ (p. 64). My collaborators co-authored their occupational stories by recollecting key episodes, periods of working experience displaying a common thread of activity or aspiration, within their career trajectories – their narratives exhibited the characteristics of a temporal plot, namely chronological sequencing and structural form.

Thematic and structural approaches

I decided to adopt a thematic approach to the analysis of my raw data sets since it focused on finding commonality between my research cases; ‘thematic analysis’ is defined by Boyatzis as:

‘...a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit ‘code’. This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms. A

theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon'

(1998, Preface, p. vi)

As this definition implies, the process is relatively straightforward to understand; the main idea is to develop a set of recurrent subjects or issues (i.e. the themes) and work out how each theme relates to the others. This approach is widely used in narrative studies, as noted by Riessman:

'theorizing across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take is an established tradition with a long history in qualitative inquiry'

(2008, p. 74)

A disadvantage of this approach is that, since it focuses on the classification of the data obtained, it takes little account of the narrator's language or contextual landscape, which may detract from the richness of the final interpretation. Although temporality, the chronological sequencing of events, is important, many writers (Polanyi, 1985; White, 1987) have also recognised that effective narrative is more than a series of events, a chronological recollection of past experiences; it is a comprehensive elaboration of occupational experience including motivations, meaning and outcomes, both positive and less positive, that represent the reconstructed story of the professional's career trajectory.

Labov and Waletzky (1967), however, suggest that an analysis of narrative texts should start with an examination of its form that is its structure; they argue that a successful narrative should have, as a minimum, an element of temporal action, and they:

'...described fully formed narratives as having six separate elements: the abstract (a summary of the subject of the narrative); the orientation (time, place, situation, participants); the complicating action (what actually happened); the evaluation (the meaning and significance of the action); the resolution (what finally happened); and lastly the coda'

(Cited in Elliott, 2005, p. 8)

Whilst temporal action is essential, evaluation is critical for making sense of a narrative since it conveys to the reader the underlying meaning that the narrator attached to the story when writing their story. A disadvantage of their approach, also known as structural analysis, is the rigidity of the methodology they apply; meaning can still be attained without the full structural analysis that Labov and Waletzky (1967) propose, for example a simple evaluation of an occupational story can tell us a lot about the individual beyond an appreciation of their

occupational experiences, it can also tell us about the society within which the individual is culturally and socially accommodated. Taking this model as his foundation Cortazzi (1991) describes his framework as a narrative evaluation model. Although both approaches highlight the importance of evaluation, to my mind they deny the power of the categories or themes arising because they focus on the structure of the narrative, particularly across a set of research narratives from individuals with similar professional backgrounds.

A model for analysing narrative

An extension to both of these approaches to narrative analysis is a framework modelled by Lieblich et al who suggest, when considering different approaches to narrative analysis, that:

‘...two main independent dimensions arise – those of (a) *holistic versus categorical* approaches and (b) *content versus form*’

(1998, p. 12, *italics original*)

In the first approach, as in content analysis, the researcher dissects the story and collates sections of the story falling into the same category from different parts of the whole story or from different texts, whereas in the holistic approach, the analyst interprets sections of the text in the context of the whole narrative. Because of the form of my research programme, I adopted a categorical approach looking for degrees of similarity between the different occupational narratives that I have obtained from my opportunistic group of professional workers. This approach is supported by Lieblich et al.’s commendation that:

‘...the categorical approach may be adopted when the researcher is primarily interested in a problem or phenomenon shared by a group of people’

(1998, p. 12)

In my research the shared focus of interest is *the occupational experience and aspirations of older workers*, and, in determining my approach to narrative analysis, I anticipated some similarities in my respondents’ occupational stories. Looking at the second dimension, content versus form, my research focuses on the form of the story, what Lieblich et al describe as:

‘the structure of the plot, the sequencing of events, its relation to the time axis, its complexity and coherence, the feelings evoked by the story, the style of the narrative, the choice of metaphors or words’

(1998, p. 13)

Taking their model for ‘classifying types of narrative analysis’ this resulted in the ‘categorical-form’ (c-f) type of narrative analysis, which looked at the formal aspects (structure, sequence, temporality etc.) of different categories of each occupational narrative. I see this approach as an

extended form of thematic analysis in that the ‘categorical’ dimension is seeking to identify narrative themes and the ‘form’ dimension is looking at the structure within which the narrative has been constructed. Perhaps Lieblich et al.’s (1998) model is an integrative framework combining the essential elements, theme and form, of the traditional thematic and structural approaches to narrative analysis. Certainly this model matched my research intentions and, for this reason, I adopted the ‘categorical-form’ (c-f) type dimension of Lieblich et al.’s (1998) model as the foundation of my approach to narrative analysis.

Identifying ‘first wave’ narrative themes

As noted, I chose what Lieblich et al (1998) suggest is the ‘categorical-form’ (c-f) type of narrative analysis. I regarded this as an integrated model comprising both thematic and structural dimensions similar to the ideas of Boyatzis (1998) and Labov & Waletzky (1967). In practical terms, I describe this as the ‘thematic-structural’ approach looking at the thematic classifications emerging i.e. categories of common/shared issues arising across my raw data sets, and the structural framework adopted i.e. form (structure, sequence and temporality) of the occupational texts generated. I needed to understand my raw data and create a frame within which I could locate the common themes emerging. Boyatzis describes the objectives of this type of activity as being:

‘...to understand the raw information, internalize as much of it as possible (i.e. bring it into conscious functioning and at least medium-term memory), and to reduce it to a manageable size’

(1998, p. 69)

Taking my own occupational experiences (King, 2007) and the two occupational case studies of Charles and Jack (see Chapters 5 and 6) – my three primary texts, I located some initial themes emerging using what Andrews et al (2008) describe as a ‘top-down analysis ...a socially oriented [perspective]’ (p. 52). Drawing on my analysis of these three principal occupational texts, plus my readings in the fields of career, narrative and storytelling, I concluded that there were four primary themes, namely:

- **ECC: Early career choice** – the choices that each individual made when setting off on their occupational journey; the organisations they worked for and their reasons for making/deciding on a career change.
- **PRD: Professional development** – how they attained professional accreditation and what steps they took to achieve acceptable status within their organisation.

- **OCE: Occupational evolution** – the degree of satisfaction (depending on the positive or negative characteristics of the role) held at different points during their career timeline, and the impact on them at different stages of their occupational involvement.
- **TAC: Third-age challenges** – what affects their continuing career options as they move into the period preceding occupational disengagement and what is important as they contemplate life continuation post retirement.

These four themes gave me an initial framework on which to locate my early analysis, but, left me with a sense of frustration regarding narrative authenticity and the thought that there was little relevant data in the occupational texts that I had collected. However, Squire acknowledges this to be a common experience amongst narrative researchers, who, she suggests, examine their texts by:

‘...moving back and forth between the interviews themselves and generalizations about them in a classic ‘hermeneutic circle’, using a combination of top-down and bottom-up interpretative procedures’

(2008, p. 50)

My personal resolve to complete my research investigation and others – family, friends and academic colleagues – encouragement to persevere in my endeavour meant that I continually questioned my collaborators’ occupational stories and increasingly extracted deeper understanding as predicated by Squire (2008) in her observations about the ‘classic hermeneutic circle’ (p. 50). As my foreboding dissipated and my understanding accumulated deeper insight, I pursued my occupational study with greater enthusiasm and a clearer sense of how to interpret the occupational texts generated with my narrative inquiry.

These early themes evolved through a process of continually examining my three principal occupational texts to locate key elements that expressed some meaning for the research collaborator to whom they referred. Hermeneutic interpretation suggests that meaning evolves from a continual, iterative interaction between the individual parts of the text with reference to the whole and its cultural and historical contexts. At this iterative stage in my analysis, I chose to identify my initial themes from pre-existing (*a priori*) ideas that I had identified in my early thinking on this research topic and questions/topics that I explored in my occupational interview with each respondent; these included:

- **From pre-research thinking** on opportunity theory (Roberts, 1968) – what were the opportunities that each individual made and how did these affect their early career choice; on career plot (Cochran, 1997) – what had been the highs and lows of each individual’s occupational trajectory; on occupational evolution (Ibarra, 2003 and

Jenkins, 2008) – what sense did each individual’s career journey make in terms of their identity?

- **From occupational interview** my questions on professional allegiance – employer or profession oriented; on third-age challenges – the chronological context of my collaborator’s occupational journey and the implications of their obligations.

Having located these *a priori* ideas, I searched my three primary texts for examples of each early theme and identified elements of each story in terms of key descriptive words/activities experienced by the career actor/storyteller. This hermeneutic process required an iterative analysis, continually reading, re-reading and questioning each text to locate these four early themes. As Gibbs and Taylor note:

‘coding is the process of combing the data for themes, ideas and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code label so that they can be easily retrieved at a later stage for further comparison and analysis’

(2005, p. 1)

In this research, the cultural contexts are ‘professionalism’ – the reputation and credibility achieved through qualification and sustained by adherence to an agreed code and/or standards, and the ‘modus operandi’ – the practice for a professional discipline such as accountancy. These cultural contexts are shared by all practitioners within a specific professional practice, whilst the historical contexts are a combination of the economic, political and social dimensions (shared by all at a point in history) and the organisational and occupational dimensions (experienced exclusively by each individual during the historical period of their occupational involvement). I, therefore, concluded that, although I had been initially sceptical of my early themes, they represented an acceptable set of themes generated through a process of reasoning. Indeed some researchers argue that there can never be one interpretation, since there are many interpretations of any one narrative text, all of which can be considered valid – there are multiple narrative truths (Freeman, 2003).

‘Second wave’ occupational themes

One of my earlier concerns, regarding theme extraction, rested on my (false) assumption that to be rigorous it was necessary to interrogate my research texts in minute detail i.e. at a micro level of analysis. My research had, I realised, generated what Squire refers to as ‘experience-centred narrative research’ (2008, p. 41), in other words research that focuses on the experiences of individuals within contextual boundaries – in my study, occupational, professional and (largely) organisational frames of experience. This level of occupational research reflects the subjectivity

of narrative, a representation of what happened, that makes allowance for what Patterson (2008) acknowledges:

‘[to be] the inevitably *partial and constructed* nature of any account of personal experience’

(p. 30, *italics original*)

If my collaborators’ occupational narratives are analysed as subjective interpretations as opposed to objective realities, then the intensity or depth of the analysis becomes less critical since the narration is in itself a selection of the occupational experiences that the author selects to include within their retold story, their perception of the occupational events imprinted in their memories. All narrative analysis is, arguably, a textual refraction of the story as told, a redirection, or rerouting, from the recounted story to one reframed within the contexts of their career experiences – formed through personal drive, professional identity and occupational opportunity. In her engagement with the debate about productivity within ‘big’ or ‘small’ stories, Georgakopolou refers to:

‘[a] second wave of narrative analysis ... moved from the study of narrative as text (first wave) to the study of narrative-in-context’

(2006, p. 123)

Whilst ‘small’ stories focus on those stories that we tell in everyday contexts, as conversations or interactive dialogue, ‘big’ stories centre on the robustness of experience expressed in grander narratives that embrace the fullness of a story reflecting on the author’s enduring recollections embraced over a longer period of time – in my research, their occupational trajectories from the outset of their careers to their transition through the life stage known as the third-age. Thus big story narrative, in addition to noting specific occupational events, also captures the creativity of the person telling the story, their story of occupational experience, a reconstruction of past recollections told as present reflections.

In my first wave of theme detection, described earlier, I interrogated the autobiographic recollections of my own occupational experiences intertwined with the auto/biographical narrative of two of my collaborators. In this process of questioning, I sought to unravel my collaborators’ occupational journeys in an attempt to comprehend their occupational progression, a process that often focused on and reflected their cognitive life experiences of processing their occupational knowledge. By this I mean both technical knowledge, gained through qualification and post qualification practice, and vocational knowledge, gained through comprehending one’s experience of occupational transition over many years. Occupational knowledge is an interweaving of acquired technical knowledge and vocational experience, uniquely particular to the individual encountering that specific set of biographical trajectories.

So what were my collaborators' transcribed stories telling about their biographical trajectory? In their raw state, it was difficult to extract comprehensible themes due to the complexity and density of the stories recounted. Although these texts were what Geertz (1973) identifies as 'thick descriptions', their richness was obscured by the formatting – writing style, composition and structure – of the written texts. In an attempt to locate the core themes within each occupational story, I revisited my research texts and highlighted the main events, incidents, feelings, observations and decisions that each individual made during the course of their career trajectory. I highlighted specific events, incidences, in each occupational narrative, and, using an association technique, reassembled the highlighted extracts into three primary clusters – this presented a new way to interrogate my research data. Using this approach, I found it easier to locate themes which I sensed were shared across the breadth of my research population. As a consequence, I identified some shared themes – personal career aspiration, mid-life challenges and retirement perceptions – that influenced the individual as they made choices during their career journey, particularly as testified to in the latter stages of that journey; the three additional themes were:

- **DEA: Drivers of early adulthood** – the drivers (personal and contextual challenges) that shaped these individuals career progression.
- **MAC: Middle adulthood challenges** – the considerations (personal and organisational challenges) that influenced these professionals when determining their occupational continuation.
- **WPD: Workplace disengagement** – personal perceptions of the concept of retirement and the practicalities of what it might mean in reality.

This iterative process, of labelling/relabeling and filtering my prospective themes lasted a period of several months, but identified the seven themes from which I present my findings in Chapter 7, illustrated with comments and observations from my research collaborators.

Revealing occupational interactions

The other dimension of 'social' construction is the process by which the story is revealed; in this case an interaction between the participant – their cultural, historical and occupational context – and the researcher. This interactive, and often iterative, process has an impact on the meanings deduced by the research participant – in this research an individual's norms will be negotiated in the context of their family and professional associations. Additionally, as researcher, my aim has been to make sense of the meaning that my research participants have about the occupational world that they have participated within over the preceding 30-45 years. With regard to 'constructivism' Crotty noted several assumptions, including:

‘...the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field’

(1998, p. 55)

If, as Crotty (1998) suggests, ‘meaning is always social’ (p. 55) then my research is dependent on the interaction that I had with my research participants and that the knowledge in the occupational texts are ‘socially constructed’ reality. Having positioned my research ontologically, what do I believe about how I acquired the knowledge generated? My research produced occupational narrative (i.e. socially constructed data) which is the textual, and therefore visible, form of each research collaborator’s recollected memory; this extracted knowledge is a representation of each collaborator’s personal occupational experience. My epistemological assumption is that this knowledge is unique and personal to each individual and was created through my direct involvement with each person who was the subject of my research – this philosophical stance positions me as anti-positivist, in other words someone who believes in a subjective approach to research, not the objective (or positivist) approach in which the investigator regards knowledge as being hard (quantifiable), real or observable and external to the individual. As a subjective social researcher:

‘[my] principal concern is with an understanding of the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he or she finds himself or herself’

(Cohen et al, 2000, p. 7)

In my research context, this means how each participant created and made sense of their occupational existence: in this section, I have positioned this research conceptually and philosophically, and identified myself as a subjectivist social researcher.

The ‘Stargate’ model of narrative analysis

The analytical approach that I adopted provides a robust framework for making sense of the occupational narratives acquired from my research collaborators; it encouraged me to explore my research texts from a variety of perspectives, namely content categories, structural form and context, as illustrated in Figure 5 which shows the dimensions that I used to analyse the occupational narratives that I co-authored. In this representation, I have used the fictional metaphor of a ‘Stargate’ which I propose reflects what the creation and analysis of occupational narrative is designed to achieve, that is to move from an individual’s past historical context (occupational history) to their future emergent context (occupational futurity) through the gateway lenses of ‘thematic content’ and ‘structural form’.

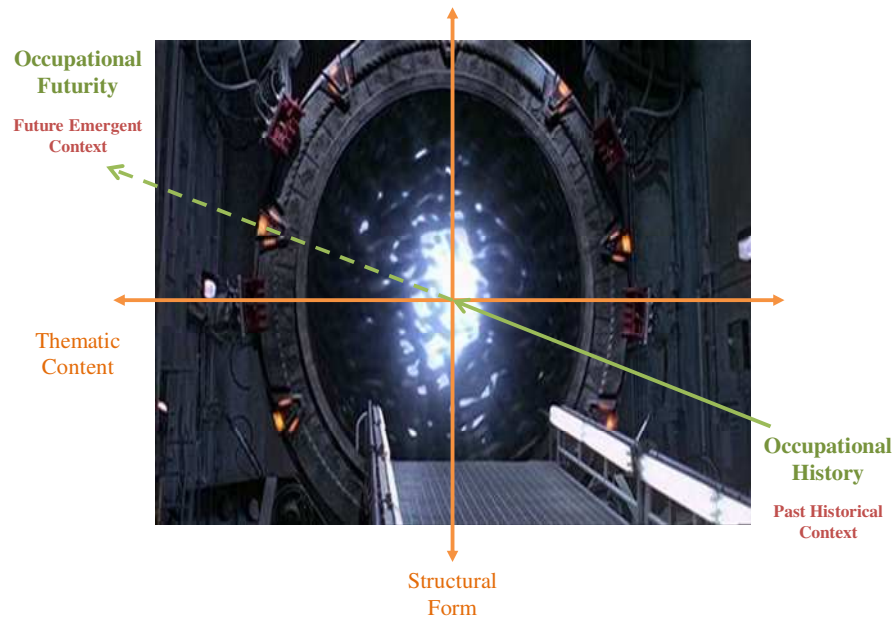


FIGURE 5: 'Stargate' narrative analysis model (adapted from Leiblich et al, 1998)

The integration or syntheses of these three analytical axes gave me a tripartite lens to explore my narrative artefacts as acknowledged by Lieblich et al, who declared that:

‘...synthesis between form analysis and content analysis can prove very fruitful. Form analysis requires the researcher to engage in definition of criteria, classifications, and examinations of the deep structures of a text, while consideration of these categories in terms of content often highlights dimensions and distinctions that would not have arisen from purely structural analyses’

(1998, p. 163)

I have labelled my approach the ‘Stargate’ narrative analysis model as it visually illustrates the purpose of analysing occupational narrative – to determine a way from the clarity of the past to the uncertainty of the future through a gateway of obligations and opportunities. I contend that this fictional metaphor offers a valuable illustration for appreciating the aims of occupational narrative and the analytical process for making sense of the stories recounted.

CHAPTER 5: A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT of Charles Jackson: Presenting the deterministic career of a commercial solicitor

In this chapter, I investigate the occupational experiences of Charles Jackson, a commercial property solicitor advising business and charitable organisations on the purchase and conveyance of commercial properties. Charles' occupational profile illustrates a 'deterministic career' that involved selective career moves determined by personal choice and/or opportunity within discrete legal practices and professional networks.

In this narrative account I have explored Charles' occupational story looking to locate and understand the progress of his career emergence in the context of his professional allegiance – what were the key turning points in his career, why did he decide to make his changes in occupational direction and what were his obligations for and anticipations of workplace disengagement? My comment and critique in this chapter is derived from the commentary that I have written for Charles' story (Appendix E). Using the coding identified earlier (p. 124), I highlighted selected extracts from the approved text (adaptation 3) and examined them to investigate Charles' occupational trajectory.

An opportunity to serve articles

At school leaving age, Charles entered the legal profession as a clerk, articled to a partner in his uncle's legal practice, an opportunity automatically invested on him as a family member. This early career choice, constructed out of a family arrangement, is a prime example of what Ken Roberts (1968) describes as 'opportunity structures' theory, to the extent that he was guided in his choice by the opportunities available to him, in his case clearly a family preference for him to join a family business. Referring to Roberts (1968, 1981), Watts et al suggest, that when discussing the power of the sociological construct of 'agency', it is probable that a young person only has limited power when determining their career options:

'Even when they appear to themselves to be following their own preferences, people tend to be treated as acting-out the consequences of their socialisation, so far as it has formed their identities as men or women, as members of this or that social class, and so on, thus fulfilling a social destiny to which they have been assigned'

(1996, p. 25)

For Charles, his occupational choice appeared pre-determined, his early career identity destined to be that of a legal trainee, a position located for him through family socialisation. However, his initial training didn't run to plan, for when his uncle died, he was transferred 'as part of the package' (Charles, p. 1) and continued his articles in a much larger firm, which provided greater

opportunities for professional learning. The practice of offering articles in professional firms was, at the time Charles entered the profession, a traditional way of educating young people in the practice of legal work. Raelin describes this process of professional socialisation as:

‘[a period of] assimilation into the professional culture ...during this time the professional begins to identify with the profession and take on some of the personal attributes associated with it. These manifestations are in most cases premature and are largely imitative, but they are nonetheless important in fulfilling the ambitions of the individual’

(1991, p. 89)

After its early setback, Charles’ assimilation of the process of professionalisation proceeded smoothly, he settled in through socialisation and qualification, which he gained after 5 years. These early years established an occupational identity that Charles would sustain for the entirety of his professional life and one that he would have hoped to have built on as the foundation for his future occupational career, a trajectory that he would have anticipated to follow the career stage model first proposed by Dalton et al (1977) who found that professionals typically progressed through four occupational stages, described in ‘primary relationship’ terms as ‘apprentice, colleague, mentor and sponsor’ (p. 23). This traditional model of professional ascendancy from articled clerk to partner (sponsor in Dalton et al.’s terminology) is one that Charles aspired to, but, as we see from the following exchange, one that held an additional requirement as far as Charles’ family employers were concerned:

Aspiration	Exchange (From occupational transcript)	Consequences
Partnership	‘But what it meant was that when I qualified, although I was very welcome to stay with the firm, because part of it bore my family name, my difficulty would have been that they would never have gone into partnership with me because the Brethren’s view was that you didn’t go into partnership with anyone other than another member of the sect, and I wasn’t going to become a member of the sect just to become a partner’	He found that family values – associated with membership of a religious sect – restricted his career opportunities, and decided to move on and find a new employer.

(Charles, p. 1)

Charles found that, to become a partner, in addition to fulfilling the qualification and professional requirements, he would also be expected to hold a shared belief system, in this case

beliefs and values held only through membership of a religious sect. Having entered the profession through his family connections, Charles might have been expected to fulfil his family's anticipations, but instead he made a clear occupational choice, possibly the first of his determination, to transfer to a different employer. Even in an era of traditional approaches to the design and delivery of professional service organisations, Dalton et al.'s (1977) ideas about the emergence of professional roles, although relevant for most professional organisations where capability, reputation and skill are the principal attributes required for partnership, were not totally relevant in an organisation where the overriding requirement for corporate governance was a shared religious belief, that brought spiritual equanimity through common beliefs and values. Although welcome to stay as an employee, after a year, Charles opted to move on in search of his occupational destiny.

Individual performance and stardom

His grounding in legal work had given Charles a clear indication of the possible route ahead and he realised that to achieve the ultimate accolade in professional services work, namely partnership, he would need to perform. His search for a new employer involved a careful search where the prestige and reputation of the firm were important – Charles said of his targeted firm:

‘...the senior partner was a member of the Council of The Law Society; it was generally regarded as a very reputable and quite a progressive firm’

(Charles, p. 2)

He realised that, if he was to deliver sustained performance that would merit promotion to partnership, then he needed to locate a legal practice that would provide an environment within which he could consistently deliver a quality client service and, in the process, build a reputation for himself. Critical to the success of any professional firm are the individuals within the firm and to build a successful legal practice, a firm needs to attract the best lawyers. Løwendahl acknowledges this need for a highly qualified practitioner base when he states that:

‘The professionals bring to the firm their expertise, their experience, their skills in relationship building and maintenance, their professional reputation, their network of professional peer contacts, and their established relationships’

(1997, p. 41)

Charles had joined his new firm as an assistant, but after a few years, he was able to prove his capabilities by generating a lot of income ‘because of my family's connections ...started bringing in quite a lot of work ...[they] decided it was probably cheaper to make me a partner’ (Charles, p. 2). At an early age, Charles had achieved his ultimate goal, partnership of a legal

practice based on what Løwendahl describes as the attributes of a qualified (i.e. certificated, experienced and networked) practitioner who is able to develop and maintain effective client relationships throughout his occupational engagement. Charles had become what Lorsch and Tierney describe and label as:

‘[a] star ...the individuals who have the highest future value to the organization, the men and women in critical jobs whose performance is central to the company’s success’

(2002, p. 25)

Through his professional networks, enabled through personal and family connections, Charles had achieved a status, grounded in the high levels of income that he was generating, whereby the firm would notice if he decided to leave. In a successful law firm, the appropriate recognition for such accomplishment was to advance a ‘star’ to the role of partner, whereby he acquired an equitable interest in the firm and associated responsibilities for the assets and liabilities of that organisation. As Lorsch and Tierney (2002) noted ‘... not all partners are stars, nor are all stars partners’ (p. 25), but Charles had certainly impressed on his colleagues the value of his contribution to the financial performance of their firm – he had proved his worth as a critical professional at the core of the his firm’s business activity.

However, although professional firms are dependent on key players like Charles, so too is the ‘star’ on the reputation of the firm that they are a member of – it is a symbiotic dependency, that is a relationship exists between the star and their organisation with a mutual benefit to both in terms of reputational profile, financial prosperity and entity advancement. Lorsch and Tierney suggest that what makes a person a ‘star’:

‘...is the fact that they propel the business model along all three of its dimensions: building enduring client relationships, consistently performing up to their full potential and putting the firm first, and implementing strategic imperatives’

(2002, p. 25)

Looking at his performance over this emerging period of his occupational trajectory, a pattern crystallises in Charles’ approach to building an occupational trajectory – search for a firm with an excellent reputation, build a personal profile based on sound financial performance and strong client relationships, develop the business strategically, and continually sensing the commercial reality, moving on if the situation demands. This pattern is documented in the following exchanges extracted from Charles’ occupational transcript:

Transition	Exchange (From occupational transcript)	Consequences
Into 1st organisation following qualification	<p>‘I got a job in 1966 with a firm in Brighton. There were sort of three prominent firms in Brighton at the time and this was one of them. The senior partner was a member of the Council of the Law Society, it was generally regarded as a very reputable and quite a progressive firm, and I wanted to do some form of criminal work’</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Charles, p. 2)</p>	<p>He was appointed an assistant, generated high levels of income (for which he was paid a lot of commission), and, after a few years, was appointed ‘[a] partner at a fairly early age’</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Charles, p. 2)</p>
Out of 1st into 2nd organisation	<p>‘I didn’t feel that the firm was looking sufficiently commercial when we got into the 1970s and ultimately I looked around at what I might do and I looked at Crawley, and it may seem strange but I looked in the AA book at the time [to determine the ratio of solicitors to population]...it was about 18 or 21 solicitors in Crawley, which was a town of 80,000 inhabitants, and was such that there was enough work there for another pair of hands. And that, curiously, was the motivation for coming to Crawley’</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Charles, p. 2)</p>	<p>His rationale for moving to a new area was based on an assessment of the utilisation of solicitors per head of population, he was appointed and ‘stayed as an assistant for about 12 months and then I became a partner and the practice grew’</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Charles, p. 3)</p>
During period at 2nd organisation (post qualification)	<p>‘it grew very substantially, and it grew to the extent that we were taking on matters that I felt were really beyond the scope of the then seven partners that we had, and some 50, 60 staff. And I suggested – I was the middle of seven partners – that the firm ought to look for some kind of merger with another firm so as to increase its capabilities’</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Charles, p. 3)</p>	<p>As a consequence of growth, Charles recommended a merger to grow the firm’s capabilities. He subsequently reflected that ‘the decision to grow bigger was the right one; the mistake we made was choosing the wrong partner’</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Charles, p. 3)</p>

In the last exchange, Charles identified his relative position within the corporate governance structure of the firm – ‘middle of seven partners... and some 50, 60 staff’ (Charles, p. 3), a

professional governance scenario recognised by Morris who noted that professional service firms:

‘...had two core characteristics in their purest form: a partnership form of ownership and producers who had a formal professional accreditation. These characteristics contributed to the distinctive nature of these firms’

(2008, p. 145)

Towards the middle of his occupational journey, Charles had progressed to a position of influence whereby he was able to influence the strategic direction of his firm; he had, in Lorsch and Tierney’s terms, propelled the business model through strategic imperatives and achieved relative ‘stardom’ – driving the business toward a period of growth and increased capability, but what would be the impact on his occupational journey?

Partnering with organisational reality

Initially the combined strengths of the two firms resulted in a substantial growth in the variety and scale of the work procured and Charles gained some advantage in his occupational aspirations, including ‘exposure to a lot of things that I wouldn’t otherwise have been able to do and I started running a department of some size which I wouldn’t otherwise have been able to have mustered’ (Charles, p. 3). Charles had apparently located an ideal outcome to his strategic manoeuvrings, but how sustainable were the actions of the merged firms? Løwendahl (1997) suggests that the successful outcome of a strategic professional merger emerges from the gradual integration of the professional resource base and targeted assignments of the new firm – from heterogeneity to homogeneity in strategic purpose and aspiration. At the outset of the new merged venture, Charles believed that the foundation for his recommendations to merge the two businesses were sound and that, taking into account Løwendahl’s recommendations for the strategic base for effective integration, the merger was a success. However, by the late 1980s, he recognised an ominous dereliction of professional duty – he realised that:

‘a downturn in the late 1980s and the firm’s willingness to borrow money without checking whether it could repay it adequately came home to roost, and the firm had quite a major financial problem’

(Charles, p. 3)

For Charles this was a turning point – a recognition that the continued growth and stability of the firm was under threat, as a consequence of the financial risk taking culture of the partner firm with whom they had merged. According to Charles’ interpretation of the situation, the firm was at risk, because of its recklessness in borrowing money without a confirmed capacity to

repay it – the firm was unable to manage a key resource, its financial assets/cash flow efficiently and was, in his opinion, in danger of financial meltdown. In his earlier firm, as a member of a small group of seven partners, Charles had been able to exert significant influence on the strategic direction of the firm, but now, in its new combined structure, he was one of ‘45-48 partners’ and less able to impact the strategic direction of the firm moving into the 1990s, a period of economic downturn. As professional partnerships grew, so too did the organisations demand for managerial direction, but, as noted by Morris, professional partnerships are often not enthusiastic about distinctive managerial leadership:

‘Partnership as a governance form embodies three beliefs: the fusion of ownership and control, a form of representative democracy for purposes of strategic and operational decision-making, and the non-separation of professional and managerial tasks because the professionally and partnership-focused organization discouraged any emphasis on management’.

(2008, p. 151)

Although Charles had demonstrated a considerable degree of aptitude in his strategic decision-making capabilities in earlier roles, the practice in larger partnerships tended to focus on what Morris describes as ‘a form of representative democracy for purposes of strategic and operational decision-making’ (p. 151) which would have necessitated the inclusion of every partner’s comments, observations, thoughts and ultimately votes, thereby diluting the overall protestations of a minority group of disaffected partners. In my own experience, working for a firm of consulting actuaries, the partners retained full governance control but delegated managerial responsibility for the daily operations of the firm to a management board headed by an annually elected managing partner, who, as Morris also notes, ‘retained clients’ (2008, p.151). I believe that this would have been a similar organisational control scenario that Charles faced in his legal practice, one that eventually changed as business moved into the 21st century and professional partnerships, no doubt guided by the potential implications of financial liability and regulatory enforcement, determined new approaches to corporate governance and administration.

At this point in his occupational progression, Charles faced a dilemma – how to find a means of leaving the firm without jeopardising his financial investment in it; he believed that ‘an awful lot of massaging of accounts would have happened and they found reasons for not giving you anything when you left’ (Charles, p. 3). Accordingly he bided his time for a number of years – interestingly he did not speak of his participation within the firm throughout this period merely reporting that:

‘ultimately I and seven others fell out with the management of the firm in 1999 and, because it then served their purpose to remove some of us, we were able to negotiate

financial terms which we wouldn't otherwise have been able to do, and I was able to leave, and I left with most of my good will intact, and I joined this current firm'

(Charles, p. 3-4)

He had made another occupational transition precipitated by organisational disillusionment and ultimately financial expediency, motivated by both self-interest and, according to his assertion 'because it served their purpose to remove some of us' (Charles, p. 4). Although continuing to grow his personal capabilities, Charles faced nearly a decade of organisational frustration, whilst his firm meandered forward with a small group of disillusioned and disaffected partners. For reasons that Charles did not disclose, his individual operational competence at delivering strategic growth in both of his previous two employments, was not recognised by his present peers and he was side-lined in his aspirations to continue to deliver organisational growth and sustainability. Perhaps it was simply that his employing practice, now increased in size and capability, was unable to identify or face the challenge of motivating their 'professionals to stay with the firm and to utilize their competence for the benefit of firm value creation' (Løwendahl, 1997, p. 82). Whatever the reason, Charles embarked on a new phase of his career trajectory, transitioning to another legal practice where he noted that:

'I'd had something like 12 years of work ahead of me before I thought of retiring, and I think my intention then was purely to become a partner in the new firm and to have, I thought, a happier end to my career'

(Charles, p. 4)

At this stage in his occupational life-cycle, his aspiration/intention seems to have become more limited – instead of the forceful young partner striving to make his mark and achieve occupational stardom, we see a less forceful, but perhaps more contented, partner acknowledging that the end game was in sight, the pursuit of occupational glory was diminishing and the light at the end of the occupational tunnel was becoming brighter and crisper as he started to imagine his emergence into the fields of non-occupational engagement, commonly known as retirement. At this stage in his mid-life transition, Charles is perhaps coming to terms with what Levinson et al (1978) point out is a natural turning point for:

'...even if he has accomplished a great deal and is on the path to greater attainment, his basic orientation toward success and failure normally begins to change. It is no longer crucial to climb another rung on the ladder'

(1978, p. 214)

Certainly the intensity of his occupational aspirations had changed – from thoughts of strategic growth to personal contentment as he anticipated the closing era of his occupational journey. Had he, like Levinson et al (1978) suggest, accepted that 'the hero is a youth who must die or be

transformed as early adulthood comes to an end. A man must begin to grieve and accept the symbolic death of the youthful hero within himself’ (p. 215). As Levinson et al compare the strivings of a young man to that of heroic intent, so I realised (in my mid 40s) that, having moved out of my early adulthood, my motivational drivers for business success had waned and I yearned for something new and challenging, which, at that point, remained uncharted – an uncertain future occupational destiny with ‘a hero of a different kind in the context of middle adulthood’ (Levinson et al, 1978, p. 215), yet to be discovered.

This may be the reason why Charles remained apparently content for up to a period approaching 10 years, before he finally managed to remove himself from an unsatisfactory employment situation – the hero-self of his early adulthood was indeed transforming into a new ‘hero’ of middle adulthood, a new self which he was still seeking and begins to recognise when he acknowledged that his occupational aspiration was ‘to have, I thought, a happier end to my career’ (Charles, p. 4). But with ‘something like 12 years of work ahead’ Charles still had a period of occupational choice to pursue, with some interesting professional undertakings yet to be forged.

Adventures in third-age professional practice

Having spent over 30 years in occupational employment, Charles was seeking new challenges, perhaps in response to his search for the new ‘hero’ of his middle adulthood, and, although he had remained silent about his closing years with the partnership that he and seven others eventually left, he did reveal two opportunities that were offered to him:

Opportunities	Exchange (From occupational transcript)	Consequences
Chairman of an Industrial Tribunal	‘When I was at [name removed for confidentiality] they did a lot of employment work and were not very happy with that because it would have meant that they would have been unable to have carried out any appearances in any industrial tribunal in this area, because I’d have been appointed somewhere in this area, so that was not something they were very keen on’	Did not pursue as ‘restriction of trade’ created organisational pressure not to consider.

(Charles, p. 4)

Appointment as a Judge	‘it did also mean quite a few days out of the office, particularly while you were training, and there was frankly no encouragement’ (Charles, p. 4)	Did not proceed as employing partnership gave no organisational support for the required development.
-------------------------------	--	---

On reflection Charles noted that ‘with hindsight, I think I should have stood firm and taken up one of ...those offers’ having recognised that he did subsequently ‘enjoy that kind of activity’ (Charles, p. 4) whilst referring to his involvement on other tribunals. It is noticeable that the reason he gave for not accepting either opportunity was the lack of organisational support from his employing partnership. In the case of the industrial tribunal, the reason given is probably reasonable in so far as it would have meant that the partnership would not have been allowed to take on certain employment related assignments, although it may have been possible to negotiate with the statutory authorities for Charles to be appointed only to tribunals that were not considering cases where his employer represented one of the parties to the case under consideration. His reason for not taking up the second opportunity is possibly due to organisational reluctance to support his endeavours. This issue of organisational support for the older worker is one of the areas that this research programme is considering; if, as Levinson et al suggest (1978) it is natural for a person to be seeking new challenges as they transition into their middle adulthood, then arguably employers should be encouraged to consider ways in which they can help their older workers discover and participate in assignments that appeal to their occupational aspirations in their third-age of employment. In maintaining employment stability, Raelin recognises, in addition to the need of management, that:

‘[for] its professional staff to be up-to-date and sufficiently versatile to respond to changing business patterns. Some professionals will also want to try new things, particularly where they are encouraged to take charge of their own career development. It makes sense to offer them wide opportunities to retool and retrain’

(1991, p. 79)

In this context, Raelin (1991) is proposing that professionals should be offered an opportunity to re-skill, that is obtain the ability or capability to do the new job, complete the new assignment, but why shouldn’t older workers also be given an opportunity to re-focus? In cases, such as Charles, the older professional worker already has the capability to work on the new challenge, but often the structure of their working environment prohibits them from taking up the new challenge – what they need, as did Charles, is, in addition to the opportunity to re-skill, the freedom to change their working conditions to enable them to take up a new appointment, which may mean restructuring their working time and/or conditions; as Maister recognises:

‘...one of the reasons many professionals do not love what they currently do is that they have outgrown it. They *used to* find what they do challenging and exciting, but they’ve done it too many times now to still feel the thrill ...the choice to be made is ...which *next* challenge would fulfil you’

(1997, p. 35, *italics original*)

If, as in Charles’ story, the older worker is seeking new challenges which satisfy their revised occupational aspirations, why do employers not accommodate these new aspirations by adjusting their working time, conditions and benefits to reflect their aspirations rather than ignoring their preferences or, in many cases, enforcing change on them? In Charles’ case, his employer was unwilling to accommodate his need for new training and possibly an adjusted schedule, whilst, in my own experience, my employer did not address my needs as an older worker, deciding instead to enforce change, initially through redeployment and ultimately redundancy. In either case, it could be argued that a mature employer, recognising the need for older workers to absorb themselves in new challenges, would enable a dialogue to help older workers determine the best occupational choice for them, one that satisfies, as Levinson et al (1978) suggest, the anticipation of an older worker to pursue activities that are meaningful in an altruistic sense not necessarily financially rewarding. Later, when recalling the highs and lows of his occupational experience, Charles recounted his experience of an assignment that provided him with a high level of occupational stimulation:

‘between 1990 and 1996, when I was a member of the UK housing team into Eastern Europe, and I acted as one of the government advisers to Eastern European governments on reforming their housing and property law; I was one of the team. And that for me – it was only a part time activity – but for me it was one of the most fascinating times of my life’

(Charles, p. 6)

This example showed how a special assignment fulfilled Charles’ aspirations in the third-age of his occupational existence. It seems that, for the older professional worker, there is an intrinsic need to find and have an opportunity to prove new occupational challenges that provide new adventures for the worker to experience new boundaries, either geographically or intellectually, and to feel that their efforts are of value, at least to those who are receiving the benefit of their input. For Charles it was the opportunity to help an eastern European country reform its housing and property law, and, for me, the opportunity to help my students look at their occupational responsibilities through a new lens and to reflect on how they might contribute to improving their occupational spaces through developing new people or systems strategies within their organisational enterprise. As Sugarman (2001) suggests in her considerations of human development ‘the life-span perspective tends to stress the importance of adopting a contextual

view of the person as embedded within an environment that both influences and is influenced by the individual' (p. 203); it is, therefore, important that any occupational challenges are integrated within the older workers sphere of occupational influence for them to gain some meaningful outcome from their experience of participating within the challenge.

Occupational highs and lows

In response to a question about describing his career high and low points, Charles initially identified the high points as being those case assignments resulting in a successful outcome – specific examples included an acquittal for a criminal trial, a complex retail property transaction and the amalgamation of two disability trusts. A common feature of these three assignments is that they all utilised the technical competence of the principal case worker, Charles, and utilised his professional skills; these skills are the core capabilities that differentiate a professional allowing them to offer the specialist service for which they are qualified. In these situations Charles was acting in an expert capacity or doing what works in normal situations (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986) – an expert has a level of intuitiveness that is focused on a tacit comprehension of the situation they are advising on, and, when this is achieved at a high level of output and recognition, there is a direct association to their sense of occupational achievement. As a partner, Charles had attained the highest level of professional accolade, so he did not see that as a revelation of occupational success, preferring to focus on the delivery of specialist assignments that reflected his professional capabilities.

Whilst his occupational highs recorded his professional strengths, Charles noted 'staff relationships ...[and] organisational downturns resulting in staff layoffs' (pp. 5-6) as the two low points in his occupational trajectory. Interestingly, both concern people, but one in the negative sense of the need to handle difficult relationships and the other as a caring concern for staff that may/did experience redundancy as a consequence of recessionary pressures. These high and low career points illustrate a principal characteristic of Charles' professionalism – his consistent drive for professional proficiency and his underlying sensitivity toward people in his practice. Both of these characteristics/traits surfaced during the client relationship that he established with the charity that I was the principal legal adviser for and during his occupational interview. These expressions of frustration illustrate Charles' concern for his staff and present a reflexion of his personal views on the value of maintaining strong peer/staff relationships and the importance of humankind. As McKenna and Maister (2002) highlight:

'...by adapting your approach based on understanding preferences in styles, you increase the receptivity to whatever you are trying to communicate'

(2002, p. 90)

According to his earlier recollections of occupational life, Charles had been noticeably adept at sustaining client, partner and staff relationships which had helped him achieve partnership at an early age. His reported perceptions about occupational highs and lows reflect two dimensions of professional independence – personal proficiency and interpersonal relationships, both of which determine an individual’s competence when achieving high professional status as Charles had clearly accomplished; he had, as acknowledged by Eraut, become ‘an expert acknowledged by colleagues as having progressed well beyond the level of competence’ (1994, p. 167).

Periods of occupational specialism

In the emergence of his career, Charles identified several periods of occupational evolution including:

Early career	Commentary
<p>‘Well obviously 1960-65 is training, so I look upon that quite clearly’ (Charles, p. 6)</p> <p>‘From 1965-72, I look upon as a very heavy advocacy period, where I was doing nothing but magistrates’ court work and so forth. From 1972-85 was a very mixed time, because I continued doing quite a lot of advocacy’ (Charles, p. 6)</p>	<p>These two occupational episodes (1 and 2) combined to form a period of occupational learning in terms of initial knowledge, skills acquisition and socialisation in professional advancement.</p>
Mid-career	
<p>‘then in 1985 when we merged with [names removed for confidentiality] I tended to have been restricted. Now one of the things with larger firms is that they have to restrict your activities ...and I had to cut out a lot of what I would call my more interesting activities’ (Charles, p. 6)</p>	<p>In this episode (3), Charles’ occupational preferences are circumscribed by organisational demands for operational efficiency – he had limited opportunities to pursue his professional interests.</p>

‘then from 1985, as it were, up to ’99 was very much devoted to commercial property, but I then started to deal with charities’

(Charles, p. 6)

Episode (4) presented Charles with some new challenges – dealing with charities and working as a member of a UK Housing team in Eastern Europe.

Third-age career

Charles spoke very little of this period (the last 10 years of his working life) only referring to a continuation of his practice, particularly regarding his participation in charity work and specialist advisory assignments.

Episode (5), a period of continued consulting pending his approach to the standard age of retirement that was 65 for Charles.

Charles’ recollection of the different episodes in his occupational trajectory are clearly chronologically focused, certainly in the early periods of his career emergence, but he became more perspicacious as he emerged into the third-age of his occupational existence primarily responding to the new challenges that awakened his social interests. When talking about his UK housing advisory work within an East European country, he commented that:

‘...it was the novelty of it, because communism had only fallen, what, 18 months previously? And it was going into a country which had enormous aspirations, an enormous willingness to look at other systems, and it was just something so new’

(Charles, p. 7)

Charles was clearly inspired by the professional opportunity offered to him in this international assignment and valued it as a high point in his third-age occupational journey; his response is perhaps surprising when reading comments such as that from Lorsch and Tierney (2002) who, when considering ‘strategic obsolescence ...[suggest that] people, and professionals are no exception, tend to hang on to the comfort of past practices rather than venture into uncharted territory’ (p. 50) and become ‘complacent elders who may be focused on retirement’ (p. 51). Charles appears to have contested the researcher anticipations of Lorsch and Tierney (2002), and, through his actions and retold experience, actually refuted a suggestion that older workers are content with doing more of the same.

To many of my research collaborators, the opportunity to do something different, perhaps of more social worth, is central to their occupational purpose and continued presence in the workplace. Within my experience, I am more challenged by my current academic endeavours than by the continual facilitation of repeated organisational development interventions which I suspected would be circumvented when the next organisational vagary materialised – my

intrinsic motivation had evaporated. Our experience would abnegate and confute the traditional perception that older workers simply do not want to change, rather suggesting that certainly older professional practitioners are infused with a fresh degree of excitation when offered the scope to work on new and value-driven commissions. Although perhaps sideways in positional terms, these commissions are generally far more inspiring in terms of the personal benefits derived from being involved – utilisation of professional competence, freedom to choose assignments that interest self and in many cases that exhibit a high degree of social worth. Perhaps this aspiration to work on new challenges is a central tenet of the third-age professional life and an acknowledgement that a person has moved into the ‘middle passage’ having learnt, as Hollis suggests, that:

‘the ego building activities of the first adulthood ...only represent projections onto finite and fallible icons ...[that] are illusory idols which, though necessary early in life, may later cause us to lose sight of the journey’

(1993, p. 114)

I contend that occupational life for the older professional worker is more highly valued if it allows the person to participate in new and socially inspiring activities which employ the professional capabilities of the individual concerned – this seems to be an essential part of occupational maturation.

The duties of professional engagement

In whatever organisational context, Løwendahl (1997) suggests that ‘in order to maintain a high quality professional reputation, it is critical that the firm limits its engagements to projects within its area of expertise’ (p. 20). He then continues to describe the characteristics of a professional service as one that:

‘is highly knowledge intensive, delivered by people with higher education...involves a high degree of customization ...involves a high degree of discretionary effort and personal judgement by the expert(s) delivering the service ...typically requires substantial interaction with the client firm representatives involved, and is delivered within the constraints of professional norms of conduct, including setting client needs higher than profits and respecting the limits of professional expertise’

Løwendahl (1997, p. 20)

To enable this level of professional excellence, a professional firm must employ highly skilled and knowledgeable practitioners with the expertise to deliver the service to the standards expected of that profession. In his recollections Charles demonstrated his professional

capabilities and exemplified the characteristics noted by Løwendahl (1997); he also acknowledged his membership of the Law Society, and noted, in response to a question about his professional allegiance, that:

‘[he] would put the client first, firm, then the Law Society. Because of course it’s implied that if your duty is to the client you’ve got to comply with all the professional regulations and discipline as well’

(Charles, p. 8)

He also observed that professional etiquette is now enshrined in society regulations and comments that, in his opinion, ‘the standard of solicitors in the profession has dropped enormously ...[and that] as a consequence ...there are now so many rules which are there in substitute for what would otherwise have been regarded as a sort of professional attitude’ (Charles, p. 9). He clearly felt that there had been a dilution of professional attitudes/standards and that this has impinged on their individual credibility and reputation for client service. Erant suggests that ‘too little specificity can lead to lack of clarity, poor communication and diminished credibility. Too much specificity leads to cumbersome standards’ (1994, p. 212), a perspective recognised by Charles who commented that:

‘The Professional Code and Etiquette of Solicitors ...now it is like seven, eight inches thick’

(Charles, p. 9)

Contemporary professionalism appears to be prescribed in comprehensive handbooks, arguably a complete denigration of professional integrity and credibility, a founding tradition of the professional’s duty to deliver expert knowledge, for which s/he was adjudged competent through professional assessment/ examination and trustworthiness. After over 40 years legal practice, Charles appeared to have become disillusioned about the standards of professional competence now demonstrated within the profession that he had held membership of throughout his occupational continuum.

