Career Research & Development

the NICEC journal: making practice thoughtful and theory practical

NICEC
National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling

Career Research & Development

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Editorial

The first issue of what was then called 'The NICEC Bulletin' that I took responsibility for was devoted to 'Career Guidance for the Third Age' (No. 51, Winter 2000). It was a particularly strong edition as I recall not least because Geoff Ford, one of the NICEC fellows, made all the contacts with potential contributors for me! So, it is with sadness that we carry an obituary to Geoff in this issue. I absolutely concur with Tony Watts when he comments on Geoff's extraordinary generosity of spirit. I still recall with great fondness the day I spent with him at his home in Thirsk planning my first journal.

Textbooks on career development often make the distinction between established and emerging theories and approaches. Traditional theories and approaches that are empirically supported and that have been well researched such as Holland and Super have had a considerable impact on career guidance practice. Interestingly, this is not the case for all influential theories. Gottfredson, for example, has commented that not all parts of her model have been sufficiently well tested. So, it is even more important to examine the ideas behind emerging approaches, to see what needs to be done to check them out and to consider what they might have to offer to career guidance practice now and in the future.

We are delighted, therefore, in this issue of the NICEC journal to publish Gudbjörg Vilhjálmsdóttir's article about the value of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* in career guidance research and practice. Gudbjörg answers a number of questions about the applicability of Bourdieu's ideas to work with young people and draws some interesting distinctions between the way that Bourdieu's ideas have been taken up in France and the Nordic countries in comparison with England. It is to be hoped that further research will show us how we might be able to assimilate ideas around *habitus* in career guidance practice.

This is the second time that we have given prominence to the possible applications of Bourdieu's ideas in career guidance work (see Phil Hodkinson and Martin Bloomer's two-part article about cultural capital and young people's career progression in the autumn 2002 and spring 2003 journals). Gudbjörg's article is based on the London lecture she gave in October 2007 in memory of John Killeen, a NICEC Senior Fellow, who was her PhD supervisor.

A major theme of this issue of the journal is the career planning and development of older workers. We have four main articles submitted by contributors and attendees at the CRAC Barbican conference in October on 'Decisions at 48: Supporting mid-life career planning'.

The Decisions at 48 conferences are set to become an annual event. They aim to bring together those working both in adult career guidance and in career development in employment settings to facilitate discussion and take forward the older worker agenda. The UK faces a number of challenges including a decline in the number of young people entering the job market, an ageing workforce and growing skills shortages. We are only just beginning to think about how to address the career needs and aspirations of older workers in ways which will both benefit them as individuals and benefit society and the economy as a whole. Jeffrey Defries sets the scene and raises a number of issues relevant to the role of companies in promoting career development opportunities for older staff. Stephen McNair considers the implications of the changing workforce for policy-makers and careers providers involved in implementing the Leitch skills agenda and the proposed new adult careers service in England. Mike Clark and John Arnold discuss some of the implications relating to the career motivation and needs of men in middle and later career. Ruth Hawthorn also picks up on the theme of career change for the over fifties and the kinds of support that they need.

Finally in this issue we complete the final part of Ian King's series on the career transitions of staff in professional service firms. His article focuses on the capabilities that professionals need to make effective career choices.

Anthony Barnes
Editor

Career Guidance and Habitus – The Value of Bourdieu's Concept of Habitus in Career Guidance Research and Practice

Gudbjörg Vilhjálmsdóttir

A previous version of this paper was presented at the John Killeen commemorative lecture in 2007. It was a true honour for me to be asked to give this lecture. John Killeen was my PhD supervisor, but sadly passed away a month before my viva in 2004. His interest in guidance research, overview of the field of guidance theory and rigorous scientific frame of mind will always be of great value to me. It was under John Killeen's supervision that I began working on the research presented in this article.

When I started my research on social differences in occupational perceptions (syn.: occupational thinking, occupational conceptualisations, occupational cognitions or concepts), I came across articles by Jean Guichard and associates (1994a, 1994b, 1994c) on *habitus* and occupational thinking. *Habitus* is a central concept in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002). It is an interesting concept for both researchers and practitioners in the guidance field because it accounts for the social aspects of cognitions and decision making. Bourdieu defined *habitus* as a 'social subjectivity', revealing how the collective or social environment is embedded in people's everyday thinking and being. According to him, the human mind is socially structured (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Occupational perceptions have been an object of study within career development theory for a long time. Mainstream researchers have concluded that we all think about occupations in more or less the same way (Gottfredson, 1981; Goldthorpe and Hope, 1974). A few researchers have criticised this consensual view on occupations and pinpointed social differences in occupational thinking (Coxon & Jones, 1978; Guichard et al., 1994). *Habitus* theory is an interesting vantage point for research in social group differences in occupational thinking because *habitus* accounts for social structures in our thinking. The way we perceive occupations would, therefore, be influenced by our immediate environment. Within career development theory, occupational perceptions are simply defined as the way people think about occupations. Occupational perceptions are an important field of study because there is a strong relationship between individuals' occupational cognitions, their vocational preferences and subsequent career behaviour (Shivy, Rounds & Jones, 1999).

Within the framework of *habitus* theory, occupational thinking is presented as thinking of opposites where the male–female opposite is one of the basic dimensions. Gender is the dominant dividing structure in the labour market and researchers and practitioners in the field of guidance have yet to take the influential gender variable into account in their work. Gender research, both within vocational psychology (Fassinger, 2005; Enns, 2000) and sociology (Bourdieu, 1998/2001) gives valuable insights into the effects of gender on career; but *habitus* has the advantage in research on occupational perceptions of being a variable that has gender at its roots but also includes other aspects of the social environment such as socio-economic status and choices of cultural goods.

Many guidance researchers who have been drawn to Bourdieu's *habitus* theory (Hodkinson, Sparkes, & Hodkinson, 1996; Colley, 2003; Artaraz, 2006; Guichard et al., 1994a, 1994b, 1994c) have been perplexed by how the individual chooses in a highly structured environment where gender, social class and stratified pattern of schooling are at play. Bourdieu's theory in guidance research can be divided into different approaches which for simplification I shall call the English school and the French school. The English approach is reflected in this quote from *Triumphs and tears*: "Differences in *habitus* influence the ways in which career choices are made as well as which options are considered" (Hodkinson, Sparkes, & Hodkinson, 1996, p. 149). Hence the English school addresses how to talk about choices for those who have few choices if any. Others here in the United Kingdom such as Colley (2003) and Artaraz (2006) use Bourdieu's theory to criticise over-simplifications in policy-making in guidance, where too much emphasis is placed on the free will of agents. They claim that the functioning of *habitus* is ignored in programmes such as *Connexions* which aim at social inclusion. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) have presented a model of career decision making called 'careership' and define a career decision making model that is midway between social determinism and free choice of individuals. This approach uses qualitative methods.

The French school is led by Jean Guichard and has Nordic adherents, for example in Finland and Iceland (Motola, 2001; Vilhjálmsdóttir & Arnkelsson, 2003; Vilhjálmsdóttir, 2004). The French focus is on research on the interplay between *habitus* and career-related factors such as the perception of occupations. This approach uses quantitative methods where the relationships between a measured

habitus and career-related variables are examined, whereas the English approach is qualitatively oriented. Although the foci of these two schools are somewhat different I am sure they could be combined in further research.

Short presentation of habitus theory

To present Bourdieu's theory very briefly I will use one of Bourdieu's own metaphors (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Society, which he labels social space, is compared to a hall full of card tables, each surrounded by people playing cards. People are playing games for a prize by written and unwritten rules. Each card table represents a social field. One might think that everyone is playing the same game, but in fact different games are played at different tables since the games have different stakes and different logics. The different card games represent the different fields in social space, such as the artistic field, religious field, economic field, academic field etc. Another concept in Bourdieu's theory is that of illusio. It is a socially embedded interest concept, referring to people being caught up in the game; believing that the game is worth playing.

To each card table or field people bring their capital, be it cultural capital, symbolic capital or economic capital. The notion of cultural capital is undoubtedly one of Bourdieu's best known concepts. Cultural capital is a form of value associated with culturally authorised tastes, consumption patterns, attributes, skills or awards. Within the field of education, for example, an academic degree constitutes cultural capital. Symbolic capital is a form of capital or value that is not recognised as such. Prestige and a glowing reputation, for example, operate as symbolic capital, because they mean nothing in themselves, but depend on people believing that someone possesses these qualities. For instance, famous people in Iceland who have symbolic capital at home may not have any in the United Kingdom. Finally, economic capital simply constitutes economic wealth.

Within this metaphor of society as a hall of games, habitus stands for the ability to play by the rules and recognise values in a certain field. This is usually acquired during upbringing. The son or daughter of an actor has the cultural capital of knowing many things about the theatre, and has even experienced acting at an early age. He or she will be more at ease in the field of the theatre and therefore be more likely to succeed within that field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu was a structuralist and hence claimed that opposites are basic in all thinking. The opposites are the structures of meaning. Bourdieu was also a constructivist claiming that the oppositional structures are social in origin, thus referring to his work as structuralist constructivism (Bourdieu, 1990). According to Bourdieu, we embody the habitus as historical structures of the social order in the forms of unconscious schemes of perception and appreciation.

The cognitive structures of the habitus are shaped by similar environmental conditions and function as matrices of the perceptions, thoughts and actions of all members of society (Bourdieu 1998/2001). These social structures are part of the history of the social group we belong to, such as women performing womanly tasks or pursuing careers in female occupations. Habitus is both structured (by past social milieus) and structuring of present representations and actions. Bourdieu therefore defines habitus as a "structuring structure" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It is a structure; i.e. a 'set of relations' by which the subject perceives and gives meaning to the world. The past history of one's social group, the habitus, is incorporated into one's whole body and being and orients choices and thinking of possible future moves (Bourdieu, 1980/1990). Objects of knowledge are constructed by the structuring structure. One important object of knowledge is the knowledge of an occupation which in turn is linked to the social structures such as the gender division of labour.

Habitus is also defined as a socialised subjectivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) a meaning-making structure that originates in one's social environment. How we perceive things and how we think is rooted in the social structure. Taste for cultural goods (such as books and music) and lifestyles, for example, is not based on free choice, but rather on the habitus, a way of thinking that is socially embedded (Bourdieu, 1979/1984).

Habitus is inculcated by experience more than direct learning and has to do with everyday matters, such as bodily postures, gestures and aesthetic choices. Habitus divides people into different social groups. Bourdieu studied habitus by studying people's judgements about things and their taste in art, music etc. It follows that what people hang up on their walls, the music they listen to, the books they read, their jokes or insults derive from their habitus, although they might seem to be the product of unfettered self–direction and individual purpose.

Bourdieu's method is based on classification of cultural consumption which he analyses with correspondence factor analysis, adopted by him in order to analyse relationships of social oppositions or practical taxonomies. The philosophy of correspondence factor analysis "corresponds exactly to what, in my view, the reality of the social world is. It is a technique which 'thinks' in terms of relation…" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 96). Correspondence factor analysis was also attractive to Bourdieu because he believed it allowed social space and social distances to be displayed visually (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu used it to map the habitus, namely lifestyles and taste, within social space. Bourdieu used correspondence factor analysis to show how taste, choice of leisure and goods is distributed according to positions of power (be it symbolic, economic or cultural) within social space (Bourdieu, 1984).

