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THE MEANING OF WORK IN THE LIVES OF OLDER, MALE WORKERS

by

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**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to better understand the differences in the way older, male workers perceived themselves as they aged, particularly with reference to work and aspects of the work environment. Career theorists have, for the most part, paid scant attention to this population. Research efforts that have focussed on the "older worker" implicitly assume that they are homogeneous, that aging itself has a uniform impact, and that aging is a process of inevitable loss.

A grounded theory approach was chosen because it was deemed most suitable to explore the phenomena because the basic variables were not readily identifiable, the field was rather ill-defined, and the research questions were best asked from within the "lived experience" of the participants. A sample of older, male workers, who were actively employed, were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format.

A number of major categories and subcategories emerged through the research analysis including attitudes toward aging, the meaning of work, and the value of interpersonal relationships. The content of these categories were observed to change over the lives of the respondents, and these changes were neither uniform nor necessarily predictable.

The differences that were observed among, and within, the respondents were attributable to the interaction of the level of cognitive development, locus of control, self-knowledge, interpersonal orientation, adaptive competence, spiritual courage, and the emotional viability of one's life story.

The results of the study suggest that "older workers" do not constitute a unique population within the general workforce and that, in the future, researchers must attend to their individual differences. The findings of the study provide strong support for the notion that adult development is not the result of the passage of time alone, but rather is the result of an interaction among a diversity of factors. The results also affirm that, for

many older workers, aging is a time of ongoing growth and renewal, and further that personal development is inseparable from career development. Older workers have the potential to not only contribute to the postmodern workplace, but also markedly enhance the quality of working life for all.

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For all the respondents of this study who gave of their time freely, and in the hopes that others might understand that, although they are getting older, they are not aging.

DEDICATION

For

Maria Baldini

for your irrepressible confidence in this "older worker"

For

Kimberley Ann

for the lessons you taught me about the magic of human development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to better understand the differences in the way older workers perceived themselves as they aged, particularly with reference to work and the work environment. That is, what are the salient issues that older workers identify from their perspective as they look back upon their lives? Do they perceive themselves as changing or do they remain relatively the same over time? In what areas of their lives do they notice change? Does work itself become a more or less meaningful activity? Are there discernible differences among workers?

This study was necessary because vocational psychologists have paid scant attention to the life issues of older workers, much less those past midcareer (Greller & Stroh, 1995). The majority of existing career theories have been derived from young, male, middle-class workers and have limited relevance to older workers (Richardson, 1993). Vocational counselling interventions directed toward older workers have been noticeably absent from the literature (Cahill & Salomone, 1987).

Older workers, defined in this study as those over the age of 50, are rapidly becoming a visible presence in the workplace (Foote & Stoffman, 1996). The

participation rate of older workers, based upon demographic trends, will increase sharply for the next several decades and will continue as more workers opt to remain in the paid workforce. This trend reflects increases in longevity, shrinking pension reserves, improved health care, increased levels of education, and projected demands by industry for older workers (Bridges, 1994). This study addresses the emerging need to fill a gap in existing vocational theories that excluded the “older worker”. Older workers will, in increasing numbers, seek out career services (Lowman, 1994). Olsen (1985) has noted that a significant number of older workers are demanding assistance with employment problems including assessment, job search skills, and training. It is unlikely, in the absence of significant refocusing of research efforts by vocational psychologists, that these needs will be met in an informed and ethical manner.

In the absence of a research tradition that has focused upon the “older worker”, a grounded theory approach was chosen. This qualitative methodology is best suited for research studies that seek to explore phenomena in which even the most basic variables are not readily identifiable, or when the field is considered ill-defined, or when the research questions can be best answered from within the lived experience of the participants (Creswell, 1998; Struass & Corbin, 1998). A sample of older, employed males was selected using the “snow-ball” technique. Each participant was interviewed through a semi-structured interview process.

The research questions that guided the interview process were based upon a review of the existing, albeit scant, research literature. This review had suggested that “older workers”, who possess particular abilities and skills, might find it easier not only to adapt but also prosper in the postmodern workplace. These included the ability to initiate and maintain effective interpersonal relationships, to identify work that was

satisfying and personally meaningful, the ability to focus themselves in times of change, the ability to be inner-directed and resist the temptation to conform to the prevailing myths about aging, and to maintain a high degree of physical and emotional health. Based upon a clearly delineated analytical processes characteristic of the grounded theory approach, the transcripts were analyzed to identify a basic set of categories, or themes, that emerged from the data. These themes were, in turn, fully developed and discussed in relation to existing concepts and theoretical accounts of the older worker.

This study assumed that work is only indirectly related to securing an income, but rather is a major source of personal significance, meaning-making, and self-definition. Work allows an individual to become connected to a larger community and find fulfillment through this connectedness.

This study will provide a starting point for future research studies that focus upon the "older worker" by (a) identifying the salient issues in the lives of older workers, (b) assessing the viability of the grounded theory approach to address the problem, and (c) identifying a research agenda for the future.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is organized into five parts. Part I, *The Graying of the Workforce*, describes the social, economic, and psychological environments of the older adult worker. Part II, *A Research Perspective*, describes the relevant albeit limited research that has focused on the older workforce. Part III, *Models of Human Development*, describes two related constructivist models that may have potential for understanding human development and its relationship to work. Part IV, *The Research Agenda*, is a brief summary of the related research and points toward potential avenues of research. Part V, *The Research Questions*, puts forth the research questions specific to this study.

PART I: THE GRAYING OF THE WORKFORCE

The Worst of Times, The Best of Times

The workplace is turning increasingly “gray” due to the demographic impact of the baby-boom generation born in the 1940s and 50s. By the year 2002, the leading edge of the baby-boom generation will turn age 55. For the next twenty years, the size of the older working population will rise dramatically – to a projected 20% of the working population. The population of the cohort immediately following the “baby-boomers”, or the “baby-busters”, will be dramatically smaller (Foote & Stoffman, 1996).

It is expected that older workers will soon be at a premium as the demand for labour begins to exceed the supply (Warr, 1994). For most of the last 50 years, older Canadian workers avidly pursued early retirement. In 1950, 75% of men over age 65 were in the paid workforce, and by 1990, this proportion had dropped to less than 33%. There is mounting evidence that this trend towards early retirement – for both men and women – is not holding (Hansson, DeKoekkoek, Neece & Patterson, 1997). Early retirement, or even perhaps “normal” retirement, is becoming less of an option for an increasing number of aging Canadians.

On the one hand, there have been a number of economic and social forces interacting, which require older workers to delay their decision to retire. The baby-boomers have not accumulated savings or capital to the same degree as their prior cohort. Indeed, because the baby-buster generation is roughly half the size of the baby-boomers, they will be unable to fund public pensions at anywhere near the required rate, and less than half of the baby-boomers have private pensions plans (Foote & Stoffman, 1996). Further, the children of the baby-boomers have had poorer employment prospects and tend to remain at home longer while, their own parents, facing health-care cutbacks and experiencing greater longevity, also require time and financial support from the baby-boomers.

On the other hand, an increasing number of older workers appear to be voluntarily opting to remain in the paid workforce voluntarily. The baby-boomers have enjoyed better health, physical fitness, and nutrition consciousness, hence they expect better longevity than any previous cohort in our history (Foote & Stoffman, 1996). In addition, the physical demands associated with the “industrial age” have diminished, hence the workplace is more inviting for older workers. Finally, the baby-boomers are

the best-educated cohort in history, and educational level is positively associated with remaining in the workforce longer (Barth & McNaught, 1991).

In a recent survey of US workers aged 51 to 61, 75% said they would like to continue working beyond the traditional retirement age of 65 (AARP, 1996). Olsen (1985) surveyed a sample of older individuals about services that were available to them, and found that individuals including those in their 80s and 90s wanted assistance with employment problems. The most frequently requested counselling service was job placement followed by interest and aptitude assessment, training and job search skills.

Thus, it does appear that many older workers will want to stay in the paid workforce. However, it is simply not a matter of older workers “staying the course” until retirement at a later point in their lives. Many older workers, while they may be increasingly desirous of remaining at work, are being terminated at unprecedented rates (Noer, 1993). Indeed, many older workers will be required to approach reemployment with a completely different set of expectations – all may not find opportunities in the new work context.

Indeed, there have been dramatic changes in the workplace over the past twenty years. In the mid-1980s, North American workers witnessed a maelstrom which dramatically changed the economic landscape. Global competition, rapid technological innovation, deregulation, international trade agreements, and a shift to an information-based economy (Bridges, 1994; Rifkin, 1996), signaled the demise of the resource-based industrial-age which had characterized most of the 20th century.

In an effort to cope with this highly turbulent external environment, reduce overhead, and remain competitive, most companies have reorganized, delayed, restructured, reengineered, amalgamated, and - most significantly - downsized. Many types of jobs have simply disappeared from the economy and, in other cases, employers have cut positions and staff to reduce costs and remain competitive. During the 1980s, over 3.5 million jobs were eliminated from Fortune 500 companies alone, and many more were erased in mid-sized and small firms (Bridges, 1994). Companies are becoming "leaner and meaner" and this trend is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

Downsizing and layoffs have affected all employees, but mid-life and older workers have been disproportionately impacted. In a recent study of the US workforce, Hall and Mirvis (1993) noted that more older workers lost their jobs via corporate cutbacks than any other age group. They observed that the greatest reductions were in mature companies in heavy industries which employed the largest share of workers age fifty-five and above. Also, they observed that downsizing generally targets the kinds of jobs and positions held by midlife and older workers (i.e. middle managers). Older workers who have recently experienced involuntary retirement or layoff during the 1980s and 90s, face particular difficulties – many have skills which have grown obsolete or lack the financial resources to retire early. Employers, and maybe older workers themselves to some degree, hold many stereotypic perceptions of the older adult worker.

Unplanned retirement often becomes an extended period of unemployment for many older workers (London, 1993). In one US study, 52% of displaced employees between the ages of 55 and 64 did not find other employment and 31% left the workforce entirely. In comparison, 65% to 70% of workers under 55 were re-employed

(Cascio, 1993). Barth and McNaught (1991), extracting from a survey of older Americans, estimated that there are 5.4 million older people who are “willing and able” to work but unable to find a job. Of these people, 38 percent are between the ages of fifty-five and sixty-four, 41 percent between ages sixty-five and seventy-four, and 21 percent age seventy five or more. These unemployed individuals were matched with working colleagues in level of education, professional and technical skills, and health and fitness.

Counselling professionals must be sensitive to the reality that, for some employees at least, the emotional turmoil and feelings of alienation associated with job loss or, even as a corporate “survivor”, may never completely dissipate – confidence in oneself, in other people, and in the future may be quickly eradicated. The direct and indirect impacts of downsizing are projected by many to be a major source of psychological distress for the next several decades (Burke & Nelson, 1998). Although an older worker may secure another employment opportunity, of the 1,034 public, private, and nonprofit Canadian companies surveyed, 90% do not offer any form of job security – the watchword now is employability (O’Reilly & Alfred, 1995).

A number of “enlightened” employers have begun to turn to the “untapped resource” of older workers. In a survey of managers by the American Association of Retired Persons (1996), many described older workers as having more experience, better judgement, a stronger commitment to quality, more reliable attendance and punctuality, and lower turnover. They added that, given the opportunity, older workers offer many skills that can reduce training costs and increase profits.

Some forward-thinking companies are now hiring older workers as consultants, independent contractors, temporary workers, salespersons, and on-call or contingent

workers (Kane, 1997). Recognizing the untapped potential of the older worker, financial services firms such as Aetna, Prudential, and GEICO rehire their own retirees for part-time and temporary positions. Texas Refinery and Northwest Pipeline hire older employees as “independent contractors” in customer sales and services and, Aerospace Corporation employs many workers over the age of 65 in its labs and production facilities. Travelers Insurance uses older workers throughout their organization: Days Inn employs older workers as reservation agents because they are fast learners, have lower turnover rates, and are more likely to complete a call with a successful reservation. Interestingly, the sheer volume of baby-boomers as consumers will certainly heighten corporate America's responsiveness to older worker's needs. Kane (1997), referring to older adult workers, suggests that the tide is “beginning to slowly turn; companies with foresight will reap the benefits. Companies who ignore stereotypes and look objectively at older workers will outdistance their competitors, because they discovered a vast pool of talent and experience often overlooked” (p. 2).

The new millennium, it appears, may be either the best of times or the worst of times for older workers who wish to remain in the paid workforce. For those older workers who wish to remain at work and who can manage to circumnavigate around the new workplace, there are growing opportunities that will capitalize on their accumulated experience and talents. For those who wish to remain in the workforce but become embroiled in the tempest of change, it may be a time of confusion and demoralization. It is imperative that professionals specializing in career work, identify older workers who are at risk of chronic unemployment, those who may become emotional casualties, and those excluded from the paid workforce because of obsolescence.

As the magnitude of the population of older workers increases in the decades ahead, they will be actively recruited to fill a shortage of experience and skills. Based upon information to date, however, most employers appear to be ridding themselves of older workers in record numbers. Without doubt, unemployment, forced retirement and/or job insecurity of older workers is rapidly becoming a national mental health issue. At the same time, however, many older workers are more desirous, either voluntarily or involuntarily, of extending their tenure in the paid workforce. Are employers prepared to accommodate older workers in the workplaces? Are they prepared to see past the gray hair? Are older workers capable of adapting to the changing workplace? Are they capable of advancing the employer's interests? It is increasingly important that professionals interested in occupational mental health and career development gain a practical understanding of "older workers" – their strengths as well as their vulnerabilities. Failure to do so will not only detract from our economic well-being, but also increase the likelihood that a growing proportion of the population will be excluded from a major source of human dignity and self-definition – work (Savickas, 1995).

From A Career Path To A Path Of The Heart

Many writers believe that this world-wide economic realignment and structural shifts have announced the demise of the large organization (Beck, 1992; Bridges, 1994; Brousseau, Driver, Enroth & Larsson, 1996; Drucker, 1997; Hall, 1996b). Early in this century, industrialists created large organizations to mass produce inexpensive goods and services for consumption. Large bureaucratic structures with multiple, hierarchically arranged layers, were created to administer the infrastructure required to support these industrial organizations. It was assumed that most employees would acquire, either through education or on-the-job, a specialized set of skills that would last them for the

length of their career – the “one skill set – one career – one life” mentality. There was the expectation of organizational stability, job security, and unquestioned loyalty. Traditional organizational careers have defined time – early, middle, and late career stages. They have provided status in the community – a rung on the organizational ladder. They have provided identity – a job title.

It is from within this traditional context that most career theorists conducted research, accumulated data, and published results. Constructs such as organizational tenure, seniority, and fast-tracking may soon drop from our vocabulary. Hall (1996b) envisions the new work environment as involving multinational firms comprised of multiple divisions, joint ventures, regional alliances and private-public partnerships designed to dominate major markets, while entrepreneurs, franchisers, and small businesses provide raw materials and technologies, handle support services, distribute goods, and, at the same time, reach niche markets with their own goods and services. Workers in these loosely-structured organizations will be free to move seamlessly across levels and functions, through different kinds of jobs, and even from company to company.

Handy (1992) foresees this loose organizational structure as shaped in the form of a shamrock. The “shamrock” organization is composed of three leaves. The first leaf, containing the core technology of the firm, is populated by highly skilled managers, professionals, and technicians. The next leaf is composed of autonomous, specialized and independent firms. This leaf will supply essential support services, inventory, distribution systems and so forth, at a faster rate than could be supplied by the core firm itself. The third leaf is composed of part-timers, dependent contractors, and temporary workers utilized on an “as needed basis”. The shamrock structure allows the “core

technology” to respond rapidly to changes in the economy, the competition, or in production demands. Mirvis and Hall (1996) describes this as the 3F organization – free, fast and flexible. The firm is free to organize in response to problems or opportunities - fast to assess and respond quickly to change - and flexible in their ability to change thinking practices and established routines in light of new information and developments.

This 3F “organizational entity” described by Hall envisions only a few full-time jobs other than in the first leaf. Bridges (1994) describes this trend toward alternate forms of employment as the “dejobbing” of America. Indeed, temporary employment is a fast growing work option – it cuts costs, increases flexibility, and avoids restrictions and consequences such as legal liabilities, demands for wage equity, and unionization (Von Hippel, Mangum, Greenberger & Skoglund, 1997). In 1994, for example, only 50% of all jobs created in the Canadian economy were full-time positions. The temporary services industry has expanded over 360% since 1982, and 20% of the new jobs created in the US between 1991 and 1993 were temporary. As many as 90% of employers are using temporary services. Some commentators assert that the strategic use of various forms of the contingent work force has actually increased job security for groups of core employees (Von Hippel et al., 1997). Morrow (1993) believes that we have entered the age of the contingent or temporary worker, of the consultant and subcontractor, of the “*just-in-time work force*”. He suggests that the message to employees is very clear “You are on your own. For good (sometimes) and ill (often), the workers of the future will [. . .] invent new relationships with employers who must, themselves, change and adapt constantly in order to survive in the ruthless global market” (p. 24).

Kegan (1994), synthesizing the recent management literature, concluded that the enterprise of work demands a substantively higher order of mental complexity than in past eras. He suggests that:

[. . .] although we have not yet recognized it, a qualitatively different order of mind – as different as that between prelogical and concrete thinking, or between concrete and abstract thinking – is called for to meet these expectations in adulthood (p. 165)

Kegan (1994) argues that the major expectations, the “new curriculum of the workplace”, currently placed upon employees include:

- 1. To invent or own our work (rather than see it as owned and created by the employer).**
- 2. To be self-initiating, self-correcting, self-evaluating (rather than dependent on others to frame the problems, initiate adjustments, or determine whether things are going acceptably well).**
- 3. To be guided by our own vision at work (rather than be without a vision or be captive of the authority's agenda).**
- 4. To take responsibility for what happens to us at work externally and internally (rather than see our present internal circumstances and future external possibilities as caused by someone else).**
- 5. To be accomplished masters of our particular work roles, jobs, or careers (rather than have an apprenticing or imitating relationship to what we do).**
- 6. To conceive of the organization from the “outside in,” as a whole; to see our relation to the whole; to see the relation of the parts to the whole (rather than see the rest of**

the organization and its parts only from the perspective of our own part, from the “inside out”).

The modern curriculum of the workplace demands that workers at all stages of the life-span design their own work, manage it in accordance with their own vision rather than cling to agreed-to conventions and realities, accept responsibility for defining themselves rather than attributing “problems” to their external environment, adjust their performance to meet their own performance standards, master their own job, and understand the relationship between their work and within the greater organizational context. For some older workers facing a rapidly changing workplace, greater complexity in the demands of the work itself as well as their own aging processes, the challenge must be truly burdensome. Research is required to explore the impact of this advanced “organizational curriculum” on the emotional and psychological well-being of the older worker.

In a similar vein, Brousseau et al. (1996) have suggested that responsibility for career development has shifted from the organization to the individual. He believes that individuals should equip themselves for a career involving frequent changes in employers and in the very nature of the work they perform. “Enlightened” organizations will be searching for workers who are highly adaptive, who thrive on variety and change, and those who develop a diversity of work competencies (Spenser & Spenser, 1993). They must learn to “cobble” together a career with a loosely defined duration rather than search for a so-called “job” (Brousseau et al., 1996). Hall (1996a) describes this shift to an internally-directed career as the “protean career”, a term taken from the story of the Greek God Prometheus, who could change his shape at will. He states a protean career

is “a career driven by the person, not the organization, and that will be reinvented by the person from time to time, as the person and the environment change” (p. 1).

The protean career is the metaphor for the 21st century worker. Indeed, it points to the continuous interaction between the ongoing development of the individual and the evolving context of the highly turbulent and complex workplace. In the traditional career path, with the career ladder as the central metaphor, the individual is portrayed as experiencing career growth – maintenance – and then inevitable decline, and, the worksite is portrayed as relatively stable and predictable. The goal of the traditional career was vertical success, or climbing the corporate pyramid and acquiring status and possessions. According to Hall (1996b), in the protean career, the goal is psychological success – “the feeling of pride and accomplishment that comes from achieving one’s most important goals in life, be they independent achievement, family happiness, inner peace, or something else” (p.1). Shepard (1984) describes the protean career as the “path with the heart”. The protean workers must develop new competencies if they are desirous of managing their own career and themselves – developing self-knowledge and adaptability. These are, according to Hall (1996b) “metacompetencies” – competencies of a higher order than basic skills and knowledge. A clear identity allows a worker to determine their strengths and their weaknesses, to distinguish their personal priorities from what the environment may impose, and to set their internal gyroscope in light of the normlessness of working independently and in the absence of formal organizational roles. The adaptable employee, according to Hall, will learn to match their needs with those of their employer, merge personal development and career development, and assume only those roles that permit them to maintain their “authentic” self.

The major career theories, developed when the first-wave of baby-boomers were entering the work force, tend to reflect the notion that success in career is evidenced by one's place in an organizational hierarchy and is entwined with job titles and position. It was a time when one reached their "career" zenith at middle age, and "older workers" were expected to "naturally" opt for early retirement. Most extant theories are based upon research studies of younger workers and tend to emphasize career selection or decision-making. With the "graying" of the workforce, theories of career must be developed that incorporate older-workers, reflect the evolving challenges in the post-modern workplace, and emphasize adaptability rather than stability, human development across the life-span rather than in the early stages of one's working life. In addition, the demands placed upon all workers in the post-modern workplace have significantly changed. Further, with the demise of the organizational career, workers in general, and older workers in particular, are facing a "brave, new world". Workers are now expected to define their own "work" and manage it in accordance with their own "vision" – to follow their own path. It demands that an individual choose the terms of their success, maintain an identity in the face of discontinuous change and, above all, to listen to their heart for direction rather than be seduced into following the siren of the "well-beaten path". There is little doubt that this dramatic shift has caught some older workers unprepared. Are older workers, who are increasingly desirous of remaining in the workplace, able to make this transition? Do older workers have the necessary skills to prosper? Can they adapt? Are they able to be self-correcting? Self-initiating? Are they capable of acquiring self-knowledge as well as technical knowledge? Moreover, are there differences amongst the population of older workers, and are these differences significant? Will only some older workers survive and prosper? Will some be relegated to the contingent workforce?

PART II: A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

Defining the Older Worker

One of the primary challenges facing the researcher in the study of the “older worker” is identifying the inclusion criteria. Existing studies, for the most part, have used chronological age as an objective criterion for sample selection. Stems and Alexander (1987) have defined the older worker as being age 40 or over which reflects both a psychological milestone and, in the United States, the criterion for protection under the *Age Discrimination in Employment Act*. According to this piece of legislation, it is illegal to discriminate against a worker over 40 on the basis of age, age-related stereotypes, or assumptions concerning abilities, physical status, or performance, for any employment decision. The *Canadian Human Rights Act*, a federal act designed to protect individuals from discrimination, includes no definition of the term “age”. Other sample selection criteria have included functional, biological, social, organizational, and psychological age.

Stroh and Greller (1995) suggest an approximate “working definition” would be around the age of 40 years – or 45 years – or 50 years. Rather than being facetious, what they are pointing to is the arbitrary nature of age as a marker in the study of the older worker. Indeed, at midlife and beyond, human development becomes increasingly idiosyncratic. Genetic predisposition, individual differences, life experiences, gender, economic opportunities, social pressures, and health, among other factors, tend to slowly widen the gap between individuals over the course of their life.

Perhaps the more pressing research question is to understand whether older workers are, in fact, a unique group of employees different from workers in other age categories. Indeed, it may well be that the term older workers encompasses many diverse individuals who have more in common with workers in the general population than with their age peers. Toward this end, it would be important for researchers to identify any variations within the population designated as older workers. Further, few research studies have actually examined the phenomenon of aging in the workplace from the perspective of the worker - their phenomenological experience. Paradoxically, researchers may not even know at this point what it is we need to know about older workers.

Age Bias, or Do Not Go Gently into Retirement

A number of studies have examined older workers' self-perceptions of the aging process. Barnes-Farrell and Piotrowski (1970) describe a number of studies that examined the age stereotypes held by most adults in our society. These stereotypes affirm that our society holds a set of shared expectations about the characteristics and skills of older people and older workers. They conclude "the predominant tone of such stereotypes reflects the expectations that many of the skills, abilities, and traits that we value in work settings tend to decline as people age" (p. 178).

The authors hypothesized that discrepancies between one's chronological age (CA) and how old one actually felt, or their perceived personal age (PPA) would be an indication of the degree to which the older worker accepted the veracity of the societal stereotypes. Since most of the stereotypes are negative, older workers who "felt old" would tend to evaluate themselves negatively. In one research study, the authors

discovered that as workers experienced increasing amounts of work and non-work “stressors” and “strains” in their lives, the older that worker actually “felt”. The manifestation of these stressors – loss of energy, increased medical symptoms, sleep disturbances, and decreased performance - are consistent with the stereotype of the older worker. Interestingly, 62% of the sample (n = 1674) reported a discrepancy between their perceived personal age (PPA) and chronological age (CA). Roughly 32% reported feeling younger than their stated age and 28% reporting feeling older than their stated age.

Haber (1970) hypothesizes that stress-related outcomes (e.g. reduced performance) are precursors to personal “age-labeling”. That is, the greater amount of stress that one experiences, the greater the likelihood they will devalue their work skills and accept the “older” self-image, and, that this devaluation will, in turn, be reflected in lower aspiration levels and work performance. Bailey and Hansson (1995) found that older workers, who perceived their age to exceed what they believed to be the normative age for an older worker in their present job, perceived greater risks to be associated with job change.

This research clearly suggests that some individuals, as they age, tend to attribute much more to the aging process than what is perhaps, in reality, warranted. Has age become, in effect, a “catch-all” attribution for the inability to constructively resolve the stresses and strains of day-to-day living that members of every age group within the population experience? Is the stereotypical image of the older worker so embedded in the psyche of our culture that some older persons have simply come to accept it as their “reality”? The phrase “You are only as young as you feel” may, in fact, be more than a trite cliché. Indeed, it suggests that an older worker’s “age identity” may

in fact be no less important to their functioning than their chronological age (Barnes-Farrell & Piotrowski, 1991).

The embeddedness of age labeling is also revealed in a number of studies examining the propensity to retire. Eden and Jacobson (1976), in a study of older executives (age 55 and above) found that the older one actually was, and the younger one felt, the less one desired to retire. Indeed, executives' attitudes towards retirement were more related to feelings about themselves, their youthfulness, health and job effectiveness, and less related to job variables (e.g. peer relations, intrinsic reward, organizational stress). In other words, retirement decisions may be unaffected by factors external to the individual. In a study of displaced engineers undergoing retraining following downsizing, Wolf, London, Casey and Pufahl (1995) found that older participants who strongly identified with a career path or an industry, demonstrated lower levels of motivation hence lower success in job search training programs (e.g. resume preparation, networking). They found that those individuals who were more wedded to their careers, that is; viewed themselves as professional or technical experts, found changing gears particularly difficult. Older workers who demonstrated higher levels of motivation; that is, a combination of career resilience (i.e. ability to adapt to changing circumstances) and career insight (i.e. realism of individual's view of self, organization, and career goals), were better able to cope with career change. Are those individuals who have a clearer understanding of "self" less likely to confuse who they are with their career title or organizational position? Are they more flexible because they perceive "self" as an ongoing entity hence they are less likely to struggle to preserve, or protect an external definition of themselves? Commenting on this study, Greller and Stroh (1995) concluded "employment success seems to be associated with resisting prevailing age beliefs, norms and organizational practices" (p.327).

Other studies affirm the extent to which our societal stereotypes of older workers are entrenched in our culture. Avolio and Barret (1987), in a study of discriminatory attitudes toward older workers in the selection process, found that “. . . interviewers often view older job applicants as more difficult to train and place into jobs, more resistant to change, and less suitable for promotion and expect them to have lower job performance” (p. 57). Older workers are often not given challenging assignments, their performance expectations are reduced, and their rewards are limited accordingly (Mirvis & Hall, 1996). Indeed, many older workers, who have long since reached the top of their pay structure, find there are few financial incentives to maximize their performance and exercise the depth of talent and experience they have acquired over a lifetime (Stroh & Greller, 1995).

Systemic barriers in the workplace also tend to reflect and perhaps reinforce age stereotyping. Many systemic barriers that older workers face are inherent in current human resource policies and government programs. Older workers who choose to work after age 65, are faced with reduced government pension payments (AARP, 1996). New parents who perform paid work are provided maternity/paternity benefits by our taxation system; however, older workers with frail parents are rarely allowed time away from the workforce nor are benefits provided. Employers appear to be unwilling to recognize the needs of older workers.

It has been suggested that some older people come to understand what is expected of them by observing cues and role definitions provided by others (Cole, 1993). As a result, they may reduce their involvement in competitive sports or work because others expect it of them. People generally perceive different occupations as being held

by different age groups of job incumbents (Gordon & Avery, 1986). That is, occupations such as file clerk, airline steward, and lab technician were viewed as being held by individuals in their 20s, whereas physician, librarian, and janitor were judged as being “right” for those in their 40s. The authors noted that, although all research participants did underestimate the actual ages of occupations, their perceptions were relatively accurate. A study of perceived “windows” for promotion by Lashbrook (1996), revealed two age periods in which men expect promotions. The first was earlier in the career (ages 25 – 34), while the second fell during mid-career (ages 45 – 49). The majority of employees over the age of 50 do not, in general, expect another promotion during their career. In effect, the authors discovered the existence of some degree of normativity in promotion expectations indicating the existence of age norms – the widely shared judgment of the standard or typical ages of individuals holding a role or status within a given organizational context (Lawrence, 1996).

Others have argued that socially-sanctioned age norms are a strong factor influencing the aging process and the decision to retire. In a survey of older workers, it was found that social pressure was an important factor in predicting early retirement intentions, but that income and health status were not found to be significant (Hwalek, Firestone, & Hoffman, 1992). Lawrence (1988), states that “age-related norms about matters such as when to retire may be general for a society or specific organization” (p. 235). Younger workers and colleagues often imply that older workers who want to remain in the workforce are considered somewhat deviant (Daatland, 1988). In addition, for many older workers, early retirement may be a way of avoiding the embarrassment and indignity that comes with either being underutilized or ignored. It may also be true that some older workers, faced with layoff or firing, opt to accept the incentive “package” and retire early rather than face the humiliation of prolonged unemployment. Cole (1993)

suggests that “some of the actions most limiting to older workers are undertaken with the kindest intent and are rooted in concern for older people’s well-being. The message conveyed to older workers, however, may be that they have no longer any potential” (p.85).

What qualities do some older workers possess that would allow them and others to deny the reality of their own aging? Are they distorting the reality that others perceive so readily, or do they construct their “reality” differently? Is “age” just a self-imposed barrier that allows some individual to withdraw from the race before the finish line is reached? Is the invocation of “age” a response to the myriad, and possible overwhelming, demands of aging? It is, no doubt, an affront to all North Americans that older persons who choose to remain in the paid workforce often encounter ageism and systemic barriers. In addition, it is perhaps one of the largest waste of human resources in our economy (Barth & McNaught, 1991). However, it may be that future researchers may confirm that, at least in part, it is the beliefs that the older adult worker holds about themselves, and the aging process in general, that is the greater self-imposed burden. Indeed, it appears that older workers who are able to ignore the “norms”, the “expectations”, the “social pressure”, and, most of all, the label old, appear not only to perceive a larger number of options in their lives but also to experience more positive emotions.

Successful Aging

A major strand of research has been devoted to examining the relationship between job performance and the process of aging. On one hand, many studies over four decades of research have found no relationship between job performance and aging (Forteza & Prieto, 1994; Rhodes, 1983; Waldman & Avolio, 1986; Warr, 1994).

On the other hand, some evidence has been found to support the notion that persons experience performance degradation as they age (Baltes, 1993).

The lack of a consistent relationship between performance and age appears counter-intuitive. Warr (1994a) suggests that the salient issue is not the simple linear relationship between age and performance but rather the “fit” between an older worker’s changing abilities and the particular demands of his or her job. Thus, where the demands of the job exceed the worker’s physical and cognitive capacities, and, where their experience and coping efforts are overwhelmed, job performance would be predicted to decline. Indeed, several researchers, spurred by age-bias litigation in personnel selection, have found evidence to support this premise (Barret, Alexander & Forbes, 1977; Harano, 1970; Kahnemen, 1973). For instance, the use of perceptual information-processing measures (i.e. selective attention, reaction time, and perceptual style) designed for task-specific situations appear to be quite effective in differentiating between older and younger commercial drivers in terms of their potential for involvement in accidents and traffic violations.

Therefore, there appears to be some evidence to suggest that, by using task-specific criteria and specialized cognitive measures, a decrement can be demonstrated for some jobs as workers age. The relationship between age and job performance may, moreover, be masked by the use of chronological age as a meaningful proxy of cognitive functioning. Indeed, the idea that individuals in any particular age group ought to demonstrate roughly comparable abilities ignores differences in genetic predispositions, physical health, cardiovascular conditioning, economic status, diet, education, or emotional adjustment.

Several researchers have developed a psychological model that appears to have tremendous heuristic value in advancing our understanding of the nature of aging (Baltes, Smith, & Staudinger, 1992; Schulz and Heckhausen, 1996), particularly with reference to cognitive functioning and age. They have created a model of “successful” aging to explain why many aging individuals are able to maintain a high level of self-efficacy and well-being despite losses in an increasing number of psychological and biological capacities. The model distinguishes between aging as a disease, termed pathological aging, and aging as a “normative” process. Because the term “normal” tends to obscure the heterogeneity of the group and detract from telling us what is possible, the term normal is further divided into “usual” and “successful” (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Individuals who exhibit non-pathological age-associated changes would be classified as usual agers, whereas individuals who exhibit little or no loss in function relative to the average of their younger counterparts would be classified as successful agers (Schulz & Heckhausen, 1996). This distinction sensitizes researchers to the notion that what is statistically normal may, in fact, underestimate the age related potential of individuals under more ideal conditions.

The successful aging model presupposes that “older people have much developmental reserve capacity, which can be used to create better states of functioning and of aging” (Baltes et al., 1992, p. 133). Few would argue with the notion that, in general, most jobs do not demand that employees work at their maximum capacity. In fact, older workers are often treated “as if” they are in decline, incapable of taking on new and demanding challenges (Cole, 1993). Citing a number of training studies which demonstrated that older adults can readily raise aspects of their cognitive functioning (e.g. memory, intellect) with practice and by engaging in new learning, Baltes and Baltes (1990) suggest later-life potential or plasticity of the aging mind. The authors conclude

that it is possible for the basic mechanics of the aging mind (at least up to age range 70 – 80 years) to remain intact. The model, in addition, explains the observation that older workers may not demonstrate significant declines in performance despite losses in the range and strength of their cognitive potential. The authors distinguish between genetically (biologically) driven and knowledge (society) driven systems of intellect, or, between cognitive mechanics and cognitive pragmatics. The former systems are assumed to be the product of genetically driven biological evolution, and they are assumed to be “knowledge free” (in computer terms, the hardware of the mind). The latter systems are assumed to reflect primarily bodies of factual knowledge and procedural knowledge that society offers (in computer terms, the software). Because there is no genetically-driven program for “optimal” aging, aging losses are likely to occur in the mechanics or hardware. Gains, in contrast, may be possible in the pragmatics, or software. For instance, if two older adult workers demonstrate approximately equal standing in their cognitive mechanics, the one who has acquired knowledge relevant to the demands of the task will demonstrate better job performance. The authors cite the example of older expert typists who have slower reaction times than younger adults, but compensate by anticipatory reading. As a result they can type as fast as younger workers. Older expert typists, therefore, can use a knowledge-based pragmatic – anticipatory reading – to compensate for a deficit in psychomotor mechanics.

Building upon the construct of successful aging, or adaptive competence, Baltes and Baltes (1990) have constructed a model in which individual workers employ strategies to adapt to developmental change, particularly when losses predominate – a model referred to as “Selection, Optimization, and Compensation” (SOC). Selection involves restricting or narrowing of one’s range of activities to fewer, important domains (e.g. giving up peripheral job responsibilities, delegating duties). Optimization refers to

strategies by which persons augment their developmental reserves and maximize their capabilities (e.g. training and development). Compensation refers to the use of pragmatic strategies (e.g. impression management) or external technological aids (e.g. hearing aids) in making up for developmental losses. Abraham and Hansson (1995), who have developed and tested a research instrument to evaluate the model, suggest that although individuals might use these strategies throughout their lives, they take on particular importance as older adults begin to experience declines in biological, mental, and social reserve capacity. They assert that:

to the extent that job requirements are sensitive to these age-related losses and aging individuals have the opportunity to use these strategies, Selection, Optimization, and Compensation should be effective for maintaining performance at work (p. P95).

The results of the only published study to test this model (Abraham & Hansson, 1995) indicated that older male workers are more likely to use SOC strategies than are younger workers, that they are more likely to employ Selection as an adaptive response when they have the latitude to organize their work and their work-day, and to use Optimization when they have tendencies toward tenacious, problem-oriented coping. Older females, those with lower incomes, and those with less controllable environments are more likely to use Optimization and Compensation strategies. Among older workers (age 49 and above), the use of SOC strategies were found to be significantly related to self-report measures of success in maintaining job competencies, whereas among younger workers (age 40 to 48) this relationship was not significant. The relationship between use of SOC strategies and maintenance of occupational competency became increasingly positive with age.

The successful aging model suggests that a decline in cognitive function is not inevitable until the very late 70s or perhaps even later and, in fact, its effect can be reversed. However, the individual has to seek out challenging activities that force them to “exercise” their cognitive mechanics – “use it or lose it”. Further, the model suggests that cognitive functioning can actually improve by the acquisition of knowledge-based pragmatics. The workplace provides an ideal arena for older workers to develop and practice compensatory strategies to offset the effects of age, and to acquire and maintain both their “learning how-to-learn-skills” (cognitive mechanics) as well as work-relevant skills (cognitive pragmatics).

There is much evidence to suggest that it is difficult to make any generalization about older workers. On some tasks older workers as a group tend to excel, on other tasks they lag behind the population. Some older workers demonstrate high levels of cognitive functioning well into “old age” whereas some show lower than normal functioning. Some maintain high levels of physiological function late into life, others experience deterioration and loss. Without doubt, we need to understand how older persons might differ, if at all, from the population in general. Further, are these differences of any practical significance? In other words, does chronological age have any practical significance in the workplace? Moreover, we need to understand the significance of differences amongst the population of older workers. The model of successful aging points us to the potential of the aging adult and raises a number of research questions. Have most research studies assumed that older workers are a uniform population? Have there simply been too many variables to control, or did we control for the wrong variables. Is it possible that older workers differ in different ways? There is some evidence that successful agers tend to adopt many strategies to limit the

effects of aging including conserving energy, maintaining their system “software”, and forging supportive alliances. We need to further understand how these adaptive strategies can be employed proactively in the workplace. In addition, we need to better understand, amongst other factors, the personality attributes, the sense of agency, the motivations, and the self-perceptions of these successful agers in order to construct practical counselling models and techniques for all older workers.

Older Workers and Relationships

The organizational career places a high value on organizational, upward mobility through individual achievement, and increasing levels of autonomy and independence. In this model, workers accumulate “human capital” – the experience and contacts that help them move up in a particular company (Kanter, 1989). A location in an organizational box and job titles provides identity, social status, and recognition. According to Miller (1988), the emphasis in this model is upon the differentiating process itself, the goal of which is establishing a strong self-identity. The worker learns the skills required to become independent, prove and/or distinguish oneself from others, and masters tasks through personal achievement. Gilligan (1982) asserts that this model is strongly associated with masculine models of growth and development; that is, growth occurs in interaction with others in a one-directional, sequential process where one moves in their career from the role of learner to the role of mentor, or teacher. The older worker was attributed respect and recognition based upon the experience and knowledge they had accumulated over a lifetime. According to Kram (1996) older workers became mentors or coaches for “individuals just establishing their careers – they were to provide challenging assignments, constructive feedback, exposure and

sponsorship, which help the novice establish a work identity, learn the ropes, and successfully advance to positions of greater status and responsibility (p. 134).

In an evolving work environment of the protean worker, characterized by flatter structures, interacting work teams, rapid technological evolutions, project or temporary assignments, and discontinuity in the marketplace, all workers find themselves in the same uncontrollable vortex of change. Older workers are no longer automatically accorded respect for their knowledge and experience. The rapidity of change in the information age renders all workers novices – everyone is at once a mentor and novice.

The primary resources for career development in the new work environment are work challenges and relationships with other people (Hall, 1996b). He suggests that the more “turbulent and difficult conditions become in today’s work settings, the more naturally occurring work challenges there are, and the more motivated people are to give and receive help because most people realize that banding together is the best for survival” (p.2). Miller (1995) cites a number of issues about individual career development that can be addressed through this type of relational activity. During times of transition and turbulence (e.g. downsizing, reorganization), an individual worker can seek out support from others who have experienced similar events. Moreover, when learning new skills or competencies following the introduction of new work processes or technology, other individuals can enhance the learning process through relationships with others, younger or older, who have related experience. And as organizational boundaries shift and transitions persist, one maintains an ongoing sense of identity in the context of their ongoing relationships with others. That is, an individual defines themselves over time not in the context of a organizational niche, but rather in the context of their relationships with others – the mirrors of their souls.

In a similar vein, Fletcher (1996) describes a relational model of growth-in-connection; that is, career development through interdependence rather than independence, through mutuality of skills and motivation rather than mentoring, reciprocity wherein both parties expect to grow and develop in the context of the relationship. Kram (1996) describes the necessary conditions for a relational approach to career development. They include a willingness to see relationships as important sources of learning and development, the value of interpersonal competencies such as self-reflection, self-disclosure, active listening, empathy and feedback, fostering relationships based upon interdependence, mutuality, and reciprocity, and searching for opportunities to develop multiple development alliances at work. These are the skills of the protean worker of the 21st century.

In a review of the literature, Hansson et al. (1997) concluded that little attention has been focused on the relational or support networks of older adults in the workplace. They suggest that the quality of a worker's social network would change and mature in both form and function over the course of their career. Stroh and Greller (1995) posit that people relate to others both as sources of job knowledge and as social creatures and, that these aspects of relationship would be increasingly important as peer relationships and ad hoc structures become the norm. There is no reason to believe that older workers are any less skilled at developing new relationships than are younger workers. However, whether older workers actually realize the importance of developing these relationships as an integral component of their "job" is a separate question. Counsellors/ therapists must "let older workers know that to maintain one's role at work requires not just developing new skills but new relationships" (p. 237). Unfortunately, in a longitudinal study Cartensen (1992) found that older persons narrow their social

interactions and emotional closeness of acquaintances that would foster developmental functions such as acquiring knowledge, developing an identity in the mirror of relationships, and fulfilling social needs. Instead, they appear to focus their interactions and emotional closeness with family and close friends. Cartensen calls for a similar study of the relational networks across one's work life.

If the shift in career development is from fostering autonomy to cultivating relationships, the focus of research ought to be upon the role of relationships in career growth and personal development. Toward this end, Carpenter (1993) has developed a model of interpersonal competence which includes skills for both initiating relationships and for enhancing relationships. The former are most relevant for initiating, controlling and making demands upon relationships (e.g. assertiveness, intimacy, trust). The latter for enhancing and maintaining relationships, thereby making them more accessible, useful, satisfying and enduring (e.g. perspective taking, interpersonal sensitivity). Initiation skills are more directly related to coping and have tangible rewards, whereas benefits of enhancement skills are largely indirect, through relationships. In a series of interviews with highly successful older men and women in large organizations, Perry and Hansson (1992), were able to identify four important characteristics that contributed to successful aging in the workplace. They were all high in sociability; that is, they liked social involvement, more extraverted, and tended to perceive social exchange as an integral part of job success. They treated others with courtesy and respect; that is, they appear neither manipulative nor selectively attentive to only those with status but, rather, friendly to all. They maintained good emotional control which may be useful in positively impacting others, and they appeared to attract influential mentors and faithful followers. These skills, in turn, seemed to lead to creating a network of supportive others in the organization and to training and experiences useful to their careers.

In another study which examined, in a sample of older workers, the impact of relational skills on their ability to retain organizational influence and power late into their careers, they noted that older workers high in initiation skills were most likely to report having retained power and influence in the workplace. Fletcher, Hansson and Bailey (1992) evaluated the role of individual differences in older workers nearing retirement. They discovered that shy, lonely workers reported greater retirement anxiety, whereas those high in control in masculinity (instrumental competence) and femininity (interpersonal sensitivity) experienced less anxiety. The more relationally competent individuals appeared to make the transitions to retirement easier.

The ability to initiate and maintain mutually supportive relationships in the workplace appears to facilitate the acquisition of many of the skills required of the workforce in the 21st century – learning new tasks and skills, a sense of identity or knowledge of the self, and interpersonal learning. Indeed, effective relationships appear to be of assistance for all workers but older workers may be served particularly well by maintaining their level of skills. Indeed, during times of transition including layoff, retirement, unemployment, or even as a downsizing survivor, relationships appear to enhance coping effectiveness and aid in the development of other resources (e.g. using social supports effectively and self-esteem). Effective relational skills also appear to be related to retaining organizational influence, maintaining supportive relationship with colleagues, and making positive impressions upon others, particularly in later career. Perhaps most importantly, relational competency supports the older workers' ability to self-reflect, to assess themselves, and to learn about themselves over time and in varying contexts. Replacing the traditional organization career icon, the model of "growth-in-connection" appears to be a valuable way of understanding the importance of

relationships in the post-modern workplace. There is some evidence to suggest that the skills necessary to “grow in-connection” may not be evenly distributed across the population of older workers.

PART III: MODELS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

If we accept the assumptions inherent in the writings of Hall (1996b), Bridges (1994), and Kegan (1994), career will increasingly become an “internal event”. As Hall (1996b) argues:

Whereas in the past we tended to look more at the external career, the actual jobs or positions that a person holds over the course of the career, what seems to be more important now is the internal career, the person’s perceptions and self-constructions of career phenomenon. [. . .] this shift from outside to inside as the place where career lives is happening both in the people’s actual experience as well as in the scholar’s inquiry into career matters (p. 1).

Indeed, the study of career requires a shift in the perspective taken by the researcher – a move away from an external, outsider’s point-of-view to a focus on how people actively construct the realities to which they individually respond. This shift is ideally captured by a constructivist approach to vocational research. Although there are a growing number of constructivist approaches (Neimeyer, 1993), the two models which hold potential for the study of work are those of Guidano (1995a, 1995b) and Kegan (1982, 1994).

A Model of Human Development – Guidano

To date, the writings of Guidano (1995a; 1995b) have yet to be applied to vocational development. Nonetheless, they hold much potential for understanding the human development process across a number of interrelated domains including the self and interpersonal relations. Arguably, it could also be deftly applied to vocational development, particularly older workers who perceive their development more retrospectively than prospectively. Guidano (1995a) argues against the dominant research paradigm which assumes that reality, an objective external order, exists independently from an individual's perception of it. He suggests that in an "objectivist" world the only possible themes of investigation are to refine or perfect one's mental representations in ways that reflect improved "contact" or compliance with objective reality. To Guidano, this objectivist striving leads people away from understanding their own characteristics and processes as observers of their world. That is, it encourages individuals to look 'out there' rather than to "within" for understanding themselves.

Individual life-span development, argues Guidano (1995a), is best understood as a horotegenic progression: that is, an open-ended, spiraling process in which continuous reordering of self-hood dynamics results in the emergence of more structured and integrated patterns of internal complexity. This model of life-span development flows from two basic assumptions of this constructivist model. They are:

1. The assumption of an evolutionary epistemological perspective – one based upon the continuing study of evolving knowledge and knowledge systems;
2. The assumption that the ordering of our world is inseparable from our experiencing it – that is, we 'experience' rather than we experience our world;

Guidano (1995) posits that because there is no omniscient point-of-view, all knowledge must be viewed from an ontological and epistemological perspective in which knowing, consciousness, and all other aspects of human experience, are seen from the point of view of the experiencing subject. The model emphasizes that an individual's knowledge of self and the world play a central role in regulating his or her perception of and activity toward environmental events. It is the knowledge structures of the individual that are progressively shaped in response to challenging environmental pressures as he or she attempts to order and reorder their experiences.

Because individuals can only perceive the 'reality' in which they live and, only from within their perceiving order, Guidano suggests that we "always find ourselves, as human beings, in the immediacy of our ongoing *praxis* of living, which is the absolute primary ontological condition" (p. 94). As a result, human experience is the emerging product of an ongoing process alternating between experience and explaining; that is, a process in which ongoing patterns of activity (immediate experience) are subject to linguistic distinctions and are reordered in terms of symbolic propositions across conceptual networks. The level of symbolic reordering (explanation) makes possible new categories of experience, such as successful-unsuccessful, right-wrong, or real-unreal. Mental functioning becomes, therefore, a constructive scaffolding of experience through active (primarily tacit) expectations, hypothesis, and theories (models of being).

According to this model, emotions or emotional affectivity depend upon immediate and irrefutable apprehensions of the world. From an ontological point of view, feeling can never be "mistaken". Feelings confirm or disconfirm our way of being in the world – the viability of our models of being. At the level of immediate

experiencing, it is impossible to distinguish between illusion and perception. For instance, one may feel emotionally devastated at the announcement their position is redundant to the needs of the organization (immediate experience). However, by shifting to the level of “languaging” (explanation) the individual is enabled to construct an alternative explanation to the felt experience, thereby making it consistent with their appraisal of the world. (e.g. “I have other options”, “I was going to leave anyway”). The validity of the individual's constructions of their world, their working models, is theoretically unknowable hence it is their *viability* that is of more central concern to the constructivist.

It is the search for consistency and a sensitivity to contrast that are the prime regulators of the knowledge processes. The perceptions of discrepancies-anomalies in experience can initiate modifications in existing knowledge structures (accommodation in Piagetian terms). According to Guidano (1995a), “knowledge is the continuous construction and reconstruction of a world by the ordering individual in an attempt to make ongoing experience consistent” (p. 94).

Guidano (1995a) argues that being human is to live in an interpersonal reality that is structured primarily through language. Knowledge of oneself and the world is always dependent on and relative to knowledge of others. The ability to discriminate among individual others, he argues, is innate in primate organizations. Guidano (1995a) suggests that the ability to differentiate among individual others allows one to, in turn, anticipate the perceptions of one's behavior, thus improving synchrony and reciprocity. Also simulating how others will interpret one's own behavior, involves the ability to view oneself from the perceived perspective of others. This enhances the possibilities for self-bordering (i.e. setting one's own psychological boundaries) and self-individuation.

This notion of inter-subjectivity is a requirement for individuation and self-recognition from which a sense of self – both as object and subject – emerges. Through language, the individual is able to make distinctions between and make reference to (at least symbolically) between the self that is experiencing and the self that is appraising those experiences. As Guidano (1995b) explains:

... the experiencing – explaining interdependence that underlies self-understanding is matched by an endless process of circularity between the immediate experience of oneself (the acting and experiencing *I*) and the sense of self that continually emerges as a result of abstractly self-referencing the ongoing experience (the observing and appraising *me*). The self as subject (*I*) and the self as object (*me*) therefore represents the irreducible dimensions of a selfhood dynamic whose directionality depends upon the continuous flow of our praxis of living. Indeed, the acting and experiencing *I* is always one step ahead of the current evaluation of the situation, and the appraising *me* becomes a continuous process of reordering one's conscious self-image. (p. 101)

The continuous – both progressive and regressive – shifts in the balancing point in *I* – *me* dynamics that construct a scaffolding that enables one to maintain a sense of continuity of experiencing while, at the same time, allowing for the disturbances that arise from that experiencing. This explains, in part, why an individual who obviously knows himself or herself, and is known by others as consistent may, at varying points in time, express different or even contradictory beliefs, emotions, opinions and behaviours.

Self-awareness, in this model, flows from the achievement of an explanation of the ongoing experience of being a unique, irreducible, and unpredictable *I*. Self-

awareness is a reflexive process for self-referencing the immediate experience (*I*) in order to amplify consistent aspects of the perceived *me* while inhibiting discordant aspects. Because the acting and experiencing *I* precedes the current appraisal of *me*, it is quite possible for an individual to be overwhelmed by discordant information sufficient to disturb their self-image consistency. As a result, the ability to actively manipulate immediate experiencing while self-referencing and recording is absolutely essential. This ability is required to distract one's conscious attention in a manner which contrasts with the selected appraisal of the current situation. According to Guidano (1995a), one can say in a sense that no self-awareness can be viable without a necessary level of self-deception. He hypothesizes:

... that excessive self-deception lowers the accuracy of decoding immediate experiencing, whereas limited self-deception, by failing to reject extraneous information, complicates the self-referencing process exponentially such that levels of the self-referencing process exponentially such that levels of complexity in selfhood dynamics are difficult to manage. Hence, any individual, although having critical emotional tonalities in immediate experiencing, is also endowed with specific self-deceiving abilities designed to manipulate their decoding so that it is consistent with the quality of awareness they have reached thus far.

Through such procedures, individuals can appraise critical feelings and make them intelligible without questioning the total validity of the currently existing self-image (p.99).

According to this model, developmental stages across the life-span are considered as a progressive series of qualitative transformations, beginning with the structuring of basic patterns of self-organization and ending with the emergence of a structured self-identity.

In this step-like process, each emerging conception of the self depends in its structuring on the level previously reached and, in turn, determines the possible direction of the next step. Thus, each emerging self-conception is new in form (structure) not just in content, and is the expression of the whole structural reorganization.

In summary, this model of individual life-span development suggests that:

1. Human experience must be viewed from the perspective of the subject;
2. An individual's knowledge of self and their world play a pivotal role in regulating his or her perception of, and activity toward, environmental events;
3. Knowledge appears to be a progressive, hierarchical construction of models of being;
4. Human experience is the emerging product of a process alternating between experience and explaining;
5. Feelings confirm or disconfirm the viability of our models of being;
6. The self as subject (*I*) and self as object (*me*) represents the irreducible dimensions of a self-hood dynamic whose directionality depends upon our praxis of living;
7. The shift in the balancing equilibrium in the *I – me* dynamic allows one to maintain a sense of continuity of experience;
8. An individual's search for consistency and a complementary sensitivity to contrast appears to be a regulator of the development process;
9. Individual life-span development is a continuous reordering of selfhood dynamics the results in more structured and integrated patterns of internal complexity;
10. Development is considered to be a progressive series of qualitative transformations.

Model of Vocational Development – Kegan

Although not a theory of career development per se, an emerging theory of human development offered by Robert Kegan (1982; 1994) seems to have potential for increasing our understanding of the role of work in our lives across the life-span – constructive developmentalism. Kegan suggests that an individual does not happen upon a reality existing 'out there' but, rather, constructs the reality to which they respond. Humans organize the elements of their day-to-day experience of their world into a meaningful whole. According to Kegan (1982):

[. . .] to be human is to organize and what humans organize is meaning. Thus it is not that a person makes meaning, as much as that the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making. There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context in which it becomes a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception, because we are meaning-making contexts (p.11).

Behind every form (or thing or situation) there is a process that creates it, or brings it into being. On occasion, an individual is unable to literally make sense of their experience, or compose a meaning. This inability to organize experience in a meaningful way is experienced as affective distress, or a loss of composure. According to Kegan, the manner in which the human organism comes to organize their experience, or make meaning, evolves through distinct eras according to regular principles of stability and change. Human growth and development, according to Piaget, is a process of increasing differentiation of the self, the evolutionary emergence of the self from its

embeddedness in the immediacy of experience. The evolution of meaning making is considered the fundamental motion in personality.

According to the constructive-developmental theory, there are five epistemological balances, or orders of consciousness. Each balance is characterized by a particular subject-object relationship and by an underlying structure with each expressed in separate but interacting domains. "Object" refers to those aspects or elements of our knowing that we can reflect on, touch, gaze upon, relate to each other or otherwise operate on. The "subject" refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we are identified with, tied to, or embedded in. We have object and we are subject.

McAuliffe (1993) has adapted constructive developmental theory, or an individual's meaning-making framework, to understand career transitions. Only three of the epistemological balances are relevant to this discussion. "In psychological terms, career can be considered to be an act of meaning-making" (p.23).

1. The Interpersonal Balance

Within this epistemological balance of meaning making, a person is entirely embedded in their relationships with other people. "I am my relationships" rather than "I have relationships." (McAullife, 1993, p. 24). There is no center from which to author a story of 'how things ought to be', hence they are unable to generate a perspective outside of the relationships in which they are embedded. Because the self is embedded, the individual is not sufficiently individuated to possess a coherent identity. A person's occupational behavior (i.e. vocational choice, retirement) is sanctioned, either tacitly or explicitly, by

their reference group (e.g. family, socioeconomic class, colleagues). Within the Interpersonal Balance the individual looks 'out there' for approval and support rather than make their own meaning, or listening to their internal voice – their occupational calling. In the Interpersonal Balance, individuals are highly invested in an external, omniscient authority. It is his or her long-standing investment in the 'common sense' ideals and dictates of an external authority that cause many individuals to opt to retire from the active workforce, to decrease their investment in themselves as employees, and, perhaps, to 'act their age'. Kegan argues that the essence the Interpersonal Balance is the essence of the pre-modern, traditional state of mind.