A continuing route to disengagement

Looking to a comparison with existing research, West (1996) tells the story of one of his research participants, Kathy, and her attempts to link ‘different aspects of her life history and career ambition together’ and of her determination to become a solicitor, believing that:

‘it would enable her to move more inside her own life ...to take some control over it and not be put down; to find space, for once, for self’

(West, 1996, p. 45)

Kathy's objective appears to be to create some coherence between her personhood and occupational ambition, a desire to establish an identity that allowed her space to operate in a professional environment and achieve a feeling of control over her life. I see Charles' aspiration in the later stages of his career as being the reverse of Kathy's – having achieved the professional space to function as a solicitor and the identity associated with that professional standing, Charles wanted to develop new challenges and satisfy family obligations (looking after his grandchildren and helping his grown-up progeny sustain their busy lives) whilst also retaining the professional space granted as a consequence of his lifelong occupational continuity. Charles' recognition that he found 'working in a part-time capacity is just ...it keeps me ticking over and happy' (p.10) is indicative of the balance that many third-age professionals yearn for, that is 'to find space, for once, for self' but in the contra meaning to that implied by Kathy, namely to sustain professional continuity at a reduced level allowing them to participate within other areas of interest, both recreational pursuits and familial obligations. Charles wants to achieve some sense of control over his life whilst also retaining an element of occupational continuity by participating in his profession in a part-time capacity, thereby regaining a sense of purpose in his life's journey. Regarding retirement, Charles noted that he came:

'...from a family where you don't necessarily think that because you're 65 you've got to stop working. And culturally I see no argument why I should'

(Charles, p. 10)

He is expressing a preference for a flexible retirement age based on cultural, financial and personal needs rather than a prescribed age set, or at least recommended, by the state. Now working three days a week, Charles has relinquished his partnership role and is content working part-time on a flexible basis allowing him to work on days which complement his other commitments. Following discussion he confirmed that he has the partners' support and mutual consensus as to his agreed work targets. He vigorously defended the right of an individual to determine the age at which they chose to retire, stating that retirement is:

'...when you cease sort of gainful employment. I have never been particularly attracted by it, simply because I've never seen it as a sort of golden age and the idea of having nothing to do doesn't really appeal to me'

(Charles, p. 12)

At the time of the conversation, his preferred option was to continue to 69 and then decide whether to continue, but said that he would be quite happy doing some lecturing. Although supportive of his personal journey, he felt that his employer was 'not equipped to [provide any help]' (p. 13) for employees approaching workplace disengagement; however, he fondly recounted a time when he had been involved in a programme designed to help older workers in making decisions about their retirement, including legal inputs on tax, wills, powers of attorney

and even divorce and annulment. In speaking of partial employment, a phase that Charles had already entered, he spoke enthusiastically about the opportunities that it presented for him to support other family members, and acknowledged the difficulties that he believed older people experienced in seeking to regain meaningful employment at an older age – he regarded age discrimination as quite prevalent in his business area, and recounted a story about an older solicitor that he had employed.

Overall, Charles expressed a high degree of contentment with his occupational engagement believing that it gave him a healthy balance between his desire for occupational continuity and other recreational activities. Charles' experience seems to align with Hollis' observation that:

‘...if our courage holds, the Middle Passage brings us back to life after we have been cut off from it. Strangely for all the anxiety, there is an awesome sense of freedom as well. We may even come to realize that it does not matter what happens outside as long as we have a vital connection with ourselves’

(1993, p. 116)

It would seem that Charles has been able to sustain his preference to continue his occupational trajectory at the same time as reconnecting with self, perhaps a balance that most third-age practitioners would opt for given the ideal occupational circumstances and considerations when approaching the age to withdraw from active employment.

CHAPTER 6: A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT of Jack Sparrow: Exploring the opportunistic career of a public health consultant

In this chapter, I examine the occupational experiences of Jack Sparrow, a quality assurance/public safety consultant advising government and their agencies on product design and safety. Jack's occupational profile illustrates an 'opportunistic career' that involved multi career moves determined by personal values and/or opportunity within government agency and networks.

In this narrative account I have explored Jack's occupational story looking to identify and understand the emergence of his career in the context of his participation within government agencies – what were the key episodes in his career, why did he decide to make career changes and what were his life obligations as he anticipated workplace withdrawal? My comment and critique in this chapter is derived from the commentary that I have written for Jack's story (Appendix F). Using the coding identified earlier, I have highlighted selected extracts from the approved text (adaptation 3) and examined them to investigate Jack's occupational trajectory.

Workplace entry through apprenticeship

On commencing his occupational story, Jack referred back to the mid/late 1960s when, nearing the end of his secondary school education, he first started to think about the options that he faced in selecting employment. Like many young people he commented on his father's guidance and the economic reality of the 1960s, both apparent determinants in his initial considerations:

'...and under my father's guidance went for an apprenticeship. Believe it or not back in the mid-60s, late-60s there wasn't a lot of work about'

(Jack, p. 1)

Occupational entry is a challenge for most young people; they engage with a variety of social influencers – including media presenters, parents, peers and teachers, those whom Ken Roberts (1977, 1981) refers to as 'occupational gatekeepers', that is those people who are part of the habitat of the adolescent. Reflecting on Roberts (1977) theory on 'opportunity structures', Watts et al (1996) suggest that, rather than a free choice, young people learn 'to like what they can secure – through 'anticipatory socialisation'' (p. 48). They also argue that it is the availability of local jobs and vocational opportunities that is a primary consideration in a young person's early occupational choice. Jack accepted his father's guidance and started an apprenticeship at a small local engineering company, who offered him the opportunity for day release to study City & Guilds Mechanical Engineering and Technology. When considering occupational entry, my experience was similar as my father's introduction to a local insurance company manager led to a position as a 'professional trainee'. Although he was mainly talking about 'working class'

young men, Roberts' theoretical position on 'opportunity structures' did account for a significant element of Jack's early occupational acceptance, but his choice was also influenced by a preference to do a job which matched his interests and skills. The suggestion that we have complete freedom of choice when entering a career is naive, for, as noted, both chroniclers chose to be guided, or constrained, by local paternal advice and labour opportunity.

A search for occupational cohesiveness

In Jack's narrative, he attempted to make sense of his early choice, but acknowledged that there had been a lack of coherence between his school qualifications and the apprenticeship that he started; he noted that:

'It didn't necessarily link in with what I'd done at school with GCSEs and O Levels ...[and] apprenticeship and everything else I'd done was not engineering but more inclined to the woodworking side so it was a subtle change'

(Jack, p. 1)

So is coherence, or a clear link between our past experience and future trajectory important when it comes to making occupational choices? This initial reflection, whilst recognising the pragmatics of his early choice, also locates the importance of making sense of occupational existence. As Jack moved through his occupational story, he attempted to link the different stages of his occupational experience and to justify the connections between each episode or phase, in a way to interweave each episode presenting a stronger image or representation of the threads of his narrative. Regarding narrative coherence, Sugarman (2001) comments that:

'...a requirement of even the simplest coherent narrative is that it has, like a life, a beginning, a middle and an end ...[it involves continually making decisions about] which events are sufficiently significant to include, what themes best provide a coherent and meaningful plot'

(p. 175)

Concerning the issue of occupational coherence, that is the sense of continuity that a narrator believes runs through their occupational story, Jack noted the links, what I describe as bridges, between the different episodes of his career. In the following example, he talked about the zenith of his occupational trajectory, recognising that the role described, in the Department of Trade and Industry's Consumer Safety Unit, gave him occupational coherence, that is an opportunity to connect his new occupational role to his past experience and capabilities:

'because that's where I started to put into play everything I'd done, all my past experience from working in a workshop, running a workshop, running testing, drawing office, the procurement side; everything started to fit in'

(Jack, p. 4)

What makes this episode especially important for Jack, what he acknowledged in the interview as the ‘highest point’ in his occupational trajectory, is the strong belief that he ‘fitted in’ and was using his ‘past experience’. Perhaps these are two of the most important characteristics – fit and experience – that any worker aspires to when entering a new occupational role and that feeling the presence of these occupational characteristics creates a sense of occupational worth and value. This may be particularly true for the older worker, who, having amassed an extensive career history, would like to think that their occupational experience is valued by both self and others; perhaps, when constructing their occupational story, the older worker looks to include events which they believe adds value/credibility to their story and experience. Kroger (2007), in discussing identity development, comments:

‘...one may reconstruct one’s story of the past in order to provide the present *me* with a greater sense of unity or purpose. Thus, one’s life story, giving rise to identity, is likely to change over time to bring a greater sense of unity, coherence, and purpose to an individual’s existence as he or she meets new life circumstances’

(p. 24, *italics original*)

This striving for a coherent reconstruction of a person’s occupational story presents the narrator in the best light and creates a story that the individual is proud to own and recount, but does it enhance the veracity of the narrative told? The authenticity of the story recounted lies in the reflexive nature of the story and the degree to which the narrator can be identified as the person about whom the narrative is a representation. I found that, having been made redundant in my early fifties, I needed to find a role that would utilise my previous comprehensive educational capabilities and enable me to feel that I fitted in to a new occupational environment. I derived this sense of occupational coherence in my transition from commercial to academic education and the discovery of the term ‘portfolio educator’, described by Fenwick (2003) as:

‘a term adopted ...to represent people engaged in adult education activities, who create portfolios of self-employed work arrangements to contract their skills in a variety of contexts’

(p. 165)

This role description appositely connected my past and future educational roles whilst acknowledging the contemporary nature of my emerging career. Having been uncertain about my occupational future immediately following my workplace disengagement, I was unhappy about my lack of occupational clarity, and was pleased when I sensed that I was not only regaining an occupational purpose, but equally important, had found a new occupational identity that linked back to my former educational role. Like Jack, I valued the opportunity to believe that I had strong occupational cohesiveness between my working roles. However, if an individual does not change occupational roles, then there would remain an embedded link within their occupational existence, so why do individuals decide to change jobs? I move onto consider Jack’s occupational experiences and transitions.

Public and governmental agency

The primary triggers for occupational change can be simply categorised as those arising from within, that is those where the individual decides that they want or need to change employment (chosen) and those from without, that is those circumstances forced (imposed) on the individual – organisational restructuring, redundancy or family/personal reasons such as health breakdowns, over which the individual has no or limited control. In considering this issue, Brown suggests that one basic assumption is that:

‘many occupational choices (perhaps most) are uninformed, that is, they are the result of chance or external variables and circumstances that have little to do with the nature of occupations or the individual’s self-evaluations’

(2006, p. 466)

This proposition may be true for some, but looking at Jack’s occupational choices, it can be seen that, generally, he made a positive and conscientious decision to make each career change. Considering those early occupational transitions where Jack chose to make a change, he gave the reason (interview comment) and responded (action) as shown.

INTERVIEW COMMENT	ACTION
<p>Situation A: Reviewed his work values and realised that, following his initial apprenticeship:</p> <p>‘I was getting fed up of removing metal from metal to make something’</p> <p>(Jack, p. 1)</p>	<p>Moved to Ministry of Defence (MOD) – sideways move.</p>
<p>Situation B: Questioned his ethical stance, whilst working for the MOD designing and supplying kit to the Armed Forces in the Falklands war, and decided:</p> <p>‘I was getting a little bit of conflict of working for MOD and being a Christian, even though I was on the non-warlike side, I guess having a very close friend in the Welsh Guards...must have affected me... [and] I felt I could be more help to people rather than being on the other side of it where MOD is more destructive so I guess some of the ethics are coming in there, sort of changing my thinking of ‘Why am I working?’</p> <p>(Jack, pp. 1-2)</p>	<p>Moved to Prison Service (HMP) – a promotion, where he believed he would be helping prisoners and giving them employment whilst in prison.</p>

Situation C: Considered his family’s wellbeing and, acknowledging that they were settled following an earlier move, decided:

‘I’m going to get out before they move to Derby. They were under threat of moving to Derby and I thought ‘right can I move somewhere in the South East, stay around here?’

(Jack, p. 2)

Moved to the Consumer Safety Unit (CSU) at the Department of Trade (DTI) – sideways move.

Situation D: Attended a promotion board at the CSU and realised that, if successful, he would be expected to move:

‘At the time I thought ‘oh this has blown it, they’ve given me promotion’ and my bosses at the time couldn’t promote me in post and the personnel management were squeezing me to take another job’

(Jack, p. 2)

Moved to a different part of the DTI running research for new technologies (lasers and electron beams) – forced move.

Up to this time (approximately 1998), Jack is progressing upwards through an emergent career that he facilitates by responding to occupational triggers involving personal (ethical and family) concerns; he appears to be in control of the decision to change, even though, in situation D, he is promoted and encouraged to transfer to a new role, leaving one that he obviously valued. Perhaps this last occupational change is an example of an imposed change; although he had chosen to attend the promotion board, he had not anticipated that a successful outcome would require him to change his occupational role. In his theoretical deliberations about occupational choice, Brown presents a further assumption that:

‘all decisions regarding occupations are made under conditions of uncertainty because decision makers do not have access to complete information about their abilities, external conditions that may influence the outcome of their decisions, or the outcomes that will actually accrue as a result of a particular occupational decision’

(2006, p. 467)

In this case, it might be said that all of Jack’s occupational decisions were not chosen, but imposed on him as he did not have access to all of the information available and, therefore, an element of uncertainty existed at each of the occupational trigger points where he had to make a decision about his future occupational engagement. On this basis all career decisions are not choices, but responses to an occupational trigger that impose an outcome that the individual concerned cannot possibly be expected to have complete control over. This suggests that all

occupational transitions contain an element of uncertainty and are, therefore, ambivalent in nature. Looking at Jack’s occupational profile (Figure 6):

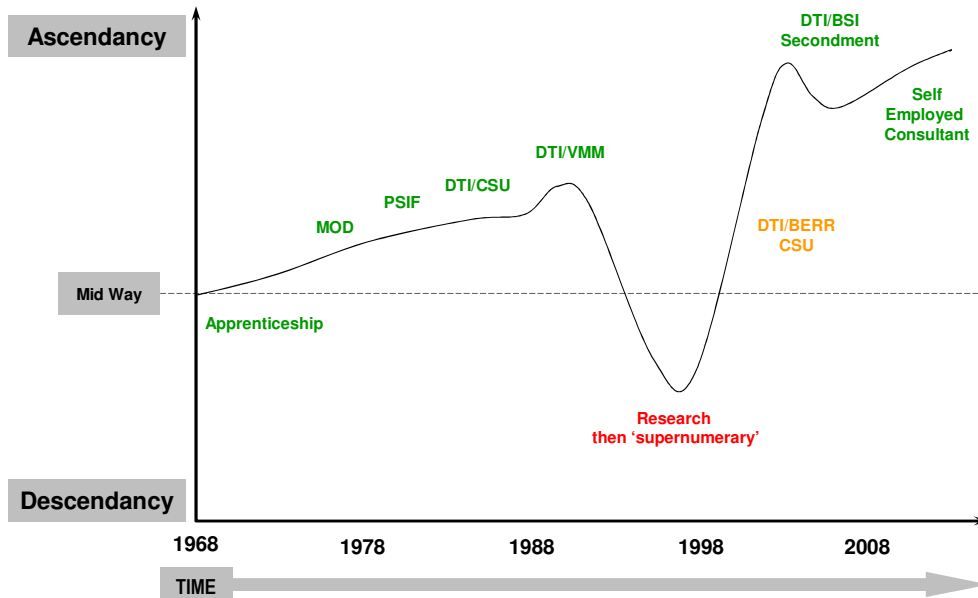


FIGURE 6: Jack Sparrow's occupational profile

For the majority of his occupational existence, Jack’s career had been ascendant, progressing steadily through a series of unrelated, but connected occupational roles, but this changed in the late 1990s when organisational challenges presented a more turbulent business environment for Jack, who found that he faced a situation where he was regarded as being ‘supernumerary’ as well as feeling uncomfortable in the role he had been forced into. Occupational choice and subsequent satisfaction are closely linked, although most individuals can adjust to a work environment which they would rather have not entered had they been given complete choice over the occupational decision they had to make. As a result of an organisational decision to shed numbers, Jack was declared to be ‘supernumerary’ and had to adjust his working practice to accommodate the revised role that he had been offered. In 2003, I experienced a similar situation which resulted in my leadership role being made redundant, but, as an alternative to redundancy, I was offered a new role at a reduced salary, a position that I accepted, but like Jack struggled to adjust to. Dawis and Lofquist define ‘work adjustment’ as:

‘[a] continuous and dynamic process by which a worker seeks to achieve and maintain correspondence with a work environment’

(1984, p. 237)

This definition infers a tension between the worker and their work environment, through which the worker is striving to maintain an equilibrium with the work to which they are adjusting. If the worker has not chosen the work environment to which they are required to adjust, then the process becomes more difficult and often unsustainable. Exploring our stories further, we both faced similar outcomes at different stages of our employment experience, ultimately leading to self-employed consulting and early retirement.

I will now examine those latter occupational transitions where Jack made a transition because a change had been, or was being, imposed on him; considering these transitions Jack gave the reason (interview comment) and responded (action) as shown, during a period of ambiguity and uncertainty in his occupational life:

INTERVIEW COMMENT

ACTION

Situation E: Made ‘supernumerary’ due to organisational changes:

‘During this time there were tremendous changes going on within DTI ...[who] had to shed numbers and I became supernumerary, partly my own fault and I had six months to nearly a year supernumerary running some of the old projects that I still had going and looking after the finances’

(Jack, p. 3)

Returned to CSU, following request from former boss.

Situation F: Seconded to standards institute due to organisational pressures:

‘there was pressure on all the budgets and some clever spark somewhere saw two technical advisors on the staff and suggested we could second them to BSI ...[where] they could work for both DTI & BSI’ and

‘It was like having two full time jobs... which has its own problems. That’s when I also started working from home, we had a desk if we wanted it in either place ... but trying to run two jobs, which had similarities was difficult’

(Jack, p. 3)

Transferred to British Standards Institute (BSI) – sideways move.

These occupational challenges were imposed on Jack by the government departments that he was working for and the organisational pressures that they faced to improve efficiency and reduce cost. In a continually changing world, all organisations, both private and public, find it necessary to adjust how they operate to optimise their resources and deliver those outcomes

(e.g. manufacturing products, financial services, public services) for which they have been established. Governments are no exception and here Jack is faced with the reality of being told that he was ‘surplus to requirement’ (situation E), a situation that he lived with for a time and ultimately survived by transferring back to his former government department, but this period was short lived, and, in a further government review, he is seconded to the British Standards Institute (situation F). During this period, he experiences a series of ‘ups and downs’, particularly in situation E, where he experienced what could be described as the ‘nadir’ of his occupational experience. It is not surprising that, when the opportunity arises, he seeks and, at the second attempt, accepts early retirement from Government service. Kelly notes, in contemporary economies, that:

‘changing economic structures of production and markets are encouraging corporations to buy out workers once considered in mid-career or even forcing them out of the paid workforce’

(1997, p. 165)

This practice of occupational exclusion has become a shared experience for many older workers in the latter part of the 20th and early 21st century since the emergence of globalisation and integrated economic systems. Many commercial and manufacturing organisations have, often in the name of production efficiency, sought and delivered business restructuring schemes which have resulted in organisational de-layering, downsizing and disruption. The anticipation of a ‘job for life’ has evaporated as international economics now determine the ways in which all organisations plan and implement their operational practice – the value of human well-being in organisational existence has become of lower importance than that of financial expediency.

What is surprising, in Jack’s situation, is that, whilst the government espouse the value of older workers and encourage businesses to retain them, the practice of government departments is often little different to those of their commercial counterparts. Whilst considering the government’s role in encouraging extended working lives, Vickerstaff et al (2008) also note that government ministries have encouraged workforce attrition and local government saves money by encouraging early retirement. From this acknowledgement, it seems that government practice and policy are often not aligned and that, when the need occurs, government practice leads to older workers being displaced.

An opportunity for flexible working

Jack was fortunate as his age allowed him to be considered for early retirement, the practice of relieving a person of their occupational responsibilities at an age earlier than that prescribed by

government legislation, namely state pension age (SPA); Jack, therefore, volunteered for ‘early retirement’:

Situation G: Volunteered for early retirement:

‘they were offering voluntary early retirement with enhancements, and three others, all from the same unit in the DTI, all managed to get early retirement in June 2004. I was turned down’ and

‘they did another call in early 2005 and I thought ‘oh’. I had long chats with my wife again of course because it impacted on her ...and I was really fed up working for government then and said “I’m going to try it again” and I got it’

(Jack, pp. 3-4)

Moved back to CSU/DTI – first attempt failed, but at second attempt...

Accepted early retirement and recruited by LGC as self-employed consultant.

It seems that Jack had chosen ‘early retirement’ in the sense that he had voluntarily opted for it, having decided that his current career experiences were not meeting his expectations and he was feeling negative about his continuing opportunities. For Jack, the decision was based on personal preference, an opportunity to disengage from a working experience that he found uncomfortable and difficult; his choice was taken as a result of self-interest, not as a consequence of any other circumstance such as forced disengagement, ill health or financial dependency. Many professional people choose early retirement – indeed over recent decades ‘early retirement’ for professionals and managers in the United Kingdom has become an ingrained expectation. Like Jack, I chose to take a pension at an earlier age; my choice had not been free, but imposed as a consequence of forced occupational disengagement. Whatever our reasons for taking ‘early retirement’ we both faced an opportunity to pursue other activities, but did we engage in a period of leisure activity and recreation, a typical impression of what retired people spend their time doing.

In a former age, when people had an opportunity to continue working until they reached the state retirement age, people generally did transition to a phase of their life which became disengaged from the workplace. However, in contemporary society, where larger numbers of workers accept ‘early retirement’, many older workers find that they have a variety of options when it comes to deciding what to do with their lives, including the opportunity to continue working in a variety of occupational patterns. In accepting ‘early retirement’, Jack had no thought for the future, he had no clear aspirations as to what he wanted to do and, having started on a retirement programme, reported that:

‘...whispers started to come down [suggesting that he would] ‘be setting up as a consultant, won’t you? (Jack, p. 4)

Having questioned ‘why’, he was advised that someone would need to do the work and it was suggested that he should work for a third party and so Jack found a very different occupational scenario emerging as a consultant working for an agency offering the DTI technical advice. After working in this role for nearly three years, Jack reported that:

Situation H: Developed portfolio working through networks:

‘I don’t know if it’s going to be renewed, I don’t know if it will be renewed with just bits or what hours. It could be 1st of April I’ve got no paid employment but who knows what will happen?’

(Jack, p. 4)

An opportunity to work flexibly as a self-employed consultant working within a European network of consumer interest groups.

In situation H, Jack is adapting to a style of working, ‘portfolio working’ that enabled him to accommodate a number of different assignments on a flexible self-employed basis, that he chose to fit in with his occupational preferences. Similarly, I have adapted to flexible working combining research scholarship with self-employed working as a ‘portfolio educator’ allowing an opportunity to continue working on a number of different business advisory and educational assignments. For both Jack and I, this has enabled us to pursue an occupational pathway allowing the freedom to choose how and when we work. This pattern of flexible working has been recognised as a potential route for the development and transition of the older worker (Platman, 2004) from permanent work to retirement. Her observation suggests that, although ‘portfolio working’ has frequently been considered as a route to flexible retirement, it has never become embedded in company or institutional retirement policies.

Jack engaged in flexible working and valued the freedoms it offered him to work on both paid and voluntary projects at a convenient time and place; I have also realised the potential of this form of flexible working through the business and educational assignments that I have engaged with, so why have so few workers had an opportunity to work in this way? One response to this question has been noted by Hirsch (2003) who makes the point that high-quality bridging employment from work to retirement tends to go to those who were in the best occupational positions before retirement. Bridging employment is defined by Alley and Crimmins as:

‘...labor force participation in older workers between their career jobs (e.g. jobs held 10 or more years) and complete labor force withdrawal in full retirement’

(2007, p. 19)

This form of occupational working is typified by transitional working patterns that enable workers to continue their occupational engagement in a less intensive way. Older professional workers hold a high level of specialist knowledge and technical capability which they can apply to any specialist assignment. Their knowledge and skills are transferable leaving them free to engage on flexible assignments under self-employed terms and conditions. The commissioning organisation procure the technical capabilities that they require at a competitive cost without the associated employment costs; although this approach appeals to the accountants on financial optimisation grounds, it does not take account of the administrative time and effort required to commission a series of outsourced working relationships. The benefits of this flexible approach to working enable the older worker to manage their transition from full time working to permanent occupational disengagement at a pace that matches their personal need for occupational continuity. From his experience, Jack indicated that he valued his new style of flexible working, but that he was uncertain as to where it might be taking him; when asked where he was in his occupational journey, Jack commented that he was:

‘coming to the end of a three year contract, I don’t know if it’s going to be renewed, I don’t know if it will be renewed with just bits or what hours. It could be 1st of April, I’ve got no paid employment but who knows what will happen? But in this period I got involved in other networks and I really got involved with the European consumer organisation that looks after the standardisation work from a consumers point of view and I’m doing more and more voluntary work for them’

(Jack, p. 4)

Jack’s occupational trajectory, recounted at the time of our narrative interview, suggests that his past occupational trajectory had influenced his future destiny to the degree that he had been enabled to transfer into a flexible working role that enabled him to continue working in a way that he found satisfying. In this last reflection Jack did indicate that, irrespective of what might happen in the future, he would be doing more voluntary work for the European consumer organisation that he had become involved with. Perhaps Jack has assembled/is assembling a programme of activity in early retirement that enables him to achieve what Kelly (1997) suggests is one of the motivators for retirees, that is ‘maintaining a sense of worth and even productivity is a central theme of satisfying retirement, even when the context of activity yielding such a self-definition shifts away from the workplace’ (p. 168). Jack appeared to embrace and value his continuing occupational engagement post early retirement.

A spiral of occupational experience

My exploration of Jack's employment trajectory led to a descriptive recollection of how he had encountered his occupational experiences; they were factual, functional and fairly mechanistic recollections of what he had experienced. Although, he had located his career experiences, his reflections were constrained in their expression of how he had responded to each of his significant career transitions – his emotions, feelings and evaluations. In preparing for our occupational interview, I asked Jack to plot the 'high and low' points of his occupational experience, as an initial activity to start his career exploration – this career plot is represented in his occupational profile in Figure 6 (p. 160). It shows the ascendant and descendant nature of his occupational trajectory over the duration of his occupational experience; a career plot gives the career actor, the person whose career is represented, an opportunity to visualise their career and plot a line that represents their occupational continuity. My idea for this visual representation of a career plot originated from the 'life line' technique that Cochran notes when introducing:

'...techniques for empowering narration ...[a technique that] sensitizes a person to past memories and provides a chronological outline of his or her life'

(1997, pp. 73-74)

I adapted this idea to focus on the occupational life of my research participants by asking them to create an occupational profile showing the 'highs and lows' of their occupational experience, which I used to explore their actions, feelings and thoughts about the different occupational moments that they had displayed. For Jack, this graphic representation (Figure 6) illustrates how he felt about his career in terms of 'satisfaction' (ascendant/positive or descendant/negative) and where he located his 'turning points', that is those stages in his career which resulted in a significant refocusing of his career direction, purpose and satisfaction. In his supporting documentation, completed in preparation for the occupational interview, Jack describes his career as a 'spiral' that is a curve that winds around a fixed point at varying distances from that point. This metaphor suggests that Jack sees his career centring on a core focus to which he continually returns despite the vagaries – ups and downs of occupational experience – that he encountered. In considering how individuals determine a new or different career focus, Sloan talks about:

'career decisions ...the term refers to any major self-initiated rearrangements of a person's involvements in the vocational domain ...[which he describes as] moments we usually recognize as significant and meaningful because they indicate a change of course, entail new challenges, and reverberate through other spheres of the person's life structure'

(1992, p. 168)

Within the parameters of this research, the term ‘life structure’ refers to a subset of an individual’s total life experience, namely the part that embraces their occupational existence. For Jack this includes all of the career activities, episodes and experiences that he describes and includes within his occupational narrative as told and recounted in his occupational interview transcript. In his recollections, Jack engaged in conversations about how he felt about specific episodes – turning points – in his career trajectory; these included the following interactions:

Focus	Exchange (From occupational transcript)	Interpretation
<p>Career high point</p>	<p>‘I think the highest point was probably working for CSU the first time ...that’s where I started to put into play everything I’d done, all my past experience from working in a workshop, running a workshop, running testing, drawing office, the procurement side; everything started to fit in’</p> <p>(Jack, p. 4)</p>	<p>Zenith of occupational trajectory, because it (a) built on previous experience, (b) provided clarity of purpose and (c) presented a sense of occupational coherence.</p>
<p>Career plateau</p>	<p>‘I think with the Prison Service there was a peak but it plateaued, it became very much the same and every job will do that but it didn’t have the same spark as working with the Consumer Safety Unit because you were dealing with everyday products and everyday problems and you never knew when someone would have a problem’</p> <p>(Jack, p. 5)</p>	<p>Middle position representing a comfortable, but non-challenging and lacking the excitement of the role that he held in the zenith of his occupational existence.</p>
<p>Career low point</p>	<p>‘Once I got made supernumerary the graph just plummets and that’s probably the absolute lowest point... sometimes there was nothing to do... and I was on full pay and it was basically a long time for just relaxing and really thinking through everything’</p> <p>(Jack, p. 5)</p>	<p>Nadir of occupational trajectory, because it (a) locates a sense of ‘wasting away’ and (b) ultimately concludes a perception of worthlessness.</p>

In these three interactions, Jack expressed his feelings and emotions regarding the situations that he described from a sense of meaningful involvement (his zenith) to that of meaningless

exclusion (his nadir). Here Jack told about those career episodes that really excited and frustrated him in his pursuance of occupational meaning, that is the desire to believe that his occupational being meant something and ideally within the sphere of his total life experience – his family, friends and life acquaintances. For Jack these turning points represented a significant time in his occupational continuum at which he faced challenges – to continue in the same direction or to change to an entirely new direction. Our expressions of how we feel at these significant moments are an insight into how we handle the highs and lows of life – our resilience, our determination and our ability to embrace occupational dilemmas, which create conflict and tension as we strive for occupational coherence and continuity. Sloan argues that there are three moments of interpretation at which we are required to respond to the occupational circumstances that we face; these are:

‘A first moment exposes the complexity of the practical situation in which a decision seems to be called for. A second moment unravels the role of the person’s life history and character structure in producing the decision dilemma and its particular meanings as well as imagined resolutions. A third moment initiates reflection on the sociohistorical, cultural, and ideological processes that intersect in the consciousness of the deciding subject’

(Sloan, 1992, pp. 168-169)

I will reflexively illustrate these moments by reference to an occupational circumstance that I faced, using Sloan’s framework as a model to make sense of the situation. In 2003, I was told that my role was being made redundant, but that there was a possibility of a redeployed role at a discounted salary. The first moment, therefore, was that I was faced with a complex situation – being made redundant or redeployed – and that a decision was required about what to do next. The second moment required me to consider all of my circumstances – age, family, location and work opportunities – to enable me to unravel my role. As a rational individual, I asked for some time to consider my options and explore the possibilities; when granted, my wife and I, together with our two younger children, took an impromptu short break to reflect on the possibilities. At the time, our decision dilemma was whether to accept the current employment offer or take an opportunity to move to an area which we had increasingly been attracted to; this presented us with an opportunity to consider meanings and resolutions – continued employment, albeit in a redeployed role, in our existing location/community or transition to a new community with its attendant uncertainties. We decided to review education, housing and employment options and tried, as far as we could, to gather as much local insight through dialogue with the local communities of the areas that we were interested in. Our interactions included conversations with a local tourist board officer, the couple who ran the hotel that we were staying at, a

waitress at a local cafe and a walkabout in which we discovered the relative numbers of estate agencies and recruitment centres.

Following our investigation, we concluded, that, although we were likely to meet or exceed our aspirations with regard to housing and education, employment was a significant hurdle, as the area we were interested in had very limited employment opportunities, its labour markets were relatively inactive and heavily dependent on local consumerism and the tourist trade, neither of which offered any employment opportunity for us in the short term or our children in the longer term. In the third moment, we reflected on the ‘sociohistorical, cultural, and ideological processes’ that impacted our consciousness. A strong sociological driver was, and remains, that my wife’s forebears originated from farming communities within the area, which no doubt also had a cultural impact on our contemplations; ideologically, we were drawn to the environmental ambience and lifestyle in a different area, distant from the commercial and social pressures of our existing domicile. Our deliberations and ultimate decision led us to postpone a geographical move and accept the available option of redeployment.

Sloan (1992) argued that his ‘three moments of interpretations’ (pp. 168-169) are an opportunity for a career actor to make sense of the occupational challenges that they face. In my analysis in the previous paragraphs, I have illustrated the practical application of Sloan’s model for sense making and suggest that it presents a set of lenses that an individual can adopt to evaluate the occupational challenges that they encounter in a career trajectory. Returning to Jack’s occupational challenges, similar career decision scenarios occur in his trajectory when he considers the move to the South East and his subsequent decision to stay there rather than move on to the Midlands for a continued role with the Prison Service. However, what stands out as a principal driver for Jack when making occupational decisions is his ideological stance; two examples at different stages – early/contemporary career – of his occupational journey include:

‘I was getting a little bit of conflict of working for MOD and being a Christian, even though I was on the non-warlike side, I guess having a very close friend in the Welsh Guards come back from the Falklands and seen what had happened must have affected me ...[and] I felt I could be more help to people rather than being on the other side of it where MOD is more destructive’

(Jack, p. 1-2)

‘I think, having had children and knowing the value of having your own children, I want to ensure that the products they use are safe, even if they misuse them ...Although I can’t do a lot, I can do a bit to help them [the parents] try and get justice and get products that have caused injury or could cause an accident out of the system’

(Jack, p. 9)

In both these examples, there are strong ideological influences that, in Sloan’s words, ‘intersect in the consciousness of the deciding subject’ (1992, p. 169) – Jack, the deciding subject, has a strong ideological position regarding the ethical context of the work that he is engaged in, which often influences his occupational choices. On face validity, that is the degree to which a model can be practically applied, Sloan’s framework, captures three of the decision elements – complexity, agency and consciousness – that an older worker is called upon to address when determining their occupational futurity. However, what about other considerations that impact on a professional worker’s occupational decisions such as obligation and dependency? Sloan’s model presents a lens which focuses on the domain of the inner self, that is their internal or cognitive decision making, but does not enable the older worker to take account of other significant factors, that is those external influences, or what I term contextual decision making. In this part of Jack’s occupational review, I have looked at some of his turning points and, through a process of researcher reflexion, explored the value of Sloan’s ‘three moments of interpretations’, as a tool for evaluating the occupational challenges faced by an older worker.

The impact of contextual influences

I suggested earlier that, when an older worker makes an occupational decision, they might, in addition to reflecting on their cognitive influences, and inner thoughts, also embrace those contextual influences that may impact on the decision/s they make. These influences which I will call ‘life obligations’ include any consideration, which in the course of a person’s life journey, may have an impact on how they respond to ‘life choice’, or, in the context of this research arena ‘occupational choice’; in particular, these ‘life obligations’ include, for the older worker, elderly care, financial dependency, health concerns and so on. Fundamentally, decisions about how and when older workers contract for work are affected by any one or more of these considerations, which are indirectly related to the occupational circumstances of the career player. From Jack’s occupational interview, a number of these ‘life obligations’ can be identified alongside his thoughts on how they might impact on his future occupational direction:

Obligation	Exchange (From occupational transcript)	Impact
Elderly care	<p>‘I’ve got three elderly parents, step-parents, I have got concerns there, not so much for their financial position but more for their health ...yeah that’s going to be the thing that impacts most in the future is the elderly’</p> <p>(Jack, p. 12)</p>	<p>His initial response suggested little impact, but, he then recognised that care for his elderly relatives may eventually impact on his occupational working.</p>

Financial dependency In response to, do your pension arrangements allow you to match your preferred pension option? ... ‘Yes is the simple answer’ No anticipated impact.

(Jack, p. 14)

The initial impression that Jack gives, is that, there are no ‘life obligations’ that will impact on his choice about how he works, but he then acknowledged the possibility that care for elderly parents/step-parents might become an issue. Vickerstaff et al report that:

‘...a minority of those between 45 and 65 find themselves as the ‘sandwich or pivot generation’, combining care for their own children with informal care for elderly parents’

(2008, p. 218)

This care can take a number of forms depending on the requirements of the elderly person being cared for; although Jack has had no actual requirement for ‘eldercare’ (American term for care of the elderly). To date, my (and my wife’s) experience includes financial management, house maintenance, health visits, meal preparation and occasional nursing care for a senior (nonagenarian) family member. With increasing longevity and reducing social finances to meet everyone’s need for care in their advanced years, more carers are going to be required to look after the increasing number of dependent family members in our ageing society. Baltes and Young observe that:

‘given the steady increase in the proportion of elderly, many of them needing daily assistance, it is likely that the number of working adults attempting to balance careers and eldercare responsibilities has also increased – a trend that is expected to continue to grow rapidly over the next decades’

(2007, p. 260)

There is little doubt that care for elderly relatives is becoming an increasing responsibility for all workers aged 50 – 65, so it is surprising that there is dissonance with Jack’s expressed beliefs on ethical considerations and his hesitancy in recognising that ‘eldercare’ may impact on his future occupational choice.

CHAPTER 7: MY RESEARCH FINDINGS: The nature of occupational emergence

In this chapter, I have searched my research texts – the original transcripts and the occupational artefacts (Appendix C) for meaning and located a number of shared themes that appear to be shared within most of my research collaborators’ occupational experience. These texts, totalling hundreds of pages of recollected memories, represent the occupational narratives of my research collaborators; they tell the story of 13 (including self as researcher) people, who embarked on and, in most cases, continue on an occupational voyage that has taken them through distinctive phases in their career journey. The chapter reflects on how each individual career evolved and illustrates the iterative processes – decision, re/orientation, incident, evaluation and emergence (drive) – that individuals make when re/cycling their career throughout the duration of their occupational existence. It is written as a celebration of the occupational lives of a group of professional practitioners who, having amassed approximately 400 years of occupational existence, now, as Whyte (2001) observes find themselves about to disembark having (nearly) arrived at their occupational destination.

In the preceding Chapters (5 – 6) I have explored the occupational stories of two of my research collaborators, Charles and Jack, considering their career journey over their working life. Although these two stories represent a fraction of the occupational memories that my research collaborators recollected during their reflective interviews, they presented a subset of data, a platform from which I could start to detect some potential themes or patterns. I chose these two occupational stories as both stories had completed their trajectory i.e. they had arrived at ‘retirement’, but in doing so their outcomes represented two very different positions. Charles had enjoyed a satisfied voluntary transition at the anticipated state retirement age of 65 that had evolved out of a successful ascendant career. Jack, however, had concluded his career in a forced transition, following a spiral of changing occupational roles, at an earlier retirement age in his late 50s; although satisfactory to that point, the manner of Jack’s transition to retirement was not expected.

Investigating these two occupational stories and my own (King, 2007), I started to search each text for some shared occupational themes. In my ‘first wave’ of identifying themes I examined each of these three occupational narratives and located events or episodes in their trajectory that embodied a significant incident within that person’s work experience and illustrated their occupational continuum – the main occupational incidents identified are shown in Table 5 (next page). Having located these, I categorised them by clustering to form distinct groups of occupational experience and labelled each cluster with the theme shown.

CHARLES' Story	JACK'S Story	MY Story	THEME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving articles located through family socialisation • Shared belief systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace entry under father's guidance • Ethical considerations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry enabled through opportunity • Disengaged from university studies 	Early career choice (ECC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progression through qualification • Performance and stardom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining skills and experience • Search for promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early studies and skill development • Opportunities for promotion resulting from company growth 	Professional development (PRD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly ascendant and progressive • Rational decisions to move between organisations • Partnering for success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switches between governmental and private agencies • Occupational profile illustrates • A spiral of experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initially ascendant and exciting • Re-established focus • Organisational turbulence led to changes in role 	Occupational evolution (OCE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New adventures and challenges • Limited reference other than continuation of practice and importance of charity work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made supernumerary • Voluntary early retirement • Flexible portfolio working • Elderly care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work adjustment following redeployment • Economic uncertainty • Developing an educational portfolio' 	Third-age challenges (TAC)

TABLE 5: Top down analysis of three occupational stories

In the 'second wave', I explored all twelve of my occupational narratives highlighting significant career incidents and reassembled them, through clustered association, to pinpoint three further themes. Having identified seven principal themes – early career choice (ECC), drivers of early adulthood (DEA), professional development (PRD), occupational evolution (OCE), middle adulthood challenges (MAC), third-age challenges (TAC) and workplace disengagement (WPD), I examined each of my occupational transcripts in depth by highlighting the script to locate examples of each of the themes, which I have analysed and critiqued in the remainder of this chapter.

T1 ECC: Early career choice – Identifying career possibilities

All of my respondents commenced their occupational reflections by telling me how they had chosen the occupation that they wished to pursue. Most of my research collaborators considered how they had made their choice – for many it was a combination of conversations with teachers (occasionally a career adviser), parents and other influential adults that had helped them make their initial choice. This is an approach that Roberts (1977) refers to as ‘opportunity structures’, that is the opportunities presented through the availability of jobs within the local labour market, or as a result of family experience and/or connection. My respondents, as young people, looked for guidance from those that they were closely associated with and started their first job as a consequence of:

- **Family guidance**, e.g. Jack who acknowledged that ‘when I left school and under my father’s guidance I went for an apprenticeship’ (Jack, p. 1)
- **Friends’ influence**, e.g. Diane who responded to suggestions from ‘friends who were on that course, which sounded really interesting, because it was a range of... business studies was actually quite new... it was also a degree course’ (Diane, p. 1)
- **School counselling**, e.g. George who noted ‘I couldn’t really make up my mind what I wanted to do so the part-time careers teacher suggested I do business studies because it was quite varied’ (George, p. 1)

Another respondent, Charles was articled to his uncle’s law practice, others waited until they had completed their degree courses (Anthony; John) and others trained as a teacher (Diane; Edward) before choosing a different career route. As a young man, and like George, I sought career guidance from my school and went to Loughborough University to study Chemical Engineering. However, like Diane and Edward, my chosen university studies did not turn out to be my preferred choice and, following departure from the university, I sought professional advice from a ‘vocational guidance unit’. Their primary recommendation was that I should consider a career in administration, not science which came out as my second preference. This revelation encouraged me to consider banking and insurance as possible career opportunities, but my choice was made as a result of my father’s connection with the personnel manager of a local insurance company and I was appointed a ‘professional trainee’. In many cases these early career choices appear to have been made as a result of family, friends, school or mere happenstance or coincidence, but are there other influences on early occupational choice?

The influence of ‘habitus’

Bourdieu (1984) suggests that we are brought up and live within different social fields that he calls our ‘habitus’ and which determine how we relate to the world. In professional life, this

‘habitus’ is formed by a practitioner’s disposition towards and participation in a field of professional practice, which, through subject specific knowledge and compliance to published codes of operation, construct an expected, even approved way of managing and presenting professional self. Burkitt suggests that an additional influence on occupational progression is:

‘...the cultural capital ...angles them in a biographical trajectory towards certain positions in the social structure, through education and work-place hierarchies, to jobs and social status’

(2008, p. 149)

My initial observation had been that my occupational decisions refracted the opportunities presented within my local employment market and connections, but I realised that I had, in a way similar to many of my research collaborators, based my early career choice on my ‘habitus’, what Burkitt refers to as ‘the cultural capital that people inherit from their family and educational background’ (2008, p. 149). This is illustrated by the following observations from two of my collaborator’s stories, William and James:

‘...conversations with my father went down the road of accountancy. He at that time worked for Courtaulds ...and he kindly took me to see the chief accountant for Courtaulds and we sat down and talked through what accountancy was all about and it sounded interesting to me so I took a decision not to go to university’

(William, p. 1)

‘I had a cousin who was very successful in accounting for Unilever, so that set me thinking about accountancy and through a contact of my father’s I had a couple of interviews with this particular firm’

(James, p. 1)

So ‘habitus’ or what, at the outset of a career, I prefer to call ‘opportunistic conditioning’, is a significant consideration for young people when determining their career options, but it is not always formed through family and local labour market conditions. For some, such as Mary, her early decisions emerged as a consequence of her educational endeavours and resulted from choices made towards the end of her degree studies:

‘and in my third year I made a choice that I would need to do something when I finished and I went ...and I got a place at the College of Law to do conversion ...to law’

(Mary, p. 1)

This approach to career choice is based on the realisation that we need to do something with our life, what I refer to as ‘occupational realisation’ – in this sense, ‘habitus’ is determined by a life stage consideration, what Sharf, in describing Super’s (1957) Life Stage Model, refers to as:

‘...the exploration stage [that] ranges from about 15 to 25 years of age. This stage includes the efforts that individuals make to get a better idea of occupational information, choose career alternatives, decide on occupations, and start to work. This stage includes three sub stages: crystallizing, specifying, and implementing’

(2006, p. 210)

In Mary’s story, she crystallised her thinking about career options in the early years of her degree studies and then specified them by deciding to go to the College of Law. Another example of ‘occupational realisation’ is in the story of James who formed his thinking at an earlier stage by deciding to take articles and go to college to study accountancy. These two occupational snapshots illustrate the diversity of early career choice and show how two professionals made their initial career choice through participation within the notion of ‘habitus’. Although indicative of some professionals’ experience, this is not true for others such as Edward, George and myself whose early career choices were more closely determined by occupational opportunism or what Burkitt (2008) suggests are based on workplace hierarchies or the opportunities created within the occupational environment that the individual finds them self-working within. Having opted out of higher education, I entered commercial practice, based on familial connections, initially as a professional trainee, but this was replaced by occupational decisions that I made, as a consequence of emerging workplace opportunities, enabling me to move into a new career space helping organisational colleagues develop their career trajectories. However, some people enter a career by coincidence with no element of design or even opportunism. Earlier, I referred to happenstance, or what is sometimes called coincidence, in which the individual has no clear idea of what career to take up. Martin illustrates this approach to occupational choice in his story when he noted that:

‘I got here by happenstance ...I was never any good with my hands and, so it had to be something with my head, but I wasn’t academically inclined ...[and] I finished up finding my own job, as it were, in an office. And by sheer good fortune – I worked for a firm of wholesale grocers – and the guy who was chief accountant at the time I owe a great debt to, because he said ‘why don’t you go to night school’ to do O Level bookkeeping ...and I found I’d got a talent for accounting’

(Martin, p. 1)

Here a young man, with no idea of what career to choose and inadequate career guidance, initially going his own way, but with the intervention of a senior colleague, discovers a talent which ultimately located his career direction. Early occupational choice was, for the majority of my research collaborators, a fluctuating mixture of habitus, happenstance and opportunism, distinctive to the individual making their early career choice. Although occupational

opportunism or conditioning is a determinant of career choice, was it the primary bases on which my collaborators, as young people, decided which professional career path to follow?

Different styles of occupational decision-making

In the occupational stories of my research collaborators, I detected different approaches to early career choice ranging from a determined focus to a laissez-faire response – in his story, Charles had clearly identified law as his chosen route, whilst Jack responded to the occupational influences that he encountered. In his discussion on career decision-making, Arnold suggests a categorisation of the intensity of a person’s occupational choice from decided to habitually undecided when he notes that:

‘a three-way distinction much used by some career counsellors is that between people who are already decided about what they want to do vs. those who are currently undecided vs. those who are habitually undecided’

(1997, p. 115)

This observation suggests three distinct decision-making frames, but does not differentiate between their styles of decision-making. Arnold extends his discussion to acknowledge the work of Phillips et al (1985) when he identifies the following occupational decision-making styles, which I have embraced to locate the styles of my research respondents:

STYLE	DESCRIPTION (Arnold, 1997, p. 116)	TYPICAL OF
Rational	‘The person weighs up information carefully, accepts responsibility for decision-making, and anticipates consequences of previous decisions’	Charles, Ann, John, William, James
Intuitive	‘There is heavy reliance on attention to feelings and on fantasy and imagination. Responsibility is accepted for decision-making, which is often based on ‘gut feeling’	Mary, George, Self , Diane, Martin
Dependent	‘Other people or random events are seen as responsible and capable of acting in either a benign or malevolent way. The person tends to be passive and compliant, heavily influenced by the expectations of others’	Anthony, Jack, Edward

This model presents a way of looking at how an individual makes their occupational choices both at the outset and throughout the duration of their career trajectory – it is indicative, but not

conclusive about how an individual determines their career trajectory. In my experience, I responded to ‘gut feelings’ that is what seemed right at the time, more imagination than fantasy, but nevertheless an emotional response to my occupational challenges, as exemplified by the following career choices, recorded in my autobiographic narrative (King, 2007):

- Transition from life clerk to training assistant – my supervisor and two managers encouraged me to attend the interview, after which I concluded that I should attend.
- Application for role of client services director – my extensive absence from home (involving frequent travel) strongly influenced me to seek a role with limited travel.
- Transfer to different employee benefit consultancy – this resulted from a corporate takeover and, not valuing the management team style, I looked for a new appointment.
- Disengagement from workplace through redundancy – following repeated ‘nil responses’ from workplace applications, I opted for further postgraduate studies as this reflected my imagination to become a part-time lecturer during my third-age.

From my own occupational decisions, outlined above, I can clearly see the value of Arnold’s framework for conceptualising career decision-making styles, but how has this model manifested itself in the occupational lives of my research respondents?