Habitus and career choice

The notion of *habitus* accounts for people taking decisions reasonably without really being rational agents. A major function of *habitus* is what he calls the practical sense: a socially constituted 'sense of the game' that is at the basis of decision making. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This means that people take sensible decisions without really thinking about them. Bourdieu supposes that anticipation towards the future is somehow inscribed in the current *habitus* in that:

> "[p]eople are 'pre-occupied' by certain future outcomes inscribed in the present they encounter only to the extent that their habitus sensitizes and mobilizes them to perceive and pursue them" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 26).

We perceive certain things or certain aspects of things in our environment, such as occupations, while being oblivious to others.

Change of habitus

It is important to remember that Bourdieu believes that *habitus* can and does change.
This happens mainly under two conditions. Firstly, *habitus* changes when a different social trajectory is entered, such as changing schools or school levels. Bourdieu himself is a good example of someone whose *habitus* changed via schooling because as a low class rural child he got grants and was educated in the best schools of his time. Somewhere he writes that schooling is a process of conversion for the lower classes. Secondly, *habitus* can change via socio-analysis, which is a reflection upon one's social origin and how it has affected one's life. Individual self construction occurs within structural social contexts or social fields, but the knowledge of how it happens or what he calls 'socio-analysis' makes it easier to change one's *habitus*.

Habitus and guidance research

Guichard and his associates (1994a, 1994b, 1994c) were the first, to my knowledge, to use the *habitus* concept in guidance research in 1994. Their sample counted nearly 600 adolescents, 17–18 years of age. Their studies, reported in a series of three articles, gave me the idea to explore *habitus* and occupational thinking in my country, Iceland. The study conducted was exploratory because it was uncertain whether *habitus* could be measured in an ethnically and socially homogeneous society such as the Icelandic one. At the outset, I was not sure that the *habitus* groups would form easily in a younger age group, than in the Guichard *et al.* study, and even when I did another study of an older age group, I was not sure the *habitus* groups could be found without difficulty. By studying two age groups, I have a comparison that can tell me if the structures found in the younger age group are still there in an older age group.

Below I shall present my findings on the *habitus* in two different age groups and how they relate to other social structures, such as gender, place of living, and social class. I will also show that gender and *habitus,* in particular, are reflected in occupational perceptions. I will begin by comparing gender differences in occupational perceptions between the two age groups. In order to show what *habitus* analysis adds to an analysis of gender differences, I will present results on *habitus* differences in the older age group. The research questions are:

1. Do *habitus* groups form readily with 15–16 year olds in their final year of compulsory education?
2. Do *habitus* groups form readily with 19–22 year olds in their final year of upper secondary education?
3. How do the *habitus* groups relate to other social variables such as gender, social class and place of living?
4. Are there gender differences in occupational perceptions in the two age groups?
5. Are there *habitus* differences in occupational perceptions?

Method

This study compares samples from two age groups that are in the final year of their school level. The first group of 883 participants (sample 1) is made up of 15-16 year olds (483 boys and 400 girls) in the final year of compulsory education. The sample was drawn from 26 schools in both urban and rural regions in 1996. The second group of 476 participants (sample 2) is made up of 19-22 year olds (μ =20.1) (225 men and 250 women). The sample in this second group was drawn from 25 upper secondary schools in six different educational programmes: trades and vocations (76), natural sciences (69), languages (102), social sciences (159), business (49), clerical, computers and information (21). The data in the second sample was collected in 2006. The two groups were chosen since they are both very close to important career decision points in the Icelandic school system.

Procedure

Data collection in the two groups was similar apart from the fact that items in the *habitus* measure were different due to the fact that the two groups differ in age, and since the data was collected with an interval of 10 years; time-bound items, such as listening to Britney Spears or playing computer games, were different. These are two cross-sectional studies on a similar subject.

Measures

The participants described their leisure activities by indicating their participation in 84 activities (sample 1) and 145 activities (sample 2); specifically, which titles they had read, musicians listened to, TV programmes watched etc. They were asked about specific items, such as if they listen to Nirvana, Metallica, Joanna Newsom, Björk etc.

Participants rated 11 occupations on 8 scales. The scales were seven-point bipolar scales anchored by a pair of adjectives: Interesting–not interesting, easy access (e.g. easy studies)–difficult access (e.g. hard studies), prestigious–not prestigious, masculine–feminine, great social utility–little social utility, low income–high income, little responsibility–much responsibility, little spare time–much spare time.

The following occupations were evaluated: car mechanic, electrician, engineer, lorry driver, nurse, physician, public school teacher, salesman, secretary, seaman and welder. Guichard *et al.* (1994) choose the nine occupations so that they would represent a wide spectrum of existing occupations as well as sampling both typically male and female occupations. The last two occupations were added to the set because those are prominent occupations in Iceland.

Analysis

In the two samples the cultural and leisure activities items were submitted to a factor analysis. An exploratory analysis with the k-means cluster algorithm resulted in a 5 cluster solution grouping together 5 groups of people in sample 1 and 4 groups of people in sample 2 who rated alike on the factors. A hierarchical cluster analysis determined the number of clusters in the leisure activities declared. Correspondence factor analysis was performed to show how the *habitus* groups relate to other social variables.

Correspondence analysis revealed that two scales, gender type (masculine/feminine) and prestige (prestigious–not prestigious) explain most of the variance in the occupational variables or have the highest inertia. On these grounds, I will concentrate on the gender and prestige scales in the analysis of the results.

Results

The adolescents distinguish themselves by listening to certain music, doing certain types of sports etc. In doing so they are showing their *habitus*. In both groups the *habitus* groups formed readily. The clusters are given names by their most prominent features. The groups in the younger sample are:

I. Music listeners.
II. Classical music and poetry.
III. Feminine.
IV. Sports and films.
V. Science and literature.

I. **Music listeners**. The young people in this group listen to all kinds of music and are not selective like some of the other groups. This might suggest that they are passive. They reject science and literature.

II. **Classical music and poetry**. This group is very selective in its music and literature taste. Its members listen to classical music and jazz, read poetry and non–fiction books. 40% play a musical instrument, which is significantly more than in three other groups.
III. **Feminine**. This group watches TV soap operas such as *Guiding Light* and *My So Called Life*, its members read love stories and fashion magazines, practise aerobics and go swimming, listen to Oasis and Michael Bolton.
IV. **Sports and films**. This group is active in sports and in going to films and consists mainly of boys (76%).
V. **Science and literature**. This is a group where the young people do some sports but are very active in science and literature. They watch scientific documentaries on TV, read comic books, science fiction, computer magazines, novels, sagas and all sorts of literature.

When the *habitus* groups are differentiated on gender, place of living and class of parents, we get a good description of each cluster. This relationship between social variables and *habitus* groups is shown in the CFA map (figure 1). Correspondence factor analysis can simply be described as displaying graphically very large contingency tables (hundreds of cells). For example in figure 1 most people in *habitus* group 2 are boys from urban areas and upper classes. This analysis validates the *habitus* concept since the *habitus* groups are formed out of leisure variables (not from the variables social class, gender or place of living), but the *habitus* groups are not independent of the three social variables. Belonging to different *habitus* groups is reflected in different patterns of socio–economic status, place of living and gender. *Habitus* is strongly related to these major social variables, even though only choice of leisure activity was the variable in the *habitus*.

Figure 1: Habitus groups vs social variables in age group: 15–16
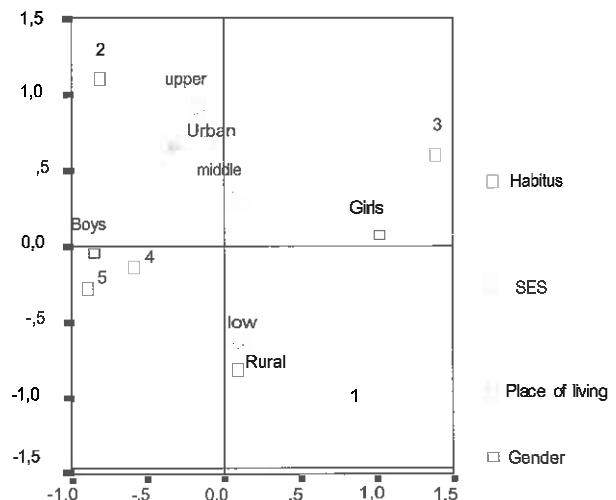
In the sample with young people aged 19–22 the *habitus* groups formed readily and were as follows:

I.   Arts
II. Feminine
III. Inactive (active in computer games)
IV. Sports and movies

I.   **Arts.** This group selects both classical films and films that do not originate in the US. This group reads a lot, especially books on art and culture. They listen to classical music, jazz, indie and alternative pop. This group has learned to play musical instruments, paints and writes poetry.

II. **Feminine.** This group watches soap operas on television and watches fashion shows on television. They listen to fashionable pop music such as Britney Spears and Pink. This group does sport regularly, swimming, jogging and works out at the gym.

III. **Inactive.** This group is not active in any special activity apart from computer games and board games. They have played musical instruments at some time but don't do that any longer.

IV. **Sports and movies.** This group listens to heavy rock, rock, britpop and rap. They watch comedy and technical programmes on TV, as well as sports and news. This group watches all kinds of films, but only from North America.

Figure 2 shows a map derived from correspondence factor analysis for this sample. As before the four *habitus* groups are closely linked to gender, place of living and social class. The same structure appears where choice and practice of leisure activities reflects a certain social status. Again the *habitus* concept is validated.

Figure 2. Habitus groups vs social variables in age group: 19–22
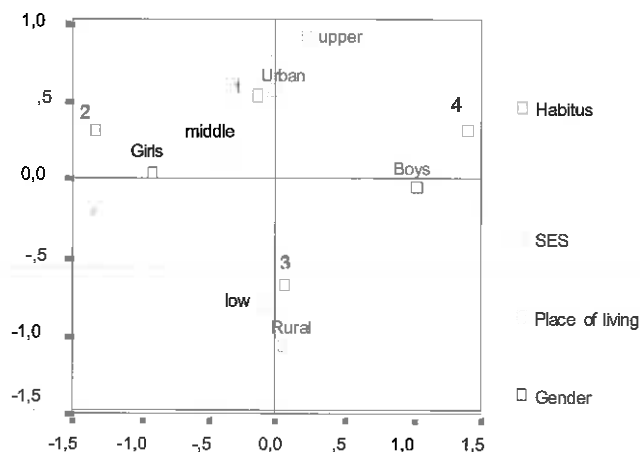
Gender is a basic dimension in *habitus*. Therefore I will first present to you a map based on gender differences in perceiving occupations. It will serve as a basis for understanding *habitus* differences in occupational

perceptions. Correspondence analysis of occupational perceptions (not shown here) revealed two dimensions that explain most of the variance on the occupational variables (highest inertia). The two dimensions are gender type of the occupation and prestige. Therefore results are only presented on these two scales, even though information was collected on 8 scales in all. How do young men and women view occupations? As can be seen in figure 3, girls and boys in sample 1 have very similar perceptions of the male occupations on the left side of the map, but not the female occupations shown on the right side of the map. We see a structure where perceptions of feminine occupations are clearly different according to gender.