2. The Institutional Balance

In this epistemological balance, an individual can construct a "whole new ideology, an internal identity, a self-authorship that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intra-personal states of mind. It is no longer authored by them, it authors them and thereby a personal authority" (p. 140). Individuals are now able to identify their objectives or purpose, articulate a position independent of their psychological surround, run themselves as a 'fixed institution," and act in a relatively autonomous fashion. The individual becomes thoroughly identified with a particular life-role (a job title or position) and cannot self-correct to connect to a larger purpose (a workplace mission statement) of which he or she is merely a current expression. ("I am my occupation" rather than "I have an occupation"). Such rigidity or single-mindedness can blind the individual to one's larger occupational potentials (Peterson & Cortez, 2000). In the Institutional Balance, individuals begin to perceive their relationships, inner states, and principles as the 'objects' of their gaze, examine their interrelationships, and act upon them. The

limitations of the Institutional Balance are reached when one recognizes that he or she has been conserving a product (a job title or position) rather than cultivating a process (potentially multiple positions or occupations).

3. The Interindividual Balance

This Balance is characterized by openness to new information that may challenge the form (e.g. occupation) that may have been currently taken. In this Balance, the individual is able to hear dissonant voices and actively invite contradiction. The self is no longer embedded in its allegiance to the institution ("Who am I becoming and how shall I express this emerging self?). The Interindividual Balance

. . . allows individuals to be self-transforming, open to new expressions of their yearnings, and responsive to internal and external reports on their performance, their likes, their impact upon others, and their changing needs. [. . .] The Interindividual Balance may be especially advantageous for negotiating adult redefinitions of self, as in midlife and beyond, because of its reflectiveness, the welcoming of contradictions, and the acceptance of incompleteness (p. 72).

The transformation from one order of consciousness to the next is not absolute. Any particular individual could remain for most, or all, of their adult life, embedded within one particular order of consciousness. In other words, an individual can remain embedded, for example, within the third-order "evolutionary balance" and remain both content and fulfilled. A worker might prefer to have their work structured by an employer, rely upon performance feedback from supervisors, work to maintaining mutually supportive relationships with peers, and ascribe to the 'absolute' values inherent in the perceived

culture (e.g. hard work, loyalty). It would be, therefore, within this evolutionary balance, or truce that the worker would construct meaning. However, the individual may encounter an incident, event, or relationship which 'unbalances' him or her (e.g. downsizing, discriminatory practices, death of a loved one). The "unexpected" event, to some extent, may require her or him to restructure how he might make sense of his changing world. It is often a crisis event, or an internal change (e.g. value shift) which creates 'imbalance' within the individual. Thus, human development is an ongoing, successive series of balances between equilibrium (evolutionary truces) and disequilibrium (crisis). Any particular individual, at any point in time, may be "in balance" or "out of balance". Nonetheless, the evolution in the growth of the human mind moves in a forward direction, that is, toward successively greater complexity.

The forward momentum is, in fact, very gradual almost imperceptible from one year to the next. Using the Subject-Object Interview as a measure of a subject's epistemological balance, Kegan has identified six levels of adult development – 3, 3(4), 3/4, 4/3, 4, and 4+. On the basis of his reviews of the existing research, Kegan (1994) observed that a significant proportion of the sample were experiencing an "imbalance" and that roughly one-half to two-thirds of the adult population appear not to have fully reached the Institutional Balance. This conclusion appears to hold true across differences in gender, socioeconomic status, level of education, or occupational level. Torbert (as cited in Kegan, 1994) using a comparable measure to the S-O Interview, found in a sample of nearly five hundred "entrepreneurial professionals" that 58 percent of the sample had not reached the Institutional Balance.

To summarize, Kegan (1982) offers a perspective for understanding human development across the life span. He has suggested that there are three adult distinct

orders of consciousness, or balances, that evolve across the course of development.

Each order of consciousness is organized by a set of principles that include:

- (1) these principles characterize how we construct experience – how we think, feel, and relate as social beings;
- (2) they are principles for the organization of our thinking, feeling, and social relating and do not speak to the actual content of this experience;
- (3) they differ in what is taken as the object of our experience and what is taken as subject;
- (4) each successive principle subsumes or encompasses the prior principle, what was taken as subject becomes object in the next principle - change in the relations among subject-object is transformative, qualitative, and incorporative;
- (5) the evolutionary development by which one comes to organize their experience according to higher order principle implies that what is taken as subject and what is taken as object is not necessarily fixed; our mind grows through a series of transforming epistemologies, what was once subject becomes object, we are no longer embedded in our experience but rather we can develop the ability to relate to what we were formerly attached to.

The theory of constructive development appears to hold tremendous potential for understanding how older workers may perceive the changing role of work in their lives. How does an older worker, who is “roughly third-orderish”, respond to the challenges and changes brought about by the aging process itself, changes in the organization of the workplace, or come to understand the role of work as compared to older workers at the “fourth-orderish” level of consciousness? Is there a relationship between the manner in which older workers define work, find meaning in their work, compose their relationships

with colleagues, and create a vision of their future? Can the theory help to explain why some older workers become entrapped within their career? Can the theory help us to understand why some older workers disengage from the paid workforce whereas others tend to seek greater and more complex challenges, or why some workers engage in life-long learning?

PART IV: THE RESEARCH AGENDA

As we enter the 21st century, more and more older adult workers will opt to extend their tenure in the paid workforce. The prospects for employment for this population appear to be both positive and negative. It seems that for those older workers with the ability to centre themselves and define work and their purposes, the future is both bright and inviting. Many enlightened employers are beginning to awaken to the “untapped potential” of these older workers. Those older workers unbalanced by the uncertainties inherent in the new workplace, and perhaps unable to redefine themselves in the context of the “brave new world”, may continue to struggle in their search for secure employment, loyalty, and ongoing opportunities for advancement.

It may be much easier for older workers to cope with changes in themselves and in the workplace if work was simply an economic relationship between an employer and an employee. For good or for bad, work has a host of other meanings. Carlsen (1988) frames career as more than a simple job definition but rather as a concept which builds on its original metaphor – “the way or route over which one passes”, “path or street” or “chariot”. She suggests that career transition and change, more than threatening economic survival, throws up questions of self-worth, continuity across the life-span, and of personal meaning. The individual moves forward through their career from restricted

constructions of the self to a more universal frame of reference – a sense of belongingness in the world, a purpose beyond the superficial structure of any particular job.

Without doubt, we would be in a better position to understand the older worker if we actually understood the importance and function of work in their lives. Does work, for the older person, still have the ability to evoke questions of self-worth? Does work lose its personal meaning to an individual over time, or does work take on a special significance as one ages? Are older workers, as a consequence of their experience, able to conjure up a special wisdom which allows them to adjust to ongoing change in their world?

Although stereotypic beliefs and images about older workers are deeply embedded in our society, older workers appear to react to them differently. Some workers appear to unquestionably accept the restrictions dictated by age-norms, social norms, or organizational norms as if it were outside of their control to change - the inevitable fate of aging. On the other hand, some employees refuse to act “maturely” and behave in ‘irresponsible’ ways, including developing strategies to work-around the idiosyncrasies of aging, refusing to retire when they should and running the risk of being labeled “deviant”, and maintaining a balance between work and other aspects of their life. Why do they feel in control of their world and ignore the obvious “reality” of their aging? What factors account for the differences in felt control amongst older workers?

Older men and women who wish to participate fully in the world of work, must be prepared to take a proactive stance, to seek creative solutions to problems, and work toward integrating all aspects of their lives. Those individuals who are prepared to

demonstrate concern for their physical and emotional well-being by maintaining fitness levels, to cultivate adaptive strategies to compensate for energy reserves, to maintain their cognitive 'hardware' as they actively participate in learning new skills, and recognize that age is just as much a phenomenon that occurs in the head as it does the body may have greater control over their destiny. Why do some older workers take a proactive stance to their aging while others seem to accept aging as a period of loss and decline?

Another line of research points to the importance of the web of relationships for older workers. It seems that older workers who forge strong social and emotional ties to others are more resilient to the stresses and strains of workplace changes. The additional buffer of supportive relationships appear to enhance personal effectiveness and self-esteem. Relationship skills also appear to be related to enhancing organizational influence and impression management in the latter stages of one's career. Relationships also provide a forum for interpersonal learning, ensuring a source of self-corrective feedback and opportunities to learn about oneself across differing contexts. Why do some older workers work to maintain relationships later in life? Do some older workers place a higher premium on relationships as they age? Why do other workers seem to allow relationships to lapse and weaken?

There is much evidence in the literature to suggest that older workers may be characterized as much by their differences as by their similarities. Indeed, there are marked variations in how older workers appear to cope with the challenge of change; in their ability to stand outside of the culturally-imposed stereotypes and refuse to accept the inevitability of decline in aging, in their incorporation of adaptive strategies to deflect

the impact of 'normal' aging, and in the importance they place upon relationships in the later stages of their lives.

As the study of work in people's lives shifts from an external to an internal perspective, researchers will need to build different models of human development and its relationship to work. Guidano (1995a) provides an outline of a model of human development which emphasizes the evolution of knowledge structures and processes, the reordering of human experience, and transformational shifts in self-organization occurring across the life-span. Kegan (1994) also offers an intriguing model to explain the variations in human development. He suggests that chronological age may not even be a significant variable in human development until very late in life and, that some older workers may not, in fact, be significantly different from workers in general.

PART V: THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The limited research on older workers has been, for the most part, focused upon comparing them, as a group, to young or middle aged workers using a diversity of quantitative measures (e.g. motivation, performance, learning style). This approach assumes that older workers are, in essence, a uniform group of individuals by virtue of their chronological age. This assumes that the dimensions we use to measure and make comparisons are, in general, applicable across the spectrum of the workforce. What is required, is more research that promotes greater understanding of older workers rather than more generalized descriptions. Said differently, we first must understand the most salient issues or concerns in the lives of older workers as a first step in developing a practical research agenda. This study is, therefore, exploratory in nature. It focuses upon the most fundamental questions, derived from the extant research, that

need to be answered if this field of research is to proceed in an orderly and thoughtful manner. They are questions that can only be answered by older workers from within their framework of experience and understanding. Stated formally, this study is guided by the following four major research questions:

- What fundamental changes, if any, do older workers notice in themselves as a consequence of their aging?
- Do older workers respond in different ways to these changes?
- Do older workers come to understand the function of work in their lives differently as they age?
- Do older workers attribute more or less importance to interpersonal relationships as they age?

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 is divided into three major sections. Part I, *Grounded Theory* provides the rationale for selection of the grounded theory approach in this study, a definition of grounded theory, variations in the goals of grounded theory, and the elements of grounded theory analysis. Part II, *Evaluating Grounded Theory*, provides a summary of the standard criteria for evaluating qualitative studies in general and grounded theory in particular. Part III, *Research Processes*, describes the research processes I completed in the collection and analysis of the data. The Analysis section is, in turn, divided into three parts and describes the phases in the data analysis process that I completed before I found the optimal procedure.

PART I: GROUNDED THEORY

The Choice of Grounded Theory

This section will develop the argument that grounded theory methodology is best suited to address the research questions posed in this study. There are a number of reasons for selecting grounded theory.

(a) A grounded theory approach is useful to explore areas in which the most basic variables cannot easily be identified (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Collin and Young (1986), in their review of the career-related literature, observed that the majority of it, including the most influential, lacks rigorous definition and clarification of its basic concepts. They noted the lack of agreement among researchers about even the most fundamental concepts integral to the field such as “identity”, “development”, and “maturation”, which seem to be ill-defined and often contradictory. Further, the concept of career itself has been most associated with a hierarchical, bureaucratic form of work organization that implies a developmental, vertical progression over one's working life. We must question how relevant this concept is to the majority of present-day employees, and to older adult workers in particular given the observation that the vast majority aged 50 and above do not expect a promotion during the remainder of their work tenure (Lashbrook, 1996). Further, the majority of concepts that have emerged from the literature are based upon young, white, middle-class samples to the neglect of persons at middle-age and beyond. In addition, the demographic composition of the workplace is changing so dramatically that most concepts are describing phenomena that may, in fact, no longer exist.

(b) A grounded theory research approach is useful when theories are not available to explain the behavior of participants, or the existing theories are inaccurate or biased (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Indeed, many researchers have argued that most studies of vocational behaviour have not been conducted within the context of any overarching theoretical orientation

and, as a result, the majority of studies are disconnected or lack any clear organizing principles (Collin and Young, 1986; Richardson, 1993; Savickas, 1995). Hence, they suggest that the continued study of the older worker, in the absence of any unified theoretical orientation, can only lead to the production of more data leading neither to our improved understanding nor practical suggestions as how to better assist the older worker in their day-to-day lives.

(c) Grounded theory is appropriate when the field is considered 'immature' and ill-defined.

As Stroh and Greller (1995) have pointed out "those in the field of vocational behavior have historically paid little attention to the life issues and counselling needs of older Americans, not even those just past midcareer" (p.232). Other researchers have noted the relative paucity of research focussing on any aspect of this particular population (Cahill and Salomene, 1987; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Indeed, few psychometric measures used in career assessment and intervention even have appropriate norms for the population, are rarely administered in ways appropriate to the older worker, and generally have limited relevance to this population (Sommerstein, 1986).

(d) The choice of grounded theory methodology is appropriate when the research question(s) themselves can only be addressed from the lived experience of the respondent (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997).

For the most part, theories of vocational behavior, counselling methods, and assessment have all been developed from the perspective of the researcher - the

“objective” perspective. This perspective neither strives to recognize the significance of the subjective experience nor seeks to understand the phenomenon in the subject’s own terms. Savickas (1993) suggests that “the possible contributions to counselling practice that may be envisioned from the subjective perspective on vocational choice have remained relatively unexplored” (p. 97). For instance, few, if any, research studies have actually asked older workers about their experience of the aging process. By not including the subjective perspective, vocational researchers have missed a rich source of data. As a result, there is no assurance that most, if not all, of the concepts or issues currently being studied are even relevant in the lives of older workers (Collin & Young, 1986; Richardson, 1993). One of the major strengths of the grounded theory approach is that it ensures that older workers are allowed to speak for themselves and are able to identify the most important issues in their lives from within their perspective.

In summary, the research questions posed in this study can best be answered by older workers from within the framework of their experience and understanding of the world of work. The study demands that the researcher make no a priori assumptions about the relative importance of issues or concepts but, rather, seeks to allow them to emerge from the interview data itself. Indeed, a grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), is:

. . . one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through a systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. [. . .] One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant is allowed to emerge (p. 23).

Because the relevant concepts have neither been identified nor clearly defined for this population, the study is essentially exploratory. Although the interview process itself is guided by the concepts derived from the current literature, the respondents will have the opportunity to define and redefine them in their own words. The respondents will have, in other words, “grounded” the concepts that emerge from the interviews. The emergent concepts, in turn, will be organized in terms of the processes by which they stand in relationship to each other and in terms of their relatedness to the existing literature.

Thus the intent of this study is to:

- (a) identify the issues (themes) which older workers have themselves identified as they strive to make sense of work in the context of their day-to-day lives (conceptual development);
- (b) identify the major processes that influence the construction, or evolution of the emerging concepts across the course of one's life span;
- (c) preserve the integrity of the meanings that older workers give to their experiences by grounding the findings in the data;
- (d) link the emerging issues with existing research findings to evaluate the ‘fit’ of the data with existing theory (conceptual comparison);
- (e) identify the necessary counselling approaches that would allow these issues to support the ongoing development of the older worker;
- (f) evaluate the usefulness of grounded theory methodology as an approach to the study of older workers; and,
- (g) identify an agenda for future research.

Grounded Theory Defined

Grounded theory is a social science research methodology that integrates both theory development and theory verification in the same research process. A grounded theory is one that has been derived using a formal, consistent set of inductive procedures for analyzing the data. The term 'grounded' conveys the notion that the theory actually emerges from the data during the interaction between the data collection and data analysis phases of the research process. The procedures of grounded theory, according to Strauss & Corbin (1990), are intended to develop an integrated set of categories that provide a theoretical explanation of the social phenomena under study. As defined by Creswell (1998), a grounded theory study:

generates an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, a theory that explains some action, interaction, or process [. . .] accomplished primarily through interview data, making multiple visits to the field (theoretical sampling), attempting to develop and interrelate categories (constant comparison) of information, and writing a substantive or context-specific theory (p. 241).

Grounded theory is a qualitative approach that uses a systematic set of procedures including: (a) simultaneous involvement of the researcher in the data collection and data analysis phases of the research process; (b) theoretical sampling, that is, sampling for theory construction, not for representativeness of a given population; (c) creation of analytic codes and categories which emerge from the data, not from preconceived hypotheses; (d) memo-making, that is, writing analytic notes to explicate and flesh out categories, which are the intermediate steps between coding

data and writing first drafts of papers; and, (e) the development of mid-range theories to explain behavior and processes (Charmaz, 1995).

Types of Grounded Theory Studies

Grounded theory is a set of developed themes or categories that are interrelated in a systematic way through statements of relationships to build a theoretical framework that both explains and predicts the phenomena under study and, in turn, provides guides to action (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Charmaz (1995) suggests that most grounded theory works are in fact not actually theories. She claims that most grounded theory studies, instead of creating substantive or formal theory, have aimed to develop rich conceptual analyses of lived experience and social worlds. Indeed, the greater emphasis has been upon developing analytic categories that integrate and explicate processes rather than upon the construction of tightly framed theories that generate hypotheses and make explicit predictions. Creswell (1994) states that only a few studies have been developed at the broad level of analysis envisioned by Strauss and Corbin.

In a similar vein, Pidgeon and Henwood (1997) state that the construction of complex and comprehensive theoretical systems may be a laudable goal for well-funded, large-scale projects but a risky ambition for the majority of individual researchers. Grounded research is highly time and labour intensive and demands a resource-rich research environment. They suggest that individual researchers may feasibly apply the techniques of grounded theory to:

- (a) develop *basic taxonomies* of relevant features of the data through a process of basic coding and defining aspects of the textual material, or

- (b) *focused conceptual development* which is designed to fully explore a limited set of categories which are most relevant to the problem under investigation, or
- (c) an *intensive study* of selected case(s) to exemplify wider themes which are emerging from the study, or
- (d) a *theoretical comparison* between the emerging analysis and existing theoretical accounts in the existing literature: the researcher would attempt to compare the emerging concepts with existing theory to investigate their 'fit', to identify gaps in the existing theories, or develop alternate explanations of current theories.

Because of the relative paucity of research studies that have focussed upon older workers, this research study is designed to be essentially exploratory. This study will seek to identify the basic set of categories, or themes that might emerge from the data as in (b) above and, in turn, to fully develop those concepts that comprise the basic categories as in (b) above. In addition, this study will strive to compare these themes and concepts with the theoretical frameworks found in the existing literature as in (d) above. The focus of this study, therefore, is to develop a conceptual underlay for future research studies rather than develop a formal, substantive theory. Indeed, the identification of a limited set of basic themes and concepts relevant to the study of older workers is, in its own right, an ambitious project given the complexity and diversity of the emerging field.

Interpretation by the Researcher

A cornerstone of grounded theory methodology is the constant interplay between the researcher and the research acts of data collection and data analysis. There is considerable discussion amongst researchers using qualitative methodologies with regard to the role of the researcher (Annells, 1997; Charmaz, 1990; Henwood &

Pidgeon, 1995; Richardson, 1993). Does the researcher approach the data collection and data analysis processes as objectively as might be possible, developing an impartial and accurate rendering of events? Or conversely, does the researcher allow himself or herself to be shaped by the data, sensitive to the subtle nuances and meanings in the data?

Henwood and Pidgeon (1995) have suggested that efforts by researchers to maintain 'distance' from the data to allow the theory to simply 'emerge' is neither possible nor desirable in the development of grounded theory. Rather, they argue that all observations are pre-interpreted in terms of existing concepts and theory – the researcher's framework of knowledge. This framework includes the researcher's substantive interests that guide the questions asked, a philosophical stance which provides a store of sensitizing concepts, and the researcher's personal experiences, priorities, and values. Indeed, according to these authors, there is a necessary interdependence of the subjectivities of the researcher and the participants in the research process, and that experiences are constructed as meaningful within the current cultural framework. The meaning of a subject's experience is always mediated – or interpreted by the researcher.

Strauss & Corbin (1998) also argue that theory is not the formulation of some discovered aspect of a preexisting 'out there' but rather interpretations made from given perspectives as adopted or rejected by researchers. The discovery of grounded theory is never purely inductive. Whenever the researcher conceptualizes the data (e.g. statements of relationships) they are, to some degree, interpreting the data. To Strauss and Corbin (1988), interpretation is a form of deduction. Deductions are, at once, based on data and the researchers' 'reading of the data', their assumptions about the nature of

life, their readings of the literature, and the conversations with peers about the data. They argue that in the act of conceptualizing the data the researcher refrains from interpreting the data from within their personal framework yet realizes that absolute objectivity is neither desirable nor even possible:

We are not saying that we place our interpretations on the data or that we do not let the interpretations emerge. Rather, we are saying that we recognize the human element in analysis and the potential for possible distortion of meaning. That is why we feel that it is important that the analyst validate his or her interpretations through constantly comparing one piece of data to another (p. 137).

Development of Grounded Theory

The method emerged in the late 1960s, when two sociologists (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) challenged the state of social science research. They noted the preoccupation of researchers with the verification of a few esoteric, large-scale theories, the absence of theory development, the arbitrary separation of the research process from theory development, and the dominance of quantitative methodologies. They were concerned that many of the encompassing, "great-man" theories of sociology could not encompass all areas of the social world in need of exploration. They noted the vast preponderance of highly empirical studies with conclusions derived from logically deduced theories that were only later "tacked-on". By uniting the processes of theory generation and verification in the same research paradigm, Glaser and Strauss (1967) sought to develop a method which would complement the hypothetico-deductive method of scientific inquiry – a paradigm that tends to focus almost exclusively upon testing

(verification-falsification) of an *a priori* theory. The focus of grounded theory methods is upon theory development whereas the focus of hypothetico-deductive methods is upon theory verification. Both can be combined within the same study, and both are considered as meeting the criteria of doing good science (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory were derived from two principles drawn from Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The first principle addresses the issue of change itself. Social phenomena are not static but, rather, continually changing in response to evolving conditions. As a result, it was important to build change, through process, into the research design. The second principle pertains to the issue of determinism. The authors rejected both the notions of complete determinism and non-determinism in the sphere of human activity. Rather, people are seen as having, though not always utilizing, the means to make choices in response to conditions. They are able to make choices according to their perceptions or understandings about the options that they encounter. Thus, the central focus of grounded theory is “not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions. It is the researchers' responsibility to catch this interplay” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 5).

Elements of Grounded Theory

The basic set of analytic procedures used in developing a grounded theory are open, axial and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through the application of these procedures, the researcher develops categories of information (open coding), links the categories (axial coding), builds a integrated 'picture'

connecting the categories, and creates an interactive set of theoretical propositions that serve to explain the phenomenon (selective coding) (Creswell, 1998). In looking for phenomena, (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) suggest a researcher is “looking for repeated patterns of happenings, events, or actions/interactions that represent what people do or say, alone or together, in response to the problems and situations in which they find themselves” (p. 130).

Open coding is a process of discovering salient themes (or categories) in the raw data that yield information to the researcher. A category is a unit of information in grounded theory research. It is comprised of events, actions/interactions, incidents and instances of a phenomenon (e.g. job loss). It is assigned a short conceptual label. A label is a *potential* indicator of a phenomenon. During open coding, a researcher scours the data for instances of a theme/category, compares each occurrence (constant comparison technique), and continues searching until all occurrences of the category have been identified (saturation). A category is saturated if no new information emerges during coding. Every category is initially considered as provisional and only enters the theory when it is repeatedly present in the data. The researcher discovers categories by asking questions of the data -“What is this?” - “What does it represent?”. Over the course of the open coding, the important themes gradually emerge and the side issues, or single-case occurrences of a provisional category are subsumed. Through open coding, the provisional set of subthemes are gradually reduced.

Categories are composites of subthemes (subcategories), or properties. Properties represent multiple perspectives about the categories (Creswell, 1998). For instance, the subcategory ‘preference for working with age-alike peers’ may be labeled as a dimension of the category ‘Relationships’. Properties can be located

(dimensionalized) along a continuum or ranges can be specified (e.g. “absolute preference”, “preference” , “no preference” for age-alike peers).

During axial coding (around the axis) the researcher explores the relationships amongst the categories. In general, the researcher seeks (i) to identify the conditions (if . . . then) which gave rise to the phenomenon, (ii) what response(s) the conditions created in the respondents (causation), (c) what contextual/intervening conditions influenced the response(s), and (d) what was the end result of the respondent’s action (consequences). Contextual conditions are a specific pattern of conditions that come together (in time and place) to create a set of conditions which give rise to an action/interaction. Intervening conditions are those which so alter the causal conditions that the respondent acts in an atypical fashion. According to Struass and Corbin (1998), the salient issue in grounded theory analysis is not so much a matter of identifying causal, intervening, contextual conditions per se but, rather, the researcher must strive to identify the complex, interwoven nature of events (conditions) leading up to an action, a behavior, or a belief (e.g. sense of agency) that results in some consequence for the respondent (e.g. retirement). In addition, the researcher must be sensitive to the subtle changes in the original situation that the action/interaction has generated.

Identifying and specifying changes to the original set of conditions (e.g. early career) is, in essence, attending to process – a key element of grounded theory.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe process as a:

. . . series of evolving sequences of action/interaction that occurs over time and space, changing or sometimes remaining the same in response to the situation

or context [. . .] What makes the action/interaction process is its evolving nature and its varying forms, rhythms, and pacing all related the same purpose (p. 165).

Process demonstrates the propensity of an individual to react to and/ or shape the situation in which they find themselves embedded. Process is discovered in the sequences of events or shifts in the course of an action/interaction. Identifying processes is an integral part of axial coding. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out: “. . . one is purposefully looking at action/interaction and noting movement, sequence, and change as well as how it evolves (changes or remains the same) in response to changes in context or conditions” (p. 167). Depending upon the data and the research question, process can be the organizing thread and central category of a theory, or it can take a less conspicuous role.

During the selective coding, or final phase of analysis, the researcher generally identifies a theme or category as representative of the *central phenomenon* of the study and, in turn, explores the relationship between it and the other categories. The central theme can be a process or a pivotal content category that explains the variation amongst the other categories and is the key point of the study as discovered in the data. Through selective coding, the theory begins to appear more integrated, growing in depth and explanatory power. Categories are ‘fleshed out’ and refined until theoretical saturation; that is, when no new information (i.e. incidents, events, or activities) about a category emerges from the data.

During the final phases of a grounded theory study, a researcher constructs a visual diagram mapping the relationship between a central phenomenon and the casual, contextual, and intervening conditions. The value of diagramming enables the

researcher (a) to look at the 'big picture', (b) clarify the logic of relationships, and (c) lead up to the integrative narrative of the study. Generally, integrative diagrams are constructed as abstract representations of data and tend to focus on the major content and process categories discovered in the study (Creswell, 1988).

Throughout all phases of data analysis, the researcher uses "memoranda" to organize the analytic process and to write down ideas about the evolving theory. They contain the products of the coding processes and vary in form and content over the course of the study.

PART II: EVALUATING GROUNDED THEORY

The authors of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) consider grounded theory to be a scientific method. Its procedures are designed so that, if they are carefully carried out, the method meets the criteria for doing "good" science. As articulated by Gortner and Schultz (1988), the criteria include generalizability, reproducibility, consistency, precision, significance, theory-observation compatibility, and verification. The authors suggest that these canons can readily be defined and applied in the context of the grounded theory approach. Other approaches to the question of the evaluation of grounded theory methodology have, for the most part, been couched as general evaluative criteria applicable to all qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Ely et. al., 1991; Howe & Eisenhart, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Richardson, 1993).

Generalizability

In the hypothetico-deductive model, external validity is the degree to which the findings of a study can be generalized to individuals and settings beyond those that were studied (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Strauss & Corbin (1990) suggest that since qualitative studies are not based upon statistical decision making models, the more appropriate evaluation criterion is generalizability; that is, that ability of the propositions to apply to a broad range of situations. The generalizability of a theory is reflected in its explanatory power theory: its ability to “predict” what might happen in a given situation under the conditions that give rise to the phenomenon specified in the theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Theoretical sampling, or the process of selecting new data sources on the basis of emerging theory, contributes directly to generalizability. The more systematic and widespread the theoretical sampling, the greater the likelihood that more of the conditions and variations will be discovered and built into the theory. Hutchinson (1988) suggest that a predictive theory is one in which the variations in the data and the interrelationships among the constructs are clearly explained – the theory flows from the clarity of the theoretical model.

Creswell (1998) argues that it is the thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon that allow the reader to make decisions regarding generalizability because the writer describes in detail the participants or settings under study. With detailed descriptions, the researcher enables readers to determine how the information is best transferred to other settings. The writing of grounded theory demands that researchers develop skill in weaving together descriptions of concepts/categories, memoranda, quotations, and their own perspective on the data. In addition, through the techniques of theoretical sampling

and category saturation, the emerging theory demonstrates the widest variation and inclusiveness possible.

Reproducibility

In the hypothetico-deductive paradigm of science, replication is a process of repeating a research study with a different group of research participants using the same or similar methods. Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that no theory dealing with social or psychological phenomena is actually reproducible given the difficulty inherent in finding new situations whose conditions exactly match those of the original study, although many may be similar. They suggest that, in grounded theory, theoretical explanation is a more useful term than replication:

Given the same theoretical perspective of the original researcher and following the same general rules for data gathering and analysis plus a similar set of conditions, another investigator should be able to come up with the same theoretical explanation about the given phenomena (p.56).

Indeed, whatever discrepancies arise can be worked out (a) through re-examination of the data, and (b) identification of the different conditions that may be operating in each case. The authors suggest that the more abstract the concepts, the more variations uncovered in the original study, the greater the likelihood is that the study can be reproduced in subsequent studies. The constant comparison procedures, categorizing, memoing, recycling of earlier steps, and the write-up of theory, all ensure that the researcher has exhausted all patterns in the data set, and that all concepts and categories have been fully saturated. Further, as hypotheses about relationships among

categories are developed, they are taken back to the field for verification or revision. Thus there is greater confidence that the hypotheses will hold true in subsequent interviews, observations, and research studies.

Charmaz (1990) argues that reproducibility must take into account the researcher's theoretical perspectives. Researchers who wish to reproduce a study must appreciate the researcher's theoretical orientation throughout the research process. Rennie et al. (1988) warns that it may be difficult for grounded researchers to fully realize the goal of identifying and disclosing their implicit assumptions. In published reports, at least, editorial constraints impose limits on the extent to which grounded theorists can document their studies. Corbin and Strauss (1990) urge analysts to test concepts and their relationships with colleagues who have experience in the same substantive area. Letting others view and discuss one's work openly often adds new insights and increases theoretical sensitivity.

Consistency

A researcher strives to demonstrate that a particular factor caused a perceived change or effect. In qualitative studies, the researcher strives to establish causal relationships by demonstrating certain conditions are consistently shown to be related to other conditions, and not from spurious relationships. In grounded theory, *consistency* is enhanced through the procedures of theoretical sampling and constant comparison. In theoretical sampling, the grounded theory researcher selects a sample for its potential ability to represent a phenomenon – its concepts, properties, dimensions, and variations. Sampling occurs in vivo – incidents, events, and happenings in the lives of the respondents – under a variety of contrasting circumstances and conditions. The aim is to

build a theoretical explanation of a phenomenon by specifying phenomena in terms of conditions that gave rise to them, how they are expressed through action/interaction, the consequences that result from them, and variations of these qualifiers. The researcher is alert to indicators of all the important concepts with each new protocol as well as reviewing existing data and memos. Each qualifier adds greater and greater specificity to the data. A concept, a subcategory, or a category are eliminated from the study if not consistently supported by the data, or do not support established relationships. Also, all concepts and categories are saturated until no new information is emerging. Consistency, or internal validity of a grounded theory study, supports the notion of credibility or "truth value" of the findings (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Precision

This canon of 'good' science stresses that the researcher has reduced the potential for the intrusion of arbitrary inferences in the process of interpreting 'raw data'. This does not imply, however, that the grounded theory researcher tries to remain objective, or detached. To do so would be to ignore the importance of the epistemological debate within science – a debate that struggles with the nature of reality and the importance of multi-perspectives in the research process. Corbin and Strauss (1990) posit that the procedures of comparative analysis and constant questioning guard against personal bias by constantly challenging the researcher to incorporate new data into the emerging theory. Such comparisons, facilitating the grouping of like and only like phenomena, require that the researcher ground the emerging theory in the data in front of them. By doing so, they cannot engage in wild flights of fancy or be selective in the data analysis process.

Theory-Observation Compatibility

As has been emphasized throughout the paper, the grounded theory must emerge from the data. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue:

If theory is faithful to the everyday reality of the substantive area and carefully induced from diverse data, then it should fit that substantive area. Because it represents that reality, it should also be comprehensible and make sense both to the persons who were studied and to those practicing in that area (p. 23).

According to Rennie et al. (1988), a grounded theory should be believable in that it should seem to the reader to be a plausible explanation. It should be adequate in that it should present a comprehensive account that does not omit large or important portions of the data.

Verification

As hypotheses about relationships emerge from the data, they are verified against the existing data and new protocols. If the relationships amongst categories fail to hold, then they are revised until they do hold true for all evidence concerning the phenomenon under study, as gathered in repeated interviews, observations or documents. The researcher is constantly searching for negative and qualifying evidence. Creswell (1998) argued that it is incumbent upon a researcher to conduct a negative case analysis of the working hypothesis of the study. In other words, the researcher actively searches for negative or disconfirming evidences throughout the research process. These hypotheses, in turn, are revised until all outliers and

exceptions found in the data set can be incorporated into the theory. Grounded theory methodology, by emphasizing constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and hypotheses verification meets these criteria fully.

External Audits

Creswell (1998) alludes to two procedures of good qualitative research studies that appear to support precision – external audits and clarifying researcher bias. The former, a term used by Lincoln and Guba (1985), refers to the practice of allowing an external examiner to “audit” the reliability of data classification process - that is, the “reasonableness” of the placement of memoranda into themes and subthemes. The procedure provides a sense of inter-rater reliability to a study. In developing an audit for this study, I first selected a cross-sectional sample of memoranda from which the theme and subtheme labels had been removed. Second, I provided a short-definition of each major theme and subtheme. In the next step, I asked two graduate students to place the memoranda into the four piles according to themes and, in turn, into subthemes. The average inter-rater reliability for placing the themes in the expected pile was over 90%, and, for the subthemes, the average was roughly 80%. Without doubt, this is an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability given the lack of contextual cues in the excerpts.

Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) have suggested that the researcher might enhance the credibility of a study by laying a ‘paper trail’ throughout the research process that is open to external audit. Indeed, to the authors this exercise:

[. . .] provides an account of what is done, and why it is done, at all phases in the research process. As well as reflecting upon values and assumptions, and

writing memoranda and definitions for categories, researchers should also document such things as initial concerns and, how these may change, sampling decisions, hunches about the quality of the data gathered, and observations about the context of data generation (p. 57).

Grounded theory methodology is an evolving research methodology. Evaluative criteria, according to Corbin and Strauss (1990), should not be regarded as hard and fast rules but, rather, as guidelines. Grounded theory procedures and evaluative criteria ought to be modified to fit the circumstances of the research and the scope of the research study.

Evaluating the Quality of the Research Process

Strauss & Corbin (1998) point out that in published studies there is limited opportunity for the reader to accurately judge how the analysis was actually carried out. To remedy this, they suggest that it would be useful for readers to be given certain types of information bearing on the criteria to follow. The detail, although not necessarily great, should be sufficient to give some "reasonable" grounds for judging the accuracy of the research process. They suggest that the types of information needed would be answered by the following questions:

Criterion 1: How was the original sample selected? On what grounds?

Criterion 2: What major categories [themes] emerged?

Criterion 3: What were some of the events, incidents, or actions (indicators) that pointed to some of the major categories [themes]?

Criterion 4: On the basis of what categories did the theoretical sampling proceed? That is, how did theoretical formulations guide some of the data collection? After the

theoretical sampling was done, how representative of the data did the categories [themes] prove to be?

Criterion 5: What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to conceptual relations (i.e., among categories), and, on what grounds were they formulated and validated?

Criterion 6: Were there instances in which hypotheses did not explain what was happening in the data? How were these discrepancies accounted for? Were hypotheses modified?

Criterion 7: How and why was the core category selected? Was this collection sudden or gradual, and was it difficult or easy? On what grounds were the final analytic decisions made?

These criteria may not, according to the authors, be applicable to every study but they are useful for evaluating the analytical logic used by the researcher.

In light of these criteria cited, the next section of this chapter explains in detail the steps of the research process that I followed. It is in the context of these criteria that I tried to make the process transparent and logical. Although the reader will be left to judge the merits of this study, I am confident that the results of the study, as detailed in Chapter 5, flow logically from the research process and are defensible against the evaluative criteria.

PART III: RESEARCH PROCESS

Theoretical Sampling

In the process of building a credible grounded theory, a researcher must choose a theoretical sample. A theoretical sample is selected on the basis of the respondents' potential to contribute to the evolving theory. Thus, it is not a sampling of individuals per se, but rather, a sampling of incidents, behaviors, and self-observations. In this study, events are presumed to denote the respondent's perceptions, understandings, and feelings about their work and their work environment. In the initial phase of grounded theory development, a homogeneous sample of individuals (in this case, older employed workers) is chosen. Once a tentative theory has been constructed, the researcher would then select a more heterogeneous sample (e.g. older unemployed workers) in order to confirm or disconfirm the conditions, both contextual and intervening, under which the tentative model holds (Creswell, 1998).

In this research study, the theoretical sample of older workers selected were (a) aged 50 or more, (b) male, and (c) employed over 30 hours per week. The age restriction imposed upon the theoretical sample reflects a reasoned estimate as to when most individuals may consider themselves nearing the end of their career, and, perhaps, are more in a position to reflect back upon their working lives. Karp (1987) in a qualitative study of workers over the age of 50 observed that most felt they had reached a career plateau and tended to be less idealistic about what they expected for the remainder of their tenure of employment – the central parameters of one's working life had been established, promotions were not anticipated, and their level of compensation had most likely peaked.

The present sample was restricted to males based upon the assumption that the experience of work for females has tended to be different than the experience of work for males, particularly for this age group. As Fitzgerald and Weitzman (1992) have noted, “[. . .] the career development of women, is demonstrably more complex due to a socialization process that has emphasized the dichotomy of work and family life since at least the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century” (p. 125). It would be important in future research to focus upon the relationship between older women and their work. The sample was also restricted to individuals employed at least 30 hours a week to ensure they were active in the contemporary workplace and, as such, had an up-to-date perspective.

Sampling was conducted through a “snowball” process (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). In this sampling process, I approached one or two potential respondents from my own network. The first respondent chosen was an individual I had worked with briefly on a joint committee several years earlier. This respondent was, in turn, asked to name at least two respondents who might provide a perspective on their relationship with work. This “snowball” sampling process continued until saturation had occurred, or no new information was emerging from the interviews. There were eight respondents included in the theoretical sample of this study. Because of the paucity of research in this field, this process constitutes a ‘reasoned’ attempt to select a credible sample of respondents. Future studies may allow for more refinement in selecting the theoretical sample. Only one potential respondent, when approached by the interviewer, refused involvement in the study.

The average age of the sample was 57 years at the time of the initial interview and the range of ages was from 50 through to 67. One of the respondents retired from his position shortly after the first interview but he remains actively employed as an external consultant. The respondents' educational level ranged from the 8th grade through to the master's level. Although all the respondents had worked as employees for most of their lives, three were now self-employed. The range of occupations included (a) two tradespersons, (b) one sales representative, (c) two public sector employees (administration/training), (d) one educator/manager, (e) one senior manager, and, (f) one consultant. The range of occupations reflects my attempts to maximize the variation in the sample. This also reflects the grounded theory approach in which the researcher selects sites, persons, and documents that will maximize the opportunities for verifying the story line, relationships between categories, and for filling in poorly developed categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Interview Guide

The interviews were conducted either in my home or the respondent's home to accommodate the needs of the respondents. The tempo of each interview was adjusted to suit differences in presentation styles amongst the respondents. Most of the respondents commented at the end of the interview that it was, without doubt, one of the few times they had talked exclusively about themselves for such an extended period.

The respondents were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide developed by the interviewer (Appendix A). The length of each interview ranged from 90 minutes to over 120 minutes. The interview guide was designed to tap issues, derived from the literature, which were considered theoretically relevant to the lives of the older

worker. Interview questions in grounded theory research are designed to explore areas suggested by the current research. As previously discussed, there is a paucity of theoretical or applied occupational research focussing upon the older worker. The interview guide was, in essence, "developed" as an exploratory tool which would be neither too narrowly nor too widely focussed.

The semi-structured interview guide was divided into the following four sections:

- (1) **Orientation** - The respondents were told that the general aim of the study was to understand how they perceived themselves in relation to the world of work, and, how this perception may have changed over their time in the workforce. Questions in this section gathered information on work history. This section also provided the researcher with an opportunity to gauge the degree of structure that best suited each particular respondent.
- (2) **Perceptions of the Aging Process** - This section of the interview required a respondent to compare his current perceptions with his past perceptions of himself in a diversity of areas. These included his qualities as an employee, work-related skills and abilities, job performance, physical health, and feelings about the future. In addition, it required the respondents to explain the direction of any changes (i.e. positive or negative) and to the attribution of these perceived changes (e.g. aging, external circumstances, experience).
- (3) **Evolving Role of Work** - This section of the interview took a more philosophical turn focussing upon the evolving role of work in their lives. The purpose was to understand the relative importance of work in the context of the respondents' lives,

their attempts to balance work with other demands, the sense of control they experienced in choosing their life's work, and any regrets they might have about their chosen occupation. Each respondent was, in addition, asked to describe the 'meaning' that work held for them.

(4) **Role of Other People** - The final section of the interview looked at the role of other persons in their work lives. It was focussed upon identifying others who significantly influenced their career as well as preferences for working with persons of different ages. In addition, it sought information about mentoring, socialization in the workplace, and the importance of developing and maintaining relationships with others.

Data Collection

Once the theoretical sample has been selected, the researcher then proceeds to collect relevant data. Each interview with the eight respondents was recorded on audio tape with the written permission of the respondents. The interview tape was then transcribed. The audio tape was replayed until the researcher was confident that the voice recordings were accurately transcribed and any missing lines or allusions were included.

Each transcript was examined, paragraph-by-paragraph, to generate a list of emerging issues in the content of the interview. In grounded theory methodology, this analysis is recommended early in the data collection process because the results may be used in subsequent interviews to adjust the guide should important, but

unanticipated, issues emerge. This procedure often leads to the addition, deletion, or amendment of questions in the interview guide.

The results of the initial interview confirmed that the responses reflected the general intent of the interview questions. It was noted that the level of detailed description might be enhanced further by using follow-up questions to clarify or amplify particular comments made by the respondents. In one section of the interview guide (i.e. relationships with others), the questions related to interpersonal conflict seemed to be rather intrusive and the responses seemed outside of the context of the research focus. As a result, it was eliminated from the interview guide. No other adjustments were made to the interview guide other than to ensure more follow-up questions were used in the subsequent interviews. Five more interviews were then conducted. The tape recordings were transcribed immediately after each interview. As before, the tapes were reviewed to ensure that there were no errors or omissions in the transcriptions.

The seventh and eighth interviews were delayed until after a more detailed review of the first six tapes were conducted and the major categories or themes had been tentatively identified. This process was included by this researcher to ensure that all the emergent categories had been "saturated". By definition, saturation occurs when no new properties, dimensions, or conditions are seen in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Saturation, a matter of degree, is more an issue of reaching the point in the research where collecting additional data seems counterproductive; the 'new' that is uncovered does not add much to the explanation of the data. All of the major themes in this study did, in fact, emerge in the initial four or five interviews. The latter interviews provided necessary clarification and confirmation but did not reveal "new" information.

In hindsight, the interview tool appeared to work relatively well because (a) it appeared to be in tune with the changes the respondents perceived in themselves from the beginning of their career to the present, (b) it appeared to capture the respondents' attributions of these changes including contextual factors, and (c) it was sufficiently flexible to allow for the desire of some respondents to expand upon particular issues.

During the interviews it was necessary to attend closely to the responses to ensure all questions had been answered to the required level of detail yet not interfere with the natural flow of dialogue. In the later interviews it became more apparent that, save for some clearly defined areas, the respondents appeared to answer most of the questions without prompting – almost intuitively. This indicated, at least for me, that the interviews were tapping into a natural flow of conversation that two people might have about their careers, its origins, significant crises, and future ambitions.

I contacted each of the respondents to confirm both the veracity of the interview transcripts and to have the respondents reflect upon the relevance, or “face validity”, of the major themes. All eight respondents were provided typed copies of their interview transcripts and all affirmed their accuracy. In these meetings, however, the respondents appeared to be uncomfortable with discussing their transcripts. Most had few changes to suggest other than to correct one or two idiosyncratic references. They also appeared rather reluctant to discuss the major themes of the study. It was as if during the first interview they had unwittingly revealed more personal information that they would normally have disclosed. Perhaps they simply did not want to return to the former level of disclosure. In hindsight, it may have been more prudent for me to have structured the second interview more in line with the first interview, starting with relatively neutral issues and proceeding to more intimate topics. However, this process would have taken

more time than the respondents were undoubtedly prepared to commit. I consider myself fortunate, therefore, to have garnered the depth and breadth of information in the first interview. In future research, researchers might want to consider the more creative approaches to interview males who are, perhaps, uncomfortable with high levels of personal disclosure for prolonged periods.

Data Ordering

All transcripts were printed and organized in the order the interviews were completed and placed in a binder. Over 150 pages of transcribed material were collected. In keeping with the grounded theory methodology, these eight interview transcripts constitute the 'raw data' I used in subsequent analysis. Once transcribed, an indexing system, or Transcript Table, was developed to organize the raw data and allow for the accurate retrieval in later data analysis. First, each page of the transcripts was numbered. Each paragraph of the interview was also numbered. Thus, each paragraph of the eight transcripts was identified by the initials of the respondent, the page, and the paragraph (e.g. DR, Page 3, and Paragraph 4). Finally, all data from the interview were placed into tables as illustrated in Fig 1.

	Paragraph	Category Label
D.R. P. 5 Para 1	In my early days I was . . . hungry to move ahead – I am less hungry now.	
D.R. P. 5 Para 2	No, not ominous at all, I just mean imminent. I look forward to it, actually, conceptually – there are a number of things that [spouse] and I want to do – together, what I meant by that – is that's it's not far off.	
D.R. P. 5 Para 3	I haven't identified a time . . . no. . . . Probably not, I don't know , how I'll feel. When I'm 60-65. Probably by 65 I'll pull the plug. I haven't set a date or anything - we'll see how I feel.	

Figure 1: Transcript Table Example

The left side of the table contained the verbatim transcription of the interview divided into paragraphs. This organization of the data allowed for the subsequent labeling of the data in the open coding process on the right side of the table.

Data Analysis

The data analysis occurred in three different but overlapping phases. These phases will be described in order to illustrate my approach(es) to the data. The description reflects the suggestion by Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) that the researcher construct an “audit trail”, or an account of what was done and why it was done, at all phases of the research process. The more transparent the process, the easier it might be for an “auditor” to decide whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data.

Phase I

In this phase, I attempted to adhere as closely to the formal methods of grounded theory as might be possible. My first step was to analyze the data through open coding - that is, examining the transcripts for salient categories of information. Each transcript was examined, paragraph-by-paragraph, in search of events, actions/interactions, incidents and instances of the phenomena emerging from the transcripts. A label or labels was placed on the right side of the Transcript Table (see Figure 1) that appeared to indicate the presence of a potential category, or instance of a phenomenon. Each transcript table was printed and an Organizational Table of preliminary categories was created. This process continued until all eight transcripts had been analyzed.

In the next step of analysis, I compared each instance of a category within one transcript with the instance of a similar category in another transcript. That is, each instance of a category was compared with previous and subsequent categories within a transcript and across all transcripts (constant comparison technique). I repeated this process in the expectation that a tentative set of categories might begin to emerge. The emerging categories and their respective labels were refined and placed into the Transcript Tables. At this point in the analysis, those categories were given tentative labels. For instance, each respondent responded to general questions regarding their health. From the excerpts of responses referring to the phenomenon of physical health, the following labels emerged as illustrated in Figure 2:

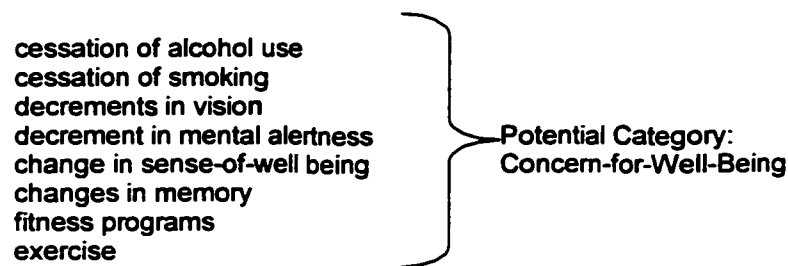


Figure 2: Organizing Conceptual Labels of Data

Predictably, at this point in the analysis, the definitions were imprecise. For example, the category 'fitness program' tentatively referred to any attempt by the respondent to follow a pre-planned program designed to promote health and well being. The category 'exercise' was intended to refer to activities that promoted health but were not pre-planned, or necessarily part of a scheduled program (e.g. evening walks, hiking). The paragraph in which the category was embedded was extracted from the data (cut and paste) and placed on a separate sheet of paper in the form of a memorandum. Each

memorandum was indexed by respondent, page, paragraph, and category and placed in a binder. A short note was added to the bottom of the sheet to explain the phenomena and the label and, in turn, each category was cross-indexed. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

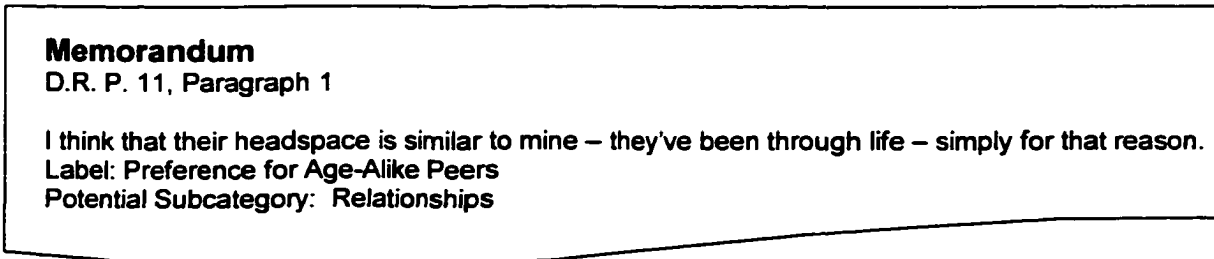


Figure 3: Indexing Categories

The indexing process ensured that the category label was 'grounded' in the data of the study, or that the labels 'fit' the data by providing a reasonable description of the incident, idea, or event.

As previously stated, the intent of this research study was very broad and focused on a phenomenon that had been relatively unexplored in the research literature. As a result, it was expected that it would be difficult to gauge the relative importance of the categories that were emerging from the data. Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) have suggested that the coding process is

“. . . not a simple one - and [. . .] involves a constitutive relationship between researcher and the text – is clear from the fact that judgement is always associated with this labeling process. The facets of the data coded will vary depending upon how the aims of the study are presented to participants [. . .] as well as the interpretations of the researcher. (p.86)

For example, was the declaration of a “value” an important concept in its own right? Or a tertiary concept? Or was it subsumed under a more encompassing concept? In the initial analysis, relatively specific concepts were used, because I assumed it would be easier in later analysis to collapse the concepts than to risk missing potentially salient features of the data.

I continued to analyze the data to refine the categories and to ensure that all instances of a phenomenon had been captured (saturation). I had gathered, at this point in time, a number of categories that seem to reasonably ‘fit’ the data. For example, under the category label “Work”, I placed all references to a respondent’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviours related to his work. All references to the “role of work”, or the respondent’s thoughts about “work in the future”, for instance, were tentatively placed into subcategories. I continued to “uncover” more subcategories and potential dimensions of the subcategories, to create new memoranda, and to update the indexing system on an ongoing basis. In grounded theory, this ‘flip-flop’ process is anticipated and involves changing, re-changing, and adjusting to ensure the labels provide a defensible and recognizable description of the phenomenon - that is, they “fit” the data.

However, the number of memoranda in my study had begun to grow and to spill over into even more binders. Some subcategories were eliminated, others were refined, and still others reintroduced. In short, it was difficult at this stage in the research to find any organizing principles to point to how the data might be integrated. At this point in the analysis, I put the transcripts aside with the hope of finding some meta principles, or major organizing principles.

Phase II

After several weeks, I reviewed each transcript of the eight respondents. What was now obvious to me was that many of the respondents were describing how their views, attitudes, feelings and so forth had changed over their lifetime. Some disclosed that they were now more confident, less concerned about the opinions of others, and more content with who they were now, as compared to some earlier period. I could, in fact, map many of these changes for each respondent across time. In other transcripts, the changes in the respondents were clearly less dramatic and less positive across time. Moreover, not all the respondents changed along similar dimensions.

What I had not seemingly anticipated was that the content of the categories I had defined in Phase I were, in fact, changing over the course of time. For instance, Jake suggested that the "role of work" used to be an external expression of who he was – his position and his title. At this point in time, however, he does not garner his identity from his work, but from who he is as "a person". Kyle, for instance, gave "short shrift" to anyone who disagreed with his opinion when he was young. He finds at this point in time, however, that he is much less opinionated, more accepting of differences, and less inclined to become emotional when people disagree with him. These changes were occurring, to varying degrees, within all eight transcripts. These changes in the content of the categories are illustrated in Figure 4.

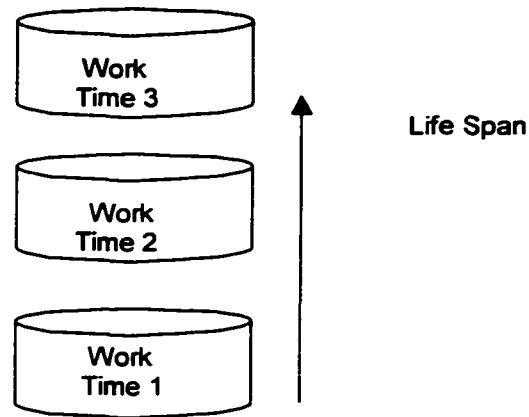


Figure 4: Changes in Content of Category Over the Lifespan

A respondent may have disclosed his feelings about a specific issue, event, action/interaction in the past (Time 1). Through experience and/or maturation, their beliefs about that issue may or may not have changed (Time 2). As they further reflect back, the respondent may well realize that their feelings have changed once again about that situation (Time 3). Although the category itself may remain constant, the content may have evolved significantly over the course of a respondent's lifetime. This calculus of change within transcripts helped to explain, in part, why it was difficult for me to organize the categories in Phase I – their content often changed over time.

This "discovery" also pointed to the necessity of capturing both **content** and **processes** in the analysis of the data. At this point in the data analysis, I realized that that older workers, or aging itself cannot be studied as a static phenomenon but rather as processes across time. This realization, suggested that the transcripts were capturing, in several cases, developmental process, or change across time. Indeed, some of the respondents were describing how their lives had, in essence, improved

across time – they have come to like themselves better, to accept their failing and mistakes, to be more inner-directed and confident in themselves.

Toward this end, I sifted through the original data set once again. I traced the manner in which each respondent changed their self-definition over time. Daniel, for instance, described himself as less interested in climbing the “corporate ladder”. Ron described himself as more accepting of individual differences. Dean finds that he is getting mellow. Jake finds he is more assertive and less tractable, and so forth. Over time, the respondents were disclosing that they seemed to possess less of one quality, or behavior, or belief and/or more of another. Time lines of incidents, events, actions/interactions illustrating changes to their self-definition were literally mapped over the life of each respondent. In addition, particular attention was given to the processes associated with *transitions*. Questions were posed to the data including: Why did they leave? What was the motivation? What did it mean to them? What were they searching for? How did it turn out? How long did they remain in their position? For example, Sean left a position because he disagreed with the policies of this supervisor. He stated, “I do not like being treated like a child”, “I like to work in jobs in which I can work independently”, or “The appealing thing about this job [new job] is that [. . .] it is fairly autonomous”. These excerpts appeared to indicate that Sean may be moving toward greater independence, or autonomy. This desired quality – independence – was one of many important metaphors characterizing his employment quest. In the process of describing their motivation for transitions from their perspectives, the respondents were, in effect, defining themselves – their values, their beliefs, their problem solving styles, their motivations, and their goals.