Illustrations of different decision-making styles

The rationale behind the occupational decisions made by my research collaborators are unique to each individual, but include a number of examples of the different occupational decision-making styles identified. To illustrate, I have located one example for each of the three decision-making styles promulgated by Arnold (1997) and reflected on the implications for the person concerned. Following a highly successful career as a property consultant, and, having been appointed a partner, John resigned without another job and, interestingly, without advising his wife of his intentions. At a turbulent time in the commercial property market, he decided that:

‘I really felt that I needed to make a more significant change ...I was in a position to do something different, try and use my skills in a different way, and so I did make the decision to make a real break ...to do something which wasn’t just commercially based ...and I suppose I associated that with the idea of working for some form of not-for-profit organisation, probably a charity’

(John, p. 5)

Initially his decision may have appeared ‘intuitive’ but, in fact, he had carefully weighed up the market conditions, his financial commitments and viability, his likelihood of continuing employment, and, most importantly for him, the criticality of his perceived occupational value. Despite the turbulent conditions in the property market, he persevered and, after several months,

was appointed as the property director for a charity providing accommodation for people with visual impairment. His belief regarding personal value and preferred decision-making style had facilitated a satisfying occupational transference, for which he had taken full responsibility. This example, from John's occupational life, presents an example of 'rational' decision-making, based on a systematic analysis of the considerations – market conditions, skill sets, financial obligations and personal values – that he faced during this depressed property market.

In her portfolio career, Mary had founded her occupational decisions on what she felt right for the circumstances in which she found herself. Early in her career, she realised that she needed to do something after graduation and 'got a place at the College of Law to do conversion ...to law' (Mary, p. 1). So she made a career choice which, after further study, led to a career as a solicitor – at this early stage in her career, this decision appears 'rational', but exploring Mary's occupational trajectory, there are examples of 'intuitive' decisions emerging, for example when she migrated between the UK and Africa, initially to be with her partner, and then to reflect her needs as a mother of two children when she noted that 'I had a gap with small children, which was partly in Africa and partly in the UK' (Mary, p. 2). Her career journey is then determined by the choices that she makes as she strives to balance the responsibilities of parenthood and the need to work to generate income. Later in her career, having successfully raised her family, built her own legal practice and merged it with a local firm of solicitors, she advised that:

'at the same time as merging here, I did actually start an MA in Religion and Human Rights ...and I am trying to find myself ways of changing direction so that I can hopefully in the next couple of years, or maybe even sooner ...find an alternative route'

(Mary, p. 4)

In her occupational story Mary tells of a journey which reflected her needs for relationship, family life, financial reward, work enrichment and a quest for developing a new career direction to satisfy her occupational aspirations. Throughout, Mary's story illustrates her attention to feelings and imagination as she continually morphed her occupational existence to reflect her ever changing lifestyle and occupational preferences; there are many examples of occupational choices that she made as a result of her intuition or gut feeling.

Finally we look at a life that has been 'dependent' on the influences and/or expectations of others; in his story Anthony told of a career journey frequently buffeted by the intervention of others who caused him to change direction along different pathways. Rarely chosen by Anthony, these circumstances – company fragmentation (p. 2), industrial fickleness (p. 8), professional dissatisfaction (p. 3) and organisational underperformance (pp. 7 and 10) – resulted in redundancy, role demotion and sideways transfers. In between each appointment within this multitude of organisational roles, Anthony engaged with contract and temporary assignments. His expectations were nearly always, as Arnold suggests, determined by 'other people or

random events [that] are seen as responsible and capable of acting in either a benign or malevolent way' (1997, p. 116). Indeed, Anthony recognises the impact of these continually changing occupational demands when he made the following observation:

'...it's quite interesting really, because looking at my past, in the beginning a lot of my personal satisfaction would come through work. And I suppose frustration as well. So if things were going well at work I would be happy and if things were not going well then I would be down on that'

(Anthony, p. 15)

In his story, Anthony's degree of occupational satisfaction was heavily influenced by how well things were going at work and often determined by others. Both within and without his narrative interview Anthony spoke of his aspiration to transfer out of accountancy into another occupation, possibly 'human resources ...or teaching' (p. 11), but he never took the steps necessary to acquire the required skills. His career decision-making style is dependent on others' expectations and the consequences of organisational change and turbulence. This section has considered the relevance of personal decision-making style to occupational choice at the outset and through the duration of a person's occupational trajectory, but what are the primary determinants of a professional's early career choices?

The determinants of career choice

Career choice is determined by what Bourdieu (1984) describes as 'habitus' which is dependent on the social communities that we are part of and determine how we relate to our occupational world. In my collaborators' stories I observed two primary occupational determinants, namely 'opportunistic conditioning' and 'occupational realisation'. The first determinant suggests that a person is influenced by the occupational opportunities presented by family/community connection and local labour market conditions as originally proposed by Roberts (1977). The second supports the notion that an individual will make an occupational choice on realising that life, at least for most, necessitates some form of income which is procured through occupational participation – an exploratory transition, as recognised by Super (1957) in his 'Life Stage Model'.

Whilst 'habitus' is a primary determinant in early career choice, Burkitt's (2008) concept of 'cultural capital' underpins the emerging trajectory of my collaborators as, through education and occupational structures, they progressed through different professional roles to senior positions with the social status attaching to such appointments. The occupational circumstances within which a professional starts and continues their career journey clearly influenced their occupational choices, and the roles/positions that they are appointed to. Arnold's (1997)

consideration of career decision-making located a different perspective from which to interpret my research collaborators' preferred decision-making styles and illuminated the notion that a person's feelings can also be a legitimate contribution to their occupational choices: a psychological expression or response to the multitude of occupational influences on an individual in the workplace. Early career decisions are the foundation of a professional's future occupational presence and are unique to each individual as they seek to make sense of the world of work at the outset of their career trajectory.

T2 DEA: Drivers of early adulthood – Engaging life adventures

Making an occupational choice to set out on a professional career is the first step in a vocational journey that will last a significant number of years and embrace many twists and turns that are unknown at the outset. As Whyte observes, for most it is 'a hidden journey, a secret code, deciphered in fits and starts' (2001, p. 8), a navigation that will remain unclear until it expires and becomes an occupational memory, potentially lost unless reconstructed, and, as Whyte (2001) suggests, a journey that can only be decoded once it becomes reality. What can we learn about the early career drivers of a professional seeking to establish them self in their chosen career, at a stage in their occupational formation when most are still questioning their commitment to an occupational existence that will extend through the duration of their working life?

Most professionals, but in the 1960/70s (when my research collaborators commenced their careers) not all, spent their early years studying at university; others acquired their professional status through articulated training, a form of professional apprenticeship involving practice and examination. All of the professionals that I interviewed spent the early years of their occupational life studying for and achieving accreditation in their chosen profession. As previously reviewed, their final occupational choice came either before, during or, in some cases, after their first main period of professional study. In their consideration of occupational choice, Levinson et al note that young people do not make a definite occupational commitment on entering the world of work, as is often assumed, and that:

'...the sequence [of occupational choosing] is longer and more difficult ...it is far more useful to speak of forming an occupation, a complex, social-psychological process that extends over the entire novice phase and often beyond'

(1978, p. 101)

They also note that 'even when the first choice seems to be very definite, it usually turns out to represent a preliminary definition of interests and values' (Levinson et al, 1978, p. 101), which

suggests that the process of actually committing to an occupation will probably take several twists and turns and may take a number of years. The transition from adolescence to early adulthood is characterised by a number of developmental tasks which, in addition to those associated with human maturation – autonomy from parents, gender identity and relationship exploration – include career choice and work. Having looked at the first step of occupational choice, I extend my discussion to look at the phase of occupational building – establishing the foundations and constructing the infrastructure of an individual’s chosen occupation. What are the career drivers that steer a professional in the early years of their career during the life stage often referred to as early/young adulthood or entering the adult world (Levinson et al, 1978; Newman and Newman, 1995)? What were the interests and aspirations of my research collaborators during this phase of their occupational emergence?

Forging occupational foundations

As Sugarman (2001) records ‘the period of early adulthood can witness considerable career advancement, especially for those entering the professions’ (p. 60). For any professional this period may seem conflicting, with emerging demands on personal and private life, and, for those in a relationship, the need to negotiate a, sometimes delicate, balance between family and work expectations. Whilst the potential rewards – advancement, financial, promotion and status – are available to individuals willing to engage with their new occupational environment (Sugarman, 2001), the reality can be demanding in terms of time, emotions and sometimes relationships. So what were the experiences of my research collaborators?

The overall expectation for a person at this stage in their occupational development is to achieve professional recognition and the associated benefits of such a position. Young people have a strong sense of self belief and a drive to continually explore their occupational options in pursuit of their dream of vocational success. A number of my collaborators illustrated this drive for achievement with a definite quest for status, commonly assumed to be partnership within many business consultancies, particularly accountancy and legal practices; this is illustrated in the stories of Charles and John:

‘I started bringing in quite a lot of work and ...they decided it was probably cheaper to make me a partner, so I became a partner at a fairly early age’

(Charles, p. 2)

Charles accomplished an early progression to partnership, his anticipated achievement, but, as demonstrated in his story, this was not to endure and as he ‘didn’t feel that the firm was looking sufficiently commercial ...ultimately I looked around at what I might do’ (Charles, p. 2) and he consequently moved to another practice where he was appointed a partner within a year of

joining. Throughout Charles' story, he displays 'determinism' where he appears constantly in charge of his occupational evolution, locating the next step that he had to take. To a degree, this is replicated in the story of John, a property surveyor, who, whilst enjoying his work, 'decided that I needed to do something a bit more on the agency side' (John, p. 2) to gain complementary experience. John had a clear sense of Sugarman's (2001) observation of 'considerable career advancement' (p. 60):

'if you are really going to hit the very peak of the profession, you tend to get promotion fairly quickly ...and I didn't achieve promotion ...that I might have hoped for ...that was a setback in my career'

(John, p. 2)

Despite his initial frustration, John moved to another firm which 'put me as head of a team, it was a new environment where I felt I could make a fresh start ...[and] things went well and after only about a year I got promoted to partner' (John, p. 3). Both Charles' and John's stories illustrate vocational attainment within a professional partnership, but what about professionals in organisations governed in other ways? In her story, Diane 'realised that I needed to gain more experience and so I moved to another company' (Diane, p. 2); this conclusion appears to be an early trigger in the emergence of an individual's occupational evolution, that is the realisation that to progress a young professional needs to gain complementary occupational experience. Whilst this experience can often be gained within a professional partnership where promotion to partner is a recognition of professional attainment and not constrained by the number of roles available, this is not so in limited companies where traditionally advancement is dependent on a restricted number of roles within the workplace hierarchy. George recognised this several times during his early occupational emergence:

'I then realised that working for one company wasn't necessarily the right strategy and as I really couldn't get any further upwards I started looking around ...[and later on] I got itchy feet because again my way up was blocked and decided that I would like to be a personnel manager by the age of 30'

(George, p. 1)

Having established my chosen career in organisational learning, like George I decided that I intended to be a training manager by the age of 30 and this strongly influenced my early career decisions – new company, searching for development opportunities, eagerness to learn and willingness to travel extensively – all in the pursuit of my aspiration to be a manager. Whether explicitly located or implicitly inferred through actions, it seems that goal achievement – the aspiration to succeed, often by appointment to a recognised organisational role, is a primary occupational driver for many young adults in professional organisations. Other than George, the

only research collaborator to mention age was James who, in considering his career development options, commented that:

‘I was just over 30 at that stage and, generally speaking, I think after the sort of age of 28 to 32 age bracket, it was then quite difficult to move, mainly because of pay’

(James, p. 4)

This extract from James’ story, locates the idea of an ‘upper limit’ to the occupational transition of a young adult professional worker, but 32 is probably a little early and the norm is anticipated by critical authors (Super, 1980; Newman and Newman, 1995, Sugarman, 2001) on life stage development to be around the age of 40. However, during the age 35-45 period, individuals may recommit to pursuing their original vocational goals or make a decision to change, as demonstrated by those individuals whose case studies are explored by Ibarra (2003) in her study of professionals reinventing their career, so perhaps James was right in his assertion. The occupational stories that I have referred to so far in this section present a positive image of career progression and illustrate what Dalton et al (1977) describe as the four stages in the development of a professional career ‘apprentice, colleague, mentor and sponsor’ (p. 23) – this model suggests that a professional moves progressively through the four stages achieving sponsor status, which is full partnership in most professional firms; this model of professional advancement remained relevant up to the 1990s, but has faded with the emergence of the notion of the protean career. Dalton et als’ (1977) blueprint is represented visually by Gergen (1999) as a ‘happily-ever-after’ narrative (N_1 in Figure 7) which suggests a progressive occupational profile continually in the ascendant and providing the career actor with a satisfying (positive) occupational experience throughout the duration of their occupational trajectory:

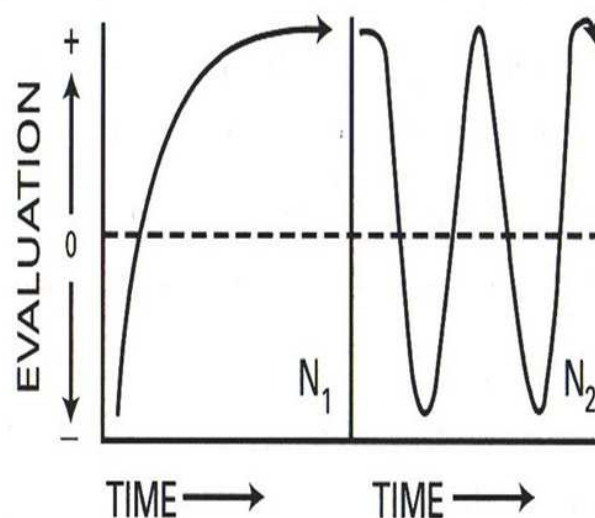


FIGURE 7: Narrative 'Happily-ever-after' and 'Heroic saga' profiles (Gergen, 1999)

In contrast the 'heroic saga' narrative (N₂ in Figure 7) suggests a regressive occupational profile providing the career actor with a fluctuating experience varying between a satisfying (positive) and frustrating (negative) occupational trajectory. This alternative occupational profile is representative of the career experiences of a large number of workers, including several of my research collaborators who encountered alternative pathways, blockages and other setbacks that hindered or diverted their occupational emergence. So what were the occupational realities affecting some of my research collaborators? When analysed they divided into two categories – firstly the realisation of personal choice and secondly the need to adapt to organisational change.

Engaging with individual realisation

Whilst some professionals achieve their occupational ambitions, others are less successful and encounter setbacks which limit their occupational progress. 'Work provides people with a sense of purpose, challenges, self-fulfilment and development, as well as the essential income to enable them to participate in other spheres of life' (Baruch, 2004, p. 39), but what if that choice of work fails to deliver its anticipated opportunities and benefits? In Edward's story he disclosed that his first occupational choice proved to be the wrong one and that he eventually realised that it was not for him:

'...the first job, which I shouldn't ignore, the first sales job, I didn't perform well in that ...it finally dawned on me that sales was not for me and it took a while to permeate'

(Edward, pp. 1 and 3)

Edward's experience is typical of many young people, who struggle to locate the right job that matches their occupational interests, as acknowledged by Levinson (1978) who commented that 'a young man [sic] may struggle for several years to sort out his multiple interests, to discover what occupations, if any, might serve as a vehicle for living out his interests, and to commit himself to a particular line of work' (p. 101). For Edward, his realisation meant a change in occupational direction into organisational learning which continues to be the vocational space he occupies. However, whilst Edward made a choice and discovered that it did not suit him, Anthony struggled to make a first choice, not really knowing what he wanted to do:

'So at the end of three years I passed all my professional exams apart from the finals, but I was no further forward really, either professionally or knowing what I wanted to do with my life'

(Anthony, p. 2)

In his early adulthood Anthony displayed uncertainty about what he wanted to do and, from our interview and subsequent conversations, he remains a 'dependent' decision maker relying on the

expectations and influences of others to help him decide which occupational route to take. From his early working experience, Anthony displayed a career challenge, what Peterson et al describe as:

‘...a career problem: a gap between an existing state of indecision and a more desired state. The gap creates a cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1964) that becomes the primary motivational source driving the problem-solving process.’

(2002, p. 315)

Anthony’s occupational profile shows a wide variation of roles and degree of job satisfaction and he continues to question his occupational domicile, often wondering whether he should change occupation and, if so, in which direction? His career challenges remain focused around this ‘cognitive dissonance’ as he continues to question the gap between his current occupational role and his desired, but as yet undefined, occupational aspiration. Whilst Edward and Anthony experienced changes in their occupational direction, others made choices dependent on their values and belief systems; as noted by Brown (2006) values are ‘beliefs that are experienced by the individual as standards regarding how he or she should function’ (p. 42). For Mary, it was based on her life values during early adulthood and orientated to settling down and building a relationship with her husband:

‘I then got married to my partner and was out of work ...out of work for three, three and a half, four years. Because he was still working in Africa’

(Mary, p. 2)

Looking at his values from an ethical perspective, Jack felt that, working in the defence industry, his work was in conflict with his personal beliefs:

‘I was leaving MOD because I was getting a little bit of conflict working for MOD and being a Christian’

(Jack, p. 1)

For another collaborator, Diane, it was an issue of work value – she realised her preference for working in an organisation where she was enabled to execute her work with light touch control by her manager:

‘I do tend to be somebody who likes to just be told ‘do this’ and get on and do it myself, so I don’t particularly like being micro-managed’

(Diane, p. 3)

These values, whether life, ethical or work centred, indicate some of the motives that young adults might engage with: what is the main focus of my life? ...do I approve of the primary

purpose of my occupational role? ...and how do I prefer to work? For a young person seeking occupational stability, it is important that they are in alignment with their:

- Life purpose – what is important for them in terms of the key relationships, that they wish to establish, sustain and see flourish.
- Ethical beliefs – whether their organisation’s primary objectives are in conflict with their personal beliefs.
- Work preferences – if they are working in a way which complements their capabilities and preferred ways of working.

These narrative extracts explicitly highlight the importance of values, but I believe that most, if not all, of my research collaborators were driven by value-based motives. At this stage in my career emergence, I occupied a role, as training adviser, that I found creatively satisfying. My beliefs did not conflict with the organisation’s purposes, provision of employee pension benefits; in fact they endorsed my view that everyone should be making financial plans for their disengagement from the workplace, a contested concept in contemporary society and one dependent on economic underpinning. Rokeach (1973) defines a value as:

‘...an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct’ (p. 5)

At the time that a young adult makes their initial value-based decision it is an ‘enduring belief’ that forms a foundation on which they have started to construct their career, albeit that the belief, as explained, may not actually endure throughout their occupational trajectory. Rokeach (1973) argues that values are a benchmark by which we evaluate our behaviours and those organisational behaviours prescribed in our place of work. However, as a result of contextual challenges, values may change and the important thing is the authenticity of the belief held at the time that the occupational choice or decision is made. Values are an important determinant of career choice and development at all ages throughout a person’s occupational span.

Adapting to organisational turbulence

Other drivers for early career adaptation were associated with organisational triggers resulting from workplace turbulence, a frequent experience within contemporary business. Blustein, in considering the notion of a career contract, notes that:

‘...workers and employers generally held onto a view of a psychological contract that defined and structured a stable and predictable relationship ...[and] represents the overt and covert expectations that exist between worker and employer’

(2006, p. 46)

This anticipation created a sense of organisational belonging and commitment, a reciprocal arrangement that benefited both the individual and the organisation, of which they were a member. The notion survived until the early years of the information era, the period within which my research collaborators were seeking to consolidate their vocational experiences and construct a foundation from which to promote their ongoing careers. Although most of my research collaborators were able to ground their careers on a sound foundation, a few were not – Martin encountered problems because of the difficulties facing the manufacturing sector:

‘I needed to seek out promotion, and the only way to do that was to leave ...at the time Sheffield was closing down, that was when all the steelworks were going and all the heavy engineering was going and there was nothing about’

(Martin, p. 2)

His experiences were due to organisational blockages linked mainly to the demise of manufacturing industry within his local labour market. However, although significant changes were taking place in this industrial sector, they were not confined to it as emerging information technology and commercial conditions combined to create a global market within which the pace of organisational change accelerated at an increasing rate. In the professional markets of the late 20th century, a new awareness dawned on businesses seeking to be competitive in the national and transnational markets of the imminent 21st century; that is the realisation that they needed to strengthen their capabilities and develop new ones if they were to compete and sustain a viable organisation to grow through the new century. In this race for survival they strived for a distinctive brand, enhanced capabilities, efficient operations and optimised finances – this combination of organisational aspirations resulted in a significant increase in the pace of change in professional service organisations. In Ann’s organisation this resulted in a cull of the partners on the reported grounds of cost efficiency and led to her outplacement, but her fear derived from what others might think rather than the act of organisational disengagement:

‘My biggest fear was having been a partner and being selected for redundancy that everyone’s going to think ‘well, the only reason you get redundancy is because you’re no good at your job’

(Ann, p. 2)

In her story Ann focused on her fear of others’ perceptions as being her main concern and ultimately her primary driver in determining her next career step, which manifested in the form of a sole proprietorship, starting her own business – an opportunity to prove her self-worth and be valued for the work that she did rather than the status that she held within her former employer’s organisation. However, she also presented a glimpse of the political circumstances which oversaw her displacement from organisational life – partners made redundant included all female partners; if she were to find herself being made redundant today, it is unlikely that her

experience would be similar to those resulting in her displacement. In her explanation of how she handled the situation, Ann advised that:

‘...we went quietly because if you’ve got, at that time, 40 male partners against ...two female partners, you weren’t gonna get to win [a vote]’

(Ann, p. 2)

Ann and her colleague’s reactions were to accept the situation without protest, an acquiescent response to a career changing proposition, situated within a framework of gendered behaviour. Although contemporary employment law would mitigate against this type of discriminatory action, there remains the possibility that informal networks could close ranks and exclude women from organisational positions, as recognised by Wajcman who notes that ‘[in organisations] formal and hierarchical relations of power and authority coexist with informal networks and patterns of behaviour’ (1998, p. 41) and that informal processes can counter against women’s occupational advancement. From Ann’s account, it appeared that she and her colleague sensed the power of the informal network within the conventionality of the partnership authority; it could be said that they succumbed to discriminatory behaviour resulting in gendered exclusion, although the partnership would probably have argued that men were also made redundant and they were, therefore, not selecting against Ann and her female colleague. The issue of gendered exclusion remains a sensitive political issue in many organisations, whose equal opportunities policies aim to enhance rather than hinder women’s career progression.

Another person to start his own business was William, who disillusioned by his experience as an investment consultant within an organisation that had been taken over by a larger national banking institution, made the following career decision:

‘[lack of investment] gave me a jaundice about large companies and being controlled by them without a lot of ability to influence, so not being someone that wanted to sit on my hands I decided rather than going and taking a job ...with large organisations I was going to go and set my own business up’

(William, pp. 2-3)

In his attempts to understand what was going on in his organisation, William came to a clear decision based on what he had observed about the way in which large organisations work. Feldman (1989) suggests that individuals attempt to make sense of their organisational environments and that it is necessary for ‘organizational members to understand and share understandings about such features of the organization as what it is about, what it does well and poorly, what the problems it faces are, and how it should resolve them’ (p.19). The outcome of this interpretative process is often that people work together to resolve the organisational

problems that they face, but, an alternative outcome is that the individual decides to take a different route, as did William in deciding to set up his own business. Towards the end of the ‘young adulthood’ phase of my life transition, I worked for an organisation that was taken over by an international broking firm; for three months after the acquisition, I deliberated on what the new organisation was seeking to achieve and how it intended to do this, but concluded that I did not want to be part of it and opted to take a job with a competitor. Efforts to understand the organisations that we work for often lead a person to question their intentions and their role within those plans; as a consequence young adults sometimes decide, as William and I did, to make a change in our career directions and move into new occupational endeavours.

Early occupational motives

For all professionals in business consulting, a primary career driver is the requirement to achieve technical accreditation in the form of the mandatory professional qualification. This requirement precludes all other working aspirations since without the qualification they cannot practise and will not benefit from the rewards – credibility, financial and status – associated with membership of the profession. In his work on ‘professional knowledge and learning’, Eraut (1994) observes that professional occupations require a combination of different forms of preparation, including:

‘...a period of pupillage or internship ...enrolment in a ‘professional college’ ...a qualifying examination ...a period of relevant study ...and the collection of evidence of practical competence’

(p. 6)

In response to being asked to tell me about their trajectory, all of my research collaborators started with the same two topics – how they made their early career choice and how they acquired their professional qualification. Although it is critical, a young professional’s aspiration to succeed may also be underpinned by the opinions, aspirations or motivations of another in a significant relationship, e.g. in the case of James who, when considering an alternative career, acknowledged that ‘[his] dear wife said don’t be so stupid, get upstairs and keep studying’ (James, p. 1). As noted by Levinson et al (1978) the process of forming an occupation is a complicated set of development tasks that the young professional has to assimilate to succeed.

Another occupational driver is the desire for recognition; having gained professional qualification the young adult is looking for development and advancement. Stories told within my research collaborators’ occupational narratives identified the perceived importance of promotion and the attendant benefits achieved – this topic is the focus of my third theme which

is considered next. This stage of occupational life also starts to decipher/unravel the satisfying nature of emergent career as represented by Gergen (1999) in his ‘progressive’ and ‘regressive’ profiles illustrated in Figure 7. Beyond qualification and advancement, the main drivers of occupational motive at this stage in a young professional’s transition are personal realisation regarding the authenticity of their original occupational choice and occupational adaptation consequent on the impact of organisational turbulence in the form of restructuring, refinancing or even outplacement. This section has asked ‘what are the occupational drivers of young professionals’ and identified four principal occupational motives – qualification, advancement, realisation and adaptation – taking, as a given, that each individual’s actual drivers were forged and negotiated within the parameters of human maturation typical for young adults within this phase of their life span.

T3 PRD: Professional development – Attaining professional status

During the ‘young adult’ stage of life transition, most young professionals are, in addition to establishing a relationship and possibly a family, also acquiring professional credentials in the form of qualifications and accreditations. This is driven by the desire to be appropriately authorised to conduct business in their chosen discipline, as noted by Maister who observed:

‘...traditional definitions of professionalism are filled with references to status, educational attainments, “noble” callings, and things like the right of practitioners to autonomy – the privilege of practicing free of direction’

(1997, p. 18)

Although these characteristics are integral to the role of a professional practitioner, the primary objective of the ‘young adult’ seeking recognition is to pass their examinations and achieve their qualification, giving them the right to practise. In his analysis of professional knowledge, Eraut (1994) proposes that there are three central features of a professional organisation:

- A specialist knowledge-base that legitimises the ‘knowledge’ and limits its access to competent (qualified) practitioners.
- Autonomy resulting in increased accountability whilst securing operating freedoms.
- Service that infers action is required to reflect a specified client need.

These features of professional organisations suggest a defined set of requirements that characterise professional business and their operatives, but has their membership of such a body influenced my research collaborators’ choice and development of an occupational pathway? One of the selection requirements for my research collaborators was that they had a

qualification authorising them to specialise in their chosen profession and so one of the areas that I directed them to in their occupational interview was the impact of their professional membership on their evolving career. From their narrative recollections, I have identified three areas of insight, namely professional allegiance, relationships and service.

Exploring professional allegiance

As a prerequisite of professional practice, the main platform on which a professional assumes their legitimacy is their membership of a specialist professional body. This membership is their licence to practise and without it they are devoid of all the professional freedoms associated with their chosen occupation. In contemporary discourses, professionalism is often seen to be a way for individuals to improve occupational status and rewards and for organisations to strengthen their managerial control (Evetts, 2011). So what allegiance did my research collaborators believe they had? Expecting to elucidate a disposition toward the professional body, I was surprised to discover that some believed that they owed their primary allegiance to their clients, as located in the following occupational narrative extracts:

‘I think I owe it to my clients ...a lot of us are, I would say, well we have to belong to it. You know, we have no choice. So ... and it hasn’t really influenced what I do at all’

(Mary, pp. 8 and 9)

‘In terms of professional allegiance I suppose actually it’s primarily owed to the client. So actually I would put the client first, firm, then the Law Society’

(Charles, p. 8)

‘I respect them for the professional body they are and the ethics that they stand for but I think my loyalty is with my clients’

(Ann, p. 6)

These three collaborators were definitive in their belief that clients were at the forefront of their professional focus, but, as hinted at by Mary, others negated their response by reflecting on their obligation to be a member in order to practice. In the narratives of Ann and John, there is an acknowledgement of the importance of professional membership whilst minimising its influence on their occupational evolution:

‘...everything I do is governed by whatever their [the professional institution’s] regulations are. So it’s really as a monitoring type of thing rather than how it’s influenced what I’ve done’

(Ann, p. 6)

‘I wouldn’t say allegiance to the professional body... I mean, yes, the actual qualification is quite important. But no, I mean, I wouldn’t see that as the allegiance’

(John, p. 10)

Ann and John did not consider their membership of a professional organisation as being the overriding factor in their professional identity, but suggested that it was necessary as standard compliance or quality assurance for their professional activities. In her response Ann recognised the plurality of her position by acknowledging that her allegiance is owed to both her clients and the professional institution providing her regulatory oversight. The theme of labelling the expert body as a regulating authority was picked up by George, who pointed to his professional body’s role as the custodian or keeper of the standards that reinforce the professional’s right to a distinctive occupational profile:

‘...professional allegiance probably the institute ...because they are ...almost the keeper of the quality, the professional nature, the skills and experience of what I do’

(George, p. 14)

From my research, there seems to be no clear answer to the question ‘to whom does a professional owe their allegiance?’ Whilst some collaborators emphasised the importance of their clients, others recognised the role performed by their professional body. This should not be surprising as it acknowledges the early commentary of Harries-Jenkins who observed that:

‘...as a professional, he [sic] participates in two distinct, irreconcilable systems. He is a member of two institutions – the profession and the organization. Each of these attempts to control his occupational activities, and the manner in which the former establishes standards and norms for the conduct of professional activities, contrasts with the way in which the latter specifies task objectives, and controls the means whereby these objectives are realized’

(1970, p. 53)

In this citation the phrase ‘he’ (sic) should be taken with gender plurality in contemporary business. The dissonance and conflict that professional membership may infer, as recognised by Harries-Jenkins (1970), was also identified in the stories of Edward and Martin, who locate the dual mandate of professional membership:

‘I think it is a bit of both ...I’m paid by my company so there is a professional allegiance to them, to help them achieve their corporate objectives ...I don’t feel the allegiance to [my professional institution] but rather the professionalism that they spearhead’

(Edward, p. 10)

‘...you have professional integrity to both the firm and the institute’

(Martin, p. 14)

Interestingly, Edward referred to the professionalism that he felt his professional body initiated and pioneered rather than the membership itself; this professionalism is the foundation of a professional's credibility and the distinctiveness that they offer. If the professional body instils this sense of professionalism then both the practitioner and their organisation can benefit, provided they also share their solution design and development abilities with other professionals within the organisation. Quinn et al (1996), in their discourse on the importance of 'managing professional intellect', suggest that optimising a professional's creativity will enhance that individual's ability to extend their organisation's professional capabilities, but caution 'the tendency of each profession to regard itself as an elite with special values may get in the way of cross-disciplinary sharing' (p. 75). Whilst this act of professionalism is unique to the practitioner delivering a particular service, its intent, in an organisational context, is to deliver appropriate solutions to satisfy their clients' business needs. In acknowledging the value of professional membership, William also noted the dilution of professional accreditations within his business context:

'...the problem that we have in the world of financial advice is that the recognition of qualifications is not as high as it should be'

(William, p. 11)

William's insight has possibly arisen as a consequence of the plethora of technical accreditations available to nascent professionals and the reluctance of established professionals to share their knowledge with others holding qualifications in a different specialism (Quinn et al, 1996). So, according to my collaborators, professional allegiance is a diverse notion reaching out to the anticipatory requirements of clients and to the regulatory role of the profession.

The sustainability of service

In his identification of the features of a profession, Eraut (1994) also notes 'service' as being the responsibility of a professional to act and deliver a solution that satisfies a client's specified need. True service is a combination of product quality and delivery – as Maister recognises:

'...because of the ambiguity that surrounds technical excellence (and the difficulty the client has in appraising it), the personal relationship between the client and the provider takes on great significance in all of the professions'

(1993, p. 71)

In her narrative Mary remarked on this responsibility by highlighting 'looking after clients' as being her primary responsibility:

‘I would still call myself an old fashioned professional. I think doing the ... looking after your clients is the primary objective of anything we do. And I know I have to make money, but actually it’s secondary for me’

‘You know, it might have been in the past, I don’t know, my parents’ generation, they were your trusted advisers and things. You’re not now ...you’re just someone who does a service, which is fine. That’s what you’re doing, you are doing a service’

(Mary, pp. 9 and 10)

Whilst noting the importance of what Maister (1993) refers to as ‘the personal relationship between the client and the provider’ (p. 71), Mary also reminded of the need for pecuniary returns, but concluded that, at least for her, the client relationship was the most important. Maintaining a sound relationship with your client is the foundation for securing future business, assuming that the primary requirement of the client, a cost effective technical solution, is also delivered. The commercial advantages of what Mary referred to in her narrative regarding trust and service are reported by Maister et al who comment that:

‘...a trusted advisor benefits from having trusted relationships because they lead to repeat business from the same client. These relationships also lead to new business through referrals from existing clients’

(2002, p. 14)

All of the professionals that I interviewed would agree with the criticality and importance of the client relationship whether delivering service to external or internal clients. However, in his recollections, Charles drew a note of caution concerning general professional standards:

‘I think the standard of solicitors in the profession has dropped enormously and I think as a consequence of that there are now so many rules which are there in substitute for what would otherwise have been regarded as a sort of professional attitude ...clearly there’s been a dilution of the average standard, which has resulted in all this regulation coming out’

(Charles, p. 9)

He reported his belief that, at least in his profession (legal), more regulation is emerging as a consequence of what he sees as ‘a dilution of the average standard’ – codification is increasing because of deteriorating common sense regarding professional attitudes and diminishing trust in the term ‘professional’. Charles’ reflection on what he has detected has led to what Hansen et al (1999) term ‘reuse economics’ (p. 109) in which knowledge management is focused on the codification of frequently used knowledge assets. This approach to value creation is improving the processing of knowledge for commoditised services, but reducing the application of and need for professional expertise, a position of concern for senior professionals whose articulation

of their chosen profession has been at the forefront of their service relationships throughout their career. However, at the other end of the continuum, Hansen et al (1999) also suggest that the term ‘expert economics’ involves delivering customised solutions to specific client problems and resulting in higher fees with associated higher profit margins. This latter profile is that experienced by and anticipated for senior professionals with high capability and experience in delivering client solutions.

Influence on occupational progression

One of my questions in the narrative interview was ‘how has your membership of a professional institution influenced your career progression?’ If membership is to be perceived as valuable, then it must, I contend, be seen to be adding value to a professional’s occupational progress through their chosen profession. So what, if any, value did my research collaborators gain from their professional membership? Again their responses vacillated between ‘very useful’, as acknowledged by William who believed it had been a significant influence:

‘I think it has been a major influence ...when I joined ...I went as an accountant, albeit on the investment side. When I moved over to the advice side, whether it’s in management or in sales as I am now, it is an incredibly powerful factor that you understand accountancy’

(William, p. 10)

...through a continuum of perceived usefulness – the following extracts indicate the fluctuating perception of three of my research collaborators regarding their professional membership from ‘partially useful’ (George), to ‘hardly useful’ (James) and ‘of no use’ (Jack):

‘I’m still on the committee as a membership adviser ...it was partly instrumental in getting this new career stream in tutoring’

(George, p. 14)

‘...it’s given me the badge, it’s given me the passport, other than that I have to say hardly at all really’

(James, p. 11)

‘I don’t think it has. The only way I use it now is when I get into expert witness work ...it gives me more kudos, credence’

(Jack, p. 10)

It seems that my collaborators held a wide range of views regarding the value of their professional membership in terms of their career advancement – according to their expressed views, there is no apparent relationship between being a member of a professional institute and its influence on occupational progression. The concluding response is that the value of professional membership is unique to the individual holding that membership, but without the required accreditation, no individual would have been appointed to membership of their chosen profession. Therefore, their progression was influenced by professional membership, at least at the outset of their chosen career, and through professional socialisation – a continuing process whereby an individual acquires a professional identity and learns the norms, values and behaviour appropriate to the professional appointment that they hold. In his discussion on this topic, Page found that:

‘...graduates have not only obtained technical skills but have also changed their values and how they think. The professional socialisation means they think like, look like and have values of their respective profession’

(2005, p. 113)

This suggests that membership of a professional body does influence occupational progression simply through the process of being immersed within the profession through the socialisation processes whereby the professional acquires the capabilities to become a competent member of that profession. However, it seems that my research collaborators did not realise the occupational value of their membership after they had achieved professional status and commenced their occupational transformation.

The importance of professional recognition

In this section, I have looked at the contribution that membership of a professional body has made to the occupational emergence and progression of my research collaborators. Whilst there is no question regarding the necessity of attaining the required accreditation to practise, there are varying conclusions regarding the perceived value of such membership. The diverse nature of professional allegiance, as expressed by my research collaborators, partially supports the premise of Harries-Jenkins (1970) that a professional is a member of two institutions – their professional institution and employing organisation; it also extends it by embracing the client as a third element in this triad of professional obligations. The process of acquiring the required special knowledge allows the professional access to the register of competent (qualified) practitioners. Whilst believing service is a key feature of a sustainable client relationship, several of my respondents commented on the changing nature of that service relationship from trusted adviser to service provider and the consequential outcomes of reduced trust, diluted

professionalism and the risk of weakened autonomy. As noted by Eraut (1994), ‘autonomy’ is one of the features of professional practice, and, according to Maister (1997):

‘...one of the most salient psychological characteristics of those who choose professional careers is a strong need for autonomy. People choose professions (rather than, say, corporate careers) *because* the work is not routine or rigidly structured’

(p. 291, *italics original*)

Some of my research collaborators indicated in their narratives that their autonomy – the operating freedom within which they conduct their business – is gradually changing, a phenomena reported by Evetts (2011), as business, society and the public adjust their understanding of what constitutes professional practice. Whilst professional socialisation determines the way in which a practitioner achieves occupational entry and practises, at least initially, my research contributors held differing views about the influence of their professional membership on their occupational progression, ranging from a ‘major influence’ (William) to ‘of no use’ (Jack). This suggests that professional membership is seen to be a regulatory requirement to meet corporate compliance requirements rather than being of personal value to the practising professional in supporting their occupational development.

T4 OCE: Occupational evolution – Tracking occupational direction

When briefing my research collaborators, I asked them to plot an occupational profile that located their principal career episodes on a time line from the time they started work to the current time and at varying positions on the time line to show their relative occupational satisfaction – ascendant (high satisfaction) and descendant (low satisfaction). In his review of how to compose a life history Cochran (1997) describes a technique for preparing a life line, noting that it ‘sensitizes a person to past memories and provides a chronological outline of his or her life’ (p. 74). This was the inspiration for my approach to helping my research collaborators visualise their occupational progression; other writers refer to similar techniques for visualising occupational emergence – lifeline (Amundson, 2003), life-space mapping (Spangar, 2006) and life portrait (Savickas, 2011). My intention in using this approach was to facilitate my research collaborators’ career reflection skills and enable them to think lucidly about what they had done during their occupational trajectory.

As an illustration of this approach, Jack’s occupational profile (Figure 6) shows the fluctuating nature of his career progression, with different events/episodes labelled green (satisfactory +), amber (neutral satisfaction +/-) and red (non-satisfactory -). In this illustrative profile, Jack expressed the general ascendant nature of his occupational progression, but highlighted a

significant turning point when he took on a research role and expressed the view that he ‘felt supernumerary’ (Jack, p. 5), as illustrated by the dip/descent in his occupational dissatisfaction.

The value of occupational plotting

Although a few asked about its relevance, most completed this activity and understood that it gave them a framework or lens through which they could reflect on their working pathway through the preceding decades of their occupational life. These occupational plots were a secondary tool to the main narrative interview and were completed freehand allowing each research participant to draw their progression, thereby visualising the form of their career in terms of their satisfaction within each phase of their occupational progression. This process was subjective, not rigorously prepared or enforced in methodological terms, but nevertheless one that highlighted the variant nature of the occupational trajectories of my research collaborators.

In my occupational profile (King, 2007), I recollected some of the principal turning points in my occupational emergence – two satisfying events involving promotion and advancement and two non-satisfying events resulting in redundancy as a consequence of organisational restructuring. My profile shows greater variation over the duration of my career trajectory with more highs and lows, similar to the diagrammatic form of Gergen’s (1999) ‘heroic saga’ regressive profile (Figure 7). I found the process of preparing my occupational profile helped me to reflect on what had been the main episodes within my career, how I had perceived them in terms of satisfactory experiences and what their relevance had been in terms of coherence – Savickas notes that:

‘...through continued narration the stories increasingly fit together ...coherence forms as links join and hold together’

(2011, p. 40)

In my narrative, I detected a unifying plot to my occupational progression – as I continually re-focused and re-interpreted my story, I appreciated that ‘business education’ had been the consistent theme that pervaded my occupational evolution. This was highlighted by a degree of consistency between the different elements of my occupational story and it generated a sense of shared meaning within my narrative construction.

Whilst people have a preference to aspire to the ascendant nature of the progressive career, many will experience a regressive profile (Gergen, 1999) resulting in a continually changing profile of ‘high and low’ occupational experiences. Within a career life-time these experiences combine to form an experiential cluster of occupational incidents which typify the evolutionary style of a professional’s occupational emergence. I revisited my occupational narratives to detect the meta-narrative apparent in some of the stories – Charles’ continually ascendant

progression, John’s impulsive decision for a late career change and Anthony’s frequently dependent career choices. Whilst analysing my data I repeatedly returned to these meta-narratives that seemed to be ‘bubbling’ just under the surface of my collaborators’ stories and wondered whether there was any way that I could classify the nature of their occupational emergence and the processes by which they had sustained their career progression. Through an iterative process of reading, listening and interpreting my collaborators’ narratives, I identified two variables, ‘transformation’ – the degree to which my collaborator’s occupational status (professional standing) had changed over the duration of their emergence and ‘mobility’ the degree to which their occupational class (societal division) had moved over the duration of their trajectory, as shown in Figure 8:



FIGURE 8: Occupational evolution matrix

This involved deeper interrogation of three occupational narratives (Charles, John and Anthony) and continual reclassification of the evolutionary styles that my collaborators had adopted to sustain their occupational progression, leading to a framework of evolutionary styles that I designated the ‘occupational evolution matrix’ (Figure 8).

Sustaining occupational evolution

I discovered that each collaborator seemed to display characteristics for a preferred style of occupational evolution. In my search for meaning, I deduced a matrix (Figure 8) that locates four quadrants (Q), each describing a different state of occupational evolution that is a style that typifies how a professional sustains their occupational emergence. In ‘Q1– Renovation’, the

main occupational activity is about ‘surviving’ or renovating career position within roles of equal or reduced status – a person in this state will continually reinvent their career to maintain an occupational existence and remain in employment. As they will take any job to satisfy their need for employment, their transformation is low and so is their mobility for, in terms of societal recognition, they have maintained an occupational status, but not enhanced it to achieve greater recognition in terms of status or position. In his occupational narrative, Anthony told of his chequered work pattern moving between permanent and contract agency work, often resulting from organisational restructuring which culminated in his outplacement; in his occupational interview, Anthony recounted:

‘So I was over 40 at this time ...because I’d been made redundant three times in the profession ...and the market had changed as well ...you couldn’t just walk into an employment agency and get it [a new job] ...I would either go in a completely new direction or modify where I am’
(pp. 7 and 16)

Throughout his career trajectory Anthony juggled with different roles in different organisations and seemed content to do any job that employed his professional capabilities and enabled him to pay his financial commitments. He expressed continual dissatisfaction with his employer’s operational processes and reflected a lot on alternative roles that he might be interested in, mentioning teaching on several occasions. Although he stayed within one major organisation, Jack also experienced changing roles with no significant advancement in terms of seniority or occupational recognition. The other characteristic held by these two collaborators was, as noted earlier, that they were dependent on others when they made occupational decisions.

Moving laterally to ‘Q2–Migration’, I locate individuals who have progressed in their occupational advancement by migrating to other organisations, but have not attained high status or recognition. A person in this occupational state will often experience ‘morphing’ from one appointment to another in order to gain more professional autonomy, but no advancement in career progression or status. If a person’s overriding occupational experience is migration, then they will relocate from one role to another in order to achieve deeper professional opportunities providing intrinsic motivational opportunities, not extrinsic promotional benefits. These intrinsic opportunities provide them with a working environment in which they can apply their professional skills and maintain an optimum amount of authority/responsibility, whilst allowing them opportunities to balance their work and personal life. Diane changed jobs to progress her career and secure greater professional freedoms – she notes this in the following extract when discussing her reasons for leaving her first job:

‘...it was a conscious decision that I had to leave to progress my career, because you can’t stay in the same industry for ever’

(Diane, p. 6)

She acknowledged that she made this decision despite being content in her first job, but perhaps another occupational driver for Diane had been her responsibilities for her second daughter who required specialist educational and health services; she noted that it was important to know that she was going to be supported and allowed time off to look after her daughter. Another collaborator who made few job changes was Edward who, whilst enjoying his employment, moved to gain greater autonomy after the organisation he was working for was taken over by an international consulting firm. Edward told of his personal interest in drama and opera involving him in two or three productions a year and, for a period, he was chair of his operatic society. His participation in these external activities necessitated a significant amount of personal time allocation outside of his occupational sphere. Perhaps individuals whose primary occupational evolution is migrational (sic) are satisfied with the occupational freedoms that enable them to accommodate dedicated life activities outside of their employment, and are not dependent on or aspire to occupational mobility that allows them to transform their roles to achieve high standing/recognition within their professional life space.

Ascending to ‘Q3–Realisation’, an occupational domain where individuals have aspired to and attained occupational recognition in the form of ‘position/authority’ and/or ‘status/rewards’. In this zone they have progressively moved up within one organisation, or to another organisation, which appointed them to a position of corporate status achieved through determined ambition. In his essay ‘Of Ambition’ Bacon recognises that:

‘...he that seeketh to be eminent amongst able men, hath a great task [and that] honor hath three things in it: the vantage ground to do good [philanthropy]; the approach to kings and principal persons [influence]; and the raising of a man’s own fortunes [wealth]’

(1960b, p. 149)

Transformation in this zone delivers benefits enabling the holder to manage and control their occupational position, since they will, almost exclusively, hold a high position within their organisation, e.g. director, partner, head of department or senior manager, enabling them to do good, exercise authority and receive pecuniary benefit. In his occupational progression, Charles constantly looked for the next position that would give him advancement and/or status:

‘...when you’re training your ambition is obviously to qualify ...and then when you join a firm you realise instantly that being an assistant is fine, but being one of the bosses, one of the partners, is better. So you want to become a partner ...that was certainly my ambition’

(Charles, p. 1)

James also had aspirations to succeed and was appointed to senior management positions within a global banking corporation requiring him to travel to different international offices; for him the driver seemed to be corporate recognition for diligent performance wherever he was required, in London or another continental location. He told of the time when ‘just over 30’ he reflected on his future career development and promotion opportunities and decided that he was not going to be appointed a partner; later in his narrative he commented:

‘I’m not a high flyer by any means, I am just, I’m a finance guy, but even so, opportunities have been presented to me and I’ve generally said yes to those and so maybe the last episode is a question of opportunities being presented and accepting those opportunities and running with them, making whatever you can with them.’

(James, p. 10)

James accepted that he would not achieve the highest position, but that what he really enjoyed was numbers ‘[as] I’m a bit of a bead counter’ (James, p. 10). His varied assignments involved internal audits, sales preparation and regional accounting, which required him to travel to different company locations – in his story he recounted the satisfaction gained from working with global colleagues and the delights of international travel. His story is rich in description of the different assignments he worked on, the people he met and the places he visited; he realised his occupational achievements through the recognition bestowed on him by his senior managers and the opportunities to execute ‘high level’ accounting assignments at international locations. James also acknowledged the impact his travelling had on his family – ‘so my street cred at home went down even further because I’d previously said to my wife that I wouldn’t be travelling’ (James, p. 6).

In my narrative, I recognised this hindrance to stable family relationships as I also travelled frequently on international assignments, but not for such long periods as James. However, like James, I did not achieve the highest positions, plateauing at non-board director in one company and associate, the level below partner, in another organisation. At one stage in my occupational life, I would have described my evolutionary style as ‘Q3–Realisation’ since I had achieved most of my career aspirations to my highest level of opportunity. This zone probably represents the one that most young professionals anticipate when they set out on their occupational journey, aspiring to professional recognition and status. The key difference between Q2 and Q3 is that those in Q3 have achieved an occupational status that is recognised outside of their employing company and one that fulfils their professional capabilities, whilst those in Q2 may only have achieved a level that satisfies their quest for professional recognition.