Figure 3. Gender differences in occupational thinking: age 15–16
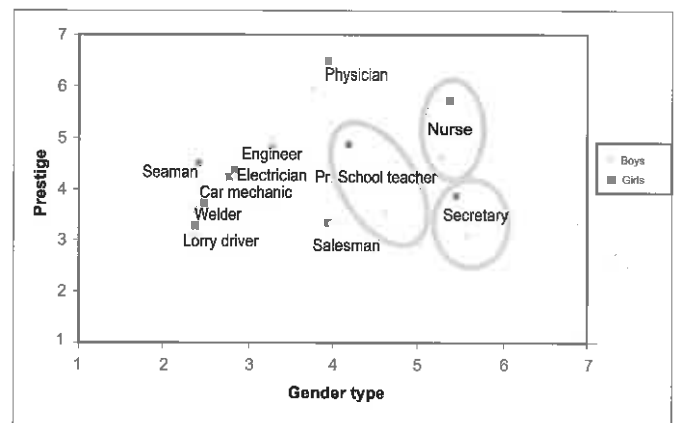
When analysing the data in sample 2 last summer I was very interested to see if the same structure of gender differences in perceiving female occupations would be seen in an older sample, or if with maturity this had changed. But no, in the same way as the boys, young men find female professions less prestigious (when compared with girls and women) and they also find the female professions more feminine (with the exception of the primary school teacher), than did the younger boys. The mapping of men and women in the older sample is shown in figure 4.

Figure 4. Gender differences in occupational thinking: age 19–22
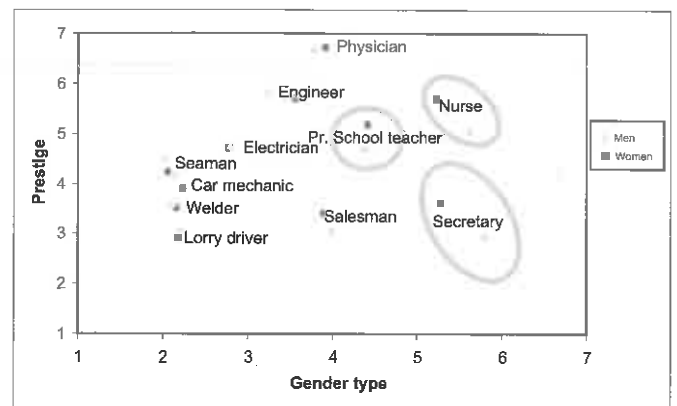
When comparing the graphs in figure 3 and figure 4 it is interesting to see that in fact there is not much change between the two graphs; men and boys hold 'female' occupations in lower esteem than do girls and women. It can be argued that we are looking here at the gender divide in the thinking of occupations.

Next we shall look at *habitus* differences in occupational thinking. Since the composition in the four *habitus* groups in the sample of 19–22 year olds are opposite on the two dimensions of gender and prestige and since analysis of this data is preliminary at this point, differences in occupational thinking are presented by opposing groups 2 (feminine) and 4 (sports and movies) (that were opposite on the feminine masculine dimension in figure 2) and groups 1 (arts) and 3 (inactive) (that were opposite on the social class dimension in figure 2).

Figure 5. Habitus differences in occupational thinking: Groups 2 ● (feminine) and 4 (sports and movies) age 19–22

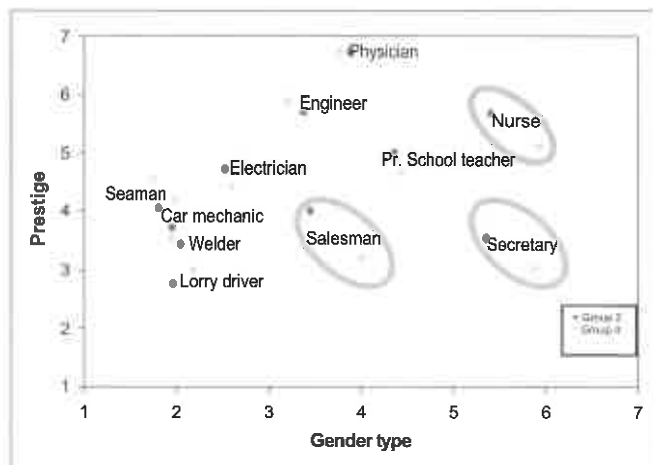When we look at this map in figure 5 comparing group 2, the feminine group, to group 4, the group that is mainly composed of boys (94%) we see that the feminine group finds the salesperson a more prestigious occupation than girls in general in the sample. A possible explanation could be that girls in this group do more shopping than girls in general and hold salespersons in higher esteem.

Figure 6 compares an axis of groups on opposite social economic status. Group 1 the arts group is of higher social origin and ranks the traditional female professions higher on the prestige scale. What is also interesting is that they have a more gender equalitarian view of the professions. They, for example perceive the electrician as nearly gender neutral, whereas the inactive group, (that comes mostly from a lower origin) view that profession and the seaman as more male and the secretary as more female. In the same manner the inactive group perceive the occupations of nurse and secretary as being more feminine. This group uses the feminine – masculine scale more to differentiate between occupations.

Figure 6. Habitus differences in occupational thinking: Comparison of groups 1 ■ (arts) and 3 ▲ (inactive) age 19–22
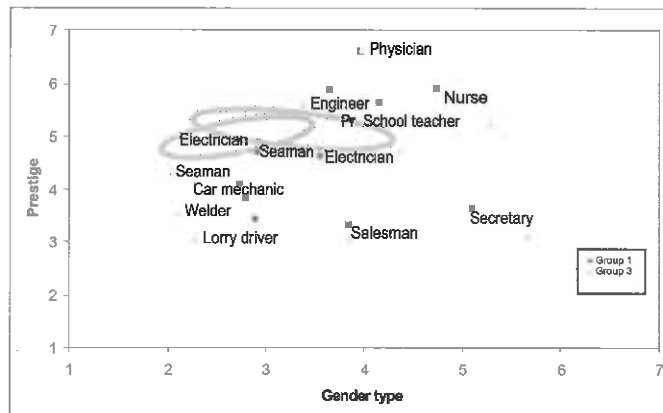
Conclusion

We have seen that *habitus* groups form readily with 15 to 16 year olds in their final year of compulsory education. They also form readily with 19 to 22 year olds in their final year of upper secondary education. In addition, the *habitus* concept is validated, since *habitus* groups related strongly to social variables of gender, class and place of living.

By measuring leisure and culture variables, distinct groups can be found in young and late adolescence. Their choice of activities is socially embedded, as well as their thinking on occupations since both gender and *habitus* differences in occupational thinking have been detected. This shows that in *habitus* analysis and *habitus* theory we are looking at phenomena that are strongly linked with aspects of career, such as occupational thinking. The groups construe the reality of leisure activities in a different way, and they also construe occupations differently.

There are indications that *habitus* analysis is telling us more about occupational perception and career preferences than gender and social variables together. There are gender differences in occupational perceptions and they are similar in the two age groups. In both age groups the same pattern is revealed of boys having less respect for women's occupations. Moreover, *habitus* analysis reveals more distinction on occupational perceptions than is visible when comparing boys and girls or young men and women. Feminine girls hold salespersons in higher esteem than do girls in general and people of higher socio-economic status are more egalitarian in evaluating the femininity or masculinity and prestige of an occupation.

In counselling practice this means that counsellors need to be aware of these social mechanisms (know their own *habitus* – do their own socio–analysis) and be prepared to inform their clients about these social mechanisms. This means that counsellors need to inform themselves about cultural items that are very differentiating within the youth culture, know about Foo Fighters, computer games etc.

Counsellors can be out of sync with the *habitus* of young people, which means that this important part of reality of the young person could be disregarded in the counselling relationship.

Four main *habitus* groups were detected in the sample of the age group of 19–22 years of age and a similar pattern had been found previously with a younger age group. The four groups have different proportions of men and women on the one hand and people from higher or lower social status on the other hand. People can change *habitus* groups, especially in youth and adolescence when important changes take place in schooling. It would be interesting to explore such changes further in future research. A better understanding of changes in *habitus*, whether they are a result of socio-analysis, changes in schooling or of other causes, can help us to understand further the relationship between cultural items people cherish and the way we perceive occupations.

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Developing Career Development Strategies for Older Staff

Jeffrey Defries

Why?

For the foreseeable future, indigenous growth in the supply of labour will be firmly concentrated in the group aged 45 and over. Whilst business and government leaders appear to agree that the UK's economic well-being depends on keeping older workers employed, the majority of organisations, large and small, are yet to come to terms fully with the profound impact of the shrinking labour pool.

It is predicted that between 2010 and 2020 60,000 fewer young people will enter the job market each year, whilst approximately 1.3 million new jobs will be created. In addition, by 2020, 22% of the workforce will be well into its 60s. By 2030 half the UK population will be over 50 and one-third over 60. Although the state retirement age is expected to rise to 66 in 2024, 67 in 2034 and then reach 68 by 2046, organisations are facing a growing skills shortage with knowledge and expertise being lost faster than they can be gained.

The ability of business to maintain productivity in a globally competitive market will depend on its ability to reframe its view of the pool of available labour and develop new strategies to adapt to this changed environment.

The opportunity

The period of 'nearing retirement' brings opportunity for both employers and employees.

For the employer:

- the timeframe to set in place processes for capturing knowledge (including tacit knowledge) and providing for its transfer to the next generation of staff

- a programme of phased retirement allows continued access to talent, experience and skills

- in ensuring that promotion routes and career progression programmes are neither blocked nor stratified by age distribution

- by allowing the maximisation of intangible benefits that directly or indirectly impact on company performance – such 'soft benefits' as staff welfare, morale, staff support and employee satisfaction

- treating people well and allowing them to maximise their personal contribution over an extended period of time will bring 'reputational' benefit both within the organisation and externally

- enabling 'nearing retirement' staff to contribute more widely to society if they wish to do so e.g. in voluntary, not-for-profit roles will, again, enhance the reputation of the organisation and its corporate social responsibility obligations.

It is not suggested that employers become 'age blind'; more that if the nearing retirement cohort was seen as a useful and productive part of the workforce rather than the group of decline and lost skill and ambition, there is significant benefit to be won. Allowing older staff to still have the opportunity to access new learning and skill opportunities will, if properly managed, open up new possibilities in areas such as inter-generational coaching and mentoring, intrapreneurship and product and company advocacy.

For the individual:

- the pursuit of a more flexible work/life balance that is shaped according to the needs and circumstances of the individual

- the moment to reflect and to weigh up one's needs and their financial underpinning – the balance between time (paid work/unpaid work/societal contribution/family and leisure) and money (salary/pension/casual income/savings)

- the opportunity to contribute to the organisation in new and different ways but capitalising on a lifetime's bank of knowledge, experience and people skills

- the opportunity to contribute more widely to society but still utilising one's personal stock of knowledge and talents

- and aggregating all these factors, the time to consider and re-define one's personal notion of 'career' in relation to the next five, ten or 20 years.

A recent survey of over-50 year olds[1] concluded that 89% thought the skills and talents of older people were being wasted, 22% thought their jobs were mundane, and 20% didn't feel valued.

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[1] CROW (Centre for Research into the Older Workforce) Postal Survey, 2004.

Developing strategies

"Most adults at midlife want meaningful...rewarding work but have little idea how to get it."
Don't Stop the Career Clock, Helen Harkness 1999

Few companies have yet taken on board the idea that there is as much a need to invest in how people exit the organisation as in how they are hired. Firing and downsizing done well is inevitably better in human, economic and reputational terms than that done poorly or haphazardly. The transitioning of staff from full time employment to whatever they and the organisation seek from the 'nearing retirement' phase is similarly of importance. For any career development programme to be successful, it will be essential that it be perceived within the organisation to be a wholly positive initiative and not a cynical move to either shed or marginalise older workers or to save costs. Indeed, the initiative should seek to embed the notion within the organisational culture that the employer both wants and needs to invest in the career development of its older staff. To this end, it will be important to ensure that top level/board support for, and encouragement of, the initiative is visible within the organisation and that all shares its inherent values. The education and awareness raising of line managers will be critical.