What was emerging from the data seemed to confirm that the interviews were capturing an ongoing evolution or development of the individuals across time – their self-definition and redefinition. The events, incidents, and actions/interactions (phenomena) encountered by these respondents caused them, in varying degrees, to reevaluate or alter their opinion about themselves.

The categories developed in Phase I were once again revisited. What was now more obvious was that there was dramatic variation amongst the respondents and, further, that retaining categories that were too restrictive may obscure this variation. I realized that I needed to raise the level of abstraction of the categories in order to capture those categories common to all, or most of, the respondents. That is, Ethan describes himself at this point as “less of a scatter-brain”, Ron as “more grounded”, and Ned as “more focused”. In context, these respondents were describing positive changes they had experienced in themselves – they were moving forward toward a higher level of development. I placed these and similar comments into a loosely defined category titled “Intra-personal Development”. In doing so, I could then ‘dimensionalize’ the categories - that is, I could show variation among the respondents along similar dimensions of the category. In addition, I invoked the term “theme” to capture this higher level, or more abstract level of the category. Subcategory was replaced with the term “subtheme”. Grounded theory methodology permits the researcher to exercise judgement in choosing the relative level of abstraction for the categories selected in accordance with the focus of the particular study (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997).

In the next step of analysis, I developed a matrix in order to organize the subthemes across the eight interviews. An excerpt of this matrix is captured in Figure 5.

The left column labels the Theme and related subthemes while the Respondents are listed across the top row.

THEME	Respondents							
	DR	JI	KB	EH	DS	SS	ND	RA
Relationships								
Subthemes								
- Developing Relationships								
- Setting Boundaries	X			X		X		
- Balancing								
- Socializing								
- Working Alone/Team								
- Older/Younger Worker								
- Mentoring								

Figure 5: Matrix of Subthemes by Respondent

As concepts leading to subthemes emerged from the data, they were recorded on memoranda for each respondent. Each memorandum contained the transcript excerpts, a theme/subtheme label, and the initials of the respondent. This process is illustrated in Figure 6, using selected excerpts from the transcripts

MEMORANDUM
<p>RELATIONSHPS SETTING BOUNDARIES</p> <p>And my trust threshold has gone way down – for them. So that’s one thing I learned, about myself that one should keep their guard up – even when you don’t think you need to . . . have it up. . . if I can add this, I dislike people who have an agenda and play office games – and have knives to stick into people’s backs – and I have no time for that at all - if I ever have an employee like I will fire them – if I find them doing any of that . So I have a very short temper when it comes to manipulation. I prefer a straight-forward gimme-all-you got, well-presented - DR</p>

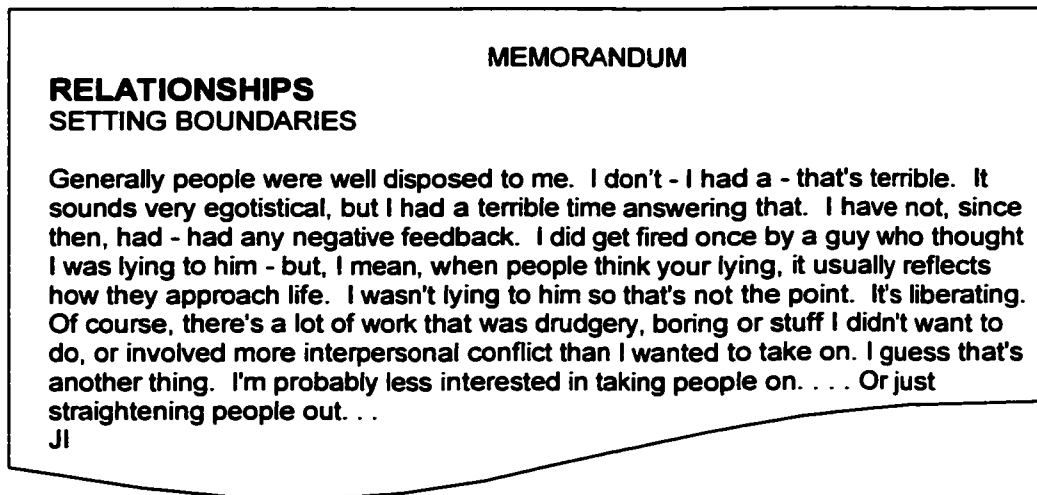


Figure 6: Examples of Memoranda

Each of these memoranda were organized into a binder and tabbed according to the subtheme. Each tab contained excerpts from most, if not all the respondents. At this point in the analysis, over 21 subthemes, organized into 4 themes had been identified for each of the 8 respondents. This produced roughly 200 memoranda in total.

The next step in the analysis was to demonstrate, where possible, how the subthemes varied across time. Toward this end, I searched for excerpts that appeared to demonstrate change over time - that is, I searched for samples from the same respondents addressing the same theme at different points in time. In the process of searching and recording these sample excerpts, I was struck by the parallels between the changes in the respondents over time in this study and the writings of Kegan on adult development (1983, 1994). In colloquial terms, the similarity rather leapt off the pages of the transcripts. Indeed, his constructive-developmental theory seemed to explain, or account for many of the changes in the content of the subthemes across time. For instance, some excerpts seemed to deftly illustrate the Interpersonal, and

others, the Institutional, and still others, the Inter-individual Balance. At this point, I adapted the perspective of the constructive-developmental and again reviewed the 150 pages of transcripts. I selected excerpts for the data at different points in time and across all respondents. Each excerpt from the data was placed in a subtheme albeit "approximate", equating to one of the three adult developmental balances identified by Kegan (1982). By adopting this developmental perspective, it was possible to trace the development, or lack of development, of the respondents. For instance, an excerpt from Jake, shown in Figure 7, appears to illustrate the movement from the Interpersonal to the Institutional Balance.

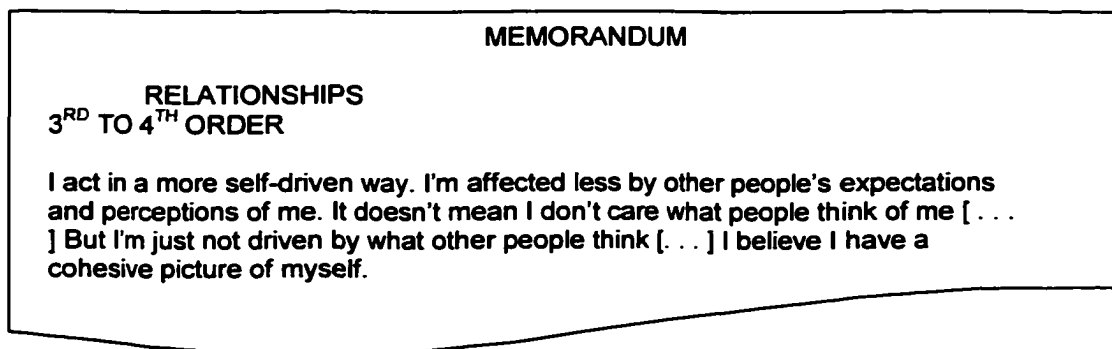


Figure 7: Developmental Order - Jake

Rather than being embedded in his relationships (Interpersonal Balance), Jake is able to talk about his relationships as 'object'. That is, rather than defining himself in the context of his relationships, the respondent recognizes that he has relationships (Institutional Balance). His relationships, however, are now managed in a more systematic, cohesive manner.

In a similar vein, an excerpt from Ned's transcript illustrates a relative shift from the Interpersonal Balance to the Institutional Balance in his definition of work

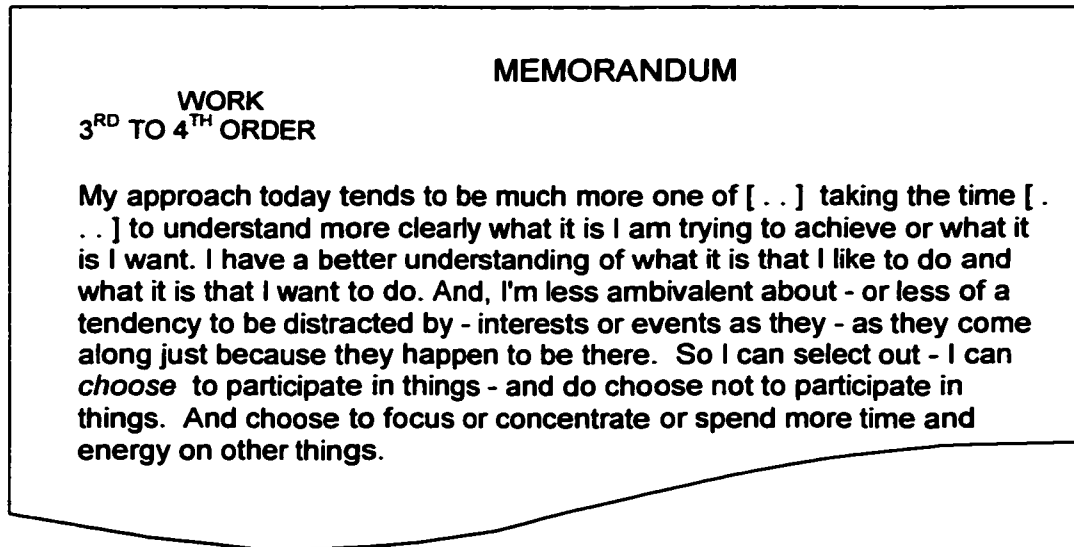


Figure 8: Development Order - Ned

Ned discloses that he is, at this point in time, in a better position to proactively choose which activities he might engage in. He is less likely to be distracted by transient issues or events. He can be more selective, more focussed now.

Using the three roughly defined orders of mental construction, or balances, I was able to collect several examples of developmental or transformational shifts for most of the respondents in the study. Not all the respondents, it seemed, actually demonstrated significant changes across their lifespan. Further, it was very difficult to link the three developmental balances against all of the subthemes. There were, nonetheless, sufficient excerpts to illustrate changes at least within some of the subthemes. This produced roughly 40 additional memoranda.

The developmental phases of Kegan became, in effect, the organizing process theme that sought to explain much of the variation in the data. In grounded theory terms, a process is revealed by its evolving nature and its varying forms, rhythms, and

spacing, all related to some purpose. At this point, I constructed a model, or tentative theory, that posited that the variation in the transcripts within and across the respondents could be, by and large, accounted for, by the cognitive-developmental balance of the respondents. Some of the respondents were, in effect, further along the developmental “continuum” than were others. Further that these variations in adult development could be demonstrated using the themes and subthemes of the study.

I subsequently began to draft the study findings (Chapter 5). I was looking at well over 250 memoranda that could be potentially incorporated into the discussion. After multiple attempts at drafting the results, as well as many creative attempts to draw and re-draw the theoretical model, I realized that although the model was intellectually intriguing it, detracted from an appreciation of the basic data. Indeed, this approach was more interpretative than descriptive - that is, the data had to be interpreted in the context of constructive-developmentalism at the same time that they were presented to the reader. Moreover, the raw data were being edited and refined more to illustrate the tentative theoretical model than to simply present the basic findings of this research study. At best, the theoretical model would have simply supported the writing of Kegan (1982) and, at worst, it ‘buried’ some of the concepts and subthemes, which did not easily fit the ‘model’. It was at this point that I again set the work aside to perhaps gain a fresh, or renewed perspective on the data. I was beginning to see the data not for what they were but rather I was perseverating on the theoretical model.

Phase III

In this phase of the data analysis, I attempted to approach the data without any preconceived notions (“tabula rasa”). Up to this point in time, I had struggled to build a

model or theory that might integrate the data, explain the variations, and capture processes. However, after looking at the data anew, I realized that this approach might be leading me away from examining the basic data set and from addressing the research questions that this study was designed to address. I, therefore, posed a number of fundamental questions of the data which included: Does knowing the age of a worker allow me to better understand them? Can I make predictions based upon their age? What do the significant variations in the data and across the respondents imply? In which ways are the respondents alike and in which ways are they different? As I began to answer these questions, I saw that the essential "discovery" of this study was that "older workers" were, in all likelihood, as varied as is the population in general. Knowing that a particular 'worker' was 60 or another 25 allowed me to make relatively few inferences with any certainty beyond, perhaps, their hair colour or relative aerobic capacity. A theory of older workers would have, in essence, contradicted this observation. Indeed, it was the dramatic variations in the subthemes that pointed to the most salient issues in the lives of older worker. This thinking suggested, in addition, that I should focus attention on how, or along what dimensions, we can better understand the older worker rather than upon developing generalizations which lead us away from understanding.

Given these observations, I returned once again to the memoranda. The labels of the subthemes were erased, and the hundreds of excerpts from the transcripts were laid out on a large table. I tried to organize them according to defensible, logical content areas. For example, all references to work, career, and retirement were placed together into a pile titled Work. I went through this process until the majority of the excerpts were in a pile. I then took each pile and organized and reorganized them until all excerpts with the same or similar content were placed in sub-piles under the label associated with

the larger pile. This process continued until the majority of excerpts had been placed. For example, under the label Work there were 4 distinct piles including Constructing the Workplace, In Quest of One's Work, The Path not Found, and The Importance of Work in Later Life. The pile, titled, In Quest of One's Work contained over 18 excerpts that appeared to relate to the 'meaning' of work for this group of respondents. In all, the 4 major themes were, in turn, divided into 14 subthemes. The excerpts, now organized into 14 piles, were relabeled and placed into a large binder which, once completed, contained over 200 memoranda. The excerpts were organized in a manner as illustrated in Figure 9.

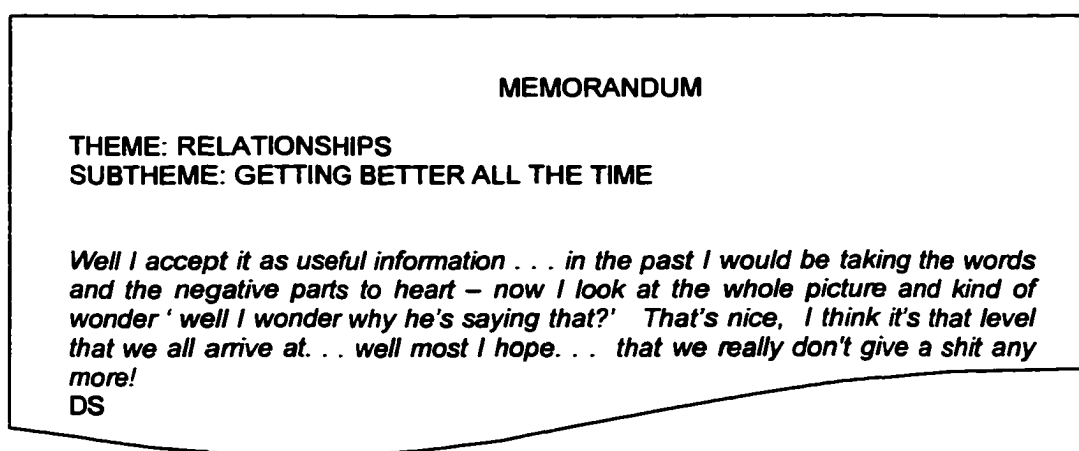


Figure 9: Interpreting Themes and Subthemes – Dean

The actual content of each excerpt would not necessarily be apparent to the casual reader of the data set and did require me to make varying degrees of interpretation. For example, the following transcript from Dean (Figure 9) suggested to me that he is less affected by negative feedback now than when he was younger. Further, it suggested to me that he now was able to evaluate feedback in a larger, broader context than he did previously. Finally, it suggested to me that he finds his ability to deflect negative feedback perceived to be a gain rather than a loss. In my

mind, this disclosure by Dean contained similar content to excerpts from Jake's transcript (Figure 10).

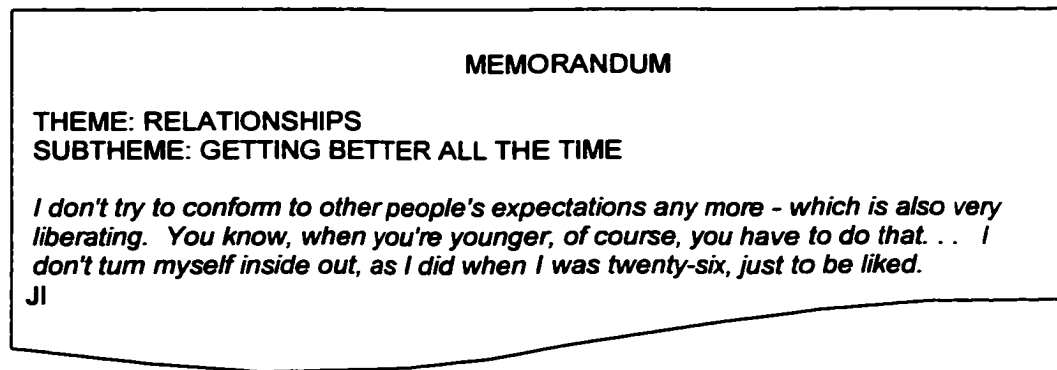


Figure 10: Interpreting Themes and Subthemes – Jake

Like Dean, Jake appears to be saying that he is less affected by others' expectations, less likely to struggle for their approval, and less likely to be impacted by negative feedback. In addition, it suggested to me that this ability to be less conforming was, for Jake, a gain rather than a loss. All the excerpts containing behaviors, thoughts, or incidents that illustrated how the respondents' interpersonal behaviours had shifted as a result of aging, experience, or maturity were grouped together. Thus, all excerpts illustrating that the respondents were being more assertive, less competitive, more empathetic, more tolerant, and so forth were organized into the subtheme – Getting Better All the Time. Other researchers may well have provided different interpretations of the data. Perhaps they would argue that this group of older workers are becoming more insensitive, more insular, and less concerned with their survival. In grounded theory, interpretation is expected, particularly when one is making a statement of relationships within the data. However, the researcher strives to validate their interpretation by comparing one piece of data with another (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). In

addition, the findings of this study presented in Chapter 5 provided yet another level of interpretation as the excerpts are interwoven by the theme and subtheme structures.

The next step in the analysis was to organize and incorporate those excerpts that illustrated the developmental balances found in Kegan (1982). I reexamined the data set from Phase II and extracted excerpts which illustrated one or more developmental balances for each respondent. There was sufficient evidence to suggest, for instance, that Jake had passed through all the adult phases to come to rest in the Interindividual Balance. As a result, sample excerpts were selected to illustrate these changes across time. In contrast, Sean appears to be hovering between the Interpersonal the Institutional Balance, hence, the number of excerpts used to defend this interpretation were fewer in number as compared to Jake. These excerpts, at times, were duplicates of those excerpts chosen for the subthemes - that is, one excerpt from a transcript may illustrate both a content and a process theme depending upon the interpretation provided. For example, below is a statement from Sean illustrating his difficulty in defining his own work and his contentment with letting others define it for him

MEMORANDUM

THEME: WORK
SUBTHEME: THE PATH NOT FOUND

It is like a nice warm blanket, a comfortable bed – you slide into it, it feels comfortable, everything feels good! You know that your next paycheck is going to be there . . . I guess the downside is you have to go where the administration tells you to go – you don't have any say in that – on the other hand, you can go in the direction that the administration is taking . . . hey, it has worked out fine!

Figure 11: Interpersonal Balance – Sean

This excerpt also illustrates, it is argued, that Sean remains within the Interpersonal Balance because he is unable to define his own work. The ability to define your own work is integral to the Institutional Balance (McCauliffe, 1993).

At this time I revisited the data set once again. Working through the transcripts in sequence, each one was reviewed and content areas, which were contained within the existing data set, or memoranda, were excised. The remaining parts of the transcripts appeared to contain only specific references to unique events, clarifying elements of dialogue, and side comments not related to the actual interview. In doing so, I was assured that the materials from all of the transcripts were now included in the analysis.

In addition, this procedure ensured that the designated categories had, in fact, been saturated. Indeed, in grounded theory methodology, the researcher continues to sample until theoretical saturation of each category is reached. This means, until (a) no new or relevant data emerge regarding a category, (b) the category development accounts for all the variation and processes, and (c) the relationship between themes has been well established and validated.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the major themes and subthemes emerging from the transcripts. They reflect, in general terms, responses to the research questions posed in Chapter 2. Each subtheme is related to the extant literature whenever possible. The developmental motif of Kegan is addressed in the context of a summary discussion.

As stated earlier, Charmaz (1995) suggests that few grounded theory works are actually formal theories; rather they are rich conceptual analyses of lived experiences

and social worlds. In a similar vein, Pidgeon and Henwood (1997) state that it is a laudable goal if the researcher is able to apply grounded theory techniques to develop basic taxonomies of relevant features of the data and/or develop theoretical comparisons between emerging analysis and existing theoretical accounts. In the context of this study, however, the development of a formal theory of older workers would have probably led us away from the "truth". That is, older workers are themselves as unique and varied as the general population and the label "older worker" may be a vacant, or hollow descriptor.

CHAPTER 4: A PORTRAIT OF THE RESPONDENTS

This chapter presents a series of interpretive portraits of the eight respondents in the order in which they were interviewed. The intent of this chapter is twofold. One is to provide the reader with a context for reading Chapter 5, the results of the research. Rather than experiencing the respondents through quotes scattered throughout Chapter 5, it is hoped that the portraits might create a mental image as background for the reader as they work through the results. Secondly, the portraits, hopefully, convey the immense variation among the respondents. Indeed, I was impressed with the diversity in the way these “older workers” constructed their world, the vicissitude in their self-evaluations, and the divergence in how they perceived the “world of work”.

These portraits were constructed from interviews with the respondents. In the initial stages of the analysis, I developed a summary of each respondent’s vocational history. This was done, in part, to trace the chronological development of each respondent. Toward that end, I selected excerpts of events, situations, or behaviors in each respondent’s life that seemed to be indicative, or characteristic, of their reactions to events, or provided commentary on their lives. Later I edited out data that seemed redundant. These summaries are, therefore, a distillation of the original portraits developed early in the analysis stage.

DANIEL

Daniel is 58 years old and employed, on an almost full-time basis, as an administrator in a small, private college. He began his career as a classroom teacher at the age of 22 after completing an undergraduate degree in education. He discloses that his father, also a teacher, had a major if not compelling influence on his occupational choice

There was no question in my mind that I had to have a university education . . . – and I probably had no thoughts to the contrary – because of him – I even went to the same university as he did. He drilled into me that a degree was essential in life . . . it opened doors. And I can't say that I ever remember disagreeing with him on that – I just did it.

He disclosed that the profession of teaching, in addition to a secure income, provided him with status, an identity, and a feeling of self-importance

I was in that mode, that you were who you were at work, your job, your title, and the job gave you status with peers and friends and I was completely into that mode of being important to me. . . . and a teacher was important. I was very proud of being a teacher, in fact I would be proud today to say I was a teacher.

In retrospect, Daniel described himself as aggressively pursuing advancement in his career path. He admits that others likely perceived him as “someone who is anxious to move ahead”, “as an arrogant know-it-all”, and as “climbing the bottom rungs and seeing the next job”. He perceived his potential career path in education as traditional and likely uninspiring – classroom teacher, department head, principal, department administrator,

and director. Daniel suspected that this career path was likely too narrow for him because it lacked the scope and the challenge he so desired

. . . probably wouldn't do well as a school principal – I might have – I might not have – I don't know. But in any event I saw that as the track that people took to be superintendents or directors, and I saw myself doing that, and I thought no - I want something else – something provincial or national in scope.

After 10 years as a teacher, and eventually as a department head, Daniel took a senior administrative position with a small private college. He was responsible for organizing educational conferences, in-service programs, and seminars in education for some 14 years. This position appears to have been the zenith of Daniel's career. It provided him with both personal and professional satisfaction

If you liken it to a play, I was kind of the director, producer, and sometimes a writer, sometimes actor – I would often give a workshop at a conference. A stage manager, and editor, whatever you want to call it, all the positions were either done by me, or under my purview. So I became, the educational equivalent of an impresario . . . in terms of organizing conferences.

During this period, Daniel acquired a graduate degree in educational administration in order to remain competitive in the job market

. . . when I first graduated, my dad said, well probably a BA is enough and that's all I did, and it was only 10 years after my BA, so that I suddenly realized the world is going by, I better do something else, so I went to get another degree.

Although enjoying his position, he was planning yet another advancement in the corporate career ladder

. . . my desire at the time was to be - to advance – to be an executive director, a CEO, of a small non-profit organization

Toward this end, Daniel considered enrolling in a professional accounting program “because financial people become CEOs”. However, for whatever reason, Daniel deferred this decision preferring, in his terms, to take his chances with the future

So my thinking at that time was – get into something else, like finance? Which I did not do because I don't like it – so I did not take an accounting course or become a CGA. I thought I will put my future into fate's hands and whatever happens – happens, and this job was so great - I'll ride it out.

Having decided against taking more academic preparation work, Daniel states that he placed his future in the hands of Fate (“ride it out”). He states, in retrospect, that he

. . . downplayed the importance of work in my career is because I enjoyed my time off. I like to travel, I'd like to take off – all the time - in the off hours and in- between. And so pleasure pursuits if you like, but also educational, I like doing different things, I just love getting out and doing different things. And that includes travel, but it also includes some hobbies . . . like the computer, diving, flying and so forth. When I was young and doing all these new things, they were just wonderful and the money was really well spent! Whereas others may wonder “how can I spend my summer getting ahead?” I didn't do that – I spent my summers having fun!

I'm not a workaholic - I like leaving my work behind me and going on to other pursuits – weekends and so forth.

Daniel's disclosures implies that he maintained a "devil-may-care" attitude toward his future. He was out having fun while others toiled advancing their career. It also reveals an attitude of mockery toward others who may have taken life too seriously. In hindsight, he suggests that he made a major mistake by staying in his position too long – riding it out. He suggests that he was mistakenly seduced by the tangible rewards of the job. He simply could not let them go

. . . the pay was great – the benefits were wonderful – the rewards professionally were great – it was a job that I just couldn't let go – even though I knew I should have moved on, or sooner. The more I moved on, the more chance that I could transfer to something else. I didn't

Following a unexpected reorganization of the trustees' association, Daniel's position became redundant

. . . so in 1988 I was dead in the water – no job – a completely flat job market . . . at that point I was ready for anything, because I needed to work.

He successfully acquired a position in the public sector. He "promptly walked out of there" some 10 months later because he was placed in a position where his personal values conflicted with the politics of the organization. Although he was facing a long period of sporadic employment, he remained vigilant in his search for a CEO position.

He perceived himself as lacking the marketing skills necessary to advance as a consultant

So back on the street again, job hunting for 8 more years, doing some consulting. Again doing a bit of networking (badly) doing self-promotion (badly) doing some consulting – nowhere near enough to bring in a decent salary. Even during that time . . . I was looking for an executive director or a directorship of a senior management type of some sort.

Daniel admits he was surprised by the length of time it took him to find a regular position

I never thought I would see the day that I would spend years and years looking for a job. That was a surprise. Now I knew the job market and I knew my boxed-in career was in place, I was surprised it took so long to get a job.

After many years of unemployment Daniel finally secured his current position. It is neither full-time nor pays anywhere near his salary expectations. He perceives that the opportunities to be a manager are increasingly limited as he ages and nears retirement. Nonetheless he still desires to move ahead

Now I'm kind of limited in my thoughts of the future – first there is retirement looming on the horizon – finally there's a small window of opportunity to be manager . . . I still like a salary and a large salary

Although he has made many applications for more compatible positions, he has not been as yet successful. He hints that perhaps employers might be less than honest in their recruitment practices surrounding older workers

.....at my age I find very few opportunities open , although when you apply, they don't know you age, but I know government . . .

Although he is still desirous of advancing his career, he discloses a much more subdued even passive approach to work at this point in time

My approach now, is if there's a job out there that looks really attractive and I'm qualified for it, I will apply for it. . . .and if there is a job there that I can be – stretched in a little more – I would apply for it. I don't get it fine.

. . . in my first few jobs I needed to move ahead quickly . . . I wanted to . . . now that's not a concern and I don't have any trouble in saying "I don't know" or "I have no experience in that" . . . you take me as I am now – or not! Back then I would probably try to become what you wanted me to be – to get the job or to get along or to get ahead . . . Now I don't . . .

Daniel provides some hints that the aggressive attitude he displayed in the past was not necessarily well received by others. Indeed, he has learned to subdue his preferred interpersonal style most likely by the feedback he received

It was pointed out to me in a number of ways . . . not directly . . . but by comments and body language of other people and whatnot . . . and by reading between the lines . . . I picked that up.

. . . that I've worked on being better at . . .not to put my mouth in gear before my brain, and I have a habit of doing that – of off-putting comments – several of which in the past have landed me in deep do-do – and it's my nature to do that and . . . they had the impact that was totally

unexpected and unintended even – but had a huge impact. So I have to be careful of what I say.

Daniel describes himself as a much more pleasant individual now than he might have been perceived earlier in his career. He describes himself as perhaps overly ambitious and aggressive. He implies that because he is “near the end of his career”, he might be freer to discard aspects of his personality that may have detracted from effective relationships with others and focus more on his work

... in my first job beyond university, counting part time jobs and so forth . . . I was probably seen as an arrogant know-it-all ... as someone who is anxious to move ahead ... and knew all things and today that is definitely mellowed ... inasmuch as that I'm sort of the end of my career...

I am probably more productive at the workplace by not having any baggage like I did when I was climbing the bottom rungs and seeing the next job . . . I don't have two levels ahead to look at – except retirement!... and so that is not a factor...

I think I'm a much better now as a colleague to people than I was back then - a team player.

Daniel looks back of his career with a mixture of regret and disappointment. He is seemingly unsure, nonetheless, if he can accept full responsibility for his perceived “failure”. In part, he suggests that he lacked the insight, or knowledge to chose an appropriate career path for himself. He compares himself negatively to other people

I see people who have definite tracks and goals in mind – they were going to this and become that – I never had that because I didn't know

what the goalposts were - what to do when I grew up. I really admire people who have those goalposts in sights and go for it.

He attributes his lack of direction in his career, or purpose in life, to events to forces beyond his control

I don't know why – you either have it or you don't – maybe our parents create that for them, their parents' influence, whether it's something genetic that they always wanted to be musicians, that's the end it - they're going to be musicians, that's the end of it - no questions. I never had that, that purpose – not that I drifted – I went into the direction I wanted to move in - but I never had "I want to be this or in this position" and go for it.

On the other hand, he blames himself for failing to plan his career in a more proactive fashion

I did not architect my career as well as I should have . . . or seriously as I should have - others may actually chart their careers and go forth with a plan with goals and so on, I did not do that. Not that I fell into jobs, I applied for jobs that I wanted, so in a sense it carried me a little bit.

Daniel appears unsure of who is responsible for his lack of career direction, or even if he has, in fact, "lost his way". On the one hand, he aggressively pursued a career as a CEO and, on the other hand, he states that he never really felt he knew where he was going. He looks forward to retirement yet he would gladly accept a high-paying job should one come along. It would seem that Daniel is in a state of flux, or transition. He appears to have trouble making sense of his past or deciding if he is actually in charge of his future. There is no doubt that Daniel is an enigma: in my opinion he has been

relatively successful in his work, he is well educated, and reasonably personable. It is his nagging doubts about himself, about his career, and about his future that I found unsettling.

KYLE

Kyle is 59 years old and employed, on a full-time basis, as a training professional in a large, public-sector organization. After high school, he joined the RCMP as a constable. He joined the quasi-military force because he had limited interest in furthering his education at that time

. . . when I graduated – the last 2 or 3 years in high school – just not interested in school at all, I just got through – just not a good student – not interested – did not see the relevance in it – liked the social side of it – that was fine – to my mind that was the value of high school for me – learning to become more socially acceptable human being

He describes the experiences as contributing greatly to his maturity and development

I was 18 when I joined the RCMP. . . so really a kid . . . and you grow up awfully fast . . . you mature awfully fast . . . I think you have to do . . . because when I was 20 . . . I had my own one-man detachment in Northern Saskatchewan - a summer detachment . . . so basically you're it . . . so you do. . . you mature and you grew up very fast. . .

Kyle , although not certain of his original motivation, knows that he did not join the RCMP for the money. In fact, money has not been a major motivator in his life

When I joined the RCMP . . . my mother sent me a clipping from the Vancouver Sun, and a big photograph – this would be in 1960 – it has a street-sweeper and a member of the RCMP sitting on a horse and salaries below – and the member of the RCMP was making less than the Vancouver City street-sweeper. You didn't join the RCMP for salary or benefits or any of those things at all – and that's sort of the way I've gone throughout my life . . .

Kyle was prepared to remain with this federal police force until retirement. He felt he was a dedicated, as well as a loyal, employee. He describes the relationship that he developed with his employer based upon mutual reciprocity. His career path was fixed and relatively predictable

When I joined the RCMP you were expected to be loyal to that organization – but there was a trade-off - that organization, conversely, was very loyal to you. . . they looked after you – they basically provided me with my education . . . they paid for my undergraduate degree while I was on full salary . . . provided me with all of the training I needed . . . and the experience I needed and basically you had all sorts of opportunities. . .you were promoted up through the ranks. . .so you knew you had a career . . . provided you were prepared to work at it, and had talent for it and persevered.

His talents were being recognized and his career progress was affirming to him

When I joined the RCMP I aspired to be the Commissioner – when I had about 19 years of service, I was in a group that were being 'fast-tracked' for commissions. They put me through university, I went on a one year full time language training, to learn a second language.

While in the RCMP, Kyle is able to complete both a undergraduate and a graduate degree. His attitude toward education shifted dramatically since high school

. . . it wasn't until probably into my late 20's that it started the shift. Once I got involved - I guess my perception of what university was all about changed – my courses weren't all that great – but the graduate courses were interesting . . . I think also an eagerness to learn more.

Unfortunately, a number of incidents caused him to rethink his desire to remain with the police force until retirement. A skewed promotion policy favoring minorities, a large-scale government inquiry into the security services, and ongoing relocations were among the factors that caused him to rethink his career objectives

I describe it as a personal contract was broken – for me I think that, even though you don't have anything in writing or anything like that, an organization that you're working for, you do have that mental-psychological personal contract with them. And it's a very fragile thing, to my mind, and if something happens in the organization, dysfunctional organizational dynamics or that type of thing, that tends to shatter it or break it . . .

It was not an easy decision for Kyle to make after 21 years of loyal service. He went through a long-period of soul-searching and self-examination

So I really, I guess about that period of time, I really went through some significant soul searching, and I asked myself - do I still want this? – and after a lot of soul searching and a lot of discussions with my wife, decided no I didn't.

Once reached, however, he felt confident in his decision. Rather than feel embittered or betrayed, Kyle recognized that the demise of organizational loyalty was simply part of the “changing times”, he waxes philosophic

. . . there is, of course, no more loyalty . . . employer loyalty to the individual – so you become much more, I guess, a company of one – and invest in yourself in terms of your education, your skill set to ensure that you are more competitive . . . There’s been that sort of evolution – but that’s pretty common, I mean, everybody’s been exposed to that and those changing organizational dynamics.

Kyle moved on to a position in the Department of National Defense as a civilian instructor in military leadership and management training and stayed for over 3 years. From there he transferred to a position with the federal public service and was responsible for civilian training and development. After 5 years, he transferred to the BC provincial public service where he is currently employed. Over the past several years, when thinking about the frequency of job changes, he recognizes that he probably becomes easily bored with routine

. . . even with the RCMP I mean it was a changing organization, and when you’re a small detachment, you could be faced with a range of situations in 24 hours. So there was always lots of activities - there was never a chance to get bored. So I guess I’ve been fortunate, because in retrospect, thinking about all the jobs I moved into, I think in a point where I would start to get bored – I moved to something else.

He recognizes that, throughout his career, he has managed to find a job that changed frequently or even move to a new job if he was bored

It's interesting, because a few years ago – I was sitting around thinking ‘ you know I've done this – this is the third time I've done this kind of thing – I don't think I'm going to bring anything new to it – so maybe it's time to move on – why am I feeling so restless?’ Is the age thing – is it the time of year – is it the weather? . . . and I never really sat down and thought about it – till until a couple of years of ago, when you know, I was going through these little restless periods – and you sort of, you know, sharpen up the resume, look around for something else – which is basically what I did.

Kyle attributes his ability to find new challenges – to intuitively navigate through his career – to good fortune and his ability to recognize opportunities - rather than to adept career planning

. . . and in retrospect I've been incredibly lucky – no question about it – I think that I've never been a long-term career planner, maybe the next year or two years - so I think that to the extent that I've been able to recognize an opportunity or a circumstance or a situation as the right one for me – and have been fortunate enough to move down that road and it's worked out quite nicely.

He also recognizes that the degree of his commitment to accept only those opportunities which he finds intrinsically satisfying

I can't think of a particular job that I've ever been in . . . I didn't like – that I didn't thoroughly enjoyed doing, maybe that's me - I don't even go near jobs that don't appeal to me. Work to me is more of an avocation than a source of income or a source of livelihood or something like that. I just couldn't see anybody doing a job they didn't like for any amount.

Kyle feels confident that he can retire without worrying about his financial survival. He plans include the rather traditional retirement activities

Really want to start doing more golfing, I've never been much of a golfer, but the last 3 or 4 years, just felt that I could really become addicted to that game quite easily. I do a lot of fishing now, and plan to do more when I retire. A fair amount of travelling . . . I've been very active in community affairs, that's occupying a lot of our time in the evenings and weekends, we enjoy it – so you know, we'll probably continue to do it. There's charitable work, I'm more active in that – the RCMP veterans are doing a lot of interesting things – so I'll increase my activity there. I fly fish – I'm a member of the fly fishing club – and they're doing a lot of interesting little conservation projects throughout the area around here – I enjoy doing that kind of thing, getting out. I'm starting to think now – yeah it'll be nice - less work and more of these kinds of things.

After formally retiring, he plans to remain active as a consultant. However, he places a number of conditions on his involvement in this activity

I'd like to eventually to start to do some consulting, with smaller organizations, and maybe move into broader organizational development consulting. Again I'll pick my spots – if something is challenging for me and particularly interesting – if not I won't do it – if I don't like the client organization – I won't do it. So I've kept my options open to that kind of thing. . .

Nearing 60 years of age, Kyle is able to look back over his working life with only limited regrets and toward the future with anticipation. He seems to have an incredible ability to, in his terms, recognize the opportunities that befall him. His ability to capitalize on

happenstance rather than proactive planning seems counterintuitive to the notion of career management.

SEAN

Sean was, until recently, employed as a sound-technician/technical director in the theater-arts programme with a local educational institution. On leaving high school, Sean began a four-year apprenticeship programme as an electronics technician. When he became a certified journeyman, he secured employment with a local defense establishment. He liked the position for the opportunity that it provided him to work with interesting and sophisticated technical equipment. However, he had a fundamental value conflict with his employment situation

. . . the idea of working on weapons systems didn't really appeal to me – fixing and modifying engines for killing basically, so that kind of bothered me, also a lot of the people I worked with, had a military background and therefore a military mentality.... so....I found it difficult to be around people like that, every day, or 5 days a week.

This work experience, in part, appears to have provided Sean with an opportunity to discover the structure of his values. That is, he felt distressed about working with weapons of destruction. Within a few years, Sean quit his position in order to launch a career as a musician. He had been a musician since his early childhood and he believed that the timing was right to pursue this new venture. His new career was certainly less than successful. He subsequently moved to Alberta to assume a position as an organ salesman. He quickly recognized that he was not a salesperson. Again, his value structure conflicted with his new line of work

I think I could be a salesman if I really believed in the product – if I had a product that was really good . . . I couldn't sell someone something that I didn't think they should have or that they need or not be beneficial. There's people out there that are salesmen – they'll sell anybody anything, just to make a sale.

He recognized that his firm sense of “fair play” worked against him in his sales careers

. . . just not part of my makeup...it's...I guess I don't like the bullshit – I guess that I like truth. . . I've always had a strong sense of fair play I guess – I always like to consider the other person too - that's something that I see in myself - generally speaking, for most things I tend to look at how the other person might feel or think.

Staving off starvation, Sean returns to his former position with a military contractor.

Again, he confronts the same conflict of values that he experienced previously

. . . eventually a job opened up again . . . I got in circuit board and repair, and I really enjoyed that a lot – but again the working environment, I was back in the military thing, I was in a room that was air-conditioned, no windows – it was sealed off from the outside environment by copper shielding – all fluorescent lighting. . . and again I was working on the war machine.

Eventually, he secured an electronics maintenance position with an educational institution – his current employer. He remained in this position for some 10 years. He resigned in a policy dispute with his manager. He describes the nature of the dispute

I liked him . . . but I really disagreed with the way he managed the shop – he treated us like children to a certain extent – he did certain things that really didn't work well, in my view. . . it really irritated me and I guess it really brought home the idea that it wasn't happening with the way the shop was run. And I had 2 choices – I could live with it or I could quit!

Sean discloses that he has no particular problem with authority, rather, he objected to being treated as an incompetent. Within a few weeks, Sean managed to secure another position with the same educational institution but in a different technical area – sound technical/supervisor. He described his position as one that allowed him greater independence

The appealing thing about this job is that the Technical Director position is fairly autonomous – the person above me is the type of person who lets his staff take care of things – and that really appealed to me, because it meant I could run the shop the way I wanted, I could run the technical aspects the way I wanted. So that worked out really well – I enjoyed it quite a lot.

This experience clarified, for Sean, that he tends to work best in employment situations that allow him to maintain high technical standards. Autonomy, for Sean, it seems, was important because it allowed him to maintain his standards

I don't have a problem with authority – if it agrees with me - with the way I think. If the shop were run properly – I wouldn't have had a problem working in a situation where I felt the shop is run efficiently and sensibly.

Technical competence and conscientious work habits have been important to Sean for most of this life

I was a pretty conscientious worker – I mean I always have been – so I always tried to do the work . . . attitude toward work?... I'm still conscientious – I like to get the job done and do a good job – so that hasn't really changed.

He has discovered that he works best with colleagues who are technically competent or are at least willing to learn

I like working with people who work well on their own – who understand – who are good technicians . . .and if they didn't know something – that's fine – you could tell them and you could explain, and they would understand. What was really frustrating is working with someone who is incompetent, wasn't willing to learn – didn't care about doing a good job. I have some people like that.

Sean recognizes that he becomes frustrated with colleagues or subordinates who are unwilling to work hard

I guess I expect a lot from people – and I feel if they're here to do a job, then they should do their job . . . then if you have to discipline them for being lazy or not showing up on time or that sort of thing.

He recognizes that, on those occasions he expresses his frustration openly, he feels guilty and regretful

I get really upset with myself when I loose my cool, which I do on occasion, or if I say something negative about somebody – afterwards I think about it, and say "ah! I shouldn't have said that" there's no reason,

even though it may be true, there's no reason for me to express it openly. And it's my feelings as well – not necessarily those of someone else.

He was attracted to his current position because it represented a greater opportunity to expand his technical knowledge and expertise

There is other aspects of this job that are very inviting. I have access to a 9-foot concert van in a world-class performance space – how many other sound men can say they do that? That's just an incredible thing! And that's just one aspect of it . . . It's the idea of....I mean I enjoy passing on my knowledge to students – I actually did some teaching in the theatre department in the early days and I enjoyed that and also I enjoyed doing the maintenance, I enjoy that a lot – most people look at me and say "how can you enjoy doing that sort of thing?" . . . I really like working with electronics.

In the past few years, Sean began to realize that there is a growing mismatch between him and the position he had held for some ten years. He states that his health has begun to deteriorate in recent years, particularly his hearing

. . . there's really any one thing that's driving me – health is one issue – my hearing doesn't seem to be as good as it used to be – a lot of the work here is sound – it's impossible for me now to judge the quality of a reinforced sound – be it music or voice, or whatever - so therefore I can't do my job as a sound man

Shortly after my interview with him, Sean resigned his position. He remains employed, on a contractual basis, with his former employer. It is not surprising that Sean would feel compelled to resign this position. He places a high standard on his technical ability which, by his own admission, he can no longer rely upon. In addition, he began to notice

that his ability to physically cope with aspects of the job was decreasing rather substantially

. . . a semi-trailer rolls up to our loading zone and they have a crew of about 8 to 10 – and we unload this vehicle and it's all heavy boxes – and lifting, stuff like that – I used to do that sporadically – it's pretty hard on the body, takes a couple of days to recover – so that's another aspect, I find that I can't deal with that end of it as well.

What is difficult perhaps to appreciate in Sean 's narrative is that he is, in fact, a supervisor, hence, he could delegate this responsibility to subordinates. He states, however, that he prefers to work with his staff rather than direct them

I am not the kind of supervisor who in a sense walks in a space and says "you do that, you do this, you do that" and stand and watch them do it – I am part of the technical crew – always have been – that's the way I prefer it – it always bothers me to stand there and watch other people work.

He recognizes that he had, for sometime, disliked the responsibility inherent in a supervisory position. He avoids, until absolutely necessary, having to reprimand subordinates ("I am not good at discipline"). In addition to his concerns about his health and the physical demands of the job, Sean notices that he was becoming increasingly impatient in the interactions with the clients renting the theater. He discloses his frustration

This is another aspect – I'm frustrated dealing with clients who don't know the industry, the business – and I end up trying to make their show, like they're professionals – you know, they come in and say 'gee we saw this really neat show with lots of lights and fog and it looked great, can you do

this for us?' And why can't you! So there's a lot of frustration there. I can say "yes I can do it for you but it's going to cost you \$1,000 for to track spots. . . 4 hours of technical time with all the spot operators and all of that".

In addition, Sean is feeling pressure from his spouse due his unpredictable schedule. He, as well, would prefer to spend more evenings and weekends at home rather than work. Sean 's solution to the pressures impacting him at this point in his life was to resign. He does not have another secure position at this time, and his plans for the future are rather tentative. He speculates that he may, in fact, capitalize on opportunities in cyberspace

I thought the biggest opportunities right now are in cyberspace – and I don't know, the idea of building up this web store- the potential – having the potential of it becoming fairly large – it's kind of exciting!

He contrasts this venture into cyberspace with his previous sojourn into music and sales. He certainly recognizes the importance of advance planning and a change that has occurred within him

. . . probably back then... um ... I would go at things without thinking about them in depth, whereas now – the idea of building this web thing, I've given it a lot of thought – I'll probably spend of lot of time working at it and developing it, before I actually go for it! Whereas back then, I thought. . . well I would just do it, even though I might not have done a lot of research, I might have just gone for it anyway - I actually quit and went into music – tried to go into music full-time basis – but I really went into it wrong! I should have done a lot more studying..

Sean states he experienced difficulty, over the years, focussing on long-term goals in his life. He believes that he had just “slid” along

*I'm just saying my life . . . everything is . . . just slid along, I guess
I don't think I've really done . . . put a lot of effort into getting a job or . . .
it's been easy for me – it feels like it's been easy for me.*

He perceives this venture as a radical departure from anything he has done before in his life

*The thing I – the most likely thing that I see myself doing is
working for myself and actually thinking about doing something with the
web – probably distribution or sales – that sort of thing – that actually
appeals to me – that idea – and it's such a radical departure from what
I've done, most of my life! And work wise ! It's kind of frightening too!*

Sean looks to moving his life forward. However, he experiences a mixture of great excitement and sincere trepidation when contemplating his future

*The future looks kind of foggy at the moment I can't say that it looks
bright, no – the future . . . it's very much a question mark for me – I can
see it go in a lot of different directions – in extreme – very extreme
different and opposite directions –very easily - no I can't say it looks bright
– there's the potential for it to look bright!*

Although we may never know whether Sean actually develops his business in cyberspace as he anticipates, one is, however, captivated by the notion that Sean is struggling to gain his independence – to act more autonomously. There is a refreshing sincerity about Sean, a earnest struggle to live in accordance with his values and his

desire to “do no harm” to others. Sean is, without doubt, in a period of transition as he struggles to become more than he was, to confront a new challenge in his life.

JAKE

Jake is 66 years old and employed, on a part-time basis, for a local human resource consulting firm. He recently retired from a middle-management position in the public sector having held a very senior post in another provincial government before moving to BC. Jake was born in England and completed an undergraduate degree in Geology there. His ambition was to be a professional geologist. Unfortunately, he failed to attain the academic standing that he was mistakenly told was a requirement for the profession of geologist. His occupational ambitions were put on hold

So it kind of threw me because I was going to be a Geologist but I was given very bad advice by one of my professors who said that, you know, really I shouldn't go into Geology without a good degree. I'd never get a good job. Which wasn't true but he didn't know any better. . . I ended up with a pass degree not an honours degree.

As a consequence, Jake developed an image of himself as a failure within the context of his then current psychological surroundings. His life, to age 21, had been geared toward academic success

And my Mother's reaction was - well, what good's that! You know - I mean nobody in our family had ever had any kind of degree and so, yeah, in that context, in kind of the expectations that other people have of me, I failed.

He admits that this experience had a devastating impact on his then shaky self-confidence. Rather than pursue his geology career any further, he decided to complete his compulsory military service

I had to do two years of national service anyway. Because I wasn't sure what I was going to do next - I mean what I should have done was come to Canada and they'd have pulled me off the train and I'd have been in the oil industry and my whole life would have been different. But that - that's what could have happened.. So I spent three and a half years in the Air Force knowing I didn't want to make a career out of it.

As an educational officer, Jake was rather pleasantly surprised to find that he had a talent for teaching others. The positive comments and above-average ratings he received served to bolster his flagging confidence in his self-worth. As the end of his military service, Jake emigrated to Canada with no guarantee of employment

But then I came to Canada and there was no work. It was '59. It was a depression. I was trying to get a job in Geology. And there was no work for Geologists so, you know, I spent three months - I interviewed sixty companies in Calgary. And so, economically, I was desperate.

To stave off starvation, Jake sought out the services of Canada Manpower. Out of desperation, he accepted a position in sales

Have you ever sold?" I said "No, but I'm awful hungry". So I ended up as a Sales Representative for Texaco. It's a job I absolutely hated. I felt I'd been hired only for my personality and nice smile and there was no intellectual content in it. And, and so here - this is another blow to my self-confidence.

He felt, at the time, that his self-definition was encompassed within his intellectual ability – an asset that he could not use in his sales position.

So, to me, you know, a job without - I mean, my definition, I think, comes from my intellect. It doesn't come from my physique or my ability to build things or whatever. It comes from my mental ability to solve problems.

He continued to perceive himself as a failure. Within a few years, he successfully applied for a position in human resources within the provincial public service. He sensed that he had secured a position that had a future for him. He began to rebuild his self-image

. . . it was a lot of intellectual challenge then because we were doing everything for the first time and - uh - there weren't many people to do it. So, I was in the right place at the right time. I got all the good stuff, and I did it well and I liked it and I got lots of good feedback. So I just, you know, eventually I started to rebuild a picture of myself as - as being a worthwhile person.

Jake was quickly promoted and began to earn an income at least comparable to his friends who were employed as Geologists. He felt, nonetheless, that in the context of the times he had a slow start to his career

And I was still struggling to find a start in life. I didn't really start on a career until I was twenty-seven, almost twenty-eight, I think which in those years was late - it's not now.

He attributes his career turn-around, in part, to a mentor who took the time to challenge him to grow and develop

So then, yeah, and I was getting feedback from [. . .] who was my mentor - who was the guy really that hired me and set me on the path . . . who kept telling me how good I was 'cause he could see that I didn't know how good I was. It was a combination of me proving to myself - of doing good work, having it recognized, proving to myself I can do it and then being told I had. So I just found myself to be more self-assured.

Jake manages to rise to a very senior position within the public sector with the support of a variety of individuals who either coached or challenged him. Unfortunately, Jake had less success resolving a steadily deteriorating marital relationship. This failing relationship greatly distracted from Jake's self image and confidence. He describes his overriding tendency to dwell on his failings

I tended to look back a lot 'cause I kept dwelling on past failures and mistakes. As long I was in that awful marriage, I had this great long litany of failures in my life. You know, I'd failed in school, I'd done this, I couldn't get a job, I'd made an awful marriage, I'd done this, I'd done that, I was this, I was that. And I used to always looking back to what I would have done and. . . reinventing my life in my head.

With a mixture of despair and frustration, Jake ends his long-term marital relationship. In doing so, Jake appears to have brought most aspects of his world into alignment. He stopped "reinventing his life in his head"

Once I got out of the marriage and - and once I met [. . .] and had some jobs which were pretty successful, I just stopped doing that. I don't do it

anymore. Back then I almost used to get obsessed with - with reinventing my life and what I could have done with it.

Jake was able, in effect, to forgive himself and recognize that his was, after all, simply human

Now I look at it and say - well - bullshit! You know, my life wasn't bad, or I haven't handled it too . . . Sure. I screwed up on some things but I did a lot of things well and I -uh - don't look back and try to change it. So that's really a very big difference in my life.

Although pivotal, the memory of this evolutionary change in himself had drifted into the recesses of his mind, to be recalled again in our conversation. It was a point when he stopped "looking back" and started looking to the future

And I'd forgotten that one. I mean it's one I'm really conscious of - but . . . I'd stopped looking back - but I hadn't really thought about it until you asked me that. I really wasn't looking - I didn't look to the future because my future didn't look very good. I was always trying to correct the past.

Once Jake is able to bring his life into alignment, he throws himself into his work. He finds, however, that his work is no longer the source of his esteem or his identity

And then, once I'd out of the marriage, I kind of took off again - for a bit. And I had some good jobs and did some good things and then I came here and none of that really mattered.

Jake finds that he no longer "needs" work to define "who he is". Rather he is now content with being successful as a person rather than as an "older worker"

Once I'd proved to myself - what I did it was because I was successful in other jobs. I - I proved to myself that I could have done all the things that I should have done - if life had been different or - you know, I could have done it. Once I'd proved to myself that I could do it, then I didn't worry about it any more. And that was a fairly gradual thing.

He attributes this shift to “discovering” his identity, his personhood apart from the workplace. He is much more than an employee, a title, or a position in an organization

. . . what's helpful is finding out who I am - uh - because even if I'm not working, I'm still a nice person and I've still got a good analytical mind and all the things I've found out about myself is still there. And, I don't have to prove them to anybody. . . . Work used to be a way to prove them. I could say I'm a this or I'm a that or I'm a Director of this. So it helped establish who I am.

After a slow evolution in how he valued himself, Jake is simply content to be “me” now, to conform to his own expectations rather than “twist himself” to fit the expectations of others

I'm quite happy to be me now. Whereas even ten, fifteen years ago I was, you know, more dissatisfied with myself, or - or didn't fully appreciate what I had that was good, and - and was still trying to . . . I don't try to conform to other people's expectations any more - which is also very liberating.

Although his motives for employment have changed, Jake would like to continue working in the future. He alludes to the vital and perhaps unexpected change that has come to characterize his life

I'd like to [work] as long as I can. Partly because it is interesting, but also because it does provide that extra bit of money which will allow me to do some of the other things. I think the best answer I can give you . . . is the future looks pretty good to me now. But that perhaps I never thought about it enough when I was younger. I never really projected what the future would be like. I never imagined myself being old and saying what's it going to be like. I tended to look back a lot 'cause I kept dwelling on past failures and mistakes. That's a very vital change in me.

He claims that he has not, in any real sense, changed over the years. He still has the same picture of himself. However, it is a picture taken from a different vantage point

But it's a picture I like. That's the difference. I'm quite happy to be me now.

Jake provides us with one of the most articulate recollections of adult development. In doing so, Jake reminds us how difficult it is simply to be human, to recognize that we are not perfect, that we sometimes take ourselves too seriously, that we often confuse our success as individuals with the “external” trappings of careerism, and that we change less in substance than in form. Jake passed away before this study was completed. I spent much time with him in recent months and his “infectious humanness” was both delightful and disarming. I will miss him.

NED

Ned, aged 50, is self-employed as a business consultant specializing in program evaluation. He has had, to this point in time, three rather distinct but nonetheless successful careers. He spent roughly ten years with the Canadian Armed Forces as a

navigator, fifteen years as a counsellor-administrator, and the past five years as a consultant. He recently acquired an MBA. In retrospect, Ned recognizes that the events of his life were unwittingly leading him toward his present career niche

Each one of these phases resulted in a higher level of integration of my own characteristics and what I had acquired from them from the outside world. And I think in many respects it culminated in the awareness of a passion for this thing called research. And that I had a real strong sense of curiosity, that was a complete surprise.