Moving laterally to ‘Q4–Innovation’, I position individuals who have re-engineered their role to create an opportunity to do something different i.e. they have taken their existing role and recomposed self to innovate a new occupational being, but one often reflecting their former

capabilities. My original thinking for this matrix derived from three of my occupational texts, one of which introduced a very different dimension to occupational transition. Having aspired to and achieved high organisational office – he was a partner in a firm of property surveyors – John decided to resign and look for a new role; he explained his reasons:

‘I was seen as one of the leading people within my particular field, but I was ...feeling slightly back into the rut that I had been in before ... and then ...we could see the market taking another real hit ...and I decided then that I really felt that I needed to make a more significant change’

(John, p. 5)

Building on his aim to ‘make use of his property skills’, John looked for a different role that ‘wasn’t just commercially based’ (John, p. 5) and found a charity that required him to manage their property portfolio. This role embraced his business background and appealed to his altruistic intent – a value that John appreciated after many decades of commercial endeavour; in this example his primary evolutionary style is ‘Q4–Innovation’.

Mapping collaborator profiles

In Figure 8, I introduced the ‘occupational evolution matrix’ that identifies the principal way in which a career actor has sustained their occupational emergence to the present time. In this process of interpretation I located each of my research collaborators and mapped them into one of the four matrix quadrants, as shown in Figure 9:

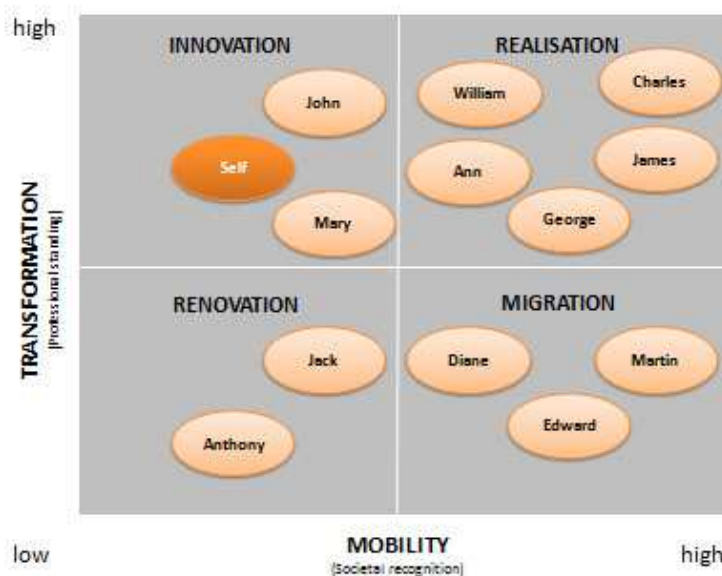


FIGURE 9: Occupational evolution profile map

This map locates the primary ‘occupational evolutionary style’ for each collaborator during their career emergence; the location is based on my interpretation of their primary style as identified in their occupational narrative. This prototype model is based on subjective observations of the different ways in which my collaborators have steered their professional evolution – from a career that has been continually ‘recycled’ to one that has been progressively ‘actualised’. I acknowledge that this model is not validated and requires further research to verify the authenticity and cogency of what it proposes.

My collaborators’ narratives are constructed around their working experiences encountered over decades of occupational endurance and professional constitution. In Jack’s story, explored in Chapter 6, he frequently responded to the opportunities presented and, accordingly, experienced a ‘regressive’ career continually reinventing his career (Q1–Renovation). In contrast, Charles’ story, investigated in Chapter 5, illustrated a trajectory in which he determinedly pursued a ‘progressive’ career and attained his aspirations (Q3–Realisation). In the second part of his interview Charles disclosed a range of different endeavours including, lecturing, advising European governments and delivering a ‘call-in’ clinic; although he seemed more enthusiastic when talking about these activities, he never found an opportunity to break away from his primary occupational existence.

Through her story, Mary continually explored occupational possibilities to match her family commitments and lifestyle and, in her narrative, told of her ideas for her future occupational existence, having commenced an MA postgraduate study programme in ‘Religion and Human Rights’:

‘I’m still at the questioning stage, but it’s quite interesting. Because I started doing that and I got involved in the Chamber of Commerce much more ...I find myself doing an awful lot more things outside of my little work sphere or my little home sphere’

(Mary, p. 10)

Mary was exploring alternative occupational routes, which might take her in new directions to match her emergent interests. In his reflexive consideration Ravn (1991) asks ‘if we are not forced to reproduce the given social reality, what alternative realities should we try to construct?’ (p. 97). Having been a solicitor, her given professional reality, what alternative realities might Mary have composed? At this stage in her occupational story, Mary is uncertain, but, sensitive to the possibilities that might emerge; her opportunities were dependent on her ability to innovate and incubate her imagined possibilities (Q4–Innovation). In her narrative, Diane relocated jobs to accommodate her family commitments and her story exemplifies many people who adjust their working environment to adapt to personal circumstances (Q2–Migration). In response to his own question, Ravn (1991) notes that:

‘...fulfilment in life derives not so much from possessing the abstract freedom to do *any number* of things as from doing *some* things (and, of course, feeling free doing them)’

(p. 97, *italics original*)

The stories (Q2–Migration) of Diane and Edward, who enjoyed a significant interest in operatic drama, demonstrate styles of occupational evolution where the individual concerned migrates their occupational existence to a new workplace to satisfy personal commitments and/or interests, allowing them freedom to balance their work-life obligations. To distinguish the degree of change within a person’s career, Ibarra comments that:

‘...the difference between a job change and a career reinvention lies in a depth of personal transformation that is largely invisible to an outside observer’

(2003, p. 81)

This observation outlines the contrariety between Q4 and Qs1-3, and highlights the principal differentiator of ‘Q4–Innovation’ that is the intensity of the transformation that has incurred and the process by which the career actor has retuned their occupational purpose. I have included an autobiographic representation of self, what I believe is now my primary style of occupational evolution. As previously explained, I would have positioned my evolutionary style as being in ‘Q3–Realisation’, but since my reorientation in the early years of the 21st century I now locate myself in ‘Q4–Innovation’. I believe that, since deciding to become a ‘portfolio educator’, my main aim has been to innovate and remodel my occupational purpose. Having decided to develop an academic pathway, I have adjusted my working practices to accommodate the requirements of an academic ‘portfolio career’; this adaptation gradually took place in a way described by Ibarra:

‘New competencies and points of view take shape as we act and, as those around us react, help us narrow the gap between the imagined possible selves that exist only in our minds and the ‘real’ alternatives that can be known only in the doing’

(2003, p. 58)

This has resulted in a deep transformation of my main occupational purpose for, although I had comprehensive experience of teaching in commercial organisations, I needed to adjust to align my professional practice to the requirements and standards of higher education, especially regarding the practice of academic assessment. Savickas (2011) recognised that:

‘...although individuals talk their own selves into existence, they need more than language to construct a self. People need experiences on which to reflect, particularly interpersonal experiences, because a self is built from the outside in, not from the inside out’

(p. 17)

Whilst I have participated in different teaching, assessment and writing assignments thereby transforming my occupational purpose, my role has not mobilised in terms of societal recognition since people do not understand the term ‘portfolio educator’ or what I actually do; in fact most people think that I am retired i.e. economically inactive, and I sense that my professional identity is now masked, concealed from public understanding.

Styles of occupational evolution

Conversing with my research collaborators, I heard about their ‘ups and downs’, the variations in their occupational trajectories and, in some cases, saw these represented visually in an occupational plot/profile. Whilst interpreting their occupational life-line, a continuum of occupational space extending from the past to the present, I observed many deflections in their trajectories, each particular to the person experiencing the career. There were no shared themes emerging, as a career, by nature of its exclusivity, remains unique and reserved for the actor whose vocation it has been and will continue to be. However, whilst the career emerging has been unique to each collaborator, I detected an underlying pattern of occupational styles surfacing to explain the process through which their career had emerged, as summarised:

STYLE (Q)	DESCRIPTION	OCCUPATIONAL FUNCTION
Q1 RENOVATION	The state of restoring or reinventing occupational existence.	Renovating occupational position within roles of equal or reduced status to remain in employment (Surviving – circular movement).
Q2 MIGRATION	The state of relocating occupational domicile or residency.	Migrating between occupational contexts in the same or similar occupational zones (Morphing – lateral movement)
Q3 REALISATION	The state of actualising or attaining a higher occupational form.	Realising occupational position through attainment to a higher position (Succeeding – ascendant movement).
STYLE (Q)	DESCRIPTION	OCCUPATIONAL FUNCTION
Q4 INNOVATION	The state of converting or transforming into a different occupational form.	Innovating to a new or different occupational form which reflects values and/or obligations (Elevating – uplifting movement).

These ‘occupational evolution’ styles symbolise four ways in which a professional practitioner’s occupational trajectory may emerge; each style typifies a different way in which my

collaborators' occupational trajectories had evolved. After several decades of occupational experience, I contend that a professional life will transpire in one of these four ways and that, in the closing phase of their trajectory, a professional will continue their occupational progression through one of these four 'occupational evolution' styles.

T5 MAC: Middle adulthood challenges – Sustaining career purpose

Middle adulthood is a stage of life in which we conserve our past and imagine our future, a period of reflexivity offering scope for an improved existence or one strangled by the mishaps of the past? According to Hamilton middle age is:

‘a kind of psychological and conceptual blank, by which I mean not that there is not much said on it, but that what is said on it is said in the face of the natural tendency of middle age to resist articulation and clarification; it does not naturally offer itself for our investigation’

(2009, p. 24)

Whilst appearing abstruse, middle age represents a bridge between the optimism of youth and the certainty of old age, a period of transition bound in the experiences of the past, but unrestricted from future expectations. It is a season of life that implicates corporeal degeneration with a corresponding degradation of mental agility or, as Hamilton positions it, an ‘eclipse [of] the consciousness of the world’ (2009, p. 11). In terms of life-stage theory, middle adulthood is, according to some authors (Levinson et al, 1978; Super, 1980; Colarusso and Nemiroff, 1985), a period spanning circa years 40 to 65 of a person’s life cycle. However, although defined chronologically, it is often a stage of life uncharted and unexplored in terms of a working practitioner’s actual occupational experiences. This section looks at the middle adulthood or mid-life transitions of my collaborators; it is a study of a life-stage in which Hollis suggests:

‘...the realistic thinking of midlife has as its necessary goal the righting of a balance, the restoration of the person to a humble but dignified relationship to the universe’

(1993, p. 22)

Restoring the balance requires an individual to reflect on and assess the impact of their occupational history and engage with those experiences to sustain an orderly, but sometimes splintered, occupational progression through to workplace disengagement, whenever that may occur. For some, an early departure could extend their available temporality for reconnecting self to the community of humankind; this opportunity applies to everyone who experiences a fragmented, non-linear occupational progression, increasingly men as well as women who find themselves excluded from the labour market due to economic disruption. In our occupational

conversations my collaborators reflected on their careers up to and including the early years of this life stage, and, in some cases, for the majority of their middle adulthood. Following a review of their narratives, I discovered four sub themes emerging – occupational endeavour, workplace harmony, new pathways and complementary life challenges – which located the primary concerns that my collaborators held at this stage of their professional lives.

Sustaining occupational endeavour

As individuals continue into the middle passage of their life evolution, they start to reflect on what they have achieved and, for those in ‘professional’ employment, to ask the midlife question ‘what do I want to do for the remainder of my occupational existence?’ This question directs them to engage again with the issues of self and identity and to refocus on their vocational aspirations – their choice is to remain in their existing occupation or switch to a new one. According to Super (1990) there are three sub stages – holding, updating and innovating – that an individual needs to sustain if they are to maintain their career during the mid-life stage of their occupational evolution; additionally, if they opt for a new occupational direction, they will need to recycle through the stages of exploration and establishment to locate, engage with and consolidate a new occupational role. For all of my collaborators their primary intent, certainly at the beginning of this life stage was to hold on to what they had already achieved; for most this meant holding onto their current occupational role, but, for those running their own businesses it meant that they hoped to continue to run their businesses profitably and to be able to sell it on as a viable business concern, as noted in the stories of Ann, George and William:

‘I think probably if I had any [aspirations] it would be to grow the practice sufficiently so that when I did decide to retire it would be a sellable product for somebody and that would protect the jobs of the people who work for me at the moment’

(Ann, p. 9)

‘...what I’d quite like to do is build up a business that I could sell that has some kind of product, that has some kind of intellectual property maybe as part of retirement funding ...You’ve worked for 40 years and what have you got to show for it?’

(George, pp. 14-15)

‘selling ABC or creating an environment where someone can buy it off us is therefore a key ingredient, and therefore creating value in the business, i.e. a portfolio that people would like to own, but also ensuring that the clients that I have ...will have that advice and assistance from people who I think will provide them with an ethical and quality service’

(William, p. 13)

Creating and sustaining value was the main objective of all three professionals, but two of them, Ann and William, also had conditions associated with their aspirations – employee security (Ann) and client quality (William), indicating the ethical stance of professionals owning a small business. Looking from a different perspective, George suggested that it is about occupational recognition, an indicator of a successful life with some pecuniary value attached, but he also acknowledged that this ‘value’ could be a contribution to his retirement fund. This concept of value pervades most of my collaborators’ narratives, a sort of reaction to the question ‘so what use has your career been?’ Older workers wish to maintain a sense of economic usefulness, whether through organisational participation or ownership value, both of which indicate a degree of occupational productivity and the notion that an individual is holding on to and updating their occupational purposefulness. The aspiration of most of my research collaborators was to sustain a sense of self-worth and continuity in their occupational endeavours, identified by Biggs (2010) as ‘a drive toward ‘productive ageing’’ (p. 359).

This contrasts with the negative stereotype of increasing incapacity often associated with adult ageing and the false belief that older workers are less able to change and adopt new working procedures. Economic usefulness is a perception that a person adds value to an organisation or society by their participation within that community; from subsequent conversations with some of my collaborators, I believe that this is more to do with their need for recognition of the self than for the financial support that the economic participation provides. Whilst these three stories concentrate on aspiration to create enterprise value, James reflected on the inefficiencies of one of the corporations that he had elected to work for:

‘I thought I’d made the biggest mistake of my life because [company name removed] 25 years ago, in my view, was a very sleepy organisation, like a clearing bank if you like, so run very similar to Lloyds, Barclays ...I suppose strategically you’d say it didn’t have much focus, it was doing everything everywhere’

(James, p. 4)

In this extract, he cogitated on his occupational choice, realising shortly after joining that the organisation did not have a clear focus for its strategic intent and hence its value was diminished as a result of operational inefficiencies. James joined this organisation at the end of his ‘young adulthood’ so, having contributed to its turnaround throughout his ‘middle adulthood’, now found it strategically aligned and profitable. From other insights in his occupational narrative, James has enjoyed and benefited from the openings offered ‘accepting those opportunities and running with them, making whatever you can with them’ (James, p. 10). These opportunities arose as the organisation strived to align its international businesses into a coherent global organisation; for James his organisation’s strategic objectives lined up with his occupational

aspirations, which, despite some testing times, including potential redundancy, enabled him to continue along his professional trajectory.

Consequent on occupational dissolution in my early 50s – redundancy following organisational restructuring – I strived to remain intellectually cognisant, and, despite repeated organisational rejection, opted to reinvent my occupational endeavours through advanced academic study. Occupational success can take many forms, but all contribute to an individual's sense of self-worth and purposefulness. In my analysis of their narratives I detected a strong aspiration for my collaborators to remain productive throughout the continuance of their working life and concur with the maxim of Rowe and Kahn (1998) who claim that:

‘...the frailty of old age is largely reversible ...what does it take to turn back the ageing clock? It's surprisingly simple ...Success is determined by good old-fashioned hard work’ (p. 15)

Whilst the opportunity to sustain occupational endeavour seems to be important in middle adulthood, I believe there is a point when this aspiration declines, probably, according to my research collaborators, in the transition period between ages 60-65, when mid-life adults start to consider their blueprint for occupational disengagement. However, before that consideration becomes important, the adult in mid-life decides whether to continue in their professional role or change to another in response to an incident, what I call an occupational trigger that initiates their need to search for a new occupational living.

Harmony within occupational role

My collaborators commented on how they felt in their role and indicated that their sense of occupational harmony was a strong influence on their decision to stay in or switch from their occupational appointment. In George's extract below, he acknowledged his appointment as a Director whilst also expressing his uncertainty about what the role required:

‘I became a Director, which was enormous fun but I'm not really sure, looking back, that I really understood the difference. It was explained to me that I was expected to, if you like, be part of management and delegate the work and I never really understood that properly’

(George, p. 3)

The concept of occupational harmony represents an individual's perception of their relationship to and alignment with their occupational environment, epitomising the sense of accord that they feel toward the organisation and/or occupational role that they inhabit. Within George's narrative testimony he confirmed that, some years later, he started to experience self-doubt, what he described as ‘wobbling’:

‘That’s when [age 40] I started wobbling and I had a little premonition ...do I come out of personnel? I was young enough to start something new and to some extent, it didn’t matter what that something new was, it was the fact that I could start something new’

(George, p. 10)

In this context ‘wobbling’ implies a swaying or wavering from a position of certainty, an expression of self-doubt that George had encountered and which caused him to question his occupational certainty. Sharf explains harmony by suggesting that it:

‘refers to finding the work that will bring about a true sense of appreciation and understanding ...individuals must know that their work and their current career is producing harmony by meeting their interests, values and abilities’

(2006, p. 352)

At this point in his career trajectory, George did not feel that his aspirations were in harmony with the role that he occupied; he did not, as Sharf notes, ‘have a sense of meaningfulness in his life’ (2006, p. 352). Other collaborator’s occupational narrative included references to self-doubt and recognition, for example those of John and James:

‘So things were going okay but I was getting very stale in what I was doing. The work we were doing was okay but I was not feeling I was progressing as an individual in the work I was doing’

(John, p. 4)

‘...that particular time I found very difficult because, if you like, I was outside of my comfort zone ...it sort of ended after two years in HR with me facing the prospect of redundancy or something of that nature’

(James, p. 7)

Whilst John felt that he was ‘getting very stale’ (p. 4), James believed that he was ‘outside of his comfort zone’ (p. 7), signs that they were not in harmony with, that is aligned to, the primary purposes of their occupational role. At this point in their career, both were considering a change in occupational direction, but, for both of them, that change materialised from within the organisation – James accepted a new international assignment, whilst John found another new occupational avenue to maintain his interest:

‘I think every time I really was just at the stage of thinking ‘I’ve got to break away from this’ then actually something else would come along which would keep me in essentially the same sort of professional role ...which gave me a new interest for a while and then sort of kept me at it’

(John, p. 9)

In both of these narrative insights, the solution to their occupational oscillation arrived in the form of a new organisational commission, which meant that they could continue for a limited time, at least until the next digression in their occupational continuum. However others, including Ann who encountered redundancy at the peak of her occupational ascent and Martin, were faced with a more difficult decision – what job to switch to in order to sustain occupational permanence? Their resolution was to set up their own professional business offering, in Ann’s case, an accountancy practice providing solutions to a range of private and public clients, and, for Martin, an accountancy agency providing contract accounting services:

‘I set up my own company and for about five years worked as an interim manager, contract accountant, doing various quite interesting bits of work really’

(Martin, p. 7)

Their decision to set up their own business, which Mary, George and William also chose to do, provided them with freedom to operate in a way that they were comfortable and in tune with, and this seems to have resulted in a greater degree of organisational harmony. In her review of ‘Working in Private Practice’, Porter (2010) concludes that ‘having autonomy and freedom to make their own decisions is the best thing about working in private practice’ (p. 448). Of the five collaborators who set up their own business, Mary and Martin opted to return to corporate practice – Mary through selling her legal practice and Martin by appointment as a management accountant. The other three, Ann, George and William, continued running their own business and, from subsequent conversations with George and William, they would concur with Porter’s (2010) inclination towards ‘autonomy’.

In these stories, I detected an association or reciprocity between the attributes of ‘self-perception’ (how confident do I feel in this role?) and ‘recognition’ (how acknowledged am I in this role?). My inferences strengthened as I noted allusions to recognition (George and William), self-doubt (George and John) and the appeal of autonomy through self-management (Ann, George, Martin, Mary and William). This notion of occupational harmony through autonomy commended deeper consideration and I concluded that there was an affinity between the constructs of ‘perceived worth’ and ‘acclaimed recognition’ – the higher that an individual rated them self on each of these two scales, the stronger their sense of occupational harmony or alignment with their organisation and their role within it. I assembled a hypothetical model of occupational harmonisation showing the association between the two constructs of ‘self-perception’ and ‘recognition’ and their combined influence on a person’s sense of alignment within their occupational residence; this is shown in Figure 10:

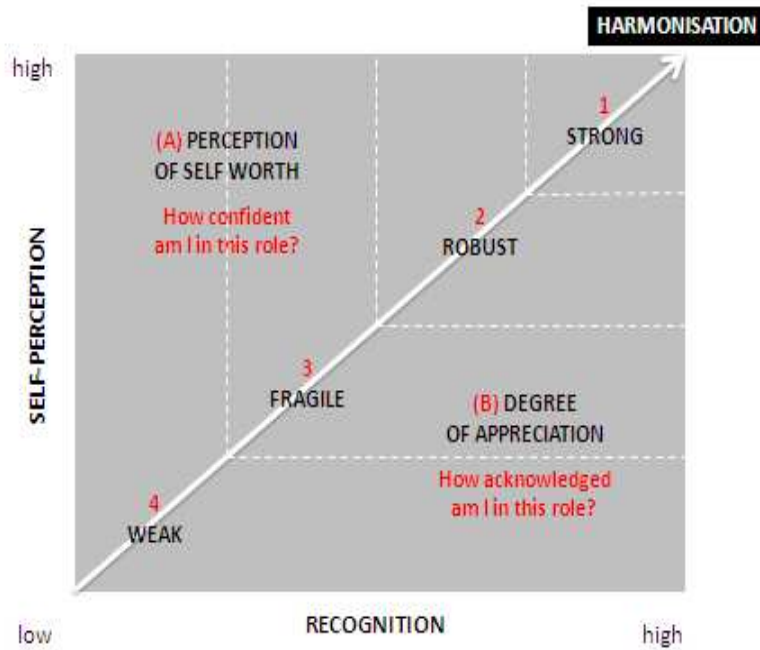


FIGURE 10: Occupational harmony

Auto/biographic narrative is a recollection of past experience told as a story, a memory of what a person experienced; it offers insights into those experiences and a commentary on why the person acted in the way they did. My notion of ‘occupational harmony’ engenders an explication of why professional workers remain engaged within their organisations and may present employers of third-age professional workers a discernment on how to sustain the occupational engagement of older workers for reciprocal benefit.

In Figure 10, the convergence of two lines representing ratings on the axes of ‘self-perception’ (Domain A) and ‘recognition’ (Domain B) intersect to locate a point in one of four zones representing the degree of harmonisation that an individual feels from ‘1 Strong’ to ‘4 Weak’. In George’s story, which prompted my thinking on this matter, he expressed concerns about his role, whilst having just been appointed a director, which later materialised as his ‘wobbling’. Plotting George’s experience onto this model locates a position towards the lower right hand corner – although his recognition is high, his self-perception is wavering which leaves him in zone 4, possibly 3, a weak or fragile rating on the harmonisation scale. From his subsequent narrative, we know that George did disassociate himself from this organisation and continue on to a series of occupational roles within different organisations. In contrast John talked about ‘breaking away’ when he felt that his recognition was deficient, in this situation he would probably locate in zone 3 (high self-perception – low recognition), a fragile rating on the harmonisation scale, but as soon as something else came along to increase his recognition, he

would move to zone 2 (high self-perception – higher recognition), a robust rating, where he would stabilise for a time until he needed to make his next occupational decision.

In my previous employment, I found that, whilst my recognition, as Head of Learning, was relatively high, my self-perception was low due to organisational disruptions (company restructuring and politics) which left me in zone 3 (high recognition – low self-perception), a fragile rating, ultimately leading to my disengagement from that organisation. My experience illustrates another of the principal reasons that an individual feels a lack of affinity with their organisation, namely the way that their organisation behaves; in the narratives of Edward and Martin, organisational tensions (cultural, political and structural) are the primary source of institutional conflict:

‘the same thing happened almost, corporate restructure in the sense of takeover by another organisation, which was characterised by management shake-ups, management changes, which sort of not only unsettled me but actually caused a lot of conflict, personal conflict’

(Edward, p. 5)

‘I first realised the sort of machinations behind the surface, that business leaders can behave like children unfortunately with greater fire power and you know not every decision that is made in business is sensible or for the good of the people of the business or the business itself. So as a result of that I am far less trusting and far more cynical about people who lead businesses, I know that’

(Edward, p. 8)

‘...a new culture came in , and I really didn’t get on with the guy who was the new finance man, and finished up leaving them’

(Martin, p. 6)

In these extracts, organisational turbulence has caused a dilution or diminution of the strength of harmonistic relationship that the individual held for their organisation resulting in cynicism (Edward) and disillusionment (Martin). Another factor in this affinitive relationship is the strength of the bond between an individual and their manager as illustrated in the narratives of Diane and Martin:

‘...the person who is your manager is very important to me, and the team that you work within’

(Diane, p. 7)

‘I was not very happy with the direction the consultancy was going in, and my boss was ...had two or three bosses over the years but the last one was a ...you know not the sort of guy I wanted to work for’

(Martin, p. 8)

Whilst Diane emphasised the importance of the managerial relationship, Martin noted the damage that can be caused by individuals failing in their managerial responsibilities. The managerial relationship is critical and a contributory factor to the relative ratings on the self-perception and recognition scales – whilst a good relationship will enhance the ratings, a poor one will diminish those ratings and so reduce the overall ‘harmonisation’ rating that an individual holds. Another contributory factor, certainly regarding a person’s self-perception, is, as James acknowledged, the belief that an individual’s skills and knowledge are being appropriately utilised:

‘that was really the first time, apart from doing audit, when I was using actually the skills or the knowledge that I’d been trained up in, so it was a bit like going home in a way ...what I mean by good, yeah felt quite comfortable’

(James, p. 5)

Occupational capabilities, their skills and knowledge, are the primary assets that a professional practitioner offers their employer and, as James recognised, there is a feeling of satisfaction when those capabilities align with the actual work that an individual is engaged with; there is a synergetic association when a congruent match between capability and opportunity occurs in an occupational setting. In this example, James had identified a sense of compatibility between his occupational assignment and his self-image, what Gottfredson (2002) explains as ‘*congruence and person-environment fit* ...The greater the perceived compatibility (suitability), the stronger the person’s preference’ (p. 91, *italics original*). An individual’s sense of compatibility or congruence, therefore, strongly influences their self-perception and hence their empathy towards the notion of ‘occupational harmony’.

New occupational pathways

In the mid-life stage of adult development, an individual’s preference is usually to sustain their occupational existence by maintaining their current role, but for a number of reasons – dissatisfaction, loss of self-worth, outplacement – some may opt to move in a new occupational direction. If they decide to do this, then, as Super (1990) advises, they will need to reprocess through the stages of career exploration and consolidation to engage with a new occupational role. George and Anthony found that career reconnaissance was their next option:

‘...there wasn’t really much else I could do apart from repeat the process, so I decided to start thinking about ‘what next?’

(George, p. 3)

‘I thought about doing ...very similar things ...you can do radically different things. Or you can do something in between the two ...and so that’s the sort of reflection that I did. I didn’t get very far in terms of actually putting it into practice.’

(Anthony, p. 11)

Having cycled through several appointments as a personnel executive, George decided that he was going to do something different and pursued different options which resulted in him taking on a series of consultancy roles in career and people development related roles. He proactively searched for and tracked down roles which he believed suited his occupational preferences and consequently had enjoyed a satisfying career trajectory. In his attempts to reinvent his career, George cultivated what Ibarra (2004) describes as the ‘strategies for reworking identity – crafting experiments, shifting connections and making sense’ (p. 18). George’s narrative continuum is one of progressive ascendancy (Gergen, 1999) building on his previous roles and associations to move into a satiating occupational experience. In contrast, Anthony acknowledged that he did not put his alternative career aspirations into practice, and so, buffeted by the vagaries of organisational indifference and sometimes incompetence, he frequently encountered occupational disappointments. As a result of his tendency to recoil from these discouragements, and ricochet from one role to another, I would describe Anthony’s occupational profile as a ‘careening’ (from nautical origins) transition that has pitched from side to side. However, from recent conversations, he appeared to have settled in his current occupational appointment, typifying what Gergen (1999) describes as a regressive narrative.

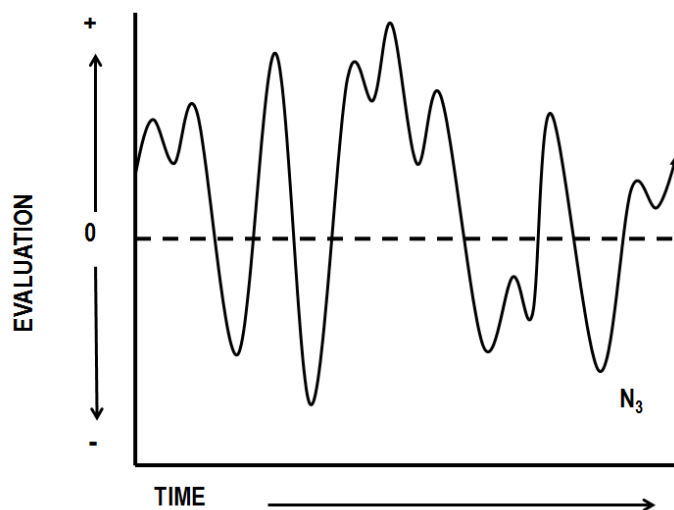


FIGURE 11: Narrative 'As lived and fragmented' profile

These narrative observations suggest another term for describing an occupational profile, namely a retrogressive or reactionary profile, to depict the careening nature of some people's occupational reality. I adopted the term 'retrogressive' to denote the careening nature of this occupational profile, and have illustrated this profile in Figure 11. In Gergen's (1999) 'regressive' profile (Figure 7), the graphical plot shows an orderly and regular oscillation from an ascendant (positively satisfying) to descendant (negatively satisfying). I sought to differentiate the terms 'regressive' and 'retrogressive', deciding to illustrate this occupational plot as a randomly oscillating variation from the 'mid-way' line to reflect the reality of an increasing number of people's occupational experience. This notion of a 'retrogressive' plot implies a type of occupational flow which is based on my interpretation of the occupational continuums of two of my research collaborators, Anthony and Mary. Whilst their occupational flows fluctuated frequently, others changed only at the determination of the career actor; in Edward's and John's narratives, two different occupational transitions emanated:

'...there comes a point where it's actually better for you and everybody else if you leave and somebody else takes it on. And the opportunities, the longer you stay, the opportunities diminish is my experience to date'

(Edward, p. 6)

'it's got a total change inasmuch as it's still property but in many ways it's totally different aspects of property than what I was dealing with before, and it's working in an organisation which has a totally different approach to life, really. So that's good'

(John, p. 6)

Both extracts illustrate a shift from one occupational role to another involving a change in institutional employment; in Edward's story, he suggested that there is a time to leave an organisation and that is when an individual's opportunities for progression diminish. In his story, John described the transition when he decided to move away from his recognised and rewarded position as a partner to work for a charity. Both stories originate from different occupational perspectives and attest that there is a present moment to lock in the past and unlock future potential by making a transition to a new occupational environment. Ibarra's (2004) case studies tell many stories of individuals who chose to reinvent their careers in mid-life and Biggs (2010) contends that 'midlife emerges as a period of heightened sensitivity to one's position within a complex social environment, and where the reassessment of the self is a prevailing theme' (p. 355).

For both Edward and John the realisation of the needs of occupational-self arrived through personal evaluation and choice, whilst for others the realisation came as a consequence of forced evaluation following occupational displacement. In mid-life, an individual must be prepared to entertain the idea that it may be necessary for them to take a new pathway to

maintain an occupational existence. Although John opted for an alternative career, the nature of his work remained similar, whilst the contextual environment changed. In Mary's narrative, she described how, having sold her legal practice, she was exploring a new occupational avenue 'I think I'm still searching, I got interested in Human rights almost by accident' (Mary, p. 4). Her aspiration was to find a 'possible self', but Ibarra (2004) notes that:

'...working our identities ...is a messy trial-and-error process of *learning by doing* in which experience in the here and now (not in the distant past) helps to evolve our ideas about what is plausible – and desirable' (p. 163, *italics original*)

She also comments on the impossibility of perceiving self, rather 'self-knowledge, therefore, comes from our reactions to things that happen to us and around us' (Ibarra, 2004, p. 144). Mary's search continued in an indeterminable direction, but my occupational exploration is coming to a pivotal moment with the opportunities available following the completion of this research investigation. However, Levinson et al (1978) caution that:

'...as he [sic] attempts to reappraise his life, a man discovers how much it has been based on illusions, and he is faced with the task of *de-illusionment*' (p. 192, *italics original*)

Reflections on my occupational history bolster this duplicitous perception and have encouraged me to consider my beliefs, conscience and values about the appropriate things to do as I pursue my occupational existence. In the residue of my potential trajectory, I aspire to engage with assignments whose purpose resonates with my personal values for an occupational continuation.

Complementary life challenges

In their mid-life appraisal, some people ask the question that Levinson et al advocated 'what are my central values and how are they reflected in my life?' (1978, p.192); having pursued ambition throughout their young adulthood, some turn to their inner self and start to explore whether their work – what they are doing as an occupation – is in alignment with their beliefs and values. In response to this ego-centric inquiry, John opted to move from a commercial to a charitable environment where he continued to apply his property management capabilities, but without the client pressures, fiscal responsibilities and legal liabilities of being a business partner. In their narratives other collaborators, including Ann and Charles, told of endeavours that they had engaged with working in institutional office and specialist professional roles:

'I am quite involved with the Institute [of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales], I am on their District Society and I have been a District Society President'

(Ann, p. 6)

‘I’ve become chairman of one or two other things on the side, such as the Appeals Committee for the Legal Services Commission’

(Charles, p. 2)

‘I also had another period when ...I acted as one of the government advisers to Eastern European governments on reforming their housing and property law’

(Charles, p. 6)

Ann described her involvement within her professional institute and Charles enthusiastically articulated his ancillary occupational interests; when reciting these occupational enhancements, both collaborators engaged in animated discussion about what they had gained from their participation in these professional engagements. Having established their professional capabilities and credibility, older professionals seem to value opportunities to utilise their proficiency for the service of others, either within the profession or to other communities. Perhaps, for the busy professional, this type of opportunity appeals to their social consciousness and a belief that, by engaging in this endeavour, they are giving something back to society. The desire to be socially conscientious is an intrinsic motivational driver, for as noted by Cappelli and Novelli:

‘once our identity and sense of our self is established, our focus in later years shifts towards goals that make us feel good about that identity that we have already established’

(2010, p. 103)

It seems that some individuals become more magnanimous and willing to serve others as they proceed through mid-life and the ambitions of youth evaporate giving way to a more altruistic self. During the mid-life stage of my occupational being, I discovered this magnanimity when asked to participate in an educational assignment for a professional institute – preparing a new accreditation scheme and authoring two study programmes. As reported by Charles and Ann, I felt beneficent about these specialist assignments, but acknowledge that it is possible that this type of opportunity provides the professional with an intrinsic recognition of their capabilities and, therefore, similar to my earlier discussion about occupational harmony, contributes to their overall sense of occupational self-worth. The other main life challenge reported was the opportunity to immerse self in postgraduate study, as attested to by Edward and Martin:

‘That job, although it was something that I absolutely engineered and decided I wanted to do, that was the job that gave me the opportunity to do my masters degree, which I thoroughly enjoyed doing’

(Edward, p. 9)

‘...so I started doing an Open University MBA, which the company said they would sponsor me. And as part of that I did a change management module, based on the stuff that we’d been doing, because I really enjoyed it’

(Martin, p. 10)

Together with Mary and James, who also completed masters degrees during this life stage, both research collaborators expressed their deep sense of satisfaction at having the opportunity to pursue an advanced programme of academic study. The three men studied subjects relevant to their business discipline, but Mary chose a topic ‘Religion and Human Rights’ (Mary, p. 4) that interested her following attendance on a series of short courses; likewise, I selected a topic ‘Career Education’ that interested me rather than a programme that would directly benefit my occupational participation. In her treatise about ‘working identity’, Ibarra considers the value of:

‘...going back to school ...often an executive education program or its equivalent is enough to reorient a career’

(2004, p. 104)

Certainly this is an anticipation that Mary and I presumed as a consequence of our academic participation. However, whilst not exploring a change in their occupational role, Edward, Martin and James were seeking to develop and refresh their business competences by participation in academic inquiry. Having successfully completed a programme of professional accreditation in their young adulthood, many mid-life professionals aspire to enhance their technical capabilities through advanced study; in any case the syllabus that they originally studied for and qualified in will have radically changed since attainment of their professional credentials. As Goldstein posits in his reflections on ‘the future of counselling psychology’:

‘If our professional identity stems primarily from a syllabus that can be redefined according to almost any arbitrary whim or fashion, then we have no distinctive ground from which to venture forth and profess our calling’

(2010, p. 672)

Although Goldstein’s aphorism is linked to the future evolution of professional competence for counselling psychologists, I contend that it equally applies to all professionals, in whatever discipline, since the syllabi that my collaborators originally studied will have been refashioned as a consequence of exigent economic, political and social circumstances. It follows that an individual’s professional identity and their integrity are endorsed by their attempts to update their professional capabilities. Although these events have been reported by my collaborators, as members of the life stage known as ‘middle adulthood’, it is likely they are more predisposed to pursue this type of professional development as their personal circumstances – familial responsibilities, financial stability and professional status – permit them to indulge in this form

of intellectual challenge. In addition, there were other interesting reflections made in my collaborators' narratives, including James' assertions about the benefits of international travel and overseas postings, which had accounted for a significant proportion of his assignments over the past decade. Despite the enthusiasm that he expressed for his work, this predilection caused him dilemmas in his work-life balance, although it may also account for his continued employment in an economically weakened global banking system:

‘so that was probably a highlight of my career actually, first real posting overseas, so although I travelled a lot ...up to five weeks maximum but never actually been posted overseas, so that was again a whole new dynamic’

(James, p. 7)

Taking a different approach to the issue of work-life balance, Anthony and Edward focused on the essence of the psychological contract that exists between the worker and their employer, and highlighted their belief that work should not replace a private life outside of the workplace:

‘...and I’ve made a conscious effort to ...do other things in my life. I’ve got involved in the church and involved in charities ...and fitness’

(Anthony, p. 15)

‘The first corporate experience I had I went into it all very positive, all very stable and then of course found that this apparent certainty is really only a shadow ...so they buy my time, they buy my skills but they don’t buy any of my soul ...ever since then I’ve consciously actually had that frame of mind’

(Edward, p. 7)

In the contemporary workplace, globalisation, refinancing and restructuring have changed the nature of the psychological contract with the consequence, as recognised by Blustein (2006), that ‘people are often left feeling significantly disconnected and even isolated [from their workplace]’ (p. 50). In their narratives both Anthony and Edward noted the importance of sustaining an appropriate work-life balance, but Edward also emphasised the criticality of retaining control over his soul – his psyche, his inner-most self; many professionals become so engaged in their professional activities that there is a danger of becoming corporate-centric, that is they are fixated on the demands of their occupational role and blinkered to the obligations and expectations that they have in their private lives. Over the course of my occupational trajectory, I have often stumbled in to the mentality of the corporate mind and forgotten my responsibilities to people and events within my private life, but have escaped from the dilemmas that this potentially holds through the understanding of my family and friends.

In this section I have reflexively considered the experiences, observations and thoughts of my research collaborators regarding their participation in the middle adulthood stage of their life

course. In the four sub themes covered – occupational endeavour, workplace harmony, new pathways and complementary life challenges – I have reflected on the narratives generated from our occupational interview, my thoughts on and interpretations of the stories told and subsequent conversations that I had with some of my research collaborators. My research collaborators confirmed that their primary desire was to maintain an occupational existence through ‘holding, updating and innovating’ (Super, 1990) their occupational capabilities within their current employment.

On the issue of job sustainability, I explored the association between self-perception and recognition reflecting on the notion of the ‘occupational harmony’ that an individual may have for their present professional role. Acknowledging that the alternative to staying, is to change occupational role by reinventing self and adapting to/consolidating into a new career, I observed the new occupational pathways that a few of my research collaborators had chosen, and examined the complementary challenges that some of them had participated in through ancillary professional assignments and advanced academic study.

T6 TAC: Third-age challenges – Encountering life realities

This research is set within the context of a life transition phase often referred to as the ‘third-age’, a period of life emergence which parallels the phases that Levinson et al (1978) denote as ‘middle adulthood’ and ‘late adulthood’. In occupational terms, Super (1990) suggests that this ‘maintenance’ phase (ages 45 to 65) is about accepting limitations, identifying new activities, developing new skills and sustaining occupational self, whilst his ‘disengagement’ phase (age 65 and older) is a period for retirement planning and living. So the third-age is a period in which a person has dual occupational aspirations, that is to maintain their existing career whilst acknowledging their need to prepare for occupational disengagement. This chronological explanation correlates with Curnow and Fox’s (1994) specification that this category is for ‘those between ages 50 and 75’ (p. 3), thus spanning two interpretations of life stage development. Although Super reviewed his ‘age bands’ in later treatises, it is pertinent to record Savickas who cautioned that:

‘Super’s account ...is an account of vocational development tasks for one culture in one historical era ...[and that] the new story lines for contemporary lives ...rather than focusing on progress through an orderly sequence of predictable tasks, will increasingly focus on adaptability for transitions’

(2002, p. 182)

Savickas' commentary introduced an anticipation of prodigious change within an individual's career and heralded what is now becoming a benchmark for many people's career experiences, namely an occupational span that entwines ambiguity and uncertainty. This emerging prospect includes third-age workers – in this discourse, aged 50 to 65 and contemplating occupational release – who may already need to work longer to address pension deficiencies resulting from benefit changes, economic shortfalls and retirement age reforms. So what are the challenges and tensions that older professional workers currently encounter as they embrace the third-age?

Perceptions of the 'third age'

The third-age is a period of life in which an individual often reassesses their past life trajectory and questions how best to pursue the continuance of their life, pending transition to the fourth-age with its potential for physical fragility and consequent dependence. With developments in medical science and lifestyle improvement, the chronological age at which this transition occurs is now located at around age 75. The third-age is, therefore, a period of preparation for a future life of unknowns in terms of physiological and financial well-being.

Firstly, I focus on my research collaborators' perceptions and understandings of this life stage concept – what do they understand by the term 'third-age'? For Mary and Charles – the term is perceived to relate to 'the university of the third-age' commonly known as the U3A:

'Well I know the University of the Third Age! ...but apart from that, no [perceptions]'

(Mary, p.16)

'Well my wife's a member of the University of the Third Age in that sense. And also I think I've been a member of it because I've been on some of the outings, and they won't take you because you're not insured if you're not a member'

(Charles, p. 16)

The U3A is a network of 'self-help, self-managed lifelong learning co-operatives for older people no longer in full time work, providing opportunities for their members to share learning experiences in a wide range of interest groups and to pursue learning not for qualifications, but for fun' (2012, home page). Whilst it was frequently the first response, the recognition of this institution suggests a link to the period beyond occupational employment, as noted by John:

'I would have to say that the context in which I've heard of it is my mother being quite involved in it and she's in her eighties. So I would have said I had thought of the third age as being the retirement age rather than earlier'

(John, p. 20)

John's response suggested that the third-age is the period beyond occupational contribution, that is retirement, but the U3A's mission statement specifically locates the network as being for those 'no longer in full time work' (U3A, 2012, homepage), which means that it is intended for all of those engaged within any of these categories – seeking employment, part-time employed or no longer employed. However, Jack also shared this perception:

‘the third age are those people who have retired and take on new roles, use all their career experiences to have a different input into communities, industries or whatever’

(Jack, p. 16)

John and Jack's perceptions are, therefore, limiting and constrain the intended meaning of the term, which was embraced to acknowledge the transitory nature of occupational trajectory in the later stages of working life, from occupational maintenance through to disengagement. Later, I consider the closing occupational aspirations of my research collaborators; a significant number indicated their preference for an occupational profile that progressively reduced their number of working days as they moved toward total disengagement. The term 'third-age' was created to encompass the changing nature of a person's occupational interface as they move through and beyond the closing stages of their working evolution. This anticipation is captured by George, who recognised the importance of rebalancing life activity as an individual struggles to locate a more holistic sense of their life:

‘Well I can recognise the third age. I think my monk acquaintance at Worth Abbey helped me recognise the fact that I think I went to try and talk to him about what to do next, an activity, and he sort of talked to me about what was I going to do with this next phase of my life? I'm still at the beginning of the third age in terms of transitioning into this role where perhaps life is a bit more holistic, more perhaps to do with my faith in terms of time spent, more integration of faith with work, more family time and perhaps more time to pursue interests as opposed to work dominating’

(George, p. 18)

In his observation, George sensed the importance of a total and balanced approach to life's progression, one that seeks to integrate faith, family, leisure and work commitments. This positive intention is supported by various writers (Adams et al, 1996; Frone et al, 1991) who strongly commend the importance of reducing the imbalance between personal (faith, family, and leisure) and work commitments. Whilst this holistic perception of the third-age is idealistic and sensible in terms of physiological and mental well-being, George's observation also suggested that it is a perspective that does not come naturally, for he implied that he did not arrive at this understanding on his own, having had the facilitative intervention of his 'monk acquaintance'. The value of this interpretation of the third-age lies in its acknowledgement of

the total life continuum and the harmony between all elements of a person's life, together with the contribution that can be made by a valued third party intervention.

Whilst George noted the integration of life experience and the importance of interleaving third-age experience between work and other valued life commitments throughout a person's life emergence in their later years, Diane recognised the changing nature of this phase of the life continuum. In her observation, she reverted to the perception that the third-age is to do with full retirement, not a partial transitory phase of life stage development:

‘[it is] a totally different concept from what it used to be, in that you retired, you lived for five, ten years, and then you died. Whereas now the people I know who have retired say that they don't know how they ever had time to work, so they're doing different things, socialising, perhaps voluntary work, you've got time to do your garden, you've got time to do a lot of different interests that there wasn't the time for when you worked’

(Diane, p. 14)

In her reflection, she has partitioned retirement living from occupational experience, implying that it is a separate phase of life experience not one that can be interwoven with a diminishing occupational contribution. This interpretation hints at the earlier commentaries made by John and Jack that the third-age is restricted to those who have totally disengaged from the workplace. In this perspective, Diane looked at the degree of satisfaction experienced by those who have taken retirement with the suggestion that total separation from the workplace leads to greater satisfaction today than it has done in the past. This view negates the true nature of the third-age, that it is a transition between two life stages, which embraces both the preparation for and embarkation on the penultimate phase of life experience. It may take an indeterminate length of time and will vary from person to person, but it cannot be defined as a specific point in chronological time. In his response to the question ‘what does the term ‘third-age’ mean to you?’ Martin expressed it in terms of his reaction to a TV news report:

‘Because I was outraged a few weeks ago, I was sitting in front of the TV and it was the regional programme that was on. And there was some guy who had had an accident who was 63 or something, and this TV presenter referred to this person as an elderly man. And I'm thinking, ‘He ain't bloody old,’ you know. I mean I've got friends who are 63 and 64 and if they'd have heard it they'd have been throwing bricks at the TV screen. I mean, what the hell, elderly man? ...Things are just so different now, so what is the third age? Is it 50 to 65, is it 55 to 75? I don't know’

(Martin, p. 23)

He clearly demonstrated, through the tone of his response, his strength of feeling to the TV presenter's use of the label 'elderly' to refer to the man who had had an accident at the age of 63. The use of this phrase in this context is emotive particularly to an individual like Martin who, through the proximity of his own age, did not associate with the phrase used to describe the age of the man involved. Merchant suggests that the term 'third-age' has:

'arisen as writers and researchers have sought to provide a structure of age without reference to either 'the elderly' or 'the aged' – descriptions that throw together everyone above a certain age and are seen to represent the oppression of age ...[these terms] are considered more representative of the differing experiences of older workers, regardless of actual age'

(2003, pp. 1-2)

In his presumption, Merchant (2003) comments on the need to disregard 'actual age' to classify different stages of the life-course, so affirming the caution to recognise that Super's earlier work on life-stage development was a product of the social culture of the mid-20th century (Savickas, 2002). By rationalising the use of the term 'third-age', Merchant (2003) also recognises a reason why Martin felt so strongly about the use of the phrase 'the elderly' in his reaction to the TV news report. However, as a consequence of the connotations that he associated with the phrase 'the elderly', Martin also declared his continuing confusion about the term corroborating his lack of clarity about what the phrase 'third-age' is intended to represent.