Some of the Elements

Intergenerational learning

All individuals will reach a career plateau at some time in their working life and this can either be a personal plateau or one imposed by the organisation. If imposed, and the individual considers promotion as an indicator of success, this can lead to de-motivation and a downturn in performance. It is therefore important for individuals to recognise that reaching a career plateau is part of the natural pattern of working life and not a sign of failure.

The notion of a career plateau is often bound up with age, and learning at work between generations is one way of demonstrating that the plateau may be more open-ended than is normally assumed. Building succession planning and knowledge transfer pathways that transcend age is more than just cathartic for all concerned: it can release new energy and enthusiasm and thereby provide for improvement rather than stagnation.

The role of older staff in developing protégés, mentoring and coaching and in providing some of the roles that are normally associated only with younger staff e.g. graduate recruitment, external representation, giving talks and seminars can be supported by learning from younger staff around new knowledge, new technology and more recent experience.

Phased retirement and flexible working practices

It is of importance that HR policies accommodate arrangements that will help and encourage older staff just as they do for younger staff and new recruits by way, for example, of induction processes, social amenities, childcare support etc. Thus, there should be a range of 'wind down' options including job-share, part-time working, downshifting and time out sabbaticals. It is also useful to consider more flexibility around time away from work, for example by allowing a paid/unpaid 'time off bank' on which staff can draw more flexibly than that allowed for in traditional leave arrangements.

We have had some discussions around the creation of alumni groups including high level alumni support teams of semi-retired personnel that can be called upon when higher levels of experience and skills are required for a specific project for a limited amount of time. Similar thinking can embrace alumni learning sets and alumni mentoring.

Line management

Addressing performance issues with 'older' workers is something that is avoided within many organisations, with line managers choosing to find it is easier to let employees close to retirement stagnate rather than to challenge their behaviour and performance.

It is often difficult to open those frank discussions about an individual's pre-retirement thinking without the conversation appearing at least threatening, and at worst as if the organisation no longer wants to engage with the individual. This is particularly relevant when the organisation has not got an overt and well-communicated policy in relation to the management and career development of its older staff.

Both these issues can be compounded when a 'younger' and sometimes inexperienced manager is working with an 'older' employee who has more knowledge and experience, and in many cases has worked for the organisation for many years.

It is therefore imperative that one aspect of any career development programme for older workers pays attention to the development and support of line managers. This support might well take account of innovative and highly regarded work in this respect by Wendy Hirsh and Charles Jackson, two NICEC Fellows who have developed a model for career discussions at work.

Pre-retirement planning

Older workers' attitudes and orientations to work have usually been formed in youth, and have been influenced by prevailing expectations about working lives at the time they entered the workforce. As workers age, inevitably the prospect of work ending comes into view. This evokes a range of responses, including acceptance and denial.

For many the thought of retirement can be a daunting prospect. Some measure their worth through the nature of work itself seeing it as a key source of pleasure and personal satisfaction. Others will miss the social network they have established or the status they have achieved. Many are unsure of their financial position and factors such as pension income and paid for benefits become the dominant consideration in considering the implications of possible retirement. For others the major concern will be whether or not they will have the opportunity to use skills, capacities and expertise that are relevant in the workplace but may have limited visibility or relevance outside employment.

The best pre-retirement programmes will acknowledge the array of concerns and emotions in play and provide expert advice and assistance across the range from the financial issues to those around health and well-being. One to one support in the form normally associated with outplacement counselling would be of significant benefit.

Conclusion: further learning opportunities

Adults in their early 20s are twice as likely to engage in learning as their 55+ co-workers: The corollary being that the older people are, the less likely they are to participate in learning.[2]

Organisations that do not provide the opportunity and incentive for older employees to continue to develop skills are likely to find that older workers may be regarded as essential but are perceived to be stagnating in situ. Further learning for older staff will be beneficial for both employee and employer provided it is thoughtfully constructed in particular with an understanding of generational differences in preferred learning styles.

Such further learning requires the active engagement of line managers who must be encouraged to continue to give feedback to older workers on their training and development needs and to help staff to keep their knowledge up to date, regardless of when they plan to retire.

Age is neither a barrier to productivity nor its guarantee. Older staff need to be treated on an equal footing to others and be afforded comparable opportunities. Older people as individuals need to be prepared to re-adjust and realign their working lives. Between employers and employees there is a productive dialogue to be constructed.

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[2] NIACE Adult Learning Survey, 2005 and 2007

Careers at 48: A Human Resource Perspective

Stephen McNair

As the workforce ages, with declining birth rates and rising life expectancy, Government is seeking to persuade people to stay in work longer. The core aim is to maintain a viable dependency ratio between people in and out of the workforce[1] and enable older people to live a satisfying life both in and after work. One key to achieving this must be ensuring that people get better advice about work, finance and retirement in their late 40s. This represents a new challenge for careers providers, and especially for the Government's proposed new adult careers service.

This paper presents a human resource perspective on the older labour market, examining what human resources we have available, in numbers of people, skills, motivation and organisational capacity. It concludes with some observations about the guidance needs which these issues raise and the challenges facing us in developing a service to respond to them.

The size of the UK population has been rising steadily for more than a century, but in recent years this has been mainly due to extending lifespan, which does not increase the size of the workforce. Although fertility rates have been rising for the last five years, at 1.8 children per woman they remain firmly below population replacement level[2], and the numbers of young women are themselves falling. As a result, the numbers of new young entrants to the labour market are beginning to fall, and employers have begun to notice problems, though few yet recognise the cause (McNair & Flynn, 2007). Most recently the underlying trend has been masked by two new factors. The first has been immigration from the A8 countries. The scale of this migration is historically unprecedented, and relates to a single event, the accession of 8 new countries to the EU, which will not be repeated in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, it seems likely that the imbalance of the economies of western and eastern Europe will prove temporary, and a large proportion of these migrants will return home at some point (IPPR, 2007). The second factor has been a sharp rise in the numbers of older people who

remain economically active. Since 1997 the number of people over 50 in work has risen by over a million, with the most rapid growth in people working after 65 (DWP, 2007). Although part of this growth merely reflects a growth in the size of the age cohort, there has also been a significant underlying growth in the employment rate of the over 50s.

However, the human capacity of the population is not simply a matter of numbers. It also depends on the skills of those people, an issue examined by the Leitch Review, commissioned by the Chancellor, and published in December 2006 (HM Treasury, 2006). Using OECD comparative data, Leitch presents an apocalyptic picture, showing that the UK lies well down international league tables in terms of qualifications held by the workforce, and while our qualification levels are rising, they are not keeping pace with our competitors. The social and economic consequences, he argues, will be severe unless firm remedies are applied. He suggests that the two strategies pursued in the past – planning by the state, and funding colleges to provide what they believe is required – have both failed. His remedy is to create a 'customer-led' system, with two key customers: employers and individuals. Employers should have more control over the design and delivery of qualifications, and be assisted by informed brokers to find appropriate training to meet their needs. Alongside this, individuals, advised by the new adult careers service, will be able to use individual learning accounts (and their own money) to buy training to meet their own development needs. The idea of allowing the customers to drive the system has some appeal but the scale of the shift is very large: to move from the present model, where most education and training is provided through state-funded institutions aiming at Government targets, to an open market of competing providers selling training to sceptical employers and individuals, will certainly create some transitional problems, and could risk destabilising the supply of training altogether.

However, this is not the only problem with Leitch's plans, most of which the English Government has accepted (DIUS, 2007)[3]. A much larger problem lies in his dependence on formal qualifications, both as a measure of skills, and to tackle shortages. In reality, despite its qualifications shortfall, Britain has one of the most successful economies in the world, which suggests either that skills make no difference to economic performance

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[1] At November 2007 the life expectancy for 65 year old men in England was 17 years and for 65 year old women almost 20 years. Improvements in health mean that for most the majority of this period will be spent in without major limiting health problems.

[2] Normally defined as 1.2 children per woman. The only exception is among women of South Asian origin, whose fertility rate has been falling but is still above 2.1.

[3] Leitch was an English report, and his conclusions and recommendations have been viewed less enthusiastically by the Developed Administrations in Scotland and Wales.

(possible but unlikely), or that qualifications do not measure the skills which make people productive, and there is a growing body of academic evidence for the latter hypothesis. The "Skills at Work" report published by the SKOPE consortium (Felstead, 2007) examines in some depth how individual workers describe their own skills, and a recent study by Felstead based on NIACE's annual Adult Learner Survey, confirms its findings. When asked to rank a variety of ways in which people had learned to be good at their jobs, they did not talk about qualifications or training courses. Most people list learning from line managers, workmates, trial and error and internal projects within the firm, well before formal courses. This is, of course, uncomfortable for Government, since it suggests that the central issue is more to do with how employers manage, which the state has little influence over, rather than what courses are provided, which the state can affect. This is not to argue that qualifications do not matter. It is likely that they matter for entrants to the labour market as a convenient way for employers to sort applicants but it is far from clear that they matter to those already established in the workforce.

In relation to older people (who are generally less well qualified anyway), the role of qualifications is even more problematic. To consider an extreme, but by no means unrealistic, case of two people who acquired the same vocational qualification thirty years ago, one of whom has never practised in the industry, and the other who has worked in it ever since. It is likely that the first is now unsafe to practise, since technologies move on, and people forget skills that they never use; for the second, the qualification now represents a very small part of his of her expertise, which will have evolved through practice and experience. In the context of an ageing workforce, where initial qualifications play a smaller part, it may be that Leitch is wrong about how serious the problem is. Furthermore, the evidence that qualifications produce economic returns to individuals and employers, which derives from samples of the whole workforce, is necessarily skewed by the concentration of qualifications among young people. The lifetime return to an NVQ acquired at 25 is inevitably higher than the return to the same qualification acquired at 55. This does not mean that learning, and perhaps formal training, is irrelevant for older workers, though the evidence for this is inconclusive at best (McNair & Maltby, 2007); rather it suggests that the focus of Government policy, following Leitch, on formal qualifications, may be inappropriate for this age group. It may be that employers and individuals are making rational decisions when they choose not to embark on them, although such decisions, rational at the level of the individual firm, may be damaging in the long term to the economy as a whole.

Whatever skills are available in principle, they are valueless unless people are willing to apply them, and whether older people are willing to use their skills depends, to a large extent, on motivation and management. Research on older workers shows very clearly that most people who are working after 50 like work, and many would like to stay longer than they expect to be allowed to (McNair & Flynn, 2004). However, they often do not like their present job, but are reluctant to ask for change (promotion, new roles, flexible or part time working) because of a – sometimes justified – fear of age discrimination. It is easy to be branded a 'difficult' employee by asking for inconvenient changes to ones working pattern, or a move to something less stressful (Flynn & McNair, 2008). What then do older people want from work? Respect for oneself as a person, and for one's skills and knowledge is one critical factor, and many older people report that they want to feel that these are valued, and that they can use them. Lack of respect, and devaluing of skills are things often cited by those who have retired prematurely as motives for labour market exit. Older workers also seek a degree of control over how they work, sometimes including flexible or part-time working hours (particularly for those in stressful jobs). However, it is important to recognise that attachment to work and motivation does not necessarily mirror traditional occupational hierarchies. There is good evidence that some people in very low status jobs remain strongly attached to the work, while some in high status professional and managerial roles are keen to escape (Owen-Hussey, 2006). Money also matters, especially to those whose pensions have been damaged by changes in company pension schemes over the last decade. However, in surveys older people rarely put this at the top of their lists, and many older people seek work despite being relatively secure financially. Finally, social contact is important: for many people, especially men, the workplace provides a network of acquaintances and friends who are an important part of identity and wellbeing. Indeed, the people with the highest levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction in their 60s are, significantly, not those who have retired, but those in part-time work, and one reason why retired men are particularly prone to depression is the difficulty they have in replacing this social support after leaving work (Barnes, Parry & Lakey, 2002). If employers do not respond these needs, they are likely to lose good people, and sometimes the only people available to do particular jobs (good or not), but how far are older people different? One might reasonably observe that these requirements are not peculiar to older people: most young workers also want good work-life balance, respect and social contacts. The difference for older people is that, at some point after the mid 50s, the possibility of escaping from an uncongenial work environment becomes real, albeit often at a financial cost. While a 30 year old who becomes unemployed has to find another job, a 59 year old can simply opt out, retiring with some dignity, rather than face the humiliation of repeated rejection, or major downgrading in status.