He suggests that in retrospect, he can now understand his sense of unease with his previous work. Having found his niche, he simply stopped questioning if his career was proceeding in the right direction

. . . my assessment of that past history, it helps to explain a sense of unease or discomfort or lack of fulfillment, or something like that, that I was aware that I carried through each of these. It changed. It was modified significantly by each of these experiences for sure. After the experience in Graduate school, kind of put it to rest. Put that aspect of myself to rest. And yeah, I didn't ask - ask the question any more. Just pursued the activity.

For Ned, his range of experiences have taught him to become more focussed, more directed, more selective now than when he was younger. He describes these changes in himself

Probably more directed I guess - more focused on a number of activities as opposed to a whole range of them . . . Probably more confident . . . a better understanding of what it is that I like to do and what it is that I want to do. I'm less ambivalent - less of a tendency to be distracted by

interests or events as they come along just because they happen to be there. So I can select out. I can choose not to participate in things and choose to focus or concentrate and spend more time and energy on other things.

Ned believes that with more life experience and the accumulation of knowledge he has become more aware of himself - of both his strengths and his weaknesses. As a result, he feels much more confident in his ability to control ambivalent situations or circumstances now, than when he was younger

I think another part of that is the development of a level of self-awareness. Becoming more observant of my own behavioral range, for example, my own emotional responses to a situation, my own limitations and sources of fear or anxiety or apprehension or discomfort. I think the self-confidence is a result of the development of that kind of information and experience and awareness.

Ned states that his inner-directedness or confidence was certainly not present in his early years. He describes his experience of growing up in a village in the Maritimes

Having grown up in an environment where the limitations were very significant - and I was very aware of the limitations of growing up in a small community with few material resources and very limited access, at that time, to things like - sources of information, - entertainment - other than, I mean, other than the - the practical or fundamental things that were around which had to do with the environment. Just natural sources of information.

Having accepted the financial support from the military for his undergraduate degree, Ned was obligated to serve six years with that organization. He describes this a very formative experience

One of the early experiences was the realization that I had made a commitment to - in the form of a contract with the Air Force - to go through and finish the degree and then spend six years, you know, flying around in the aircraft. And my initial naïve understanding of what that was going to be like was severely challenged by the realities of the assignments that - that were available and the kind of flying that I was going to be doing and the type of job that I was going to be doing as a crew member. And, it wasn't at all what I had initially envisioned.

Ned finds that although he could perform the science of navigation, he could not find within himself any intrinsic satisfaction or "passion" for the work

I found that the initial training indicated to me that, although I could manage the tasks - I didn't have a passion for the work that I thought I would have. That it wasn't there in the way that I thought it would be. There were many aspects of it that I enjoyed. But I didn't have, as I say, that passion - that sort of drive that I observed and could appreciate in other people in that field.

He failed his final examination as a navigator. Rather than being reassigned to an administrative position, as he had expected, he was instructed to repeat the training course

I did make the decision to accept that, although extremely reluctantly. But in the process found that I carried a lot of bitterness and resentment about how not having gotten my own way. The second course I went

through was really very pleasant, actually. It was quite a different experience and I had a different stature in the place by that time.

Slowly Ned began to recognize that he was beginning to enjoy his fellow crewmembers not for their technical expertise but rather as individuals

I found that during the first posting on the Squadron I'm still carrying this chip on my shoulder and I had some preconceived ideas about the individuals. I came after a certain point to realize that my assessment was really flawed. That I didn't really understand these people at all. I realized that I didn't have any respect for them and it was entirely unwarranted. That they had attributes and skills and knowledge and insight and characteristics that I really - once I got to know what they - once I was willing to let down or let go of my own chip, I could then see who they were as individuals.

As Ned lets go of the "chip on this shoulder", he begins to realize a growing interest in working with people. This interest is highlighted when he is faced with the decision to reenlist or leave the military

From a job point of view, I knew that the best - the better thing for me to do would be to move on. Because I do the work well, like I say, I knew then - it confirmed for me that I didn't have the passion for the - the art of the job in the same way that other people have. I had the passion for working with people and getting people to work together.

Building upon his evolving interest in working with people, Ned shifts his career toward counselling. Again, he recognizes in hindsight that his decision was relatively naïve

My interest was in finding a way to work with people. And I thought that was in counselling. And simply because I had limited information about the possible range of work, you know, with people and I had a kind of preconceived notion of what my strengths were and I had an experience base that I used as a reference which was very limited. I thought well, if I have an interest in this I better go and find out something about it and learn something.

He remained in the child and family counselling profession for some 15 years in a variety of capacities eventually rising to the position of Executive Director of a publicly-funded social service agency. He realized, however, that he was becoming bored

and I found that eventually I got to the point in the counselling business where I was bored. And, it took me a while to realize that I was bored. And I had to make a decision then to either invest significantly more time and energy in - and money and resources in my own training as a counsellor, or, find where, what my interest actually was. And, at that point I got into the supervision aspect of it, or shortly before that, I'd gotten into the supervision aspect of the work. And, then found myself eventually in the position of Executive Director in the organization. And I found - it wasn't until I got to that point that I began to develop an awareness of what that passion was.

Building upon his interest in the organization of work, Ned enrolls in graduate studies in Business Administration although with mixed emotions. To his surprise, however, he “discovers” graduate studies to be the path he was, at some level of his consciousness, searching for

I had played with the idea of graduate school but was very apprehensive about whether I could succeed in that environment. My

undergraduate time . . . was a horrendously painful experience and my performance was mediocre to say the least. . . . found that when I - uh - when I got into graduate school and began to actually study research as a - as a topic, that I had a passion for that that I was completely en route.

He decided, during graduate school, to become a self-employment consultant focussing upon the relationship between the individual and the workplace. In hindsight, Ned has come to understand that his past experiences were, in effect, leading him toward his current path. He finds that he is able to “integrate” the seeming diverse aspects of his life and self. One has the sense that Ned, in listening to his heart, has found meaning in a manner that defies reason and logic – a complete surprise

. . . so there were those three critical points, I think, in my life, that I would use as kind of milestones which indicated a significant change in - in direction. And, when I look back in it . . . the change was moving towards integration, in terms of myself. . . each one of these phases resulted in a higher level of integration of my own - characteristics . . . was a complete surprise.

From this point forward, Ned anticipates that he might be adding new dimension to his life but they will not be more than extrapolations or extensions past experiences and learning

. . . the new dimensions are rooted in the basis . . . in the base of experience that I have acquired. And I find that in that concept of integration is a very significant one for me because the things that I am interested in pursuing now are extensions or extrapolations of what of work I had done and learning I had acquired in other environments in my past experience.

From this more “integrated” position, Ned is able to focus his energy, work more efficiently, and exercise greater control over his life

. . . reduce the overall amount of work that I took responsibility for . . . the impact was like reducing your load by a third. The feeling or the perception is that you're cutting it in half - simply because you're often more efficient. The other decision I made was to become more selective about what kinds of things I worked in. And to make choices to work in areas where I had confidence and that I had a passion for. As opposed to just doing something because it was there and I had some interest in it and it would generate revenue.

It is from within this newly-found vision of his life's work, that Ned is able to define the nature of his work – “doing what I believe to be important”

. . . what I'm doing has much more to do with what I hold to be important and what I believe I have to offer that's of value. And that there is - that what I'm doing is worthwhile - aside from the fact that it generates revenue.

Ned cannot, at this point in his development, separate work from other aspects of his life

But, I don't sort of separate out the work I do from the rest of my life - to any great extent. I make choices to limit the time I spend doing it . . . so that it doesn't become a debilitating exercise. But, I don't see it as being a lesser part of my life in terms of a job. But I would see a job in that way.

A “job” in his view would, in effect, be a lesser part of his life. The work he performs, however, is largely of his creation, hence not a job

My vision of a job is that it's something that somebody else has predetermined. And it's my requirement to operate within those constraints. I see the work I do now as being largely of my own creation.

At this point in his life, Ned envisions himself continuing to get even more satisfaction from his work. The future looks bright from his current vantage point

I'm very optimistic about it. The vision I have for myself is that that I will continue to do what I - what I love doing as long as I want. That I'll continue to get better . . . and that I'll continue to appreciate that kind of satisfaction from the work. And, expect that that will actually deepen with time.

Ned presents a fascinating image of a young man from an impoverished background in rural Nova Scotia, who started his career rather “rudderless”. He learns, however, to listen to his “inner voice”, to distinguish between what he “should do” and what he “feels” is right for him. Paradoxically, he “discovers” his future rather accidentally. His passion for work did not evolve from intense career planning, or from logic and reason, or even from happenstance but rather from a “sense of unease” with the present, and a “strong sense of curiosity” about the self.

RON

Ron, aged 50, is employed as a real-estate agent with a small, independent firm. Ron described himself as a “typical guy” unsure at first of what vocation he might want to pursue. He describes himself as “a bit of a late bloomer”

. . . at 20 I didn't know whether I was going to go into higher education – so I was a bit of a late bloomer as far as that goes – so at 20, I wasn't quite sure where I wanted to go . . .

After graduating from high school, Ron worked for a period before entering college. He realizes that he was not ready for academia or, alternately academia was not ready for him

I guess, when I was going to school, I was in my second year at Camosun, I was taking my first two years of higher education – and was going to be a psychologist! I guess what happened for me is that I looked around...I had one Prof. who was obviously teaching psychology, and I wanted to be a psychologist ...I was getting concerned that I was not going where I wanted to go, as far as some of their . . . perhaps their idiosyncrasies – one fellow I felt had been affected greatly by his work over the years– and I started to question that!

He wanted to “do something” but was unsure of what “it” might be

I think I always wanted to get into some kind of selling, because I enjoyed people. Have always been involved – even when I was 16 or 17, I worked for Coca Cola Canada . . .

He had an opportunity to “go into real estate” on a temporary basis. He found it to be the niche he was looking for,

. . . and once I got into real estate and found my niche, I stayed there. So I did a correction of, or rather a change of course, and not necessarily a correction, when I was about 23 or 24. That sort of, I guess that sort of influenced – I could have maybe gone on to become an academic but I didn't, I ended up going into sales.

He finds that he is successful in real estate, and felt that he had found a comfortable place for himself, a place where he felt involved

I was very fortunate when I was very successful very quickly. Within 6 months I had got some awards and gone on some trips – and I was being financially rewarded – so I felt that that's.. you know... a place where I wanted to be, and I was being involved ...and a place where I was comfortable in...and I wasn't sure if I went back into the academic world would I be as comfortable or would it be as lucrative, or if I would enjoy it as much.

Ron disclosed that he felt a tremendous sense of responsibility to the people to whom he was providing services

. . . and realizing it's the largest investment people are going to make, I'll have an input into that – from a work standpoint and realizing that I better know what I'm talking about! I was 25 when I got into the business . . . , and people that are twice your age are asking your advice on situations that constitute at least at that time, 3 or 4 or 5 times their yearly income – and they're asking you for decisions on that – so I had to know what I was doing – so I worked very hard to learn the business

Some 25 years later, he still really enjoys his “work” and it assures him a life-style that he might not otherwise have – “to have the proper mix in his life”. Foremost, in his mind, his work has provided him an opportunity to become the primary-caregiver to his two growing children

I spent a lot of time with the kids, I didn't work between 3 and 5 everyday they were in school – so I picked them up, spent time together, did a lot of things because sometimes on evenings and weekends I wasn't around – so we made up for it – so I didn't book an appointment between 3 and 5. The kids are now getting a little more self-sufficient, they don't want mom and dad there all the time - but I think, the mix now is where I want it to be and if it isn't, then I adjust it – and so we have Saturdays . . . Saturdays are sort of family days and those days maybe going to a soccer game here and a soccer game there – it's what we do as a family, as a unit, and I think that's really important.

In addition, his “work” offers him an opportunity, although currently limited, to remain involved in his community both as a member of a service club and as a parent-coach

...have been, until recently, a member of Kinsmen... I have been involved in that a lot – I don't have a lot of hobbies – if I have more time, I would like to play golf – and I play golf occasionally, but it's just too time consuming ... do a little sailing, not nearly enough! But then again, all these things take time, and I've really devoted a lot of that spare time to the kids right now – I think we're a couple of years away from them – sort of needing a lot of time – they will be out with their friends a lot.

Through Kinsmen yeah, I do my community involvement with kids, more or less – I coach a team in the night league to help with a basketball

team, I help out with a soccer team, I also help with a school team, the elementary school in the area – so I do... my involvement, I guess is through my kids and helping other kids.

Again, Ron perceives his “work” both as an opportunity to provide, what he perceives to be, a valuable service as well as to exercise greater control over his life-style

I enjoy helping people out – I enjoy the adrenaline pump of putting it all together – I enjoy the aspect of my job, particularly, you can work as little or as much as you want and your destiny is really in your own hands.

Most of all, his work is a source of great intrinsic pleasure and an opportunity to develop long-lasting friendships with customers and associates

I really enjoy my work – so it's fun! I mean, I went to the office this morning and chatted with a friend of mine at the office, kibitzed.... A lot of my relationships have developed through work – through other realtors – through clients who became some my closest friends whom I met through business and we really hit it off – certainly not all of my clients come to my house for dinners, but I have a lot of people I have met, which I found interesting and developed a relationship with, a friendship with.

Ron has worked hard as a salesperson and has met with financial success. His early financial success has allowed him the option of early retirement

. . .when I want to retire, and what I want to I'll do when I retire, and financial goals are pretty close to being realized in that plan – the timeline...so overall as long as health holds out . . . we'll be fine. . . . I've always had a plan – my essential plan was, not to retire at 45 but to be able to retire at 45 – and I was right on track to do that.

Ron appears to have managed to integrate his “work” into a life-style that provides him with the opportunity to enjoy his family, to develop meaningful relationships, to remain involved in his community, and to provide for early retirement. On the surface, it appears that Ron has been most fortunate to find an occupational calling literally that ‘fit’ for him. On another level, however, Ron seems to have listened to his own inner voice rather than to look outward for direction and approval

I wouldn't say written my own ticket, but I directed myself more than anything else – I've been more inward-looking, taking that path than looking at someone else to show me the way.

Indeed, it appears to be the overwhelming desire for self-sufficiency, or inner-directness that has allowed him to both define and control his life-style

I haven't got a corporate mentality, I wouldn't have a manager dictating what I do, I wouldn't respond well to something like that – I've been in that position early in my life and didn't enjoy that very much! Especially when I felt I was more competent than the manager – so I knew he wasn't going to retire at 28 years old to get out of my way – and he wasn't going to let me climb over, so that's why I decided that I would go back to school and get into a line of work where I would be a little more self-employed for the most part.

Ron finds himself “hard pressed” to see himself as much different now than what he was like at age 20 years

. . . like I say, a few pounds heavier, a few hairs lighter. You know, I think probably at 28 I had my sort of course charted to a certain degree –

obviously again, other than for the family aspect which wasn't rally charted – I mean I never decided I was going to get married – I certainly met the right lady and certain circumstances happened – but I don't see myself too much different - so you know, it's almost as your original question – how are you different at 50 than you at 20 . . . I found it hard to come up with a tangible thing.

In reviewing Ron's career, one wonders what constellation of events might have come together for an individual, at such a young age, to listen with confidence to their inner voice, to set their own gyroscope. More surprising, however, is his ability look back over his career and feel confident that, for the most part, he has generally made the right decisions.

ETHAN

At 68 years of age, Ethan is the owner-manager of a small barbershop. He grew up in a working-class family in southern England. He started work at age fifteen as an apprentice/journeyman upholsterer with the British Railway. At 22, after completing two years of compulsory military service, Ethan set about to "see the world". He was employed for many years as a crewmember on a cargo vessel and traveled to most countries in the world. Then he "grew-up"

I had no intention of settling down and getting married, I just wanted to see the world - which I was fortunate enough to see most of it Then I matured. I think I matured at the age of twenty-nine. And then I felt serious - more serious about family and life in general, I guess.

Ethan trained as a barber, married and started employment in a barbershop. Up to that point in this life, Ethan states that money was never particularly important to him. However, after marriage at age 29 he began to be more serious about his future. He suggests that, in England at the time, it was increasingly difficult to purchase property or own your own business. As a result, he immigrated to Canada, to provide better opportunities for himself and his family

I got married - I had the two boys and that's why we immigrated to Canada - to improve my family's life and give our boys a better opportunity. And, I think it has. I don't think I would have had my own business in England.

After immigrating to Canada in 1973, Ethan was employed for a short period in a barbershop in Saskatoon. He describes his decision to take more control of his destiny

I struggled. When I first came to Canada . . . I think haircuts then were \$2.50 . . . and the highest pay day for me was \$14 on a Saturday. And I had two boys - six and two. And, I said to my wife, I had an opportunity saying that this barbershop was coming up for sale, and I said to my wife, you know, I'd like to buy it because I'd like to be in charge of my own destiny. Because at this shop, I could see no future. . . and so I bought it and it was successful.

Ethan recognizes that entrepreneurship is not for everyone. It requires, in his opinion, greater dedication than employment

You know, people may have been working for somebody and they've been able to go out fishing every weekend and take their two weeks holiday and go camping - whatever - get away from it. But, when you go

into business you've got to be prepared to give up that. . . . but you've got to work to give yourself a job. You're buying a job, in other words. And you hope that you'll be able to keep and the future will build and maybe a retirement plan for you.

Ethan has never been worried by the thought of maintaining a small business that is often affected by the ebb and flow of the business cycle. He states that he simply sets realistic expectations for himself and maintains a sense of humor and a positive attitude

I think it's probably the British way of growing up. I think you'll find that with every country that - any province in Canada that's had adversity. They look on - they'll have a sense of humor. I found that with Newfoundlanders. They've had a lot of disasters in their history . . . fishing and boating. . . keeps your sense of humor and it keeps you going. I think I'm positive. There's always - there's one door shuts and another one opens. Another saying - I believe in that. Every cloud has a silver lining. We - we live by those sayings, actually.

For whatever reason, Ethan has managed to maintain an incredible level of confidence in his ability to survive and prosper. A few years ago, his youngest son enrolled in a college program on the West Coast. Ethan has always envisioned retiring in this location and, rather than wait until then, he moved early. He describes the decision process

The reason we came here was we had confidence that we could get on and something would come up. And, we had been out here before on holiday and my wife and I decided this is where we'd like to retire some day. But this came up and she said, "Well, what are we waiting for? Why wait around - there's just the two of us now. Why don't we move now. I

can get a job there. You can get a job." And that's how we approached it. Jump on the opportunity when you see it.

Ethan discloses a incredible confidence in his ability to survive. He earnestly believes that he can turn around most difficult situations that might engender worry in most other people

I've never been a worrier. I've been in situations in life - that maybe another person would have worried about but . . . I've always been confident and felt that I will go out and change it.. I will go and get work and I don't care what I do, you know. There's a lot of people like that but, they just don't get up and do it.

In retrospect, Ethan attributes his intense satisfaction with his life to his ability to maintain a focus upon what is important to him

...appreciating things and people. And, I think that's mainly what I've found, is that - that I've appreciated life more - I think in most older people do, as a rule - they appreciate what they have achieved and don't be greedy for what they haven't got, you know. I think sometimes you've got to make the best of what - what's there at the time - and that's how I've lived my life. I think being brought up during the war when we had nothing - and we just made the best of what we had.

He attributes his personal success, in part, to his ability to develop positive and mutually supportive relationships with other people ("the luck of being able to get along with people"). He discovered this personal asset when he started barber school

I think it was - it sort of hit me that - I like to think that I had a personality that people - and people have told me so many times is - you make it so easy to have conversation with people. And, you are a people person and you come across - your personality comes across - it might not be conversation but - and always remembered, too, that I always had a smile on my face. And, that was very important, I mean, I think. But also a teacher told me once when I was a kid, "Be careful with that smile. That smile's going to get you into trouble."

In addition, Ethan believes that his religious values and his life-long membership in a fraternal organization have both served to remind him of how to treat other people ("I believe in treating people the way you want to be treated yourself"). He finds it easy to develop close and personal relationships with most of his customers. He respects the importance of these relationships

Yes. It is. I was told by a Doctor once that - an MD . . . that a barber has a closer relationship with customers than what he does with his patients. Because they get to know him personally and they're actually hands-on all the time.

It is the quality of relationships with his customers that Ethan has sought so earnestly to maintain throughout his work as a barber

I think that I'm fortunate enough to be the owner so that I can spend more time talking to people. And, I find that I can spend more time with them and, if a person is willing to spend time, fine. I'm not go, go, go like I used to be. If a person - if you have people waiting - I don't hurry - but I've always remembered, and I emphasize it to the people that work for me is that the person you've got in the chair is the only customer you've got -

and you treat him as such. And, in other words, you want him to come back. It's not a production line.

Many of his customers have, over the years, become friends

You know, the work in the work force when I started out - you saw them at work - not socially. In my position now I see a few of them socially - my customers. And, it's pretty - I feel to have good relationships, good understanding with each other and, you know, my customers help me out, I help my customers - it's been that sort of . . . relationship.

When asked to describe what role work plays in his life, Ethan has difficulty distinguishing between work and "not-work"

The job that I'm doing is important to me because I enjoy doing it. I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I didn't work. I'm a people person, I would have to be with people if I wasn't working. So that means sitting in the mall having coffee with your friends and as long as I've got my business and they can come in here and we do the same thing and I get paid for it... I go to work for the enjoyment.

Ethan shows little concern about his future because, it seems, he again is not worried

I'm not worried about my future. I know my wife is going to be OK. Money has never been a big problem with me. I - It's not - I've never had it so - what I haven't had, I never miss. (chuckle) I like a comfortable life. I like a few little toys but I've got one car - that's all I want, you know. I've got a house.

Ethan is the oldest respondent in the study and has the least years of formal education. He is, however, one of the most disarmingly charming. His speech is filled with family “homilies” that seem to have guided his life. He coaches soccer, is actively involved in charity work, and takes delight in his time with his granddaughters. Perhaps what is most delightful is his ability to cope with the changes in his life. He immigrated to this country on the full expectation that he would not only survive but also prosper. Ethan’s life has been prosperous but not in material terms – he has time for his family, for his community, and for his friends. He has managed to move beyond “earning his daily bread” to a place where “work is no longer work”. It is an opportunity to provide a good service and, above all, simply to be with people. He is after all, a “people person”.

DEAN

At the age of 53, Dean is biding his time until he qualifies for early retirement. Dean has been employed for over twenty-years as a human resource practitioner within the public sector. His relationship with his employer has, in recent years, become increasingly tenuous. He administers programs that he knows are inherently unfair and often internally contradictory. He has faced a number of involuntary job changes, usually following downsizing or reorganization. On one occasion, he has been dismissed from a position. He describes how the last round of changes negatively impacted him and others in the organization

. . . during the last one, the most negative – the [ministry] changeover – and speaking in the broader sense and not just specific to myself, it became somewhat of a game at the top management, creating this new world order, in a very pompous, secretive and selective manner that triggered anxiety at the very least with just about everybody in that

particular ministry – after the dust all settled a lot of changes – but everyone was landing on their feet – and that to me was almost criminal in the way they went about it – but so be it!

He fully recognizes that within the current organizational climate of the public service, he is less than motivated to expend what is required to develop his “career”. He recognizes, at this point in his working life, that his employer is disinterested in developing employees or even acknowledging their efforts

Yes, strokes would be nice to have but I never expect them and ironically you rarely get them – and that’s exactly it. . . if there was a time I was more driven by need for approval, it got dampened. . . just with experiences, knowing that no matter how you tried to do it, the work culture the way we have it now, gives lip-service to a it to a very, very limited degree.

Dean confesses that with the prospect of early retirement in mind, he can afford to take a more detached view of his work environment

I don’t have that worry now – and in fact now with the rule “85” I don’t give a shit what they do! Because I’ve now got to the point where I don’t need to concern myself with employment – it would be nice to get more money – but I don’t have to panic on it!

Although he would prefer the opportunity to make changes in the workplace, he appears to stop short of becoming frustrated or angry about his inability to make a difference. Rather he seems to have adopted a more philosophical approach to his work environment – you can feel sorry for yourself or you can simply move on

I remember something like if you get lemons in your life, you make lemonade' that kind of.... And that wasn't part of my upbringing – but it's those kinds of things – and then it's just watching other people – usually family, and seeing how they handle their hardships – you can feel sorry for yourself, or you can move on! And so I'm fortunate that way.

And in doing so, he has simply refused to be “traumatized” by the unpredictable and constant changes. As long as he can ‘land on his feet’, he likely can maintain his detached, philosophical approach. Despite the seeming turmoil, Dean derives something of meaning for himself. He argues that because he is a curious individual, the constant exposure to change provides something of value to him

The changes. . . the multitude of changes in terms of career path. . . while it didn't give me more money – it gave me, I'm a curious individual – so any exposure to something new is of value – so in the long and short of it – some blips ... oh hell, here we go again . . . then reorganize, then I suddenly have to take charge of my career again .. but that was just a blip, as opposed to kind of trauma, or whatever . . . the closest to trauma would have been getting fired – you still land on your feet but to me, I viewed it and treated it as such.

Indeed, he recognizes in himself a marked tendency to become bored with the routine of a particular position. He recognizes a pattern of predictable cycles wherein most jobs become boring and predictable. As a result, the changes that he has experienced – often involuntarily - have been more than welcomed

The longest I've stayed at a job was seven years, in the last two to three of those years, I was bored silly - just absolutely, utterly bored silly. The world, luckily changed for me, then, not but my own step – but I knew it was coming – a year plus, I knew it was coming, so I welcomed it – so ...

prior to that, and after that, there is no time that I stayed any longer than that – I didn't count that, but probably no longer than 4 years in one place, sometimes accidental re-organization pressed me into a new area – sometimes there was a job opportunity that I moved to.

In addition to the cycling between periods of creativity and boredom, Dean recognizes an annual or even weekly ebb and flow in his level of productivity. He suggests that his work style is neither good nor bad but rather a 'reality' that he must accept

. . . cyclic ... and I've recognized this for a long time – there are times that I can focus and be extremely productive, creative ...whenever I need to be – and then there are other times that I'll float, and float quite deliberately . . . the Monday/Friday phenomenon – I've been fascinated by that, and have tried to change it – but there's absolutely nothing in my head on Monday - and on Friday, I'm okay. I suspect, no I don't suspect, I know that Fall is a better time – and sometimes in the late Winter or Spring that is better for me – and I've recognized that – and I don't adjust to it - because you can't really do that!

Dean appears to have literally created for himself a good "fit" between his own idiosyncratic personality style and the organization. The irrational and unplanned changes within the organization, as he perceives it, tend to fit with his low threshold for boredom. Further, the impersonal, change-driven nature of the large organization tends to fit with his desire to sometime be creative and to sometimes simply "float".

Rather than awaiting the "strokes" from his employer, Dean states that he has become quite capable of defining his own self-worth. He recognizes that he must provide his own "strokes" by learning to value his achievements in his own terms rather than how others might define his worth

To me it is the achievements that you personally gained. The achievements that happened your way that were the important things. Going back to university was quite a big deal – failed high school and all those kinds of things – so going back and then having success there was extremely worthwhile – having the family – moving to an island, because it was part of the agenda . . . but hey here it is! I made it to an island, I'm living on an island

In addition, Dean finds value or “meaning” in a less than supportive work environment by improving the quality of his relationships in the workplace

I look for relationships within the work setting and over a period of time you find people who either right away or over a period of time - you build on relationships, on interactions that have worked, and you just carry on with that. . . It's fun! It's meaningful, it's beneficial, it has a purpose, it's a big element in my life.

The quality of interpersonal relationships are for Dean mutually beneficial, possess inherent meaning, and infuse his life with a larger purpose. In looking toward steadily improving his relationships with other people, Dean redefines his daily work. It is not a fixed set of tasks for which his employer is likely to compensate him or ever recognize

. . . in terms of the outcomes – it's a value or a fundamental – I do believe if you're enjoying yourself at work – you're better at everything you do! Everything else follows from that – and if you're not enjoying yourself at work, more than likely, other people around you are not enjoying themselves to the same degree that they could – and everything else is not as productive.

His ability to cultivate relationships is an asset that Dean feels he has probably possessed most of his life but only recently has begun to recognize and value. He recognizes within himself an intuitive ability to understand the organizational dynamics of a work unit

I've always thought of myself having a sense. . . of walking into an area and really in a fairly quick way getting a sense of how a work environment is functioning . . . I think sensitivities to people . . . the dynamics in those kinds of issues . . . more in the last few years. . . accepting that as a reality . . . it's more developing a theme that was already there but you never paid much attention to it!

Dean recalls a friendship earlier in his life that becomes, for him, a relevant metaphor for how he constructs relationships. Within relationships one strives to challenge another person not to defeat them to enable them to become better or more than they were. In doing so, Dean finds both purpose in his life and comfort in his relationships

. . . when I was in my teens, in my younger teens, there was another chap and myself we were learning tennis. . . and we would just volley back and forth, without trying to beat the other person, we would try and make it more difficult – back and forth, back and forth – and it became to me almost a symbol... a process...of doing better all the time, without trying to beat the other person, we were trying to make it more difficult for each other – but in that process we were both getting better. So when I look at relationships at work, that's what I try to do – I try to make it better – and how that works out is some people understand, either intuitively or just by accident of life, that that's a good way to work. You try constantly to make things better for each other – that's something that I think I can say with a fair degree of certainty.

For Dean, the process of making it better provides meaning to his life – making it better. Although it might reduce interpersonal conflict, his actual purpose is much more fundamental

I think, by consequence it minimizes your problems – but that's not the focus, you're trying to make things better – and so there's always going to be problems. . . .It makes for it a good day at work – just a good day at work.

Dean finds the experience of solving unusual or difficult problems, ones that his colleagues might find tiresome or outside of their job scope, personally rewarding. He actively seeks out the more challenging assignments

There's always, on occasion, not regularly, and people will come in and have these unusual problems – I will find their solution for them – and help them over and above what they really needed – what they thought they needed – or that they. . . just make their unusual request work, because I saw some value in that – that to me is rewarding! And there are no real thanks, but you know that there's nobody else in that office that would help them that way. Partially because some are unwilling, but some are without the knowledge – and some are just too busy or too bureaucratic, so they don't do it! Those kinds of things I find very personally rewarding.

His desire to help people with unusual problems provides another illustration of how an individual can find significance or personal meaning in work-related activities that were neither formally assigned nor ultimately acknowledged by an employer. By defining what is of intrinsic value to him, Dean tries to infuse his work with personal significance

and reward. Dean recognizes that his detached, philosophical stance toward the workplace (“just have a good day at work”) reflects the wisdom of experience

I think, the benefit of the philosophy, and the consistency in which I try to go that way, is more stable now than when I was younger. And then there were other things that drive you, you do have your sense of ambition, you do want to get ahead - so your focus then is not so much the betterment...

Dean believes that he has grown past the competitive striving of youth. He found that it detracted from relationships and created unnecessary stress for himself

. . . the competitiveness has been deliberately deleted - lessened - I still like to do well, and on occasion it would be really great to get paid much higher! . . . I know that I deliberately worked on stress management and getting less concerned with life – now I suppose when you reflect on that. . . when you're younger you have those kinds of anxieties, I suppose in some respects. I knew an awful lot more then than I do now.

Dean discloses that in addition to becoming less competitive and upwardly striving, his mellower, Zen-like detachment has reduced conflict in his life. He finds that with age he has become more reflective and perhaps more strategic

I can't think of an incident, but I know I handle the issues of demands and pressures in a much better way. I will plan and think out a process as opposed to reacting and then finding that process or plan. So I'm a little more reflective beforehand and in younger years, I would be more energetic and just going for it, and not necessarily going the right direction – ending up usually, hopefully in the right direction but not as efficient or as effective in terms of the initial step to the end result.

He recognizes, in addition, that he is less prepared at this point in his life to work with people he simply does not like

I like to work with just about everybody but I'm sure not interested any longer in working with people that I don't like any more . . . you sometimes put up with people and it really is 'good bye and thank you very much' don't bother me. . that's the negative reaction to those kinds of circumstances... I will avoid people that I don't like – and in a work situation that becomes a little difficult sometimes you wouldn't even have guessed that you would be this way five or ten years ago, but what I do know now, is that if there is someone that comes along and doesn't rub right, I'm not going to waste my time, I'm not going to try to figure them out!.... and work at a relationship, unless it's absolutely and utterly unavoidable.

In addition, to his lessening desire to “relate to every turkey that comes along”, Dean perceives himself as less impacted by negative feedback from others. He is able to place negative feedback from his environment in a broader perspective now compared to his younger years

. . . it is useful information and I mean it in the total sense, it means what you say that about me as opposed to something specific coming across and taking it apart - I would have been taking the words and the negative parts to heart – now I look at the whole picture and kind of wonder ' well I wonder he's saying that?' That's nice, I think it's that level that we all, that most I hope, that we really don't give a shit any more!

Dean acknowledges, in hindsight, that he has made the “wrong” career decision and that he is probably more suited to another line of work

The career planning would have been to change... from what I'm doing now to something totally different.

When asked how he might have changed his life given the opportunity, he provides a reasonably clear vision

I imagine I would be doing exactly what you're doing - that would one thing. If it happened that life allowed or I had the courage or that opportunity at a younger time, I would be training. . . I would be facilitating, I would be a consultant . . . would be on my own but working as an associate, or something like that - or again. . . go back to medical school. . There is a whole host of other avenues to take. . . and I would never get myself into [this situation].

Rather than blame others or circumstances, he accepts responsibility for his decision not to have changed occupations earlier in this career.

. . . life's circumstances – family, maybe lack of courage, or opportunity or whatever at the time, when we reflect back, you should have done it – but that's hindsight thing!

He accepts that perhaps he found his “calling” too late in life. To change career paths might simply created more trauma for him at this stage in his life – he has gone beyond the ‘time’ when he could cope with that significant a change in his working life

Something along that line – but you do get in, this if both a cliché and real, you get into the point, where you've invested so much into a career, and the trauma, and it would be a literal trauma from where you are

sitting, at that moment in time, to break into that and go out and look for another major change job, which means at a much lower salary, on and on, that kind of thing – and I think the insight of my skills and abilities, came at a time when I had gone beyond that point.

Although he may not have found 'passion' in his work, Dean has made the experience meaningful for himself for many years. The actual job he has performed is simply a source of income ("... the work becomes dispassionate, something you can do, good at it, it's an income, it provides you with some travel times, skiing times...."). He plans on pursuing his interests in facilitating or helping people in his retirement

I still will select, on occasion, a new learning opportunity – either during my holidays or that it fits in relatively well in the evenings – Not as much as I have in the past, and I'm relatively certain that I'll be doing a lot more of that when I retire – learning new things, doing new things – different things.

CHAPTER 5: THE OLDER WORKER'S EXPERIENCE OF AGING

This chapter presents the results of the analyses of the interviews with the respondents. It is organized according to the major themes and subthemes identified during the analysis stage of the research study. There are four major themes, *Continuity over the Lifespan*, *The Experience of Work in Later Life*, *Relationships in the Workplace and Beyond*, and *Development Over the Lifespan*. Each theme is further divided into subthemes (13 in total). The themes and subthemes “discovered” in this study include:

THEME: CONTINUITY OVER THE LIFESPAN

Subtheme: The Experience of Aging

Subtheme: Controlling the Impact of Aging

Subtheme: Adaptive Competence

THEME: THE EXPERIENCE OF WORK IN LATER LIFE

Subtheme: Constructing the Workplace

Subtheme: In Quest of One's Own Work

Subtheme: Taking the Long Way Home

THEME: RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE AND BEYOND

Subtheme: I Get By With a Little Help From My Friends

Subtheme: Will you Still Need Me, When I'm 64

Subtheme: The Joy of Mentoring

Subtheme: Getting Better All the Time

THEME: DEVELOPMENT OVER THE LIFESPAN

Subtheme: I Know Who I am Now

Subtheme: Variations in Adult Development

Each theme and subtheme are discussed and, where appropriate, related to the relevant literature.

THEME: CONTINUITY OVER THE LIFESPAN

This section of the chapter focuses upon how the respondents in this study described their experience of aging itself, their attempts to ameliorate the physical and psychological impact of aging, and what practical strategies they have adopted to compensate for the cumulative effects of chronological time. The results have implications for how we demarcate the population of older workers from the remainder of the workplace, the importance of one's "felt" ability to exercise control of physical aging, and the ability of older workers to adapt to internal and external changes in their lives.

Subtheme: The Experience Of Aging

One of the main focuses of this study was to gain a more refined understanding of what changes older workers might observe in themselves over the course of their working lives. To this end, the semi-structured interview sought to determine along what work-related dimensions the respondents perceived the most significant changes within themselves as a result of aging. Specifically, they were asked to identify any differences

they had noted in their work attitudes, skills and performance at this point in their life as compared to some earlier point(s) in their lives.

Many of the respondents, although accepting that the aging process itself has created changes in their day-to-day lives, tended to perceive themselves, at some core level of their being, as essentially the same person. Age, in Kyle's perception, is simply a "state of mind". Although he acknowledges he has aged "chronologically", he believes that he continues to be the same person as when he first entered the workforce.

You never notice it . . . It is just a state of mind . . . you have chronological age and then you have the internal perception of who you are and how old you are – age doesn't enter into it. It's not something I think about . . . it has never really been an issue. I think who I am would probably be who I would be regardless of my age.

Kyle cites examples of the differences among acquaintances in their perception of chronological age, or "states of mind"

I know people who I've met that were exceptionally young at 90 – there is a woman at our church that was nominated for Women of Distinction award for this year. Just active – go - go- go – exceptionally young at heart, and I've known people in their 20's who were almost dead – they were so old.

Ned, like Kyle, believes that chronological age is not a defining characteristic of his being. The concept of aging tends to lie just outside of his consciousness – recalled when someone "out there" draws his attention to it

Age is not a characteristic or an aspect of myself that I pay much attention to. Oftentimes if somebody asks me how old I am, I have to stop and think . . . because I don't pay much attention to it. It's just . . . it's just there.

Ron, in fact, struggled with the interview question and wondered if he was alone in his confusion.

Do people see any differences? I was a little hard pressed to . . . maybe that's a common reaction among people . . . but I found it very . . . what would they see? I guess it [age] is always a thing . . . but I found it a very difficult question

Jake is, in fact, surprised that other people have from-time-to-time perceived him as aging. He states, somewhat tongue-in-cheek

I am still twenty-one. Next question. . . I am always at a bit taken aback when people refer to me as old. Although, they don't very much. Because I never felt old and I still don't. I realize that people who don't know me and look at me would sort of think I am, 'cause I'm now starting to look old.

Why do these respondents so adamantly insist that they are the “same person” despite acknowledging the reality of their own aging? They readily acknowledge that their children are grown, their hair is graying, and they are perhaps less physically resilient at this point in their life. At the same time, however, they tend to perceive “self” as relatively unchanged or continuous over their lifespan. Indeed, despite their many years of diverse experiences, the differences in their occupations, and the inevitable strains and stresses of their respective workplaces, these respondents perceive themselves, at

some level of their being, as “still twenty-one”. Kyle, for instance, suggests that he does not perceive a particularly significant difference in himself from when he first entered the workforce

I can't think of any significant changes in . . . personality . . . my values . . . by and large, they have remained relatively intact just about all of my working life.

Excerpts from Ron, Dean, and Ethan respectively would confirm this observation

I think the changes are probably a little more mature . . . it's just a simple aging process. I don't see a tremendous change . . . in fact, when I went to my 30th year reunion, everyone said “hey you are just the same”.

So I suppose the only difference would be . . . a sense of responsibility has lessened. I would imagine that would be the biggest factor. Other than that, I don't think I've changed all that much – in other ways.

The only difference is there when you look in the mirror every morning to shave. But in your mind nothing has changed.

A plausible explanation for these counterintuitive observations has been forwarded by constructivist developmental psychology. This perspective, in essence, suggests that human beings actively create their own particular reality to which they in turn respond. Reality is structured, or organized from the “stuff” of day-to-day experience and represents an ongoing, interactive relationship between the self and the outside world. According to Piaget (Crain, 1980; Kegan, 1994), humans use three basic functions to organize their experience – assimilation, accommodation, and organization.

In the process of organizing one's experience, the individuals must assimilate novel experiences into their existing cognitive structures, or organizing frameworks. If, however, new experiences do not quite fit into the existing structures, then the individuals will accommodate, or change their existing fashion of constructing their experience. Is it possible that Kyle, Ron, and Jake, for example, have been particularly adept at both assimilating and accommodating to the changes brought about by their chronological aging? That is, they may have been able to assimilate new experiences into their day-to-day working lives in such a way that has allowed them to maintain a consistent image of themselves across the course of their working lives. Not until there is a time when their ability to assimilate new experiences is overwhelmed will these older workers, in fact, begin to literally experience themselves as aging.

Baltes and Baltes (1990), alternatively, have suggested that human development, at any life period, reflects a dynamic interplay between gains and losses. Although one may have less physical energy to expend they might, in turn, waste less energy solving problems because they have a greater repertoire of proven experience on which to draw. Alternately, an older person may gain a more philosophical, or big picture view of events, hence, gaining what is traditionally termed "wisdom". Therefore, older persons may, in fact, perceive the losses and gains associated with aging as, on balance negating each other, leaving them relatively unchanged. Further, our culture has a particularly negative view of aging and an inherent expectation that losses inevitably exceed gains over time. As one ages, they discover that the losses they expected are, in fact, controllable, even perhaps, desirable, hence their conception of what is "old" changes, or is modified.

Guidano (1995b) suggests how is it possible that the respondents, who throughout the transcripts, describe the breadth and depth of changes that they have undergone over the course of their working lives also adamantly insist that they have remained “just the same”. He argues that these respondents have “reordered” their experiences over time in order to make them more internally consistent. That is, over time these respondents, by means of the *I – me* self dynamic, have tended to amplify those experiences consistent with their perception of themselves (*me*) while inhibiting discrepant experiences (*not me*). Perhaps the interview questions themselves may have triggered a form of emotional denial of aging. Indeed, the ability to manipulate immediate experiencing while self-referencing and reordering is integral to emotional well-being. In other words, no self-awareness is viable without a necessary level of self-deception. At the same time, however, the knowledge structures of these respondents have become considerably more sophisticated and elaborate over time. As a result, they are able to perceive “self” within an increasingly broader context – one that allows for greater variations and even contradictions. Guidano (1995a) describes individual life span development as a “hologenic progression”- that is, an open-ended, spiraling process in which the ongoing reordering of self (*I – me* dynamic) results in the emergence of more structured and integrated patterns of internal complexity – order through fluctuation. Thus, from an external perspective, these respondents have experienced considerable fluctuation in their lives whereas, from an internal perspective, their ever more complex knowledge structures have expanded to incorporate these changes - the more things change, the more they remain the same.

There is some evidence to suggest that at least one respondent, Daniel, who was described as in “career transition”, was more conscious, or aware of the passage of time. He fears, for instance, that his applications for employment may be viewed with a

jaundiced eye because of his age. He discloses his concern that employment, at least within the public sector, may be limited due to age discrimination

. . . at my age I find very few job opportunities, although when you apply, they don't know your age, but I know government!

In addition, Daniel is keenly aware that the changing demands of the contemporary workplace are particularly difficult for "older" workers like himself. He feels less confident of the job search process because, as an "older worker", it is simply more difficult for him to adapt, to change with the times

. . . my earlier years. . . there was so many jobs to be had . . . if you were breathing and had a BA – you had a job. . . those days are long gone. But I guess some of that has stayed with me - that if you were educated . . . a job would be yours. . . I think it is more difficult today for older workers, because that has been their life's experience.

These excerpts suggest, at least, that Daniel may construct himself differently than other workers. Whereas other workers may be as aware of their aging as Daniel, they seem less focused upon the negative changes the passage of time has brought them. Indeed, for most of the respondents aging "is just there". Has his perceived "career crisis" so overwhelmed him that his meaning-making structures are unable, at this point in his life, to assimilate the changes he is encountering? Alternatively, is his "self-deceptive" explanatory framework failing to reject extraneous information, hence, making the assimilation of the negative feedback difficult to incorporate - that is, is he unable to construct an emotionally viable appraisal of his current situation or himself? Is there some underlying personality disposition that detracts from viewing the passage of time

as a negative, demanding that he adapt? Or is it simply happenstance? That is, if he had secured a position in management or as a CEO, as he so vehemently desired, he might have, in fact, begun to perceive his "self" as "age-irrelevant"?

Is it possible that "older workers", when overwhelmed by change, tend to attribute blame to the aging process. Hence, the changes associated with aging may not in themselves create problems for workers but rather their difficulties may emanate from their construction of their aging. Further, "older workers" may begin to be more aware, or conscious of their chronological aging when their internal resources are over-taxed.

The extant literature suggests that other researchers have observed similar differences amongst older workers in their experience of aging. Barak (1987) observed that workers who judged their "felt age" to exceed their actual chronological age experienced measurable increases in the degree they experienced work and non-work stresses and strains (i.e. decreased energy level, sleep disturbances, and lowered job performance). In a study yielding similar results, Bames-Farrell (1970) observed that stress-related outcomes are correlated with personal "age-labeling". That is, if one defines themselves as "older" then they are more likely to devalue their skills and abilities, lower their aspiration levels, and lower their work performance. Bailey and Hansson (1995) found that older workers who perceive their age to exceed what they believe to be the normative age for an older worker in their present occupation, tended to overrate the risks associated with job change. In a study of the propensity to retire in a group of executives (age 55 and over), Eden and Jacobsen (1976) observed that the decision was more related to feelings older workers held about themselves (i.e. subjective age, self-rated effectiveness, health) than to job-related variables (e.g. role conflict, organizational stress). Is it possible that "older workers" who are unable to cope

with change, or find it difficult to accommodate themselves to ever-changing events in their lives, simply feel the stresses and strains of living and, as a result, simply feel older?

The results of this section “discovered” that some older workers tended to experience “self” as unchanged over their lifetime. Indeed, many older workers argued that their age was irrelevant to their construction of the “self”. At the same time, however, this group of older workers acknowledges that their lives have been impacted by changes brought about by their aging. It was suggested that as long as the changes associated with aging can be incorporated, then “older workers” will likely perceive “self” as continuous over the lifespan.

It was further suggested that older workers may become more aware of, or acknowledge their chronological age when change itself overwhelms their internal resources. The results also suggest that some older workers might attribute “problems” in their lives to the aging process itself. That is, the normal stresses and strains of daily living, left unresolved, may overwhelm the individuals’ capacity to respond appropriately. In younger years, the cause of their “distress” may have been attributed to other causes. However, as one ages, their distress is more than likely to be attributed to age, or “getting older”.

If chronological aging is as much a “state of mind” as a biological reality, then there are profound implications for how the population of “older workers” is defined in the vocational literature. It may well be that researchers might need to develop a measure of the respondent’s internal experience of “age” rather than rely upon their chronological age. As Kyle has pointed out, one can be “almost dead” at 20 and exceptionally “young”

at age 90. In addition, the results suggest that the population of “older workers” may not be a uniform group but, rather, demonstrate significant individual differences in their construction of “self” in relation to the aging process. That is, “older workers” may be dispersed across a continuum, ranging from those distressed by day-to-day change through to those who can adapt to ongoing, discontinuous change in their lives. Some workers may construct themselves as “aging” and others as “just the same”. In addition, it may be that the aging process itself becomes a source of stress for some “older workers”.

Subtheme: Controlling the Impact of Aging

This theme encompasses the respondents’ reactions to the aging process from the perspective of their physical health and well-being. The ability to sustain one’s physical well-being is considered the superordinate criteria of successful aging (Baltes, Smith & Staudinger, 1992). Generalized cognitive, intellectual, and social relations skills are second-order criteria of success. The interview questions in this research study were intended, at a minimum, to distinguish between normal and pathological agers amongst the respondents. Surprisingly, the respondents provided considerably more information than was anticipated by the questions. Indeed, the majority of the respondents appeared to respond to the impact of physical aging in a constructive, even proactive manner. They acted as if physical aging is simply a problem to be addressed, much like maintaining their level of work skills. Most of the respondents who did smoke have stopped, most drink now only in moderation, and most pay particular attention to their diet and control their weight. Kyle remarked that, after years of ignoring his body, he finally began to listen to it

I think the body sends to messages periodically when it's not happy about this or that or whatever . . . I am in better health now than when I was younger. I think when you're in your 20s and 30s, you think you're going to live forever – so you abuse the body – and suddenly your body says 'okay' enough of this . . .

Most respondents were involved in a regular exercise regime or activity. For Ron, fitness had an impact beyond simply maintaining his physical health. He notes that his cognitive functioning and his ability to optimally perform at work is closely related to his physical well-being

. . . when I occasionally have been hurt and not able to exercise, I find that my mental alertness isn't there, and I don't feel as comfortable with myself and my energy level as well . . . I always tried to stay reasonably fit. . . I think the performance of work and your life is a lot better.

Jake also places a priority of exercise in this life and is pleasantly surprised by the seeming limited impact chronological age has had upon this well being. He states

. . . when you're younger, you know, you abuse your body . . . I didn't know that at 66, I would feel this vigorous and active . . . I didn't know I would feel this good . . . I mean apart from my vision and my hearing. . . I mean I can do anything else I want to do.

It is both interesting and revealing that most older persons in this study seemed to attend more to their health in the later part of their lives than they did in their younger years.

Dean, for instance, implies that the aging process made him more aware of differences in his level of energy that he may not have appreciated in his earlier years

. . . I'm more conscious of energy – I'm more conscious of what I can do to maintain that or increase that, and I'm conscious of the techniques that get rid of the static and the overall life energy, I'm not sure ...so I'm eating better, I'm doing all sorts of those kinds of healthier pursuits – aches and pains, I'm noticing more of those, and I'm getting the odd bit like a sore neck that was like a wake-up call in another area.

It is perhaps not hard to understand that as the respondents age, they begin to take better care of their general health. In their younger years, the respondents were simply more physically resilient and could absorb the effects of "neglect" or "abuse". However, as they age it is more and more difficult to ignore the warning signs from the body. Bateson (1972) lends support to this notion when he implies that the significance of any particular day-to-day event is uniquely determined by the meaning-making structures within the individual, the receiving context. Incoming data that does not "fit" within the "known pattern of events" are ignored, or assimilated in the terms of cognitive psychology. What is not ignored, however, according to Bateson is "news of differences". That is, it is the perception of differences that trigger all new responses in living systems. Bateson (1972) suggests that "Human sense organs can receive *only* news of differences, and the differences must be coded into events in *time* (i.e. into *changes*) in order to be perceptible" (p. 79). News of unwelcome physical changes (e.g. weight gain, muscular aches, and joint pains) are "news of differences" and signal the need to be actively preserving our physical well being. Other writers suggest that one's health begins to become incorporated into one's identity in middle age because it is both an indicator of one's approaching mortality and an index of the integrity of the "self" (Whitbourne, 1996; Hooker & Kaus, 1992). That is, changes in the quality of one's health have an early "signal" value regarding the status, or continuity, in the sense of "self".

Not all respondents, however, felt as able to control the impact of chronological aging. Daniel, for instance, stated that after possibly (undiagnosed to date) suffering a minor stroke, he is now reluctant to push himself physically

So I'm reduced to walks. And I smoke . . . and I know that it's bad for me and I should quit. I seem to have the metabolism that I don't get obese. That's as far as my thinking goes on the subject. I know I should be at the gym. I know I should stop smoking! There you have it – phew!

In part, one might conclude that Daniel's response reflects a more resigned stance to the aging process distinct from the, perhaps more proactive, responses of others in the theoretical sample. Daniel, however, has also experienced the emotional trauma of corporate downsizing and prolonged unemployment for several years prior to the interview. Although he had found a position, it provided neither the income nor the status he had enjoyed for many years. This added to the observation that he had in the past a membership in a health club and placed a priority on his physical well-being. Have the stresses and strains of change, of loss, simply drained Daniel of the energy necessary to "refurbish" his body, to delay the effects of time? Is the loss of concern about his health an indicator of a larger issue of feeling less in charge of his life? Sean also struggles with balancing his unpredictable work schedule in order to find the time to attend to exercise and recreation. He admits that, although an exercise routine is a priority, he is very much "out of shape" ("I need it desperately") but is simply unable to control his schedule. Although he may be perceived as excusing his behavior, he is also undergoing major crises in his career. Indeed, shortly after the first interview this respondent had resigned his position after some ten years due to an accumulation of changes in the requirements of the job, marital pressures as a result of irregular hours,

and a loss of enjoyment in the type of work performed. Again, is Sean simply too overwhelmed, or drained by the pressures in his life, that he is unable to attend to his health?

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the psychological model of “successful aging” (Baltes et. al., 1992) distinguishes amongst three possible aging trajectories – pathological aging, usual aging, and successful aging. Individuals who display non-pathological age-associated changes would be classified as “usual aging”, whereas individuals who exhibit little or no loss of function, relative to the average of their younger counterparts, would be classified as “successful” agers. Implicit in the model is the assumption that successful aging includes the ability to sustain control throughout the life course. That is, “individuals who are able to engage and impact the environments around them for the longest period of time would be judged most successful” (Shulz & Heckenhausen, 1996, p. 711). The differences amongst the respondents raise question about the interrelationship between one's sense of control over their life in general and their attention to their physical health and well-being. That is, is the degree of attention one might pay to their physical health a proxy for how empowered they might feel to maintain control, or exercise agency over the course of all events in their life? their work?

Physical health and fitness emerged as significant issues for this group of older workers. They are, in all likelihood, the most salient reminders of one's chronological age. However, many of the respondents seemed highly motivated to minimize, or extinguish the impact of physiological aging. Does this reflect, as demonstrated in the previous section, a desire to ensure their essence, their “self” remains intact over their lifetime? Or do some workers simply have more energy reserve because it is not being

drained off by their difficulty in coping with change? That is, they have more energy because they can more easily assimilate change.

Subtheme: Adaptive Competence

As discussed in Chapter 2, the model of successful aging proffered by Baltes and Baltes (1990) sought to explain why many aging individuals are able to maintain high levels of self-efficacy and well-being despite losses attributable to aging. They suggested that that successful older workers are more likely to utilize a number of adaptive strategies in response to situations where developmental losses begin to appear. These strategies are particularly useful during middle and old age when individuals experience decline in their energy levels, or their ability to do some of the things that they were once able to do. Abraham and Hansson (1995) suggest that the model might be conceptualized as “successful adaptation to developmental change or as adaptive competence” (p. 95). Citing Brandtsadter and Renner (1990), they posit that adaptive competence is a gradual shift with age from assimilative coping (i.e. actively adjusting one’s circumstances to fit personal preferences) to accommodative coping (i.e. adjusting one’s preference to fit with circumstances) that may assist older workers to better cope with the growing impact of uncontrollable events and maintain a sense of well-being. The adaptive strategies associated with successful aging include Selection, Optimization, and Compensation. Most of the respondents utilized the spectrum of adaptive strategies, although in varying degrees.

Ned provided an insightful illustration of his shift to accommodative coping when he noticed his body losing its former resilience, his energy reserves draining more quickly

I guess my stamina is not as good as it used to be . . . my balance is not as good . . . my strength in my hands . . . If I don't exercise on a regular basis and periodically that happens –it's easy to ignore it. When I go back to it, I find that . . . it takes longer to get back to the same level physically.

Rather than resign himself to the fact that his physical stamina inevitably declines with age, Ned is proactive in his response by increasing his physical training regime. Schulz and Heckenhausen (1996) suggest that physical exercise is an example of the adaptive strategy of Optimization. Exercise allows an individual to regain the balance in his life in response to the imbalancing effect stresses and strain including physical aging. The strategy of Optimization refers to those adaptive strategies that allow individuals to augment their developmental reserves and maximize their capabilities. Successful agers generally optimize those capabilities in their most important life domains. Other examples of Optimization within the workplace include maintaining work skills, developing new skills through formal education, and participation in developmental opportunities in the workplace – strategies aimed at proactively preparing oneself for change.

Kyle discloses that he is proactive in his efforts to remain current with changes in his occupational field

I do a lot of professional reading – a lot of dialogue with colleagues on the Internet . . . always interesting dialogue and discussions going on there. I collect all sorts of management research and surveys . . . not as much as I'd like, or seem to have the time to do as much as I'd like to. . . are primarily my sources of keeping myself up-to-date in the field.

Daniel states that he actively participates in a formal educational upgrading program.

The college has a program where we began the . . . Diploma Program – that is a weekend program I've done a third of that . . . it is strictly in the area of education and teaching and teaching methodology. I read professional journals. . . . at work I read a number of journals and calendars from other colleges - and visit their websites and so forth.

Dean, recognizing the need to keep up with the information age, struggles to find ways of incorporating technology into his daily routine and make more efficient use of his time and energy

. . . I lagged in warming up to the new technology. Now I've learned to like computers, I like the systems . . . I try to keep up with the new technology as much as I can at work. . . I'm more selective in what I read but sometimes will try to break out and just explore a variety of ideas...