From this selection of narrative comments, it is clear that the term 'third-age' is misunderstood by many of my collaborators, who believe it to refer to a period post occupational engagement often embraced through membership of the U3A network. They do not see it as having anything to do with them as they are still engaged in full time employment and do not believe that they have yet passed into this life-stage. This perception is surprising since most have also noted their occupational preference to move to a role of reduced activity nearly always involving part-time or portfolio assignments – one of the key differentiators for people working in the third-age. The only research collaborator to have an authentic appreciation of the term is George who recognised the holistic nature of the transition and the emergent focus as a person progresses towards occupational release. This analysis serves to highlight the confused perceptions that older workers have about the third-age and its relevance for them; as Curnow and Fox suggest:

... 'the key to positive and effective transition from a main career into the Third Age lies in the preparation that is carried out beforehand'

(1994, p. 61)

The third-age is an integral not differentiated part of the process for preparing for occupational withdrawal; it should, they argue, be seen as the initial stage of a re-orientation process that

draws on contemporary working experience and embraces the transition from full employment to permanent disengagement. Through experiential testing and research insight I have been encouraged to embrace my third-age vocational experience as a principal episode within my occupational continuance. Like George, I perceive it as a holistic process that I am engaging with and looking to use as an ‘integrative life planning’ (Hansen, 1997) approach that examines the whole life including the context within which a person’s life has and is continuing to evolve. Emerging from this autobiographic insight I am discovering new occupational possibilities for my third-age that embrace my working, faith, family and community aspirations. I postulate that the majority of my collaborators do not see it this way as they remain content within their current occupational space; unless a crisis intervenes, they assert that they have no need to accede to the notion until institutional policy or social ideology, regarding the ‘right’ time for occupational withdrawal, encroach on their life-space identity.

Life obligations, children, eldercare and inheritances

Whilst a person makes their career decisions in adolescence and early adulthood through self-determination and/or the influence of others (e.g. parents, peers and teachers), they are making an occupational choice for them self and, as a single person, normally have no responsibility for others. In middle adulthood the needs and expectations of others – dependent children and senior family members – may directly influence the career choice that a person is able to make if they have some form of responsibility (financial, social, legal) for others’ lives. These ‘life obligations’ arise as a result of the familial ties that a person usually retains throughout their life, unless the dependent person chooses to make their own arrangements and limit or remove the obligation from their family member. However, the strength of these obligations is often dependent on how important the individual thinks their family commitments are. Wilson (2000) suggests that:

‘We have first to ask how people think and feel about their families. The answer has far-reaching consequences for the lives of older men and women. At the extremes, the choice is between whether the *family* or the *individual* is the basic unit of society’

(p. 115, *italics original*)

The potential consequences are, in middle adulthood, for the individual in terms of their career options – location, hours available and type of work – all of which may be influenced by the dependencies of others; in late adulthood, the consequence may be whether or not there is a younger family member available and committed to looking after them. As Wilson (2000) notes, in European societies the principal response is that the individual represents a primary constituent of community; if true, this observation has wide ranging implications for society and

for individuals, at all levels, within the family. So what were the views of my research collaborators? In their responses Martin and Mary considered obligations to their adult children:

‘I’ve still got one daughter at home because she can’t find anywhere to live that she can afford ...it’s not her fault’

(Martin, p. 17)

‘I have two sons, who are both in their twenties. Shouldn’t be an obligation any more, but still are’

(Mary, p. 12)

In acknowledging her obligation, Mary also recognised that her sons’ needs were no longer critical since they were not children; she had greater volition to make choices without responsibility for their domiciliary needs:

‘...and it’s very nice I can house them, but actually it’s not the driving imperative it was when they were small. So yes, actually there’s more choice now than I think I’ve ever had in my life. It’s brilliant’

(Mary, p. 16)

Her response illustrates the dilemma that many older workers, including Martin and myself, now face, that is adult children who, often for economic reasons, find that they need to remain in the family home. Another predicament for some older workers is that, as a result of second or even third relationships, they still have younger dependants – a situation similar to the one expressed by Charles, who noted a commitment to looking after their family, including grandchildren, for familial and social reasons:

‘Well I spend quite a lot of time with our grandchildren. I have an older daughter who’s a headmistress and she and her partner have separated ...she’s on her own, so we do a lot of help for her ...so my wife and I do actually think that part of our job is to be active as far as we can for our age and so forth in looking after the children’

(Charles, p. 11)

In some societies, this commitment to looking after the extended family is an integrated responsibility, but, in Western culture, it remains a discretionary one, leaving the individual and their partner to determine the level to which they are willing to extend their support. Some people find that they have an obligation to care for dependent younger adults who are unable to support themselves, as in Diane’s situation:

‘My second daughter is severely disabled. So that does restrict ...mostly it restricts where we live, because we’re into education and health and so on, and so it wouldn’t

make it easy to move. And also it means that I need to know that my employer would support ...when I need time off'

(Diane, p. 10)

In both these circumstances – dependent younger adults and extended families – an individual's occupational options are bounded and constrained by the needs of their family members and the individual's willingness to extend their support to those family members in need. According to Evans and Bartolomé (1984) there is a case to suggest that older workers show 'more sensitivity to the problems and opportunities present in their leisure and family lives' (p. 19). For several of my research group, including Anthony and Jack, their responsibilities embraced the obligations that they and their wives had to senior family members in their late adulthood:

'...well then there's my wife's parents, who are very frail and elderly. So at the moment that's a restriction, but her dad's in his 90s and her mum's really ill. So that's an immediate restriction. But it won't be in the longer term.

(Anthony, p. 16)

'I've got three elderly parents, step-parents, I have got concerns there, not so much for their financial position but more for their health and I guess we've even re-jigged upstairs so that my wife's parents can stay with us. Now they're saying long-term they've got all their care sorted ...that's going to be the thing that impacts most in the future, is the elderly'

(Jack, p. 12)

This obligation to care for elderly family members, also referred to as 'eldercare' (Baltes and Young, 2007), is a comparatively new phenomena in the West, emerging as a consequence of increased longevity enhanced by improved medical and social care. Subject to the degree of eldercare dependency required by their senior member, a person's occupational contribution may be affected, as noted by Baltes and Young:

'...not finding a proper balance between work and eldercare may jeopardize the quality of care that is given as well as the individual's standing within his/her organization. Research investigating the impact of working and providing eldercare has in fact indicated that participation in both domains leads to numerous negative consequences'

(2007, p. 261)

This need to juggle work and family will probably, at some stage of their occupational continuance, affect an older worker's choices when deciding how to continue their working experience. It may require them to reduce their workload and/or to adjust it to enable them to provide the eldercare required, and, in some cases, could lead to conflict between their

aspiration to continue their career (without letting up) and their duty to provide care for older family members. Whilst Jack acknowledged ‘that’s going to be the thing that impacts most in the future, is the elderly’ (p. 12), Anthony noted that it is a limited obligation, ‘it won’t be in the longer term’ (p. 16), but the extent of limitation is dependent on the life duration of the person requiring support and whether other family members are able and willing to share these obligations. My experience of this obligation occurred in the early stages of this research study when a nonagenarian family member required eldercare assistance which, as available relatives, my wife and I accepted responsibility for; however, this commitment lasted only two years until the beloved family member passed away. In my research group only two people identified eldercare as an obligation that they faced, although others did say that this was not a current issue for them either because another family member was taking the lead responsibility or their elderly family member/s had already died.

Another issue often requiring attention during this life stage is inherited property, following the decease of a family member: I had responsibility for administering five family estates and arranging the sale of three inherited properties. Although not a responsibility associated with eldercare, it is a commitment for the caregiver requiring significant time and effort; it is also an obligation that has financial, legal and family implications if not handled appropriately as realised by Mary who acknowledged that:

‘I happen to be sharing ownership and living in a house with my brother at the moment, which doesn’t work at all and we do need to get rid of it. It was one we inherited and we thought we could make it work, but it hasn’t so ...so I have a strong need to get rid of this house at the moment. I do feel life would be a lot easier if I didn’t have that ...it’s been quite destructive. So it would be a very good thing if that was gone. It’s on the market. But then it’s been on the market for two years. It’s not easy to sell!’

(Mary, p. 12)

Her open comments hint at difficulties experienced by her and her brother and that life would be easier if the encumbrance of inherited property was removed – in the current economic market property can be a burden rather than the benefit it is anticipated to be. Taking into account the domiciliary care and monetary obligations of elderly family members, my research suggests that these caring obligations are a significant undertaking for many older workers within this stage of their life transition. As with childcare, the burden of responsibility for eldercare often rests on the women of the family, although Baltes and Young suggest that this is not always the case:

‘While most research suggests that women are more negatively affected by juggling work and eldercare than men, there is also evidence suggesting otherwise. For example, a recent study (Barrah et al, 2004) found no differences between men women eldercare providers and their levels of work/family conflict’

(2007, p. 263)

Whilst this issue of ‘eldercare’ obligations, in different forms, has been and continues to be apposite for many of my collaborators, it is predicated on the existence of elderly members within the family group. For most of my research group, particularly for those in a relationship, it currently is, or has been, a consideration for them to integrate within their life trajectory, but not necessarily for all. As a single man, Edward, made the following observation:

‘My family has moved and left me, so they’re all in Spain ...I’ve got a mum whose getting older and frailer ...actually being single I don’t have any immediate family dependencies except potentially my mum. I don’t actually have many ties in reality’

(Edward, p. 13)

Although recognising his mother’s potential care needs, because of proximal considerations, he did not feel that he had any ties ‘in reality’ – this phrase indicates that he acknowledged the actuality of his obligations, which is that if his brother, who lived near their mother, were unable to look after her, he would have a primary obligation to take responsibility for her eldercare needs. It seems that life obligations can present a boundary to an older worker’s occupational freedom and influence their ongoing career options during this phase of their life transition.

Affordability of retirement

Having worked for up to 45 years in a professional role, an older worker would probably expect to have accrued a reasonable pension entitlement that would make adequate financial provision for the remainder of their life. A few of my research collaborators believed that they had or were expecting a sufficient retirement income, as illustrated by John’s comment:

‘I have effectively got my finances in a position which, you know, I feel I’m able to meet those commitments from existing savings and [my current] level of income’

(John, p. 14)

However, a number had no anticipation of an adequate pension for a variety of reasons, including reduced entitlement due to job changes, poor pension investment returns and changes in government policy. To feel secure in a future world outside the workplace, a person needs to know that they will have an income and/or disposable assets that will give them an acceptable lifestyle in their old age. Recognising the importance of adequate pension provision, Alley and Crimmins acknowledge the necessity of alternative income sources to enable a person to retire:

‘The availability of pensions, including employer-based pensions and public pensions is an important determinant of timing of withdrawal from the labor force. Pension availability is essentially a measure of access to assets, which can finance consumption

for a person no longer in the labor force. In other words, pensions provide an alternative source of income, allowing an individual the option to retire'

(2007, p. 17)

To retire, that is remove them self from the labour market, an individual needs to know that they have an alternative source of income that will enable them to continue to meet their living and lifestyle costs. Several of my research collaborators expressed their concern about the adequacy of their potential pension, and two, Mary and Martin, said that they had a very low pension due to frequent job changes during their occupational evolution, which had resulted in reduced levels of accrued pension or, if self-employed, no entitlement as they had no pension fund:

'I have a tiny, tiny little pension ...so I can't see myself ever retiring, really. Unless I can live off the state pension ...what is one going to live off, really? You do have to have money to survive. I don't want huge properties, but I know I really don't think I could live on the state pension. But maybe I could. I don't know. It's unlikely to be more generous than it is now'

(Mary, pp. 13-14)

'...the only downside to the career I've had is I've no real pension arrangements to speak of because I've moved about a lot. I did have some pension savings with the Equitable Life, but that went bust which didn't do me any good'

(Martin, p. 17)

Martin had set up a pension plan, but the provider failed in its administration and regulation resulting in near collapse in 2000; last year the coalition government initiated compensation payments to individuals who had suffered a financial loss in their pension savings as a consequence of this firm's failure. As a policy holder, Martin is entitled to compensation, but at a rate of less than 25% of his original savings; his story illustrated the predicament that an individual faces if their pension provider fails to honour its promises. Both Mary and Martin realised that they will need to continue to work indefinitely as they don't expect to be able to survive on their state pension entitlements, although they may be able to generate an additional source of income from any capital investments they hold. In his commentary, George records the aspiration of most people to be 'financially independent':

'Well financial I suppose in that I have some pension, which probably will provide half of what I would like so I would like to sort of find some other way of increasing that pot ...I guess just really to look after ourselves in terms of being financially independent'

(George, p. 15)

His story shows the position of many older workers, who, having worked for 30-40 years now find that their pension entitlement only partially meets their anticipated retirement expenditure and that they will be dependent on working longer and/or accepting the limitations of living on the state pension. Whilst his aspiration to be ‘financially independent’ represents that of most older workers in terms of their retirement finances, George’s position is probably representative of many who now have insufficient pension funds to support them during retirement. A combination of job mobility and poor investment returns in an unstable economy has reduced the level of pension returns that many older workers in the knowledge economy anticipated; this has led to a need to work longer and/or adjust lifestyle to match reduced income levels.

Another contemporary feature of UK pension design is the changing public pension policy, which has resulted in increased state pension ages for both men and women, to address the pension crisis and the need to reduce public expenditure. However, as noted by Wilson (2000), raising the age at which a state pension can be taken ‘is liable to shift the cost of older workers from the pension fund to social assistance unless jobs are available and age discrimination is effectively outlawed’ (p. 99). Although she made her assessment early in the 21st century this is a contemporary issue that many older workers are starting to address as social policy on pension provision has changed. Another person to comment on the personal impact of these changes was Diane, who acknowledged that she was adjusting her retirement plans to accommodate the change in pension policy:

‘...one is driven, I suppose, a lot by financials, so I don’t have the option of not working. Having said that I’m happy to be working, but ...and I’m the first year who can’t retire at 60 ...but it means that I’m now having to plan for it being more than 60. And I think what I would like to do at the end of whatever time I decide is to be able to reduce working time ...so some sort of flexibility around that’

(Diane, p. 11)

Her comments illustrate the dilemma of older workers who, having anticipated a specific age at which they could receive the state pension, now find that they are going to need to work longer with insufficient time to adjust their pensions planning. For a few (John, Charles and William), who have adequate pension provision, affordability is not a concern, but for most professional workers, this issue remains a key factor in their decision when to retire, as it does for many older workers in other commercial and industrial sectors. James identified another financial consideration when choosing a retirement date – whilst acknowledging that ‘[his] pension would be more than some people are earning on an average wage’ (p. 14), he also noted that his financial liabilities had increased as a result of poor investment returns on the contracts underpinning his mortgage repayment strategy:

‘we’ve got three endowment mortgages on the house as we’ve extended and done various things and they’re all under water, so that does influence the fact that I do need to keep earning for a number of years yet, or we have a significant shift of lifestyle’

(James, p. 13)

His financial situation illustrates another scenario affecting older workers, namely the need to repay any funding commitments on retirement – although preferable, this is not critical as other financial strategies could be adopted to reduce or repay the capital amount owing. However, it does illustrate the complexity of the retirement decision; from research collaborators’ testimony and my personal experience, affordability is an important factor to be taken account of as a person starts to consider when to withdraw from occupational engagement. Except for a few people who have an adequate pension to match their living costs in retirement, most of my collaborators identified this issue as crucial for their post retirement financial security and lifestyle fulfilment.

Family retirement preferences

Whilst retirement is an individual transition in terms of the new experience of living in a state of freedom to do whatever a person chooses, it also impacts those people with whom a person lives. Retirement is a shared experience for those in a close relationship, as noted by Beehr and Bennett:

‘Aside from the individual retirees themselves, their families are also involved in their retirements. Retirement decision-making is not a wholly individual decision, because it affects other family members’

(2007, p. 284)

Therefore, as there are implications for the other person/s in close relationship, I asked a question – ‘what retirement preferences do other (close) family members hold for you (if known)?’ in the structured part of the occupational interview. In terms of those in a marriage relationship, there were two primary responses as to what they thought their partners’ preferences were namely the opportunity to spend time together and the caution to keep out of the way. George and John both thought their wives would be keen to spend more time together:

‘My wife, I’m not sure actually spending more time with her necessarily but kind of perhaps doing different things and increasing hobbies, I think that would be the other thing she would say. She would like me to find something else to do’

(George, p. 17)

‘I think she [my wife] would go along with the idea of really what I was saying. The idea of not suddenly stopping work and sort of ...so that we could spend all our days together. But a more gradual move into retirement, but still keeping active interests’

(John, p. 17)

However, Jack and James both thought their wives would expect them to stay at work for as long as they could and not to get in the way at home that is to avoid creating an interruption to their own preferred lifestyle:

‘I think the only other one is my wife who’s got any close interest on it and I think she’s happy with me doing what I’m doing ...just ‘don’t stay here 100% of the time, it’s nice when you go away and I get time to myself’ ...so I’m not sure I can retire totally’

(Jack, p. 14)

‘I do know what [my wife’s] preferences are, keep out the house, keep working, keep her in the lifestyle that she has been accustomed to, she may not put it quite as bold as that, but I mean she’s enjoying doing what she does and she would like that to continue or, if you like, not to be interfered with, with a husband sort of at home going, where are you going or when are you coming back, it would drive her nuts’

(James, p. 15)

Whilst appearing antithetical, it is possible that, through both responses, the partners are expressing a similar preference that is to remain occupied, at least as an individual if not as a couple. However, Beehr and Bennett report that ‘it has been noted that there is an increasing coincidence of spouses retiring at about the same time, despite the fact that the wives are usually younger’ (2007, p. 285), thus enabling the couple to spend more time together. Perhaps, in a contrary way, their wives are simply saying do not retire until we are able to do so together. The responses came mainly from men within my research group; of the three women, Ann’s husband had already retired and held, according to Ann, no preference, whilst Mary expressed the view that she had to take responsibility for her own retirement decision:

‘My partner could retire and will. He’s a civil servant. And it’s quite strange. We do see it differently ...[but] I do think I’m responsible for myself’

(Mary, p. 14)

Her response appears to avoid the intent of the question by stating what he will do rather than what his preferences are for her; she is also asserting her independence by expressing self-responsibility. This perspective is more common in Western society where individualised action and behaviour is more anticipated than a collective response: contrasting cultural differences between different societies, Wilson (2000) comments that ‘in the individualized family,

independence is usually highly valued and dependency is something to be avoided' (p. 116). Although the outcome of a person's retirement decision is, within a relationship, a shared living experience, it seems that some people want to retain responsibility for their own decisions. Perhaps this is the intent of Jack and James's interpretation of what their wives would say if asked about their husband's retirement preferences – they just want to remain independent for as long as possible before their husbands retire and they become co-dependent in a shared living space. From the research that I have conducted, most professionals make an individualistic decision about when to retire, including partial consultation with their partner en route to workplace withdrawal. Whilst several collaborators expressed definite views about what their partner's preferences were, Martin suggested his wife and he were happy to stumble forward:

'We're quite happy to bumble along until we decide that we don't want to bumble along any more. So I'm under no pressure from my wife or my daughters to retire. I'm in good health, touch wood, and always have been, apart from the odd minor glitch that we all get. So why retire?'

(Martin, p. 20)

Retirement is a life stage different to any experienced in the past and, for those in a relationship, one that has significant implications – including reduced income, adjusted living space and possible increased health considerations – for self and those with whom a person shares life. It seems, therefore, important that an individual has an open and transparent conversation with their close family member/s and agrees on the best approach for them. Whilst most of my collaborators had reviewed the matter with their partner, it seems that the main consideration remains how long can we work and receive more income before we have to retire. Whilst this is their individual choice, does it integrate all of the obligations that a worker encounters as they progress through this, the third-age of their occupational journey?

The success of a long journey includes planning for the next passage and I suggest that, other than the financial element which is important, most of my collaborators had only reflected transiently on the changing obligations they would encounter as they moved closer to the point when occupational disengagement became inevitable. Barnes-Farrell and Matthews (2007) suggest that this time arrives 'when retirement becomes a socially acceptable and economically viable alternative [to the current work role]' (p. 145). Although economically viable many of my collaborators indicated, for reasons reported earlier, that retirement was not yet an option; exceptions were Mary and Martin who expressed a variant perspective on this issue. Both did not believe that they could become financially viable to remove them self from occupational engagement and settle within a sphere of economic uncertainty, dependent on the state pension and other private funds. In UK society, it seems that some older professional workers continue

to make their final retirement decision on the basis of individualistic choice, perhaps taking account of their close family members’ preferences.

Life stage discrimination

Within Western society there is a propensity to associate older age with a lack of capability, the suggestion being that older workers are less capable than younger ones. In the third-age of their employment people often say that they feel there is discrimination against them, so why do older workers find it more difficult to sustain their occupational existence, particularly once they have been displaced from the workplace? Taylor (2008c) records that:

‘A large body of evidence demonstrates that older workers face considerable discrimination in the labour market. Not only are they overrepresented among those targeted first for redundancy; once in the labour market they find themselves facing considerable age barriers’ (p. 4)

If confirmed, this evidence supports the reality of age discrimination in the contemporary UK workplace, but how, if at all, had my research group experienced ‘ageism’ within their occupational experience? In this context, I define ‘ageism’ as the act of distinguishing between people on the basis of their age and, in the case of older workers, discriminating by regarding them as less capable in employment; Cappelli and Novelli suggest that:

‘There is some evidence, unfortunately, that the group most likely to hold negative attitudes toward older adults is actually other older workers themselves ...The most common stereotype of older individuals is that they are less adaptable than their younger counterparts, a bias that extends across cultures’ (2010, p. 80)

So how do older professional workers perceive the impact of ‘ageism’ on their lives and those of their family, colleagues and acquaintances? My collaborators reported their views and their comments fell into one of four points along an awareness continuum, as shown in Table 6:

(1) NO IMPACT	(2) SOME IMPACT	(3) ANTICIPATED IMPACT	(4) DEFINITE IMPACT
No personal experience or knowledge of others experiencing ‘ageism’.	No personal experience, but some knowledge of others experiencing ‘ageism’.	Possibly some experience, but an anticipation of future discrimination.	Definitely some experience and/or knowledge of others facing discrimination.

TABLE 6: Age discrimination awareness (ADA) continuum

The continuum moves from ‘no impact’ to ‘definite impact’, each point representing the degree of age discrimination that each research collaborator believed exists in the workplace. The only person to indicate explicitly that she had no experience and did not believe ‘ageism’ to be an issue – (1) on the ADA continuum – was Mary, who expressed her opinion that discrimination was not an issue within her occupational field, the law profession:

‘Because of where I am within my conventional career pattern, no it’s not an issue. I think even if I wanted to move to another firm it wouldn’t be an issue, because it’s still expected that you’ve got time under your belt and all that kind of thing. So within the legal world it probably isn’t really an issue. But it could be outside’

(Mary, p. 17)

Her perspective is centred on the belief that ‘time under your belt’ (Mary, p. 17) is an important attribute that negates the impact of ageism and ensures a professional’s survival when moving employment, certainly within the legal profession. In some societies the experience of a person is valued as a sign of respected contribution within their workplace; this contribution is recognised by Cappelli and Novelli who advised that an employer survey (Corporate Voices, 2006) noted:

‘...88 percent reporting that the ‘valuable knowledge’ shown by mature workers was a source of advantage for their businesses, with 74 percent reaching the same conclusion about the reliability and dedication of older workers’

(2010, p. 82)

This survey finding indicates that most American employers do value the experience, reliability and dedication of their older workers, but whilst this is the espoused view of many employers, it is not necessarily practiced by employers when recruiting or retaining older workers (Cappelli and Novelli, 2010). However, it is a position disputed by Charles, the only other solicitor in my research group, who believed that, based on third-party testimony, age discrimination is a possibility within the legal business – see next page for Charles’ comments. Moving to (2) on the ADA continuum, George commented that, although he had not experienced discrimination, there are business sectors in which he sensed that age discrimination is a reality:

‘Well aware in a sense of obviously in my job and as careers coach I’m aware that people have to present themselves differently and there are certain occupations – IT is one and marketing I guess is another one – where it’s practically impossible because it’s seen to be fast moving and a young person’s thing to actually move on in terms of a career in those areas’

(George, p. 19)

Since he is in a specialist role as a career consultant, George's commentary is likely to be an evaluation of his clients' experiences within these types of organisations; his reflections are based on his perception, or sensing, of the issue within these businesses rather than actual practice supported by evidence. Being involved in the selection of workers through his coaching support of job seekers, George's insights may hold additional weight to the extent that they represent not only his perceptions, but also a sagacity based on actual experience of helping older workers re-enter the workplace. His viewpoint is paralleled by that of Charles who drew the conclusion that 'age is a bar' based on conversations that he had held with solicitors seeking re-employment:

‘Yes, a number of solicitors have spoken to me from time to time, particularly those made redundant or seeking jobs ...who have said “I’ve been for an appointment but of course it’s my age that tells against me”. So there may not be any apparent evidence to show it but it’s been inferred from what they’ve told me that age has been a bar’

(Charles, p. 16)

Charles' commentary suggested that there is an age barrier that precludes older workers from gaining new employment, but that the evidence remains scant. That said his perspective is supported by Hansen (1997) who indicates that she believes that older workers are in a doubly difficult situation in so far that, after they have been displaced from the workplace, they are less likely to find new employment. This concern was expressed by two other collaborators, Anthony and Edward, who anticipated that ageism would be an issue if they found themselves in a position where they needed to find a new job:

‘...if I was made redundant it would be a factor, certainly, because ...each time I had to be made redundant I had to get further work it would be a major issue, age. Which isn't fair. But that's the way life is unfortunately’

(Anthony, p. 20)

‘In this supposedly non-ageist society I fully anticipate that it would be far more difficult to find jobs and assumptions will be made about me. I don't feel like I'm 50 ...I'll probably have to put more effort into things and you know hit harder or whatever’

(Edward, p. 19)

Anthony's anticipation of difficulty in finding new employment is grounded in the dilemmas that he faced following several outplacements in his forties, whilst Edward's is his perception of what he expected to encounter. These are both examples of (3) on the ADA continuum – although a person may not actually be experiencing discrimination, they expect to do so either because they have previously done so or simply because of their interpretation of the pressures facing older workers. Some illustrations of the last position (4) on the ADA continuum show

that some of my collaborators believed that age discrimination definitely has had an impact on older worker's occupational existence:

‘A friend of mine who has taken a career break to bring up children, because in the situation where you're in high unemployment, as we are now, you're discounted completely. And yet she has the same qualifications, a lot of the same sort of experience as I have, but she has struggled to get a job and has had to take a job at a lower level than she would be capable of doing’

(Diane, p. 15)

‘... most of the people who took early retirement were older people ...it did look as though people in certain industries (the government) who have got that technical knowledge have been not wanted anymore and it's been left to the pure policy people so there could be a bit [of discrimination] ...but there's nothing concrete – it's just a general feeling’

(Jack, p. 16)

Diane's illustration of her friend's experience demonstrated the difficulties that women often face when seeking to re-enter the labour market after a long period of child caring. Employers wrongly assume that a woman, who has been away from work, is less capable because she is not up to date with current work procedures, often because of new technological advances. Increasingly, this assumption is applied to all older workers and possibly explains why they sometimes face discrimination when they try to resume active work in the labour market; Cappelli and Novelli conclude that:

‘despite generally supportive statements from employers about their [older workers] value, individual hiring managers and supervisors hold negative attitudes toward older workers that are refuted by research. In other words they are prejudiced’

(2010, p. 94)

This negative attitude will always reduce an older worker's employment opportunities as it establishes a barrier to work inclusion and for many third-age workers is a troubling time resulting in emotional and psychological disruption. It is also a surprising response for a society that apparently renounces discrimination in all its embodiments – ethnic, gender, racial and so on – particularly as Ainsworth (2006) notes ‘ageism directed against the old is hostility towards a future self, not a clearly differentiated other’ (p. 316). When practicing ‘ageism’ by supplanting an older worker or in deciding not to appoint an older worker, a person is exacting prejudice and unfairness against their future being, as an older worker. In an earlier study I contended that:

‘by supporting ageism society is reinforcing the idea that ageing is a state of inevitable decline and that ambivalent, possibly discriminatory, attitudes are acceptable; it effectively erodes its future experience by relegating individual capability and experience to the past’

(King, 2007, p. 15)

This viewpoint, exposing potential prejudice and ageist attitudes, is recognised in different texts about the perceptions of older workers (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2007; Riach, 2007; Williams, 2007), each of which illuminate the myths pertaining to senior workplace members. Throughout Europe, the boundaries of life transitions are being contested: acknowledging these challenges, Tikkanen et al note that:

‘...in the Nordic societies the life-course has been highly institutionalised around education, work and retirement – a framework which has been challenged and changing since the 1990s’

(2008, p. 10)

In the UK these policy changes are illustrated within the emerging welfare and pension policy reforms which are altering when an individual may claim state benefits; for older workers, this means that the state pension age is moving from 60/65 to 67 by April 2028. Whilst these changes take effect, attitudes towards older workers remain ambivalent with many finding it difficult to sustain their occupational participation through to the age at which they can receive their state pension. This is a predicament that only two members of my research group, Mary and Martin, encountered due to inadequate pension funding levels. As noted, Mary stayed positive and unconcerned about ageist discrimination, and Martin remained unperturbed about the personal impact of discrimination:

‘Because while ever you’re learning new things and you’re able to adapt, and you’re capable of turning up and doing the work and all the rest of it I don’t see how people could discriminate against you, because as long as you’re pulling your weight ...But of course that can be naïve, sometimes it doesn’t work like that and people are going to have you out because of how old you are, and they’ll engineer a way to do it’

(Martin, p. 25)

In this commentary, he negated the potential influence of discrimination, but also acceded to the credulity of his presumption. This finding may indicate that older workers, who realise that they need (of necessity) to continue their occupational participation, subjugate any ageist concerns that surface, since they do not want to acknowledge their actuality and, therefore, their need to counter the bigotry these perspectives represent. Some explanations may include people’s reluctance to comprehend any notion endangering their identity, or that jeopardises their

occupational continuance and therefore seek to defend, justify or even deny the reality of such a denigrating conception. Although equivocal in their responses, most of my collaborators sensed some degree of age discrimination – either real, professed or imagined – for older workers.

In his report Williams (2007) states that a ‘CIPD survey evidence found that ...one-third of workers over 50 experience age discrimination; and one in five people are put off applying for a job because of reference to age’ (p. 6). As Jack noted in his narrative ‘...there’s nothing concrete – it’s just a general feeling’ (p. 16), I too sensed discrimination based on my experience of seeking vocational engagement in my mid-fifties. Although intangible, the general view of the majority of my research collaborators was that age discrimination does appear in various guises, such as non-acceptability for selection, minimising performance contribution, dilution of role responsibility and transference to ‘special projects’, for older workers progressing through the third-age of their occupational existence. In conclusion, the third-age seems to be a stage of occupational existence in which the legacies of the past, exposed to the mythical scepticism of the present, dissipate under the [false] premise of future incompetence. Within the occupational world ‘age bias’ continues to masquerade as delusions that negatively affect the occupational continuance of older workers.

T7 WPD: Workplace disengagement – Managing occupational withdrawal

The construct of ‘retirement’ emerged during the 20th century as a consequence of people living longer (extended life) and government determination for a state income (economic pension) to be paid to older workers who had discharged their working responsibilities. Formerly people worked through the whole of their lives, often dying in their forties and with no financial safety net in the event that they were forced out of work due to ill health. In contemporary Western society, retirement has become a process emerging over a period of time instead of an occurrence at a set age (Beehr, 1986; Williams, 2007), determined (in the UK) to be the state pension age (SPA) also known as the default retirement age (DRA). As Beehr and Bennett observe:

‘Although we can think that retirement occurred at a certain time on a certain day, the decision to retire, planning for retirement, and anticipating and preparing for it might have occurred over a period of years’

(2007, p. 280)

In the latter part of the 20th century, people tended to remain in occupational engagement until their state pension age (SPA) which meant that most people accepted automatic disengagement at this age. However, since the 1990s, corporate life has become more turbulent and less stable due to economic uncertainty and organisational restructuring. My research collaborators started their occupational existence in the 1960/70s and, at the time, might have expected continuous engagement through to their retirement, but, instead, have emerged into a period of organisational disharmony and uncertainty, with many people displaced in their third-age of employment. So what are their expectations and aspirations for occupational continuation and withdrawal during the concluding years of their professional tenancy?

Closing career aspirations

On entering the third-age of their life course at around 50, most workers do not reflect on their occupational futurity expecting it to continue uninterrupted through to their retirement, but as they intermesh with the reality of being an older worker, they start to reflect on their prospects for occupational endurance. As suggested by Super (1990) in his 'life stage' model, an individual's primary developmental task during this life period is to maintain their occupational continuance through rejuvenating, evolving and checking their occupational progression. Sharf (2006), noting the work of Power and Rothausen (2003), suggests that people in this life stage start to ask questions such as:

‘Will the work I am doing still be available to do in a few years? How will automation or computerization affect my work? What topics concern the people who do my type of work? What types of problems are people who do my type of work trying to solve?’

(Sharf, 2006, p. 219)

These questions indicate the types of concern that older workers begin to express as they realise the portent of their continuing occupational involvement and the actuality of their occupational embodiment. The third-age of employment offers an opportunity to sustain occupational relationships, but some older workers consider alternatives as they start to recede from their former occupational trajectories. In some industries, their reasons for withdrawing and/or choosing alternative employment are associated with physical decline, but, as this capability doesn't impact on professional workers, I was interested to know what career aspirations my research collaborators had for the residual period of their occupational space.

In summary, most responses indicated a proclivity to maintain their occupational position either in their current role or by transposing to a consultancy role, ideally part-time, which enabled them to continue working on assignments within their arena of professional expertise; however, a few wanted to transfer to an entirely new vocation. Perhaps the comfortable option is for a

person to continue doing what they have always done, but only two of my respondents expressed their wish to do this, namely Ann and Charles:

‘I would not want to change what I do so I would continue to do this ...What I would like to do if I could change something is I probably would like to try to find someone of a like mind that I could bring into the business to share the load really, the responsibility ...I wouldn’t stop work I would do something much more artistic and creative ...I would like to do something creative with flowers’

(Ann, p. 10)

‘Well actually I like what I do. And as a consequence I would like to go on doing it for a little longer. I was always brought up in a practice that you are there in a form of vocation that you do aim to earn a living at it, but that that’s not the end all and be all ...But I’m happy with doing what I do. I find it interesting, fascinating, and I would not want to spend my days on the golf course or something of that kind, and I find working in a part time capacity is just ...it keeps me ticking over and happy’

(Charles, p. 10)

These two respondents worked in long established professions (accountancy and law) and both had taken responsibility for practice ownership – Charles as a partner and Ann as sole proprietor over at least 20 years. The ownership of a professional firm creates both governance responsibility and reward (economic and social) as outlined by Maister (1997). In occupational terms, ownership creates purpose – the desire for favourable practice outcomes – and encourages the professional to sustain an inducement to organisational tenure, at least for as long as the firm continues to accomplish its strategic objectives. In Charles’ story he told of economic and social upheavals as he progressed along his partnership continuum and, at the time of his occupational interview, had resigned from partnership in preparation for a period of part-time consulting within the firm that he had previously co-owned. As a sole proprietor Ann expressed her aim to find someone to ‘share the load’ and, separately, she indicated that she would like this person to take over the firm, releasing her ‘to do something creative with flowers’ (p. 10). It seems that investment, both financial and psychological, in a person’s occupational engagement is a strong indicator of occupational permanence that is their desire to continue in the trajectory from which they have emerged.

Opening their consciousness towards alternative occupational endeavours, several collaborators entertained the idea of changing their career, but only one person had done so, namely John who had resigned his partnership and transferred to a charity to look after their property portfolio:

‘I’m fairly strongly convinced that actually that is something that I will be ...can be actively involved with and will be happily involved with for what I see as the remaining period of my working life ...in terms of ten years until I am 65’

(John, p. 13)

Having adjusted to his change in occupational direction, John declared his satisfaction with that change and expressed his desire to continue working until his SPA – now age dependent and variable (ages 65 to 68) following recent policy changes. Feldman (2007) considers this to be ‘career change’ as he has moved employers and is now working in a different organisation. In their narrative responses several other collaborators express their desire to change, but ‘although highly motivated to change careers ...don’t make the transition because they perceive there are not suitable alternatives in the labor market’ (Feldman, 2007, p. 188); collaborators expressing an interest to change were James and Edward:

‘depending on what’s available ...set up some sort of consultancy myself or doing some temporary work or interim management, seems to be, used to be the flavour of the day ...there’s part of me that would be quite keen to do, in other words to set up my own accounting business, that’s the sort of grassroots’

(James, p. 13)

‘The clearest picture would be something to do with what I’m doing at the moment so some learning and development type role, possibly as you know consultancy work ...that seems the most likely outcome and I’d be very happy with that’

(Edward, p. 15)

They have expressed a preference for consulting which would enable them to continue working in their specialist area, but on a temporary or interim basis. This transition appears to be especially appealing to older professional workers as it enables them to build on their network connections and sustain their professional practice, whilst having the flexibility to accommodate their life priorities, such as looking after grandchildren and/or pursuing leisure activities. Cappelli and Novelli (2010) report that ‘many older workers say that they expect and/or want to work later in life ...but not all of them want to work full-time’ (p. 157). As I discovered – both from my collaborators’ narratives and my own experience – this phased approach to retirement becomes a preference as a person recognises the reality of impending occupational disengagement. However, a drawback for many people in adopting this approach is the restrictions set by pension scheme rules that calculate pension based on the last years of occupational service, but there are many ways of overcoming this limitation. As Cappelli and Novelli note:

‘the most common approach has been to allow workers to ‘retire’ and take up their company-defined benefit pension and then have an intermediary organization like a temp agency employ the retiree on behalf of their original employer’

(2010, p. 142)

This was the experience of one of my research collaborators, Jack, who having accepted early retirement was immediately appointed by an agency to facilitate assignments for his former employer. He articulated his ideal working profile as:

‘I guess to tick over because I enjoy what I’m doing. I would be quite happy to carry on at the level I’m at for another three/four years or in the next six months even to reduce that down to a much lower level and start doing what I said I was going to do five years ago and be semi-retired’

(Jack, p. 12)

He expressed his preference for continuing workplace participation, but at a reduced level and with the intent to move to a state of semi-retirement, a step en route to full occupational disengagement. In fact this arrangement continued for several years until his employer’s funding dissolved as a result of national policy interventions and he entered prematurely, as far as he was concerned, a state of full retirement. His experience invites a discussion on ‘what is retirement, when does it start and what does it mean in the context of a person’s life history’? I ruminate on these questions next.

Another uncertainty about this intervening passage to retirement is the acquisition of suitable assignments and the consequent income fluctuations, and so there is, according to a few of my collaborators, a reluctance to adopt this retirement transition. This consideration relates to the topic of financial stability and the security of any person who might choose this approach to occupational disengagement; there is more opportunity for an older worker to pursue this option if they have a robust financial platform from which to launch their occupational alternative. Interestingly, Martin, who disclosed that he had to continue working because of incompetent investment practice by the organisation with whom he had entrusted his future pension, also stated his preference for part-time working:

‘I mean the easy option would be to do some of what I do now on a part time basis ...one other idea I had was becoming a non-exec director of one or two organisations, because I’ve got loads of experience that I could share ...a non-exec directorship would be nice, turn up for a couple of days a month and just keep my brain going’

(Martin, p. 17)

In addition to the benefits of flexible working, he identified a ‘non-executive directorship’ as an opportunity for sustaining his mental agility, although the ambience of his comments raises the

question, for whose benefit is his contribution – self or organisation? The primary aspiration expressed by most of my collaborators was that they wanted to continue working in their chosen profession, but ideally with the option to choose their working hours to maintain an optimal work-life balance. Older workers’ priorities seem to relocate toward embracing family and friends rather than seeking to accrue more professional achievements (Baltes and Graf, 1996), that is they seek to rebalance their life by focusing on relationship building activities within their familial and community groups. Perhaps this aspiration acknowledges the tension that people experience as they approach an age where it is acceptable to retire, that is the closer a person draws to retiring, the less inclined they are to actually retire, a perspective contemplated by Diane in her observation:

‘what I perceive from other people is that you change the closer you get to retirement so that in actual fact the closer you get to retirement the less likely you are to want to retire ...I think the flexibility would probably be quite helpful ...so you need some sort of period of acclimatisation’

(Diane, p. 12)

She recognised the dichotomy that people face between two states of life existence, that is working and not working and, therefore, proposed a period of adjustment/adaptation from a life condition inferring application and exertion (employment) to one often perceived to be a state of relaxation and rest (inactivity). The interface between these two states is a difficult one to negotiate especially as, for many people, work has become a natural state of life existence having been conditioned to it over a considerable period of 30 to 40 (sometimes up to 50) years. Humphrey et al (2003) refer to this as ‘the ‘cliff-edge’ between work and retirement’ (p. 151) and present a number of flexible retirement approaches – self-employment, temporary or short term contracts – to encourage people to mitigate the effects of this phenomena. This is often referred to as ‘semi-retirement’, an abstruse and perplexing life transition during which a person is seeking to retain their occupational identity whilst also negotiating their route to full occupational disengagement; Bimrose and Brown acknowledge this ambiguous realignment by referring to the dissimulating effects of partial workplace disengagement:

‘Distinctions between work and retirement are also likely to become increasingly blurred by the notion of semi-retirement as a way of easing the transition from work to full retirement’

(2010, p. 182)

Whilst several of my collaborators identified a gradual occupational shift as their preferred way toward full workplace withdrawal, only two people, Jack and Mary, actually chose to embark on an alternative occupational pathway. Their reasons for deciding to do so are very different; as previously noted, Jack opted out of a permanent occupational role through voluntary

redundancy believing that he would be able to continue as a consultant to the organisation that he had left, and Mary because she wanted to do something different having sold her law practice. Mary demonstrated her occupational intention to make a complete change:

‘Ideally I would totally change it. That’s what I am working towards ...No I am going to do something else completely different. I think that’s the freedom that I’m aiming for at the moment’

(Mary, p. 13)

In this excerpt, she notes ‘that’s what I am working towards’ (Mary, p. 13), illustrating Ibarra’s (2004) contention that people do not change their livelihood overnight, but ‘build a new working identity by developing the girders and spans as ‘side projects’ – extracurricular ventures that allow us to test possible selves without compromising our current jobs’ (p. 91). Mary was exploring her options by extending a ‘span’ into a new area of professional interest through her postgraduate studies in ‘Religion and Human Rights’, but had not yet made the change. Her experimentation in exploring a new occupation demonstrated her willingness to make a change, a different perspective to James and Edward who, whilst espousing a change, displayed a strong connection to their current role, a behavioural preference often referred to as job attachment. Reflecting on this concept, Bimrose and Brown note that it:

‘...brings considerable benefits, including a sense of career stability and having a ‘career anchor’. However, there is the question as to whether a strong commitment to work also acts to hold individuals in ‘chains’, preventing them from attempting an appropriate career transition until it becomes more and more difficult to achieve’

(2010, p. 194)

Perhaps older professional practitioners, like James and Edward who were economically secure in their existing role, are unlikely to make the change to a gradual phased transition as their attachment is acting as a ‘chain’ binding them into their extant occupational position. In my research group, only three people actually made a change to a phased retirement, that is Jack, Mary and my self – a common feature in the occupational trajectories that each experienced is an external stimuli acting as a trigger for change – either a forced organisational outplacement or an individual voluntary decision to try something new.

The concept of retirement

In response to a question on anticipated retirement expectations, my collaborators expressed their understandings of the term ‘retirement’, their perceptions of what it meant in contemporary society and their thoughts on what it might mean for them as individuals. Contentiously Merchant argues that:

‘...we have reached the stage where retirement is accepted as a ‘normal’ experience; one should expect to leave active economic participation in a national workforce on the basis of age’

(2003, p. 11)

This statement does not attune with many of my collaborators as they contemplated the affect that retirement would have on their lives; firstly there was no appreciation of the notion of it being a normal experience, as illustrated by Charles and George who discerned it as a foreboding event that they would prefer to avoid:

‘It’s when you cease sort of gainful employment. I have never been particularly attracted by it, simply because I’ve never seen it as a sort of golden age and the idea of having nothing to do doesn’t really appeal to me. I would want to have some other activity’

(Charles, p. 13)

I find the word unpleasant, I can’t get my head round it because for me it means stopping work because that’s what my father did and really, to some extent, vegetating ...I have a horror of that concept. So retirement I don’t like, so for me it’s transitioning, perhaps through health reasons as well, I don’t know, to a life which had more choice’

(George, p. 16)

Both commentaries note the idea that it is to do with a period of life in which there is ‘nothing to do’ (Charles, p. 13), an impression of occupational retreat in which an individual withdraws totally from the workplace and finds that their life-space is devoid of any useful activity. In referring to his father, George located the inception of this rumination, connecting back to an earlier generation in which the boundary between work and retirement was more explicit, and one where the act of retiring literally meant withdrawing from any form of occupational practice. In contemporary society this is an incongruous ideation as the spectrum of retirement options has expanded to reflect the realities of social, economic and political policy in the early 21st century. Secondly, Merchant (2003) propounds the idea that it is to be expected that a person will leave the labour market ‘on the basis of age’ (p. 11). The idea that a person should retire at a specific age is predicated by global social policies in which ‘chronological age ...has come to dominate administrative systems ... [and] retirement age is the most common boundary in countries with pension systems’ (Wilson, 2000, p. 21). John certainly expected to retire at this ‘boundary’:

‘Well I guess 65. I’m just not very imaginative and I have always thought of that as being the age one does these things. And I suppose it’s also tied in to when pensions might kick in. Quite a significant part of my pension kicks in at 65’

(John, p. 16)

Whilst acknowledging the relevance of a set pension age for him, his view was not shared by other collaborators, such as Anthony and Charles, who held different perspectives:

‘So basically I won’t be retiring at 65. Okay. Because (a) financially I won’t be able to afford to do that and (b) I think I take the same view as my dad, who is not alive now, but he was still working in his 70s. Not a conventional role ...so that’s what I could see myself doing. I won’t just finish at 65 with a gold watch and handshake’

(Anthony, p. 17)

‘I also think that making people retire at a particular age is a load of nonsense. Some people at 65 may be worn out and ready for the scrap heap and others will go on till much later’

(Charles, p. 10)

In his thoughts, Anthony vocalised the concerns of many people who do not have adequate pensions to support them in retirement, due to changes in share values, funding policies and employment practices over the duration of their working life-time (Wilson, 2000). Unspoken, but also relevant, is the perceived inadequacy of the state pension entitlement to enable a person to enjoy the life style to which they aspire. Originally the UK state pension was introduced to ensure that people who had moved out of the labour market were able to continue to finance their living, but, over the past century a disparity has arisen between the level of entitlement and average earnings. This means that people do not believe that they will be able to live on their state pension, in the absence of any other source of retirement income. In addition, Anthony observed an old fashioned symbol of occupational withdrawal that is ‘a gold watch and handshake’, commonly seen to be the acclamation of a successful retirement, but now to be avoided, dismissed as an anachronistic token of occupational residence. In contrast Charles argued that a set age of 65 is ‘[a] load of nonsense’ (p. 10), since, whilst some may be enervated, others will be energised to continue occupational engagement. The ambiguity of this discussion on a set retirement age is endorsed by Bimrose and Brown, who note the distortions of retirement as a consequence of the emergence of a state of partial occupational deployment:

‘Distinctions between work and retirement are likely to become increasingly blurred by the notion of semi-retirement as a way of easing the transition from work to full retirement’

(2010, p. 182)

This ‘blurring’ has arisen as a result of economic and social changes which has meant that individuals’ occupational trajectories have become disjointed and exposed to the vagaries of global economic disorder. The emerging forces of this disharmony have resulted in

organisational turbulence that has affected the career trajectories of many people meaning that they need, according to Pryor and Bright, to:

‘...reinvent themselves continually, to identify opportunities, to recover from setbacks, to find meaningful work that matters to them and to others, and to capitalize on chance’

(2011, p. 11)

As the occupational landscape changes, so too does the way in which people need to adjust in order to sustain their occupational existence; Pryor and Bright suggest that one way to do this is to ‘reinvent themselves continually’ (p. 11), a practice advocated by Ibarra (2004) for anyone wanting to change their occupational identity, but, as noted, only three of my research group expressed a resolution to ‘reinvent themselves’ with the rest opting to continue through to retirement in their current roles. So what was their definition of retirement? Diane and John designated it as a time when ‘paid employment’ ceased:

‘I suppose it’s the end of paid employment ...I personally think that people should think about doing some voluntary work in retirement ...But you don’t really hear about that’

(Diane, p. 12)

‘I would see retirement as being stopping paid employment. It would be when I got to the stage where I was not having to earn a living’

(John, p. 15)

Whilst this has been an acknowledged denotation of the concept, it presents an historical interpretation that, for many people, may never be realised due to their financial dependency. However, both extracts raise a question about the state of employment; customarily it refers to an occupation from which a person derives a living, but another interpretation is that it simply means engagement in an activity, in which case Diane’s inference about ‘voluntary work in retirement’ (p. 12) suggests that the term ‘employment’ should be extended to include all forms of enterprise where a person is engaged in organisational activity whether paid or voluntary. Her commendation to do voluntary work connects to the idea that an occupational existence can and often does exist beyond retirement, although effort expended may no longer be recognised in monetary terms. However, the opportunity to extend occupational involvement in this way is contingent on an individual’s capacity for financial independence; as expressed by Ann, she regarded the act of occupational withdrawal as unnerving:

‘I define it as very scary at the moment. I mean there’s lots of things I would do, lots of things I could do but to me it’s quite scary because it just seems like a big black hole that I’m going to fall ...It’s all very well when you’re earning and growing, earning and refilling the pot ...So that’s I think the really scary part about retirement for me, the time, the black hole and the money. At least if I’m still working I can replenish the pot’

(Ann, p. 11)

Although successful in her professional employment, Ann was the most pessimistic of my collaborators when it came to the issue of financial security; although this extract describes Ann's personal situation, it may represent an increasingly prevalent scenario for professionals approaching retirement in the future, since those in private practice will often encounter tensions between investing in their business for current operations and investing in them self for their future welfare. It is now understood that an adequate retirement income has a direct impact on the well-being of a retiree, since money acts as a doorkeeper to services – such as healthcare and leisure – that predict well-being after retirement (Taylor and Geldhauser, 2007). Whether for financial or other reasons, Taylor concludes that:

‘Working later ...seems , at first glance, like an attractive prospect, particularly if one adds benefits for older workers such as income and social participation’

(2008a, p. 205)

The opportunity to continue to generate an income post-retirement would seem to be of growing importance for an increasing number of older workers. Additionally Taylor (2008a) notes the debate arguing that individuals should be allowed to decide when to retire based on their personal commitments; flexible retirement has been boosted by legislation to remove the ‘default retirement age’ allowing a person to withdraw from work at an age of their choice unless their employer can objectively justify, that is have no reasonable alternative to introducing an age-centred policy which achieves a legitimate aim of the business. Whilst retirement may be justified on health and safety grounds in a physical working environment, employers of professional practitioners are unlikely to be in a position to insist on retirement unless it is agreed by the individual concerned. It seems that, provided their financial requirements are met, most of my collaborators would embrace retirement from a future age of their choosing, an age that enabled them to engage in leisure activities, as illustrated by Edward and Jack:

‘No longer the need to have a full time job to keep body and soul together, to do something, I think I’d probably still want to work but I think I’d just do something that I could potter around with and so it gives me more time to do the things I want to do. How idealistic is that eh? ’

(Edward, p. 14)

‘Certainly not full-time employment, much more time to take on leisure activities, more time for family, leisure activities I guess could involve church, boating for me, maybe get back into bowls, but the way I am now, to keep my mind active and stay involved. I would carry on doing a certain amount of work voluntarily’

(Jack, p. 13)

Whilst Edward adopted a philosophical stance to his potential occupational retreat, in his reflection Jack expressed a directory of recreational activities that he would engage with, providing it left him with the option to retain some element of employment, either paid or voluntary. In their contemplations about the meaning of retirement, both Edward and Jack have alighted on the freedom for self-expression in the activities that they would engage with, thereby reinforcing Taylor and Geldhauser's (2007) observation regarding the importance of an adequate retirement income to enable participation in leisure activities. However, William notes a caution:

‘...the number of people who’ve decided to retire and go and just enjoy themselves are invariably the most miserable and saddest. Because they’ve been used to being involved in lots of things and all of a sudden most of their planning is deciding which hotel they’re staying in next or which airport they’re going to. So from that point of view, I can’t see myself, certainly for a number of years, just being on holiday permanently’

(William, p. 16)

This reflection is William's perspective on possible drawbacks to a satisfying retirement, but, I suggest, it is predicated on the assumption that the retiree has sufficient financial provision to fund this type of leisure activity. However, it does present an impression of the exclusivity and space available to those retirees who have attained an ample retirement income, a state of pecuniary advantage aspired to by many of my collaborators, but attained by the minority. Possibly more apposite, for professionals facing retirement in the future, was the following commentary in which Mary forewarns of the emerging difficulties facing generations preparing for retirement in future times, a period of continuing social change and financial uncertainty:

‘I think it’s going to be increasingly difficult. It was fine for the guys who are just going through it now. They were the kind of golden age group. The baby boomers who kind of had it right all the way through and they made money at the times they needed to make money and are incredibly well-heeled a lot of them. But there aren’t going to be so many of us like that in the future. And it’s only going to get worse, I think. So, no, I don’t know what my kids will do. They keep saying they don’t want to be old’

(Mary, p. 14)

In her commentary, Mary suggested that future generations are going to face adverse conditions when they consider how best to secure their pensions and enable a comfortable retirement space. She associated herself with the group known as the ‘baby boomers’ – defined by Baruch (2004) as ‘people born in the late 1940s and 1950s ...[who] entered the labour market in the 1960s’ (p. 260) – a group who have benefited from increasing property prices and reasonable investment returns during their working lifetime. All of my research group were born within this time-span and are now approaching/have reached retirement; most, but, as noted, not all, will

receive or are receiving a good level of pension provision. However, Mary expressed concern for the next/future generation/s who will find it more difficult to secure their well-being in older age. Although not of direct consequence, her observation will concern all of my collaborators with (adult) children as it will be they who next encounter the challenge to provide for a future time of occupational withdrawal.