Just as employees have to be motivated to employ their skills, so employers have to be motivated to deploy older workers. How far do employers recognise the potential of

older workers? CROW's 2007 study for DWP of employer response to ageing (McNair & Flynn, 2006) found that, despite a shrinking working age population[4], many employers, and their representatives, continue to pursue old strategies, trying ever harder to recruit from the dwindling pool of young people, rather than adapt their policies to the aspirations of the older people who are still available. However, there was evidence that employers generally are beginning to recognise that the supply of young people is drying up, and in sectors where labour shortages are particularly severe were beginning to develop strategies to make work more attractive to groups, including older people, who have traditionally been seen as marginal). There was very little hostility in principle to older people, and indeed most of the stereotypes of older workers are generally positive: they were seen as more reliable, hardworking, conscientious and motivated, as well as bringing more experience to the job. As one employer commented, "if it was legal to discriminate, I would always prefer Poles or older people". There are also some specific kinds of job which are seen as particularly attractive to, or appropriate for, older people. In construction, experience of old materials and construction techniques is valued in maintaining and renovating old buildings; in health and social care older workers are sometimes seen as better able to deal with the emotional distress of terminal care or to act as mentors for stressed younger colleagues; in transport, coach operators have found that they can fill labour gaps with retired people who seek interest and social contact without the pressures of their former managerial responsibility. Many employers are happy to retain existing older people, whose strengths and weaknesses are known, longer. However, despite positive general views, most employers appear to be suspicious about recruiting people over 50, who are seen as a risk, and line managers in particular are often reluctant to negotiate employment arrangements which add to the complexity of their workload.

Having skilled and motivated workers is not, however, sufficient. How far do their skills match the work available, or potentially available? Some of the recent trends in the labour market are clear. Current estimates suggest that during the period from 1984 to 2020 professional and managerial roles will grow from 30% to 46% of the workforce, mirrored directly by a fall in manual roles from 44% to 25% (Wilson, 2006). For the growing majority of jobs the key skills of the emerging economy involve negotiating, doing deals, persuading people, and organising things, rather than making and moving them. Many older people have these 'soft' skills, and employers often identify them as more easily found among old than young workers, since they are perceived to come with life experience. However, this does represent a 'feminisation'

of the workforce which can be problematic for men who have spent most of a working life in manual jobs with little contact with customers, and where capability was very specifically linked to a particular role in a particular workplace. Such workers can find themselves stranded when a particular firm collapses or closes, unable to demonstrate their capabilities through qualifications, and perhaps unwilling to redefine themselves and their skills for a new world. At the individual level this can result in unemployment, ill health and premature exit from the labour market. However, one must not overstate the case: there remains an irreducible demand for skilled craftsmen, and the high age profile of such occupations means that there will continue to be a high demand, simply to replace those who retire. Furthermore, as Keep has pointed out, the largest labour shortages in the UK economy continue to be for jobs which require no qualifications at all (not even speaking English), but are not worth automating.

Our ability to effectively deploy the skills we have among older people also depends on the match between those skills and the pattern of firms, by sector, size, aspiration and skill need. Firm size is clearly an important variable. Although policymakers sometimes talk about 'SMEs' as if all firms employing less than 250 people were alike, this is plainly nonsense. Firms employing fewer than 50, for example, are very unlikely to have a dedicated HR function, without which some changes in the management of human capital are difficult, but they often retain personal management relationships which allow considerable creativity (and sometimes exploitation). Such firms are often keen to keep their older staff, both to retain their expertise, and because the individual's needs and circumstances are more visible to senior managers (McNair & Flynn, 2006). Firms employing over 100, on the other hand, are likely to have HR professionals, management strategies and agreements which make managing more systematic, but also potentially less flexible. In large firms line mangers also play a critical role in mediating between (possibly enlightened) organisational policy and individual aspirations, and they are frequently identified by senior managers and individual employees as a barrier to creative management. One should also beware of assuming that all firms (or individuals) have common aspirations. For an economist, growth is the natural and desirable process, but for a small employer, paying the chief executive's mortgage and securing his pension may be much more important. For such an employer, or for line managers in some larger firms, increased managerial complexity comes at a real price in extra work and stress, and one which he or she may be disinclined to pay. As a result increased flexibility of working patterns which might make work more attractive to older workers may be rejected out of hand.

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[4] "Working age" continues to be widely defined as 20-60/65, despite the evidence that all the expansion in employment in recent years has been of people over 65 (ref ONS/DWP).

The age profile of firms also varies greatly, and many firms have few or no workers over 50. Large firms have historically used early retirement as a relatively painless way of downsizing their workforces, and as a result many have few older workers. Small firms are different: since the turnover of small firms in the economy is high, many have not existed for long, they started with a group of young people, none of whom are yet anywhere near retirement age. Some sectors have heavily skewed age profiles, because of the nature of the work (the average age of workers in hospitality is in the early 20s) (McNair & Flynn, 2006), or for historical reasons (periods of recession leading to cut backs in recruitment) which mean that the average engineering technician is in his (sic) late 50s. Some sectors have particular reasons for age balances: most gas inspectors are former gas fitters who have long experience and worn out knees (McNair and Flynn, 2005). Some sectors have eccentric profiles and priorities: public services like the police are subject to sudden periods of expansion and contraction as a result of public policy decisions, which leaves them with an uneven age profile, with large numbers all retiring at the same time, and few people in the next age cohort. Some firms and sectors have also traditionally offered forms of work which appeal to older people: many retailers, for example, can offer flexible working arrangements to older people seeking to reduce stress or phase gradually out of full time work, because the whole workforce works on flexible contracts.

The overall picture is, therefore, relatively clear. Government wants people to stay longer in work, though on a voluntary basis[5]. Older people in general want to stay longer, but to do this on a more flexible and less stressful basis. Employers are generally well disposed to older workers, especially when labour is scarce, as at present, especially to retaining good current employees. However, with exceptions, they are less willing to adapt work to meet the aspirations of their older employees, and generally cautious about recruiting older people to fill vacancies. This ought to be a soluble problem.

The core problem for the deployment of human capital is that, as a result of prejudice, risk avoidance and inappropriate and obsolete practices, the labour market seizes up after people enter their 50s, with everyone sticking to what they know and minimising risk. Employers avoid recruiting older people who might prove difficult to manage or remove if they are unproductive. Employees avoid seeking new challenges or reduced responsibility for fear of drawing attention to themselves and exposing themselves to age discrimination. As a result people with real attachment to work and potential to offer become stale and unmotivated, and in due course confirm their employer's preconceptions about unproductive and worn out workers. At worst they stay, blocking promotion for others, reducing profitability and sapping energy from the

organisation. At best the employer buys them out, losing expertise and potential, and depriving the individual both of the rewards of work and the sense of leaving with dignity after a successful career.

The missing element in the equation is honest conversations between employer and employee about what both seek from the relationship and how to meet both needs. Where levels of trust and ethics are high this happens, but too often one or other of the factors is missing. One response to this situation would be to improve employment relations in the workplace – an aspiration to which all would subscribe, but not easily achieved, particularly given the relatively low level of management skills in the UK workforce. Another might be the development of more effective careers guidance. There are perhaps three elements to this. One would be a systematic approach to mid career review, giving people in their 40s the chance to explore their career and life choices, before the forces of age discrimination begin to bite seriously. The second would be a good guidance service for those into their 50s and 60s in work, to help them to keep their careers energised, and escape the staleness which leads to premature retirement. The third would be a broader ongoing service of guidance, recognising that people after 50 continue to have aspirations for 'career', in paid and unpaid work, and in their broader lives. The chance to discuss one's aspirations and how they might be met is no less for someone leaving the workforce than for someone entering it. What is critical is that these services should recognise the different patterns of opportunity, circumstances, capacity and aspiration of people as they approach retirement and the impact of widespread age discrimination on morale and attitudes.

Developing these services is a particular challenge for the Government's new adult careers service which is to be set up as part of the 'World Class Skills' process following Leitch. Some of the issues were explored by Geoff Ford in *Challenging Age* (Ford, 2003); and the subsequent study for the Government's Review of Information, Advice and Guidance carried out by NIACE with TAEN and the Centre for Guidance Studies (Ford, 2006) provided the beginnings of a map of current provision and the issues to be explored. Critically, the latter highlighted the relatively low attention which the largest existing services give to older people, with only 6% of learndirect clients and 16% of Next Step ones being over 50. There is also anecdotal evidence that a number of more specialised services which sought to address the guidance needs of this group directly, and which Ford documented, have more recently ceased to operate, as a result of the ending of short term project funding. This is particularly ironic since many of these were funded through the European Social Fund, which is giving particular priority to the older workforce in

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[5] There are plans to raise State Pension Age, but only after male and female ages are harmonised in 2020.

its current funding round, with many programmes required to ensure that 20% of beneficiaries are over 50. One of the larger surviving initiatives is the ReGrow project which is piloting work-based guidance for older workers across the South East on a relatively large scale, but even this is time limited.

The challenges for the new adult careers service are many, but in relation to older workers, there are three major ones:

- developing expertise which reflects the distinctive needs of the older workforce: in terms of the impact of age discrimination (which is illegal but continues); of limited career opportunities; of individuals' desire to downscale and move into more flexible work; and of the blurring of the boundaries between paid and voluntary activity as people phase into retirement

- developing structures to bring together understanding of labour market, education and training with health and finance (the latter a highly regulated sector), since for many older people health issues can affect employability and, for all, decisions about whether to work and on what basis depend on understanding complex questions about pensions and taxation

- developing more effective ways of delivering guidance in the workplace (probably with closer relationships with HR professionals), since many employers are much more willing to retain employees they know than to recruit people over 50, making changing work within the current firm more realistic, and less risky, than trying to move on the open market.

How far these needs will and can be met through the new adult careers service, and who will pay for which elements of them remains to be seen. It is encouraging that Government has finally grasped the nettle of creating the long overdue adult service, but the constraints of resource and competing pressures mean that there will be many problems to overcome.

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A typology of career growth among men in middle and later career

Mike Clark and John Arnold

Although it is widely known that the working population is ageing, studies of the second half of career remain few and far between. There is consequently a lack of diagnostic tools to guide individuals and organisations in managing this period of career. On the basis of an intensive research study with a diverse group of 41 men, we propose a model describing four characteristic outlooks on middle and later career which is intended to stimulate discussion of how career interventions can be matched to individual needs. Key aspects of this model are the character and salience of growth motivation, and the continuing centrality of work and career in this period of individuals' lives.