Ron suggests that he would embrace any strategy that would help maintain his energy reserves

. . . it's here to stay and e-mailing and computer work is part of my job now - where five years ago it wasn't! You'd be a dinosaur and you couldn't survive without embracing the technology – so that's one thing I have learned to keep up with the field . . . become more efficient.

Selection is an adaptive strategy that involves restricting or narrowing one's range of activities to fewer, important domains. Ron provides perhaps the more grounded definition of the strategy of selection, “. . . I certainly don't have the energy

level that I had when I was about 25, but I am working smarter rather than working harder". Recognizing the decrease in his previous level of energy reserves, he has learned to be more selective of the types of clients for which he provides services

In a sense, I don't waste time on dead ends . . . including what is actually going to generate business. I feel that after 25 years in the business, I don't necessarily have to do things that I did when I was getting into the business . . . and this is absolute. I've built a clientele . . . so it makes it a lot easier to carry on business, and much better quality business without having to do things I don't want to do.

Ned states that he knew he had to change the amount of work he took on to fend off the inevitable harm, either physical or mental, that he was inflicting upon himself. He describes this realization

The other decision I made was to become more selective about what kinds of things I worked on. And to make choices to work in areas where I had confidence and that I had a passion for. As opposed to just doing something because I had some interest and it would generate revenue.

Jake, formerly an enthusiastic human resource trainer has had to accommodate to the aging process. He discloses that

I used to love teaching. Part of teaching is eye contact and – picking upon on nuances and . . . I'm slightly deaf. In most situations it doesn't bother me. In a classroom . . . I would have difficulty. I also have an eye condition. So I'm not as physically confident in the classroom. So, I don't teach anymore . . . I'm not as comfortable cause I can't see the reactions and I can't interact. I have had the opportunities to teach but I turn them down.

Rather than become embittered or reclusive, Jake has opted to maximize the use of those abilities and skills that are intact. He says

There are things I don't want to do and things I recognize I don't do as well. There are plenty of other things left that I do do well that people are willing to pay for . . . So you know, I'll go where I have fun. And the world needs problems solvers and you don't need to see or hear well for that

The degree to which an older worker might utilize the adaptive strategy of selection may, in part, depend upon their ability to exercise control over their job requirements. Sean, struggling to accommodate to physical changes within him, does not sense that he can exercise the necessary control over his job that would allow him to remain in his current position.

Well health is one issue . . . my hearing doesn't seem to be what it was . . . a lot of the work here is sound . . . therefore I can't do my job . . . and a semi-trailer rolls up . . . and we unload the vehicle . . . it's pretty hard on the body, takes a couple of days to recover . . . I find that I can't deal with that end of it as well and some of the days are 14 or 16 hours . . . now that is pretty hard on me physically.

Sean occupies a supervisory position and, as such, is not required to actively participate in the physical demanding aspects of the job. For whatever reason, he refuses to assign tasks to subordinates that he himself would not perform. In doing so, he finds his physical stamina diminishing and his ability to adapt to the demands of the job. He is not, in effect, implementing an adaptive strategy that would allow him to maintain his equilibrium in his workplace.

Compensation refers to the use of pragmatic strategies (e.g. impression management) or external/technological aids (e.g. glasses). Impression management is, in effect, a series of strategies that one uses to ensure others garner a positive impression of their abilities, skills, and work performance. Examples might include letting others know of unique or special skills, performing tasks in a way that weaker points are not visible, or attending to how one presents themselves at work (Abraham & Hansson, 1995). Jake, for instance, discloses that others in the workplace might be more inclined to assume that he is less capable of performing some tasks because of his physical aging ("I am beginning to look older"). As a result, he makes a strategic, or conscious effort to belie this notion by becoming more interactive and allowing others get to know him better.

But once they get to know me they usually don't think I am old, because I don't think I am mentally old. It is important to let other know . . . my age is not who I am.

Jake, in effect, states he proactively manages the false impressions that others might initially have of him rather than passively accept their attributions. Dean appears to have resigned himself that others, particularly senior managers, are increasingly viewing him as less capable of performing his full duties.

... a negative result of getting older . . . I am sure that when you hit a certain age level ... that there is less of a need for people to connect with me . . . senior management and the like partially because of that they would look toward key. . . fresher players – in other words to get the job done better.

This appears to reflect a passive acceptance of age-labeling by others, or a resignation that more attention is paid to younger, fresher workers.

Jake, in his struggle to maintain focus, or concentration, provides an interesting example of the strategy of Compensation

And I forget things, I have a little list . . . a checklist down in the bathroom downstairs telling me to, you know, turn off the light, lock the garage door. Because if I don't do that I'll get to thinking about something else and I'll forget.

In this study the concept of adaptive competence appears to capture many of the practical strategies that some older workers “intuitively” utilize in order to maintain or even enhance their ability to respond to changes in themselves and their environment. Ned, for instance, recognizing that he has an increasingly finite reserve of energy has become more selective of the types of jobs he takes on. He now is more likely to accept work that captures his interest rather than simply accepting work to generate more revenue. Ron is less likely to waste time on “dead ends” than he did when he was younger. Kyle tries to keep up with his “field” by collecting/reviewing research material on the Internet. Jake acts proactively to offset the impression that others may discount him because of his advancing physical age.

In part, these adaptive strategies reflect a growing concern with the “conservation of energy” for individuals in the latter stages of the life span. It is not that these older workers are less motivated or less ambitious, but rather they may have learned to work more efficiently, to incorporate new technologies, to focus on fewer activities - in short, to “work smarter not harder”. These strategies would seem, with some reflection, obvious

to most individuals in the workplace. Why is it, however, that individuals seem to persevere on out-dated strategies? Why, for instance, is Sean reluctant to assign responsibilities to his subordinates and curtail the drain on his energy reserves? Why does Dean seem to accept that “influential” people in this organization increasingly ignore him because of his age? Does the drive to adapt to changing environmental conditions reflect, as evidenced in the two previous sections, an ongoing drive to preserve the “self”? Or, as suggested, does the motive to adapt reflect an ongoing struggle to preserve “self”? Perhaps it reflects a more internalized sense of control, recognition that one might offset the losses in one area of their life by capitalizing on strengths in other areas. In short, “successful” aging may be a drive to preserve the “essential self”, an evolutionary adaptation of “self” in the face of discontinuous change in the work environment.

THEME: THE EXPERIENCE OF WORK IN LATER LIFE

This section captures the respondents' reflections on the “meaning” of work at this point in their lives. In addition, this section explores the importance work had in the lives of this group of older workers. The results suggest some older workers are more passionately involved in their work than at any earlier points in their lives, that the definition of work varied among respondents over time, and that our images of retirement may need to be reexamined.

Subtheme: Constructing The Workplace

Sterns and McDaniel (1994) have suggested that many employers have serious doubts about the ability of older workers to adapt to the changing workplace. In the

previous section, there was much evidence to belie this notion. In addition to exploring the adaptive competence of “older workers”, it was interesting to track what changes some of respondents have noted in the workplace over the past 30 to 40 years. Their observation of the changes emerged from the transcripts as background or contextual material and provides some interesting insights into the composition of the “psychological surround” in which the respondents find themselves embedded.

Kyle who joined the RCMP after high school, considers himself fortunate that he entered the workforce during better times

. . . in 1960, if I decided that I wanted to quit, I had my choice of six or seven other jobs. That was the way the demands for employees were in those days. High level of demand, low level of unemployment. Kids are graduating now with all sort of qualifications and basically having to start at the bottom. . . so I happened to come along at a good time.

Kyle is certainly aware of the high levels of unemployment and the current demand for ever increasing levels of education and training. Daniel notes that, in his early days in the workforce, the mere possession of a degree was sufficient to ensure secure employment, and adds that it is perhaps difficult for older workers to accept that such credentials are necessary but insufficient qualifications for today's job market

. . . my earlier years were characterized by more jobs than I could apply for . . . there was so many jobs to be had . . . if you were breathing and had a degree, you had a job . . . I guess some of that has stayed with me. It is difficult for older workers today because that has been their life's experience.

Kyle notes the demise of the psychological contract between employer and employee. The employment relationship that provided job security in exchange for loyalty has been replaced by a more transitory, exchange relationship based upon work performance and competency.

. . . when I joined the workforce you were expected to be loyal to the organization but there was a trade-off. The organization was very loyal to you. . . so you knew you had a career provided you were prepared to work at it. So that's dramatically changed now of course. . . there is no more job security . . .

Dean describes his personal experience of organizational restructuring and the emotional angst this engendered

...as I label it . . . a game by top management, creating this new world order, in a very pompous, secretive and selective manner that triggered anxiety at the very least with. . . just about everybody in the organization.

Daniel reminds us of the fragility of the employment relationship, and provides a dire warning for all older workers feeling secure within their position

I would recommend to anyone who's in a long time position ... to take a big step back – and take the blinkers off – and say where does this go? Do I want or need to adjust my experience, my education to go where I want to go, and didn't do that. I knew then, I should have, but I didn't. You know I think that's good advice for anyone. The job can evaporate – just like that! And when you think everything is fine, it isn't – you are unprepared.

Dean perceives that a significant change has occurred in the “culture” of the workplace. There is less certainty of ongoing employment and less loyalty from employers – it is just a “hell of a lot tougher”.

. . . in our era of youth there was absolutely no doubt, that if you looked for a job, you'd get it! In today's era, there's less certainty, I think in general . . . it's a little bit faster, a hell of a lot tougher, the work cultures have changed – and I'm just saying everything that you read in the paper, basically. With down-sizing, the loyalty, you're not loyal to any outfit, you're loyal to yourself, because you can go 'poof' the company or the government can go 'poof' on you, and you're out! So yeah, a whole bunch of things have changed!

The “lived experience” of most of the respondents in this study appears to closely match those portrayed in the relevant literature. The specters of unemployment, credentialism, downsizing, and reorganization were apparent to this age-cohort. However, there were differences amongst the respondents in the “power” they ascribed to these changes. Kyle, for instance, describes the changes he sees but rather than allowing them to limit his actions, he simply adapts. Indeed, if there is no more job security then

. . . you become much more, I guess, a company of one - and invest in yourself in terms of your education, your skill set to ensure that you are more competitive . . . for jobs not only within government but outside as well. There's been that sort of evolution – but that's pretty common, I mean, everybody's been exposed to that and those changing organizational dynamics.

Dean, in contrast, who has been impacted on many occasions by downsizing and restructuring, remains in a position that he vehemently dislikes, but believes that the economic conditions seriously limit his ability to take control of his career at this point in his life (“and I am just saying everything that you read in the paper”). Daniel who feels he was negatively impacted by downsizing, and perhaps ageism, ascribes some of these current difficulties to changing economic conditions.

Jake and Ethan were, by contrast, both adult, economic immigrants to Canada who started their careers in their late 20s. Both worked hard to establish themselves in a new country. Both have lost full-time, regular positions through no perceptible fault of their own. Even at age 57, Ethan risks moving from Saskatchewan to Victoria without the promise of any economic security

And, we had been out here before on holiday and my wife and I decided this is where we'd like to retire some day. But this came up and she said, "Well, what are we waiting for? Why wait around - there's just the two of us now. Why don't we move now. I can get a job there. You can get a job." And that's how we approached it. We've always - we felt that we've emigrated from England with a six year old and a two year old, and, if we can do that - we can do anything!

Ned, who was “downsized” from a senior management position in a social service agency, took his severance and completed graduate studies. Although a diversity of life events affected their work and career, these respondents appeared to attribute only limited influence to the “external environment”.

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the environment to which an individual responds may, in large part, be a product of their own construction. Indeed, much of the vocational and management literatures paint a rather opaque and gloomy view of the contemporary workplace. Moreover, many of the “person-environment” fit theories that dominate vocational psychology (Chartrand, Strong & Weitzman, 1995) assume that the environment and the person are independent entities. The respondents in this study tend to support that notion that individuals construct their environments and infuse them with their own meaning. For example, whether the spectre of downsizing paralyzes an individual or challenges them to excel may, in part, reflect their construction of their environment. The environment may, in effect, be a neutral event – no more or less intimidating for us than it was for our grandparents or will be for our grandchildren – it simply exists. It would seem important, therefore, to assess how a particular individual “constructs” the “psychological environment” in which they live rather than to assume that economic changes have a uniform impact across individuals. In addition, the variation in the construction of the workplace tends to parallel the variation amongst the respondents in their sense of “felt” control over their lives – ranging from Ethan who feels “we can do anything” through to Dean who finds the workplace “a hell of a lot tougher”.

Subtheme: In Quest Of One's Own Work

The next two themes capture thoughts and images emerging from the transcripts regarding the meaning work held for the respondents at this point in their lives. This subtheme focuses upon those respondents who have not only found their “life's work” but also managed to exercise the necessary “psychological” control over their work. The next section, entitled, *Taking the Long Way Home*, focuses upon those respondents who

have not, as yet, been able to define their own work but, nonetheless, have been successful in the workplace.

Ron has now spent over 25 years of his life employed as a real-estate agent. He enjoys his “work” because, in part, it allows him to maintain a flexible life-style - “to have the proper mix in my life”. Foremost in his mind, his “work” has provided the opportunity to become the primary-caregiver to a growing family.

I spent a lot of time with the kids, I didn't work between 3 and 5 everyday they were in school – so I picked them up, spent time together, did a lot of things because sometimes on evenings and weekends I wasn't around – so we made up for it. . . Saturdays are sort of family days and those days maybe going to a soccer game here and a soccer game there – it's what we do as a family, as a unit, and I think that's really important.

In addition, his “work” offers him greater flexibility, although somewhat limited at present, to be involved in his community both as a member of a service club and as a parent-coach.

...have been, until recently, a member of Kinsmen. . . I have been involved in that a lot – I don't have a lot of hobbies – if I have more time, I would like to play golf – and I play golf occasionally, but it's just too time consuming . . . do a little sailing, not nearly enough! But then again, all these things take time, and I've really devoted a lot of that spare time to the kids right now – I think we're a couple of years away from them – sort of needing a lot of time – they will be out with their friends a lot.

I do my community involvement with kids, more or less – I coach a team in the night league to help with a basketball team, I help out with a soccer

team, I also help with a school team, the elementary school in the area – so I do . . . my involvement, I guess is through my kids and helping other kids.

In addition, Ron perceives his “work” as affording him the opportunity to “help others”, to experience a high level of personal enjoyment and, above all, the ability to maintain a flexible life-style

I enjoy helping people out – I enjoy the adrenaline pump of putting it all together – I enjoy the aspect of my job, particularly, you can work as little or as much as you want and your destiny is really in your own hands.

Indeed, Ron recognized early in his working life the magnitude of his desire to remain “in charge” of himself and his work environment.

I haven't got a corporate mentality, I wouldn't have a manager dictating what I do, I wouldn't respond well to something like that – I've been in that position early in my life and didn't enjoy that very much!

Most of all, Ron's “work” complements his social needs by providing greater opportunities to develop long-lasting friendships with customers and associates.

I really enjoy my work – so it's fun! I mean, I went to the office this morning and chatted with a friend of mine at the office, kibitzed . . .

From an external perspective, Ron performs the day-to-day tasks of a sales representative. His work provides him with an income and the opportunity, perhaps, for early retirement. From Ron's perspective, however, “work” has provided him with the

opportunities necessary to (a) develop a life-style around the needs of his family, (b) contribute to his community, (c) help with “the largest investment people are going to make in their life”, (d) develop long-lasting friendships, and (e) to simply enjoy himself.

It would be difficult for a researcher to define Ron’s “work” in an objective manner. For Ron, “work” is an activity that possesses intrinsic, personal meaning. Indeed, it is incumbent upon researchers and those involved in career development to ensure they understand how an individual constructs their “work” within the contextual framework, or meaning making structures.

How does an individual come to identify their “life’s work”? Ron suggests that one must be able to define their own path in life and listen to their “inner voice”. Indeed, they must learn to be “inward-looking” rather than wait for someone “out there” to show them the path of their quest

I wouldn't say I've written my own ticket, but I directed myself more than anything else – I've been more inward-looking, taking that path rather than looking at someone else to show me the way,

Another respondent, Ned, described the life experiences that brought him to a point where he could identify his life’s “work”. After having spent many years struggling to “understand” why he felt unfulfilled in the many jobs that he has held over his life, he finally found what he terms his “passion”

And that was really a passion for working with people in their work environment at their work site and a particular interest in trying to figure

out what made these things operate. When I found that . . . I was completely "en route".

Ned feels that he has arrived, at this time in his life, at a point at which he truly understands his quest, his vision of the future ("I was completely en route"). Does his "passion" for his work reflect a newly acquired insight into his "self", a deeper understanding of who he is as an individual? Indeed, after spending many years of searching, Ned states he has now come to understand why his previous jobs were unfulfilling and, moreover, to understand what he needs to do to secure that sense of fulfillment in his work. How could Ned feel anything less than "passion"? He has "arrived", he has found his "life's work"? Because Ned has an increased appreciation of who he is, and what he must "be", the struggle to maintain his focus in the face of ongoing, external change becomes of paramount importance to him. He realizes that he must structure his life in a way that will permit him to actually "practice" what he holds to be of fundamental importance in his life.

What I'm doing has much more to do with what I hold to be important and what I believe I have to offer that is of value - what I am doing is worthwhile. What I wanted to do was to practice what I believed to be important - and the freedom to do that.

If Ned cannot sustain this opportunity to "take charge" of his work, he will lose what has become self-defining in his life. "Work" has become, for Ned, a formalized expression of what he now holds to be important in his life rather than what other people, or the prevailing culture, might predetermine for him. To follow the "inner path" means he must turn away from the "madding crowd", to plot his own course rather than defer to others for direction and meaning.

Defining one's "life work" implies accepting what one "is". It also implies accepting what one "is not"- accepting one's strengths as well as one's limitations. Ned defines his work and, in turn, work defines him. For Ned, the ability to define his work evolves from, in essence, "self-knowledge" and, moreover, a willingness to accept what his is and, perhaps more importantly, what one is not and may never be – self-acceptance.

Like Ron, Ned has come to understand that he must remain "inner directed", deciding for himself what is important in life, rather than waiting for others to "point the way". Should Ned become directed by others ("do what someone else has predetermined"), he has come to realize, he might jeopardize the ability to be "who he is". Indeed, he makes a clear distinction between his work and having a job

A job is something that somebody else has predetermined . . . and I am required to operate within those constraints. I see work as being largely of my own creation. I didn't want a job.

Like Ron and Ned, Kyle has come to understand his "work" not as a job but rather as an avocation. He discloses that he cannot understand how others might continue to remain employed in jobs they did not enjoy regardless of their financial compensation

Work to me is more of an avocation than a source of income or a source of livelihood or something like that. I just couldn't see anybody doing a job they didn't like for any amount. If I didn't love doing this, they could be paying me \$120,000 per year, and if I didn't like it, I wouldn't be here regardless of the salary.

What Kyle appears to value, above all, is the opportunity and the freedom to take charge of the “work” that he enjoys - that he finds meaningful, or personally significant. Having found his love, or his passion, he believes he is much freer to operate in a much more self-defining, self-authoring manner.

. . . in retrospect I've been incredibly lucky. . . I can't think of a particular job that I've ever been in that I didn't thoroughly enjoy doing, maybe that's me – I've just been able to intuitively navigate through that – so that I don't even go near jobs that don't appeal to me.

One might suggest, that Kyle's ability to “intuitively navigate” suggests that he is quite confident about “self”, he knows who “he is” and who “he is not”. He listens to his heart, or his internal gyroscope to intuitively navigate his way through life. He knows he must travel in the direction of his heart or work will cease to make sense to him, and detract from what has given his life personal meaning. Rather than accept a “job”, Kyle seems to be able to infuse his own “meaning” onto the tasks he performs. That is, he “constructs” the job that he in turn performs rather than accepting the job as laid out in a formal job description by his employer. As long as the position that he occupies permits the latitude for him to define or create his own work, he is able to find work which is meaningful work - that is, work that he is able to both define and control.

For Ethan, work has paradoxically become “not work”. Rather “work” has become, at this stage in his life, a hobby or an avocation.

Not now - in this stage of life - I'm very fortunate - it's not work. I mean - I don't go to work in the morning and vacuum up I've got this to do and, you know, I dread coming in this morning because so-and-so's going

to be coming in. No. I go there because of - I turn it in my mind to as a hobby. I enjoy going and on my days off - I still go in, you know, to see if there's anything to do. I haven't got hobbies at home. My hobby is my work at this time in life.

However, in order to enjoy his avocation, Ethan had to make a major decision that would allow him to cultivate the life-style that he has come to enjoy. After many years as an employee, he realized that he had to “take charge” of his own destiny

I had an opportunity to purchase a business that was coming up for sale. I said to my wife, you know, I'd like to buy it because I'd like to be in charge of my own destiny. Because at this shop, I could see no future. I think now, in the service industry, if you don't have your own business, your security, as far as your job is concerned is worse because, like I say, you're in charge of your own future.

For Ethan, the desire to be in control of “self” seems to have become of paramount importance. However, it is not a desire borne of self-aggrandizement or monetary gain but rather the desire to provide a quality service to his customers, to control the tempo of his life, and to exercise the freedom to work when and how he wishes – activities that Ethan has come to realize infuse meaning into his life

I think that I'm fortunate enough to be the owner so that I can spend more time talking to people. I find that I can spend more time with them and, if a person is willing to spend time, fine. I'm not go, go, go like I used to be. If you have people waiting - I don't hurry - but I've always remembered, and I emphasize it to the people that work for me that, what I was told when I was learning the trade is that the person you've got in the chair is the only customer you've got - and you treat him as such.

It must be pointed out, that defining one's work does not necessarily imply that a individual must be self-employed or an entrepreneur. Indeed, Kegan (1994) explains how it is both possible to be an employee and still define or own one's work. He distinguishes between social control and "psychological" control within the traditional, hierarchical, employment relationship. An employer is, by virtue of their authority in the organization, in a position to exercise social power over an employee's job. An employee, in turn, is able to retain "psychological" control over his own work - how it is defined and actually done. More often than not, employees fail to exercise their psychological control and defer to their employer to define the job they are to perform. Jake provides an excellent example of how an employee can define his or her own work. He describe a situation in which a former employer, exercising his social authority, delegates to Jake a work assignment but simultaneously attempts to retain psychological control

He called me in and gave me this assignment, and he started telling me what to do - and I stopped him. I said, "Look, you're taking all the fun out of this. You know, if - if that's, that's how you feel why don't you just do it. I mean, I know all this. Let me go away and do it and see what I come up with. . . I react terribly to that. I really am no good at being told what to do.

Jake rather deftly exercises his psychological control over his own work but at the same time respects the social authority inherent in his employer's position in the hierarchy.

Obviously, somebody is entitled to set directions. But I just like to be left alone to solve the problem and do it and get on with it. And generally speaking, if I'm put in that situation, it works. So am I a good employee? I'm a marvelous employee for the right person and a terrible employee for the wrong one. Sound familiar to you?

Jake recognized that his decision to confront his manager was not without risk to his ongoing career ("But a less secure supervisor . . . would not like that"). The need, however, to retain "psychological control" of his work was seemingly of greater importance to him. Indeed, Jake realizes that to defer to his boss would put at risk his ability to do the "work" he found meaningful - the "work" that has come to be important to him. One can argue that each of these respondents risked job security, the assurance of a regular income, and the possibility of not succeeding in order to remain "in charge" of their work. For Ron, his work provides the opportunity to place his "destiny in his own hands" but he has had to forgo job security, a "corporate career". Ned eschewed a "job" to create his own work because he wanted the "freedom" to do what is, for him, worthwhile. Ethan purchased a business, with all the attendant risks, because he liked to be "in charge of his own destiny". Kyle feels quite comfortable simply "moving on" if he no longer finds satisfaction in his work and, on several occasions, he has left otherwise secure positions.

Work, for many respondents in this study, defies definition outside of the their idiosyncratic, meaning-making framework. Without doubt it is less about money, power, or prestige and more about contributing something of value - something possessing personal meaning. For Ron, work provides, among other things, the opportunity to "help people out" and to access to a life-style that incorporates time for his growing family and his friends. For Ned work is practicing what he "believes to be important" by allowing him to "help people in their work environment". For Ethan, his "work" allows him to spend quality time with customers because he is, above all, "a people person". For Kyle, it is an opportunity to contribute to others - to the world of ideas. Indeed, it is no surprise that Ron, Kyle, and Ethan are each deeply involved in community projects and charities.

It was suggested that the ability to clearly define one's "life work" is predicated on a clear understanding of the self, or self-knowledge. Some respondents, like Ron, appear to have found his life's work rather early in his career. Ned, in contrast, struggled for many years to find his "passion". It seems, therefore, that probability of finding one's "work" does not necessarily increase with age, although one might argue that experience itself might increase an individual's chances of acquiring greater self-knowledge. It was also suggested that "self-knowledge" implies an acceptance of one's strengths as well as one's limitations. Kyle, for instance, has come to realize that he performs best when he is doing "work" that he "loves" to do rather than what is most financially rewarding. In other words, he cannot be what he is not regardless of the monetary compensation.

In addition, each of the respondents, once they defined their "passion", were strongly motivated to be "in charge" of their work, and spurned attempts by others to define their work. Without doubt, this struggle to retain psychological control reflects the need to preserve one's self-definition, to be in control of what activities have personal meaning or significance to the individual. This desire to be "in charge" was not maintained without risk to the respondents. They were also willing to plunge into an uncertain future – to take the necessary risks to protect what they had found to be important in their lives. It is indeed paradoxical that in order for an individual to maintain control over their "work" they must, in essence, give up control, or the assurance of a predictable future, or the assurance that others will approve of their life choices. Jake could have simply completed his assignment as instructed and collected his salary – instead he took the necessary risk.

Finding one's life "work", moreover, seems at this point in our analysis, the product of a life-long search to find significance or value beyond the activities of day-to-day living – a spiritual quest. Savickas (1997) defines spirit as "an activating force or essential principle that helps to give life to physical organisms" (p. 3). The spirited person, according to Savickas:

. . . feels full of energy, enthusiasm, and courage. Individuals experience this spiritual courage as a sense of meaning that breathes life into situations. The passions, aspirations, frustrations, and anxieties that arise from meaning give life significance and chart its course. As an essential principle of life, spirit moves (or motivates) the individual and does so in a certain direction (p. 3).

Savickas, citing Adler and Freud, suggests that spiritual courage orients most human beings to move in the same general direction, to become whole as they move from where they are to where they want to be, or from a position of felt negative to a perceived plus. Or as Ned described after finding his "passion"- "When I found that, I was completely en route". To Savickas, this perceived plus refers to improved adaptive capacity not egocentric self-aggrandizement. In other words, work becomes a social activity that connects with, contributes to, and cooperates with other people. In this context, work is only the mechanism an individual uses in their quest for meaning and involves meshing a life story into a communal effort to ensure survival and cultural self-realization for the group, not just individuals.

How does one discover their life's work? How does it emerge? Can we ask our elders? Finding one's passion, it appears demands an ability to listen to one's heart, that inner voice, and follow, in Ron's words, "that inward path". Listening to one's heart,

however, seems to require, above all, the spiritual, or moral courage, as Savickas might suggest, to move beyond the “booming, buzzing confusion” of everyday living and to set one’s own internal gyroscope – “to take charge of one’s own destiny”.

Subtheme: Taking the Long Way Home

Not all respondents had been able to realize their “life’s work”. Sean, for instance, recalls that he had, earlier in his career, listened to his heart rather than his head, and it did not work out for him as anticipated. As an accomplished musician, he had tried to find a niche in the music industry, but it was a less than successful experience for him

At 21 I was on my own, and thought ‘here’s an opportunity for me to just go out and try, try to being a professional musician, and see if it works and it didn’t! . . . it was a disaster.

To fend off starvation, Sean states that he returned to the former union position he occupied before he had launched his musical career.

I left and tried to become a musician, and that didn’t work out for me obviously, so I had to get back into the trade – just about starved out there, I came back here, and got a job at [. . .] as an electrician.

Sean later adds, moreover, that if he had the money (“If I won the lottery”) to sustain his lifestyle, he would return to some form of artistic expression. He even sees it as a viable option after retirement

If I had a million dollars – what that would free me up to do... I've often thought about building electronic sculptures – I've always thought that would be a kind of neat thing to do, when I'm retired – free me up to be very artistic – spend lots of time doing that sort of thing. So I wouldn't, certainly wouldn't drop the electronics thing, because I enjoy that - I really like design – design work is quite a lot of fun - so as far as work goes. . . I don't really know if I'd do work...

Interestingly, if Sean were free to “work” as an artist (“free to be very artistic”) then it would not be, for him, “work”. Sean knows where he wants to go, to follow his “passion”, but has been unable seemingly to find the right “path”. He also feels less than certain about his decision to leave his current position to launch a new business. However, the thought of starting a “Internet” business is appealing

No it's not! It's not a burning desire at all – I like being at the university – it's a nice place to work – know lots of people here – made lots of friends up here. I guess, there is an appeal to it [new business].

Does his uncertainty with enacting this career decision reflect an ongoing desire for job security, or certainty in his life? He describes his desire for predictability as “knowing when your next paycheck is going to be”. He rather poetically describes the comfort that long-term, job security has provided him over the years

It is like a nice warm blanket, a comfortable bed - you slide into it, it feels comfortable, everything feels good! You know that your next paycheck is going to be there, you know that you can go down, if you have a bad tooth, you can go down to get it fixed, your dental plan will cover it – they have lots of services here, some of them I haven't taken advantage of . . .

He realizes that there is a cost attached to the comfort of secure employment and, for the most part, he has been prepared to accept this price. He accepts that it might have only limited control over his work.

I guess the downside is you have to go where the administration tells you to go – you don't have any say in that – on the other hand, you can go in the direction that the administration is taking . . . hey, it has worked out fine!

Although Sean places a high value on certainty in his life, he has also struggled throughout to gain more autonomy and independence. Indeed, some ten years ago he actually resigned a permanent position because he could not seem to be “in charge” of his work

. . . because I couldn't live with the policies of the manager, I liked him, he was a really nice person. . . , but I really disagreed with the way he managed the shop – he treated us like children to a certain extent – and I guess it really brought home the idea that it wasn't happening with the way the shop was run. And I had 2 choices – I could live with it or I could quit!

Sean wanted the freedom to perform his work in accordance with his own standards, to be treated like a professional technician (“to run the shop the way I wanted”). Also, part of his reluctance to leave his current position is because, above all, it continues to provide him the degree of autonomy he so highly prizes.

The appealing thing about this job is that it is fairly autonomous – the person above me [. . .] is the type of person who lets his staff take care of things – and that really appealed to me, because it meant I could run

the shop the way I wanted, I could run the technical aspects the way I wanted. So that worked out really well – I enjoyed it quite a lot.

Sean, with respect to his desire for autonomy, or to be “in charge” of his work, is not fundamentally different than Jake, Ned, or Kyle. They all desire the freedom to “do their work” without intrusion from others. Why is it difficult for Sean to feel in charge of his work, or his life? In part, he may lack the spiritual courage to act on his perceived “passion”. He resigns himself to the belief that he will never become an artist,

I know one thing, that I'll never be a professional musician! Although there's always something appealing about it – something I've always wanted to do – but it's too late in life to work towards that goal! And that is one goal that I wanted to achieve and never did – so – that direction is one that is sort of closed off – and now it's a hobby for me.

In part, he may lack a clear understanding or even acceptance of “self”. Indeed, he has held the belief for some 30 years that he is, in fact, a musician. Despite his continued failures to act upon this perception of his “self”, Sean continues to believe that it is “something he has always wanted to do”. At this point in his life, he feels that only time stops him from realizing his musical ambition (“it’s too late in life to work towards that goal”). Why is it difficult for Sean to accept that, after 30 years of yearning for a goal, it continues to remain unattainable? Is he confused about who “he is” or who “he is not”? Why does Sean continue to believe, on the one hand, that he prefers to be self-directed, or autonomous yet, at the same time, acknowledge that he enjoys the security of a “job”? Why can’t Sean simply accept that his life-long ambition is simply not going to happen for him? Why was Jake able to wrest control of his work from his manager and remain employed while Sean felt he had to resign to attain the same objective?

In part Sean, it is argued, is “in transition” between the third and fourth level of consciousness. For him to rebalance himself in the fourth level, to shift to a more inner directed path, would require the ability to be self-authoring, to possess a consistent internal identity that can act upon his beliefs, convictions, and ideals – the ability to “run himself” as an independent entity, or institution. He appears to lack, at this point in time, a consistent sense of who he is. He vacillates between a desire for greater independence and the challenge of self-employment and the angst of giving up job security, or predictability in his life (“It is kinda scary”).

Without doubt, Sean will continue his struggle to find the necessary balance in his life. On the one hand, he may follow the path of Kyle, Jake, and Ethan, and find the right opportunity to “take destiny into his own hands”. On the other hand, he may continue to place greater value on job security, and predictability in his life. Sean will undoubtedly remain a contributing, conscientious, and highly motivated individual. However, there is little doubt that Sean will, for the foreseeable future, continue the struggle to make sense of his life.

Sean is not alone among the respondents in his desire to find his “dream” job, or enact his belief about what would be meaningful work for him. Dean, who admits to biding his time until retirement, takes a retroactive view of his career and suggests that he made a major mistake (“I made a major mistake . . . my work is not my passion”). When asked how he might have changed his life given the opportunity, he provides a reasonably clear vision

I imagine I would be doing exactly what you're doing - that would be one thing. If it happened that life allowed or I had the courage or that opportunity at a younger time, I would be training. . . I would be facilitating, I would be a consultant . . . would be on my own but working as an associate, or something like that - or again. . . go back to medical school. . There is a whole host of other avenues to take. . . and I would never get myself into [this situation].

He attributes his perceived lack of success to a lack of opportunity, a lack of insight, or perhaps even courage on his part. At this point in his life, he believes he is simply too old to act upon what he finds important in work.

. . . you get to the point, where you've invested so much into a career, and the trauma, and it would be a literal trauma from where you are sitting, at that moment in time, to break into that and go out and look for another major job change, which means at a much lower salary, on and on, that kind of thing – and I think the insight of my skills and abilities, came at a time when I had gone beyond that point.

Like Sean, Dean believes that the opportunity to act upon his perceived “passion” is now blocked by time (“I had gone beyond that point”). Is it not safer for Sean and Dean to attribute their inability to act upon their passions to the passage of time, to their aging, rather than to accept that they perhaps lack the moral courage to fail (“a literal trauma”)? Is it not easier to remain unhappy with a unsatisfying job rather than take the plunge into an uncertain future? Alternatively, has Dean really identified his “passion”, or his “life’s work”? As previously noted, taking “charge” of one’s work presumes both a clear understanding and, moreover, an acceptance of the “self”. Does Dean really understand who “he is”, his needs, his fears, or his beliefs? Can he not accept that he wants job security, or a predicable work environment? Does this explain, in part, why Carson and

Carson (1997) found that over 33% of workers are dissatisfied with their career - that is, they neither identify with or feel emotionally involved with their work yet only one in ten actually change their vocation each year? That is, these workers may be dissatisfied because they do not know what would make them happy – they lack the understanding of “self” that would, in turn, lead them to define their work, to enact their passion. Alternatively, if they do, in fact, understand themselves, do they have the ability to accept who they are – to accept that their dreams may never be fulfilled, that they have weaknesses as well as strengths, or that they “have screwed up some things and done some things OK”. Do many workers, including older workers, simply lack the courage “to be” who they are?

Daniel argues that he has been unable, as yet, to find work that he finds meaningful to him. He discloses that had he been able to find some overarching purpose in his work, his life would have undoubtedly been significantly different.

I see people who have definite tracks and goals in mind. – they were going to be this and become that – I never had that because I didn't know what the goalposts were – or what to do when I grew up. I really admire people who know where they are going . . . to be musicians or whatever, that's the end of it - no questions. I never had that, that purpose - I went into the direction I wanted to move in- but I never had "I want to be this or in this position" and go for it. If I'd had that, I would have done things differently.

Why does Daniel feel so strongly at this point in his life that it might have been different had he found the “goalposts”? Daniel has been in the past, by his own admission and by most criteria been quite successful in his chosen field of education (“ . . . after 14 years of doing it successfully . . . and being told it was very effective. I guess I can believe it”).

Why does Daniel feel so strongly at this point in his life that life might have been different for him had he found the “goalposts”? He certainly appears to have launched his career with single-minded tenacity hence belying the notion that he could not find the “goalposts”

Early in my career, I was probably seen as an arrogant know-it-all . . . not that I flouted that . . . or even did that on purpose – or even thought of myself that way. . . but I was probably perceived that way – as someone who is anxious to move ahead . . . and knew all things. . . then I would have the answer before the question was asked in my first few jobs because I needed to move ahead quickly . . . I wanted to . . . back then I would probably try to become what you wanted me to be – to get the job or to get along or to get ahead . . . like I did when I was climbing the bottom rungs and seeing the next job . . . or the next couple of levels in my sights all the time . . .

Daniel suggests, in retrospect, that his “life’s work”, has provided him with very little satisfaction and perhaps diminished the quality of his life. Looking back, Daniel suggests that his dogged pursuit of the corporate career (“career ladder”, “climbing the rungs”) may have detracted him from other pursuits that would have made his life more meaningful, more complete. He states that if he had the opportunity to relive the early years of his career, he would not have not have sacrificed as much of his time with his family or his leisure pursuits for his career

. . . if I had to do it again . . . I’ll be damned if I would give up my family, the time with my family, my hobbies, my sports, my pursuits, my travel . . . for a job. I guess my . . . view has been that job is a part of life only, it’s not life, and it’s not your life. I refuse to become dedicated to a job to the

point of working all hours, becoming stressed out, climbing the ladder, taking over family and other interests . . . and I just refuse to do that.

Daniel has had, however, the opportunity to “taste the good life”, to accomplish the goals he set out for himself (“I saw that as the track that people took to be superintendents. . . but I wanted something else – something provincial or national in scope”) and he pursued his goals with both fervor and passion. Is Daniel confused? Has he not found the “goalposts” - he aggressively pursued his “passion” and he was seemingly successful. Why does he continue to relentlessly pursue a position as a senior manager? Indeed, even after being terminated from his 14-year position, Daniel spent over 8 years either unemployed or marginally employed searching for a senior position

even during that time . . . I was looking for an executive director or a directorship of a senior management type of some sort. Preferably a CEO of a small non-profit organization where I would report to a board, and I would have a small staff, and try to move that organization forward...

Is Daniel confused because he really does not understand or even accept who “he is”. He seems unwilling to accept the fact he was terminated from his position, or that his tenacious pursuit of a senior management job has met with only marginally success. Would the “goalposts”, in Daniel's construction of the world, have provided him the external beacons, or directions he needed to manage his career? (“I didn't know what to do when I grew up”). Is Daniel continuing to define “self” in the context of the external environment rather than in his own terms, his own meaning-making framework? Daniel

seems to cling to the belief, although diminishing, that that he might once again attain his former level of success.

Now I am kind of limited in my thoughts of the future – there is retirement looming on the horizon – finally there's a small window of opportunity to be a manager – My approach now, is there's a job out there that looks really attractive and I'm qualified for it, I will apply for it. I'm still wanting to move ahead.

Based on the interviews, Sean, Dean and Daniel believe that they have not, to this point in time, fulfilled their calling in life, their vocation. Although Sean still desires a career as an artist, he believes that “it is too late to work toward that goal”. Dean believes he could have been a decent “trainer, or a facilitator” but he found his “passion” too late in life (“ . . . came at a time when I had gone beyond that point”). Daniel is still searching for a management position, he realizes that with “retirement” looming there is only a small window of opportunity for him. Why do these workers feel that their occupational choices are limited by their age? Has the frustration of the struggle to find the “goalposts”, or change careers, simply drained their energy levels? Has the stress of the search simply overwhelmed them? Do older workers, who have had difficulties finding satisfying work, simply remove themselves from the search, or withdraw from the field?

Why do Sean, Dean and Daniel continue to believe that had they managed their careers differently, things might have turned out differently. Sean admonishes himself because he took the easy way out (“ . . . in my life everything . . . just slid along”). Dean states that his “big mistake” was to “not follow his passion”. Daniel is unable to understand why he could not find the “goalposts” (“ . . . maybe it's genetics, or parenting”). Without doubt, these respondents are discouraged if not saddened by the

unfolding of events in their lives – their seeming inability to “intuitively navigate” their career path. As Guidano (1995a) might suggest, their models, or constructions of the world lack emotional viability. He would further suggest that their discontent reflects a limited understanding of self and the world, or that their knowledge structures are unable to incorporate the complexity of their experiences. That is, they are likely confused about who they are, or about the world of work. Why can’t Daniel, for instance, let go of the belief that he can be a CEO, or Sean a professional musician? Is it because they cannot accept themselves as less than the image they maintain of themselves? Do they lack the spiritual courage to accept the pain and the pleasure, the joy and anxiety of change both within themselves and in the world of work? Do “older workers” who are “successful” have the ability to adapt to ongoing changes in the work environment whereas others tend to hold more rigidly to their beliefs, look “out there” for direction, or attribute their discouragement to the aging process?

Although Sean, Daniel and Dean have been secure or sustain their “life’s work” on an ongoing basis, they have found significance in aspects of their work. Sean, for instance, takes considerable pride in his technical abilities and pleasure in working with students

I’m still conscientious – I like to get the job done and do a good job . . . and there’s other aspects of this work that is very inviting. I have access to a 9 foot concert van in a world-class performance space – how many other soundmen can say they do that? That’s just an incredible thing! And that’s just one aspect of it . . . also it’s the idea of passing on my knowledge to students – I actually did some teaching in the theatre department in the early days and I enjoyed that. . . and also I enjoyed doing the maintenance, I enjoy that a lot – most people look at me and

say "how can you enjoy doing that sort of thing?" . . . I really like working with electronics.

Dean infuses "meaning" into a less than supportive work environment by improving the quality of his relationships in the workplace.

I look for relationships within the work setting and over a period of time you find people who either right away or over a period of time - you build on relationships, on interactions that have worked, and you just carry on with that. . . It's fun! It's meaningful, it's beneficial, it has a purpose, it's a big element in my life.

The quality of interpersonal relationships are for Dean mutually beneficial, possesses inherent meaning, and infuse his life with a larger purpose. In looking toward steadily improving his relationships with other people, Dean redefines his daily work. It is not a fixed set of tasks, for which his employer is likely to compensate him or ever recognize

. . . in terms of the outcomes – it's a value or a fundamental – I do believe if you're enjoying yourself at work – you're better at everything you do! Everything else follows from that – and if you're not enjoying yourself at work, more than likely, other people around you are not enjoying themselves to the same degree that they could – and everything else is not as productive.

Even Daniel, who perhaps did not reach the pinnacle of his career as he had envisioned it, does find that his work has been of some importance to him. Indeed, the income from his work has at least afforded him many pleasures and opportunities

I guess the reason I downplay the importance of work in my career is because I enjoyed my time off – I learned to fly and spent many years as a pilot and really enjoyed that. I like to travel, I'd like to take off – all the time . . . both in the off hours and in between. . . and so pleasure pursuits if you like, but also educational, I like doing different things, I just love getting out and doing different things. And that includes travel, but it also includes some hobbies . . . like the computer, diving, flying and so forth. When I was young and doing all these new things, they were just wonderful and the money was really well spent! Whereas others may wonder "how can I spend my summer getting ahead?" I didn't do that – I spent my summers having fun!

Are these individuals quantitatively different from the other respondents? Do they lack the spiritual courage to take hold of their dreams? On the one hand, they appear to have considerable difficulty pursuing the "path a heart". On the one hand, one might suggest that they are, as are most individuals, in a state of becoming - on the road seeking their spiritual destination. That is, they may be qualitatively different from the other respondents but it is quite possible, at some point in the future, they will reconstruct themselves in a broader framework of meaning. Indeed, Ned, for instance, was not born with a passion of helping others. By his own admission, he struggled and often took wrong turns in the path, and only recently found a place of "comfort" in the world. For this reason alone, it is of fundamental importance to understand the respondents as individuals, to appreciate their struggles to move forward and, above all, their ongoing struggle to find purpose, or spirit in their work. On the other hand, it would be important to perhaps accept that there is a proportion, at least, of the population of older workers who may never secure their passion, or have given up their attempts to find meaning in their lives. It may well be that, for some workers, work will be of only limited importance in their lives.

Subtheme: The Importance Of Work In Later Life

This themes capture responses to interview questions regarding the importance of work to the respondents at this point in their life relative to some earlier period. The questions sought to understand whether paid employment for older workers held greater or lesser value in the latter stages of their time in the workforce. Were older workers losing interest in work? Did work become less important to them as they aged? In the previous two sections it was shown that most of the respondents defined “work” in a rather idiosyncratic fashion, from within their meaning-making framework. As a result, the responses captured in this section are best understood in the context of how the respondents themselves defined their “work”.

Jake discloses that “work”, or the external manifestation of work, has lost its importance to him over the years. The switch from defining himself in some external context (“out there”) to an internal context was for Jake a “very rough transition”. Indeed, once Jake found out “who he was” (self-knowledge) he no longer required work to define, or prove his worth to other people.

It used to be all important. It used to help define who I was. It no longer defines who I am. I was a very rough transition for me. Part of what's helpful is finding out who I am. Work used to be a way to prove to others the qualities I have. I could say I'm a this or I'm a that or I'm a Director of this. So it helped establish who I am.

After moving to BC from Alberta, Jake was content to accept a position much lower on the organizational “hierarchy” in order to simply “do interesting work and make a bit of

money". His overriding need to be "big and important", or use the external trappings of career to define who he is, had fallen away.

. . . in my last position with Government of BC. . . I came in at several levels under where I had worked before. That didn't matter at all. I just wanted somewhere to go that was interesting and something interesting to do and make a bit of money. Which was quite different from earlier in my career when I wanted to be promoted. I wanted to be big and important.

From one perspective, it would be quite defensible to conclude that for Jake, as an example of an older worker, the importance of work in his life has reduced dramatically over the years. However, from another perspective, Jake has redefined what "work" is for him – an internal experience, rather than an external event. Is it possible that career theories that emphasize stage development have misunderstood this shift? That is, older workers are not in fact withdrawing from work but rather redefining the nature of what constitutes work, a transformational shift from career as an external event to an internal experience.

Daniel discloses, on the one hand, that the external trappings of career have lost their importance to him. He suggests that he no longer believes that "you are who you are at work".

I was in that mode, that you were who you were at work, your job, your title, and the job gave you status with peers and friends and I was completely into that mode of being important to me. . . . and a teacher was important, I was very proud of being a teacher... and still am proud...

One the other hand, however, he seems to continue defining himself through his work – an extension of himself.

I treat work as an extension of myself in that I spend a lot of time, as other people do, in their workplace. So I want a place where I can be challenged . . . a collegial atmosphere with people . . . where I can see the products of my work, come back positively. Altruistically I want to make a contribution . . .

There is a subtle difference between how Jake and Daniel have separated themselves from their work. Jake has separated himself from his work by redefining “who he is”. He describes his work now as being nothing more than “solving problems”. Daniel, in contrast, does not seem able to clearly redefine who he is apart from the workplace. He is a teacher and a person who places certain demands or specific rewards from the “job” he performs – challenge, collegial atmosphere, and so forth. In Kegan’s terms, Daniel is inexorably embedded with a particular life-role and cannot connect himself to a larger life purpose. His definition of himself as a “teacher”, an occupational title that blinds him to his larger occupational potentials – he is “his career” whereas Jake ponders “Who I am becoming and how shall I express this emerging self?” Jake has defined himself outside of the context of the workplace, the external context, a transformational shift - qualitatively. His career exists “inside of his head”. Daniel has shifted linearly, quantitatively, shifting the relative importance of work in his life but continuing to define self in terms of his work.

Ethan , in contrast to Daniel, demands no rewards from the workplace other than what values he infuses into his “work”. He doesn’t care what type of “job” he performs “out there” because he redefines it “inside of his head”

I will go and get work and I don't care what I do, you know. . . The job that I'm doing is important to me because I enjoy doing it. I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I didn't work. I'm a person that - again - because I'm a people person, I would have to be with people if I wasn't working.

Has work lost its importance for Ethan? Has he disengaged from the workplace?

Certainly not. However, how Ethan has come to define his “work” has shifted markedly.

His work is something he does “inside of his head”. That is, he defines what “is work” and what is “not work” rather than allowing somebody else to define it for him.

As discussed in the previous section, not all the respondents in this study found that they could define their own work. Sean disclosed that, for the most part, he was content to ‘go the direction the administration is taking’. When asked about the importance of work to him at this point in this life, Sean disclosed that work

. . . is something you do to produce an income, and hopefully, it also has a certain amount of personal of satisfaction in doing the job – that it would be educational to a certain extent - that you would have a certain amount of personal growth. . . but those are desirable aspects of the job that you don't necessarily get! I've certainly experienced that, when I was an [. . .] for instance, that was strictly to make money. There was very little very little satisfaction in doing that job.

Apart from the assurance of an income, it appears that Sean holds only limited hope that he will necessarily be able to secure the “desirable aspects of work” - in this case, personal growth and satisfaction. Does this not portend a potential relationship, either direct or indirect, between one’s “felt” ability to control, or define their work and the

importance they attach to work? Indeed, Sean has been unable to become the professional musician he so desired, he is leaving a secure position because, at least ostensibly, his health has begun to decline, and he remains ambivalent about his future. Indeed, one senses his regrets that his life didn't take the path he would have preferred

. . . instead of saying that it looks less bright than it did 20 years ago – let me say that the potential for it to be less bright is considerably more now, than it was 20 years ago . . . when I was young, I had a pretty impressive resume as an electronics technician, I had good references – so it was easy for me to sell myself – I always felt that I could do anything in the electronics business - I think if my life had taken a little different – it just didn't happen . . .

Why would one, particularly in conjunction with the stresses and strains associated with normal aging, remain in the workplace if they are unable to find personal meaning in their work beyond its financial rewards? Is this the reason why many older workers tend to opt for early retirement? Ekerdt and DeViney (1993) note that the decision to retire and subsequent satisfaction with retirement appear, in part, to be predicated upon having satisfied one's employment intentions. That is, having attained personal fulfillment in one's career one can, in turn, approach the decision to retire from a position of choice. How would Sean's life be different had he been able to fulfill his ambition to be a musician ("something I have always wanted to do"). Like Sean, Daniel has suggested that he has only limited confidence that he can secure the type of work that he feels he would enjoy ("there is a small window of opportunity to be a manager – at my age I find very few"). Daniel expresses his regret for not finding his career niche, his path

The difference is I would have liked to have woken up to a career path which I was more in charge of . . . I should have analyzed what I'm doing in my life and where I wanted to go and made better plans to go there.

Daniel's involvement in the workplace is tentative, unfinished ("I am still wanting to move ahead). He looks forward to retirement – at least conceptually

I look forward to it actually . . . conceptually. . . When I am 60 or 65. Probably I will pull the plug. I haven't set a date or anything – I will see how I feel...

Daniel's and Sean 's rather ambivalent views of their future, stands in rather stark contrast to that of Ned, who anticipates his future with optimism and even greater satisfaction

I'm very optimistic about it. The vision I have found for myself is that I'll be – that I will continue to do what I love doing. On the other side I really don't give a damn nor thought about it very much, you know.

Ned has limited regrets about his past, and anticipates continuing on with his work into the foreseeable future

I'll continue to get better and I'll continue to appreciate that kind of satisfaction from work. . . and, I expect, it will actually deepen with time.

Ethan, like Ned, does not envision leaving the workforce or retiring in the immediate future

I'm very fortunate that I'm in a position where I enjoy my job. And that's why I have no intention of retiring. I'm a people person . . . I would have to be with people if I wasn't working . . . so that means sitting in the mall having coffee with my friends and as I've got my business and they can come here and we do the same thing and I get paid for it!

Although Kyle has made the choice to retire from his position, he intends to remain in the workforce, albeit on a more limited basis

. . . basically I can retire anytime after age 60 . . . really want to do more golfing . . . more fishing . . . I'd like to start some consulting . . . but that is on the back burner . . . I will pick my spots . . . something that is challenging for me and of particular interest . . . if not I won't do it . . . if I don't like the client organization I won't do it. . .

Even in semi-retirement, Kyle expects that he will continue to remain in charge of his work – find intrinsically satisfying work.

The importance that work retains in later life appears to depend, in part, on how the individual defines work. For some older workers, their “work” appears to have become increasingly integrated into their lifestyle, their identity. Because they are able to define their own work, it becomes over time an increasingly interior or an “inside of the head” experience. The traditional, external trappings of work, such as power and placement in the hierarchy – retain only marginal importance for them. Retirement may be, for some workers, a shift in where “work” is performed rather than a discontinuance of their “work”. For others, work remains “something you do to produce an income”, or as an activity which is defined by someone “out there”. However, careers that are more defined in the context of the external environment are subject to the forces of change,

are less predictable, and are more difficult to “take charge of”. The struggle to maintain stability in the face of change or to control the external environment may exact a heavy toll from some older workers. As a result, some may find work to be of decreasing importance in their lives. Retirement becomes a viable and perhaps anticipated option.

THEME: RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE AND BEYOND

Little attention has been focused on the relational or support networks of older adults in the workplace (Hansson, DeKoekkoek & Patterson, 1997). The research literature has suggested that effective relationships in the workplace have a number of benefits for employees (Kram, 1996; Fletcher, 1996; Miller, 1998). In addition to fulfilling social needs, work relationships were hypothesized to be an important source of job knowledge, interpersonal learning (e.g. mentorship and team membership), and social support during times of stress and transition. Research studies that have examined the scope and quality of work relationships in later life have been sparse. Hansson et. al. (1997) have suggested that older workers may not realize the importance of developing new and diverse relationships. Indeed, older workers may tend to focus upon existing friendships in the workplace and feel less motivated to develop new relationships on an ongoing basis. In part, this study posed a number of questions to respondents to understand, from their perspective, what importance they attached to developing and maintaining relationships in the workplace. Although some of the data emerged in direct response to the questions about relationships, the major proportion of the data in this section emerged indirectly over the course of the interviews.

Subtheme: I Get By With A Little Help From My Friends

Kyle, who has been employed in the public sector all of his working life, places a priority on building relationships in the workplace at this time in his life. He stresses the importance of his “ability to get along with others” as integral to completing his assigned tasks,

. . . the work that I do is relationship building and having that ability to get along with other people – absolutely critical – if you don’t – you’re dead in the water.

He appreciates the importance of spending time with his colleagues outside of the workplace. To him, these informal meetings (“going out for a beer”) tend to not only further work alliances but also to an understanding how organizations truly “operate”. To Kyle, cultivating relationships in the workplace simply reflects a “part of human nature” and, in turn, is a rich source of personal friendships

It is important - to me it's just part of human nature - you come together as a group – there's always that social side – there's always that informal side of the organization apart from the formal part of the organization chart – which tells you nothing about how an organization works or operates – it's the relationships that you have and when you go out for a beer, on Friday evening with the group, you find you learn more about them... you establish friendships and relationships in an informal setting..

To Kyle, it appears, the cultivation of relationships in the workplace has an intrinsic value – friendships – and an extrinsic value – fostering of alliances necessary to complete

work assignments and perhaps a more refined understanding of the informal power structures and political alignments inherent in organizational life.

Ron admits that he purposefully attends to the relationship side of his business interactions, or in his terms “networking”. He has come to understand “networking” as integral to his success in the workplace

. . . I do network . . . yesterday I was with some lawyers - and they give me business and I get them business – and that’s the networking situation . . . it’s a conscious thing . . .

At the same time, however, he is quick to point out that his business “network” is a source from which he builds his personal relationships and, at times, long-lasting friendships.

I think what a lot of people in my business have done, is incorporated the business into relationships and friendships . . . a lot of my relationships have developed through work – through clients who became some of my closest friends whom I met through business and we really hit it off – certainly not all of my clients come to my house for dinners, but I have a lot of people I have met.

Ethan also points out that getting to “know and like people” is fundamental to developing his small service business. Nonetheless, Ethan like Ron, perceives an overlap between business acquaintances and friendships

. . . because if you don’t get to know or don’t like people you’re going to be stuck in square one all the time . . . when I started out you interacted

with customers only at work - never socially. In my position now, I see quite a few of them socially. And I feel we have good relationships, good understanding with each other and. . . my customers help me out and I help my customers . . .

Jake discloses that he has, for most of his working life, actively promoted positive relationships in the workplace. He states that, over time, it has become for him “second nature”.

. . . if I go into a work situation, I consciously develop relationships. . . . I mean, I've always done it. It's second-nature. . . . It's one of my skills. I am able to relate to a variety of people, and it's something I do it without thinking about it. . . .

Even in semi-retirement, Jake continues to tap into the friendships he made in the workplace.

I would need to go and find somebody to talk to at mid-morning break particularly if they were a Canucks fan. But I, you know, I need a break and I need the social interaction. I like the social interaction associated with work . . . I miss that. But I've made a lot of friends. I wouldn't be able to do that if I hadn't made working friends 'cause they're all people that I've met through work.