The concept of retirement is a relatively new notion introduced in the 20th century and now one affecting or about to affect my research group. Their responses to ‘retirement anticipations’ were varied, ranging from we would rather avoid if we could to we recognise the need to retire, but, preferably at a time of our choosing. Whilst most still see it as a period for recreational leisure, there was a recognition that this is only possible with adequate pension funding and a few acknowledged the financial difficulties that they, and indeed future generations, will face. Several collaborators expressed a preference for flexible retirement, that is the opportunity to retire gradually, but no one said that they had received support from their employer to facilitate this preference. In addition, several agreed with the idea presented by Bimrose and Brown (2010) that there is an increasing ‘blurring’ of the boundaries between work and withdrawal manifested by the escalating use of semi-retirement to satisfy the changing social and economic requirements of individuals approaching retirement. This notion connects to the question arising about what employment is, the suggestion being that, if employment is about being engaged in an activity, does it matter whether it is paid or voluntary? Perhaps, in retirement, the main concern for older workers is whether or not they feel engaged in a purposeful existence?

Life purpose and identity

In their consideration of retirement, some of my collaborators extended their reflections to embrace issues around life purpose, that is their reason/s for living, often reviewed when a person transfers across boundaries from one life-stage to another as represented by the crossover into retirement. During a transition, a person releases their individuality, their past identity, before creating a new one to represent their current existence (Bridges, 1980); a person’s core self represents who that person is and how they generate an understanding of their life. When moving toward and into retirement a person often seeks to understand their life in terms of core values as acknowledged by Anthony:

‘I’ve got a very strong work ethic. So I certainly believe in that. But also it’s become ...other things have emerged as much more important in life. So my family is much more important, my faith is much more important, my satisfaction is not from work, it’s from who I am, not from work. So as I say as long as the work pays the bills and I can manage, I’m happy, basically’

(Anthony, p. 19)

In his extract Anthony noted the importance of family, faith and self-contentment, an illustration of what Hansen (1997) refers to as the connectedness between ‘work, meaning, values, and purpose’ (p. 257). If a person experiences harmony between the different facets of their life, they are more likely to report that they are satisfied with self and their role in life. However, when discussing the ‘transition phase’ on changing identity, Ibarra comments that it:

‘...is indispensable because we do not give up a career path in which we have invested so much of ourselves unless we have a good sense of the alternatives’

(2004, p. 12)

All third-age professionals have invested significant time and effort in establishing, nurturing and sustaining their professional identity through their occupational appointments; this process has secured the professional self on which they have grounded their identity for the duration of their occupational life. As acknowledged by Ibarra (2004) a person is unlikely to relinquish such an enduring occupational presence for an unknown alternative. Faced with retirement, an unknown space mistrusted by some of my collaborators – Charles said he found it repulsive and George suggested it was obnoxious – it is not surprising that many of them had little enthusiasm for relocating to a life-stage of which they had a low appreciation and no experience. Ibarra (2004) suggests that a person needs to test their potential self in order to enter a new phase of their life-space; having experienced a partial transition through semi-retirement, I have participated in a number of different events that have enabled me to assimilate the expectations and requirements of the new part-time roles that I have adapted to. Although I did not have the opportunity, I vigorously commend that a person approaching retirement, say within five years of their anticipated retirement, consider the advantages to be gained by experimenting with the opportunities available in retirement through a process of flexible or stepped withdrawal, enabling them to acclimatise to their future life environment. Perhaps for some, as noted by Edward, the opportunity to adjust is not so critical, as they have no others sharing their life:

‘Also in a strange way although one looks forward to the freedom of, or with the perceived freedom of retirement, I also am single so there’s no obvious, ‘Oh when I retire we can...’ you know that doesn’t enter into things. So in some respects being properly occupied is a good thing because again my perception of retirement is probably ...less structured and actually structuring a single life I think is probably a bit more difficult than structuring a shared life’

(Edward, p. 15)

Edward’s status caused him to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of retirement leaving him to choose occupational continuance for as long as possible as he believed it would give him some structure in his life, in addition to the freedoms that he recognised. Within the parameters of this research group, Edward was the only single person, which set him in a unique position.

However, some of the thoughts that he expressed resonated with the comments made by another collaborator, James, who reported that:

‘I can go and work for a charity or go and do this or go and do that and I don’t actually have to worry about earning something. Now, maybe I could say that if I was prepared, and myself and my wife were prepared for that change of lifestyle because actually my pension would be more than some people are earning on an average wage or something, so what does that say? I’ve probably got used to being a too highly paid banker’

(James, p. 14)

Whilst acknowledging his financial security, James hesitated at the prospect of retirement as he questioned whether he and his wife were ready for ‘that change in lifestyle [into retirement]’ (p. 14). Earlier in the interview James had acknowledged the importance of structure when he commented that ‘[his wife was] enjoying what she does and ...would like that to continue or ...not to be interfered with [a husband at home]’ (p. 15), thereby inferring that structure was definitely important to her and to him. From these two observations it seems that the structure that an occupation provides is seen by some people as a beneficial reason to continue working; people in contemporary society have ‘fewer ‘signposts’ [for life], meaning that they have to plot their own life strategies and more often make their own strategies’ (Willmott and Nelson, 2005 p. 50). Whilst retirement is a new phase in a person’s journey through life, Beehr and Bennett (2007) note that there has been less research on the quality of retirement life once a person has embarked on it; most research conducted on the retirement decision includes consideration of the effects on partners. However, it seems that there has been little research, if any, on the decisions made by people living in a sole household – I was unable to locate any research that specifically investigated the act of retiring for people living on their own.

As they approach occupational disengagement senior workers are expected to let go of their past occupational identity and reach out for a new unfamiliar selfhood that encapsulates the acts of being out of the workplace. As expressed by Anthony, some bridge this crossover by focusing on their personal values and holding on to them as they transfer into a different lifestyle, whilst others struggle to release their former occupational presence and seek to hold on to their working identity for as long as they can. In some cases, collaborators sensed that occupational participation gave them structure and a sense of meaning in their life. To smooth the transition into occupational retreat, the opportunity to experiment with and test their potential self may be a way of facilitating the transition, as Ibarra (2004) proposes for professional mid-life career changers. Whilst some collaborators highlighted the importance of sustaining a person’s life purpose as they transferred into a state of occupational release, others accentuated the process of disengaging from the workplace.

Negotiating workplace withdrawal

A few of my research collaborators talked about the process of departing from their current work environment – their comments were generally unique to their personal circumstances. Diane, a younger collaborator, explained that she was ready to consider any opportunity:

‘In terms of working, I need to do what I enjoy doing. I want to continue working probably for the next ten years or so ...But I’m open to all sorts ...you know, always open to different types of work that may come up’

(Diane, p. 9)

Her aspiration was to embrace any prospective job, provided it enabled her to continue enjoying her occupational space – this is a perspective held by many employees and is not particular to older workers only; it is possible that her enthusiasm may wane as she progresses through the next decade of occupational participation. Contemplating early retirement, Jack advised:

‘I got it [early retirement]. That opened up a totally new field with the question ‘and now what do I do? ...and whispers started to come down ‘you will be setting up as a consultant, won’t you?’

(Jack, p. 4)

His experience illustrated a work practice known as ‘bridge’ employment, which, according to Barnes-Farrell and Matthews, ‘is a form of employment that represents a stage in a worker’s transition from the role of full-time career worker to the role of full retirement’ (2007, p. 154). In this form of employment, the professional adopts different types of employment contract including consultancy, interim and portfolio working arrangements. Loretto et al report that research has shown that:

‘...older workers with more advantaged work histories, in terms of income and skills [such as my research group], are more likely to enter flexible retirement on leaving full-time careers’

(2009, p. 150)

Bridge employees are more satisfied with their working experience mainly due to the freedom they have to choose when, how and where they work. When I interviewed him, Jack told me enthusiastically about his specialist assignments which presented him with an opportunity to utilise his expert knowledge and travel extensively in Europe; he valued the intensity of his role and the flexibility of his working arrangements. Like Jack, I experienced the engrossment and flexibility generated by utilising my professional capabilities through a range of educational assignments and attest to the sense of freedom that I valued.

One collaborator, Mary, decided to find an exit route through selling her business recognising that ‘an exit route is joining another firm, from which you then [sic] can retire’ (p. 4). Having sold her business, she remained as a consultant but experimented with other ideas and was hoping to develop a role in ‘human rights’, an alternative ‘possible self’ (Ibarra, 2003). A few collaborators, including John and James, expressed a preference for gradual transition enabling them to adjust to permanent occupational withdrawal:

‘I quite like the idea of gradually reduced ...I have talked about this idea that maybe over time I could go down to maybe three days a week, and if I could do that I suppose once I’m into my sixties and therefore can continue ...and also continue that beyond 65. I think a gradual winding-down is something I would certainly be in favour of’

(John, p. 15)

‘I think there is something about ideally a run down and a runoff ...it wouldn’t be just switching off and going on the golf course’

(James, p. 15)

These preferences are supported by the results of a survey conducted by McNair et al (2004) who found that the majority of respondents said that they would like to work part-time after withdrawing from their principal employment. This finding is endorsed by Loretto et al (2009) who advise that ‘research suggests that many older workers in relatively secure employment would welcome more flexible work options at the end of their working lives’ (p. 149). In an economically strong labour market and full employment, many people expect to retire at a defined age, usually the state pension age, but, it seems that, in contemporary society, people anticipate and/or experience occupational withdrawal in very different ways.

Within my research group, only Charles had formally retired and he had chosen to continue working post retirement on a flexible consulting arrangement. Two, Jack and I, had taken early retirement following non-voluntary occupational disengagement and had continued as self-employed portfolio workers. The remaining ten collaborators were continuing in employment recognising that they would have to decide their retirement arrangements within the next ten years. Of these, two had decided to experiment with an alternative self – John had changed his role to work for a charity and Mary was experimenting with ‘possible-selves’ (Ibarra, 2004) to see if she could locate a role connected with ‘human rights’ campaigning. Negotiating withdrawal from the workplace is a distinct process unique to each individual professional worker, and reflects the changing nature of retirement as recognised by Beehr and Bennett:

‘Retirement in the 21st century promises to be different, on average, from retirement in previous centuries. Retirement is no longer a short period of years after a long period of working, during which people have declined dramatically in activity and health’

(2007, p. 297)

Each of my collaborators' stories have shown a different approach to retirement depending on their individual circumstances – employment opportunity, financial security and personal values – which will ultimately determine how and when they negotiate their withdrawal from the workplace. As their occupational landscape changes, older professional workers choose to continue in work or not, dependent on their aspirations and condition, including financial, health and social factors. In this century, there is no right time to retire, but that which is appropriate for each individual, who will be taking a significant step in their life-cycle.

CHAPTER 8: MY RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS: Embracing themes for older workers pending workplace disengagement

In these concluding remarks, I reflect on my research objectives and consider the main issues arising, taking account of the economic, political and social contexts affecting my collaborators. I also make recommendations for professional workers engaged in the third-age of their occupational employment, their employers and, occasionally, the government agencies responsible for policy making in the areas of pensions and retirement. In contemporary society older workers are affected by a multitude of issues that influence the decisions they make during their career progression including how they approach occupational disengagement. As a result the occupational stories told are directed, diverted and sometimes distorted by the events and incidents that they have experienced within their long occupational trajectory.

My first research aim was to locate the career histories of older professional workers, to discover what they had experienced and how this had influenced their continuing career pending workplace disengagement. Through an occupational interview my collaborators recounted their career experiences which were recorded, transcribed and documented: from the occupational stories restored within a narrative form, I was able to locate themes of shared experience. In the latter part of the 20th century, many professional older workers might have told of a linear ascendant career culminating in a senior position possibly involving some form of organisational ownership. However, only one of my collaborators recounted a narrative reflecting this career form, an anticipated progression explained in the life-span theory of Super (1980), who identified five life stages – growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and disengagement – to elucidate the developmental tasks that an individual works through as they move forward in their career.

The rest of my collaborators' narratives recalled the fragmentariness of contemporary career requiring them to revisit different stages of their career as they sought to sustain it in the concluding phase of their occupational participation. These narratives told of careers that, having commenced in the 1960/70s with the anticipation of a progressive trajectory, traversed occupational landscapes only to experience continual buffeting by the vagaries of late 20th/early 21st century organisational life – realignments, refinancing and restructurings. Although I had located their occupational history, it was not the story that they might have imagined at the outset, but it was their story as lived and, therefore, represented their recollections of occupational progression. The occupational stories told embraced a range of satisfying and less satisfying experiences and continually reported on the challenges faced and actions taken to maintain their career continuance; whilst some succeeded, others failed to sustain their occupational presence, but, in different ways, everyone had to revisit their work roles to enable occupational continuity. This reality of career emergence is captured in later theoretical work

that embraces a process of recycling (Super, 1990) in which a person goes back through a developmental task they have previously been through in order to maintain their occupational progression.

There was evidence that the women in my research group changed their orientation to paid work over their life course in direct response to their family obligations, by taking time out to look after their children. This situation is anticipated by Bimrose (2001) who notes that 'women's vocational behaviour is arguably more complex than men's as it is frequently characterised by care responsibilities resulting in different patterns of employment' (p. 80). Although the men did take account of family considerations in determining their commitment, mainly in regard to work location and travel, it did not appear to reorient their career in the sense of causing them to withdraw from or seek alternative occupational engagement. This suggests that an individual's gender did influence their occupational choice/s and had an effect on the continuity of their employment trajectory. However, there were indications that some of the men in my research group were experiencing fragmented work patterns that women have always accepted in order to accommodate their family's needs. This observation is supported by research that shows that older men are adapting to different working patterns involving part-time and flexible working arrangements (Loretto et al, 2009), often due to their inability to find permanent work. The change in work orientation for women with caring responsibilities was the only indicator of a gender difference within my collaborators' occupational narratives.

My second research aim was to identify the issues influencing older professional workers, to uncover their aspirations, intentions and obligations as they navigated toward retirement. In this changing working environment, it seemed that my collaborators' expectations for retirement were disparate from those they might have anticipated when they first embarked on their occupational journey, for retirement in the 21st century is different (Beehr and Bennett, 2007). For some who had been able to sustain their occupational participation over a long career, it seemed that retirement would be the comfortable and financially secure period they expected, but for others, whose occupational involvement had been fragmented, it would be less appealing possibly requiring them to work longer to sustain their finances. For those collaborators still in full-time employment, there appeared to be a clear preference to retain their appointment until they chose to retire, but, as a few had already found, this was not a certainty. This preference was probably influenced by contemporary economics, but it was not the only reason as expounded by two collaborators who voiced their partners' preference for them to stay out of domiciliary range until the option to retire was no longer available.

There were several suggestions that a gradual transition to retirement would be welcome and that this would enable an older worker to acclimatise to full retirement; there is research (Loretto et al, 2009; McNair et al, 2004) to suggest that this is the preferred option for many older workers, but that it is rarely offered or made available by employers. Only one of my

collaborators reported they were aware that their employer would negotiate a gradual withdrawal, but only if the individual employee asked for a negotiated arrangement. Whilst the benefits of a gradual transition are clear, allowing time for the prospective retiree to address family obligations and to commence recreational activity, professional employers do not appear to encourage this opportunity, despite the evidence of this narrative investigation and other research programmes. I commend flexible working arrangements – bridge employment, home working, part-time working and so on – for older professional workers, as they have distinct benefits, including enabling continuity of employment from work toward retirement, offering freedom to participate in a variety of assignments and creating a sense of occupational identity which encourages the self to feel they have sustained some degree of occupational coherence.

What is the right age for a person to leave the workplace? Customarily this was set at the state pension age (SPA), which, according to some of my collaborators, remained as their preferred retirement age; it seemed that government policy on pensions is a key factor in deciding when to retire. However, as a result of changing demographics, the policy makers have had to review and revise retirement legislation for a variety of reasons including economic pressures, increasing longevity and social obligations. During the emergence of this study the coalition government have legislated for amendments to the state pension age and have removed the default retirement age, thus amending the expectations that my collaborators might have had regarding their retirement options. Recognising the social and economic demands on the state welfare system, I endorse the recommendation to extend the upper age limit for working beyond the current prescribed years (McNair, 2009), but, to retain equality of choice, I propose that the age at which an individual can claim their state pension entitlement should be reduced to an earlier age (say 62) for people wishing to draw their state pension, perhaps to accommodate caring responsibilities. This phased structure for the SPA would create a flexible pensions policy that would be appealing to many of my collaborators and enable older workers to select a retirement age that best suits their individual needs.

My third research aim was to detect the value of a narrative approach, to see whether it helps older professional workers embrace their occupational history and destiny. My collaborators' willingness to share their occupational experiences showed the value that they attached to documenting the richness of their career trajectory and established a foundation on which to explore their occupational direction, preferences and values. In this sense my research collaborators demonstrated the validity of narrative inquiry as an authentic approach to facilitate career counselling as propounded by some authors (Patton and McMahon, 2006; Reid and West, 2011; Savickas, 2011) writing about the value of constructivist discourses. My collaborators' narratives displayed their occupational trajectories and presented third-age employment as one of occupational uncertainty, although some were unfamiliar with the term 'third-age' to represent the employment stage leading to occupational disengagement.

In 'Working identity' Ibarra (2003/2004) commends the value of occupational stories as a way to help a person locate their occupational presence and manage a mid-career transition; for similar reasons I contend that occupational narratives help older workers capture their career history, engage with their third age occupational presence and determine their withdrawal options. Having sustained their career to the present, my collaborators encountered different occupational adventures – continuance of existing role, refocus to specialist projects, disengagement from the workplace, reorientation through bridging employment, refreshment in a new identity – each of which held challenges for some. Whilst these occupational adventures were distinct to the older worker participating in them, the one challenge that they all had to embrace was their pending arrival into the passage of life existence known as 'retirement', a life stage devoid of occupational participation.

In the transition from third-age participation to occupational disengagement, I believe that other insights – reinvention, experimentation, transitional guidance and survival (Ibarra, 2003/2004) also enable older professional workers to embark on the most significant event in their continuing life journey. I suggest that her emphasis on the importance of narrative reflection (Ibarra, 2003/2004) as a method for helping the mid-career changer embrace their occupational history, also enables the older worker to facilitate their transference from occupational participation to withdrawal, by presenting a 'frame of inquiry' within which they can identify and address those issues important to their occupational disengagement. However, whilst endorsing the value of occupational stories for capturing occupational history – the evidence, I suggest, is stored within the richness of the narratives recollected – I think that my research leaves unanswered questions about the verisimilitude of the narrative approach regarding its relevance for determining occupational destiny. Further research, perhaps a longitudinal study, is required to confirm whether narrative inquiry is an appropriate method for older workers to embrace their future career direction.

Emerging from an analysis of my collaborators' occupational narratives, I deduced a model for sustaining occupational evolution and surfaced four secondary occupational themes that my research collaborators reflected on during the third-age of their occupational span. The occupational evolution matrix proposes four styles that symbolize the ways in which a professional worker's career trajectory may emerge – renovation (restoring occupational existence), migration (relocating occupational domicile), realisation (actualising occupational attainment) and innovation (transforming occupational embodiment). I contend that a professional's occupational life will transpire with one of these styles predominating and that this style will prevail throughout their occupational progression.

Concurrently, I derived four occupational sub themes, which are:

- **Occupational endeavour** – older professional workers indicate that they wish to secure a sense of economic usefulness and continuity that is to retain the purpose and value of their occupational existence. This preference acknowledges the notion of ‘productive ageing’ (Biggs, 2010, p. 359) and recognises their occupational contribution, in addition to the financial sustenance that economic participation provides.

- **Workplace harmony** – career decisions include consideration of occupational harmony that is the degree of alignment between their perception of self-worth and the degree of appreciation/recognition conferred by their employer in their current role. All workers, including older ones, want to believe that there is an association between these two attributes confirming the strength of their organisational membership. The model indicates that a less strong relationship may result in weakening occupational affinity and ultimately disassociation from the organisation.

- **New pathways** – for some older workers, sustaining occupational existence is not possible and they need to reinvent their career adopting what Ibarra describes as ‘the strategies for reinventing identity – crafting experiments, shifting connections and making sense’ (2004, p. 18). Finding a different occupational direction is a disordered process in which grounded experience helps to locate tenable solutions (Ibarra, 2004), but is possibly a career option to be considered by those disillusioned with the reality of their occupational existence.

- **Complementary life challenges** – work should be in alignment with a person’s beliefs and values. Social conscience becomes an intrinsic motivational driver for some older workers who, having received advantage (reward and status) from their professional position, seek a role to serve others – a person’s focus transfers to beneficent outcomes that embrace a sense of satisfaction about their embedded identity (Capelli and Novelli, 2010). Whilst altruistic in its intent it seems that an underpinning aim may be to augment self-image.

Curious about some of the incidents recounted in the occupational interviews, I scrutinised the transcripts and concluded that these four sub themes represented areas of concern and/or interest to my research collaborators. Whilst the embryonic models (on occupational evolution and occupational harmony) may appear positivistic, they are an effort to explain some of the occupational incidents that I uncovered in my collaborators’ narratives. In their current form these models remain elementary, and I countenance further enquiry to ascertain the validity of the constructs proposed.

In this research I have investigated, through auto/biographic narration, the occupational histories and aspirations of an opportunistic group of professional business workers in the third-age of their life transition. Within the challenges of the 21st century global knowledge economy, my collaborators' stories have presented a rich tapestry of occupational insight into the career trajectories of older professional workers as they approach workplace disengagement from their employment within the United Kingdom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrahamson, E. (1996).** Management Fashion. *Academy of Management Review*, 21, 254-285.
- Accountancy Age (2009).** *Top 50 Accountancy Firms*. Retrieved 02/03/2009 from <http://www.accountancyage.com/resources/top50>.
- Adams, G., King, L. and King, D. (1996).** Relationships of job and family involvement, family social support, and work-family conflict with job and life satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 8(4), 411-420.
- Ainsworth, S. (2006).** Constructing Older Workers: Cultural Meanings of Age and Work. In Hearn, M. and Michelson, G. (Eds.), *Rethinking Work: Time, Space and Discourse*., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ainsworth, S. and Hardy, C. (2007).** The construction of the older worker: privilege, paradox and policy. *Discourse & Communication*, 1(3), 267-285.
- Ali, L. and Graham, B. (1996).** *The Counselling Approach to Careers Guidance*. London: Routledge.
- Alley, D. and Crimmins, E. (2007).** The Demography of Aging and Work. In Shultz, K. S. and Adams, G. A. (Eds.), *Aging and Work in the 21st Century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Alvesson, M. (2001).** Knowledge work: Ambiguity, image and identity. *Human Relations*, 54 (7), 863-886.
- Amundson, N. E. (2003).** *Active engagement: Enhancing the career counselling process*. Richmond, BC: Ergon Communication.
- Andrews, M., Squire, C. and Tamboukou, M. (2008).** *Doing Narrative Research*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Arnold, J. (1997).** *Managing Careers into the 21st Century*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Arthur, M. B. (1994).** The boundaryless career: a new perspective for organisational inquiry. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15(4), 295-306.
- Arthur, M. B. and Rousseau, D. (1996).** *The boundaryless career: A new employment principle for a new organizational era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bacon, F. (c.1960a).** ‘Of Great Place’, *The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral, of Francis Ld. Verulam Viscount St. Alban*. Mount Vernon NY: Peter Pauper Press (1st Ed. published 1625, London: John Haviland).
- Bacon, F. (c.1960b).** ‘Of Ambition’, *The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral, of Francis Ld. Verulam Viscount St. Alban*. Mount Vernon NY: Peter Pauper Press (1st Ed. published 1625, London: John Haviland).
- Baltes, P. B. and Graf, P. (1996).** Psychological aspects of ageing: Facts and frontiers. In Magnusson, D. (Ed.), *The lifespan development of individuals: Behavioral, neurobiological, and psychosocial perspectives*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Baltes, P. B. and Smith, J. (2003).** New frontiers in the future of aging: from successful aging of the young old to the dilemmas of the fourth age. *Gerontology*, 49(2), 123-135.

- Baltes, B. B. and Young, L. M. (2007).** Aging and Work/Family Issues. In Shultz, K. S. and Adams, G. A. (Eds.), *Aging and Work in the 21st Century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Barthes, R. (1977).** The Photographic Message. In Heath, S. (Ed.), *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press.
- Bartlett, F. C. (1932).** *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barham, L. (2008).** Career management skills and the older workforce – a literature review. *A working paper completed for the Ufi Charitable Trust*. Cambridge: NICEC.
- Barnes-Farrell, J. L. and Matthews, R. A. (2007).** Age and Work Attitudes. In Shultz, K. S. and Adams, G. A. (Eds.), *Aging and Work in the 21st Century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Barrah, J. L., Shultz, K. S., Baltes, B. B. and Stolz, H. K. (2004).** Men's and women's eldercare-based work/family conflicts: Antecedents and work-related outcomes. *Fathering, 2*, 305-330.
- Barton, D., Ivanič, R., Appleby, Y., Hodge, R. and Tusting, K. (2007).** *Literacy, Lives and Learning*. London: Routledge.
- Baruch, Y. (2004).** *Managing Careers: Theory and Practice*. Harlow: FT Prentice Hall.
- Beehr, T. A. (1986).** The process of retirement: A review and recommendations for future investigation, *Personnel Psychology, 39*, 31-55.
- Beehr, T. A. and Bennett, M. M. (2007).** Examining Retirement from a Multi-level Perspective. In Shultz, K. S. and Adams, G. A. (Eds.), *Aging and Work in the 21st Century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- BERA (2004).** *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. Southwell: British Education Research Association.
- Berger, P. L. and Luckmann, T. (1966).** *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books.
- Bertaux, D. and Delcroix, C. (2000).** Case Histories of Families and Social Processes: Enriching Sociology. In Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J. and Wengraf, T. (Eds.), *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science*. London: Routledge.
- Betz, N. E., Fitzgerald, L. F. and Hill, R. E. (1989).** Trait-factor theories; traditional cornerstone of career theory. In Arthur, B. A., Hall, D. T. and Lawrence, B. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Career Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beveridge, W. (1942).** *Report: Social Insurance and Allied Services*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Biggs, S. (2010).** Midlife Issues. In Woolfe, R., Strawbridge, S., Douglas, B. and Dryden, W. (Eds.), *Handbook of Counselling Psychology (3rd ed.)*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Bimrose, J. (2001).** Girls and women: Challenges for careers guidance practice. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 29(1)*, 79-94.
- Bimrose, J. (2008).** Guidance for Girls and Women. In Athanasou, J. A. and Van Esbroeck, R. (Eds.), *International Handbook of Career Guidance*. Dordrecht ; London: Springer.

- Bimrose, J. and Brown, A. (2010).** Older workers' transitions in work-related learning, careers and identities. In Ecclestone, K., Biesta, G. and Hughes, M. (Eds.), *Transitions and Learning through the Lifecourse*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Blustein, D. L. (2006).** *The Psychology of Working; A new perspective for career development, counseling, and public policy*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bornat, J., Dimmock, B., Jones, D. and Peace, S. (2000).** Researching the implications of family change for older people: The contribution of a life-history approach. In Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J. and Wengraf, T. (Eds.), *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science*. London: Routledge.
- Borenstein, A. (1978).** *Redeeming the Sin: Social Science and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984).** *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bower, F. L. and Sadler, W. A. (2009).** *Why Retire?: Career Strategies for Third Age Nurses*. Indianapolis, IN: Sigma Theta Tau International.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998).** *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Bridges, W. (1980).** *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.
- Britton, A. (1997).** Full Employment in a Market Economy. In Philpott, J. (Ed.), *Working for Full Employment*. London: Routledge.
- Brown, D. (2006).** *Career Information, Career Counseling, and Career Development* (9th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Bruner, J. S. (1983).** *In Search of Mind; Essays in Autobiography*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Bruner, J. S. (1990).** *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. S. (1993).** The autobiographical process. In Folkenflik, R. (Ed.), *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self Representation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Buehler, C. (1933).** *Der Menschliche Lebenslauf als Psychologisches Problem*. Leipzig: Hirzel.
- Burkitt, I. (2008).** *Social Selves: Theories of Self and Society* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Burr, V. (1998).** Overview: Realism, Relativism, Social Constructionism and Discourse. In Parker, I. (Ed.), *Social Constructionism, Discourse and Realism*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Butterworth, M. (2009a).** *Older people to work longer and default retirement age to be scrapped, says Dame Joan Bakewell*. Retrieved 05/10/2009 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/6243181/Older-people-to-work-longer-and-default-retirement-age-to-be-scrapped-says-Dame-Joan-Bakewell.html>.
- Butterworth, M. (2009b).** *Default retirement age abolished for top civil servants*. Retrieved 05/10/2009 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/6251058/Default-retirement-age-abolished-for-top-civil-servants.html>.

- Butterworth, M. (2009c).** *Plans to raise state pension age not radical enough, says Lord Turner.* Retrieved 17/08/2009 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/pensions/5725034/Plans-to-raise-state-pension-age-not-radical-enough-says-Lord-Turner.html>.
- Cann, P. (2009).** *BBC News: EU judges back UK retirement age.* Retrieved 09/03/2009 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7925203.stm>.
- Cappelli, P. and Novelli, W. (2010).** *Managing the Older Worker: How to Prepare for the New Organizational Order.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Catani, M. (1973).** *Journal de Mohammed: Un Algerien en France parmi 800,000 autres.* Paris: Stock.
- Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J. and Wengraf, T. (2000).** *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative issues and examples.* London and New York: Routledge.
- Charles, N. (2002).** *Gender in Modern Britain.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clandinin, D. J. and Connelly, F. M. (2000).** *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Clouston, T. (2003).** Narrative Methods: Talk, Listening and Representation. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy.* 66(4), 136-142.
- Cochran, L. (1997).** *Career Counselling: A Narrative Approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Cochran, L. and Laub, J. (1994).** *Becoming an Agent: Patterns and Dynamics for Shaping Your Life.* Albany, NY: University of New York Press.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2000).** *Research Methods in Education* (5th ed.). London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Colarusso, C. A. and Nemiroff, R. A. (1985).** *The Race Against Time: Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis in the Second Half of Life.* New York: Plenum.
- Collin, A. and Watts, A.G. (1996).** The death and transfiguration of career—and of career guidance?. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling,* 24(3), 385-398.
- Cooley, C. H. (1962).** *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind.* New York: Schocken (1st ed. published 1909).
- Cooley, C. H. (1964).** *Human Nature and the Social Order.* New York: Schocken (1st ed. published 1902).
- Corporate Voices (2006).** The Real Talent Debate: Will Aging Boomers Deplete the Workforce? *Buck Consultants, Corporate Voices for Working Families and World at Work.* Retrieved 28/02/2012 from <http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org/system/files/TalentDebate.pdf>.
- Cortazzi, M. (1991).** *Primary Teaching: how it is – a narrative account.* London: David Fulton.
- Cory, G. (2012).** *Unfinished Business: Barriers and opportunities for older workers.* London: Resolution Foundation.
- Cresswell, J. W. (2003).** *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Cresswell, J. W. (2007).** *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crites, S. (1971).** The Narrative Quality of Experience. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 39, 291-311.
- Crotty, M. (1998).** *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Curnow, B. and Fox, J.M. (1994).** *Third Age Careers: Meeting The Corporate Challenge*. Aldershot: Gower.
- Dalton, G. W., Thompson, P. H. and Price R. L. (1977).** The Four Stages of Professional Careers: A New Look at Performance by Professionals. *Organizational Dynamics*, 6(23), 19-42.
- Damasio, A. R. (1995).** *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York; Avon.
- Davies, B., Browne, J., Honan, E., Laws, C., Mueller-Rockstroh, B. and Bendix Petersen, E. (2004).** The Ambivalent Practices of Reflexivity. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(3), 360-389.
- Dawis, R. V. and Lofquist, L. H. (1984).** *A psychological theory of work adjustment: An individual-differences model and its applications*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- De Fina, A. (2003).** *Identity in Narrative: A study of immigrant discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Delphy, C. (1996).** Rethinking sex and gender. In Leonard, D. and Adkins, L. (Eds.), *Sex in question: French materialist feminism*. London: Taylor Francis.
- Denzin, N. (1997).** *Interpretive Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Donaldson, L. (2001).** Reflections on knowledge and knowledge-intensive firms. *Human Relations*, 54(7), 955-963.
- Dreyfus, H. L. and Dreyfus, S. E. (1986).** *Mind over Machine: the Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- ECJ (2009).** *Press Release No 19/09: Judgement of the Court of Justice in Case C-388/07*. Retrieved 02/05/2012 from <http://curia.europa.eu/en/actu/communiqués/cp09/aff/cp090019en.pdf>.
- Ekerdt, D., Kosloski, K. and DeViney, S. (2000).** The normative anticipation of retirement by older workers. *Research on Ageing*, 22(1), 3-22.
- Elliott, J. (2005).** *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Ellis, C. (2004).** *The ethnographic it: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- Eraut, M. (1994).** *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*. London: Falmer Press.
- Erikson, E. H. (1959).** Identity and the life-cycle. *Psychological Issues*, 1, 1-171.

- Etherington, K. (2004).** *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher; Using Our Selves in Research.* London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Evans, P. and Bartolomé, F. (1984).** The changing pictures of the relationship between career and family, *Journal of Occupational Behavior*, 5, 9-21.
- Evetts, J. (2011).** Professionalism in turbulent times: challenges to and opportunities for professionalism as an occupational value. *Journal of The National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 27, 8-16.
- Feldman, D. C. (2007).** Career Mobility and Career Stability Among Older Workers. In Shultz, K. S. and Adams, G. A. (Eds.), *Aging and Work in the 21st Century.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Feldman, M. S. (1989).** *Order without design.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Fenwick, T. (2003).** Flexibility and Individualisation in Adult Education Work: The case of portfolio educators, *Journal of Education and Work*, 16(2), 165 – 184.
- Festinger, L. (1964).** Motivations leading to social behaviour. In Teevan, R. C. and Burney, R. C. (Eds.), *Theories of motivation in personality and social psychology.* New York: Van Nostrand.
- Fischer, S. R. (2003).** *A History of Writing.* London: Reaktion Books.
- Folbre, N. (1994).** *Who Pays for the Kids?: Gender and the structures of constraint.* London: Routledge.
- Ford, G. (1996).** *Careers Guidance in the Third Age: A Mapping Exercise.* Cambridge: NICEC/CRAC.
- Forrester, V. (1999).** *The Economic Horror.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Forte, C. and Hansvick, C. (1999).** Applicant age as a subjective employability factor: a study of workers over and under fifty. *Journal of Employment Counselling*, 36(1), 24-34.
- Foucault, M. (1998).** What is an author? In Rainbow, P. (Ed.), *Michel Foucault, Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology, the Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. II.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Freeman, M. (2003).** Identity and difference in narrative inquiry, Psychoanalytic narratives: Writing the self into contemporary cultural phenomena. *Narrative Inquiry*, 13(2), 331-346.
- Frone, M., Russell, M. and Cooper, M. (1991).** Relationship of work and family stressors to psychological distress: the independent moderating influence of social support, mastery, affective coping and self-focused attention. *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality*, 6, 227-50.
- Frow, J. (2007).** Toute La Mémoire du Monde: Repetition and Forgetting. In Rossington, M. and Whitehead, A. (Eds.), *Theories of Memory: A Reader.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gallas, K. (1994).** *The Language of Learning: How Children Talk, Write, Dance, Draw, and Sing their Understanding of the World.* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gatrell, C. (2008).** *Embodying Women's Work.* Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- Gaur, A. (1984).** *A History of Writing.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

- Geertz, C. (1973).** Thick Descriptions: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture. In Geertz, C. (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Georgakopolou, A. (2006).** Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 122-130.
- Gergen, K. J. (1997).** *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gergen, K. J. (1999).** *An Invitation to Social Construction*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Gergen, K. J. (2000).** *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gibbs, G. R. and Taylor, C. (2005).** *How and what to code*. Retrieved 06/08/2010 from http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/how_what_to_code.php.
- Gillham, B. (2005).** *Research Interviewing: The range of techniques*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Ginzberg, E., Ginzberg, S. W., Axelrad, S. and Herma, J. L. (1951).** *Occupational choice: an approach to a general theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Goldstein, K., Kielhofner, G. and Paul-Ward, A. (2004).** Occupational narratives and the therapeutic process. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 51, 119-124.
- Goldstein, R. (2010).** The Future of Counselling Psychology. In Woolfe, R., Strawbridge, S., Douglas, B. and Dryden, W. (Eds.), *Handbook of Counselling Psychology* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Gottfredson, L. S. (1981).** Circumscription and Compromise: A Developmental Theory of Occupational Aspiration. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 28(6), pp. 545-579.
- Gottfredson, L. S. (2002).** Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription, Compromise and Self-Creation. In Brown, D. and Associates (Eds.), *Career Choice and Development* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Greenhaus, J. H., Callanan, G. A. and Godshalk, V. M. (2000).** *Career management* (3rd ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western.
- Gunn, J. A. (1929).** The Problem of Time. *Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 4(14), 180 – 191.
- Hagedoorn, J., Link, A. N. and Vonortas, N. S. (2000).** Research Partnerships. *Research Policy*, 29, 567 – 586.
- Hall, D. T. (1996).** Protean careers of the 21st century. *Academy of Management Executive*, 10, 8-16.
- Hamilton, C. (2009).** *Middle Age*. Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing.
- Hansen, L. S. (1997).** *Integrative Life Planning: Critical Tasks for Career Development and Changing Life Patterns*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Hansen, M. T., Nohria, N. & Tierney, T. (1999).** What's your strategy for managing knowledge? *Harvard Business Review*, Mar-Apr 1999, 106-116.
- Harries-Jenkins, G. (1970).** Professionals in Organizations. In Jackson, J. A. (Ed.), *Professions and Professionalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hewitt, P. (1997).** Full employment for men and women. In Philpott, J. (Ed.), *Working for Full Employment*. London: Routledge.

- Hirsch, D. (2003).** *Crossroads after 50: Improving choices in work and retirement*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- HMSO (2006).** *The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006*. London: The Stationery Office Limited.
- HMSO (2007).** *The Pension Act 2007*. London: The Stationery Office Limited.
- Holland, J. L. (1973).** *Making Vocational Choices*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Holland, J. L. (1985).** *Making Vocational Choices* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Hollis, J. (1993).** *The Middle Passage, From Misery to Meaning in Midlife*. Toronto: Inner City Books.
- Hotopp, U. (2005).** *The Employment Rate of Older Workers, Labour Market Trends*. London: Office for National Statistics.
- Hughes, J. A. (1976).** *Sociological Analysis: Methods of Discovery*. Sunbury-on-Thames: Nelson & Sons.
- Humphrey, A., Costigan, P., Pickering, K., Stratford, N. and Barnes, M. (2003).** Factors Affecting the Labour Market Participation of Older Workers. *DWP Research Report No. 200*, London: Department for Work and Pensions.
- Ibarra, H. (2003).** *Working identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing your career* (Hardcover). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Ibarra, H. (2004).** *Working identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing your career* (Paperback). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Jamieson, A. (2009).** *State pension age could climb to 70*. Retrieved 17/08/2009 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/pensions/5995590/State-pension-age-should-rise-to-70.html>.
- Jenkins, R. (2008).** *Social Identity* (3rd ed.). Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.
- Jensen, R. A. (1993).** *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age*. Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing.
- Jorgenson, J. (1991).** Co-constructing the Interviewer/Co-constructing 'Family'. In Steier, F. (Ed.), *Research and Reflexivity*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Kalleberg, A. L. (2009).** Precarious work, insecure workers: Employment relations in transition. *American Sociological Review*, 74, 1-22.
- Kanter, R. M. (1989).** *When Giants Learn to Dance*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kelly, J. R. (1997).** Activity and ageing: challenge in retirement. In Haworth, J. T. (Ed.), *Work, Leisure and Well-being*. London: Routledge.
- Kenyon, G. M. and Randall, W. L. (1997).** *Restorying Our Lives: Personal Growth through Autobiographical Reflection*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Kidd, J. M. (2006).** *Understanding Career Counselling: Theory, research and practice*. London: SAGE Publications.
- King, I. (2007).** *Sculpting Future Career: Reflections on the personal career transitions of an older worker and their influence on third-age career options – an autobiographic narrative* (unpublished dissertation). Canterbury: Canterbury Christ Church University.

- King, I. (2010).** Disentangling Professional Careers: A narrative approach to embracing third-age career aspirations. In Reid, H. (Ed.), *Occasional Paper, The Re-emergence of Career: Challenges and opportunities*. Canterbury: CLIENT Canterbury Christ Church University.
- Kroger, J. (2007).** *Identity Development: Adolescence Through Adulthood*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Krumboltz, J. D., Blando, J. A., Kim, H. and Reikowski, D. J. (1994).** Embedding work values in stories. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 73, 57-62.
- Labov, W. and Waletzky, J. (1967).** Narrative analysis: oral versions of personal experience. In Helm, J. (Ed.), *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Laing, R. D. (1990).** *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. London: Penguin.
- Langer, L. L. (1991).** *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Laslett, P. (1991).** *A Fresh Map of Life: the Emergence of the Third Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Legal Week (2009).** UK Top 50 Law Firms. Retrieved 02/03/2009 from <http://www.legalweek.com/LawFirms/Home.aspx>.
- Lejeune, P. (1989).** The Autobiographical Pact. In Eakin, P. J. (Ed.) translated Leary, K., *On Autobiography*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Levinson, D. J. (1985).** *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York: Knopf.
- Levinson, D. J., Darrow, C. N., Klein, E. B., Levinson, M. H. and McKee, B. (1978).** *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. and Zilber, T. (1998).** *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis and Interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Linde, C. (1993).** *Life Stories: The creation of coherence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lishman, G. (2009).** BBC News: EU judges back UK retirement age. Retrieved 09/03/2009 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7925203.stm>.
- Loretto, W. Vickerstaff, S. and White, P. (2006).** Introduction themed section: what do older workers want? *Social Policy and Society*, 5, 443-451.
- Loretto, W. Vickerstaff, S. and White, P. (2009).** Flexible work and older workers. In Loretto, W. Vickerstaff, S. and White, P. (Eds.), *The future for older workers: New perspectives*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Lorsch, J. W. and Tierney, T. J. (2002).** *Aligning the Stars: How to Succeed When Professionals Drive Results*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Løwendahl, B. R. (1997).** *Strategic Management of Professional Service Firms* (2nd ed.). Copenhagen: Handelshøjskolens Forlag.
- MacMillan, R. (2005).** The Structure of the Life Course: Standardized? Individualized? Differentiated? *Advances in Life Course Research*, 9, 3-24.