Mounting awareness of the challenge posed by ageing populations is kindling interest in a portion of career – middle and later career – which is notorious for its neglect by both academics and practitioners (Greller & Stroh, 1995; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004).

Mid-career is when most individuals encounter the career plateau, if they have not already done so. It is also a period when, according to traditional theory (Hall & Mansfield, 1975; Super, Savickas & Super, 1995), most individuals gradually make the transition from an expansive and growth-oriented outlook on career to a more stationary and conservative one. Advancement, challenge and learning dwindle in importance relative to maintaining one's position, keeping up with change and at best modest innovation. This transition – from career growth to career maintenance – may frequently be linked to plateauing, but is nevertheless distinct from it, since individuals may continue to experience informal or intrinsic growth (i.e. in knowledge, experience and competence) long after any interest in, or realistic prospect of, formal advancement has died. The distinction is most obvious in occupations (e.g. lawyer, doctor, teacher, priest) where much the larger part of career may comprise a plateau (Driver, 1994), but is also relevant to settings where career is understood as hierarchical progression. People's formal and informal career trajectories, although often closely interrelated, are best understood as at least partly independent. Both trajectories merit investigation.

The question of continuing growth in middle and later career is important for both individuals and organisations because of the link between growth and creative engagement with work (Hall, 1986; Hall & Rabinowitz, 1988). People who experience career growth are expanding their opportunity and ability to contribute. Continuing growth, especially where it takes intrinsic forms, is crucial in middle and later career, since it can counteract the common middle age experiences of feeling stale, ground down, and drained by the unrelenting pressures of work and responsibility (Tamir, 1989). When people start to feel tired and jaded, growth can help to renew their energies and enthusiasm.

The scale of the career management task now facing organisations and individuals is conveyed by projections (ONS, 2007) which indicate that over-40s will outnumber under-40s in the workforce by 2020. A consequence of career plateauing and the transition to career maintenance is that organisations may increasingly be populated by older individuals who lack both extrinsic and intrinsic incentives for growth. This problem is exacerbated by recent changes in pension entitlement in both the private and public sectors, as a result of which many people are seeing their planned retirement date recede by several years. Like exhausted marathon runners, they find themselves facing another lap just as they thought they were nearing the finishing line. What are the likely consequences, and do they matter? How can older workers be helped to keep on going, growing and contributing?

We describe here briefly a 'typology' of middle and later career which is intended to stimulate discussion of this issue. We believe that organisations' provision for middle and later career, and individuals' own career decisions, need to take account of different motivations typical of this period of career, as well as individuals' widely differing formal and informal career trajectories. Reward, career, training and other HR structures must be shaped in such a way as to ensure that they continue to encourage and support individuals' creative contributions well into late career, and that work remains rewarding for people as long as possible.

The study

Our analysis draws on the results of a study carried out in 2002-04. Our aim was to find out how much career growth occurs in middle and later career, what forms it

takes and in what circumstances it occurs. Each of 41 individuals took part in up to twelve hours of interviews and psychometrics. The intensity of our investigation meant that small numbers were inevitable and, because existing research suggests that the rhythms of women's careers are often different from men's, a choice between men and women was unavoidable. We reluctantly decided in favour of men, largely because of our access to an international aero-engineering organisation where female engineers were scarce. We nevertheless attempted to build some diversity into the sample. It included 24 engineers (roughly equal numbers of managers, professional specialists, and shop-floor craftsmen, technicians and supervisors) and 17 'human development practitioners', who were secondary school teachers and Roman Catholic priests. The engineers saw career in strongly 'linear' (Driver, 1994) terms, i.e. as hierarchical advancement, whereas the human development practitioners tended to define career in terms of serving others' well-being and they professed comparative indifference to formal advancement. We make no pretence that our sample was widely representative. However, we are reassured to note that the analysis we present here is largely consistent with the findings of other studies (eg Bailyn, 1980; Howard & Bray, 1988; Hall & Rabinowitz, 1988) which are larger, or more representative of particular occupations, or both.

Findings

Our results confirmed the importance of both the career plateau and the transition between career growth and career maintenance for understanding patterns of growth in this period of career.

The career plateau

The 'average' man in the study thought he had probably plateaued; advancement continued to have some importance for four men in every ten, but only one in seven was pursuing it at all actively. Men who thought they had plateaued (we used a subjective measure of the desire for, and perceived likelihood of, hierarchical advancement) were less concerned to develop and maintain their expertise. Work had also become less important to them as a source of challenge, learning and self-fulfilment. It would be reassuring to think that their private lives had taken up the slack, but there was no evidence of this: men whose careers had plateaued were no more likely than their non-plateaued peers to report growth in non-work areas of their lives. However, the career plateau was not linked either to productivity or pro-social behaviours in the context of work. As other studies (e.g. Near, 1985) have found, therefore, the plateau did not signify any decline in self-reported performance. Rather, the more likely victims of dwindling opportunities for formal progression were active career maintenance and self-renewal.

Career orientation

A maintenance outlook on career was more common than an expansive and 'growthful' outlook on career. Men who reported the latter – our measure tapped feelings of continuing qualitative momentum in career, regardless of men's plateau status – enjoyed significantly better psychological health than maintainers. (We cannot, of course, be sure of the direction of this relationship.) Strikingly, this intrinsically expansive outlook was also linked to higher levels of self-reported contribution whether productive or pro-social. Men who described their orientation towards career in terms of maintenance, rather than intrinsic advance, not only reported lower levels of actual growth and contribution, they were less concerned to grow and contribute, and less likely to set goals relating to growth or contribution. Thus, whereas Super (Super et al, 1995) portrays career maintenance in moderately favourable terms, the picture of maintenance we uncovered was somewhat more negative, as other investigators (e.g. Williams & Savickas, 1990) have found. The transition from career growth (especially of an intrinsic kind) to career maintenance has considerable importance both for individuals and organisations.

A typology of men in middle and later career

Our model – summarised diagrammatically below – draws on these findings. It is constructed loosely around two broad dimensions. The first (career growth vs career maintenance) has already been discussed; the second – high vs low centrality of career and/or work – refers to patterns of engagement with work which are often entrenched aspects of individual identity, but which we found to be somewhat in flux in our study.

Figure 1: A typology of middle and later career

Self-Actualisers
Career still growing but not central to life.
Want: job content; novelty; challenge; creativity
Fear: boredom, loss of autonomy, personal stagnation

Career-Builders
Career still growing and central to life.
Want: impact; recognition; advancement; challenge
Fear: marginalisation, career stagnation

Coasters
Career no longer growing and not central to life.
Want: security; material comfort; respect for skill/seniority
Fear: premature redundancy

Grafters
Career no longer growing but work central to life.
Want: satisfaction of work; valued contribution; feeling of worth
Fear: burnout, impoverishment of non-work selves

The first quadrant – high growth, low career centrality – refers to a group of men who continued to seek and experience lively growth, but for whom climbing a career ladder was not a prime concern. These individuals described their intolerance of boredom and routine, and a continuing need for tasks and roles which challenged their expertise and creativity. Congenial work content and a sense of autonomy were central to their feelings of well-being. Self-renewal through work was often complemented by well-developed, creative interests outside work. Because of their appetite for learning and discovery, we call this group *Self-Actualisers*, but not without misgivings: self-actualisation often implies egocentricity, but several members of the group clearly valued growth as much because it enhanced their ability to serve others as for its contribution to their own fulfilment. Self-actualisers feared stagnating work content more than the career plateau. Members of this group often appeared naïve or inept in managing their careers and, although far from indifferent to recognition, continued to rely substantially upon interventions by shrewd, imaginative or conscientious sponsors for continuing access to suitable work and career progression.

The second group of men – *Career-Builders* (high in growth, high in career centrality) – differed from the first in their more extrinsic take on career. In this quadrant, career growth was associated strongly with continuing pursuit of formal advancement and other forms of public recognition. These men included self-seeking careerists, as well as individuals for whom the meaning of advancement had mainly to do with public recognition of their competence and contribution, or the enhanced impact it allowed them to have upon their organisation or field. For most, the content of their work mattered less than its visibility and proximity to the organisational or professional mainstream. They were willing to sacrifice a long-cultivated specialism for the sake of advancement and, as shrewd veterans of their organisations' career tournament, were on the lookout for tactical moves which might still bring them long term advantage. This is not to say that members of this group were not also intrinsically motivated, even highly so. Challenge was as important to some as to *Self-Actualisers*, but its meaning was different: it lay less in learning and mastery for their own sake than in demonstrating an ability to function successfully at the highest possible managerial or professional level. Consequently, this was the group to whom plateauing constituted the most serious threat. However, whilst its members were more reluctant than other groups to accept they had plateaued, most were in the process of resigning themselves to it in a realistic and philosophical way. Themes of stress, fatigue and physical or mental ill health were prominent in the interview narratives of this group.

The remaining two quadrants describe individuals for whom career maintenance predominated over growth. *Coasters* comprised a group of men for whom work and career were no longer (if they ever had been) central to their lives. These individuals showed continuing pride in their work, and often prized their status as senior and respected members of their workgroup. They valued work for the contribution it allowed them to make, and for the sense of involvement and the companionship it brought. Above all, perhaps, they were concerned to safeguard the financial and material security at a time when their preparations for retirement were well underway. These men, including some as young as their late 40s, were seeing out their time. Some said they were willing at this stage in career to relinquish demanding roles and revert to junior positions, if they could do so without loss of face. Several had already done so.

Career growth, whether of an intrinsic or extrinsic kind, had also largely faded into the past for the fourth and final group. Unlike the *Coasters*, however, men in this group, whom we call *Grafters*, continued to value work as a centrally important part of their identity. They tended to work long and hard, but not for reasons of advancement or the intrinsic interest of their work. In some cases (primarily among teachers and priests), their dedication reflected commitment to a socially valued cause; in others, it seemed more like ingrained habit, indicative of the satisfaction they gained from the simple fact of working, or their pride in their workmanship. In all cases, it represented a balance each had long since struck between work and non-work aspects of his life. These men were potentially of great value to their organisations, not just because of their hard work and high commitment but also because, unlike colleagues who were still preoccupied with visibility, status, advancement or growth, they were willing to take on important but unattractive and often thankless tasks.

Interestingly, this group contained the least well-adjusted men in our sample. It included more workaholics than any other group. One such – a hippy in his youth who disavowed career ambitions at any stage of his career – probably spoke for others when he said ruefully, 'I didn't understand how work would sneak up and take over my life.' Erikson's (1959) proposition that overwork sometimes reflects feelings of inferiority relative to one's peers seems relevant to several individuals. Some had until recently pursued advancement unremittingly, only to accept finally that their career had long since plateaued. They continued to pour their energies into work in a way which they recognised as pathological. A few were struggling to come to terms with what they saw as the failure of their career; their distress was especially acute where over-commitment to career had also destroyed their marriage and other important relationships. We certainly do not mean to imply that all, or even most, *grafters* were maladjusted; however, more in this group commented unfavourably on the balance between their lives and their work and achieved low scores for psychosocial adjustment than in other groups. Themes of depletion, anxiety and depression were more in evidence in their narratives. Several described themselves as burned out.

Overlap between occupation and career type was limited, although men in managerial roles (regardless of occupation) were more likely among *Career-Builders*, and Works employees among *Coasters*. The four types describe configurations of growth and career/work centrality which may apply to any period of career. This may reflect circumstance as well as disposition – for example, the ambitious single parent in our sample whose career went on hold while he brought up his children, or the bored Works employee who discovered challenge after unexpected promotion. However, what *does* give the model especial significance in this period of career are (i) an accelerating trend for individuals to move from the high-growth to the low-growth quadrants as they plateau and/or move to a maintenance outlook on career; (ii) gradually declining career and work centrality, which we would expect to gather pace as individuals near retirement and (iii) individuals' increased vulnerability to stress, fatigue and depletion. These trends pose a tough career management challenge to both organisations and individuals.