Although Dean chooses not to actively promote friendships with workmates, he recognizes the fundamental importance of proactively building mutually supportive relationships in the workplace. In doing so, he clearly recognizes his rather simple intent to make the “day go better” for himself and/or others

. . . my objective is to make my day go better and to make their day go better – because if their day goes better, they’re going to be better for me! In terms of the outcomes – it’s a fundamental value – I believe that if you’re enjoying yourself at work you’re better at everything you do! Everything else follows from that.

Daniel, however, discloses that he prefers to actively separate work relationships from social relationships. He suggests that friendships in the workplace, however well intended can go awry and it is best to minimize any potential for conflict

Nil – I mean we have the odd lunches together, but during work days – not during weekends – it’s not important to me and we don’t do it. If we had the occasional dinners at one of our colleague’s house or here that would be fine, but I don’t want my colleagues to be counted among my best friends, for a number of reasons – they are great people but I like to keep the two separate. Things happen and there never ought to be a conflict between friendships and colleagues.

Although Daniel understands the theoretical importance of building personal contacts particularly during the job search process, he clearly feels uncomfortable networking

I guess in a way I’m slow to adapt to the reality of making your own job or networking . . . which are not my strong points and the ‘job of work’ I don’t like to do – I don’t like selling myself . . . which you have to do now . . . almost . . . to get a position you want . . .

In doing so, Daniel appears to distinguish between relationships per se which have inherent value from building relationships simply as a contrivance for self-promotion. Indeed, the term networking becomes, from this perspective, a task to be performed (“selling oneself”) in order to attain a specific economic objective. Is it possible that

Daniel simply feels uncomfortable with initiating social relationship? That is, he may simply be displaying a natural preference for maintaining distance in social relationships – a desire to complete his work with his own resources, on his own initiative and in his own way (Jung, 1971; Million, 1994). Daniel, nonetheless, attributes his discomfort with marketing himself to his age and his upbringing.

I think . . . difficult for older workers . . . and there I have not, as I said, in terms of marketing myself or networking, and I chalk that up to things . . . those are the things I do not enjoy doing . . . and it has not been by upbringing in my past to do that . . .

Daniel is not alone in this discomfort with forming work relationships solely as a means of promoting oneself. However unlike Daniel, Ned suggests that he has a “philosophical” discomfort with networking

Integrity is . . . very important for me. There's an aspect of networking that I find to be crass and intolerable and that's the aspect of cultivating a relationship simply because there's an element of personal gain. I find that so repulsive that I have neglected that part of my work as a result it's quite costly. I realize the importance of cultivating relationships and networking, but I find that I trip over my own beliefs quite often.

Like Daniel, Ned appears to have a somewhat limited understanding of the concept of networking – as fundamentally insincere, feigning interest in someone when all you really want is to use them for your own ends. However, their understanding, or beliefs appear to be at odds with the more common understanding of the term networking. Moses (1997), for instance, defines networking as the “ability to develop mutually

supportive relationships. It is as much about being there for someone else as about “using” someone else to get ahead” (p. 174).

In a similar vein, Sean makes a fundamental distinction between relationships in the workplace and social relationship. He does not, however, seem to have a discomfort with the interpersonal demands of networking nor does he hold beliefs that would make network difficult, rather Sean simply does not perceive a particular need - preferring to keep work relationships on a professional basis

No, its never been more – as far as work relationships go, for the most part. It's always been on a professional basis – just trying to think – can't say there's anybody that I have done a lot with socially.

There is no pressing evidence in these excerpts from the transcripts to suggest that older workers per se are necessarily less adept at developing effective relationships as a result of their aging. Indeed, there is much to suggest that many older workers in fact do continue to prize satisfying relationships with their workmates. There were, however, noticeable variations amongst the respondents. Ron, Kyle, Jake, and Ethan, for instance, have noted a significant overlap between their work and social relationships. They perceive a *quid pro quo* inherent in their relationships in the workplace (“... my customers help me out and I help my customers”, “They give me business and I get them business”). They also appear, however, to have moved beyond valuing the extrinsic nature of relationships toward long-term and supportive friendships. Indeed, this particular group of older workers appeared most confident in their ability to develop effective relationships with others. Jake discloses that he has,

over the years, come to understand that he is both approachable and simply “nice” to other people.

I realized over the years that I am actually very nice. People like me. I appear to be kind. You know, people come to me for help. People - it's not - not just a matter of people coming to me for advice because of the intellect thing and knowing they'll get sensible advice - they actually come to me because I'll be nice to them about it.

Ethan has come to appreciate that he is blessed with an easygoing, likable nature

I like to think that I have a personality that people... and people have told me so many times – to make it so easy to have conversation with people. And, I am a people person - your personality comes across - it might not be conversation but - and always remembered, too, that I always had a smile on my face. And, that was very important, I think.

It is quite probable that this group of individuals which includes Jake, Ethan, Ron, and Kyle have a more extroverted personality orientation, and are simply more comfortable in a diversity of interpersonal situations. In all likelihood, these “older workers” have displayed these personality attributes throughout their working lives. Hence, it would be neither more nor less difficult for this group of workers to adapt to the increasing demand for a relationship orientation toward career development.

In contrast, Daniel and Sean draw a distinction between their working and social relationship preferring to keep them distinct. Daniel argues that is it potentially troublesome to mix social and work relationships. Sean does not appreciate that one

might wish to cultivate relationships in the workplace other than to perhaps initiate corrective action,

I think it means getting on with the job!. There is the exception, especially if the person isn't getting along with the job, then I have to think about how to change their behavior or how to resolve the situation. . .

There is nothing to suggest that neither Daniel, Ned nor Sean are unsociable nor unmotivated to be friendly and accommodating to others in the workplace because of their chronological age. It may be rather that they are displaying a different personality style, an inherent preference for more muted interpersonal interactions. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that the aging process per se has influenced their preferred style.

As noted, both Daniel and Ned appear to be less than comfortable with the idea of networking. Although Ned admits his personal discomfort with the notion of networking, he is beginning to pay more attention to the “interpersonal” side of business relationships. He appears to be resolving his conflict of values – recognizing that both partners in a relationship are free to define the nature of the relationship.

I'm finding it to be a very difficult thing to do. . . I can now understand that activity as a fundamental part of doing business. I guess the element that I have not paid attention to very much, in the past, is that element of choice that the other person holds. That regardless of what the relationship is both parties have to be willing to engage in it. And, it doesn't really matter whether it's a networking relationship . . .or personal contact.

Daniel will, in all likelihood, remain uncomfortable with the environmental press to network. He attributes this reluctance to his age and upbringing rather than his interpersonal orientation. Although Jake , Ethan , Ron and Kyle acknowledge they are networking, they appear to have comfortably integrated it into their day-to-day relationships in the workplace.

The findings in this section suggested that some older workers are comfortable in initiating and developing interpersonal relationships, whereas others are less comfortable, preferring to limit the depth of interaction with their colleagues. These differences may simply reflect fundamental differences in personality styles, or interpersonal orientation, or a fundamental misunderstanding of the notion of networking in the modern workplace. The research literature that suggests some “older workers” who are having difficulty making the transition to the “new workplace” may be highlighting individual differences in interpersonal style rather than differences created by the process of aging per se. That is, these differences may have existed since the individual entered the workplace. The environmental press, or demand for a relational orientation in the postmodern workplace may have simply exacerbated these differences.

Indeed, Perry (1992) observed several characteristics common to older workers that appeared to contribute to successful aging in the workforce. These included high degrees of self-confidence, likability, and sociability; that is, older workers liked social involvement, appeared more extroverted, and tended to perceive social exchange as an integral part of job success – characteristics common to or absent from many of the respondents in this study. However, similar observations relating job success to interpersonal orientation have been noted by other researchers with reference to the

workforce in general. (Piedmont, 1999). Further, the criterion for “success”, as used in most studies, may distract researchers from understanding how the individual constructs or defines success. Could one reasonably argue that Ethan, although he has few external trappings of success, including a title, or material possessions (“Money has never been a big problem for me . . . I have never had it so . . . I never miss it”) is not successful? Or Sean, who prides himself on being conscientious, treating others decently, and helping younger workers to develop, anything less than successful? It would be of critical importance for researchers to work toward redefining the criterion for success, particularly how it has been applied to older workers, if the field is to truly understand individual differences amongst workers. The practice of describing group differences on the basis of questionable criteria must be re-evaluated.

Subtheme: Will You Still Need Me, When I'm 64

The excerpts in this section reflect the respondents' expressed preference for interacting with co-workers from different age groups, and for working independently or as a member of a group or team. The research literature does not directly address these issues. However, as small, flexible work teams, staffed by workers of all ages, increasingly become the norm in our economy, it would be important to understand whether older workers are comfortable in working with co-workers at varying ages (Mirvis & Hall, 1996b).

Ethan, again with his typical self-deprecating British humor, suggests that he is indifferent to the age of his co-workers

It doesn't make any difference. I found it easier to work with younger people and I think possibly the reason is that because I am older, they have a little more respect for me. And, they feel that I know more than they do. And, if the truth was known, you don't. And, they won't realize it until they get older. (laughter)

Jake suggests that both employees and employers benefit from a mix of ages in the workforce

I like a mix. I like working with young people because of the vigor and the excitement and the energy . . . [organization] they just had no young people so I went and hired a couple of kids off of campus . . . and immediately there was some snap, crackle and pop and they were all around, digging into things and asking questions and wanting to do more. It's good stuff. . . . they keep you on your toes.

He suggests that younger workers not only bring a perspective to the workplace but also help older workers to learn new ways of "seeing" the world, different approaches to solving problems, and a means of remaining involved in the world of work

No, you've got to stay in touch with the world. . . . and you can do that in many ways. But young people are the key. Young people are great. That's why a lot of teachers stay active. You know - involved in things.

On the other hand, Jake recognizes that, on occasions, he prefers to work or spend time with age cohorts just to relax

I also like working with people my own age because then I don't have to explain everything to them. They already understand because they have

been through it. . . . So every once in a while I like to go and sit with some old fart, like me, then I know I can relax . . .

Ron, like Jake, expresses no particular preference for working with colleagues from different age groups, but admits that he is perhaps more comfortable with his age-cohorts

. . .if you go a ten year range here – I'm 51, so 40 to 60 – I guess, yeah, probably have more in common. A couple of the fellows from [. . .] we play squash together – so, from that aspect, sure. I think there's a commonality there between the age group. If someone was 28 or 29, I wouldn't shun them just because of that, in the sense... I have a very dear friend at [. . .] who's 27 or 28 who's just a delightful man, but I think everyone feels comfortable with someone close to your own age, because you have certain life experiences together – you grew up at the same time.

Sean, rather than attending the age of his co-workers, is more concerned with their technical competence and abilities

I don't have a particular preference... when I worked in [. . .] and [. . .] I certainly worked with younger workers. . . but again – I like working with people who work well! – who understand – who are good technicians . . .

There is no evidence from these respondents to suggest that as workers age they are any more likely to turn away from others, or demonstrate a preference for keeping to themselves or their cohorts. Understandably, there is an ongoing desire to interact with age-cohorts because they often share the same world view, or life experiences.

This particular group of older respondents expressed an active desire to work in teams, or participate in group activities, although they did, for the most part, equally value time to work alone. Kyle, for instance, recognized that teamwork facilitates a connection amongst people that is not present when working alone

I've always preferred both. I really am a loner in many respects, but on the other hand I really like teamwork – I like working with people in that arena when they're trying to make things better. . . a matching of values and all of the connectors that you have as an individual. . . . I really enjoy both.

Daniel enjoys the “open dialogue”, the “sharing of ideas”, the broad perspective that one gains in team interactions

I like the interaction, the sharing of ideas and the testing of ideas with other people – simple as I can make it – and I think that in any organization, that's a real value. It came from that 14 years at the school trustees. . .and you were expected to throw out new ideas – and the team would discuss that idea . . . it means here is something that requires more minds to the issue . . . and then you would have more information or opinions to go on. That kind of open dialogue I really enjoy.

Ned struggles to find the proper balance for himself between working with others and working alone.

That's a tough question. It's a struggle for me, actually. There are aspects of working alone that I really appreciate because I like setting my own environment. I work in a very structured kind of environment - but I develop the structure. I impose the structure. I don't like the isolation and

the lack of collaboration that occurs from that, though. That's a difficult aspect of working alone that I find I always have to manage. And, I'm always struggling to - to manage that.

There is no evidence at least in this group of respondents that older workers are aging curmudgeons desirous of isolating themselves, commiserating with their aging cohorts. Rather they would appear, for the most part, indistinguishable from a cross-section of workers of any age.

Subtheme: The Joy Of Mentoring

This selection of excerpts encompasses the respondents' answers to interview questions about mentoring, or passing knowledge to younger workers or peers. Without exception, each of the respondents disclosed that "mentoring" is an ongoing source of fulfillment and personal reward. Sean, for instance, delights in that aspect of his job which allows to "pass on knowledge"

Absolutely – that's one thing about this job – is that I get to pass on knowledge to students – I spend quite a bit of time trying to teach students about the technical aspects – they don't get a lot of that here – there is nobody over there who has the technical knowledge to get into the technical detail about what the students are working with . . .

Daniel, although not currently in a position to mentor others, anticipates that he would enjoy the experience of "bringing someone along"

I would enjoy that (mentoring others) , it's not part of my job – there really isn't . . . I don't even have an assistant. . . now I may transmit certain

skills to my . . . the assistants there in the office, or even to [. . .] I don't know. Going to the second part of your question – it is something I would enjoy, yes very much so! Not only for the help that person would give me, but also for a bit of reward in bringing someone along and I would enjoy that.

Ned, in retrospect, recognizes that he has probably been mentoring others for most of his working life although he may not have labeled it as such

That's something that I really enjoy. I have a great time doing that. Just absolutely love it. I would never have thought of myself in that regard. Although, I didn't picture myself that way, I have probably been in that - or there's always been some element of that in every stage of my life.

Kyle discloses that he enjoys mentoring both for the intrinsic satisfaction it provides him and because he feels an obligation to, in part, repay the investment others made in him

It's always been important, because that's how I learned – I was very fortunate because there was a tremendous amount of people who were prepared to invest some time in me – so I shared their knowledge and wisdom. It's always been that way – that's sort of a structured approach to "senioring" which is the navy's approach. The navy's approach to executive management development has always been you don't need any – because you learn from your seniors on the ship

It is not surprising that this group of older workers is excited by the prospect of mentoring other people. This, after all, has been a rather traditional role of the older person in our culture. As Kram (1996) points out, older workers will be afforded less and less opportunity to mentor younger workers as the rapidity of technological changes renders everyone in the workplace at once both novices and mentors. What was surprising,

however, was the magnitude of the interest this group of older workers expressed for the role of mentoring. This reflects a resource for employers that must be “tapped” in some way, as well, as it reflects the ongoing interest and joy that older workers find in their work and their motivation to share this with others.

In addition, the desire to mentor, or assist others to reach their potential, reflects a keen interest, on the part of the respondents, in interacting with others in the workplace. Indeed, teaching others is, for the most part, an intensely interpersonal activity. Sean, who earlier expressed an indifference to attending to the interpersonal side of the business, is highly motivated to “pass on knowledge to students” and, moreover, he finds it an “absolutely delightful” part of the job. The depth of interest of these respondents in mentoring belies the notion that “older workers” are less keen about maintaining relationships in the workplace.

Subtheme: Getting Better All The Time

Although most of these older workers value relationship building, many admit that only recently have they begun to truly appreciate the inherent value of relationships in the workplace. Kyle contrasts his current interpersonal skills with earlier times in his working life. He notes, in particular, the evolution of his ability to be more empathetic, less judgmental, and to view interpersonal differences from an ever-widening perspective

I think in some ways I was less tolerant – I really gave a short shrift to anyone I didn't agree with or had a different point of view than mine. Clearly I think the tolerance, the patience, the ability to see points of view

of others without sort of evaluating them – that's evolved over time, I don't think that was there 40 years ago – and it probably wasn't there 20 years ago.

Kyle further suggests that, had he appreciated the importance of relationships in the past as much as he does at his current age, he would have made significant changes earlier in his career. In doing so, he infers that age and experience lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of interpersonal relationships

...if there's one thing if I could go back and share, I think I would have, in retrospect, devoted far more time to relationships building and networking. It's through those relationships that you find out what's reality . . . it is through relationships that you're going to get good candid honest feedback about yourself.

Moreover, he argues that effective interpersonal relationships are an irreplaceable source of feedback, hence, allowing for self-correction and growth – a cornerstone of the relational approach to career development (Fletcher, 1996). Kyle suggests that attending to relationships was not easy for him and required him to expend extra effort over the years. He suggests that others appear to be more naturally skilled than himself

I think I'm better at that now, than I was . . . even 20 years ago. . . It's not one of my strengths. Establishing good relationships is something I've always had to work at it – some people seem to deal and do it effortlessly, they seem to be very articulate, they – in my case, it's not quite as effortless, for me.

Ron recognizes that aging itself has bought a profound degree of maturity that has also allowed him to be more sensitive to others and perhaps view individual differences from a broader, more encompassing perspective

I think when you're 20, no matter how mature you are, you deal with people on a very superficial level as far as – it's more black and white, instead of the gray area people are in – so I think, through the maturing process that you have to look at mitigating circumstances to life and other people's lives – why they are, the way they are . . .

Jake senses that, with age and experience, he is markedly less driven to be competitive with others. Indeed, it is now much less important for Jake to defend his opinion or convince others of the “errors of their ways” – his ego is simply of lesser importance at this point in his life.

Well I used to be chippy, you know, like in hockey parlance I'd have my elbows up in the corner and, somebody crossed me, I'd straighten them out right there. Give 'em a little rap, you know, let 'em keep their heads up and let 'em know I'm around. I don't do that anymore. Can't be bothered. . . life's too short. I'm not interested. It's . . .partly - that's an ego thing when you're younger.

Like Jake, Dean notes that, over time, he finds himself less driven to compete against others to validate his worth. Although he values doing well, he finds himself becoming more mellow, more accepting of himself and others

. . . more understanding, mellow . . . and much less competitive I've deliberately worked on not being as competitive. . . I said it was time for it

to go. . . . but the ambition, the competitiveness has been deleted or lessened - I still like to do well...

Daniel finds himself decreasingly concerned about pitting himself in competition with others. He finds himself more productive, a better team player, and less emotionally absorbed in proving his worth to others.

I was probably perceived as someone who is anxious to move ahead and today that is definitely mellowed. I'm a little more free to dialogue with colleagues in a more productive way than I was before. I think I'm a much better now as a colleague to people than I was back then - more of a team player. It is simply not having any baggage like I did when I was climbing the bottom rungs and seeing the next job . . . or the next couple of levels in my sights all the time.

Ethan has found himself, over time, less energized by interpersonal frustration or conflict. As he has "matured", he finds that he has become more increasingly reflective. He attributes this shift to a growing ability to draw upon the depth of his life experiences

I was - I could be very quick-tempered at one time. But, maturity, again, has started to - well . . . now there's more than one way to skin a cat is another saying. . . . I'm more easy going. I may go into my shell and think about something for a while, but, I've learned to that - don't react straight away. . . [it is part of] growing older . .

Dean discloses that, with aging, he is more accepting and less likely to judge others negatively. He speculates that with aging has developed a large frame of reference, or a broader perspective from which to evaluate the behavior of others.

. . so in terms of judgment, I think you have less emotional, or negative attachments to your judgements – you still make your judgements – you're aware, if you're aware, you're constantly making judgements, of sorts, maybe that's the wrong word – but if you're aware of the world about you, you have to frame in certain ways, part of it is a judgement call
 . . .

Kyle has noted that, over the years, he has become more collaborative and less dependent upon his own counsel. He admits that it was been a difficult transition for him, but he recognized that, given the dynamics of organizational life, it is a basic necessity if one is to survive

I have become more collaborative than I used to be – when in the RCMP you are basically independent – you make decisions on the spot – you don't have a meeting – the decision is required and you make it – that was sort of the culture I came up in – and realized with other groups and teams that you just can't operate that way – you have to share dialogue. I enjoy that the collaboration, sometimes frustrated cause it takes so damn long to get anywhere. . . clearly, organizational dynamics right now are much consultative, much collaborative, a lot more discussions and dialogues to make decision and how they're going to be implemented. Twenty-five years ago I was probably 25/75% – now probably 75% collaborate and 25% independent.

Ned finds that over time he has become more accepting of others. He is now more capable of seeing beyond the moment and taking a longer-term, more emotionally distant perspective of the situation

I think I am now more likely to give the benefit of the doubt to the other person. If they're abrupt or rude, I think they've had a bad day - that's

not their style. And I've seen that happen, you will be attending a meeting and someone will say something that is totally out of character for them so clearly something is happening in their life that they're upset. . . and being prepared to accept that and not let it impact on a good personal relationship you have with them.

In addition, he finds himself less reactive to the immediate demands of the situation. He now has a more advanced ability to remain in control, and not be pressured into searching for an immediate solution to a problem. He finds that, with age, he has acquired a more reflective stance that allows him to be, in the end, a more efficient problem solver

. . . but I know I handle the issues of demands and pressures in a much better way. I will plan and think out a process as opposed to reacting and then finding that process or plan. So I'm more reflective than in younger years, then I would be more energetic and just going for it, and not necessarily going the right direction – ending up usually, hopefully in the right direction but not as efficient or as effective in terms of the initial step to the end result.

Although most of the workers in this study appeared to have developed greater empathy and tolerance for others, they also have become less motivated to secure the approval of others. As Jake discloses

I don't try to conform to other people's expectations any more - which is also very liberating. You know, when you're younger, of course, you have to do that. . . I don't turn myself inside out, as I did when I was twenty-six, just to be liked.

With experience, Jake suggests that he has grown to recognize that it is neither possible nor desirable to please everyone.

But I also accept the fact that it's impossible to have everybody like you and, if everybody likes you, you're probably doing something wrong.

Ron has come to feel comfortable minimizing his interactions with people, who are dishonest or just difficult to work with

I've chosen not to work with different people – situations, and essentially just told them, that I didn't think that we could work well together . . .and that gives you great power – the first time it happened I felt really empowered – felt I had arrived! Because I had some people that I didn't want to deal with them – and I just felt I didn't want to participate, I didn't want to represent them.

In addition, Ron discloses that he has been more assertive with abusive people. As a result of aging and experience, he is less apt to walk away without expressing his indignation

. . . it's almost a contradiction...perhaps I've grown a little intolerant of people who are abusive – I guess that's one aspect that, over the years, I like to think, you're becoming more tolerant . . . people who are abusive – I have no time for them! So I guess that, before I think I would have put up with it, walked away and not said anything, so if I see someone that is very abusive, I'll comment on it rather than just walk away.

Like Jake, Ron has become over time less absorbed with securing the approval of other people and more comfortable with asserting what is “right” rather than what is

acceptable to others. Dean finds that he is less prone to accept interpersonal feedback at face value. Indeed, he has learned to evaluate such information with a larger context (“whole picture”) rather than simply “take it to heart”

Well I accept it as useful information . . . in the past I would be taking the words and the negative parts to heart – now I look at the whole picture and kind of wonder ‘ well I wonder why he’s saying that?’ That’s nice, I think it’s that level that we all arrive at. . . well most I hope. . . that we really don’t give a shit any more!

Like Ron, Dean has come to accept that he is less inclined to strain himself finding common ground with everyone he must work with. He has grown to accept that there are some people that he just cannot work with despite his best efforts.

I like to work with just about everybody but I’m sure not interested in working with people that I don’t like any more. You sometimes you just put up with people . . . now I will avoid people that I don’t like – and in a work situation that becomes a little difficult . . . cause I now know that there is a host of people out there that have got positives...connectors . . .but what I do know now, is that if there is someone that comes along and doesn’t rub me right, I’m not going to waste my time, I’m not going to try to figure them out. . . and work at a relationship, unless it’s absolutely and utterly unavoidable.

Like Dean, Daniel is perhaps less comfortable working with some people in the work environment. He has learned to be more cautious, or less open, in some relationships particularly with those individuals who are less than honest with him

. . . my trust threshold has gone way down. So that's one thing I learned, about myself that one should have their guard up – even when you don't think you need to . . . have it up. . . I dislike people who have an agenda and play office games – and have knives to stick into people's backs – and I have no time for that at all.

Daniel takes a measure of pride in the fact that he has been consistent with his principles, and that he has never backed away in the face of interpersonal conflict

Another thing I learned about myself was that I am not ashamed of holding to my principles – and when I look back . . . in difficult situations when those things happened to me and I said - I look back and said “ even though it may have cost me in terms of promotions or even jobs – I learned that the right way is stay with what you believe to be right. You hold those values even though it may cost you – don't forsake them – stay with what you think is right.

Although he realizes that he has a direct approach to resolving interpersonal problems, Daniel has learned over time that it makes sense for him to say, or do “what you believe to be right” rather than compromise his values simply to be liked, or to get ahead. In a similar vein, Sean has come to accept that he may never feel particularly comfortable with interpersonal conflict, or be able to make decisions without worrying about the consequence this decision may have upon others. He takes solace, however, in the belief that he has treated others fairly and sensitively

I've always had a strong sense of fair play I guess – I always like to consider the other person too - that's something that I see in myself - generally speaking, for most things I tend to look at how the other person might feel or think – now, that's not true for everything.

Most of the respondents report that they acquired an increasingly profound appreciation for, and skill in, human relationships over their lifetime. Most have gained an ability “to see” the unfolding of events from within a wider, more encompassing perspective – to see people and the context in which they are embedded (“to look at mitigating circumstances”), gained the ability to suspend their judgements of others (“less emotionally attached to judgements”), acquired a greater tolerance for differences in other people (“more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt”), as well as an acceptance of weaknesses in themselves and others. Moreover, most older workers recognize that they are markedly less competitive, less concerned with securing the approval of others, more open to collaboration and collegiality and, perhaps, more mellow. Many have become more assertive, more confident in their ability to positively influence others, and less inclined to tolerate abusive or negative behavior in others.

Have these workers, in fact, actually changed? Has the process of aging caused them to become more mellow? Less emotionally reactive? I would argue that the respondents have not undergone a significant change in their personalities but rather have come to accept themselves for what they are. That is, they are less inclined to worry about how others perceive them, or about having their opinion accepted, or becoming drawn into meaningless competition. Because they can accept themselves, they are more likely in turn to be more accepting of others (“give the benefit of the doubt”), and more sensitive to other points of view. Above all, they have come to accept their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Indeed, many have now come to accept that they do not like some other people (“I am not going to waste my time”), or aspects of themselves (“I’ve grown a little intolerant of people”). It is the perhaps, the “wisdom” that is associated with aging that has shifted how these workers have come to view themselves and others. Baltes et. al. (1992) suggest that a major aspect of wisdom

implies an ability to “incorporate knowledge about the nature of interpersonal relationships, their dynamics, and their potential and limitations” (p. 136).

Fletcher (1996) has suggested that the new kind of worker required for the flatter, more responsive organizational structures of the 21st century must have developed a more holistic perspective, possess more enhanced communication skills, enjoy collaborating, and be team-oriented rather than competitive – attributes which bring workers together rather than promote psychological autonomy. Indeed, the increase in empowered, self-managed teams, who can make decisions and implement them, requires skills which include attending to emotional data, sensitivity to others’ emotional realities, self-reflection, and the ability to move easily from the role of novice to the role of expert, and back again. These skills or attributes are associated with the developmental models of growth-in-connection posited by Miller (1998) and Gilligan (1982). According to Fletcher (1996), this model suggests that:

. . . growth, development, and professional achievement can occur in a relational context of connection rather than an individuated context of separation and competition and that it is in the organization’s best interest to encourage these kinds of growth-fostering relational interactions and the skills they require (p. 119).

According to Hammer (1994), women appear, either for cultural or psychological reasons, to have a distinct advantage in these areas. Results of this study would suggest that older male workers also appear to be moving toward greater connectedness and interdependence. Ironically, these skills have been found to be unrewarded in organizational settings. Jacques (1992) suggests that the whole host of

behaviours associated with relational interactions – behaviours that could promote organizational goals – are virtually invisible in most workplaces. Rather than asking whether older workers can continue to contribute to the workplace, perhaps the question should seek to understand how we might learn from older workers to make the workplace a more humane, or a more tolerant place, for workers to live and work.

THEME : DEVELOPMENT OVER THE LIFE SPAN

Subtheme: I Know Who I Am Now

This theme emerged as the respondents reflected upon the changes in themselves they had noticed over the years. That is, how they see themselves “now” as compared to some point in the “past” (“ . . . 10, 20, 30 years ago”). Ned discloses that he is now able to live in a more self-directed manner, focussing more on those activities that he enjoys and forward his objectives

I have more a better understanding of what it is that I like to do and what it is that I want to do. I'm less ambivalent about - or less of a tendency to be distracted by interests or events as they come along just because they happen to be there. Less impulsive, more directed and more focused . . .

He suggests that he has, as a result of his development, become more aware of his strengths and limitations, or self-accepting, and is more likely now to “listen” to his emotions. His increasing level of self-knowledge has, in turn, buttressed his self-confidence and his ability to proactively respond to life's challenges.

The development of a level of self-awareness. Becoming more observant of my own behavioural range. . . . my own emotional responses to a situation, my own limitations and sources of fear or anxiety or apprehension or discomfort. I think the self-confidence is a result of the development of that kind of information and experience and awareness.

In typical understatement, Jake suggests that he now possesses, as a result of aging, a more “reasonable” definition of himself – one with which he is now particularly comfortable.

It's almost like a consistent philosophy. I think I have a reasonable definition of who I am I believe that I am comfortable with... I kind of like myself.

Like Ned, Jake finds that he now responds to life's challenge in a more predictable, consistent fashion rather than “being distracted” by events “as they come along”. Like the experience of Ned, Jake is now in a much better position to decide where, and how, he wants to expend his energy. Whereas in his younger years Jake would have felt obliged to prove that he was responsible and capable of meeting new challenges, he now realizes that sometimes simply sitting on the sidelines does not detract from who he is – his self-definition.

Makes it much easier for me to deal with situations and decide whether I want to take 'em on or not and if I don't take 'em on, I don't feel that I'm being cowardly or irresponsible or whatever. It's just that I don't want to do that. And I can't be bothered, but that does not detract from me being who I am. Whereas twenty years ago I'd have worried about it. Saying why aren't you doing that, you know? A little voice . . . my Mother,

or my mentor, or whoever all the various nags in my life were, would have said, "Why aren't you doing that?" Now I say "Piss off. I don't want to".

Jake discloses that he is much more in control of his emotions, less concerned about negative feedback from others – less “ego” is involved in how he responds to life events. As a result of his growing sense of “self”, he is less concerned with others’ expectations now than any earlier time in his life – “I act in a more self-driven way now”.

Dean, in a similar vein, suggests his perspective of himself is more grounded and appears to view his life from a broader, more encompassing perspective

. . . a more global awareness, and the idealism, I think, is more grounded. I think because of the experiences you gain along the way . . . in going through the phases you maintain the fact of having some kind of purpose in life – doing something of value. . . it's healthier. . . more mature . . . it's more understanding – because you have more awareness of what's going on in the world in a larger sense.

Despite the instability and turmoil he has experienced in the workplace, Dean has found solace by remaining focused upon the greater purpose of his life rather than allowing himself to become frustrated and cynical with life’s less important issues. He discloses that his growing ability to focus on the bigger, more global picture rather than the flotsam of daily living reflects the “maturity” and “experience” commensurate with aging. He has acquired a rather pragmatic philosophy by which to live

. . . if you get lemons in your life, you make lemonade. . . and that wasn't part of my upbringing – but it's those kinds of things – and then it's just

watching other people – usually family, and seeing how they handle their hardships – you can feel sorry for yourself, or you can move on!

Indeed, his ability to “steel” himself against hardships has become more stable and consistent as he has aged

I think, the benefit of the philosophy, and the consistency in which I try to go that way, is more stable now than when I was younger.

Ethan, in his rather homespun manner, suggests that he has learned, as the result of age and experience, to simply appreciate what he has achieved and not to mourn for what he has not attained. Rather than continuing the struggle to make sense of one’s life, according to Ethan, one must perhaps simply learn to appreciate life itself.

I think the biggest thing is that - I know I've settled down to life in general, I guess . . . learning to appreciate things and people. And, I think that's mainly what I've found, is that - that I've appreciated life more - I think that most older people do, as a rule - they appreciate what they have achieved and are not as greedy for what they haven't got . . . Life may never makes sense. . . to the individual. . .

Not all the respondents in this study, however, are, as yet, more comfortable with who they are, or accepting of themselves. Daniel tends to reflect upon the mistakes he has made in his life and seems to have difficulty “letting go” of his past, or even forgiving himself for mistakes. He discloses that he has failed to keep his “head up” in the past and, as a result, became too complacent, too comfortable with himself

I would recommend to anyone who's in a long time position ... to take a big step back – and look at, and take the blinkers off – and say – okay where does this go? Do I want or need to adjust – my experience, my education to go where I want to go, and didn't do that. I knew then, I should have, but I didn't. You know I think that's good advice for anyone. The job can evaporate - just like that! And when you think everything is fine, it isn't – you are unprepared.

Further he regrets that he still struggles to “control” his natural sense of humour in order not to offend other people

I've worked on to be better at . . . not to putting my mouth in gear before my brain, and I have a habit of doing that – of off-putting comments – several of which in the past have landed me in deep do-do – and it's my nature to do that and . . . so I think one of the things I've learned to overcome is my innate wry sense of humour or sarcastic sense of humour and to toss out comments that you know, wow! - had the impact that was totally unexpected and unintended even – but had a huge impact. So I have to be careful of what I say – I have to practice even now.

It is undoubtedly discomfoting for Daniel to remain on guard in case his job may disappear, or he may offend others by being himself.

Sean, who has left his full-time position, casts his fate anew in hopes of capturing better opportunities. His comments seem to lack confidence, or convey a sense that he is not in control of his life

I'm attempting to get work at [organization] but there's not a lot of hiring on . . . the most likely thing that will happen is that I'll be on my own. . . well what choices do I really have?

These excerpts capture the confidence within most of the respondents that they have arrived at a different, perhaps higher plane of development – they now possess a more grounded, refined understanding of who they are, a deeper understanding of their motives, a firmer sense of direction in their lives, and a stronger emotional resilience. Most have become more accepting of their strengths and their weaknesses. Most refer to having acquired a more consistent philosophy by which to conduct the affairs of their lives. What is most interesting, however, is that commensurate with this sense of “inner harmony” there is a renewed sense of confidence, of control that did not exist in previous years (“I appreciate life more now”, “I am more comfortable”). One might reasonably argue that for selected individuals, aging has been, for them, a period of growth and renewal rather than a process of loss. For others, aging has not bought them a greater level of self-acceptance or comfort, but rather greater uncertainty and a sense that life events might overwhelm, or unbalance them at any time – a sense of impotence in the face of time.

Subtheme: Variations In Adult Development

The results of the previous sections strongly suggested several of the respondents experienced an increased sense of comfort as they came to understand and accept who they were - their “self”. Their increased self-knowledge and self-acceptance seemed to move many of the respondents toward integration - toward a more “consistent philosophy”. None of the respondents, however, arrived at their current “place” without enduring many dark periods and emotional angst throughout their lives. There is little doubt that all of the respondents have grown significantly, having moved forward over their lifetime. However, as it has been noted, not all have arrived at the

same place nor in the same time frame – there is variation among the respondents across most of the themes.

As this section of the study will demonstrate, constructivist developmental theory (Kegan, 1982; McCaulife, 1993) or to the self-hood dynamics model of Guidano (1995a; 1995b) is a useful model for understanding aspects of the variations amongst the respondents. The developmental progression of three respondents were chosen because they were thought to be the clearest examples of the variations in the balances, or orders, of adult development.

Jake – The Interindividual Balance

As earlier discussed, the constructive-developmental framework studies a natural phenomenon – the evolution of meaning. It assumes that the evolution of meaning is the fundamental motion in personality. It is the *context* for understanding thoughts and feelings, subject and object relations, and constructions of the self and others. The evolution of meaning is a life-long succession of qualitative differentiation of the self from the world - that is, over time the self becomes more qualitatively extensive following a series of “successive triumphs” of “relationship to” rather than “embeddedness in”. With each successive rebalancing of the self-object relationship, the individual gains a more advantageous vantage point from which to view “self”. This context provides a means of viewing the development of the respondents across time, from the beginning of their entry into the workplace to the present. It explains, in part, the variation amongst the respondents in this study of the manner in which they construct their work, maintain relationships, and respond to events in their lives.

In this section, Jake's narrative is discussed in the context of the constructive-developmental framework. It is argued that Jake provides one of the clearest examples of movement from the Interpersonal Balance through to the Interindividual Balance, or from the 3rd order of consciousness to the 4th order.

From the vantage point of his current cognitive balance, Jake provides a retrospective view of his developmental trajectory. He discloses that he attended university with the expectation of graduating with honours in geology. Instead, he fails his final physics exam and is awarded a general degree. In the context of this psychological surround, Jake describes himself as a "failure"

Up until the age of twenty-one, everything in my life had been geared toward academic success. As a student the only things that mattered were passing your exams and doing well in school. So, in that context, I had failed.

From a constructive-developmental point of view, Jake would appear to have defined himself from within the Interpersonal Balance. From within this developmental balance, Jake strives to ensure his self-definition aligns, as much as possible, with the expectations of others in his environment ("that context"), including parents, employers, cultural norms, and peers. He cannot generate a "self" that he can view objectively, he cannot say, for instance, this is only a minor obstacle to overcome – his "self" is embedded in his relationships

And my Mother's reaction was - what good's that! You know - I mean nobody in our family had ever had any kind of degree and so, yeah, in

that context, in kind of the expectations that other people have of me, I failed.

Indeed, without the confirmation from his psychological surround, Jake is unable to establish a consistent sense of self-worth. His self-confidence is, at this point in this life, contingent upon the approval of others.

. . . and everything had come very easily to me. I guess I was always - lacking in a degree of self-confidence.

Within the Interpersonal Balance, Jake is susceptible to advice and direction from others. He cannot act in the absence of what is acceptable or approved by others. In hindsight, he regrets he listened to some less than useful advice

So it kind of threw me because I was going to be a Geologist but I was given very bad advice by one of my professors who said that, you know, really I shouldn't go into Geology without a good degree. I'd never get a good job. Which wasn't true but he didn't know any better.

Although the passage of time has undoubtedly blunted the emotions, one can readily imagine Jake's emotional distress at this point in this life. Rather than avidly pursuing his career in Geology, Jake completed his compulsory military service. At the end of his military service, Jake immigrated to Canada to find employment, preferably in the oil and gas industry. Unfortunately, he arrived in Canada in the midst of an economic depression. Despite his tenacity, he was unable to find employment as a geologist. To fend off starvation ("I was awfully hungry"), he accepted a position in sales

So I ended up as a sales representative for Texaco. It's a job I absolutely hated. I felt I'd been hired only for my personality and nice smile and there was no intellectual content in it. And, and so here - this is another blow to my self-confidence.

From any number of perspectives, Jake, was a success - as a recent immigrant, he had secured employment and probably had a good future with a progressive, multinational firm. He should have been pleased. Jake's position, however, was incongruous with how he saw himself – an intelligent individual.

So, to me, you know, a job without - I mean, my definition, I think, comes from my intellect. It doesn't come from my physique or my ability to build things or whatever. It comes from my mental ability to solve problems.

He continued to perceive himself as an abject failure, unable to exercise the necessary control over the events of his life. Within a few years, he secured by sheer chance a position in human resources within a provincial public service. He sensed that he had found a position that had a future for him, one that might value his intellect. He began to gradually reengineer his self-image.

. . . it was a lot of intellectual challenge then because we were doing everything for the first time . . . So, I was in the right place at the right time. I got all the good stuff, and I did it well and I liked it and I got lots of good feedback. So I just, you know, eventually I started to rebuild a picture of myself - as being a worthwhile person.

Jake 's abilities were both acknowledged and rewarded by his employer. His image became increasingly aligned with his self-definition, his psychological surround. His

income becomes, in one sense, the symbol that he is now a more worthwhile person and perhaps equal with his peers

I also got promoted and started making money close to what my friends who'd gone into Geology were making and that helped. I mean, initially they had all been working for a few years and making, you know good money. And I was still struggling to find a start in life.

He attributed his career turn-around, in part, to a mentor who took the time to support him and to challenge him in his growth.

I was getting feedback from [. . .] who was my mentor - who was the guy really that set me on the path . . . who kept telling me how good I was 'cause he could see that I didn't know how good I was. It was a combination of me proving to myself - of doing good work, having it recognized, proving to myself I can do it and then being told I had. So I just found myself to be more self-assured.

The relative importance Jake attached to positive feedback from others suggests that, at this point in time, Jake was still within the Interpersonal Balance. Although he was beginning to recognize his intrinsic worth, he still depended upon others telling him "how good he is".

Jake begins his rise to more senior positions within the public sector, he garnered a prestigious title. He became, in his words, a "force to be reckoned with", or really "quite insufferable". Jake noted a change in his interpersonal behavior. Whereas before he was, perhaps, more tractable and self-effacing, he became increasingly confident of himself

When I finally got into work that I liked, and then I started - doing well and getting feedback that I was doing well and confidence and assurance just grew from there. By the time I was in my early thirties, I was quite insufferable. I mean that I'd really - I'd really become very confident.

Kegan would suggest that Jake has started to shift from the Interpersonal toward the Institutional Balance. Within the Institutional Balance, one is no longer authored by their psychological surround but rather are capable of identifying their objectives, articulating a position independently, running themselves as a “fixed institution”, and acting in a relatively autonomous fashion. Individuals within the Institutional Balance are able to view “self” and its relationships as “objects” rather than as “subject”. Jake was no longer encapsulated by his relationship, his former valuing context. He was capable, at this point in his career, of working quite independently

I very quickly became better than everybody else there except one. . .and I was very quickly given assignments with [senior official] . By the time we got to the [. . .], I was fairly subtly leading my mentor - only did it very carefully because I liked him and he wouldn't have reacted very well.

In fact, maintaining his independence, exercising self-control became the primary objective for Jake at his point in his life. He was now quite capable of defining, or maintaining “psychological control” over his work – a defining feature of the Institutional Balance. As previously discussed, Jake encountered a situation during this period in which a former employer delegated a work assignment but simultaneously attempted to direct how the work ought to be completed

He called me in and gave me this assignment, and he started telling me what to do - and I stopped him. I said, "Look, you're taking all the fun out of this. You know, if - if that's, that's how you feel why don't you just do it. I mean, I know all this. Let me go away and do it and see what I come up with. . . I react terribly to that. I really am no good at being told what to do.

Jake rather deftly exercised his psychological control over his own work but at the same time respected the social authority inherent in his employer's position in the hierarchy. Further, Jake related an incident some years later after leaving the public service

I did get fired once by a guy who thought I was lying to him - but, I mean, when people think you're lying, it usually reflects how they approach life. I wasn't lying to him so that's not the point.

Rather than losing confidence or perceiving himself as an abject failure, in this incident, Jake simply disregarded the negative feedback from his "psychological surround" – he was now capable of creating his own ideology – I am a good person - confirming that he had, without doubt, grown beyond the Interpersonal Balance.

Despite his accomplishments in the workplace, Jake had increasingly less success resolving a deteriorating long-term marital relationship. This failing relationship becomes a discordant note in his otherwise positive self-image and created, for him, considerable emotional distress. From within the Interpersonal Balance, Jake had been unable to resolve his marital strife because he was, in effect, defined by the relationship. He could not stand outside of the relationship and view it objectively – he was "the relationship". From within the Institutional Balance, however, he was enabled to view his relationship from a different perspective – the "object" of his gaze. However, he is

initially unable to end the relationship because he is driven by principles, by truths that he perceives as universal (“No one in my family has divorced”, “Only failures become divorced”) characteristic of the Interpersonal Balance. It is only when the emotional pain and loneliness becomes so overwhelming (“crisis”), that he can no longer remain at rest – he comes to accept the dissonant and even contradictory voices within himself.

As long I was in that marriage, I had this great long litany of failures in my life. You know, I'd failed in school, I'd done this, I couldn't get a job, I'd made an awful marriage, I'd done this, I'd done that, I was this, I was that.

Inner “voices” told him he had strengths and weaknesses - a saintly side and a dark side, and that truths were relative rather than absolute. Recognizing that he is not necessarily a failure, Jake dissolves his lengthy marriage (“I would probably have died young”), and attempts to immerse himself once again in his work

So there was a point where I kind of plateaued . . . and then, once I'd got out of the marriage, I kind of took off again - for a bit. And I had some good jobs and did some good things and then I came here and, ironically, none of that really mattered anymore.

Something, however, had happened to Jake that diminished, in his mind, the importance of work in defining who he was. He describes it as a gradual process

Once I'd proved to myself - what I did was because I was successful in other jobs, I had proved to myself that I could have done all the things that I should have done. Once I'd proved to myself that I could do it, then I didn't worry about it any more. And that was a fairly gradual thing.

In terms of constructive epistemology, Jake, at that point in his life, had begun to shift to the Interindividual Balance from the Institutional Balance, or from the 4th to the 5th order of consciousness. In the Interindividual Balance, the individual begins to become connected to a larger purpose in their life, to be open to new expressions of their yearnings. They are no longer defined by their occupation, but rather have an occupation. Work becomes, for Jake, no longer an end unto itself but rather one of many facets of his individuality. Because his marriage ended prematurely, he was not necessarily a failure. Within the Interindividual Balance, he became increasingly reflective, more accepting of his human failings, and more conscious of the contradictions in his life (“I screwed up on some things but I did a lot of things well”). In simply accepting who he was, Jake finds himself more at peace with himself

I tended to look back a lot 'cause I kept dwelling on past failures and mistakes... and I used to always look back to what I would have done and. . . reinventing my life in my head. I just stopped doing that. I don't do it anymore. Then I almost used to get obsessed with - with reinventing my life and what I could have done with it. Now I look at it and say - well - bullshit! You know, my life wasn't bad, or I haven't handled it too . . . Sure. I screwed up on some things but I did a lot of things well and I - uh - don't look back and try to change it. So that's really a very big difference in my life.

It is from within the Interindividual Balance, it is argued, that Jake found that he was less competitive in his relationships with others (“and if I don’t take them on, I don’t feel I am being cowardly or irresponsible”), less driven to “prove the qualities he had” through his work (“It used to define who I was”), and less willing to “turn himself inside out” to secure the approval of others. He appears to be very much in control of his life, to act from conscious choice – to enjoy time with others or be alone, to take the time to

exercise and attend to his health, to work on challenging projects or not – to live at peace with himself. In one sense, Jake is the same person he has always been – the difference may be in the qualitatively different vantage point from which he has come to view “self”. It is this conclusion that Jake himself appears to “discover” that he is essentially the same person but essentially different - “perception is the reality”

But it's a picture I like. That's the difference. I'm quite happy to be me now. . . . Perception is the reality in this case - I believe I have a cohesive picture of myself.

Does this explain why Jake feels he is still “twenty-one”? Because his “essence” as a person has not changed over time? Rather what has changed is his perception of himself – a different picture of the same person from a different vantage point?

In summing up the interview, Jake captures the essence of what he has learned on his journey is self-knowledge – “knowing who you are”!

I think a summary statement is - life gets better. Knowing who you are, being confident in what you can do but remaining open to the fact that you still haven't learned it all. If you can do that, it's a very peaceful way to live.

The process of aging has bought, for Jake, greater self-confidence, a greater sense of control, knowledge of his essential self, an openness to new learning, and the potential of interpersonal relationships. This image of the older worker is, without doubt, incongruent with the image our culture holds.

The writing of Guidano (1995a) provides another perspective from which to view Jake's life. This author might look at Jake's life as a process of continuous reordering of his self-hood dynamic over time, an ongoing process of experiencing and explaining. For instance, when Jake "failed" at university, his experience, or definition of "self" – as an academically successful individual – is seriously challenged. At this point in his life one assumes that Jake has only a limited number of knowledge categories by which he might perceive his world and evaluate himself - successful/failure, good/bad, acceptable/unacceptable. He experienced both emotional angst and a growing loss of confidence. His tenure as a sales representative serves only to exacerbate the incongruence between the image he holds of himself and his more immediate experience of the world. Over time, however, he is able to shift from the immediacy of experiencing to the level of languaging or explanation. He comments, in retrospection, that "he was given some bad advice by his professor", "he should have come to Canada right away", or "I came to Canada during a bad recession". In calling forth these alternative explanations, he is, in essence, "constructing the self" - "I am not a failure". An alternative construction, or explanation of events that is more viable, less emotionally charged is more congruent with his experience of "self".

Later in his life, Jake disclosed that "a guy who thought I was lying to him" fired him. Rather than being emotionally distressed, Jake simply deflected the incident as unworthy of further comment. This is significantly different from the manner in which he would have reacted at an earlier point in his career. Is it possible that Jake's knowledge structures have become more internally complex, hence discordant information is more quickly assimilated? It is "as if" Jake said to himself – "My experience of me is that I am generally an honest person", or "My experience has been that when people falsely accuse others of lying it generally reflects more upon them than me". In doing so, Jake

is less susceptible to the immediacy of his experience because his identity is more structured, more consistent.

The emotional angst emanating from Jake's marital discord, however, cannot be so readily assimilated. Jake is both emotionally devastated by the experience and guilt-ridden for many years thereafter. As he describes the experience

As long I was in that awful marriage, I had this great long litany of failures in my life. . . . I'd failed in school, I'd done this, I couldn't get a job, I'd made an awful marriage, I'd done this, I'd done that, I was this, I was that. And I used to always be looking back to what I would have done and. . . reinventing my life in my head. Once I got out of the marriage I just stopped doing that. I don't do it anymore.

Jake, from one point of view, is retrospectively restructuring his immediate experience of the marital separation. Although painful at the time, he slowly begins to define it as inevitable – he is no longer reviewing the long litany of failures - he has left a marriage that “probably would have led to his premature demise”. He is, in essence, amplifying selected aspects of his past experience to bring them into line, to make them consistent. To abate the distress of the experience, according to Guidano (1995a), Jake must evolve a new structure of the self, erect a new scaffold of experience through which to view the self. It does not matter that the explanation Jake, has arrived at is valid but rather that it is emotionally viable - in line with, or consistent with, his ongoing experience.

Over time, we are witnesses to other examples of Jake 's ongoing reconstruction of himself. For instance, he attended in the latter part of his working life a developmental

workshop. It offered, among, other things an assessment of and feedback on his interpersonal style. He discloses that, as an individual, "I always thought of myself as fairly gregarious and outgoing". He is told, however, that he is likely both introverted and analytical. He describes this experience

I mean that that really is quite surprising when you look back at the things I've done. It should have been obvious. It actually came about fifteen or more years ago. I was taking one of the style courses and, you know other people judge you and I came out analytical and I was horrified. Because I thought that I was much more emotional 'cause I know what's going on inside of me. I thought it all showed. None of it shows. People have no idea whether I am angry or mad. All they see is this mask is not the right word because I'm not - not inanimate. Yeah, I just don't show my feelings.

Although he was initially "horrified" or "quite upset", he began to accept that he was, in fact, more stoic in this presentation than he had perhaps realized.

I got quite upset because the examples of the type of analyticals were all horrible. I'm not like that - but I am analytical. As soon as I am faced with something, my reaction is usually, I see - I'll think about that. . . . I don't generally make rash judgements. I like to get information and I like to process it. You know I always had friends growing up and I was part of the group at school. So, I always thought of myself as gregarious. But I never fully realized, although it was true then as it is now, that I'm quite happy with my own company for prolonged lengths of time.

With experience, Jake is able to evaluate and/or incorporate increasingly divergent information about himself – his knowledge structures ("conceptual networks") have become more complex, integrated, and more encompassing. Guidano (1995a) might

argue that Jake is, in essence, restructuring his appraisal of himself - bringing it into alignment with his experience of self ("It should have been obvious"). This is, in Guidano's terms (1995a), the essence of human development – restructuring, or reintegrating the self over time into a new structural reorganization. A restructuring that is more emotionally viable, more consistent with one's knowledge structures.

Ned – Institutional Balance

Ned grew up in a rural, rather impoverished, maritime environment. Although he attended university, he had no particular objective in sight. He was not a particularly strong student. He financed his education by enrolling in the Canadian Armed Forces officers training program. After his basic and initial training was complete, Ned realized that he had likely made a serious error in judgment

. . . one of the early experiences was the realization that I had placed myself in a position of having made a commitment to the Air Force - to go through and finish the degree and then spend six years flying around in the aircraft. And my initial naïve understanding of what that was going to be like was severely challenged by the realities of the assignments that were available and the kind of flying that I was going to be doing and the type of job that I was going to be doing as a crew member. And, it wasn't at all what I had initially envisioned.

He recognized that he would master the job requirements but the "the job" itself was uninspiring. He sensed that he might be at odds with his "psychological surround".

I found that the initial training indicated to me that, although I could manage the tasks - I didn't have a passion for the work that I thought I

would have. That it wasn't the way that I thought it would be. There were many aspects of it that I enjoyed. I didn't have, as I say, that passion - that drive that I observed in other people in that field.

Despite his best efforts to withdraw from his contractual obligation, Ned realized that he must live up to his earlier commitments. After several years of carrying around a “chip on his shoulder” he found his original evaluation of his colleagues to be somewhat flawed

I found that my first posting on the Squadron I was still carrying this chip on my shoulder - and I had some preconceived ideas about the individuals that were part of the regular crew of the squadron that I was working with. And I came to realize that my assessment was really flawed. That I didn't really understand these people at all - that I didn't have any respect for them. And - my lack of respect was really entirely unwarranted. That they had attributes and skills and knowledge and insight and characteristics that once I got to know what they were - once I was willing to let down or let go of my own chip - I could then see who they were as individuals.

In terms of constructive-developmental theory, one might argue that Ned is “in synch” with his environment – characteristic of the Interpersonal Balance. He feels the pull of a personal commitment to those in his immediate work environment. Although he had anticipated his release for many years, the reality of his actual departure is more difficult for him. He had progressed to the point where his next assignment would have been to take responsibility for the crew as the Tactical Navigator, or crew manager.

The fellows that I was flying with were saying - well, you know, why are you getting out now. This doesn't make any sense. I mean,

things are working dam well. This crew's been together now for about fourteen months, which is quite a long time because of the mobility and that kind of thing. . . .I realized that I had much more affinity with them than I ever imagined. I found that I had developed a great deal of respect for them.

Ned vacillates in his decision, he is not as firm in his decision to leave. He feels a personal commitment to and affinity with his workmates

The Tactical Navigator was about to get posted and they - they - were saying - look - it's your job. Why don't you just stay there and, you know, this is going to be, you know, a real good setting for quite a few years. And, at that point it became a difficult decision to make. Whereas, prior to that it wasn't anything that I had given any thought to at all. And one that took quite a while to make.

Although the working environment had remained the same, Ned recognizes that his perception of it had changed markedly. He feels a sense of obligation to others in the crew

And, it was difficult because I had come to understand the environment in a different way. And I had come to respect those individuals that I worked with in that - in that kind of environment. And that brought a whole new element into my life that I - that wasn't there before.

However, he resists the temptation to remain in a position that does not fulfill his "passion", his need to work with people rather than machines.

So, from a job point of view, I knew that the best - the better thing for me to do would be to move on. Because, although I could do it, do the

work well, I didn't have the passion for the - the art of the job in the same way that other people have. I had the passion for working with people and getting people to work together.

In this action of leaving, one senses that Ned has moved beyond the Interpersonal Balance to act upon his own convictions, to identify a greater objective than allegiance to his immediate environment.

Ned, in order to work more closely with people and, which is more consistent with his view of "self", secures a position as a family counsellor. He finds, however, that after 15 years the counselling work itself loses its challenge. Eventually he becomes an Executive Director of a non-for-profit counselling centre. Again, he searches for that "something" that would incorporate his "passion" on an ongoing basis

And, at that point I got into the supervision aspect of it . . . I began to develop an awareness of what that passion was. And that was a passion for working with people in their - in their work site, in their work place in that kind - in a work kind of environment. I found that working with people as family units or individuals in a counselling setting was too slow for me.

When his employing organization is closed, Ned's position is eliminated. Although he had "played with the idea" of attending graduate school, he is now faced with having to make a choice. With some trepidation, he decides to pursue studies in business management. He discovers his niche

I found that when I got into graduate school and began to actually study research as a topic, that I had a passion for that... that I was completely

en route . . .so there were those three critical points, I think, in my life, that I would use as kind of milestones which indicated a significant change in - in direction.