- Macnicol, J. (2005).** Retirement in an Ageing Society: the British Debate. *Progressive Politics*, 4 (2), pp. 44-49.
- Maister, D. H. (1993/1997).** *Managing the Professional Service Firm*. New York: The Free Press.
- Maister, D. H. (1997).** *True Professionalism: The Courage to Care About Your People, Your Clients, and Your Career*. New York: The Free Press.
- Maister, D. H., Green, C. H. and Galford, R.M. (2002).** *The Trusted Advisor*. London: The Free Press.
- Management Consultancies Association (2009).** MCA Members List. Retrieved 02/03/2009 from <http://www.mca.org.uk/MCA/Members/MembersList.aspx>.
- Markus, H. (1977).** Self-schemata and processing information about the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35, 63-78.
- Maslow, A. (1943).** A Theory of Human Motivation, *Psychological Review*, 1, 370-396.
- McAdams, D. P. (1988).** *Power Intimacy and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries into Identity*. New York: Guildford Publications.
- McAdams, D. P. (1997).** *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (1st ed.). New York: Guildford Publications.
- McKenna, P. J. and Maister, D. H. (2002).** *FIRST Among Equals: How to Manage a Group of Professionals*. New York: The Free Press.
- McNair, S., Flynn, M., Owen, L., Humphreys C. and Woodfield, S. (2004).** *Changing Work in Later Life: A Study of Job Transitions*. Guildford: South East England Development Agency/Centre for Research into the Older Workforce.
- McNair, S. (2009).** *Demography and Lifelong learning: IFLL Thematic Paper*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.
- Mead, G. H. (1934)** *Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviourist* (Morris, C. W., Ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Merchant, R. (2003).** *Pioneering The Third Age: The church in an ageing population*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.
- Merrill, B. and West, L. (2009).** *Using Biographical Methods in Social Research*. Los Angeles and London: SAGE Publications.
- Midwinter, E. (2005).** How many people are there in the third age? *Ageing & Society*, 25, 9-18.
- Mishler, E. (1991).** Representing Discourse; the Rhetoric of Transcription. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 1, 255-280.
- Morris, T. (2008).** Professional Service Firms: The Challenges of Innovation. In Dopson, S., Earl, M. and Snow P. (Eds.), *Mapping the Management Journey: Practice, Theory and Context*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mowday, R. T. (1997).** Presidential address: Reaffirming our scholarly values. *Academy of Management Review*, 22, 335-345.
- Mulvey, R. (1999).** Professional Ways: A look at the essential characteristics of professions and professionals. *Careers Guidance Today*. 7 (3), 24–25.

- Myers, J. R. (2007).** *Organic Community: Creating a place where people naturally connect.* Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Books.
- Newman, B. and Newman, P. (1995).** *Development through life: A psychosocial approach* (6th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- NODE (1998).** *The New Oxford Dictionary of English.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- OJEC (2000).** European Council Directive 2000/78/EC (Employment Framework). *Official Journal of the European Communities.* Brussels: The Council of the European Union.
- ONS (2008).** *Population – Ageing, Office for National Statistics* (Aug 2008). Retrieved 28/01/2009 from <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=949>.
- Osipow, S. H. and Fitzgerald, L. F. (1996).** *Theories of Career Development* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Out-Law (2009).** *Default retirement age is lawful, rules High Court.* Retrieved 05/10/2009 from <http://out-law.com/page-10408>.
- Page, G. (2005).** Professional socialisation of valuers: What the literature and professional bodies offer. *International Education Journal*, 5(5), 105-116.
- Parsons, F. (1909).** *Choosing a Vocation.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Patterson, W. (2008).** Narratives of events: Labovian narrative analysis and its limitations. In Andrews, M., Squire, C. and Tamboukou, M. (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research.* Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Patton, W. and McMahon, M. (2006).** Constructivism: What does it mean for career counselling? In McMahon, M. and Patton, W. (Eds.), *Career Counselling: Constructivist Approaches.* London and New York: Routledge.
- Peterson, G. W., Sampson, J. P. Jr., Lenz, J. G. and Reardon, R. C. (2002).** A cognitive information processing approach to career problem solving and decision making. In Brown, D and Associates, *Career Choice and Development* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Phillips, S. D., Friedlander, M. L., Paziienza, N. J. and Kost, P. P. (1985).** A factor analytic investigation of career decision-making styles. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 26, 106-115.
- Phoenix, A. (2008).** Analysing narrative contexts. In Andrews, M., Squire, C. and Tamboukou, M. (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research.* Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Platman, K. (2004).** Flexible Employment in Later Life: Public Policy Panaceas in the Search for Mechanisms to Extend Working Lives. *Social Policy and Society*, 3, 181-188.
- Plummer, K. (2001).** *Documents of Life 2: An invitation to critical humanism.* London and Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Polanyi, L. (1985).** Conversational storytelling. In Van Dijk, T. A. (Ed.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis: discourse and dialogue*, 3. London: Academic Press.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988).** *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- Porter, J. (2010).** Working in Private Practice. In Woolfe, R., Strawbridge, S., Douglas, B. and Dryden, W. (Eds.), *Handbook of Counselling Psychology* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Power, S. J. and Rothausen, T. J. (2003).** The work-oriented midcareer development model: An extension of Super's maintenance stage. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 31, 157-197.
- Pryor, R. and Bright, J. (2011).** *The Chaos Theory of Careers: A New Perspective on Working in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Routledge.
- Quinn, J. B., Anderson, P. and Finkelstein, S. (1996).** Managing Professional Intellect: Making the Most of the Best. *Harvard Business Review*, Mar – Apr 1996. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Raelin, J. A. (1991).** *The Clash of Cultures: Managers Managing Professionals*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Ravn, I. (1991).** What should guide reality construction? In Steier, F. (Ed.), *Research and Reflexivity*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Reid, H. L. (2005).** Narrative and Career Guidance: Beyond Small Talk and Towards Useful Dialogue for the 21st Century. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 5(2), 125-136.
- Reid, H. L. and West, L. (2011).** 'Telling tales': Using narrative in career guidance, *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 78, 174-183.
- Riach, K. (2007).** 'Othering' older worker identity in recruitment, *Human Relations*, 60(11), 1701-1726
- Ricoeur, P. (1990).** *Time and Narrative, Vol.1* (originally published 1983 as Temps et Récit). Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993).** *Narrative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Riessman, C. K. (2001).** Analysis of personal narrative. In Gubrium, J. R. and Holstein, J. A. (Eds.), *Handbook of Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008).** *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Roberts, K. (1968).** The Entry into Employment: An Approach Towards a General Theory. *Sociological Review*, 16, 165-184.
- Roberts, K. (1977).** The Social Conditions, Consequences and Limitations of Careers Guidance. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 5(1), 1-9.
- Roberts, K. (1981).** The Sociology of Work Entry and Occupational Choice. In Watts, A. G., Super, D. E. and Kidd, J. M. (Eds.), *Career Development in Britain*. Cambridge: Careers Research and Advisory Centre/Hobsons.
- Rocco, T. S., Stein, D. and Lee, C. (2003).** An Exploratory Examination of the Literature on Age and HRD Policy Development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 2(2), 155-180.
- Rogers, C. R. (1942).** *Counselling and Psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rogers, C. R. (1951).** *Client-centered therapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rokeach, M. (1973).** *The nature of human values*. New York: Free Press.

- Rowe, J. W. and Kahn, R. L. (1998).** *Successful Ageing*. New York: Pantheon.
- Rose, M. (2005).** Career Perceptions and Pursuit in the UK, 1986-2002. In Stewart, P. (Ed.), *Employment, Trade Union Renewal and the Future of Work: The Experience of Work and Organisational Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rubery, J. (1997).** What do women want from full employment? In Philpott, J. (Ed.), *Working for Full Employment*. London: Routledge.
- Rustin, M. (2000).** Reflections on the Biographical Turn in Social Science. In Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J. and Wengraf, T. (Eds.), *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science*. London: Routledge.
- Rynes, S. L., Bartunek, J. M. and Daft, R. L. (2001).** Across the Great Divide: Knowledge Creation and Transfer between Practitioners and Academics. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(2), 340-355.
- Salmon, P. and Riessman, C.K. (2008).** Looking back on narrative research: An exchange. In Andrews, M., Squire, C. and Tamboukou, M. (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Savickas, M. L. (2002).** Career Construction: A Developmental Theory of Vocational Behaviour. In Brown, D. and Associates (Eds.), *Career Choice and Development*: (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Savickas, M. L. (2005).** The Theory and Practice of Career Construction. In Brown, S. D. and Lent, R. W. (Eds.), *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Savickas, M. L. (2011).** *Career Counselling*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Savickas, M. L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J-P., Duarte, M. E., Guichard, J., Soresi, S., van Esbroeck, R. and van Vianen, A. E. M. (2009).** Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3), 239-250.
- Sharf, R. S. (2006).** *Applying Career Development Theory to Counseling* (4th ed.). London: Thomson Learning.
- Sloan, T. (1992).** Career Decisions: A Critical Psychology. In Young, R. A. and Collins, A. (Eds.), *Interpreting Career: Hermeneutical Studies of Lives in Context*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Sommerlund, J. and Boutaiba, S. (2007).** Borders of the 'boundaryless career'. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 20(4), 525-538.
- Spangar, T. (2006).** SocioDynamic career counselling: constructivist practice of wisdom. In McMahon, M. and Patton, W. (Eds.), *Career Counselling: Constructivist Approaches*. London: Routledge.
- Sparkes, A.C. (2004).** Bodies, Narratives, Selves and Autobiography, The example of Lance Armstrong, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 28 (4), 397-428.
- Speedy, J. (2008).** *Narrative Inquiry and Psychotherapy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Spence, D. (1982).** *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and interpretation in psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.

- Spencer, S. and Fredman, S. (2003).** *Age Equality Comes of Age: Delivering Change for Older People*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Squire, C. (2008).** Experience-centred and culturally-oriented approaches to narrative. In Andrews, M., Squire, C. and Tamboukou, M. (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Stanley, L. (1992).** *The Autobiographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Sturken, M. (1997).** *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Sugarman, L. (2001).** *Life-Span Development: Frameworks, Accounts and Strategies* (2nd ed.). Hove and New York: Psychology Press.
- Super, D. E. (1942).** *The dynamics of vocational adjustment*. New York: Harper.
- Super, D. E. (1951).** Vocational adjustment: Implementing a self-concept. *Occupations*, 30, 88-92.
- Super, D. E. (1957).** *The psychology of careers*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Super, D. E. (1980).** A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 16, 282-298.
- Super, D. E. (1990).** A life-span, life-space approach to career development. In Brown, D., Brooks, L. and Associates (Eds.), *Career Choice and Development: Applying Contemporary Theories in Practice* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Susman, G. I. and Evered, R. D. (1978).** An assessment of the scientific merits of action research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 23, 582-603.
- Taylor, M. A. and Geldhauser, H. A. (2007).** Low-Income Older Workers. In Shultz, K. S. and Adams, G. A. (Eds.), *Aging and Work in the 21st Century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Taylor, P. (2008a).** Conclusions: The prospects for ageing labour forces. In Taylor, P. (Ed.), *Ageing Labour Forces: Promises and Prospects*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Taylor, P. (2008b).** Sing if you're glad to be grey. Working towards a happier older age in the United Kingdom. In Taylor, P. (Ed.), *Ageing Labour Forces: Promises and Prospects*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Taylor, P. (2008c).** Introduction: The promise of ageing labour forces. In Taylor, P. (Ed.), *Ageing Labour Forces: Promises and Prospects*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Tikkanen, T., Guðmundsson, B., Hansen, L. E., Paloniemi, S., Randle, H. and Sandvik, J. (2008).** *Active Learning and Ageing at Work: New visions and opportunities for older workers in the Nordic countries*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Tindall, C., Robinson, J. and Kagan, C. (2010).** Feminist Perspectives. In Woolfe, R., Strawbridge, S., Douglas, B. and Dryden, W. (Eds.), *Handbook of Counselling Psychology* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

- Thomas, W. L. and Znaniecki, F. (1996).** *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: A classic work in immigration history.* Compiled by Zaretsky, E. (Ed.). Illinois: University of Illinois Press (1st ed. published 1918-20. New York: Dover Publications).
- Thompson, P. (1988).** *The Voice of the Past: Oral History Oxford:* Oxford University Press.
- Truman, C. (1996).** Paid work in women's lives: Continuity and change. In Coslett, T., Easton, A. and Summerfield, P. (Eds.), *Women, Power and Resistance: An Introduction to Women's Studies.* Buckingham: Open University Press.
- U3A (2012).** The University of the Third Age. Retrieved 20/02/2012 from <http://www.u3a.org.uk/>.
- Van der Heijden, B. I., Schalk, R. and van Veldhoven, M. J.. (2008).** Ageing and careers: European research on long-term career development and early retirement. *Career Development International*, 13(2), 85-94.
- Vickerstaff, S., Loretto, W., Billings, J., Brown, P., Mitton, L., Parkin, T. and White, P. (2008).** Encouraging labour market activity among 60-64 year olds. *DWP Research Report No. 531*, London: Department for Work and Pensions.
- Wajcman, J. (1998).** *Managing like a man.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Watts, A. G. (1991).** The Impact of the 'New Right': Policy Challenges Confronting Careers Guidance in England and Wales. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 19(3), 230-245.
- Watts, A. G., Law, B., Killeen, J., Kidd, J. M. and Hawthorn, R. (1996).** *Rethinking Careers, Education and Guidance: Theory, Policy and Practice.* London: Routledge.
- Webber, R. J. (2000).** *The Created Self: Reinventing body, persona, and spirit.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Webster, L. and Mertova, P. (2007).** *Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method: An introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching.* London: Routledge.
- Weick, K. E. (1979).** *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Wenger, E. (1998)** *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning , and Identity*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- West, L. (1996).** *Beyond Fragments: Adults, Motivation and Higher Education – A biographical analysis.* London: Taylor & Francis.
- White, H. (1987).** *The Content of the Form.* Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Whyte, D. (2001).** *Crossing The Unknown Sea: Work and the Shaping of Identity.* London: Penguin Group.
- Wilensky, H. (1961).** Work, careers and social integration. *International Social Science Journal*, 12(4), 543-74.
- Williams, P. (2007).** *Developing a new mindset on age and retirement* (TUC/CIPD). Retrieved 07/03/2012 from <http://www.cipd.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/28DA26B1-A25B-4E42-AF29-98F75D6ABD64/0/devnewmindev.pdf>.
- Willmott, M. and Nelson, W. (2005).** *Complicated Lives: The malaise of modernity.* Chichester: John Wiley.

- Wilson, G. (2000).** *Understanding Old Age: Critical and global perspectives*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Winnicott, D. (1971).** *Playing and reality*. London: Routledge.
- Withnall, A. (2000).** The debate continues: Integrating educational gerontology and life long learning In Glendinning, F. (Ed.), *Teaching and learning in later life: Theoretical Implications*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Young, K. (1989).** Narrative Embodiments: Enclaves of the Self in the Realm of Medicine. In Shotter, J. and Gergen, K. J. (Eds.), *Texts of Identity*. London: SAGE Publications.

APPENDIX A: Disentangling Professional Careers: A research invitation

RESEARCH FOCUS

I am a postgraduate researcher (doctoral programme) associated with the Centre for Career and Personal Development at Canterbury Christ Church University. Having worked for many years in professional organisations (actuarial, human resource and pensions consulting) where I specialised in organisational learning, including career review and development, I am now conducting research into the career aspirations of older professional workers currently employed within business consulting firms. My research title is...

‘Disentangling Professional Careers: An auto/biographic investigation into the occupational trajectories and aspirations of professional workers in the third-age of their employment within business consulting firms’.

For the purposes of this research, I define the ‘third-age’ as the period of occupational transition between the ages of 50 and 65 and a ‘professional’ worker as someone who holds professional status through qualification. My rationale for selecting this group of workers is that an increasing number of employees in the knowledge economy are now within the third-age of their working experience – many started employment and qualified before technology impacted on the conduct of business and their career trajectory has probably taken a number of ‘twists and turns’ as their professional (and personal) lives have emerged.

RESEARCH GROUP

With an ageing population, many organisations can expect their workforce to include an increasing proportion of older workers who, as they reflect on their circumstances, may decide to adjust their working experience to complement their lifestyle choice accommodating family responsibilities, financial obligations, work values and possibly personal health.

I shall use an auto/biographic narrative approach to gather insight into an individual’s career history and see how this may influence their future occupational aspirations. Participants will be asked to prepare a career outline in preparation for an initial interview during which I will talk through their occupational history, and, following transcription, analyse it to search for coherent themes that give direction to an occupational destiny as they transition toward retirement.

To conduct my research I need to have conversations with a number of qualified professional workers aged 50 to 65, working in London and the Home Counties (i.e. London, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey, Sussex (East) and Sussex (West)) who are willing to spend time recounting their career history (trajectory) and reflecting

on their career aspirations (destiny). I enclose an initial research invitation to help engage participants with my research programme and ask that you distribute a copy to all prospective participants – if you would like an electronic copy, please contact me at the email address below.

ACTIVE RESPONSE

Thank you for your active involvement – I acknowledge you could ignore this letter and take no further action, but appreciate your anticipated willingness to distribute my research invitation to prospective participants. When you have identified a professional practitioner willing to participate in this research, please either forward me their name/s and contact information or ask them to contact me directly using the information below.

In recognition of your support for my research endeavours, I will distribute a summary of my findings on completion of my research programme and, provided at least two participants from your organisation take part, will, subject to our mutual agreement, make a presentation within your organisation. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in anticipation of your support for my research programme which I will conduct confidentially and ethically complying with the educational research guidelines endorsed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) – these guidelines assure research participants of complete confidentiality and include their right to withdraw from the research at any time.

If you would like further information about this research and/or the implications of being involved, please contact me by email or mobile at the contact points shown below. Thank you for considering my invitation for participation in this research.

APPENDIX B: Disentangling Professional Careers: A research introduction

Are you a qualified professional aged 50 to 65 willing to reflect on your occupational future as you transition towards retirement? If YES... will you participate in a research programme that will encourage you to examine your career history and aspirations?

PROFILE

I am associated with the Centre for Career and Personal Development at Canterbury Christ Church University and am conducting research into the career aspirations of 'third-age' professional workers.

RESEARCH

To enable my research I shall meet with older professional workers in the 'third-age' of their employment (i.e. aged 50 to 65) to talk through your career history and aspirations. I shall use a narrative approach which will enable us to co-write your outline career story and, following transcription, shall look for coherent themes that identify your career attributes and capabilities.

Although you may not currently be considering a career change, many senior professional workers do adjust working life to complement their lifestyle choice accommodating family responsibilities, financial obligations, occupational values and sometimes personal health. My primary research proposition is that your occupational aspirations in the 'third-age' may be illuminated through the process of writing an occupational narrative (your career story) and searching it for meaning to determine future career direction. The outcomes from this research may be used to develop a narrative approach facilitating the transition of senior professional workers towards retirement.

INVOLVEMENT

I will conduct my research, from **June 2009 to March 2010**, confidentially and ethically complying with the ethical research guidelines endorsed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), which assure you of complete confidentiality and include your right to withdraw at any time.

To start, I will send you a briefing pack including some career outline questions that you can use to prepare for an interview (up to 1½ hours) during which I will encourage you to talk through your occupational history. Following transcription, I will send a first draft of your

career story allowing you to amend/edit it, and, when you have approved it, I will search your story for themes that indicate your preferred career characteristics. After our initial meeting I would expect to meet you on one or two further occasions (for up to 1 hour) – I will arrange these research meetings at an agreed time/place.

PARTICIPATION

If you would like to know more about the implications of being involved in this research please contact me by email or mobile at the contact points shown below.

THANK YOU for considering my research invitation and, if you have decided to participate, welcome to research which will illuminate your occupational destiny.

APPENDIX C: A Collection of Occupational Artefacts

Artefacts of occupational relevance

An artefact is an object that is shaped by man (sic); examples include tools, works of art or anything of archaeological relevance. In this research study my artefacts were the documented recollections of my research collaborators’ occupational memories. Initially unrefined, i.e. the raw transcripts of their recollected work experience, they presented crafted chronicles of each collaborator’s career trajectory and their expectations for workplace withdrawal. Each occupational artefact embodied the principal experiences within my collaborator’s working continuum, co-constructed through auto/biographic reflection and documented in a narrative memoir (transcript) that presented a window into the occupational life of each collaborator.

The following tabulation records all twelve of my research collaborators (names shown are pseudonyms). In the column headed ‘artefact’, I have presented an epitome of the story told, which embraces the key focus of each collaborator’s recounted story – this was framed immediately after reading the approved text for the first time and before any analysis or interpretation transpired.

REF	COLLABORATOR	ARTEFACT
1	Mary Gibson Property Solicitor	‘Balancing the obligations of a professional and private life’
2	Charles Jackson Commercial Solicitor	‘Presenting a deterministic career in private practice’
3	Ann Jarvis Private Accountant	‘Accommodating professional and personal career aspirations’
4	George Jennings Career Consultant	‘Facilitating self and others occupational emergence’
5	Anthony Leyton Commercial Accountant	‘Juggling the turning points in a regressive career’
6	John Mayhew Property Surveyor	‘Building a professional niche in a turbulent market’
7	Diane Shelton Corporate Accountant	‘Negotiating variances within an administrative career’
8	William Shotter Financial Consultant	‘Investing in occupational returns over the long term’

9	Jack Sparrow Health & Safety Consultant	‘Exploring an opportunistic career within a government agency’
10	Edward Todd Learning Consultant	‘Sustaining an organisational learning career’
11	Martin Weldon Commercial Accountant	‘Calculating occupational value in an evolving strategy’
12	James Wright Chartered Accountant	‘Participating in an international corporate career’

APPENDIX D: Letter of Informed Consent

I have received a copy of the briefing about the research programme titled ‘Disentangling Professional Careers’ to be conducted by Ian King, research student at the Centre for Career and Personal Development, Canterbury Christ Church University and read the information presented in it. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this research programme and received satisfactory answers to my questions and any additional details/information that I wanted. The purpose of this research study is to seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the occupational trajectories of professional workers currently in the third-age (50+) of their employment?
- How does this occupational history influence their aspirations as they navigate their way toward withdrawal from permanent employment?
- What, if any, occupational support do these professional workers receive from their employers and how has this impacted their transitional experience?

I am aware that the narrative interviews will be digitally recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses and that I will receive a raw copy of the transcription to amend and approve. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all of the foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this research programme and confirm that:

- I wish to review the draft narrative transcribed from the interview so that I may review and approve the content YES NO
- I agree to the use of quotations within the final thesis YES NO
- If any of my quotations are used, I wish to remain anonymous YES NO
- If any of my quotations are used, I wish to have my name identified in order to receive recognition for my contribution YES NO

PARTICIPANT NAME ———→			
MAILING ADDRESS		MOBILE EMAIL	
SIGNATURE	DATE		2009

Please hand or post your completed form to

Ian King, Postgraduate Researcher, Centre for Career and Personal Development
 Faculty of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University, David Salomons Estate, Runcie Court, Broomhill Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 0TG (UK)

APPENDIX E: Commentary Analysis of an Approved Text – Charles Jackson, Commercial Property Solicitor

PSEUDONYM and SECTOR	Charles Jackson / Commercial Property Solicitor
PROFILE	A commercial property solicitor advising corporations, private clients and trust organisations on the acquisition and management of commercial properties.
PORTRAIT	A deterministic career that involved many career moves in line with a traditional ascendant career transitioning ultimately to partner in a regional firm of solicitors.

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>I Okay. Charles, thank you for agreeing to meet with me this afternoon. Could you tell me about your occupational experiences to date, i.e. what has been your career history so far?</p> <p>R Yeah. I left school after doing A levels and I was articled to a solicitor who had been my uncle’s partner. My uncle had run our family practice in Brighton and before he died he entered into what in today’s terms would be a slightly odd arrangement, and it was that both of them were elderly and whoever died first the survivor would take over both practices and maintain the widow. Well, my uncle died before I was ready to be articled, which was a bit of a shame for me, but I came along as part of the package a little later on. I think probably quite luckily, because that solicitor was at the time a sole practitioner and he’d got an office in the City, and Acton, Ealing, Cobham, and was in practice in quite a large way. And he had two nephews that came into it subsequently, so there were three solicitors, about 100 staff. And in the early 1960s that was quite a large firm. And then he had two more offices when he took my uncle’s offices over. I trained in that; I did a five year articles, and during that period I went to college part</p>	<p>Early career choice made for him as part of a family arrangement. A prime example of ‘opportunity’ theory.</p> <p>TRA Initial career development involved the traditional route to</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>time and I qualified and I spent my time between the various offices that he ran, mainly the ones in the City, which were in Chancery Lane. Well actually that's not technically the City because the City boundary is at the bottom of Chancery Lane; this is just outside the City. Actually how I know ((laughingly)) is that when you take your final exams you can also take some additional ones for honours, which I took. And if you're successful to a good degree you're eligible for the City of London Solicitor's Prize, which is worth a bit of money. And I wasn't eligible for that because I was just one side of the road away from the City. I got a couple of other prizes but they weren't so valuable ((laughter))! So that's how I always remember that. And I spent some time in the country.</p> <p>The people I worked with were members of the Brethren, as my uncle was, and in fact my principal during the period I worked for him, between 1960 and 1965, you probably may remember if you know anything about the Brethren that during that period there was a division between the two sections and my principal became one of the exclusives. And I think it was Big Jim Taylor, sorry, it's slightly a bit of narrative, but he came over from the United States and he actually stayed with my principal, so I was right in the middle of this and my section of the family were not Brethren. But what it meant was that when I qualified, although I was very welcome to stay with the firm, because part of it bore my family name, my difficulty would have been that they would never have gone into partnership with me because the Brethren's view was that you didn't go into partnership with anyone other than another member of the sect, and I wasn't going to become a member of the sect just to become a partner. Apart from that I was perfectly happy working with them. And a lot of</p>	<p>qualification via articles.</p> <p>Family values – associated with membership of a religious sect – restrict career opportunities.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>the work that I had experience in as a consequence of that was pretty unusual and very interesting. But I'd had five years of that and when I qualified I spent about a year working for them afterwards and then decided I would do something else and I got a job in 1966 with a firm in Brighton. There were sort of three prominent firms in Brighton at the time and this was one of them. The senior partner was a member of the Council of the Law Society, it was generally regarded as a very reputable and quite a progressive firm, and I wanted to do some form of criminal work, which is the only thing really I'd missed out on during my training. So I joined that practice and I had some very happy years there up until 1972, dealing with criminal work which I found interesting, fascinating, I specialised actually in children. At one stage I did a lot of work with children. As a consequence I actually became a lecturer in child law and actually half edited a book on it, a guide to the new Children and Young Persons Act when it came out.</p> <p>I felt that... sorry, just to backtrack a little bit. I started working for that firm as an assistant and after a few years, because of my family's connections, I started bringing in quite a lot of work and the firm had agreed with me a sort of commission rate and they were a bit horrified at the commission they were paying me and decided it was probably cheaper to make me a partner, so I became a partner at a fairly early age. And I should just explain that my old firm's offices in Hassocks in Brighton had in the meantime closed, largely because I was no longer working there and they had no incentive really to run offices out of the London area.</p> <p>I didn't feel that the firm was looking sufficiently commercial when we got into the 1970s and ultimately I looked around at what I might do and I looked at Crawley,</p>	<p>TRA Second career move, carefully considered – prestige and reputation of firm important.</p> <p>ASP An early career aspiration that focused on a specialist area of law.</p> <p>TRA Advancement to partner based on family connections which created opportunity to generate high levels of income.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>and it may seem strange but I looked in the AA book at the time. I looked in the AA book because I wondered what the population was in relation to the number of solicitors, and I could get the number of solicitors in Crawley off the Law List, the population out of the AA book, and I decided that the... it was about 18 or 21 solicitors in Crawley, which was a town of 80,000 inhabitants was such that there was enough work there for another pair of hands. And that, curiously, was the motivation for coming to Crawley. And I wasn't really disappointed either when you consider there's probably about 50 in this firm alone now, and there must be, oh, five or six hundred, probably, in the Crawley area; it's quite amazing how it's grown in that period. And if you wanted the figures to be more precise I could, but there are now three large firms in the town in addition to a number of smaller ones, and of course you've got people like the AA and a lot of the commercial enterprises all with their own legal departments.</p> <p>So I left, I'd seen an advertisement in the press for a practice in Crawley advertising for a third person, another person. And in fact that had a practice in East Grinstead and it was a very old one, I joined that, and I think I stayed as an assistant for about 12 months and then I became a partner and the practice grew; it grew very substantially, and it grew to the extent that we were taking on matters that I felt were really beyond the scope of the then seven partners that we had, and some 50, 60 staff. And I suggested – I was the middle of seven partners – that the firm ought to look for some kind of merger with another firm so as to increase its capabilities. There were a number of firms that we looked at, and at that time firms joining with one another was relatively unusual; today it's happening all the time, but in the mid-1980s it wasn't. And – hindsight's a good thing – looking back the firm we</p>	<p>ASP To make an occupational choice based on commercial potential. Indicated an element of entrepreneurship.</p> <p>TRA Further career move – this time sideways – that resulted in a period of commercial growth and its associated opportunities.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>actually chose was not a good choice and the firms that we had originally approached would have been better choices, but they weren't interested. So we merged with the firm that was interested, which was (name removed for confidentiality), and that's one thing which perhaps I wouldn't... or want to advertise it, just a firm in Brighton. And we merged. And, again looking back, it wasn't a wise thing to do. The decision to grow bigger was the right one, the mistake we made was choosing the wrong partner.</p> <p>Their culture was different to ours; ours had been a very frugal one in a sense, that if you wanted a bit of equipment you saved up for it and you bought it. [Name removed for confidentiality] attitude was if you wanted it you simply borrowed the money and worried about paying back at a later date. And the trouble is they kept on doing that and, of course, ultimately met fair disaster in the late 1980s.</p> <p>The bonus of the firm getting larger was that the firm could cope with more varied work and more substantial work, and from the point of view of the professional angle that was good and I got exposure to a lot of things that I wouldn't otherwise have been able to do and I started running a department of some size which I wouldn't otherwise have been able to have mustered. So there were advantages. Ultimately I suppose the perils of being in a partnership became apparent and towards the end of the 1980s I and a number of others in the firm, which by that time had grown to something like 45, 48 partners, were very unhappy with the way that it was being run. Coupled with that there had been something of a downturn in the late 1980s and the firm's willingness to borrow money without checking whether it could repay it adequately came home to roost, and the firm had quite a major financial problem. There wasn't really anything you could do apart from sticking with it at that stage. I had, prior to</p>	<p>TRA Practice merger resulted in further organisational growth and associated opportunity.</p> <p>ASP opportunity to run department, but...</p> <p>ASP Tension between managers of organisation and 'due diligence' leading to financial difficulties – a turning point?</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>that, sought ways and means of leaving and I couldn't see any way of leaving with any money, because, without going into a lot of detail, I think what would have happened is that an awful lot of massaging of accounts would have happened and they found reasons for not giving you anything when you left. Ultimately I and seven others fell out with the management of the firm in 1999 and, because it then served their purpose to remove some of us, we were able to negotiate financial terms which we wouldn't otherwise have been able to do, and I was able to leave, and I left with most of my good will intact, and I joined this current firm.</p> <p>And by that time, I can't remember what age I was, but I'd had something like 12 years of work ahead of me before I thought of retiring, and I think my intention then was purely to become a partner in the new firm and to have, I thought, a happier end to my career. I should add that at various times I had been approached for other jobs; I had two offered to me, one was a chairman of an industrial tribunal and the other one was actually to seek appointment as a judge. When I was at [name removed for confidentiality] they did a lot of employment work and were not very happy with that because it would have meant that they would have been unable to have carried out any appearances in any industrial tribunal in this area, because I'd have been appointed somewhere in this area, so that was not something they were very keen on. And so far as the judge was concerned, it did also mean quite a few days out of the office, particularly while you were training, and there was frankly no encouragement. Now, again, with hindsight, I think I should have stood firm and taken up one of two of those offers; I think I'd have enjoyed it. And I have subsequently sat on other tribunals and rather enjoy that kind of activity, so I think that's a</p>	<p>TRA An occupational transition precipitated by organisational disillusionment and ultimate financial expediency, both self and organisationally motivated.</p> <p>INT To proceed to occupational disengagement with a 'happy end'.</p> <p>TRA Opportunities for alternative occupational career paths, but not proceeded with as organisational pressures discouraged consideration... ... restriction of trade, and</p> <p>SUP No organisational support for development</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>mistake on my part. But I also think that the attitude that I had towards partnership was perhaps one of wanting to work in with others and believing it was very much more of a family activity, because that's exactly what I'd experienced when I was training. To a degree it's what I experienced during the first firm that I worked for. And the mistake, I suppose, that I made was that with the larger firm I thought it would still apply, notwithstanding it was a large family. And the lesson I suppose I've learnt is that partnership isn't what it's cracked up to be, it's not a particularly good model for professional people, in my view, and I think if I had my time over again ((laughingly)) there are a number of things I would do, and one I think is simply to go on my own at one stage, so that I'm not beholden to partners. But I mean it's very easy to say that after a number of years and you're looking back.</p> <p>My time with this firm has been a happy one and I didn't have any regrets at leaving. Financially it's not been as rewarding as perhaps it might have been, largely because any new firm starting off, particularly a large one, has to do a lot of investment in its IT and in its staff and in its training, and this one has been very good in all those respects, and the recession has come, it's a bit of a shame really, it's sort of halted its development, but in all other ways it's been very successful and I think the people that I've joined with certainly are not of the same kind that I experienced with (name removed for confidentiality).</p> <p>Now that's just a very quick résumé, is that...?</p> <p>I That is fine to so far, but I'll be asking more questions to explore it.</p> <p>R Yes, sure. It gives you the skeleton really.</p> <p>I It gives me the skeleton, that's all I'm looking for, the gist of where you've been and what you've been doing. What</p>	<p>Reflection that partnership didn't imitate the characteristics observed and experienced when training.</p> <p>Occupational reflection to 'go it alone' independent of partnership constraints.</p> <p>ASP Achieved in later years of occupational existence – an expression of contentment/achievement.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>have been the high and low points, or what would you describe as the high and low points during your career?</p> <p>R I think largely high points are when perhaps you have achieved something that you're... you're pleased with in terms of the work. And I can't think of any particular one. I think there are a lot of minor ones that I can think of which were very successful. I suppose whenever you're dealing with a criminal trial and you're particularly successful in getting an acquittal, let's say, you might feel that's a bit of a high point, but after a while, of course, it is your job to do that; therefore not every acquittal is an achievement. I used to prosecute as well for the police and I wouldn't actually say that getting somebody convicted was a high point. I mean, that's what you're there and you're employed to do.</p> <p>I think things such as I... there was a television rental company called [name removed for confidentiality] on the High Street, and they merged with another one called [name removed for confidentiality]. And they ended up with something like 320 surplus shops in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and I organised the sale of ... they all came on the market at the same time, and organised that and dealt with the sale; they weren't all sold to the same people, I mean they were sold in groups, and I think that the way that was done was – from the point of view of the civil work – was quite an achievement; we got written up about in Estates Gazette and things of that kind, so it's that sort of thing you might look as a success.</p> <p>I managed to achieve the amalgamation of two disability trusts, notwithstanding the fact that one wasn't very keen to merge with the other, but I persuaded them the advantages of doing it. And again I would think that was an achievement as far as I was concerned.</p>	<p>Occupational highs linked to case achievements rather than occupational role, whether criminal or...</p> <p>... civil assignments, in both commercial and...</p> <p>... charitable institutions.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>I And any low points?</p> <p>R Yeah, well I think the low points are largely when you fall out with your partners. Yes, one low point was that following the merger of the firm that I joined in 1972 with [name removed for confidentiality], I found that the two partners ahead of me retired prematurely, because they just didn't like it. So that was a low point. Also at one stage I was saddled with an older solicitor, more senior to me, who I just thought was completely barmy, and coping with him was quite difficult; I wouldn't say it was a low point, but perhaps it was a difficult time in my career of coping with him. And then subsequently when I had a wrangle with [name removed for confidentiality] in 1999, I don't think that's a low point in the sense it didn't affect the work I was doing, but it's a low point in your career. And I've seen it here too, because with staff worrying about their jobs, as they all do in times of recession when there are redundancies, that would rank as a low point with them, and fortunately hasn't happened to me.</p>	<p>Occupational 'low points' all associated with difficulties in people relationships rather than occupational roles...</p> <p>... including organisational downturns, although acknowledgement that redundancy had never impacted.</p>
<p>I Okay. How would you describe the principal periods during that very long career? Are there time spans when you can think of which represented a particular episode in your career?</p> <p>R Well obviously 1960-65 is training, so I look upon that quite clearly. From 1965 to 1972 I look upon as a very heavy advocacy period, where I was doing nothing but magistrates' court work and so forth. From 1972 to 1985 was a very mixed time because I continued doing quite a lot of advocacy, and what I mean by that is you're appearing in Magistrates' Court and the Crown Court, I did a lot of children's work and industrial tribunal work. And then in 1985 when we merged with [name removed for confidentiality] and [name removed for confidentiality]</p>	<p>TRA Occupational development and emergence located in clearly defined periods or episodes of occupational specialism.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>I tended to have to be restricted. Now one of the things with larger firms is that they want to restrict your activities, so you may have been like that, you could have been 360 degrees, but I was a bit like that, and they wanted you to be like that, so it's narrowing... sorry, the transcription won't show my hands ((laughter))! And I had to cut out a lot of what I would call my more interesting activities. So that's another feature, incidentally, of larger firms on the whole, which is that your work is narrowed in its variety.</p>	<p>ASP Occupational preferences circumscribed by organisational demands for operational efficiency. Limited in opportunity to pursue specialist interests.</p>
<p>I Okay.</p> <p>R Sorry, and then from 1985, as it were, up to '99 was very much devoted to commercial property, but I then started dealing with charities. I'd already dealt with them all the while but I started doing more in terms of work involving charities; I did work for the University of Sussex and other bodies like that. I also had another period, which is between 1990 and 1996, when I was a member of the UK housing team into Eastern Europe, and I acted as one of the government advisers to Eastern European governments on reforming their housing and property law; I was one of the team. And that for me – it was only a part time activity – but for me it was one of the most fascinating times of my life. And I suppose going back to your question about high points, I think that probably is one of the high points in doing that. It was very enjoyable, apart from being absolutely fascinating.</p>	<p>TRA Organisational transitions – perhaps sideways, but triggered a turning point, and... ... in the case of the government advisory position, provided a high level of occupational stimulation.</p>
<p>I What, in particular, did you enjoy about that period?</p> <p>R I think it was the novelty of it, because communism had only fallen, what, 18 months previously? And it was going into a country which had enormous aspirations, an enormous willingness to look at other systems, and it was just something so new. I remember being invited to Sofia</p>	<p>ASP Not only societal aspirations (as expressed), but also the personal challenge of working on something so new/ radical?</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>University with two others to run a three, four day conference on Western institutions, Western European institutions, and that was a real eye-opener for me, because although I had to do some of the speaking, the students consisted not just of university students, I found it turned out to be most of the judges as well. But what was fascinating too was looking at their learning materials. Now I don't know South Russian Cyrillic script, but what I could tell was that hunks of their textbooks were simply crossed out. And it was because that was the old communist law, which had been quickly repealed. What they hadn't got was something to replace it which was really adequate. And so one of the tasks of these teams going into Eastern European was to help them formulate some idea as to what they might put in its place.</p> <p>I So it was the challenge of taking something which needed to be refreshed and updated and upgraded?</p> <p>R Yes. And some of the concepts that we take for granted over here, like market value of land, were a complete novelty to them over there. And their concepts of town centres and retailing was just a hundred miles away from ours. I found, you know, one was talking in terms... I went to a presentation of a new town centre and their ideas for retailing were just Victorian, and very nicely, you learned a lot of things about that exercise, you mustn't be patronising and it's always got to be suggesting. One of the things we were told, incidentally, is 'we like you from the UK because you don't tell us what to do. We don't like the Americans, they may have the money but they always tell us what we've got to do,' and they don't like that, resent it.</p> <p>I They clearly identified that?</p> <p>R Yes ((laughingly)).</p>	<p>Opportunity to use specialist capabilities in a different social environment – one that that had become a 'historical marker' in terms of European evolution...</p> <p>... generated conceptual challenges which could apply specialist capabilities to.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>I Okay. Are there any career markers, what I described in the briefing as a career marker, something which was of great significance and influenced you in terms of you deciding where to go next?</p>	
<p>R Well, largely with legal work, unless you have a particular interest in a subject you're often led by the work that comes into the office. And I think that I'd always been interested in the way in which the law had treated young people. So, yes, for example when one of the items of legislation came in which meant that all children in care proceedings, for example, had to have a guardian, and that then itself produced what's known as the Children's Panel, so that you had to be a member of that panel if you were to represent young children. So that was a sort of turning point in the sense it prompts you then to make sure you're qualified, get on the panel, and once you're on the panel you – because there weren't very many people on it around here, I think I was one of two in the whole of this area – you tended to get all that work, so that was a bit of a change, if you like.</p>	<p>TRA occupational transition – a turning point that led to a move into a new and different specialism.</p>
<p>I Were there any other what I've described as epiphanies, something which really illuminated...?</p>	
<p>R To a minor extent solicitors were allowed right of audience in the Crown Court and I was all for one for breaking the barristers' monopoly so I started using that. So again, if you're used to going to the Magistrates' Court and you're used to speaking on your feet, then speaking in Crown Court isn't very far different. So I figured I'd have a crack at that. So, yes, that was a change in the law that could give you an opportunity which I took advantage of.</p>	<p>ASP Change in law offered opportunity to speak in Crown Court and be listened to.</p>
<p>I So you took that opportunity. Okay. Can I look a little bit at your professional allegiance? What are you a member</p>	

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>of, which institution are you a member of?</p> <p>R Law Society.</p> <p>I And how long... at what grade and what level and how long have you been a member of that?</p> <p>R Well, you don't have to be a member to be a solicitor, oddly enough. There are various other elements of qualification and you've got to have a license to practice, but I've been a member of the Law Society since I qualified, I always have been. There's a benevolent society which is connected to it which I've also been a member of since I qualified. I also... I also took the course for the Chartered Institute of Tax but I'm not a member, I'm not a qualified member in the sense that I've never really done the job full time, ((laughingly)) I simply did the academic study for it, the Chartered Institute of Taxation.</p> <p>I Where would you say your primary allegiance lies, with the professional institution of which you're a member, or the firm that employs you?</p> <p>R Oh, I think to the firm that employs you. In terms of professional allegiance I suppose actually it's primarily owed to the client. So actually I would put the client first, firm, then the Law Society. Because of course it's implied that if your duty is to the client you've got to comply with all the professional regulation and disciplines as well.</p> <p>I I'm just looking at the issue of identity and self and what professional identity actually means, so that's what I'm exploring in that connection.</p> <p>R Yes. I think solicitors are very keen on talking about duties to clients, and regard those as very important, probably the most important. Now it's all been enshrined in the regulations I suppose anyway. The regulations there are to set minimum standards, not necessarily to be your, as it were, bible for every activity that you engage in. I think</p>	<p>Professional membership of the Law Society, but allegiance to...</p> <p>... client first, implying compliance to professional membership.</p> <p>... professional etiquette now regulated for and enshrined, resulting in...</p>

<p>sadly, one of the things I've detected over the years, is</p>	
<p>OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)</p>	<p>COMMENTARY</p>
<p>that, to be blunt, I think the standard of solicitors in the profession has dropped enormously and I think as a consequence of that there are now so many rules which are there in substitute for what would otherwise have been regarded as a sort of professional attitude. When I qualified you were given a book called The Professional Conduct and Etiquette of Solicitors, and it was no thicker than your dictating machine. If I tell you now it is like seven, eight inches thick you can tell how the legislation has developed, and now you've got money laundering regulations, accounting regulations. When I qualified a lot was taken for granted and the rules were very broad. But clearly there's been a dilution of the average standard, which has resulted in all this regulation coming out.</p> <p>I Right, okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the organisation that you're currently employed by, what their objectives are, what areas of law they specialise in, who their primary... or what type of clients they primarily transact with?</p> <p>R Yes. I mean, you can get a whole lot of data on (<i>name removed for confidentiality</i>) actually off the website. It's commercial and private clients. So private client means anything that's not commercial, it's a rather silly expression in my view but that's what it means. And its aim is to provide a good service, its aim is to provide a pretty wide range of legal services, so there's very few things, active work for example we don't do. But virtually everything else we do. The number of legal aid franchises held by the firm has reduced substantially and in fact that's in line with what most larger firms have done, because legal aid franchises now are really only suitable for either smallish firms who specialise in the work in question or for the larger firm who will do nothing but franchise work.</p>	<p>... dilution of professional attitudes/standards and individual credibility and reputation for client service.</p> <p>Occupational purposes – a description of the type of client work undertaken.</p>

<p>The point about franchise work is that</p>	
<p>OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)</p>	<p>COMMENTARY</p>
<p>it now has to be staffed in a particular way and that's not a way which is conducive to non-legally aided work. Without explaining it in detail and showing how the Legal Services Commission normally run, it's not a happy combination of... sorry, it's not a happy combination to put their work along with other work, today. You used to be able to, and for years and years I ran both.</p> <p>I Okay. What would you say are the main challenges facing the firm at this point in time?</p> <p>R Well at this particular moment obviously survival. But I'd have said that generally it is to increase our market share in what is an ever-increasing competitive market. The legal profession has been a popular target for graduates now for years and my view is – I've got statistics upstairs – but when I qualified there was probably something like 36,000-37,000 solicitors; there's now over 120,000 overall. They don't all practice. And I just think there's too many. And they're all scrabbling for the same work, so they're all having to market more carefully or actively. And I think it's to make sure that you don't lose out your share to other firms.</p> <p>I Right, okay. Can I ask you a little bit about you as an individual and your aspirations for the remainder of your working life?</p> <p>R Yes.</p> <p>I What career aspirations do you have for the time that you intend to continue in a working environment?</p> <p>R Well actually I like what I do. And as a consequence I would like to go on doing it for a little longer. I was always brought up in a practice that you are there in a form of vocation, that you do aim to earn a living at it, but that that's not the end all and be all. Unfortunately I think if</p>	<p>Change in occupational practice (regarding legal aid work) resulting from a change in how the Legal Services Commission expect it to be staffed.</p> <p>A reflection on market conditions and the sustainability of the market for legal practitioners in an increasingly competitive market.</p> <p>ASP Expresses intention to continue for a little longer regarding it as a vocation.</p>