We believe that the model's main value for middle and later career lies in the possibilities it suggests for matching career interventions to individual need. For example, whereas *Coasters* require interventions such as performance management and exit strategies, *Grafters* require strategies for managing self-worth, renewal and overwork. Thus, whilst few of the latter described growth activities which they had initiated spontaneously, most nevertheless welcomed the stimulus and learning which they said had occurred when they were required e.g. to rotate between jobs, take on new tasks, or teach a new subject. *Self-actualisers* require technical challenge and flexibility for shaping job content to reflect their emerging interests; their career ineptitude suggests the continuing importance of managed interventions for optimising their contribution to the organisation and their own fulfilment. *Career-builders* require progression, job rotation, timely and honest feedback concerning their prospects, and guidance concerning career options which may facilitate continued advancement. Where advancement opportunities are blocked, organisations need to provide long salary scales (Hall& Rabinowitz, 1988), which allow continued salary progression and recognition of continuing contribution when advancement is no longer possible. The sabbatical or secondment which may help to revive a flagging *Grafter* is unlikely to appeal to the *Career-Builder*, for whom continuing visibility is especially crucial when time for advancement is running out. Similarly, stepping down into a less demanding role may be a strategy for managing stress/depletion which is better suited to *Self-Actualisers/Grafters* than *Career-Builders*. And so on. This points to a central purpose of the model: helping people and organisations to target career interventions in more differentiated, and hence more appropriate ways.

Our model has limitations which reflect its sample base. It is unlikely to apply as well to women as to men, and among men it may apply better to some than others. For example, partly different considerations would be relevant to the many individuals whose work is better described as a 'job' than a 'career'. Further research is needed. However, our broad dimensions of career growth and career/work centrality seem to us intuitively to have potential relevance to the many individuals who continue to have careers, regardless of occupation and whether their career is of the self-managed and protean (Hall & Mirvis, 1995), or more conventional, kind.

Acknowledgement

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Who do you want to be now? Over fifties re-entering the labour market

Paper prepared for a seminar, 'Continuity and Change in Learning Lives' at the University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Institute, 3 May 2007

Ruth Hawthorn

Within the larger sample of the ESRC Learning Lives project, a group of five individuals in north London was selected in late 2004 from among clients of careers advice services who were over 50. These five are now all in their mid-fifties, with varying success in their attempts to find second, third or fourth careers. At a time in the chronological life span when many contemporaries are planning to leave work and others have despaired of getting back in, how is the situation of older job-seekers different from that of their younger counterparts? This paper explores the factors that appear to have shaped their paths, looking at what they have been learning, its impact on their sense of identity, and what this has meant for career change.

Recent government policy statements, in particular the Leitch Review of Skills (2007), have stressed the significance of older adults to the workforce, and there is a growing body of research reports around career guidance policy about what constitutes good practice in working with this group (for example, Ford, 2005). The Learning Lives project is confirming what the Challenging Age research (DfES, 2003) highlighted four years ago: firstly that decisions taken as much as twenty years before the statutory retirement age can be tinted by employers' concerns about, or individuals' expectations of, retirement, but secondly that there is huge variation between occupational sector, social group, and individual preference about when someone wants to think about retirement, and how they want it to happen.

Within this project overall, in all four research centres, there are ten women who started with us age 50 or over but before the pensionable age of 60, and 23 men over 50 but under their pension age of 65. We have thirteen more over pensionable age (five women and eight men). So we have a rich source of data about:

- decision-making about learning and work for over fifties who want to stay in the labour market
- over fifties who do not want to be in the labour market
- those who want to move in one direction or the other.

From our Leeds team, Phil and Heather Hodkinson and Geoff Ford are looking among other things at those moving from work into retirement. I am interested in the people over fifty who are out of the labour market now, but most certainly want to re-enter it. They are straightforward job-seekers. We are starting from the people we interviewed ourselves, but I am hoping to identify what I think are the key issues, and then spread out to look at the other over fifties in the project that fall into my category of job-seeker. So this paper represents work in progress, some very hesitant steps to understand the factors involved, starting with people I got to know well, and wondering where the most relevant theoretical literature might be found.

I worked with five of the Learning Lives subjects over the two and a half years of fieldwork. They were recruited through careers advisory services, so by definition they were jobseekers. That doesn't necessarily mean they weren't looking for jobs-on-the-road to retirement, but by chance mine were all in their early to mid 50s and none had retirement in their sights. One was rather different from the others – he was an asylum seeker whose appeal failed during the course of the project. I am not going to include him today, although many of the factors I am thinking about do apply to him.

The purpose of the project has been to explore formal and informal learning in connection with identity and agency, but the way this particular group was selected has allowed me to think about the way all these relate to career planning in this age group. You can see that it is hard to separate out any of these threads, but I want to look here at identity and learning in particular. We know that the issue of identity is key in understanding people's anxiety at retirement: who will I be when I stop being a plasterer or a doctor? I came to see it as equally relevant to these people who saw themselves as having one last chance to become something they had always wanted to be, or indeed at last to become the person they had always felt they were.

50 is only two thirds of the way through the four and a half decades we have between age 20 and age 65 – there are still a good 15 more years to go. Assuming an active retirement then to the age of 80, which is not so unrealistic now, there are a further 15 more years after that. One way of looking at 50 is that it is still young enough to think about re-training to become what you really want to be; and in the case of all of these four, the issue was about change of identity, not just of job.

At the time that they sought help from their guidance service, the situation and background of each of the four was as follows:

Colin Farmer, house husband
Born Scotland. Incomplete agriculture degree; period of casual labour, then carpentry TOPs course leading to self employment as carpenter until health problems made that difficult. Two daughters, early teens, wife in stressful work.

Rebecca Wright, administrator, accounts department of private hospital, left through stress-induced ill-health
Born Jamaica. Clerical qualifications acquired through evening classes, plus a one-year full-time computer course, series of administrative jobs. One son currently in college. Husband in secure employment, refurbishing second home in Jamaica.

Timothy Keane, part-time administrative work at zoo, part-time drama student
Born England. Incomplete initial HE, later taking OU courses then English Literature degree as mature student. Started but did not finish MA. Worked for a West End theatre management on front-of-house tasks. Two years group psychotherapy just completed. Never married, no children.

Jane Eddington, unemployed
Born Malta (father in forces), educated in England. Incomplete HE (two attempts), single parent, working life spent in clerical or retail jobs interrupted in late 40s by neurological problems. One adult son living independently.

By the end of the project:

- **Colin** had become a technician in the arts department of a large secondary school. This may not sound very dramatic, but his working life before his fifteen years house-husbanding had been shaped by his strong reaction against his early start in sciences.

- **Rebecca** was a qualified care assistant, planning to pursue a further specialist training in dementia care

- **Timothy** had completed his psychotherapy as well as three years drama training and had earned his first money as a professional actor

- **Jane** had benefited from a course training her to be an advocate on behalf of disabled people and was fighting some of her own battles, and at the same time has developed as a prolific and remarkable creative writer.

This all sounds very positive and easy, but in each case, of course, there have been struggles and setbacks. What can we learn from this?

I have mentioned that none was making retirement plans at the outset, and eventual retirement later became a consideration in the case of only one, Rebecca[1]. All were expecting to work for the foreseeable future. So these are jobseekers, just older than usual. There are comparisons to be made in two directions: what differentiates them from people of their same chronological age who *are* thinking about retirement? And is there anything that differentiates them from *younger* adult jobseekers, say in their thirties?

In relation to the first, it might be suggested that perhaps they also need to earn their living, and that the need for a steady income might be part of what distinguishes job-seekers from retirement planners. But in fact, I am using 'retirement planners' to include people who know they have to work for the time being, but are thinking about that in the context of transitions out of paid work, so it is not primarily a financial issue.

They had many things in common with the other over fifties, of course. All four had remarkable stories to tell, all very different. They were not selected randomly, and were probably recommended by their advice services on the grounds that *they* would sustain interest over the two to three years of the project (in fact I suspect two were probably recommended because their agencies saw them as particularly hard to place) so there is a bias of some sort there. It is also possible that everyone who is seeking advice at this stage of life is going to be remarkable in some way: thirty-plus years of adulthood gives you time to build up a lot of idiosyncrasies.

What these particular job-seekers did have in common was that they were not just looking for another job like the last one: their own particular set of experiences had imploded in such as way as to bring them to a temporary halt. They are not typical of people in their fifties, because clearly only a minority seek career advice at that age; but they may be more typical of people who seek career *changes* then.

If we want or need to make changes at that time of life, it obviously may be triggered by external (economic, social or historical) changes in the world around us which compels a change; or internal personal, changes (psychological or to our immediate social situation); or a combination of the two. What I found with these four is that it may also be linked to unfinished business, either educational, emotional or in ambition, and that in each case there was some interruption in their lives.

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[1] Although she is beginning to include retirement in her calculation it is not because she is envisaging stopping working: she will move back to Jamaica when her husband retires and she knows that there are no state-funded schemes to help people in their own homes with early dementia. She is therefore planning to carry on her vocation on a voluntary basis.

1. External changes: e.g. the economy

This was true for Rebecca, whose breakdown was precipitated by the changes in private health care – she had been working for a private hospital in the accounts department, and as that market became fiercer – changes in the wider economy – she was coming under increasing pressure to get former patients to settle their bills. One can imagine others in their fifties whose skills are obsolete because of technical changes, or because of jobs moving away from their area.

2. Changes to us

In Jane's, Colin's and Rebecca's cases health breakdowns had contributed to a career break. Health problems might account for anyone's absence from the labour market, followed by seeking advice on how to get back in, but would not necessarily result in a change of direction or of occupational identity. But in these cases, the precipitating health problem was accompanied by some release of the inhibiting and restraining factors that had kept them in inappropriate occupations. In Timothy's case, the trigger was the psychological earthquake of the death of his foster mother, which prompted him to address the mental health problems that had restrained him all his life, and it was that which released him to try to realise his ambition.

So what are the factors that are conducive to a more fundamental change?

3. An interruption long enough to take stock

Many people spend their *whole* lives in the track they fall into as a result of early, confused decisions. So another way in which this group is different is that for whatever reason the interruption in their early fifties was long enough to give them time to review their aims. This is clearly neither necessary nor sufficient: one could make a leap from one field to another, or one could endure a long break away from work and then either retire or return to the same field that one had left. But it was present in all four cases.

4. Unfinished business

This is now getting closer to issues associated with identity. There was a sense of unfinished business with all these four people, and I am hoping to explore this as a factor with the other over fifties in the wider study. While there is a wide literature on factors influencing career choice, I do not know of any which addresses this, and it seems to me to be particularly pertinent to this older group of job-seekers.

a) *Interrupted education.* It is possible that people who had not been able to make secure learning decisions in adolescence are more likely to turn up seeking help in their fifties to get back on track with what they would have liked to have done earlier. Neither Colin's, Jane's or Timothy's initial education had gone according to plan, and Rebecca's had been dramatically disrupted when she moved to London from Jamaica aged thirteen.

b) *Disturbed childhood.* In the case of Colin, Jane and Timothy, all could be said to have slithered into inappropriate work following troubled childhoods. It is hard enough for any sixteen year old to know who they are and how they should plan at least the first few decades of their adult life, but it is easy to see that psychological health and confidence, congenial and secure schooling, cultural continuity between home and school, social and cultural capital would all help what the career theorists call self-efficacy[2] or what we in this project are regarding as agency. You can make false starts even if you have those, but perhaps are more likely to do so if you do not.