Upon graduation, Ned makes the decision to become a consultant, to remain self-employed, and to work toward achieving what he believes to be important

. . .that was in some small way, what will allow or enable the organizations to do - to do what they're supposed to do. And, the result is that society, or the environments in which they operate, will be better. The people within that are influenced by that circle, will be better off. And, it's important to do that. That I believe it's important that we - that we understand how we work together. So, for me it has inherent worth and value. And that's what - that's what provides the meaning.

One could argue that this career decision demonstrates that Ned had undergone a transformational shift, from the Interpersonal to the Institutional Balance. It is from within the Institutional Balance that one is able to construct an internal identity, become self-authoring, and run themselves as a "fixed institution". Ned is now able to connect to a larger purpose ("making the quality of life better for people"), construct ideals ("it is important that we work together"), and remain loyal to his convictions rather than to the interpersonal "press". In order to have the freedom he requires, the freedom to remain allegiant to his beliefs, Ned is reluctant to take a "job"

I discovered, by accident that I didn't want a job. That what I wanted to do was to practice what I believed to be important - and have the freedom to do that. And I was prepared to take the risks that were associated with that - that I was aware of... the meaning - um - for me

has a lot to do with the personal benefit that I experience from working in this kind of way. It's hard to find an alternative for this word "work".

He needs the freedom to control the type of work he is involved in, to ensure that he is able to remain in synch with his philosophical approach. Within the Institutional Balance, an individual becomes thoroughly identified with his or her work – they no longer “have an occupation” but, rather, they “are the occupation”. Ned provides a telling description of his relationship to his work – they are inseparable

I don't sort of separate out from my life - the work I do from the rest of my life - to any great extent. I make choices to limit the time I spend doing . . . but, I don't see it as being a lesser part of my life in terms of a job. But I would see a job in that way. My vision of a job is that it's something that somebody else has predetermined. And my requirement to operate within those constraints. I see the work I do now as being largely of my own creation.

Ensnared within the Institutional Balance, Ned anticipates that he has found the necessary stability in his life. He does not anticipate making any major changes

. . . the vision I have for myself is that I will continue to do what I - what I love doing as long as I want. That I'll continue to get better and - continue to appreciate that kind of satisfaction from the work. And, expect that that will actually deepen with time.

According to Kegan (1994), the rigidity or single-mindedness of the Institutional Balance tends to blind the individual to one's larger potentials. In particular, these individuals tend to experience difficulties incorporating the affiliate feelings associated with close interpersonal relationships. Regulation, rather than mutuality, is the ultimate objective.

Interpersonal events tend to threaten chaos for the “internal polity”. A variety of feelings, particularly erotic and affiliate and doubts about performance, come to be viewed as potential dissidents that must be tamed by regulations and rules (Kegan, 1994). Ned, for instance, struggles trying to balance his desire to work with the resultant isolation

To what degree? That's a tough question. It's a struggle for me, actually. There are aspects of working alone that I really appreciate because I like setting my own environment. I work in a very structured kind of environment - but I develop the structure. I impose the structure. I don't like the isolation that occurs from that, though. That's a difficult aspect of working alone that I find I always have to manage. And, I'm always struggling to manage that.

Ned appears to infer that he works best in situations that he is able to control, or regulate, rather than simply enjoying the companionship, or affiliation with others. He has a similar “philosophical” struggle with “networking”. It is not that Ned is socially inept, or unmotivated to network. He knows that his reluctance to network detracts from his business. However, he does seem able to move beyond his current context in which he may have to compromise his internal laws and his self-government – a struggle captured by Ned’s allusion to integrity

Integrity is a characteristic that's very important for me. There's an aspect of networking that I find to be crass... and intolerable, and that's the aspect of cultivating a relationship simply because there's an element of personal gain - or some potential for personal gain. And I find that so repulsive that - I have - I neglect that part of my work as a result. And, it's quite costly. . I realize the importance of - of cultivating relationships and - and networking, but I find that I trip over my own beliefs quite often.

It is characteristic that the individual who is perhaps beginning to appreciate the shortcomings of the Institutional Balance literally “begins to trip over their own beliefs”. There is little doubt that Ned demonstrates considerable growth and development since he entered the workforce as a rather naïve military recruit. He struggled to gain his psychological independence from the aircrew that he had come to appreciate in deeper ways than he had anticipated. He has found his passion, has found meaning in his work, has defined “self”, and is literally a “force to be reckoned with”. Over time, he may begin to “stand back” from his principles and belief systems, and view them as “objects” of his gaze rather than be blinded by their immediacy.

Having solidified his transformational shift to the Institutional, Ned attempts to make sense of his past. He came to understand that his life, to the point where he discovered his life’s passion, was leading him toward integration

Each one of these phases resulted in a higher level of integration of my own - characteristics and what I had acquired from them from the outside world. I think in many respects it kind of culminated in that awareness of a passion for this thing called research . . .

According to Ned, this movement toward integration was reflected in his sense of discomfort or unease with himself

... my assessment of past history, it helps to explain a sense of unease or discomfort or lack of fulfillment, or something like that, that I was aware that I carried through each of these stages . . . it was modified significantly by each of these experiences - for sure. After it - the - experience in Graduate school put it to rest. Put that aspect of myself

to rest. I didn't ask - ask the question any more. Just pursued the activity.

In all likelihood, Guidano (1995a) would argue that Ned is moving toward greater self-awareness. Self-awareness, according to this developmental model, flows from the attainment of explanatory framework and is a reflexive process for self-referencing the immediate experience of "I" in order to amplify consistent aspects of the perceived "me" while inhibiting discordant aspects. Indeed, Ned now understands what he could not understand when he was going through the "stages" he experienced – he is able now to "put words to his experience" or explain the felt experiences ("sense of unease or discomfort") of the past. Development is literally a progressive series of qualitative transformations moving toward a more integrated, reorganized sense of the self. Ned terms this self-reflexive process as moving toward integration, adding new dimensions, a clarification of his past

A building on. . . adding new dimensions - but the new dimensions are rooted in the base of experience that I have acquired. And I find that in that concept of integration is a very significant one for me because the things that I am interested in pursuing now are extensions or extrapolations of what work I had done and learning I had acquired in other environments in my past experience.

Ned is able to identify a number of dimensions (e.g. abilities, skills) of himself that he has, in essence, rediscovered. When he was younger, he avoided uncertain or complex environments because they provoked anxiety. At this point in his life, Ned is attracted to these types of environments

My experience tells me now that that's not a difficulty and - and, not only that, I like it. Rather I enjoy complexity and unfamiliarity.

In earlier years, Ned constructed himself as lacking analytical ability, creativity, and an interest in ideas. However, from his renewed perspective, he is discovering that, in fact, he possesses these abilities

I have an interest in analysis and inquiry that I never believed I had when I was younger. I didn't describe it like that or perceive it like that. If I had a curiosity it was ill defined for me. I was curious about damn near anything. Now I understand that I have a real interest in that kind of analysis and that - that sort of logical, rational which I didn't appreciate before. I think another part of myself that I didn't appreciate or wasn't aware that I had was a - I guess maybe a creativity. . . or a joy and satisfaction in building creating is probably the best word for it.

Ned's list of the aspects of "self" that he has "rediscovered" was even more extensive. It is as if he is viewing the same person but from another position, a higher point on the scaffold of experience he is constructing. The lack of negative emotions and the absence of any fear of the future, attest to the viability of his construction of his world. However, he is not, like all of us, immune from the unbalancing forces of growth.

Sean – Interpersonal Balance

In this section, Sean's narrative is discussed in the context of the constructive-developmental framework. It is argued that Sean provides an example of an individual who is struggling to move forward toward the Institutional from the Interpersonal Balance. Kegan (1994) has suggested that as much as 66% of the population appear to

be in a similar cognitive imbalance – somewhere between the Interpersonal and the Institutional.

An examination of Sean's relationships with others in the workplace suggests that he may be operating mostly within the Interpersonal, or third order of consciousness. For instance, he recognizes that he lacks all the necessary qualities of a good supervisor

I'm not a really strong supervisor – I find it difficult to do the discipline thing – and snap decision-making is not one of my strong points. I have done it, but I always tend to look at all the possibilities, and sometimes snap-decision making requires one to make a decision without looking at all of the ramifications of it – okay you make a decision and you live with whatever happens, but the decision has been made - so - I like to think about the consequences of the decision, usually before I make them.

One might argue that Sean is indecisive, unable to frame a reasoned decision. However, he is more troubled by the impact, or potential impact his supervisory decisions may have on other people

I get really upset with myself when I loose my cool, which I do on occasion, or if I say something negative ... about somebody – afterwards I think about it, and say “ah! I shouldn't have said that” there's no reason, even though it may be true, there's no reason for me to express it openly. And it's my feelings as well – not necessarily those of someone else.

To implement an unpopular decision, or discipline someone, the tasks required of a supervisor would at the same time, for Sean, jeopardize his relationship with his

employees. He would, paradoxically, prefer to work with people, who do not require him to act like a supervisor

I work best with people who work well on their own – I enjoy working with people who I can say “ I want you to do the lighting focus – I want you set up the PA system, I want you to set up the microphones” and they can go off and do it, and do it right! And I don’t have to think about coming back and looking over the shoulder every five minutes – but I work best with people who work well on their own – I work best with people who don’t really need a lot of supervision – and I guess that’s goes with the idea that’s why I don’t like being a supervisor.

In constructivist-developmental terms, Sean’s sense of “self” is embedded within his relationships with others, he cannot risk their disapproval. He is literally, defined by his relationships. Most individuals strive to secure the approval of others – their parents, peers, society, mentors and so forth. It is an integral aspect of the socialization process particularly during adolescence and young adulthood. To be rejected by his “psychological surround” would, in effect, put Sean’s definition of self at risk. In Kegan’s (1994) terms, Sean cannot, from within the Interpersonal Balance, erect boundaries between himself and others – he is regulated by the claims others place upon him. He can be easily thrown into imbalance when he is faced with competing demands – such as, getting the work completed, ensuring your staff respect you, and not making any decisions which you may later regret. As a result, Sean seeks to minimize the number of “claims” that others might place upon him. He redefines the role of supervisor,

I’m not the kind of supervisor who in a sense walks in a space and says “you do that, you do this, you do that” and stand and watch them do it – I

am part of the technical crew – always have been – that’s the way I prefer it – it always bothers me to stand there and watch other people work.

Sean attributes his difficulty with directing others to his strong sense of “fair play”, his ability to be just one of the “guys”

I’ve always had a strong sense of fair play I guess – I always like to consider the other person too - that’s something that I see in myself - generally speaking, for most things I tend to look at how the other person might feel or think ...

An employer might suggest that Sean is “unassertive”, or lacking the communication skills necessary to have his needs met. Others might perceive Sean as lacking integrity, or the courage to act upon power he has been given by the organization – a lack of self “empowerment”. Still others might suggest that it is Sean’s values – his sense of “fair play” - that deters him from acting. Kegan (1994) would suggest that for Sean to “unravel” himself from the multiple commitments that confront him, would require a different order of consciousness, a transformational shift from the Interpersonal to the Institutional Balance:

. . . what we experience as unbalancing forces reveal not the commitments we have but those that have us, those with which we are identified. Put another way, these moves reveal not the commitments we have but those we are, the commitments that are “subject” for us (p. 165).

Indeed, for Sean to erect psychological boundaries between himself and his employees, he would have to integrate two different “sub-relationships” (himself and his

subordinates) into a single complex relationship and, in turn, to view this relationship as the “object” of his knowing. At this point in time, however, Sean is unable to stand back, view himself or the relationship objectively – he has no vantage point from which to determine “how things ought to be”. Kegan (1994) argues that:

The requirement to be self-evaluating or self-correcting demands an internal standard it requires a theory or philosophy of what makes something valuable, a meta-leap beyond the third order. Our loyalty is transformed from adherence to a value to the process of originating or inventing what is valuable, a determination that heretofore has been made by the psychosocial surround (p. 169).

In other words, it would be necessary for Sean to construct an internal frame of reference, a vision, a set of universal principles that would guide his supervisory actions (“What is the *right* thing to do”). Instead, he struggles to maintain alignment – be in good faith with his psychological surround.

In contrast to his construction of relationships, Sean appears to be to be vacillating between the Interpersonal and the Institutional Balance with reference to his “work”. Sean defines himself ‘an electronics technician’. He likes to work with people who have equal technical competence and dedication

Yeah, that’s what I’m looking for – technical competence – and if they didn’t know something – that’s fine – you could tell them and you could explain, and they would understand. What was really frustrating is working with someone who is incompetent, wasn’t willing to learn – didn’t care – didn’t care about doing a good job. I have some people like that.

From a constructivist-developmental theory perspective, Sean so thoroughly identifies with his particular life-role (a technician) that he cannot self-correct to connect with any larger, more encompassing purposes in his life (e.g. a workplace mission statement) of which his job is only a current expression – Sean is literally his work. This single-mindedness is also illustrated when Sean found himself struggling to wrest psychological “control” of his work from a supervisor. With his independence threatened, or self-definition compromised, Sean felt that there was no alternative but to resign

I actually resigned – because I couldn't live with the policies of the manage. I liked him, he was a really nice person, got along with him well on a personal level, but I really disagreed with his . . . the way he managed the shop – he treated us like children to a certain extent – he did certain things that really didn't work well in my view.

Sean does not quit because he dislikes his boss or finds the work difficult. Rather he resigned, it is argued, because he wanted to remain in control of his work, preserve his autonomy

. . . it really irritated me that we were expected to do this, and I guess it really brought home the idea that it wasn't happening with the way the shop was run. And I had 2 choices – I could live with it or I could quit! So I went home and I wrote out my resignation and handed it in.

However, Sean is unable to wrest psychological control of his work from his boss. He must resign instead. Why is Sean unable to emulate Jake, who simply told his boss to leave him alone to complete his assignment? Is it a lack of integrity? Or a fear of rejection? Again, it demands that Sean rebalance a relationship – in this case, with his

boss. However, because he is unable to separate from his relationships, he cannot confront his boss. To do so would risk his boss' disapproval. As a result, Sean will continue to struggle to feel "in charge" of his work until he is capable of rebalancing the relationship he has with others.

Looking back over this time in the workforce, Sean felt that having a "predefined" job with regular benefits had definite advantages.

It is like a nice warm blanket, a comfortable bed . . . you slide into, it feels comfortable, everything feels good. You know that your next paycheck is going to be there . . . I guess the downside is you have to go where the administration tells you to go – you don't have any say in that – on the other hand, you can go in the direction that the administration is taking . . . hey, it has worked out fine!

In exchange for job security, Sean is willing to "do what the administration tells you" to do. Unfortunately, this comfortable arrangement began to unravel. He disclosed that his health, the physical demands of the job, marital stress, and the absence of qualified assistance, the distress of contact with the public, were all conspiring to force him to leave his current position as a sound technician

I can't say it is any one thing . . . health is one issue . . . my hearing doesn't seem to as good as it used to be. . . It is impossible for me to judge a reinforced sound ... we have had quite a few shows that require a lot of physical effort . . . it's pretty hard on the body . . . takes a couple of days to recover . . .it is also hard on my wife . . . she is left alone a lot . . . graduation exercises drive me nuts . . . I 'm frustrated dealing with the client... .

He knows he must leave because of the deteriorating working conditions. However, he also has “vision” of a brighter future. He is excited about his new business venture, and appears to have a clearer picture of his “life’s work”. He finds the possibility of doing work of his own creation to be both appealing and frightening

The thing I – the most likely thing that I see myself doing is working for myself and actually thinking about doing something with the web – that actually appeals to me – that idea – and it’s such a radical departure from what I’ve done, most of my life! And work wise ! It’s kind of frightening too!

Despite the “restrained” excitement Sean might feel about forging a new career, he also has reservations about his future

... very extreme differences and opposite directions – no I can’t say it looks bright – there’s the potential for it to look bright!

It is “as if” Sean has a sense that he is launched on a quest but is uncertain of its destination. He is striving to exercise greater control over his life but lacks the ability, as yet, to maintain control over this work. (“I like jobs in which I can work independently”, “Yeah . . . I like autonomy”).

From the perspective of individual life-span development model (Guidano, 1995b), Sean seems to be moving toward psychological consistency although not completely. There are gaps in the scaffolding with which he has constructed the model of self. He feels, at some level, that he has always taken the “easy way” in life

I'm just saying . . .in my life everything . . .just slid along. . . . I go to technical school – out of technical school I slid into an apprenticeship – it wasn't particularly difficult [. . .] after the job in Edmonton, when I came back, I slid into the job at Yarrows because I happened to be an IBEW member [. . .] the job up here, the job, the technical position – so I “slid” into that!. . . when I resigned 10 years ago, I slid right into this position because I had done sound work and maintenance in here all along. . . I don't think I've really. . . put a lot of effort into getting a job or . . . it's been easy for me.

Sean seems to imply that he should have perhaps exercised more planning, more foresight in this career. He recognizes with the passage of time, it seems that he has fallen short of his full potential – it just didn't happen

I always felt that I could do anything in the electronics business, other than maybe engineering, and become an engineer, and that's another thing, I actually thought about becoming an engineer, but wasn't quite as appealing to me as being a technician - I think my life did to take a little different direction. . . initially I was thinking of becoming an engineer technician – it just didn't happen.

At the same time, however, Sean “explains” that, in some cases at least, his values, or sense of fair play have dictated his decisions. His foray into a sales career early in his life was less than successful. However, Sean is able to “explain” this a consequence of a clash of values

I think I could be a salesman if I really believed in the product – if I had a product that was really good . . . I couldn't sell someone something that I didn't think they should have or that they need or not be beneficial . . . just not part of my makeup...it's...I guess I don't like the bullshit – I guess that

I like truth. . . I've always had a strong sense of fair play I guess – I always like to consider the other person too - that's something that I see in myself - generally speaking, for most things I tend to look at how the other person might feel or think.

Upon his return from Edmonton and his job as an organ salesman, Sean secured a regular position in electronics repair. He had to leave not because he did not enjoy the work but rather his values were at odds with the work environment and the “war machine” in particular

I got in circuit board and repair, and I really enjoyed that a lot – but again the working environment, I was back in the military thing - I was in a room that was air-conditioned, no windows – it was sealed off from the outside environment by copper shielding – all fluorescent lighting. . . and again I was working on the war machine.

According to Sean 's reordering of his history, he may not have “slid” from job to job but rather responded to his sense of values, of what is right. In a similar vein, he eschews a future in administration not necessarily because he is incompetent but rather because “he likes to consider the other guy”, “. . .to look at how the other person might think or feel”. His lack of success in launching his electronics business 10 years ago, or his now muted musical career, or his sales position, reflect, in part, a lack of proper preparation rather than aptitude

I would go at things without thinking about them in depth, whereas now – the idea of building this web thing, I've given it a lot of thought – I'll probably spend of lot of time working at it and developing it, before I actually go for it! Whereas back then, I thought. . . well I would just do it, even though I might not have done a lot of research, I might have just

gone for it anyway – I don't know – hard to say - but I really went into it wrong! I should have done a lot more studying.

Because he feels he is more prepared, Sean is now more confident that his current business venture will be more successful than those in the past.

Sean appears to be relatively successful in “making sense” of his life, in amplifying consistent aspects of himself while inhibiting discordant aspects of his being. However, there is the sense that he is struggling to set a clear direction in his life. He certainly is now more acutely “aware” that he needs to work independently, that he is not a good administrator, that he is conscientious, that he enjoys electronics maintenance work and so forth. At best these appear to be quantitative changes, an ongoing reframing of himself from within the same vantage point. These changes differ from those of Jake, for instance, who strove to reconstruct himself through a series of progressive qualitative transformations. Indeed, Jake clearly moved forward from defining himself through work to placing his work within a larger context, from trying to placate those in his psychological surround to telling his inner voices to “piss off”, and from accepting that he had screwed up some things, but did a lot of things well. Jake came to view his life and himself, it is argued, from a series of substantially different vantage points. Guidano (1995a) would argue that human development occurs in step-like progressions, each emerging conception of the self depending upon the level previously reached and, in turn, determining the direction for the next step.

Sean, rather than moving up the steps of the cognitive scaffold, seems to be recycling between the desire to launch a new business venture and the desire to “slide” into something comfortable - to be decisive but at the same time control the

consequences of his decisions, and to act more autonomously yet not lose the approval of those that must approve of him. He struggles to “stand back” from his immediate experience of situations, to create a consistent model of his existence at this point in his life. As a result, he views his future with a mixture of trepidation and excitement

...the future looks kind of foggy at the moment . . . I can't say that it looks bright, no . . . it's very much a question mark for me.

The constructivist-developmental paradigm provides a model for both describing and explaining the differences that were observed among the respondents. Although the chronological ages of the respondents were similar, there were marked variations in their trajectory of development. Further, differences were observed within each of the respondents over time. These observations provide support for the notion that chronological age per se, is not the critical variable needed to understand human change processes. Further, the developmental stages provided the context for understanding more substantive changes within the individual. That is, we might have discerned that Jake was dissatisfied with his job as a salesperson. However, we would have limited information about the cause for his satisfaction without understanding his definition of “self” at the time. This observation, it is argued, demands that future research models must try to incorporate both process and content, or changes in form as well as changes in substance.

Further, this developmental paradigm is able to explain why individuals might be satisfied with their “life’s work” at one point in their life yet be dissatisfied at a later point. That is, career choice is not a “one time” decision. Individuals change significantly across their lifetime as do environments. Counselling that focuses upon helping

individuals to anticipate and respond to change might be more useful than the current obsession with matching career to the person. Interestingly, not one of these respondents spoke of career planning, or even life planning. For the most part, they tended to be driven by the need to respond to internal and external change rather than a career plan.

Finally, the developmental paradigm tended to suggest that individuals tend to develop at different rates in different areas of their life. That is, an individual mis-aligned between the Institutional Balance and Interindividual, may be quite adept at defining their “work” but struggles painfully with issues of intimacy and affiliation. Similarly, individuals in transition may be struggling both with enacting their vision of their “work” and struggling with defining “self” apart from their “psychological environment”. The constructivist provides, therefore, a very rudimentary method for assessing individuals who are experiencing a “crisis” in their lives.

This section provided an in-depth analysis of the major themes and subthemes that were “discovered” in the interviews with the respondents. The basic set of analytic procedures used in grounded theory – open, axial, and selective coding – were applied to the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In doing so, basic categories of information were developed (subthemes) and linked through the major themes. The major themes captured repeated patterns, or events, or actions/interactions that best represented what the respondents did, or said, in response to problems or situations they encountered. The content of the themes and subthemes reflected what the respondents identified as important issues or concerns from their perspective. Quotes were used to ground the interpretations, or discussions, to the data. Where appropriate, links were made between the themes and subthemes and the research literature. The next stage of the

research process – Chapter 6 - will discuss the themes and subthemes in relation to the larger research questions that were the focus of study. Key research findings will be identified and linked to the literature either to amplify or clarify issues or problems. In addition, the next section will address the major implications of the study including issues for future research.

CHAPTER 6: INTEGRATED DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study was to increase our understanding of the important issues or concerns in the lives of a group of older workers. Based upon a review of the literature, four major research questions were posed. They were:

- What fundamental changes, if any, do older workers notice in themselves as a consequence of their aging?
- Do older workers respond in different ways to these changes?
- Do older workers come to understand the function of work in their lives differently as they age?
- Do older workers attribute more or less importance to interpersonal relationships as they age?

In qualitative research, it is expected that the initial question(s) are rather broad and become progressively narrowed during the research process itself as concepts and their relationships are discovered. Research questions are framed in such a manner as to allow for the flexibility and freedom to explore a phenomenon in depth (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This flexibility is important if the researcher makes the assumption that the phenomenon is conceptually underdeveloped, or that nobody has ever asked this particular research question in quite the same way, or that it is impossible to determine beforehand which variables pertain to this area and which do not. In qualitative

research, the research question(s) serve to identify the phenomenon to be studied and help the researcher focus during the analytic stages of the research process.

It is often not the case, therefore, that the research questions are answered directly in a qualitative study. It is hoped, however, that in the process of “discovering” answers to the questions, the field of study is narrowed, the salient issues emerge, and that a new, more refined research agenda emerges. This chapter will discuss the major implications flowing from this study. This discussion will be centered on research findings that evolved in the process of answering the research questions.

Aging As An Illusion?

This grounded theory study was developed as a study of older workers. This approach assumed, as have most researchers, that the population of older workers is a relatively homogeneous group by virtue of their chronological age. This assumption was inherent in each of the research questions. The most salient observations flowing from this study, however, was the diversity within this sample of older workers.

One of the major differences was the manner in which the respondents reacted to their own aging. For many of the respondents, “old” was not an attribute they ascribed to themselves; some described aging as a state of mind and, as such, it was not a “reality” for them. It was suggested that rather than denying the reality of their own aging, it may be that these older workers were able to assimilate and accommodate to the psychosocial changes that accompanied biological aging. Many took a very proactive approach to their well being and adopted exercise regimes, relaxation protocols, and incorporated healthier diets into their lifestyle. Other respondents

increased their attention to learning new tasks, to working more efficiently, to focussing upon tasks that maximized their abilities, and to incorporating new technologies into their work routines. According to Bateson (1972), these strategies tend to minimize “news of differences” hence limiting the individuals’ experience of change, or difference in their lives. Other respondents appeared more resigned to the inevitable changes accompanying the aging process. Sean, for instance, continues to perform strenuous physical work even though he could delegate such tasks to subordinates and, as result, it now takes him several days to recover his energy reserves.

Because human beings reorder their experiences over time to make them more internally consistent, or emotionally viable, it may be that older workers engage in a necessary process of self-deception in an effort to maintain psychological health (Guidano, 1995a). Alternatively, it may be that some of the respondents had, with experience and maturity, developed increasingly more encompassing or sophisticated knowledge structures. Therefore, they are less likely to be sensitive to change – the more things differ, the more they seem the same (Guidano, 1995b).

It was also suggested that when the demand for change, from the individual's psychosocial environment, is greater than their ability to assimilate or accommodate, they will experience emotional distress. Their personal narrative or life-story will lack the emotional viability necessary to support their current structures of meaning. Some older workers experiencing unrelieved stress could also be more inclined to attribute problems, or conflicts, to the aging process. This was why, it was argued, that Sean and Dean felt it was too late to change careers, or why Daniel is unable to find a challenging job. This distress will tend to drain the energy reserves of the individual, and will continue unless the individual can accommodate the change, or reorganize their

construction of “self”. It may be that complaints about the deleterious impacts of aging have signal value for older persons; an indication that they are experiencing difficulties coping with other aspects of their lives. Barak (1987) noted that when an individual “felt” older than their chronological age, they also experienced high levels of stress and strain as well as reduced job performance. Other writers noted that when workers evaluated themselves as “older” than others of their chronological age, they were also experiencing higher levels of organizational conflict, or role-confusion (Eden & Jacobsen, 1976).

The result of this analysis supported the model of successful aging posited by Shulz and Hechenhausen (1996). In this model, individuals who are able to engage and impact their environments around them for the longest period of time would be judged as successful. It was suggested in this study, that successful agers were more likely to have the energy, or emotional well-being, to sustain their vocational trajectory later in life than those who felt overwhelmed by the demands of their psychosocial environment. Indeed, those respondents who were more likely to ignore their aging, also tended to be able to identify their life's work, turn to others for support and companionship, and feel a sense of control over their lives.

The findings also support the model of adaptive competence developed by Abraham and Hansson (1995). They defined adaptive competence as a gradual shift with age, from assimilative coping to accommodative coping. This shift tends to help older workers cope with the impact of discontinuous change while maintaining a sense of well-being. This study provided ample evidence of the adaptive strategies of Selection, Optimization, and Compensation, including impression management, attention to exercise and diet, and continuous learning. Those respondents who did not

seem to incorporate adaptive strategies tended to also demonstrate lower degrees of internalized control and confidence in their future.

The present findings question the image, or stereotypes, most employers have about older workers. It may be that aging itself is as much about gains as it is about losses. Indeed, some interviewees appeared to be highly motivated to secure challenging work, to work cooperatively rather than competitively, to work independently, to take responsibility for their own learning, to adapt to change, and to contribute to the learning of others. Why is it then that many employers tend to view older workers as more difficult to train and place into jobs, more resistant to change, less suitable for promotion, and less likely to perform well (Avolio & Barret, 1987)? Is it ageism, or stereotypic thinking?

It may be that, as has been pointed out by Foote & Stoffman, (1986), most of our images of older workers have been based upon the Depression era cohort (those aged 60 – 69). This generation was perceived to be low in their desire for novelty and change, most comfortable with the status quo, more risk averse, uncomfortable with technology, and primarily oriented to job and financial security (Mirvis & Hall, 1996). This is the generation of employees for which the term “organizational man” was coined. Indeed, some workers who may have performed well in their early careers and who had cultivated relationships with their bosses, could ‘coast’ through the latter years of their organization tenure. As Hall (1996b) described it “conformity, playing by the rules, and counting on their employer to ‘do right by them’ – generally proved effective” (p. 285).

In this study there were some workers who appeared less proactive in adapting to the work environment. Why, for example, does Sean seem to vacillate between

searching for job security and forging his own path into the future? Why does Dean remain in a position he dislikes? Noer (1998) suggests that, in part, many organizations have created a codependency with employees:

Organizations have been paternalistic; with the best of intentions, they have established systems to hold on to employees by taking care of them. Employees have been seduced and conditioned into letting themselves be captured, often putting their self-esteem and sense of relevance into the company vault. Violations of this dependence lead to anger, betrayal, and depression – the joyless, nonproductive funk of layoff survivor sickness (p. 220).

The concept of organizational dependency may help to explain why many workers are reluctant to act unilaterally, and seek satisfaction from their present careers. One in three workers are dissatisfied with their career - that is, they neither identify with nor feel emotionally attached to their occupation. Only one in ten workers, however, actually change their job each year (Noer, 1998).

Carson and Carson (1997) have suggested that employees in traditional careers have become entrenched, that is desirous of remaining in a vocation, because of the time they have invested, the reluctance to admit that they have used poor judgement in their initial choice, and the perception that there are fewer opportunities "out there". Career change requires one to risk financial investments, educational credentials, and interpersonal relationships. The longer one stays in a dissatisfying career, the greater the tendency toward preselection of the decision, and the entrenchment of the unrealistic expectation for a "miraculous" shift in the future, which in turn detracts one from solving problems effectively. The authors believe that career "entrenchment" is

“quietly self-perpetuating and entrapment begets entrapment” (p. 63). Without doubt, as one becomes older, options may be perceived as even more limited, and fewer career opportunities will be identified.

It also may be that the present sample included a higher proportion of successful agers, those individuals who are actively employed and have a history of relatively high performance. There were, however, a number of respondents that perceived few viable career options, were reluctant to take risks, and who felt that it was too late in their lives to make major decisions. More research is needed to further investigate the interaction between level of “organizational dependency” and the ability to adapt to the changing workplace.

None of the respondents in this study reported that they directly experienced any form of age-bias or discrimination on the basis of their age. There was some evidence, however, that some of participants labeled themselves as old. Daniel suspected that his applications for employment were viewed negatively as a result of his aging, Dean felt that he was too old to revitalize his career, and Sean felt that his deteriorating physical health was, in part, attributable to the aging process. Other respondents, in contrast, did not accept that their aging limited their life choices in any significant way. Ron wondered aloud if other respondents had trouble with the description of themselves as “aging”. Jake, in fact, made a point to work proactively to dispel any myths others may have about his age (“obviously I look older”). This confirms the findings of Haber (1970) who found individuals who accepted the image of themselves as “old” (personal age-labeling), tended to lower their aspiration levels and their work performance. In a similar vein, Bailey and Hansson (1995) found that older workers who labeled themselves as older than the normative age in their job, tended to perceive greater risk associated with

job change (“it would be a literal trauma at this point in my life”). It was observed in this study that older workers who attributed difficulties, or problems to their aging also were less likely to find their “passion” in the workplace, exhibit a sense of personal agency, or have a positive view of their future. It is suggested that those older workers who have difficulty responding proactively to the aging process, or who feel overwhelmed by the demand for change, would tend to accept their aging as inevitable and limiting.

The magnitude of variations in the sample of older workers in this study is obviously at variance with stage, or linear theories of human development. Super, Thompson, and Lindeman (1988), for instance, observed that past the age of 45, older workers, typically ensconced in the Maintenance Stage of development, are most concerned with holding their position in the organization:

Having attained a position, individuals are expected to hold onto it if not improve it. Competition from others, technological change, health problems, or family demands may threaten it. This is a common concern after the age of 45 (p. 4).

In contrast, the current findings suggest that these observations may be true for some older workers but not for others. Indeed, for some workers at least, advancing age brought with it a decrease in competitive strivings, a feeling of greater control over their health, and greater confidence in their ability to adapt to the changing work environment. Indeed, aging for some workers becomes a process of growth, enrichment, and contentment. Rather than disconfirming the stage theories of vocational development, this study simply points to the possibility that there is perhaps greater variation amongst older workers than the large-group studies, the basis of the stage theories, might permit

us to “discover”. Career theories are needed that are able to simultaneously capture qualitative as well as quantitative changes.

These differences in findings may reflect, in part, differences in methodological perspectives. Most vocational theories, including stage theories, have been developed from the perspective of the researcher, the objective perspective. They are adept at capturing and quantifying changes. From this external perspective, the researcher must ignore the subjective experiences of the individual, rely upon predetermined constructs to view the phenomena, and make deductive inferences based upon the more general case. The objective perspective, in addition, tends to minimize change processes within individuals. Stage theory is most adept at capturing the general or most common trend in the data but fails to capture the rich variation within the sample. Grounded theory methodology, in contrast, allows the researcher to “discover” the phenomenon from the subject’s frame of reference, capture change processes within the individual, and accentuate the variations among and within respondents.

The present findings imply that there may not be a discernable “entity” known as the “older worker”. Respondents described changes that had occurred, and were continuing to occur, across the entire spectrum of their working lives. Changes in earlier years, without doubt, were impacting their reaction to events in later years. As Guidano (1995b) pointed out, human development is a step-like progression of qualitative transformations, each emerging conception of the self depends in its structuring on the level previously reached and, in turn, determines the possible direction of the next. Any particular worker must be understood within the context of their lifespan, rather than within a limited segment, or 50 years and beyond, as was the case in this study. It may be that older workers are confronted with the same challenges, are subject to the same

pressures, and are faced with decisions similar to those of the working population in general. All workers may be searching for personal significance, for meaning, and for inclusion in the world of work. In effect, this study may have observed workers at different points in the process of adapting to changes that impact all workers.

Some might argue that individual differences, interacting with the passage of time itself, create the variations among individuals that we tend to attribute to the process of aging (Carlsen, 1988). For instance, individuals who are more open to new experiences, or have a greater ability to adapt to change, are more likely to expose themselves to growth enhancing or challenging activities. This increased exposure, in turn, is more likely to promote a major shift in how an individual constructs themselves, a greater opportunity to learn about who they are and who they are not. An individual who is very closed to new experiences, or distressed by changes in their environment, may strive to maintain a consistent identity across their adult life span, or limit their exposure to situations. The passage of time, therefore, does not necessarily have a uniform impact upon all individuals. The passage of time itself may increase the demand for an individual to change, but does not itself create change. It is suggested that the attributes of the individual interacting with the passage of time itself, might better explain individual differences that we observe across lifespan. The present research raises serious questions about the viability of continuing to research an isolated segment of the larger working population – the older worker. It assumes that aging, or the passage of time, has a uniform impact upon all individuals. We may be, in effect, looking at an isolated segment of a life and, in doing so, we may be losing the richness of the contextual information that enhances our understanding. The findings, in addition, suggest that we cannot make any a priori assumptions about the aging process, or older workers, based solely upon their chronological age. That is, we cannot assume that a particular “older

worker” is more or less motivated to learn, or might be more or less open to new challenges in the workplace, than a worker at any other age.

In summary, the results of this study have suggested that future researchers may be advised not to make any assumptions about “older workers” on the basis of their age alone. Also, it was discovered that any thoughts about aging as a necessary process of decline, or loss, might be unfounded. Rather there was much evidence to suggest that aging may be a time of growth, or spiritual renewal. Carslen (1988) cites a passage from Scott-Maxwell (1968), a practicing psychologist who wrote at age 82:

We who are old know that age is more than a disability. It is an intense and varied experience, almost beyond our capacity at times, but something to be carried high. If it is a long defeat it is also a victory; meaningful for the initiates of time, if not for those who have come less far. (p. 5).

It can be a time in life when older persons can throw off the shackles of conformity, move toward community, and find deeper meaning in day-to-day events. The findings also suggest that attending to individual differences, rather than casting all older workers into the same group, may lead to a deeper understanding of the aging phenomenon. The differences among older workers in their respective levels of adaptive competence, age-labeling, organizational dependency, stress tolerance, or emotional resiliency may promote a better understanding of this population. The findings also give rise to questions about the validity of stage-theories of human development.

Adult Development

As previously pointed out, most stage theories, or linear theories of development assume that the process of aging, or time itself, has a roughly equal impact upon all individuals. Without doubt, the respondents in this study, in varying degrees, perceived their behavior, attitudes, and beliefs as changed by time. The impact of the passage of time in this study was, however, experienced differently by different respondents. Some saw time as a limiting factor in their lives, impacting their health, their ability to compete, or confidence in their future. Others, however, saw time as opening up new vistas in their lives, as confirming that their lives had purpose, and allowing them to move forward with greater confidence.

The passage of time seems to change people in different ways rather than in similar ways. The observations in this study suggest that aging, or time itself is not the only causal factor in the human change processes. Time, it is argued, is the dimension along which we observe change, but it is not itself necessarily the causal factor in process of change. Said differently, individuals do not necessarily change because of time, but rather change over time. If the passage of time, per se, has such a markedly different impact upon the respondents, then we must conclude that the differences amongst older workers in this study are, in fact, attributable to other factors, or an interaction of factors rather than aging per se.

The findings of the study suggest that the rate of individual change is variable. Change is, in part, a consequence of development, a process that is not linear but rather one that might be best described as uneven, or transformational. In this study it was observed that an individual's reaction to changing events in their life, are modified, or

characterized by transformational shifts in their level of cognitive development. Individuals with similar chronological ages, but at different points in their developmental trajectory, tended to react to events differently. Knowing an individual's level of cognitive development provided more information than knowing their chronological age. In this study, the constructive developmental theory of Kegan (1982; 1994) was adopted to provide a useful but not a comprehensive paradigm for understanding human change processes. By viewing change as transformational rather than linear, I was able to make tentative assumptions about each respondent based upon their relative level of cognitive development. In doing so, I was able to capture and describe both quantitative and qualitative changes among the respondents.

This study provided support for the notion that it is the epistemological balances, or orders of consciousness as posited by Kegan (1982;1994) that explained some of the differences in how individuals reacted to events in their lives. Each respondent in the study was observed to have a unique developmental trajectory across time. That is, their life stories appeared to be highly idiosyncratic. They had different occupations, different levels of income, different vocational histories and so forth. However, by examining each of their stories side-by-side in light of developmental theory, discernible patterns began to emerge from the data. Constructive-developmental theory was a useful way of understanding some the differences among the respondents.

A significant change in the demands of the workplace, for instance, had a differential impact upon a respondent in accordance with their order of consciousness, or psychological balance(s). An individual within the Interpersonal Balance, or third order of consciousness, for instance, strives to remain "in synch" with their psychological surround - to take direction from others in their environment. Thus a demand by an

“enlightened” employer to become more self-directing, self-evaluative, and assume greater ownership of their work would, for that individual, create considerable discomfort, or dissonance. They may, it is argued, attribute their discomfort to external events over which they have little control, rather than attribute the blame to themselves. They may attribute change to the aging processes, to an insensitive employer, or to the deteriorating economic events of our time. An individual within the Institutional Balance or beyond would, in contrast, more readily adapt to change from their employer. Indeed, they are developmentally more able to become self-authoring, self-directing, and stand apart from the immediacy of their relationships to others. They would not, it is argued, experience the same stress and strain as those workers embedded in the Interpersonal Balance.

An individual's definition of their work, in addition, may evolve or develop over the course of their working lives. These changes may, in part, reflect evolutions in an individual's cognitive balance. At an earlier point in his life, Sean was quite content to work in an organization and accept direction from others in exchange for job security and a predictable life-style. He defined his work within the context of his prescribed job description and organizational position. Recently he resigned his position, ostensibly to explore other options, perhaps self-employment. It was argued that Sean was, in all likelihood, in a state of transition, or cognitive “imbalance”, moving from the Interpersonal toward the Institutional Balance – a career crisis. Those in the Interpersonal Balance tend to choose vocational pursuits in alignment with their reference group (e.g. family, friends, socioeconomic class). Sean has not, as yet, shifted fully to the Institutional Balance. At the 4th level of cognitive functioning, or Institutional Balance, an individual would tend to identify with a larger ideological authority, or framework (e.g. corporate mission statement), and run their lives in a more autonomous fashion. Over time, there

is no particular reason to believe that Sean will not shift to the Institutional Balance. Daniel, reflecting on what work meant to him in his younger years, commented that "It used to define who I was - it no longer defines who I am". Daniel disclosed that the shift from defining himself within an external context, to defining "self" from within an internal context, was a "very rough transition" for him. Presumably, the emotional pain was, both, the impetus for Jake to change and his reaction to the transition from the Institutional to the Interindividual Balance.

When an individual is firmly ensconced within a particular cognitive balance, then, it was argued, they experience a feeling of being in control of their lives, possess a clear vision of their work - a belief that they are "in synch" with their environment. However, the interaction of evolutionary growth and external change, can, at any point in one's life, create instability and plunge the individual into career crisis.

A transformational model of change, in addition, explains why a particular individual might feel quite confident in their career choice at age 25, yet at age 43, feel their vocational decisions have been highly inappropriate. The change may be, in part, as a result of an internal shift or an inability to find meaning in their current lifestyle. This same individual, however, may at some future point in time experience "self-renewal", discover a larger purpose in life and a renewed passion for work. It is important, therefore, that career development and change be viewed within a broader, more encompassing theoretical framework than envisioned by a linear, or stage theory of development.

It is suggested, therefore, that the variations in the cognitive balances of the respondents, explained some of the individual differences discovered among

respondents. This observation does not rule against the variation across time created by such factors as gender, economic opportunity, social pressures, and genetics. Rather, it is argued that these factors may be modified by the individual's relative order of consciousness. For instance, individuals within the Institutional Balance may feel more self-empowered to capitalize upon economic opportunities that they encounter ("happenstance"), than those in the Interpersonal Balance who might evaluate the opportunity within an entirely different framework. The constructive developmental theory allows us, in general terms, to describe and even predict change. If a researcher or counsellor can discern, either through an interview or measure, an individual's order of consciousness they can, in turn, make some reasonable assumptions about how that individual constructs their world.

For the most part, the constructive-developmental model has been developed and applied in the context of psychotherapy. McAuliffe (1993), in a theoretical-based article, however, has applied the concepts of Kegan to vocational theory. Kegan (1994) has also applied his constructivist-developmental model to forward our understanding of the demands or "curriculum" of the 21st century workplace. As noted earlier, the developmental model of Guidano (1995a) has yet to be applied to vocational theory or counselling.

Kegan's constructive-developmental model, when applied to vocational psychology, provides some distinctive advantages over more mainstream career theories as evidenced in this research study. Unlike other vocational theories, the constructive-developmental theory was an invaluable framework from which to better understand the role of work within the context of an individual's whole life, rather than within an isolated segment of time. From within the constructive-developmental

framework, it was observed that an individual appears to organize their experience into a meaningful whole, or seeks consistency across the full spectrum of their life rather than just work, or relationships, or health. Ron's work, for instance, is fully integrated with his life-style – it allows him to spend time with his family, to further his social relationships, and contribute to his community. To view his work outside of this context would be misleading and detract from our understanding. A constructive-developmental perspective helps us to view and understand an individual from multiple perspectives, rather than restricting vocational interventions strictly to the world of work.

Further, the constructivist perspective of behavioral change, of which constructive-developmental theory is but one approach (Mahoney, 1995), addresses the affective dimension of vocational functioning that many vocational theories have difficulty addressing (Neimeyer, 1993). Indeed, most trait-factor theories of vocation development tend to attribute emotional distress to a lack of congruence between personal traits and requirements of the job (Chartrand, 1993). A rational assessment of the dilemma, or conflict, it is argued, would alleviate the emotional angst. Constructivist theories of behavioral change, in contrast, view negative emotions as possessing signal value, as challenges to existing constructions and, as such, must to be respected. Or as Guidano (1995a) argues, feelings confirm or disconfirm our way of being – the viability of our models of being. Negative emotions motivate an individual to develop a more viable construction of their work in the context of their life, or to work toward integrating disparate components of their self, or to move toward greater consistency in their core ordering processes. Jake, for instance, spent many years of his life agonizing over his “litanies of failures”, until he finally forgave himself, recognizing it was nothing less than human. In constructivist terms, this emotional dissonance created the motivation for

Jake to reconstruct his model of “self, to integrate the negative and positive aspects of his life into a meaningful whole.

Constructive-developmental theorists, above all, seek to understand the human change processes we observed in this study. They distinguish between first and second orders of change (Lyddon, 1990). The former refer to changes in substance (surface structure), the latter refers to changes in form (deep structure). For instance, when Sean changes employment within a government defense establishment to become a sound technician, it is considered a first order change. Second-order change is called for when there is a challenge to the major assumptions of an individual’s self-definition, or what he or she knows about the world of work. The way one defines self and occupation is transformed (Watzlawick, 1990). Ned’s decision, for instance, to “not take a job” because it may compromise his ability to control his own work reflects a change in how he has constructed himself in relationship to work, rather than simply reflect a job change.

Although Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory has potential for explaining many aspects of human development, there are some potential weaknesses that need to be addressed if it is to be applied to vocational theory. Specifically, distinguishing between developmental balances is rather subjective, demanding at times that one make some arbitrary inferences. Further, advocates of the theory must continue to build a more refined method for capturing individuals who are between balances, or those in transition. What constitutes a developmental “crisis”, and what characterizes normal adjustments, may appear similar. There are, without doubt, significant external events that can unravel most people without constituting a “crisis”. Moreover, the theory does not seem to fully address the mechanisms that create change, or move individuals

forward from one stage to the next. Finally, the theory needs to be further integrated with mainstream psychology, specifically personality theories. For instance, does an individual's level of extraversion-introversion tend to enhance or limit their development? What role do traits, or genetics, or vocational interests play in development?

In summary, a number of points related to adult development and aging have emerged from this study. Firstly, it was observed that aging, per se, does not necessarily explain an individual's reaction to change in their lives. Rather, it was suggested that other factors may be interacting with time to explain the individual differences we observed among the respondents. Also, human change might be not only linear but also transformational, or a combination of both. Hence we garner more information about a behavior, beliefs and emotions of an individual from understanding their order of consciousness, than from knowing their chronological age. Finally, it was suggested that Kegan's constructive-development theory as applied to career development has heuristic value in linking work with other aspects of an individual's life and in explaining the role of emotion in the human change process.

A developmental paradigm is able to explain why individuals might be satisfied with their "life's work" at one point in their life yet be dissatisfied at a later point. That is, career choice is not a "one time" decision. Individuals change significantly across their lifetime, as do environments. Counselling that focuses upon helping individuals to anticipate and respond to change, might be more useful than the current focus of career development upon the match of person to the environment (Holland, 1996). Interestingly, few of these respondents referred to career planning per se, but rather integrated work or career within a larger context of life planning. For the most part, they

appeared to be driven more by the need to respond to internal and external change rather than by a career plan.

Finally, a developmental approach better explains why individuals may develop at different rates in different areas of their life. Some individuals, for instance, may be quite adept at defining their “work” but struggle painfully with issues of intimacy and affiliation. Similarly, individuals in transition may be struggling both with enacting their vision of their “work” and struggling with defining “self” apart from their “psychological environment”.

The Role of Work

This section examines the research findings and the implications that evolved from the third research question: Do older workers come to understand the function of work in their lives differently as they age?

The results suggested that the term “work” held different meanings for each of the respondents. For Ron, “work” was an activity that allowed him to create a life-style which, in turn, allowed him to spend time with his family, involve himself in sports, contribute to his community, cultivate friendships, and control the pace of his life. For Kyle, work was his avocation, an opportunity to perform activities that he intrinsically enjoyed and to interact with other people. For Ethan, work is no longer work, but rather it provides an opportunity to spend time with friends. For some older workers, it would seem, work becomes increasingly integrated into their life-style. It was intermixed with their leisure pursuits, their avocational activities, their involvement in their community

and so forth. It would be difficult for these individuals, therefore, to define their “work” outside of their meaning-making framework.

Finding one’s “work”, it appears, is a life-long search beginning when one enters the workforce and continuing probably past retirement, or maybe even to death. Discovering one’s work, it was suggested, is not a rational process of decision-making wherein one selects a career based upon the optimal match of their abilities with available work environments. Rather, the search for one’s “work”, seems to be an ongoing quest for personal significance or meaning. This quest, it appears, is the motivation, or pull on the individual that propels them forward through life. It is an ongoing process of refinement in the individual’s struggle to discover of who they are and who they are not. The object of this quest is similar to the construct of “individually unique goal” envisioned by Alder. One of the basic propositions of Adlerian psychology posits the existence of “one basic dynamic force behind all human activity, a striving from a felt minus situation towards a plus situation - from a feeling of inferiority towards superiority, perfection, and totality” (Ansbacker & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 1). The object of the quest, or “goal”, in Adlerian terms is not generally conscious to the individual. In a similar manner, the object of one’s career strivings may be outside of the immediate awareness of the individual and only “revealed” through hindsight, or self-reflection. As one moves from position to position, from job to job, more and more knowledge about “self” is revealed to the individual. As Ned describes the process

Each one of these phases resulted in a higher level of integration of my own – characteristics and what I acquired from the outside world. I think in many respects it kind of culminated in that awareness of a passion for .

..

As individuals come to more clearly define themselves, they can, in turn, more clearly define their work - their vocational calling. On the basis of this study, it is argued that the process of self-discovery is not without emotional pain and nagging self-doubts. The process of discovering who one is, also implies discovering who one is not, a process of casting out ill-fitting images of the "self". This may require laying aside any pretensions about one's abilities, or for positions of influence, or self-aggrandizement. The process, in addition, demands an acceptance of "self", of one's strengths and one's weaknesses. Savickas (1997) has suggested the quest for meaning, for one's life work demands spiritual courage – an essential principle of life, moving the individual forward toward others and community. Others have described a movement that advances the individual toward greater integration and toward greater emotional well-being (Freud, 1948).

Much of the current literature expresses concern for the ability of the older worker to adapt to the demands of the postmodern workplace. Morrow (1993) believes that, in order to survive, workers of all ages must be able to invent new relationships with employers – change and adapt constantly in order to survive in the ruthless global market place. Hall (1996a) argues that the postmodern workplace demands that workers be internally-directed, able to reinvent themselves in response to internal and external change. Kegan (1994) suggests that the "new curriculum" of the workplace demands that employees invent their own work, become self-initiating and self-evaluating, take responsibility for themselves rather than depending upon employers, and have a more global awareness of themselves in the context of the organization. Do older workers have the necessary skills? Can they adapt to the discontinuous pace of change? Are they capable to defining their own work?

The results of this study suggest that the answer is both yes and no – some of the respondents in this study appear to be able to adjust and some workers find the evolving workplace a significant challenge. It may be appropriate at this point in the discussion to recall that there was considerable variation among the respondents in how they constructed the workplace. It was suggested that the environment to which individuals respond may be a product of their own construction. The “lived experience” of most of the respondents in this study appeared to match the images of the postmodern workplace portrayed in the relevant literature. The realities of unemployment, credentialism, downsizing, and reorganization were apparent to this age-cohort. Dean, for instance, described the new workplace as a “hell of a lot tougher”, more unpredictable, and certainly less secure. He rationalizes that current economic conditions seriously limit his ability to take control of this career at this point in his life. Ethan, in contrast, who was an economic immigrant to Canada later in life and who was also downsized, appeared to give very limited power or attention to the economic climate. He realizes that all he can control is his reaction to events, rather than the events themselves (“we’re never in control”). The results of this study suggest that the workplace may, in effect, be a neutral place – nor more intimidating than the world of our grandparents – it simply exists. It is the respondents themselves who ascribe meaning to the events unfolding in the workplace.

Thus, the answer to the question raised in the literature regarding the ability of the older worker to adapt to the postmodern workplace depends, in part, upon how the individual constructs the workplace – as a positive, or stimulating place, or as a negative place - a source of ongoing threat and uncertainty, or possibly as a mixture of both positive and negative experiences. The ability of an older worker, or any worker to adapt to changes in the workplace are, in all likelihood, no different than their ability to adapt to

change in general, including aging, technology shifts, relationships, and health. Older workers are, it appears, no more or less likely to respond negatively to change than the general population of workers. More research is needed to discover and clarify any differences between older workers and younger workers in their adaptation to change in general and the workplace in particular.

There is much evidence in this study to suggest that some older workers may, in fact, make a very positive contribution to the postmodern workplace. Indeed, some older workers were found to be inner-directed ("follow my own path"), adaptable, and proactive in response to change. They were, moreover, found to be less competitive, intrinsically motivated, less emotionally responsive, more consistent in their behavior, and more focussed upon the "big picture". This finding matches the work of Wolf et. al. (1995) who observed that older workers tended to be highly motivated, adaptable, and possessed a more "realistic" understanding of "self". Kane (1997) has described older workers as a vast "untapped" potential awaiting discovery.

What is the fate, one might ask, of those workers who are unable to adapt to the postmodern workplace? Some will, without doubt, simply leave the workforce, either through attrition or early retirement, or in some form of self-employment. Many will, in all likelihood, move to the contingent workforce, the third leaf of the Handy's (1994) shamrock to find employment as part-timers, dependent contractors, or temporary workers. For some older workers this shift will be, without doubt, emotionally trying. The notion of position, power, and job is, perhaps, far too entrenched in the psyche of many workers over the age of 50. Employers must develop strategies that attend to the needs of those older workers who have difficulty with transition and change, or who might have difficulty reconstructing themselves in a world that is no longer familiar or

predictable to them. Cascio (1993) concluded that the widespread negative consequences of downsizing have arisen, in part, because many employers do not attend to the human problems that emerge when employers decide to reduce their workforce.

The results of this study lend support to extant research regarding the factors influencing the decision to retire (Hwalek et. al., 1992; Daatland, 1988). These authors suggested that social pressure was an important factor, rather than health or income, in predicting early retirement intentions. The results of this study suggest that those older workers who accept the stereotypes associated with aging, are less adaptable and lack the ability to be self-defining, would be more likely to opt for early retirement. Daatland (1988) has argued that retirement provides an opportunity for some older workers to escape the embarrassment of being underemployed, or ignored. This would be particularly true if the individual quit or left involuntarily rather than made a voluntary decision, or they were unable to construct an emotionally viable story about their retirement. Much more research is needed to investigate the psychological impact of involuntary retirement.

Do older workers come to see work as more or less important as they age? The answer depends upon how the individual constructs their work. Ethan, for example, disclosed that, at this point in this life, "work is no longer work". This implies that "work", for Ethan, has become an increasingly interior experience, and expression of the "self". It has become interwoven with his life-style, and his identity – it is an expression of who he is. Work, in Ethan's world, will always be important because his work occurs "inside of his head". Ned who describes his work as "doing what he loves" anticipates that his satisfaction with work will only "deepen with time". For Jake, work has lost its ability to

define “who or what he is” but aging has not diminished his desire to continuing working. For those older workers who constructed their work “inside of their head”, it became increasingly important to them. The external experience of work, or having a job, or seeking direction from others, however, became less important and, at times, rejected over time. For those workers who struggled to find their passion, or to maintain their job, or view it only as a source of income, work appeared to become less important over time. Daniel, for instance, is looking forward to withdrawing from the world of work. It may be that when “work” is defined as an external context, it becomes subject to forces beyond the ability of the individual to control (e.g. downsizing, underutilization, and corporate abuse). Then work may become a less enjoyable, hence less important activity.

The findings in this study strongly argue for the conclusion that work is neither an objective nor a definable entity. Rather “work” appears to be a vehicle, or means of self-definition that is ever-changing and, at times, ephemeral. It is as much about finding meaning in life as it is an economic activity (Turkel, 1972). Career theories must be constructed to incorporate differences in the meaning of work within individuals across time and among individuals at the same point in time. For some, work may never be more than a means to an end, a source of income and necessary, but not necessarily a fulfilling activity. For others, work is a means of discovering who they are and who they are not, an ever-expanding process of self-definition. What constitutes meaningful work at age 30 may, at age 45, no longer be satisfying or encompassing of one's identity. Work is, for some, the integration of their values, beliefs, attitudes, interests, avocations, relationships, and abilities. Career, for some older workers, becomes an increasingly interior experience, an activity that occurs “inside of the head” rather than “out there” in the workplace.