<p>you ask some of my colleagues here who are 30 years</p>	
<p>OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)</p>	<p>COMMENTARY</p>
<p>younger you might not get the same answer. But I'm happy with doing what I do. I find it interesting, fascinating, and I would not want to spend my days on the golf course or something of that kind, and I find working in a part time capacity is just... it keeps me ticking over and happy. I also think that making people retire at a particular age is a load of nonsense. Some people at 65 may be worn out and ready for the scrap heap and others will go on till much later. I often think of my principal, it never dawned upon me to ask him how old he was when I was articled to him, but he was way over 65, and when I heard him dictating things, particularly he could dictate documents just off pat, there's no way in which you would have called him too old to practice; a very bright man. And the same with my uncle, he went on until he was into his seventies. So I come from a family where you don't necessarily think because you're 65 you've got to stop working. And culturally I can see no argument why I should. I mean at the moment financially there's probably a good reason why people should go on working, and in my case, because the private pension fund I've got actually isn't so great, or it's much better now, but I would carry on working anyway.</p> <p>I Okay.</p> <p>R I think if the firm didn't like me doing it I'd work from home ((laughingly)).</p> <p>I You'd carry on irrespective!</p> <p>R Yeah, I'd carry on anyway!</p> <p>I Looking outside of work, what life – what I've called obligations, e.g. family, financial, health or any other aspect – do you have that might influence your decision or desire to carry on working?</p>	<p>INT Occupational participation is what inspires and wishes to continue in a part-time capacity.</p> <p>Argues for flexible retirement based on his reflections on older family members and professional mentors.</p> <p>Continues to argue for occupational continuance based on cultural and financial grounds.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>R Yes, yes. Well I spend quite a lot of time with our grandchildren. I have an older daughter who's a headmistress and she and her partner have separated for all sorts of reasons, and I think good ones, but anyway she's on her own, so we do a lot of help for her, she's in London, so we look after her children when she needs to be occupied on other things such as on courses and what have you, and I enjoy that. I've got three other grandchildren, we look after them from time to time. And I think they've all got their own careers, their own difficulties and so forth with it, so my wife and I do actually think that part of our job is to be active as far as we can for our age and so forth in looking after the children when we can, we're happy to do it and very pleased to.</p> <p>Apart from that a number of activities outside the office. I've got quite a few hobbies I like. I don't engage in any great sport, so I don't disappear for long periods at football matches or anything of that kind, and I think most of my interests lie in or around the home</p> <p>I Right. To what degree, or in what ways, do these... your desire to get involved in the family etc., do they influence how much time you spend working?</p> <p>R ((Pauses for thought)) Well, I took three days a week when I was discussing it with my colleagues because I thought that I could then carry on doing some work, and missing out two days didn't provide too much of a gap and it works in that sense, and also if I wanted to I could just work for three days on the trot and have two off and join it onto the weekend, so I thought it was very flexible from that point of view. I can also take extra time off as when children are staying with us, as they were last week. I think it works out quite well from that point of view. I</p>	<p>INT Happy to be involved with/responsible for looking after grandchildren – sees it as a strong family duty.</p> <p>INT Other expressions of activity which account for my interests.</p> <p>INT Occupational participation limited following discussion with colleagues.</p> <p>Explains the importance of flexibility to accommodate other post full-time (retirement?) activities.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>don't think that I directly decided that it was two days because that's all I wanted to devote to grandchildren etc. or anything of that kind. It's just it works out as a convenient compromise I think. And also it gives me enough time to go out and... I'm very keen for example, my interest actually is castles, and it gives me enough time to go and look at castles.</p> <p>I UK castles or castles throughout...?</p> <p>R Oh, well, no anywhere, but mainly UK and Europe, yes. Yes. I'm afraid I haven't got as far as Syria or the Holy Land yet ((laughing)).</p> <p>I Right, okay. In what ways did the firm actually support you in the decisions that you made with regard to going part time?</p> <p>R Well, when it came up for retirement you can continue as a partner beyond 65 if you want to, and you ask. Well, I never asked, I decided that that probably was the right time to cease being a partner, in other words as a partner you share in the profits and losses, and I could see a fairly rocky time ahead, and since you need to conserve whatever money you've earned at that stage I thought that was a sensible thing to do. And I talked about working on, and I think we'd had general conversations over a long period. And they said, well, you know, if you want to stay on, what do you want to do, three days a week? And it really emerged as a bit of consensus and they are very happy with that. And said, well one or two targets we've got for you, which is to try and increase our work share in this or that area, which is what I'm trying to do as well as to do some work. So it was really, from their point of view, a way of maintaining the work coming into the office, and if the opportunity arose of developing new sources of it. So that was their angle. My angle was to</p>	<p>SUP Opportunity to continue subject to preference, or...</p> <p>Financial landscape/forecast determined occupational decision to resign from partnership.</p> <p>SUP ... mutual consensus and subject to agreed work areas/targets.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>keep myself occupied, to earn something, and to provide a sort of mental stimulus.</p> <p>I But it was individually negotiated?</p> <p>R Oh yes.</p> <p>I There's no policy on later retirement?</p> <p>R No, none at all, no. No, no.</p> <p>I Okay. Looking at the whole subject of retirement, how would you define the concept of retirement?</p> <p>R It's when you cease sort of gainful employment. I have never been particularly attracted by it, simply because I've never seen it as a sort of golden age and the idea of having nothing to do doesn't really appeal to me. I would want to have some other activity. I mean at the moment what I am looking at is I used to do tutoring for the Citizens' Advice Bureau, I used to enjoy that, because the volunteers they get are... are volunteers, and volunteers normally are very nice people to work with. Incidentally, that's one of the reasons – or one of the attractions – I find with charities.</p> <p>And I would quite like to go back and do that. And that's also quite mentally absorbing because you have to prepare for whatever it is you're going to work with them on, so I would probably do something like that.</p> <p>I Okay. The next question may be difficult for you to answer, but at what age do you intend to fully retire ((laughter)) if, bearing in mind what you've just said, there is an answer to that question.</p> <p>R Yes. Well, the current arrangements for part time work will go on till I'm 69, simply because that's a multiplier of when I ceased being a partner. I haven't really thought beyond that, and I suspect that I'd still be quite happy to do some kind of lecturing. Now, there does come a point when you do have to call a day on that because one of the</p>	<p>Interpretation of the concept of 'retirement' and expression that it doesn't appeal.</p> <p>Occupational preference for working with charities – attraction of working with volunteers – values?</p> <p>INT Preference to continue flexible (part-time) working arrangements... ... plus lecturing opportunities.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>duties you must observe is to keep yourself really up to date, and at the moment I do. Every day we've got an update on the screen and I'm sort of interested in doing that. So I don't know quite how I'll feel when I get to 79 as to whether or not I'd want to go on doing it... 69 I mean. So I don't know at the moment, I find it difficult to work that one out.</p>	<p>INT Acknowledges need to keep up to date and, provided he is able, may continue post 69, but subject to review at the time.</p>
<p>I Okay. What, if anything, do you feel that your employer could do to help you in arriving at that decision?</p>	
<p>R I don't think they could do anything really. They're certainly not equipped to. I can remember years ago one of the departments, it must have been (name removed for confidentiality) College, had what they called retirement classes, and they had a series of something like six afternoon seminars and on one of them I was asked, as secretary of the local solicitors group, if we could supply six solicitors to give a talk on sort of legal problems that they might encounter in retirement. And I remember doing one of those myself, and I thought all the retirement jokes up that I could think up, and it was a really, really lovely afternoon. But there's nothing like that within the firm and as far as I know they were never continued, although I felt they were... it was a very successful series of things the college did.</p>	<p>SUP No provision, but recounted experience of being involved in retirement seminars for retirees, covering....</p>
<p>I What sort of topics did they cover?</p>	
<p>R Oh, well, tax, wills particularly, powers of attorney, Believe it or not divorce and annulment. The effect of divorces, annulments on wills and gifts. Gifts inter vivos with a view to avoiding the liability for nursing home fees, how you'd pay nursing home fees, equity release, a lot of things which would affect the general public but which are particularly apposite to retired people.</p>	<p>... topics for inclusion.</p>
<p>I Which, just listening to you, would seem to be apposite for</p>	

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>anybody today as well.</p> <p>R Oh yes, oh yes, yes.</p> <p>I Okay. What retirement preferences do other close family members hold for you, if known to yourself?</p> <p>R Sorry, if...?</p> <p>I What retirement preferences do other close family members have for you, if you actually know what their views are on that?</p> <p>R I... my elder daughter, who is a single mum, runs a school in Hackney. I mean, it's a challenging job, she's actually become very well known for the kind of work she does, and she gets trips abroad, to Kansas, to Rome and things like that. I would really like to see her relocate and I would see myself probably helping her do quite a lot of that because she wouldn't be able to do it on her own simply through time. And I would see getting her settled somewhere else ((laughing))...</p> <p>I Would be a challenge for you?</p> <p>R As quite a... yes, quite a project. My son's well sorted, he doesn't need any help in that sense, and my other daughter's married to a capable young man so she doesn't need any help there either. I think that would be one family thing. And I think also, with two of them living in London and one living locally, we might also position ourselves, if we could see where they were all going to end up. At the moment it's convenient staying where we are.</p> <p>I It's always the challenge, isn't it, working out where to be at the right time?</p> <p>R ((Laughingly)) yes.</p> <p>I Okay. Looking at you again as an individual, what career attributes would you say you have, skills, strengths, things</p>	<p>INT Family project to help daughter and be involved – personal values/interests and reversion to offering family support where required, and...</p> <p>... consideration to relocating, again to support family needs.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>companies, and this was a case involving about 200 firms of valuers and solicitors, and I prepared a report on behalf of the solicitors' insurers. And I suppose the high spot for me was that the judge actually adopted my suggestions, and so it is judgement, what I had suggested the duty of solicitors was, he's actually reproduced. So I was pretty pleased about that ((laughing)). It was also reassuring.</p>	<p>Judgement proffered based on personal recommendations – example of an occupational 'high-point'.</p>
<p>I Actually it's great when somebody else actually listens to what you have to say and takes account of it.</p>	
<p>R Yes, yes.</p>	
<p>I Had you heard of the term 'third age' before I asked you to participate?</p>	<p>Reflections on the term 'third-age' associated with University of the Third Age</p>
<p>R Yes, yes.</p>	<p>– a post-retirement activity.</p>
<p>I In what context and what did it mean to you?</p>	
<p>R Well my wife's a member of the University of the Third Age in that sense. And also I think I've been a member of it because I've been on some of the outings, and they won't take you because you're not insured if you're not a member ((laughing)) but I don't go to any of their other functions.</p>	
<p>I So what does the concept of the third age mean to you?</p>	
<p>R Well what you would do after you leave your full time employment.</p>	
<p>I Right, okay. With particular regard to the University of the Third Age which one or two other people have commented on to me as well, so... okay.</p>	
<p>R Yes. Yes, that's sort of the concept is, you know, what can retired people do, they don't want to sit at home and moulder.</p>	
<p>I Has your inclusion in this stage of life, i.e. in the last 12 to 15 years, has it impacted on your career in any way, the</p>	

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>way it's evolved or emerged?</p> <p>R I don't think it has. No, it sounds silly really, but it seems to me all of a sudden I'm the oldest member of the firm ((laughing)).</p> <p>I All of a sudden ((laughing)).</p> <p>R I'd never really thought about it, and age had never really concerned me. And it's only when you realise you've got to retire from the practice you think, "Oh, they're all younger than me."</p> <p>I Have you experienced, or are you aware of anyone who has experienced, discrimination as a consequence of their age in an employment situation?</p> <p>R Oh yes, yes, a number of solicitors have spoken to me from time to time, particularly those made redundant or seeking jobs. Those that I've known in my career who have said, "Well, I'm now too old for this," or, "I've been for an appointment but of course it's my age that tells against me." So there may not be any apparent evidence to show it but it's been inferred from what they've told me that age has been a bar.</p> <p>I Would you say it's a common issue or one that's occurred now and again?</p> <p>R No, I think it's quite a common issue. I think one of the sad things is that quite often employers are not taking people on because they're older. I think there may be salary points here though, they think they have to pay them more because they're older. But quite often, if there are good reasons for them being on the job market, it's often the case they've got a lot of experience. Without naming him, I've got a person in this firm who sought a job with us and he was in his late forties and he was very worried that he would be regarded as being shall I say too old to come in</p>	<p>Reflection on self and relative age.</p> <p>On the subject of age discrimination – sees it as quite prevalent in his business area, and quotes examples.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>as an assistant, because at 48 it is quite old to start a career with a solicitors' firm. But he'd been in four other jobs and he'd made redundant from two of them. And I hired him and I would have said that's one of the most successful hirings that we have made. An enormously knowledgeable man, very loyal, still here today, in fact he's now my senior because he's a partner and I'm not, as he's always reminding me ((laughing)), five years ago you employed me.</p> <p>I It's actually finding somebody who's willing to give you the opportunity, which you were.</p> <p>R Yes, yeah. And really it's been enormously valuable. It's true that he was slightly stigmatised by the fact that he was given a lowish salary, but as soon as he was able to demonstrate what he could do, you know, it did go up very quickly, so that I don't think that he would have any complaints on that score. But certainly he would have had problems with some people.</p> <p>I Right, okay. Thank you very much for the time being.</p> <p>R That's alright.</p> <p>I I may come back to you at a later date and ask you more questions with regard to specific points..</p> <p>R Sure, sure, is that enough?</p> <p>I That's enough at this stage.</p>	<p>Locates characteristics and...</p> <p>... salary differentiation of appointing an older person.</p>

Summary of Occupational Experiences and Aspirations

NOTED immediately after analysing the edited text for the first time, and before interpretation and rewriting to produce the thesis chapter.

Charles' occupational portrait typifies that of the 'traditionalist lawyer', one who joins the profession through family connections and naturally transcends to partnership at an early age. He was open in his responses and appeared genuinely interested in participating throughout the interview. His occupational profile contains a wealth of experience after a long and sustained

career within one occupational profession. Although generally an ascendant career, in the traditional sense of career progression, Charles' experience was not entirely smooth, facing, on occasion, tension and conflict with colleagues which occasionally encouraged a change in occupational direction to a new employer, but always in the same profession. Generally, his trajectory may be described as 'deterministic' responding, as he nearly always did, in a clear and positive way to the occupational challenges presented – he moved to a new employer with a clear sense of purpose based on a detailed and sensitive assessment of the options he faced when seeking new employment.

Towards the latter stages of his occupational trajectory, it is pertinent to note his interests moving in different directions away from traditional legal assignments, but always with a legal bias – for example the Eastern European project and the opportunity to work on the Children's Panel. His interests always engaged his personal values in addition to capturing his professional capabilities and he spoke enthusiastically about these opportunities. As he moved beyond the traditional age of retirement, namely that previously defined as the normal retirement date (currently 65 for men), a secondary interest that emerged was his enthusiasm to do whatever he could for his direct family members.

Note: Having agreed to the interview, he advised, at the outset that he was, in fact, one year beyond the traditional age of retirement, but we agreed that, as he was enthusiastic about participating, we would continue and I believe it has given a different perspective on the issues facing older professional practitioners, perhaps a voice from beyond 'the traditional realm of occupational existence'? This is the only narrative interview that explored the whole of a respondent's occupational trajectory covering from leaving school to just beyond what has traditionally been known as the normal retirement age, namely state pension age.

APPENDIX F: Commentary Analysis of an Approved Text – Jack Sparrow, Health & Safety Consultant

PSEUDONYM and SECTOR	Jack Sparrow / Government Health & Safety Policy
PROFILE	A quality assurance/public safety consultant advising government and their agencies on product design and safety.
PORTRAIT	An opportunistic career that involved multi career moves usually determined by personal values and/or opportunity within government agency and personal networks.

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>I Could you tell me about your occupational experience to-date?</p> <p>R Starting where?</p> <p>I Starting from I suggest when your career, your occupation, when you first started employment.</p> <p>R We're going back a long time ((laughs)). That would be when I left school and under my father's guidance went for an apprenticeship. Believe it or not back in the mid-60s, late-60s there wasn't a lot of work about.</p> <p>I Nothing's changed then.</p> <p>R Nothing's changed. It didn't necessarily link in with what I'd done at school with GCSEs and O Levels. It was a small engineering company I guess, precision engineering company and they put me on a five year apprenticeship or four and a half year apprenticeship and everything else I'd done was not engineering but more inclined to the woodworking side so it was a subtle change. I guess by the end of four and a half years, the first year, nine months was at full time college learning all the practical skills and some of the theory then the rest of the time was back in the workshop actually</p>	<p>Refers to father's guidance/opportunity and the economics of the 1960s.</p> <p>Hesitant acknowledging lack of coherence with school qualifications.</p> <p>Occupational initiators/triggers were father's influence and preference for wood working.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>putting it all into practice. But during the apprenticeship I was offered day release and therefore followed up throughout that period with a City & Guilds Mechanical Engineering and Technology I think. So that was the first four and half years full time employment, by the end of it I was getting fed up of removing metal from metal to make something, which prompted another move, virtually as soon as my apprenticeship finished I'd left and again this was just before dad died. He died just before my interview and I'd found a job in MOD. What did they call it? I can't remember but it was probably assurance in clothing it was non-warlike site, it was still MOD and I went there as an examiner and spent from 1973 to 1986 there. In that time I started as an examiner, got promoted to the professional side as a draughtsman then to the sideways to run the engineering workshop and test lab, then got promotion to the technical side on procurement and that was over the 13-odd years and I was there when the Falkland's was on and a lot of kit was going to the Falklands and that started me thinking.</p> <p>I When you say kit what sort of kit are you referring to?</p> <p>R I was involved with body armour. Body armour and the cooking equipment, tentage; that was the sector I was involved in at the time. Back in 85 I'd already made the decision I was leaving MOD because I was getting a little bit of conflict of working for MOD and being a Christian even though I was on the non-warlike side I guess having a very close friend in the Welsh Guards come back from the Falklands and seen what had happened must have affected me so I decided it was time to jump from MOD and to try and get into something where I was helping people.</p> <p>I Why was that important, to you?</p>	<p>Early opportunities for development, and First technical qualification.</p> <p>Frustration appears and decides to move, but coincides with family crisis.</p> <p>TRA First career move; slow, but precise in describing occupational experience which included both upward and sideways moves.</p> <p>ASP Tension between business purpose and personal values.</p> <p>ASP To work for/with people and not for war-mongering.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>R At the time I felt I could be more help to people rather than being on the other side of it where MOD is more destructive so I guess some of the ethics are coming in there, sort of changing my thinking of ‘Why am I working?’ That initiated a move to the prison service, industrial prisons, where we were there supposedly helping prisoners and giving them employment while they were in the prisons. That also initiated a move from where we were at Wallingford to East Grinstead, which was good. I enjoyed the prison service, but I did a heck of a lot of travelling all round the prisons. This work really honed my quality assurance – quality management, quality control whatever you want to call them – skills for implementing and running the systems. I had three years there and someone had said to me when I left MOD ‘you will not like commuting to London’ but I hacked Croydon okay but then decided I’m going to get out before they move to Derby. They were under threat of moving to Derby and I thought ‘right can I move somewhere in the South East, stay around here?’ and a job came up in DTI with the Consumer Safety Unit, which again sort of looking back on it, when I was going through all the briefing, followed up, yeah okay. Maybe at the time I didn’t realise it but looking back I’d moved into helping consumers at DTI. The move to DTI was sideways, whereas it was on promotion to the prison service. When I got to DTI I found the job was directly affecting the safety of consumers and enjoyed it straight away. I had two and a half years in this post. They were very very good years; it was while doing this job that I started to travel Europe, fully realised what standardisation was and how it fitted in with regulations and safety and everything. Back in them days, this will be early 90s, they used to have</p>	<p>ASP Questions the purpose of work.</p> <p>TRA A career move that addressed personal work values and ethics.</p> <p>TRA Values work experience and acknowledges skills acquired.</p> <p>ASP Stay in South East – unwilling to move to Derby.</p> <p>TRA A further career move, which was a sideways move.</p> <p>ASP Realises job matches his ethical aspirations.</p> <p>Quite rambling at this point and chose to heavily re-edit.</p> <p>TRA Confused by opportunity for promotion.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>promotion boards and I'd been in the grade long enough to sit on a promotion board. At the time I thought 'oh this has blown it, they've given me promotion' and my bosses at the time couldn't promote me in post and the personnel management were squeezing me to take another job. Eventually I had to move to a different part of DTI and started running research for new technologies, in this case it was lasers and electron beams and if you have a copy of my notes you'll see that that was probably the most uncomfortable period of my employment.</p> <p>I Do you want to describe why at this stage or come back to it at a later point?</p> <p>R I can go through it now or come back to it.</p> <p>I Can we come back to it because the next question will look at high and low points so it might be appropriate to describe it then?</p> <p>R Yep. I had about three years in this post with varying responsibilities. During this time there were tremendous changes going on within DTI. DTI had to shed numbers and I became supernumerary, partly my own fault and I had six months to nearly a year supernumerary running some of the old projects that I still had going and looking after the finances. A lot of the time there was nothing to do so that was a bit of a low point but then my old boss back in the Consumer Safety Unit said "you mentioned six months ago you wouldn't mind coming back", do you want to come back?" and I said "yes please" and went back and took up a similar job to what I had initially within the Consumer Safety Unit. That was looking after all the technical side on standards and liaising with all the enforcement authorities and Regulations, but also running a <u>lot</u> of research programmes that would guide</p>	<p>TRA A reluctant career move that proved uncomfortable.</p> <p>Technical not people focussed.</p> <p>TRA Downsizing impacts career progression.</p> <p>TRA Recognises the value of networks – 'a bridge back' and returns to CSU.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>policy in any area. That went on from 95 through to about 2003 and then because of more squeezes – the government’s been under squeeze all the time – there was pressure on all the budgets and some clever spark somewhere saw two technical advisors on the staff and suggested we could second them to BSI, they could work for both DTI & BSI, carry on doing some of the work for DTI (and the whole part we were in of DTI had been reorganised, we were not doing so much research) they could carry on doing the technical stuff for us and do some work for BSI on the consumer policy side’. That was an interesting period. It was like having two full time jobs ((laughingly)), which has its own problems. That’s when I also started working from home, we had a desk if we wanted it in either place but they preferred us not to turn up at either so I had to start working from home, which had benefits but trying to run two jobs, which had similarities was difficult. Working with BSI also opened up a lot of new networks that I’d only vaguely known about and at the time I didn’t realise how they would later impact on what I’m now doing. The other technical advisor, because they were trying to get rid of staff they were offering voluntary early retirement with enhancements, and three others, all from the same unit in the DTI, all managed to get early retirement in June 2004. I was turned down ((laughs)), that prompted DTI to pull me back in and do more for them and drop the secondment.</p> <p>I Were you given a reason as to why you were turned down?</p> <p>R No, not fully, just “sorry”, yeah it was numbers. Numbers and how much they could afford but they did another call in early 2005 and I thought oh. I had long</p>	<p>Economic influences impact on job</p> <p>TRA Unplanned career move, initiated by organisational review not personal choice.</p> <p>Tensions created by new job and home working.</p> <p>ASP Seeks early retirement but not accepted and secondment withdrawn.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>chats with my wife again of course because it impacted on her who (my daughters were at uni and maybe one was going off in 2005) and I was really fed up working for government then and said “I’m going to try it again” and I got it. That opened up a totally new field with the question ‘and now what do I do?’ I’d been thinking it through, they ran a very good retirement programme to set you up to go and whispers started to come down “you will be setting up as a consultant won’t you?” “why?” “well we’ll need someone to do the work”. “But I can’t work for DTI for two years”, “no you can work for a third party” and that’s when LGC came in. They act as agents to what was DTI for delivering technical advice on the chemical side and they’d agreed to take on an extra role delivering the mechanical aspects as well and obviously there was more money in it for them so there was motivation for them to do it and then they contacted myself and others and we started to set that up and that’s been running ever since but I’ve also had a lot of freedom to do other work for other people as well.</p> <p>I And so that’s where you are at this point.</p> <p>R That’s where I am at this point in time. Coming to the end of a three year contract, I don’t know if it’s going to be renewed, I don’t know if it will be renewed with just bits or what hours. It could be 1st of April I’ve got no paid employment but who knows what will happen? But in this period I got involved in other networks and I really got involved with the European consumer organisation that look after the standardisation work from a consumers point of view and I’m doing more and more voluntary work for them.</p> <p>I Things have expanded then?</p>	<p>INT Discussions with wife about early retirement.</p> <p>ASP Application for early retirement accepted, but no thought to future.</p> <p>SUP Government retirement support.</p> <p>Mysteries of organisational working and playing the system.</p> <p>TRA A turning point – opportunity to work flexibly as self-employed consultant.</p> <p>Another turning point – what has happened?</p> <p>ASP Need to be involved – voluntary work the way ahead?</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>R Yeah.</p>	
<p>I What would you say have been the high and low points during that period that you've just described to me?</p>	
<p>R I think the highest point was probably working for CSU the first time.</p>	<p>TRA Zenith of occupational trajectory, because it built on previous experience.</p>
<p>I CSU being?</p>	<p>Clarity of purpose and occupational coherence.</p>
<p>R Consumer Safety Unit, that's the DTI because that's where I started to put into play everything I'd done, all my past experience from working in a workshop, running a workshop, running testing, drawing office, the procurement side; everything started to fit in. I think with the prison service there was a peak but it plateaued, it became very much the same and every job will do that but it didn't have the same spark as working with the Consumer Safety Unit because you were dealing with everyday products and everyday problems and you never knew when someone would have a problem and you'd be called in to try and solve it. That was the first peak but then it plateaued and started to go down with the move over to the new technology side and the research work. I learnt a lot about lasers, new technologies and learnt a tremendous amount about running research programmes and large financial budgets but it was a bit more remote from what I'd been doing back with the consumer safety people. Once I got made supernumerary the graph just plummets and that's probably the absolute lowest point.</p>	<p>Acknowledges 'job plateaus' and danger of losing inspiration/motivation.</p> <p>TRA Nadir of occupational trajectory, ultimately because it results in feelings of limited value.</p>
<p>I So that you've just described as a low point. What were you feeling? Why was it a low point as far as you were concerned?</p>	
<p>R Because I had to go into London every day, sometimes there was nothing to do and it just felt I was wasting away, just absolutely nothing. There had to be something</p>	<p>Expresses feelings of frustration and exclusions leading to an</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>better. You sort of think at that time ‘do I stick with it or don’t I?’ and I was on full pay and it was basically a long time for just relaxing and really thinking through everything.</p>	<p>overriding sense of exclusion and limited value.</p>
<p>I Were there any other periods that you would describe as a low point in your career?</p>	
<p>R Not really. That’s the low point I’m talking about, that’s where it really dipped, most of it was going up. It was a good climb up with CSU and initially doing the new technologies with them it climbed up but it did plummet and then going back to the Consumer Safety Unit here it came right up because doing the research work as well that utilised just about everything I’d ever learnt, even from this period I started to utilise it there and start to really see all the benefits of all the agro I’d gone through from there to there suddenly come through there. Everything I’d done seem to be used with that one unit.</p>	<p>At this point refers to occupational profile describing the ‘ups and downs’ drawn on the graph.</p>
<p>I So that period there actually you were using skills and capabilities learnt over a number of years previously.</p>	
<p>R Yeah. And then when I went over DTI/BSI, the secondment, it did dip a bit.</p>	
<p>I But that’s a very slight dip.</p>	
<p>R Yeah, yeah.</p>	
<p>I What was that due to?</p>	
<p>R Trying to do two jobs, not being able to do either properly, hitting my head against a brick wall with the consumer people and BSI not being organised and knowing you could do better but you couldn’t act on it and then as you can see the last bit where I am now, that little dip shouldn’t have been there, I need a bit of Tipp-</p>	<p>Expresses frustration with work overload and organisational incompetence.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>Ex on that ((laughs)). Again working as a consultant, even this last week I've started to use skills that I haven't used since I've been a consult--, yeah I've used them, it's the procurement side. I use it to get work in but this time I've started setting work up for other people.</p>	<p>Values opportunity to use capabilities/skills.</p>
<p>I Looking at the graph obviously it describes a continuous occupational trajectory for you over a long period of time, how would you describe the principal episodes within that occupational career that you've experienced?</p>	
<p>R The principal episodes, mm? I guess the apprenticeship was one of the major ones because that sent me down engineering. You mean this one ((laughs)).</p>	
<p>I Explain – describe it to me.</p>	
<p>R Well I put training there, that's the main apprenticeship because that set up all my basic professional trades and skills there then looking about the study side of it, I've said 73 onwards for study. At every post – you can have copies of these if you want – the study bit from day one there, even probably through to here I'm still learning. Some of its intense study like I said I had a year at college and then I did all the day release right through to get the qualifications I've got but you're always studying new approaches, new things etc. Seventy-three to 89 that was mainly MOD and prison service, I guess that was exploring. I put that down as exploring, it was positive. I started to implement some of the skills that I'd got and I was gaining expertise and experience and it was 89, I put that down as a launch because that was a move from what I would say is government but real technical government and making different parts of government work to moving into a policy department where you're a key link between everyday people, the officials and ultimately the ministers. It was a new environment, it</p>	<p>TRA Recounts the positive and negative feelings associated with different episodes highlighting new approaches, the value of study/qualifications and learning new skills which build on previous experience and challenge for the future.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>tested me for everything I'd done and everything come up okay but all the time there I was learning new skills again, how the standards work, how the Regulations work, how does Parliament work ((laughs)), what do ministers do, all that sort of thing. Ninety-one, 94 that'd be with the new technologies, as I said there, it was a step too far. It put me in with new technologies, new tasks and new experiences that I found difficult to come to terms with and I did feel uncomfortable and I found it was quite difficult and that's probably something I'd never felt, in all the work I'd done I'd never felt like that until that point. That was a hard trek, it really was hard work because they expect you to go in and virtually run with it whereas I had a big big curve to climb up and found it very very difficult.</p> <p>I And then into this period that you've described as freefall.</p> <p>R Yeah that's where I just felt a freefall, thinking back about it. Since I've started looking at this I've been going through it all and it was more freefall because there were very few jobs available because DTI was shrinking and there were few jobs elsewhere in government. I did look at moving up North in this period as well, we even had a holiday in Yorkshire because there was a job up there that would have suited me but I didn't get it and everything was negative. I had a resurgence when I got asked to go back to the Consumer Safety Unit and given a bigger role than just the technical standards side but also running quite a few research programmes or research projects. That's where, even though I didn't like it, the trek was very useful in that period.</p> <p>I So reflecting back you were using the skills from that freefall period.</p>	<p>TRA Also acknowledges the disappointment of job in which he felt uncomfortable.</p> <p>Concave (possible) or convex (impossible)?</p> <p>TRA Talks about a period of downward spiral exacerbated by job scarcity in occupational environment.</p> <p>Considered relocation.</p> <p>TRA Turning point – job role expanded.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>R And the trek period where I was really under the cosh and not comfortable, it all came through to be used by someone else. When you set out, back doing an apprenticeship you never think you'll go get somewhere here and then that was going great and then the last bit and ultimately the secondment where I was doing DTI work and BSI work and that was more coasting because I wasn't doing the research work, the standards work was just ticking over and you were learning new networks and working with networks and doing a bit of training so learning new skills but it wasn't taxing like say that and that was so from the point of view of using all the skills it was just coasting along – let's get the job done, goodness knows what's going to be round the next corner. And then the last one is covering this consultancy and being self-employed, it is a venture, I've had to call on everything I've ever learnt but it's more fun.</p>	<p>Reflects on occupational start and achievement.</p> <p>Questions the value of this period during his occupational trajectory.</p> <p>Opens up when he starts to talk about self-employment.</p>
<p>I Thank you for that, and you're happy for me to have a copy of that?</p>	
<p>R Yeah.</p>	
<p>I I'm going on now to look at things that have come from the past occupation but also to ask you about where you're at in terms of withdrawal from the workplace, disengagement from your occupation, retirement or however one describes it. First, just before we do that, can I ask you about career markers; what career markers, i.e. those events or insights that have impacted significantly on your career have you identified?</p>	
<p>R I've put three down. The first one is stepping out of a safe environment and that was really moving from my home area, which is back at Wantage (Wallingford), that's where I did my apprenticeship and 13-odd years</p>	<p>TRA Identifies 3 career markers – stepping out of a safe environment; moving away from home area and explains significance...</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>with MOD. Very comfortable, I knew the area, knew the work, could cope with it all, had loads of friends there and I stepped out and joined the prison service and my wife and daughter were all in their own environment and they were quite comfortable and we had a local church there and I said “no, I’ve got to move”. So that was a big upheaval, not just for me and work but for family as well and that saw us come here to Grinstead. That’s sort of merging into that one, that’s the second one when I changed, that was quite a marker because it then set me off in a different government department, doing far more travelling and really starting to explore the UK much more. Okay it was just going to prisons and that but it was the feedback back home as well and how my work impacted more on the family because we then had our second daughter as well so the change within government and change in geographic location and at the same time my mum and step-father went down to Devon and my wife’s parents moved up north of London and they’d all been close, they’d lived within ten/15 miles of us before we all suddenly moved nearly within 18 months of each other. So, that was a major bit, I’d sort of concentrated more on work there but as I said it was impacting much more on family as well.</p> <p>I You talked about family there, I’ll come back to family obligations as they are for you at this point in time a bit later if that’s okay. Some of the epiphanies you’ve described here, can you explain them in what they actually meant for you – what your experience was at the time – why they were an epiphany as far as you’re concerned?</p> <p>R I think this first one, the practical skills could be boring, I</p>	<p>TRA 2nd career marker – joining the prison service</p> <p>TRA 3rd career marker – changing roles and industrial sector providing more travelling around UK.</p> <p>Refers to impact on own family, and dispersion of nuclear family.</p> <p>Reflects on epiphanies noting frustration of practical work...</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>went through about a few days or months where I just realised well whatever job I'm doing I'm either at a lathe, I'm at a mill or whatever and I'm just removing metal. I said it earlier, it's stuck with me that all I was doing was changing the shape of material and I was having no impact anywhere and after four and a half years I was beginning to find it boring. At the time, we'd gone through a three day working week and all that and things were picking up. I also had other interests because I was now 20/21 and I didn't want to revolve around something that I was finding boring and they wanted more and more overtime to be worked and I was saying "No, no, no" so there was a little bit of that there as well. The epiphany was 'I'm finding this boring. It's the same old thing day in day out' and as I say I wanted to do more. Although I enjoyed what I was doing at MOD it's the people side of it. The ethics of MOD are not necessarily directly helping people and I felt I wanted to get out of that and move on.</p> <p>I Okay, and the last one?</p> <p>R That's when I moved into DTI and got really involved with consumer safety, directly affecting the safety of children. I was doing toys initially and now I'm doing the nursery equipment and everything that goes with it, as well as having an impact into all consumers. When that job came up I thought 'ooh, yeah'. It was a sort of, 'Well you're helping prisoners' but you go round to some of the prisons, young offenders – we're talking late-teens/early twenties – you're trying to help them learn a trade because they go into an industrial prison. You've got all the prison officers, you've got all the civilians in the prison workshops and the people like myself going in, trying to help them by giving them skills to go outside and you start to think 'Well why do</p>	<p>Again notes impact of economic pressures.</p> <p>Acknowledges personal values and ethical considerations regarding MOD.</p> <p>Excited by opportunity to work for people.</p> <p>Although initially excited by work with young offenders, notes the disillusionment that crept in on realisation that...</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>we keep doing this?’ when the officer said “Yep, he’s out on parole” or “He’s been let off, he’s served his time; we’ll see him again in six weeks” because they can’t cope outside. To me it wasn’t helping them at all. You teach them things but they were just using it to earn a little bit extra money and there were no long-term benefits at all. I thought again there’s got to be more.</p> <p>I What’s come across on several occasions is your interest or your emerging interest in consumer safety, which seems to be at the core of what you’re currently doing as well. Can you just explain for me why that’s become important for you?</p> <p>R I think, having had children and knowing the value of having your own children, I want to ensure that the products they use are safe, even if they misuse them. They don’t want products that are going to cause them injury and I see it as helping the children and helping the parents, who are up against a system that isn’t really geared for them. Although I can’t do a lot, I can do a bit to help them try and get justice and get products that have caused injury or could cause an accident out of the system. I guess that’s the little bit of the rebel in me. Even though I work for the authorities there’s a bit there that’s trying to stop manufacturers doing cheap, shoddy products that injure people. I don’t know if that explains it. You get involved in it and it takes over, even with the girls a long long time ago and I was dealing with toys and other things then and basically I was working. Even now my wife goes “oh you’re working again”; you cannot leave it alone. It gets into the system and you become someone who wants the best for consumers and it’s moved from just being UK and looking after UK, which is where the Consumer Safety Unit really were looking after UK consumers, even though you were at</p>	<p>... they couldn’t cope and would be returning to prison.</p> <p>ASP Desire to improve consumer safety by helping parents and children remove dangerous products.</p> <p>Refers to absorption of work and intrinsic motivation to do best for end users.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>times working on European standards it was still getting the best for UK, whereas now I've moved into well let's get the best for the European consumers and it's widened my brief.</p>	<p>Challenge of expanded markets – UK to European consumers.</p>
<p>I Can I spend a few minutes looking at your professional connections in terms of your membership of a professional institute? What institute are you a member of and what grade do you hold?</p>	
<p>R ((deep sigh)) Ordinary member of The Institute of Engineering Technologies I think. It's changed names so often since I've been a member – it's written down somewhere upstairs on the computer.</p>	<p>Very vague about professional membership – seemed uncertain and not really interested in talking about it.</p>
<p>I If I need to I'll come back to you.</p>	
<p>R Yeah, I think it's IIP now, IEP? IET</p>	
<p>I How long have you held that membership?</p>	
<p>R ((pause for thought)) Since about 96. When I went back to the Consumer Safety Unit I had the necessary qualifications, I had the necessary experience and I was doing the right sort of thing and I was working with a couple of chartered engineers and they said you really ought to join a professional body and they nominated and seconded me to what was then The Incorporated Engineers and I had the membership approved and as I say that's changed its name but I forget what it is now, IET or something. It's The Institute of Engineering Technologies, it covers mechanical and electronic and computers now, they've expanded, but it also gives you membership of The Engineering Council. That's where the professional side is.</p>	<p>Encouraged to join.</p>
<p>I In what ways has your professional membership influenced your career development choice?</p>	

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>R I don't think it has. The only way I use it now is when I get into expert witness work, which there's not very much about, but should I get into doing some expert witness then membership of a professional body will help. It gives me more kudos, credence, whatever.</p>	<p>SUP Talks about limited value of professional membership.</p>
<p>I How many times do you get involved in an expert witness case?</p>	
<p>R I haven't ((laughs)). I haven't yet. I've advised solicitors over the phone and obviously they've listened to what I've said and not taken things forward. I'm currently working with a TSO and if he decides to go to court he's already talking will I go to court, so it's always there or thereabouts but there's not very much happening, thankfully.</p>	<p>Refers to non-existent expert witness work and appears relieved that he hasn't had to be involved.</p>
<p>I What are the business objectives of the principal clients that you work with?</p>	
<p>R I've read their briefing ((laughs)). They're there to look after consumers. LGC is what was the Local Government Chemist, but they don't go by that anymore. They're mainly a testing research facility but they come from the point of view of we're there to ensure the safety of consumers but we will do work for industry as well.</p>	<p>Notes the challenges facing his current employer.</p>
<p>I And what are the key challenges facing them at the moment?</p>	
<p>R Funding ((laughs)). As with any private industry it's funding and getting sufficient throughput of work to be able to continue doing their role. They do a lot of technical advisory work and they do a lot of standards work and to cover all of that they need to get the business through the door to pay for it all. One of their main issues is they've got so much work on they haven't got time to do everything, that's the other side of it.</p>	<p>Prioritises the criticality of economics, but also notes that they currently have lots of work.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>I What would you say are the professional requirements of the job you currently hold? What capabilities do you need to have?</p> <p>R Sound engineering discipline as a background, a broad understanding of all the different aspects from manufacture, distribution, testing, legislation, the compliance to legislation that's on one side. That's the background you need for that. You need to be a reasonable negotiator, you have to have very good communication skills and you need to be able to network.</p>	<p>ASP Very clear summary of skills required and, by inference, the hint that he has them and these are the skills that he requires to continue his current career.</p>
<p>I How do you sustain your own personal professional learning and development?</p> <p>R I don't want this to come out the wrong way. Obviously through the professional body I get monthly journals which keep you up to speed with technologies but they are new technologies mainly as opposed to more traditional technologies that I'm dealing with. There are nursery journals that keep you up to speed with all the new developments within the nursery trade. There are trade fairs that I can get to. On the standards side there are various monthly bulletins and things that come out showing how standards are moving forward but for me some of those, although very useful, for me it's been in the meetings, in discussion with a lot of the other people, especially manufacturers if they're prepared to say where they're developing things, is to stay in good contact with them and liaise with them in meetings and outside meetings to find out where things are going. The network with ANEC, the European Consumer organisation, that covers a much broader spectrum than what I'm involved in and that gives me a wider appreciation of the issues with consumers across Europe and I'm always learning</p>	<p>Describes a lucid, but lengthy, overview of how he maintains his own professional learning and development.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>there of the problems they're having that can then impact directly on my small sector. The other way is trying to improve standards is purely through being involved in so much, having such a wide spectrum of involvement, <u>in-depth</u> involvement and detail that I tend to use all my background to generate the way forward for a lot of standards.</p>	
<p>I Looking at an entirely new area, looking to the future, what are your career aspirations for the remaining duration of your occupational engagement?</p>	
<p>R I guess to <u>tick over because I enjoy what I'm doing. I would be quite happy to carry on at the level I'm at for another three/four years or in the next six months even to reduce that down to a much lower level and start doing what I said I was going to do five years ago and be semi-retired</u>, which I've never been ((laughs)).</p>	<p>ASP Clear elucidation of ideal transition to occupational disengagement.</p>
<p>I If and when you become semi-retired what might you do during that period?</p>	
<p>R I'd probably get much more involved in the waterways.</p>	
<p>I Waterways?</p>	
<p>R Yeah, canal systems, probably do more work there and there's a lot of voluntary work you can do and go and use my practical skills helping them.</p>	
<p>I What would make it easier for you to go and do that and why don't you do it now?</p>	
<p>R I haven't got the time ((laughs)). All <u>my time is spent delivering for clients, looking after family and that's it. I guess the other bit I would do, and this is going back five years, what things can you do?</u> And I could do all sorts of practical things, you know sort of going back helping</p>	<p>INT Current obligations preclude occupational disengagement.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>the church. I'd have more time to get more involved in the church, at the moment it's just difficult.</p>	
<p>I You mentioned family but looking outside of work, what I'm describing a life obligations, i.e. family, financial, health or anything else do you face at the moment which influences you and your thinking with regard to your career at this point in time?</p>	
<p>R Probably not a lot. That may not sound good but I've got three elderly parents, step-parents, I have got concerns there, not so much for their financial position but more for their health and I guess we've even re-jigged upstairs so that my wife's parents can stay with us. Now they're saying long-term they've got all their care sorted – goodness knows what but – yeah that's going to be the thing that impacts most in the future is the elderly.</p>	<p>INT Initial response suggests little impact, but then recognises care for elderly relatives may eventually influence occupational choice.</p>
<p>I If their health condition did change, how would that impact you in terms of what you could do or what you could continue to do for your career?</p>	
<p>R Depending what happened but if they needed more care then my career would probably take a dip. If I've contracted to do work then I'm contracted to do – I would do the work but I can fortunately work from anywhere providing I can get an internet connection so if it was a case of going and spending time with them I could do it and I could still do the work. It would be my wife who'd have the bigger problems because she's tied in with being at a certain work place each day but I'm flexible enough to be able to cope with that and hopefully be able to juggle things further; it would work.</p>	<p>INT Recognises that personal career would need to change if elderly relatives required focused attention.</p>
<p>I Given the choice, would you continue in your current occupational employment pattern, continue in a modified</p>	

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>employment pattern or change to something new entirely?</p> <p>R I'd either stay exactly as I am, if the contract's there, for the short-term. Short-term I'd say the next five years, long-term ten years and more I would continue in the career I've got but I'd modify it to be less work, less travelling so I'd start to get more time to do other activities. I wouldn't start a new career, no, unless things went absolutely pear-shaped ((laughs)).</p>	<p>ASP Expresses desire to control career rundown to allow time for other interests.</p>
<p>I Looking at your disengagement preferences, i.e. this is all about retirement, how do you define the concept of retirement?</p>	<p>Outlines activities he would like to get involved in rather than answering question about retirement.</p>
<p>R Certainly not full-time employment, much more time to take on leisure activities, more time for family, leisure activities I guess could involve church, boating for me, maybe get back into bowls but the way I am now, to keep my mind active and stay involve I would carry on doing a certain amount of work voluntarily as some of what I'm doing now.</p>	
<p>I Would that ever come to an end?</p>	
<p>R The voluntary work?</p>	
<p>I Would there ever be a time when you didn't feel you wanted to continue with any work of whatever nature?</p>	
<p>R Yeah there could be. If I really felt I'm not able to stay up to speed with the work, I'm not having an input or an influence on what's going on or I just get fed up with it then I would stop. If on the other side of it the family, circumstances changed so much and it became untenable to do any work then I'd pack it in</p>	<p>INT Ultimately accepts that he would terminate work, but reluctant, not first preference.</p>
<p>I This is a question at this point in time – at what age do you intend to retire from your current workplace?</p>	

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>R There is no set age that I've even thought of. I would like to do another three years virtually full time but it's not down to whether I will or won't, I've got no control over that. It could be next year I drop into 50/50 or even more leisure time. I But if it did come to a period where you gave up work totally, at what age would you imagine that might be? I know it's hypothetical at the moment because you're not there but by what age would you expect to have completely finished work?</p>	<p>INT No clear idea for a retirement age. INT Believes he has no control over when to retire.</p>
<p>R Providing I'm fit and capable probably nearly 70 but it certainly wouldn't be at the sort of level I'm at now but I'm still a few years away and who knows? Something else may happen ((laughs)).</p>	<p>INT Agrees 70, eventually.</p>
<p>I I know you're self-employed but do your past employers pension arrangements and your current arrangements allow you to match your preferred retirement option?</p>	<p>SUP Believes pension arrangements adequate.</p>
<p>R Yes is the simple answer.</p>	
<p>I This is two-fold because you're self-employed at the moment but what support (if any) has your employer given you in the past to make decisions about retirement and/or where would you go to now to seek advice on retirement options?</p>	
<p>R Previous employer, the government were very good on advice on retirement and retirement package. Where would I go now? If I needed advice it would probably be an independent financial advisor, there are other people out there that give advice. People like SAGA have got some good advisors and there's always Help The Aged ((laughs)).</p>	<p>SUP Acknowledges that government have provided advice.</p>
<p>I Looking at it from other people's perspective, what retirement preferences do other close members of your family hold for you and if you know, what are those</p>	

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>preferences and what relationship do those people have to you?</p>	
<p>R Well I don't think that the girls are worried providing I stay fit and healthy. I think the only other one is my wife who's got any close interest on it and I think she's happy with me doing what I'm doing.</p>	<p>INT Expresses close family member's views on his retirement preferences.</p>
<p>I She hasn't expressed anything precisely?</p>	
<p>R Just "don't stay here 100% of the time, it's nice when you go away and I get time to myself" ((laughs)). So I'm not sure I can retire totally ((laughs)).</p>	
<p>I Looking to the future, if at all, is there anything that would improve your occupational satisfaction at this point in time?</p>	
<p>R I don't think so. I think at the moment I've got the best I've had and the best of everything at the moment.</p>	
<p>I Looking at you as an individual, what would you say are your strengths in terms of career abilities and skills?</p>	<p>Specifies what he sees as his capabilities.</p>
<p>R Writing safety standards is a strength, being able to define exactly what we need to ensure products are safe so that's taking it as a risk assessment. What sort of level were you looking for here?</p>	
<p>I It's that, what are your principal skills, capabilities, competencies that you bring to bear in the workplace that would probably stand you out from somebody else? What is it that you're very good at?</p>	
<p>R Hazard risk assessment, drafting standards, negotiation, communicating and giving advice.</p>	
<p>I And how have you become aware of those capabilities over the years?</p>	

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>R It's as if I've grown into a lot of them. I've had training over the years and some of it comes out of my involvement which has got quite emotional and sometimes I have to curb that but it's just developed and I wouldn't have said I was good at maybe any of those at one stage but over the years I've come to realise that people value my input into the work I'm doing in all those areas I've mentioned.</p>	
<p>I You talked about if you do retire you could do other things, how might those strengths be useful?</p>	
<p>R They may not be. If I got more involved with the canals and boating in general that would be more practical, as I see it at the moment. I don't see me getting involved in any of the other sort of activities where the skills I've used more now would be used. Within the church who knows?</p>	
<p>I Do you recognise any weaknesses that you have?</p>	
<p>R Yeah ((deep sigh)), I get too emotional.</p>	
<p>I Why do you believe that to be a weakness?</p>	
<p>R Well ((said wistfully)) I get a little bit annoyed with people ((laughs)). I start thumping the table ((laughs)), which is not the best way to go forward sometimes. I'm not sure because I think in the tight field of where I am, well I like to think I'm okay but there must be some weaknesses somewhere. Maybe too pedantic; I've been called that a lot. Sometimes that's good in the work I do but sometimes it can be a block that I'm not prepared to move enough.</p>	<p>Specifies what he sees as his weaknesses.</p>
<p>I Thinking about what I've described as the 'third age', had you heard of the term third age before you started to get involved in this research programme?</p>	

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>R Yes but maybe a different context.</p>	
<p>I Okay, in what context? What's your understanding of the term?</p>	
<p>R Where I've met it before is where you're maybe going just a bit further than what we're discussing today and the third age are those people who have retired and take on new roles, use all their career experiences to have a different input into communities, industries or whatever <u>and</u> from the point of view of understanding that from a certain point in time some people in the third age categories have different needs and abilities to people in other age groups. I'm being very careful what I say here ((very slight laugh)).</p>	<p>Term 'third-age' used to describe those post-retirement.</p> <p>Suggests different needs.</p>
<p>I Has your inclusion in this stage of life influenced your occupational experience in any way?</p>	
<p>R No. I think I've just carried on as normal. I still think I'm quite young but there we go ((laughs)).</p>	
<p>I Have you experienced or are you aware of anyone else who has experienced discrimination as a result of their inclusion within this occupational life stage?</p>	
<p>R I think going back to DTI and part of the reason people were leaving, looking back at it, most of the people who took early retirement were older people. Now I'm not saying that was what DTI wanted, they lost a lot of experience that way it's just that the older people there were in a better position to take early retirement but being very technically based, all my career's based on engineering and the technical aspects of that, it did look as though people in certain industries (the government) who have got that technical knowledge have been not wanted anymore and it's been left to the pure policy</p>	<p>Questions DTIs motives in encouraging older people to take early retirement.</p>

OCCUPATIONAL INTERVIEW TEXT (APPROVED)	COMMENTARY
<p>people so there could be a bit.</p> <p>I But there's nothing concrete but it's just a general feeling.</p> <p>R No, just a feeling that's all.</p> <p>I Thank you very much for your participation.</p>	

Summary of Occupational Experiences and Aspirations

NOTED immediately after analysing the edited text for the first time, and before interpretation and rewriting to produce the thesis chapter.

Jack is sometimes hesitant in describing his career experiences, but honest in his responses and reflective of the occupational experiences he has encountered. His trajectory may be described as opportunistic looking for/responding to new career experiences as a result of organisational redirection, restructuring and colleague suggestion, that is to say that he is being crafted (by others) rather than sculpting (for himself) his career. He describes his career in a variety of orientations – up, sideways and sometimes down, which appear to have occurred as a consequence of the reactive rather than proactive moves he has made.

Frequent references to his family and church indicate a sincerity which has, on several occasions, caused him to reflect on his occupational purpose, particularly his move away from the MOD. He often talks about the value of the work he is doing/has done and this concern for ethics is clearly one of his principal occupational drivers. Considering his values approach/orientation, it is perhaps surprising to see a more hesitant response to the questions about life obligations, which he appears to accept reluctantly, will impact on his occupational choices.

Overall, Jack appeared reflective throughout the interview, resulting in an in-depth exposition of his occupational trajectory; he seemed less certain about his future career destination frequently inferring that it would depend... on circumstances outside of his control, again an indicator of his latent preference to allow his career to be influenced by opportunity rather than planned as a consequence of his personal aspirations.