The drive to find meaningful work is not extinguishable - that is, one may become discouraged, or opt out of the workplace, or lose their way (Carlsen, 1988) but never appear to stop the search. The results of this study indicate that the definition of work tends to shift across evolutionary or developmental balances. That is, what work means to an individual in one balance may change dramatically as they experience the transformational shifts across time.

To summarize, most of the respondents in this study appeared to be quite capable of adapting to the postmodern workplace. Those who had difficulty, it seemed, also found it difficult to adjust or incorporate change in general. That is, it was not the result of their aging, but rather a more generalized inability to adapt to internal and external changes. The findings also raised questions regarding the "reality" inherent in the postmodern workplace. Indeed, it appeared that the respondents themselves constructed the workplace to which they, in turn, responded. Some "saw" the contemporary workplace as positive and supportive and others as a source of threat, requiring one to be more vigilant.

The findings of this study also point to the need for more research regarding voluntary and involuntary retirement. What is the emotional impact upon those who opt out of the workplace, or succumb to the pressure to retire prematurely? Do they continue to struggle to make sense of their lives? Do they have more difficulty adjusting to retirement? Further, what is the impact of retirement on those who have found their passion, their life's work? Do they continue to pursue similar activities outside of the workplace? Do they tend to experience a better overall level of adjustment?

Finally, it was observed that some older workers may, in fact, bring skills and experience to the workplace that would be prized by many employers. Indeed, the result of this study strongly supported the conclusions of many “enlightened employers” that older workers are more motivated, more self-directed, and more willing to take on new challenges (AARP, 1996).

Relationships in the Workplace

This section discusses the data emerging in response to the last research question: Do older workers attribute more or less importance to interpersonal relationships as they age?

Although interpersonal relationships are a major focus of most psychological theories (Corsini & Wedding, 1995), the issue has been virtually ignored by most vocational psychologists (Lowman, 1993). This is particularly true of studies examining the older worker (Hansson et. al, 1997). Cartensen (1992) observed that older persons tend to limit their social interactions and emotional involvement with acquaintances, preferring to focus their attention more on to family and close friends. Hansson et. al. (1997) questions whether older workers appreciate the importance of developing new and diverse relationships. The findings of this research study suggest that many older workers are highly motivated to cultivate relationships in the workplace. Indeed, there was much evidence to suggest that, in many cases, older, male workers actually tend to move toward others – toward a sense of community and camaraderie.

As Perry and Hansson (1992), point out, many older workers in this study perceived work relationships as sources of ongoing friendships, as being integral to

“doing business” effectively, as providing opportunities for formal and informal learning, and as mutually beneficial sources of support in times of need. Respondents made observations such as “if you don’t get to know or like people, you will be stuck in square one all the time” and “you find you learn more about them . . . you establish friendships and relationships in an informal setting, over a beer”. It was also observed that those older workers who felt more comfortable including colleagues into their social sphere, were generally more inclined to be accepting of themselves, more comfortable with who they were, rather than seeking to preserve an image. Kyle noticed that, with aging, he has now become more tolerant of other points of view and is less emotionally reactive to the behavior of others. In hindsight, he now wishes he had been more responsive to others in his earlier years. He attributes, in part, his past behavior to the “organizational culture” of the quasi-military police force (“a decision is required, and you make it”). It is argued, however, that Kyle has, in all likelihood, come to accept his own limitations and those of others. As the result of experience and development, he has become more comfortable with his own range of behaviors, his strengths, and his limitations. Perhaps, at some level of his being, he can better tolerate imperfections in others because he can tolerate such imperfections in himself. Ned describes himself as more reflective than in his younger years, less emotionally reactive to situations, and more “likely to give the benefit of the doubt to the other person”.

At the same time, however, some respondents found that they were becoming less interested in conforming to the expectations of others, less defensive, and less tolerant of others. Dean, for instance, finds himself less motivated to work with people that he doesn’t like anymore (“I am not going to waste my time . . . unless it is unavoidable”). Jake no longer “turns himself inside out” just to be liked as he did when he was twenty-one. Ron feels more empowered to terminate his relationships with

people who are unscrupulous or abusive. It was argued that because they have come to accept their own strengths and weaknesses, they are more likely to be honest about their own feelings. They no longer hold to pretence that they can be liked by everyone, or that that they, in turn, will like everyone else. To pretend otherwise, or to struggle to be liked, is neither adaptive nor realistic. They are freer now to be “themselves” rather than conform to the expectations of others.

Hall (1996b) argued that in the postmodern workplace, career development will occur within the context of interpersonal relationships. That is, during times of transition and change, those workers who seek out support from others, enhance their learning through teamwork and collegiality, or maintain their identity in times of turbulence, will prosper in their career trajectory. As noted, many older workers in this study exhibited fewer traditionally masculine behaviors and attitudes and clearly appeared to be moving toward others - toward intimacy and connectedness. As Fletcher (1996) noted, career development in the future will be through interdependence rather than independence and a willingness to see relationships as important sources of learning and development - reciprocity replacing rivalry. At least for some older workers in this study, the future in the workplace holds promise of both opportunity and mutuality.

Kram (1996) described the personal attributes necessary for a relational approach to career development in the 21st century, and included such qualities as self-reflection, self-disclosure, active listening, empathy, and feedback. Many of the respondents in this study described themselves as less emotionally attached to their opinions, more likely to give others the benefit of the doubt, less competitive, less likely to see issues as black and white, mellow, more tolerant, more judgmental and so forth.

These observations suggest that, at least, some older workers possess many of the personal qualities necessary to prosper in the evolving workplace.

The results of this study provided support for the work of Carpenter (1993) who constructed a model of interpersonal competence. Building upon this model, Perry and Hansson (1992) identified four characteristics – sociability, emotional control, respect for others, interpersonal attractiveness – that predicted continued organizational influence for older workers. These interpersonal competencies were found to be possessed by many of the respondents in this study. Although this study did not measure interpersonal influence, these attributes appeared to be related to feelings of mastery, the ability to find meaningful work, and adaptive competence.

Why have the older workers in this study seemingly become more accepting, more tolerant of themselves and others? In part, this development may reflect a growing acceptance of “self”. It may also reflect that some older workers, at least, are turning away from the “normative” demands of “organizational” careers. That is, they have come to recognize that competition tends to detract from friendships, limits one’s opportunities for inclusion, and simply wastes one’s reserves of energy. Indeed, it may be that, with experience, some workers have recognized the folly of the socialization processes in organizations wherein self-sufficiency, muted intimacy, and upward mobility are the environmental expectations. Perhaps it reflects the observation that some older workers have come to define “self” outside of the context of their immediate work environment, to perceive themselves a part of humanity at large. It may be that they have come to accept that, they themselves are imperfect, vulnerable to internal and external changes, and that adaptation is fostered better through alliances than through individuation.

Not all workers in this study were equally comfortable with initiating and developing interpersonal relationships in a work situation. Daniel prefers to keep colleagues and friends separate ("Things happen and there never ought to be a conflict between friendships and colleagues"). He feels uncomfortable with the perceived demand to network in the postmodern workplace. Sean could not think of any occasions in which he would mix socially with colleagues. It was suggested that these differences were more likely attributable to variations in interpersonal styles. That is, some older workers are more comfortable in interpersonal situations – personality attributes that, in all likelihood, have been characteristic of these individuals throughout their working lives. Murphy (1996) has suggested that personality style may be more predictive of organizational adaptation than other abilities. He argues that behaviors such as teamwork, customer service, and organizational citizenship are crucial to effective functioning in organizations.

There is some evidence that the differences among the respondents might be, in part, explained by differences in their respective order of consciousness. Indeed, Kegan (1982;1994) might suggest that those in the Interindividual Balance were highly motivated to develop and enhance their relationships in the workplace on an ongoing basis. He would argue that in the Interindividual Balance, the "self" has gained a capacity for intimacy, it has replaced the counter-dependent independence of the Institutional for interdependence. This ability to share "self" at the level of intimacy permits the emotions and impulses to live and fully develop. Rather than attempting to be close and auto-regulative simultaneously, the individuality of the fifth-order of consciousness allows one to "give oneself up" to another, to share experiences yet retain their distinctiveness. This full emergence of the "self" fits with the observation in

this study, that the two workers in Interindividual Balance seemed to place higher value on initiating and enhancing their interpersonal relationships than they had at earlier points in their lives. Indeed, in constructive developmental terms, this would explain the observation that some respondents were found to be markedly less competitive with others, to be more patient, to be less evaluative, to be less emotionally responsive, and to be more collaborative and less independent

As was previously pointed out, the threat of intimacy in interpersonal relationships challenged those individuals at or below the fourth, or Institutional Balance. Kegan suggests that in the third, or Interpersonal Balance, the self is constructed in the context of one's interpersonal relationships. One speaks of "self" only as part of shared reality. The feelings engendered by the intimacy demanded by close interpersonal relationships tend to threaten this interpersonal balance. Sean, for instance, appears reluctant to express any anger toward others, not because he is unassertive or incapable of this emotion, but rather, an expression of anger would amount to a declaration that the "self" can exist independent of its relationships - that he is no longer dependent upon others for their ongoing validation. He would more likely, however, to feel frustrated, sad, wounded or incomplete, should others threaten to withdraw their support. In the third order, or Interpersonal Balance, emotions must be carefully modulated because they threaten to overwhelm the "self's" ability to regulate the integrity of the shared, interpersonal context. Emotions, particularly those erotic and affiliate in nature, come to be viewed as threats to smooth regulation of one's internal administration. This serves to explain why Daniel and Sean, for instance, prefer to keep their social and work relationships completely separate. It is not because they are necessarily unsociable, discourteous, or unemotional, but rather, they cannot balance the resultant emotions with their need to preserve the integrity of the "self".

Although this constructive-developmental approach to relationships is useful for understanding differences, some of the differences amongst the workers might also be explained by differences in personality, or dispositions. It is possible that Daniel is simply less agreeable than Ned? Or is Sean more introverted than Jake? Indeed, it would be useful to have more information about individual personality styles as adjunctive information. Perhaps there is an interaction between personality style and cognitive development.

In summary, the findings of this study have provided ample support to the notion that older workers are highly motivated to actively involve themselves in work teams, to work closely with both younger workers and age cohorts, and to experience the pleasure of acting as mentors in the workplace. This finding tends to reject the stereotypic image of the older worker preferring to “stick with their own kind” apart from the central action in the organization.

Perceived Control Across the Lifespan

One of the most frequent observations in this study was the variation among the respondents in their beliefs in their ability to control, or exercise mastery, over the events that they encountered in their lives. This observation was true across all dimensions, or themes identified in the study, including aging, working, and relationships. These differences amongst the respondents may, in part, reflect their perceived locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Locus of control refers to people's generalized, cross-situational beliefs about their ability to receive reinforcement for their actions. Individuals can be classified along a continuum from very internal to very external. People with a strong internal

locus of control believe that the responsibility for whether they get reinforced, ultimately lies with themselves – success or failure is due to their own efforts. People with a strong external locus of control believe that the reinforcers in life are controlled by chance, luck, or powerful others. Therefore, they see little impact of their own efforts on the amount of reinforcement they receive. Rotter argues, however, that there may be some specific situations where people who are “generally” external, behave like internals, and vice versa. In terms of the theory, this reflects a learning history that has shown them to have control over the reinforcement they receive in particular situations, although overall they perceive little control over what happens to them.

The transcripts provided many excellent examples of the differences among the respondents in their beliefs, or generalized expectation of success. Ethan, for instance, moved to Victoria at age 57 without a job or even prospects of a job. He states, the “reason we came here was we had confidence we could get on and something would come up”. He feels equally confident that he is able to establish friendly if not positive relationships with most anybody he meets. He states, “I think I have the personality that people find it easy to have a conversation with.” Although most of his peers have likely slowed down their activity level, Ethan coaches an adult, competitive soccer team (“And, I’m still capable of running with them, you know”). Ethan appears to believe that, in most every situation, he can control the outcome, or level of reinforcement he might receive. Daniel, in contrast, feels that he must remain guarded in his relationships at work (“....my trust threshold has gone way down”), he adapts a rather passive attitude toward his job search (“. . . if there's a job out there . . . and if I am qualified for it, I will apply . . .if I don't get it fine), and he has, in recent years, backed off any health maintenance programs (“. . . I am reduced to walks now”). Daniel, it appears, feels less confident in his ability to receive reinforcement for his efforts hence he limits his emotional

investment in looking for work, or avoids close interaction with his colleagues. Although there are differences among the respondents in their locus of control, more research is needed to determine what factors contribute to their relative level of confidence. The findings provided preliminary evidence to suggest that there is a relationship between internal control and the ability to find passion in work, adapt to the aging process, or find comfort in close interpersonal relationships.

One possible explanation for the observed variation in the respondents' sense of being "in charge" or in control of their lives is their relative level of developmental balances. For example, those respondents in this study who were generally in the Institutional Balance, seemed to feel a higher degree of internalized control over most aspects of their lives. Ned, for instance, is conscious of the fluctuations in his "energy level" and ensures that he works out regularly to maintain his well being. He is, without doubt, most confident in his ability to exercise control over most, if not all, facets of his work. He can define his work, be selective of the types of assignments he takes on, and control his working environment. He stumbles, it seems, when he tries to incorporate other people into his workspace ("There is an element of network that I find crass", "There are aspects of working alone that I appreciate because I like setting the environment"). He seems to have difficulty networking, or working in a team situation, it is suggested, because he prizes regulation over mutuality, action over affiliation. Indeed, individuals within the Institutional Balance tend to run themselves as self-administering units, or institutions, they govern themselves in terms of ideologies, and universal principles. They struggle to maintain control over their work. They cannot, however, take an objective stance, or perceive self in relation to their principles, their inner states, and their relationships. For these individuals, interpersonal relationships evoke feelings that cannot be regulated, or evoke doubts about their administrative capabilities, or

cause them to “hear” information that might cause the self to alter its behavior. Hence, those within the Institutional Balance would tend to have a more generalized expectation that they have control over most events in their lives, save for the complexities of interpersonal relationships.

Self-Knowledge and Self-Acceptance

Many of the respondents in this study disclosed that, over the course of their lives, they became more aware of themselves – their strengths, their weaknesses, their emotions, their values, and their beliefs. Jake describes this evolution in self-awareness as possessing a “more reasonable definition of who I am”.

Some vocational psychologists might describe this process as one of increasing self-knowledge. In Holland's (1985) theory of occupational choice, he defines self-knowledge as the degree to which an individual possesses accurate information about their interests and abilities. The accuracy of occupational decisions and the difficulties inherent in process of making them are related to the knowledge one possess about the “self” and the world of work. In Holland's model (Rounds & Tracey, 1990), career counselling is a problem-solving approach that emphasizes diagnoses (abilities, interests, preferences), assessment (standardized measures), and actuarial methods (predictive models) to optimize the “fit” between the individual and their work environment. The model assumes that the attributes of the individual and the environment are sufficiently consistent across time and situations that prediction is possible over the long-term (Zytowski & Borgen, 1983). The greater the accuracy of one's self-knowledge, the more likely they are to experience job satisfaction and

vocational “success”. This trait-factor, or person-environment fit theory, however, does not address changes within the individual across the lifespan (Rounds & Tracey, 1990).

Krumboltz and Nichols (1990) suggest that people try to make sense of their world by constructing beliefs about “self” and their environment. Based upon self-observation generalizations and task-approach skills, individuals learn to refine their beliefs about what they can and cannot do. Self-observation generalizations are summary beliefs constructed by the individual based upon a large number of prior learning experiences. Task-approach skills denote the relationships between self-observation generalizations and the external world, and include work habits, mental sets, performance standards and values, thought processes, and emotional responses. They are problem-solving skills and work habits one acquires in order to better cope with the world. Over time, one’s level of “self-knowledge” increase through learning and an individual adjusts these skills to accommodate to the evolving demands of their external environment.

The present study provides many examples that would support both the person-environment fit model (Holland, 1985) and the social-learning theory (Krumboltz & Nicols, 1990). Sean, it might be argued, learns that although he is an accomplished artist, his need for job security and a predictable work environment, limits his opportunity to find job satisfaction as a musician. Kyle has learned that his set of values would interfere with his ability to take on a job simply for monetary gain. He learns that he prefers work that is intrinsically satisfying. Both Sean and Kyle have, over the course of their lives, acquired greater knowledge of “self”. However, there is something missing or incomplete about both these models of vocational development. Many of the respondents in this study spoke of finding “passion”, acquiring a more global

understanding of themselves and their world, of finding meaning or purpose in their lives, and of turning aside from the external world to live more “inside of their head”. These self-discoveries, it appears, are qualitatively different than those that involve learning about one’s interests, or abilities, or work habits. They represent a different order of magnitude in the process of learning about the “self”.

McAdams (1994) suggests that “self” might be better understood not as a unitary construct but rather existing within multiple levels. As cited in McAdams, Hogan (1987) describes personality from the viewpoint of the actor as “the great uncharted frontier of personality psychology . . . the region of the self-concept, of social aspiration, and personal despair, of public claims and private reservations, of hopes, doubts, and self-delusions” (p. 300). McAdams urges us to view an individual perceptions of the self, or personality from three distinct levels – dispositional traits, personal concerns, and life-narratives. A description of one’s “self” or of another person based upon a listing of their traits, according to McAdams, is profoundly unsatisfying. Trait descriptions, it is argued, disregard the contextual and conditional nature of the human experience. Further, individuals do not talk about who they are in dispositional terms, but rather, in language that filled with multifaceted, contingent self-attributions that are inherently episodic and narrative. McAdams describes the dispositional approach as the “psychology of the stranger”.

Personal concerns involve what an individual is concerned with, what their plans are for the future, their goals, striving, projects, tactics, and so forth. They address:

what people want, often during particular periods in their lives or within particular domains of action, and what methods people use (strategies, plans, defenses,

and so on) in order to get what they want or to avoid getting what they do not want [. . .] they involve particular kinds of personal strivings, current concerns, and developmentally linked preoccupations that ebb and flow over the life span, in accordance with changing situational and developmental demands (p. 304 – 305).

At the level of life narrative, the person conceives a story of their life that conveys an understanding of “self” that is integrated, unitary, coherent, and conveys a sense of their overall purpose. McAdams conceptualizes the uniquely adult agenda as making an identity – finding unity and purpose in life – a evolving narrative quest. He describes identity and its evolution as:

. . . an internalized and evolving story that integrates a reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future into a coherent and vitalizing life myth [. . .] an internalized narrative understanding I have fashioned of who I am and how I fit into the adult world.[. . .] the story is created and revised across the adult years as the changing person and person's changing world negotiates niches, places, opportunities, and positions within which the person can live, and live meaningfully (p. 306 – 307).

McAdams has urged us to strive to understand another individual from three differing, more integrative perspectives. There is a parallel, it is suggested, between the manner in which we come to understand another individual and the way we come to understand ourselves. This study suggests that we come to understand ourselves through a gradual, more refined process in which we gather the bits and pieces of our experience, our personal strivings, or current motivations and weave them into a coherent whole - an

ever more integrated story of our life. This process is captured by Ned who looks back upon his life and conveys how he has come to understand himself differently. He speaks of his characteristics, of learning about himself, and of an renewed awareness of who he is

Each of these phases resulted in a higher level of integration of my own characteristics and what I had acquired from the outside world. I think in many respects it kind of culminated in that awareness or passion for . . . my assessment of my past history, it helps to explain a sense of unease or discomfort or lack of fulfillment . . . I was aware through each of these stages . . . it was modified significantly by these experiences.

From this current vantage point, he finds that has gained a more coherent sense of identity. Ned describes his life as series of stages, or transformations leading him toward a more unified, reorganized sense of who he – an identify that links his past with this future

A building on . . . adding new dimensions. . . but the dimension are rooted in the base of experiences that I have acquired. And I find that that concept of integration is a very significant one for me because the things that I am interested in pursuing now are extensions or extrapolations of what work I have done and learning I had acquired in my other environments in my past experience.

Jake, looking back over his life, feels that he is essentially the same person he has always been – the difference for him, however, is that the knowledge he has acquired about himself over the years is more integrated. He views “self” from different vantage point, and he like the image that it provides

. . . it's a picture I like. That's the difference. I'm quite happy to be me now . . . Perception is the reality in this case – I believe I have a cohesive picture of myself.

Self-knowledge, it appears, is not only a process of gathering information about one's abilities or personality style ("I like to be independent"), or about identifying current career aspirations ("I wanted to be a psychologist") but also it is about integrating this information into a coherent whole, of making sense of the past, the present, and the future. Carlsen (1988) stresses that the building of a personal story is an major focus of her career counselling:

The gathering of the bits and pieces of personal history and identity leads quite naturally into the development of a personal narrative [. . .] I encourage my clients to create a personal story as they begin to make sense of their unique human capacity to join the past, the present and the future, and as they gain new capacity to name and understand some of the significant moments in their history [. . .] In such a manner, the client is building a larger base of knowledge about self and is moving from being a novice of self to an expert on self (p. 120).

The respondents in this study appear to vary in their current ability to understand "self", to make sense of their lives and to create a consistent image of themselves. There is little doubt, however, that over time each of the respondents will be faced with changes, either internal or external, that will shift how they have come to understand themselves. Some respondents, who currently are struggling with self-understanding, may shift to a position wherein they feel more consistent, their identity more integrated. Others, who currently feel confident in their self-understanding, may begin to become unraveled as

they try to incorporate new information about themselves. Although individuals who have a more refined understand of who they are, will never escape the pressures to change but they will, in all likelihood, become refocused more quickly.

Career development models need to be expanded to incorporate a broader definition of self-knowledge. It is useful but not sufficient to urge adult clients to gain insight into their skills and abilities, or to identify their values, or to take stock of their current career objectives. Although invaluable, these exercises alone may be quickly forgotten or ignored, if they cannot be incorporated in a large framework that address such fundamental issues as one's purpose in life, or if they cannot be integrated with the image one has constructed about themselves (Bruner, 1985)

Why do some individuals appear to have a more integrated understanding of "self" than others? Self-knowledge demands an ability to accept both the strengths as well as the weaknesses one "discovers" in "self". That is, one must come to accept that, as part of the human condition, they will sometimes fail in activities despite their best efforts to succeed, deeply hurt other people intentionally or unintentionally, or act less in their own best interest at times. Carlsen (1988) describes a career crisis, or a crisis of meaning as occurring when the ordering of meanings have been shaken up, when we find information about ourselves that is discordant:

Out of the intense emotional pain of the crisis, energy was first mobilized for destruction, and then redirected into the hard work of the reorganization of personal epistemologies. Painful, as it was, emotion gave energy for the difficult task of reshaping personal knowing (p. 25).

Jake, for instance, came to recognize that he “has screwed up some things but has done lot of things well” and, further that he cannot go back and undo his mistakes. He simply has to learn to live with his past - his failures and his successes. Ethan has come to understand that he sometimes makes errors of judgement despite his best intentions. He has learned, rather than hide his mistakes, to openly admit his errors and apologize (“Nobody can argue with an apology”). Unlike Daniel, Ned does not castigate himself for his inability to find his career or the “goalposts” until late into his working life. Rather, he takes great joy in finding his “passion”. Self-knowledge assumes, therefore, a corequisite ability to accept imperfections in the “self”, to endure the pain inherent in casting off old images of self.

How does one learn to be self-accepting, to fully incorporate all dimensions of the “self”? Self-acceptance, it is argued, emerges within a supportive environment – one that matches challenge with support (Kegan, 1994). An adolescent, for instance, does not learn to become independent by being flung into the external world without the support of his or her parents. Learning occurs best within an environment that challenges the individual to take risks, to explore new avenues of their lives, but with the knowledge that they will not be rejected for making mistakes or errors of judgement. It is not inappropriate to substitute the word “employer” for “parent” in this scenario. Abusive employers, who threaten staff with reduced opportunities, heavier workloads, or the possibility of being laid off, act like some parents. They threaten or cajole their adolescents into becoming more responsible, rather than learning to couple challenge with support. In the absence of support, an employee is unlikely to take the risks inherent necessary to grow and develop, or to risk failure. Instead, they will likely act to avoid risk, and preserve their current construction of “self”. Jake, for instance, had the ongoing support of a strong mentor in his early years

I was getting feedback from [. . .] who was my mentor - who kept telling me how good I was 'cause he could see that I didn't know how good I was. . . . it was a combination of me proving to myself - of doing good work, having it recognized, proving to myself I can do it and then being told I had.

Does this perhaps explain why so many individuals remain in jobs that provide so little satisfaction, or are even detrimental to their health? Wright and Smye (1996) argue that many corporate cultures perpetuate a culture of abuse - that is, employers state they value innovative, creative people yet demand absolute compliance to rules, and seek to stifle thought in favor of adherence to rules and regulations. Indeed, Wright and Smye (1996) argue rules tend to encourage individuals to preserve the "status quo" rather than become risk-takers:

Rules make it unnecessary for people to use their own judgement. Rules can make life simpler for employees, but after a lifetime of coloring inside the lines, employees may lose their ability to think for themselves. (p. 58)

Career intervention strategists may be well advised to reevaluate the needs of employees. Rather than matching persons with positions, or assignments, they may need to turn around those corporate cultures that inhibit employee growth, or punish employees for making mistakes. Indeed, in the absence of a secure work environment, employees may learn to "survive" but inhibit any desire to take on new challenges or to learn to accept their weaknesses as well as their strengths.

Alternately, it may be that self-knowledge and self-acceptance, flow from one's strength of character, or spiritual courage, to move beyond the perceived confines of their present environment (Savickas, 1993). As was evidenced this study, there was considerable variation in how the respondents constructed the workplace. Some perceived the postmodern workplace as "as a hell of a lot tougher" than when they started their career. Others, in contrast, tended to perceive the workplace as neutral – no more or less intimidating than is, always has, and will be. The portrayal of the workplace as a rather opaque and gloomy environment provides employees with many excuses to limit risk and to preserve their position at all costs. Others seem undeterred by the images of the modern workplace, and simply do what they find necessary in order to fulfill their "passion", or complete their "lives work". Does it take moral, or spiritual courage to turn away from the "beaten path" - to follow one's inner urgings? It is argued that those respondents who took risks, who were no longer intimidated by employers, and who were able to define their "work", arrived at a more comfortable place in their lives. Jake speaks of having a more "consistent" philosophy", Ron describes himself as more "grounded", and Ned feels he is more "focused" and "integrated" than before.

Toward An Integrative Model of Career Development

This study provides support for the notion that personal and career development is an interactive process that leads the individual toward the integration of all aspects of their being. Dean speaks of being more grounded, of having a more global, encompassing awareness of "self". Jake speaks of gaining a more consistent philosophy of life, a more reasonable definition of "who he is", and becoming more accepting of his strengths and his weaknesses. Ned speaks of the phases of his development, each resulting in a higher level of integration – each adding or amplifying

dimensions of “self”. Aspects of his past are re-examined, and reintegrated into his current self-definition. It seems, one might argue, that there is some evolutionary power, or life force, that moves individuals forward, toward completion. Those who become more integrated – who possess greater self-awareness, are more self-accepting, are more oriented toward others, demonstrate stronger spiritual courage, construct a more viable life story – appear to be more capable of adapting to both external and internal changes.

It is as if, at each phase of development, an individual gains a more encompassing vantage point from which to view “self”(Carlsen, 1988; Bruner, 1985). Each successive “vantage point” reveals more information to the individual, self-knowledge increases – an unending process of growth and development. That is, the process of personal and career develop is ongoing across the lifespan – sometimes the individual feels in balance and at other times the individual may be in crisis. Figure 12 is a visual diagram, or model of this interactive process

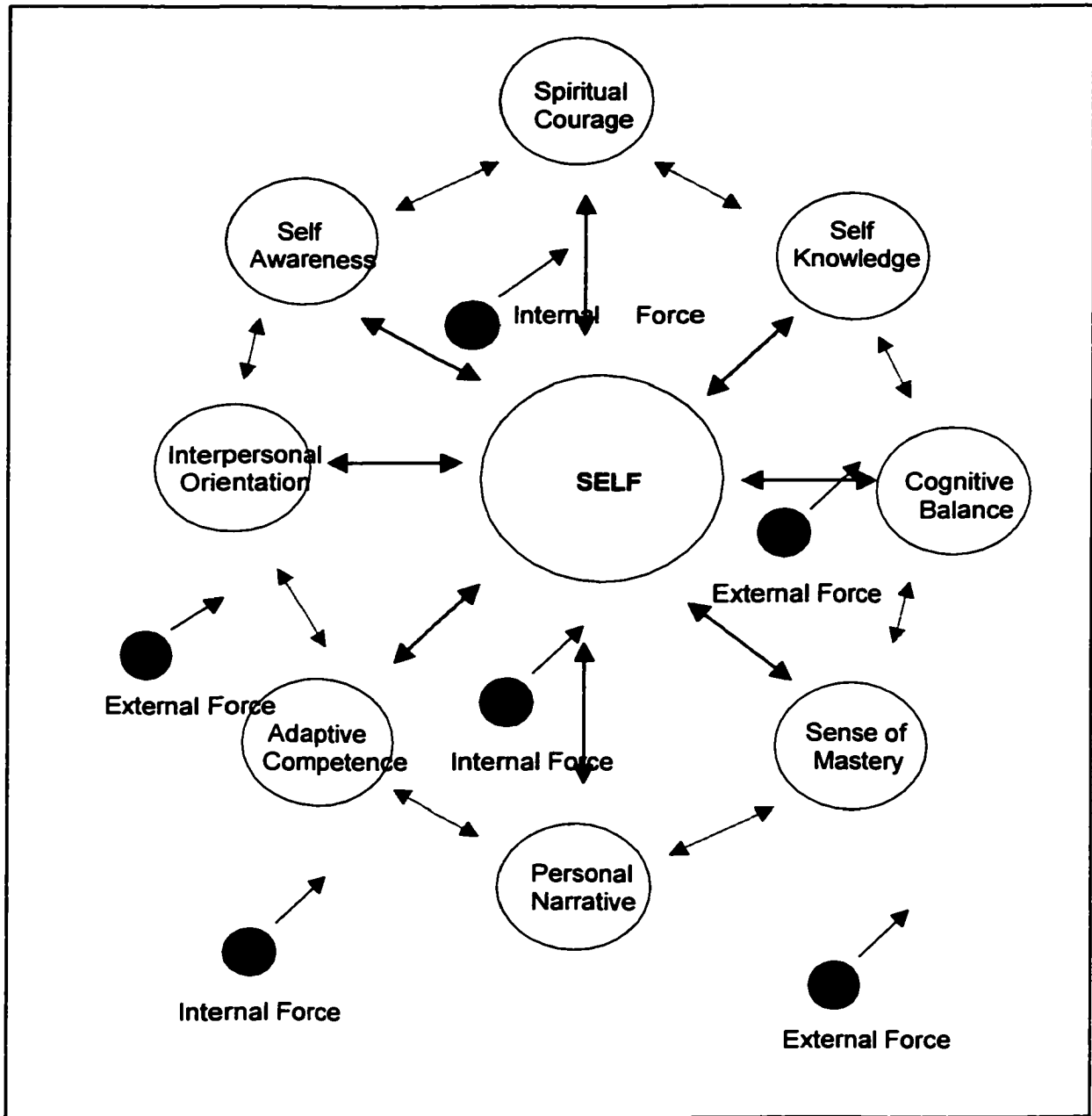


Figure 12: A individual career constellation in "balance" at one point in time

The major interactive factors that determine whether an individual is “in balance” or “out of balance” (i.e. crisis) include one's level of self-knowledge and/or self-acceptance, their ability to adapt to their environment, their courage to make decisions based upon the needs of the greater community, their feelings of being in control of their lives, the level of cognitive development, the viability of their personal narrative, and the relative strength of their orientation toward others. These multiple determinants of career development are included in the diagram as spheres circling, like constellations, around the sphere of self – the centre of the individual's “universe”. The distance between each sphere of the constellation and the centre is, at this point in our research, relatively unknown. Nonetheless, each sphere has a profound influence upon the central body, or self. Each sphere influences and is itself influenced by the forces inherent in the others spheres. The forces of internal change (e.g. development, biological aging) and the forces of external change (e.g. loss of job), portrayed as small spheres in the diagram, continually bombard the constellation. Sometimes these forces of change are so intense and frequent (e.g. job loss, aging, and divorce) that the constellation becomes completely unbalanced, the individual may be plunged into a personal and career crisis (loss of meaning). This pattern of personal disharmony, or imbalance is portrayed in Figure 13.

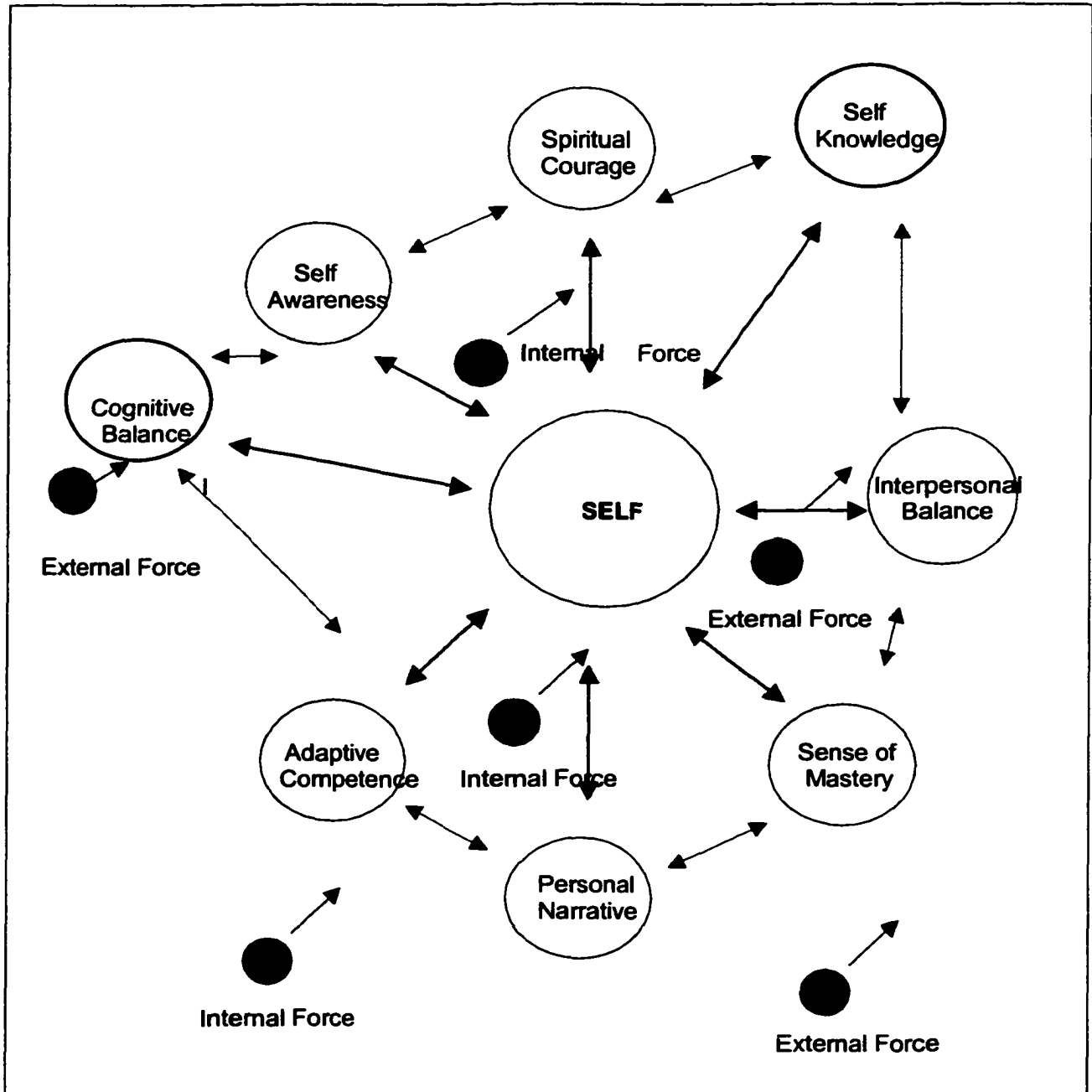


Figure 13: An individual career constellation in a "state of imbalance"

At other time, the forces of change are less intense and frequent. The individual may, at that point in time, experience a feeling of being "in balance". They may engage in self-reflection, taking the time to develop a more integrated picture of themselves.

In the situation portrayed in Figure 13, an individual may be in "transition" between the Interpersonal and the Institutional Balance. The comfort of the Interpersonal Balance is no longer a place of refuge, or a source of predictability in their lives. In this period of transition, the individual has lost the ability to derive meaning , or to cope with the demands inherent in their new vantage point from which they know view themselves.

An individual may experience a major career or personal crisis, or alternately a short period of distress or discomfort. The individual will, without doubt, struggle to bring the spheres back into balance wherein there can be a feeling of comfort. For some individuals, the struggle to retain their balance may consume most of their lives. For others, the struggle may consume a much shorter period of time. The model demonstrates, in part, why one particular individual may rarely experience feelings of harmony, or inner harmony across the lifespan. It may be that the demand for internal and external change exceeds their capacity to adapt, or that their particular interpersonal orientation limits their ability to acquire self-knowledge or to feel acceptable to themselves, or they believe their fortunes are in the hands of others (external locus of control). The model also demonstrates that change is inevitable. An individual is constantly bombarded by the forces of change. It may be, however, that some individuals escape the full brunt of the impact of these forces, or that the impact of the change is modified by their network of support (e.g. relationships). The model also suggests that, at times, the relative influence of the spheres is the result of

happenstance, or chance. Some individuals are simply faced with a greater demand for change, or experience more direct impacts from the external forces.

Over time, as an individual gains experience and maturity, they may be less susceptible to the forces of change. For instance, one's knowledge structures may become more inclusive, their adaptive capacity more encompassing, or their acceptance of "self" more forgiving. The unique developmental trajectory of the individual, may over time, simply become more balanced, less susceptible to change. This may explain, in part, why some of the respondents felt that aging was a positive experience, a time of self-reflection and time to move toward community.

This is an initial construction of the interactive and multiple forces that appear from the study to influence personal and career development. Over time, it is anticipated that this model will become more refined as the relationship among the spheres as well as their relative level of influence is further clarified.

Future Research Agendas

This exploratory study of the "older worker" perhaps raises more questions than it provides answers. Nonetheless, the study provides a diversity of interesting possibilities for future research studies. In order to keep the difference in the data manageable, only males were included in this study. A critical next step would be to replicate the current study with a comparable sample of women. This research would point out any relevant differences that might be attributable to gender. Are men's and women's developmental paths similar? Does work hold the same meaning for women as it does for men? Do women experience a shift in their interpersonal behavior as they age, or is it more

consistent over their lifetime? Does the additional challenge of the traditional childbearing role add stress to the adaptive process of aging? Do women access different adaptive competencies than do men?

Continued research is needed to develop an expanded definition of the “older worker”. The present results suggest that, in fact, older worker may share more issues and concerns with the general population of the workforce than with each other. It would be useful to duplicate this study but include workers from other age groupings, to discern if there are important differences. If age was not a discriminating factor among the larger sample, it would support the contention that older workers ought not to be studied as a homogeneous population.

In addition, the results of this study provided ample evidence that individuals change over time, and that the rate of change amongst individuals is highly idiosyncratic. A longitudinal study that tracked individuals over the course of their working lives, would provide the necessary insight to confirm the important factors and the interactions that give rise to differences among individuals, and also what forces create change within the individual. What environmental factors inhibit or enhance development? What is the role of organizations in fostering or inhibiting growth? What is the relationship between cognitive development and adaptation in the workplace?

Further research is needed to distinguish any possible sub-groups amongst the population of older workers. Would it be feasible, for example, to distinguish among workers in their relative level of adaptive competence? Does the ability to take a proactive approach to life and aging distinguish among older workers? Should the population be grouped according to their “felt” age? Is adaptive competence related to

emotional stability, or mental health? Are the personality qualities of openness, flexibility, or emotional resiliency useful to distinguish amongst this population?

More research is needed to integrate the constructivist-developmental model within a larger theory of career development and to further confirm the magnitude and direction of the interaction between epistemological balances and other factors including self-identify, self-acceptance, and locus of control. How can Kegan's model of constructive-development be applied to career assessment? What is the interaction of personality and cognitive balance? What forces tend to propel an individual forward? Does an individual who is more adaptive, more extraverted, or more self-aware tend to move through these stages at different rates? What internal or external factors inhibit cognitive change? Are cognitive shifts amenable to outside influence?

Further research is required to understand the relationship between mental health and the ability to define one's work. Is mental health, or emotional stability a prerequisite or corequisite of the ability to make meaning in one's work? How do we begin to understand the components of a career or life crisis? Specifically, what factors or combination of factors, trigger a crisis of career? A loss of meaning? Is crisis an inevitable part of growth and development? Does everyone have to experience loss in order to grow, or do some individuals appear to develop without emotional angst?

What is the role of one's belief system, or philosophical orientation in promoting growth and change? Does the rigidity of one's beliefs inhibit self-awareness or self-acceptance? Do some individuals perceive the workplace as more menacing because they expect the world must, or should be, different? Do those individuals who appear to cope and/or prosper have more goal-enhancing, or flexible belief systems?

More work is definitely required to expand the work of Carpenter (1993) regarding the relationship of relational competence and “psychological” success in the workplace. Is there a relationship between the ability to initiate and enhance interpersonal relationships and career development? That is, are those who are more interpersonally competent, more likely to adapt to change, or more able to secure support in times of need or crisis? Is there a relationship between self-awareness and relational competence? Do individuals learn about themselves as employees in an interpersonal context or through reflection, or a combination of both? Is there a relationship between the ability to define one’s work and openness to interpersonal feedback, or emotional sensitivity, or even the ability to listen? Should we, as counsellors, be fostering more interpersonal competence or matching interpersonal abilities to work environments?

What is the differential impact that employers, or organizations might have upon employees at different levels of development. Are there individuals who have found their “work” less responsive to some managerial styles because they are more capable of acting in a more self-directed fashion? What managerial style tends to fit best with those in the Interpersonal Balance? Do they respond better to structure and direction? What is the impact for the organization, or work team of matching co-workers at different levels of development?

An important focus for research should be the vocational needs of those workers who are unable to define their own work. Is the curriculum of the 21st century simply too demanding for most workers? Indeed, this is one of the most salient issue of our times. Have we created a work environment that exceeds the adaptive capacity of the majority

of individuals? Will more and more workers be excluded from active involvement in the core processes at the workplace? What might be the impact of temporary employment on the search for meaning, for one's "life work"?

Implications For Career Development

The results of this study point to the importance of making any a priori assumptions about older workers. Significant individual differences were found among and between the older workers in this study. It is equally important, for counsellors themselves to be aware of their own stereotypes or assumptions about older workers and about the aging process itself. As the finding of this study confirmed, aging is as much growth and development as it is about loss and change. Gilligan (1982) alerts us to the deleterious effects gender stereotyping has had upon the career development of women. Career professionals must also be equally sensitive to the stereotypes, or negative expectations older workers may have about themselves, either consciously or unconsciously. Counsellor education programs must include training in aspects adult development and in aspects of ageism.

If work is an integral aspect of one's identity or a mechanism for defining "self", then it is absolutely necessary to re-evaluate the practice of separating career and personal counselling. As the results of this study point out, there is a dynamic *interaction among issues of adaptive competence, self-acceptance, finding meaningful work, interpersonal relationships, and emotional stability.* Individuals who possess a clearer knowledge of "self", who are able to accept their assets and their weaknesses, who move toward others, who can identify their life's work, appear to enjoy higher levels of emotional well-being and experience greater psychological success in the workplace.

The move to re-integrate career and mental health counselling (Barkham & Shapiro, 1990) is strongly supported by the results of this study. Indeed, questions as to what constitutes career development and a career intervention are raised by this study. Does assisting an individual to manage their anxiety about a pending job change constitute career or personal counselling? Does the development of social skills enhance one's emotional well-being or career success?

The definition of career development might also be challenged. Is assisting an individual to identify a more satisfying or authentic life-style, an aspect of career development or of mental health counselling? The respondents in this study themselves were unable to separate personal and career decision making. Why is it, that vocational psychologists continue to create a dichotomy between career and personal counselling?

The results of this study, in addition, demand that counsellors be aware of their own values, beliefs and attitudes about what constitutes success in the workplace. Obviously, no counsellor would encourage a client to engage in activities that would be psychologically detrimental to themselves or others. Would counsellors act so promptly, however, to deter clients from activities that detract from their mental health in the workplace? Is success external - occupying a position of influence or is it financial self-aggrandizement? Is success an internal or psychological state of the individual? Who defines "success" for the individual? Is success the ability to "fit" within an organizational role that engenders dependency, or fosters obedience to the necessities of the marketplace? Do not counsellors have an ethical obligation to help clients define "success" outside of the cultural dictates of the contemporary society? Counsellors cannot remain detached from their own value system, or from modeling a value system that promotes or detracts from individual development and human dignity. In short, this

study raises important questions about what constitutes the “good life” beyond the prevailing cultural norms.

It is imperative that counsellors make a clear distinction between what behaviors, attitudes, and motivations are prized by employers and those that promote or detract mental health. Is downsizing older employees, in an effort to impress stockholders, fair? Is it something that our society must accept without question? There appears to be the potential for many workers, particularly older workers, to become increasingly marginalized in the postmodern organization. At particular risk are those workers who experience difficulty defining their own work, for setting their own goals and agendas, or for self-correcting. Technical workers, tradespeople, and those in support positions are potentially at risk in the modern workplace (Holland, 1997). Increasingly, counselling professional will be required to take a public stand on a variety of issues that have the potential to detract from the overall emotional well-being of our world.

The results of this study suggest that counsellors must be able to recognize individual differences, particularly in terms of the rate of individual development. There is always a demand to balance the need to promote growth, against the limitations inherent in the clients' development balance, or order of consciousness. Clients who are “out of balance” need, without doubt, to be challenged to strive toward their full potential. On the other hand, they may also need help in making their narrative more consistent, more emotionally viable, so they can get on with their life. It is important, as well, that counsellors recognize that crises, or loss of meaning is an inevitable part of human growth. Rather than focussing upon the seemingly pathological elements in the ebb and tide of human development, they should attenuate the potential for growth, and capitalize on clients' resources.

Savickas (1995) has pointed to the schism that separates career theory and research from other psychological sciences. He suggest that vocational psychology:

Remains remarkably isolated from disciplines such as developmental psychology, social psychology, cross-cultural psychology, personality psychology, and gender studies. On the one hand, vocational psychologists continue to lament that their theories and research are undervalued and not discussed in textbooks on adolescent and adult development. On the other hand, they could do more to foster this integration by studying and applying innovations in closely allied specialties of applied psychology. (p.2)

The results of this study also point to the necessity of forging a rapprochement between vocational psychology and other disciplines including psychology. The analysis and discussion of the data were interweaving strands taken from recent advancements in cognitive psychology, theories of adult development, personality theories, epistemology, gerontology, sociology, and psychopathology. Advances in theories of career and counselling will be made by incorporating the study of vocational behaviour, into a larger body of knowledge, rather than studying it as an isolated phenomenon.

The Choice Of Grounded Theory

The choice of grounded theory methodology was selected to answer the research questions posed in this study, appears to have been an effective research strategy. The techniques of grounded theory kept me, as a researcher very close to the raw data. All interpretive statements found in the study were supported by at least one

excerpt from the transcript. Time and again, I returned to the transcripts for confirmation. Many “golden” ideas were dismissed, often reluctantly, because they could not be supported.

The initial stages of the analysis were painstaking slow. The organization of the data was, at first, very time-consuming and later deleted when a new organizational schema was developed. In future, I would utilize a computer-assisted analysis. The time needed to think about the data was often consumed by more mundane administrative tasks. Nonetheless, most of the data were practically committed to memory making the writing stage of the research study somewhat less onerous.

Probably the greatest value of the grounded theory approach was the ability to capture both content and process. That is, the methodology allowed me to capture the content of a respondent’s response to an interview question, as well as the context in which the response was embedded. Thus, I was able to observe changes in the content of a respondent’s responses, as well as changes in the context that surrounded the comment. It was as if I had conducted a case-study for each respondent. Each case could, in turn, be compared to another case. Similarities and differences among and between respondents emerged from the transcripts. It was the contextual data that supported the interpretation of the content of the interviews. This would not have been possible in an empirical study wherein the content is, in essence, disembodied.

The research focus on the “older worker” was extremely broad by choice. Any one of the major themes that emerged from the data would have been a useful study in itself. Nonetheless, this research has confirmed the value of using grounded theory in

psychological research, generated a number of intriguing questions, and provided an interesting agenda for future research studies.

This writer makes no pretensions about having developed a grounded theory. Rather, the results of the study have identified the major issues in the lives of a sample of older workers, pointed to the potential of Constructive Developmental theory as it applies to career development, and provided another perspective on existing research findings.

Strengths And Limitations Of The Study

The theoretical sample in this study consisted of eight, male individuals who were actively employed. Although a small sample, there is a relatively high degree of consistency in the issues and concerns that emerged from the interviews. The categories and subcategories derived from the last two interviews were consistent with those in the first two or three interviews, indicating that theoretical saturation had, in fact, been achieved. In addition, given the depth of analysis, the number and diversity of categories, and the memoranda that were needed in the analysis phase of the research study, any more than eight respondents would have been overwhelming. There was, in addition, considerable variation among the respondents. There was diversity within the sample in the type of work performed by the respondents, the degree of satisfaction they derived from their job, their employment histories, their thoughts about retirement, and their interpersonal orientation. The respondents were, by and large, relatively successful in their jobs. Including workers who were perhaps less successful may have increased the transferability of the findings but, on the other hand, other constraints may have been introduced. For example, what might have been the impact of prolonged unemployment,

or lack of job skills on the respondents perception of work? Future researcher may want to expand the scope of the sample.

The interviews provided a relatively high number of potential quotes that could be used to identify and, in turn, ground the themes and subthemes. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges of this study was to edit out quotations that were redundant, or expanded the analysis without contributing new information. The quotations provided not only evidence attesting to the salience of the issues identified but also captured the phenomenon from the "lived experience" of the participant. The interview excerpts provide a degree of confidence that the analyses and research conclusions were not speculative, but rather firmly embedded in the day-to-day lives of the interviewees.

As previously noted, the analysis phase of the research required three attempts to capture the variations, in both, the content and the processes, that were simultaneously occurring in the data set. This struggle reflects the difficulties inherent in studying phenomena across time, rather than at one point in time (e.g. human development). This presented an interesting challenge during the write-up or discussion part of the study, particularly when development across the individuals was uneven. The content of the themes and subthemes changed across time and between individuals. It was difficult to capture these ongoing processes in the write-up of the discussion.

As discussed, this research study was exploratory. There is no research tradition focussing on the older worker on which to build. Although rich variation in the data was of benefit to the study, there was perhaps insufficient data to confirm the relationships among the major categories, or issues, thought relevant to career development. The relationships in the visual diagram are, at this point, rather tentative. For example, is

increasing self-knowledge a prerequisite to a transformational, or major shift in the construction of “self”, or an outcome of the transformation, or an interaction? A more refined research program in the future may shed light on this relationship. On balance, however, it was probably best to have identified the major themes at this point in time and focus upon refining identified relationships in future research.

Final Words

When I started this research study, I had experienced a considerable degree of angst and trepidation about the use of qualitative research in a psychological research study. I was, in addition, uncertain about my ability to conduct a grounded research study. In hindsight, the decision to use grounded theory was undoubtedly the right one. There is nothing easy or straightforward, however, about the methodology. The method demands constant attention to the data set, that each observation be justified, that linkages between observations be defensible, and that all conclusions be grounded in the data. The process was, at times, discouraging and frustrating. However, by following the rigorous methodology one gains a degree of confidence in the veracity of the research findings and a sense of accomplishment when patterns and relationships emerge from the data set. The sense of discovery is truly without parallel.

The methodology, in addition, breaks down my preconceptions about the aging process. It is literally impossible to become immersed in the process of analysis without becoming very aware of one's assumptions. As a result, I have come to understand the aging process from a fresher, perhaps more informed perspective. Above all, I have learned that aging is not a gradual process of loss over time, but rather a process of ongoing change, a process of exchanging one set of skills with another set, and a

process in which one has the opportunity to grow, to commit oneself to new ventures, and to discover dimensions of oneself that may have been hidden by youth. It is also a time that challenges many older workers, a time in which their resources are slowly overwhelmed, a time of unrelenting demand for change and adjustment. We must, as a society, begin to address the larger issue of how we value older persons in general and older workers in particular. Are they to be cast-off as a depreciated human resource or welcomed into the workforce for the multiple skills and abilities they can offer? The findings of this study show that our society might be much worse off, should we choose the former.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Opening Questions

How did you come to work in the field of [occupation group]?

Briefly trace your work history leading up to your current [occupation/position]?

Perceptions of Aging

If I were to ask someone who knew you many years ago, perhaps at the beginning of your working life, what are the differences they would be most likely to point out?

What might they say were the positive changes? Negative changes?

What (events, situations, conditions) might account for the positive changes? Negative changes?

How would you describe yourself as an employee? How might this description have changed over the course of your working life?

Again, what (events, situations, conditions) might account for the change in how you see yourself as an employee ?

What are some of your work-related attributes (skills, abilities) that you have discovered that you may not have seen, or realized you possessed earlier in your life?

How have you experienced the effects of aging? Does aging seem to affect your job-related skills/abilities?

How might you have to perform your job differently now then you did when you were younger?

What measures do you take to ensure your ongoing good health? the currency of your work skills?

How do your feelings about the future compare, at this time, to how they may have been at some earlier points in your life?

The role of work

What degree of importance does your job hold for you at this point in time? How does this compare to how important your job was at some earlier points in your life?

Looking back upon your life, what importance 'should' work have had for you? As compared to other activities in your life?

What importance do hobbies, family, community involvement have for you?

If you had to describe what work means to you, what would you say?

What do you feel has been most in charge of your work life? Choice? Chance? Your employer? Family circumstances?

If you were to live your life over again, what changes would you make in your choice of occupation(s)? employment situation?

The role of other people

Describe the person(s) who has influenced you the most during your career? What did that person(s) say or do that influenced you so much?

Describe the person in the current workplace who you feel influences you the most? What does that person do or say?

Describe the type of person(s) with whom you most like to work? least like to work?

With whom do you like to work with most - Other workers your own age? Other workers who are younger? Or other workers who are older?

To what degree do you prefer working alone? With other people? Why?

Most of us have worked with others whom we simply could not tolerate for one reason or another. What did you learn from such an experience?

To what or whom do you attribute the success you have experienced in your career?

What was your most significant interpersonal conflict – a situation in which dealing with another person (or persons) was very difficult for you?

To what degree do you enjoy assisting other workers to learn new ways of doing something, or teaching others new skills?

To what degree do you socialize in the workplace? Why?

APPENDIX B**Informed Consent for Participation in Research Project
The Older Adult Worker: A Grounded Theory**

This research study examines the thoughts and attitudes of older adults toward work and themselves as workers. It is being performed as a requirement for the Ph.D. in Psychological Foundations in Education (Counselling) at the University of Victoria.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that:

- 1. The time required for the study is between 90 and 120 minutes.**
- 2. The length of the initial interview is between 60 and 90 minutes, and the length of the follow-up interview, if required, will be roughly 30 minutes.**
- 3. *My participation is entirely voluntary, and whether I choose to participate or not will have no effect on my employment status.***
- 4. I may terminate my involvement at any time without penalty. I may refuse to answer any question. The initial interview and the follow-up interview (if required) will be audio-taped. The interview tapes will remain in the possession of the researcher at all times and locked in a filing cabinet in the interviewer's home. The tapes will be erased after they have been transcribed, or no later than December 31, 1999.**
- 5. The audio-taped interviews will be transcribed. *The transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. My name will be replaced with a code number in the transcript to assure my anonymity. The code sheet linking my name and code number will be locked in a different filing cabinet in the researcher's home. The transcripts will be destroyed no later than March 31, 2000.***
- 6. *All audio tapes and transcribed transcripts of my interview(s) will be erased/destroyed immediately should I choose to withdraw.***
- 7. I will be contacted by telephone by the researcher to confirm my willingness to participate in a follow-up interview.**
- 8. The transcripts will be discussed only with Dr. A. Marshall, the researcher's supervisor. No identifying information will be included in any reports or articles resulting from this research.**
- 9. I will be given a gift certificate in the amount of \$20 for my contribution to the research.**
- 10. I will be provided a written summary of the research findings.**

11. Should I have questions about the research, or need to talk to the researcher or his supervisor after my participation in the study, I can contact the researcher at 479-5377 and Dr. Anne Marshall at 721-7815 or by writing to:

Bryan Keith Sweet
321 Gull Road
Victoria, BC
V9B 1L3

Signed: _____ Date: _____