- Timothy's story was complicated in the extreme: contact for a time with both birth mother and father but fostered by a family with rather severe non-conformist values. They sent him to a private school with a wide range of opportunities but then disapproved of every artistic ambition and his confidence drained away.

- Rebecca is the only one of the four who does not lament her childhood, but she had the most disrupted of all: her parents set off for England when Rebecca was 7, leaving her and her three younger brothers behind in Jamaica with an auntie. By the time the parents had made a home in London for their four children and could bring them over, they had had another baby, so after a separation of 6 years Rebecca joined an absolutely unfamiliar home, school, culture, city and family. She had never seen a telephone until the flight stopped over in Miami on the way here. She arrived on a Friday, and was at school on the Monday morning (she loved it, but she was frozen).

I was interested that although her story seems to European eyes as surely damaging, it was completely normal to everyone in her immediate and extended family. Rebecca did not grow up thinking it to be a handicap. Practically it prevented her getting the qualifications that might have opened up more options at 16, but it did not leave her with the sense of failure or resentment that others in the study had to overcome before they could move on.

c) *Uncompleted ambitions.* All four always had some idea of what they wanted to be, or who they really were, from an early age, that was different from what they actually did.

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[2] Bandura (1986: 391) defined self-efficacy as 'people's judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances'.

- Rebecca had wanted to be a nurse when she left school, but was told she was too small.

- Timothy was drawn to acting from his schooldays, but lacked the support and confidence to explore that side of himself.

- Jane's whole life has been driven by her fascination and retentive memory for anything to do with Mediterranean history.

- Colin had a creative, independent, and compassionate nature which made agricultural studies quite inappropriate, and when he dropped out he left home and went to live instead with his artistic sister.

I turned hopefully to Gottfredson's (1981) model of compromise here: she talks about the process whereby young people internalise the social expectations of those around them and gradually abandon their childhood ambitions in favour of the narrow range allowed to their gender and class. But although it could have been said to apply to the reason Rebecca made her choice of nursing, or Colin acted on his mother's ambitions for him to go into agriculture, Gottfredson does not have anything to say about the consequences when these decisions come unstuck, or of interruption or compromise later in life. Levinson et al (1978) talk about the concept of 'the Dream' to describe 'an imagined possibility that provides inspiration and energy'. In their study of American males between 35 and 45 they found that the nature of the dream, and the likelihood of achieving it, varied according to occupational sector and was helped by the existence of someone in a mentoring role. But they do not speak about the idea of a dream which goes underground and then resurfaces.

The interlude of review in their fifties gave my four respondents all the chance to look again at what they had learnt about themselves over those thirty or so intervening years, check out if that early dream was still the one, and ask if the factors that prevented them realising it when young are still insurmountable.

It is clearly of interest to wonder whether taking part in the project contributed or perhaps even created the phenomenon, and I think there is a range of answers. In Rebecca's case the change had been made before I met her, so the answer has to be no. Timothy clearly enjoyed reflecting with me on what was going on in his life: his two years of interviews in the project overlapped by a year with his two years of group psychotherapy, and from the way he described that I would say that it was the therapy which was bringing about the changes. Jane was certainly changing anyway, and I saw her rise and fall and rise again in terms of confidence and creativity. But I do think that possibly her confidence to *write* was strengthened by my interest, though paradoxically the more confident she

became the more challenging she also rightly became about our use of her life story.

I asked them all what they felt they had got, if anything, from taking part in the project and Colin did say that he had come to see there was a value and interest in the very wide range of jobs he had taken during what he called his hippy phase. So I suppose, though he did not say so, that that may have contributed to giving him the necessary confidence in the job interview. But there were many other factors in his life which were all pointing in the same direction.

The longer I spent with Colin the more sure I had become that he was what my colleague, Heather Hodkinson, has been identifying as 'stuck'. He was certain that no-one would ever want him, but equally certain that he would never see the sort of job he would want to do. It was at the very last interview he told me how he had been offered what I regarded as the most perfect job in the world for him. Not only that, but he had been offered the first job he had applied for in nearly twenty years.

What are the chances of managing this change successfully?

The focus of the research has been on learning, and we have been painstakingly noting every learning incident and every kind of formal and informal learning that our respondents can remember during their lives up till now. We are all informal learners, but some of get more involved than others in formal learning as adults. Timothy and Rebecca have been such people.

- Timothy kept up his study through the Open University, then through a full-time degree as a mature student, and then more recently through drama training. Indeed, there is a sense in which his failure to do as well as expected at A level all those years ago has driven him to try to realise what always seemed to be his true nature, in spite of the very real difficulties of confidence and concentration he had to overcome to do so.

- Rebecca worked away steadily in evening classes acquiring clerical qualifications during her first jobs, and even took a year out to get computer skills (in the days of punched cards). Once in steady office work she branched out into evening class learning for the fun of it: flower arranging, beauty skills, cookery. She also learned enthusiastically through her evangelist church, around childcare, and in organisation skills. More recently she learnt self-confidence on an intensive job-search course. Once she had made her career switch, she went on to get a Care NVQ – and now she is planning more learning.

Colin and Jane on the other hand are energetic informal learners. I am tempted to say, unusually so, but who knows? You would absolutely not suspect, if meeting either briefly, that they had such a wide interest combined with such focused expertise: I have known successful academics with less.

- Jane had a good basis in formal learning at school. She has since been hampered by a difficulty over exams, but it has not stopped her using her two unfinished degrees or her incomplete drama training as the basis for a lifetime of reading, travel, and now writing about the ancient and medieval history of Sicily. Although possessed of this real, abstruse expertise, the person you meet is a small, modest, rather frail sheltered housing tenant.

- Colin has learnt skills informally all his life, from his years in casual labour on building sites and then as a carpenter, but more recently through his fifteen years as an imaginative stay-at-home parent, experimenting in arts, crafts, technical repair, making use of the internet and the library to learn and learn.

Perhaps what strengthens all four is the energy and curiosity which led them to be such active learners, more powerful than the labels put on them by the initial educational system that our recruitment and selection systems rely on to shape, sort, bundle and package adults young and old. For these four at any rate, it seems to have played a significant part in keeping alive their dreams, and assisted their ability to adapt and retrain. Arthur *et al.* (1999: 49) talk about the role of learning in surviving in the new world of 'boundaryless careers': 'learning drives one's readiness for future learning in a virtuous cycle of new opportunities'. I have also touched on that form of learning which consists of learning about oneself; so another element is surely a habit of reflection and self-knowledge which I certainly found in all of them.

Is there anything special about older job-changers?

What differentiates them from their *contemporaries* who are also active, hungry learners but who see retirement as a way of making more time for learning? I have suggested that it may be their various forms of unfinished business which makes them want to have one more chance at 'being' the person they had always hoped to be in terms of their occupation. Arthur, *et al.* suggest grouping career behaviours in terms of 'fresh energy', 'informed direction' and 'seasoned engagement'. Their account of the last of these mostly focuses on the process by which people progress towards the end of their career, often in a sequence of steps, to retirement. But our four career changers are demonstrating decided 'fresh energy' symptoms of which:

'the essential dynamic is not just of exploration but of experiment and trial-and-error refinement. Behaviourally, career actors in this mode often display intense passion, exuberence, and creativity.' (Arthur et al.,1999: 60)

What is different about these job-changers compared to younger ones? It is fairly clear how this group could be differentiated from young people embarking on their first job, and I have suggested a difference with end-of-career retirement planners. But it is not so easy to see fundamental differences between them and career-changers in their thirties.

Turning to developmental psychologists and career theorists, one might hope for some insights relating to age and stage. But those theorists that look at development over the life-course are not helpful in relation to these individuals who break with usual patterns, and those who look at patterns around individual career changes are not so helpful in relation to age (Kidd, 2006). Super's 'career rainbow' (1980), in which the rainbow's colours represent roles arching round the trajectory of the lifespan, raises some ideas of a now-or-never kind: if we look at the colour-strand-role of parenthood, perhaps people in their fifties benefit from a short break between the end of responsibilities of child care and the greatest weight of elder care, when they can pause to review. The early-thirties adults are affected by the same role, in a different way: that they may feel they must make a career change before settling down to have children. Super's patterns notoriously were based on conventions for American males in the 1970s, patterns that are challenged by all four of the older adults in question. But his idea of the way roles survive round parts of the arch and influence the life course are nonetheless useful.

There is significant literature on what older adults want in terms of careers advice, well summarised in Ford, *et al.* (2006). There are real issues for policy and practice in understanding what those differences might be, in relation to the Leitch agenda. The features that older adults want in terms of help and opportunities are what any adult wants: flexibility in access to help and in employment, sensitivity and understanding about their needs, reliable information about rights and opportunities. The problems so far have been largely in the way it has been delivered, over issues such as discrimination (making assumptions about what work is suitable for older people) or lack of knowledge about employment opportunities or legal rights. This is not the subject of this paper, but the parallels between what is going on for younger adults and older adults may be similar – different in degree and in detail, but not necessarily in kind.

There is growing interest in changing patterns in younger adults' careers. Increasingly young people are taking more of their first decade in work to decide what they want to settle to, and in their thirties may be looking to adjust initial career decisions for the same reasons as our older changers. Many of Arthur's sample of 75 New Zealanders demonstrate this pattern (Arthur et al., 1999), following changes in the world of work, changes in themselves, enforced interruptions in their careers and unfinished business. Again, their development as learners, formal or informal, proved to be highly relevant to how effective the individuals proved in implementing change.

So the differences between young and old again seem to be a matter of degree and detail, and not kind. I have said that in the terms of the kind of help that is needed, what they want from the service is the same, but there may be a difference in that if it is not present it may make the difference between it being of some use, or of being of no use at all. In relation to job-changers, it may be that older ones are not actually different, just that there is more at stake: changes by fifty-five really may be your last chance, and no amount of age legislation is going to change some basic facts of life.

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Transition in Organisations: 3 – Connecting Career Capability

Ian King

This paper concludes my study into how Professional Service Firms (PSFs) facilitate professional transitions. It focuses on the capabilities that professionals might adopt to make effective career choices. In particular it considers:

- Bill Law's approach to 'career-learning' which identifies the skills that a competent individual might utilise when deciding on career progression; and

- the appropriateness and relevance of different career development models.

It ends by considering the future challenges that are likely to impact on PSFs in the 21st century when determining organisational career practice.

Building a repertoire of career learning capacities

The career development theories considered in the previous article have added value to careers thinking and practice but have focused on an approach to thinking about careers (a framework or model) rather than the skills that an individual requires to make effective career choices. Bill Law, in seeking answers to the question "what new questions might a career learning theory seek to answer?" (1996, p.50), concludes that an individual requires a 'repertoire' of skills progressing them through a programme of career development learning activities. Citing Meadows (1993), he describes "a repertoire *(as)* a progressively acquired range of material – some basic, some developed – any part of which can be called into play as it proves appropriate" (Law, 1996, p.51). He refers to this as 'career learning theory' and proposes a four step approach to how people make their career decisions as illustrated in figure 1.

Law proposes that an individual needs to work through each of these four steps working progressively from one step to the next in order to determine their most appropriate career decision at the time they are making their choice i.e. within their 'current context'.

Figure 1: Law's Career-learning Theory
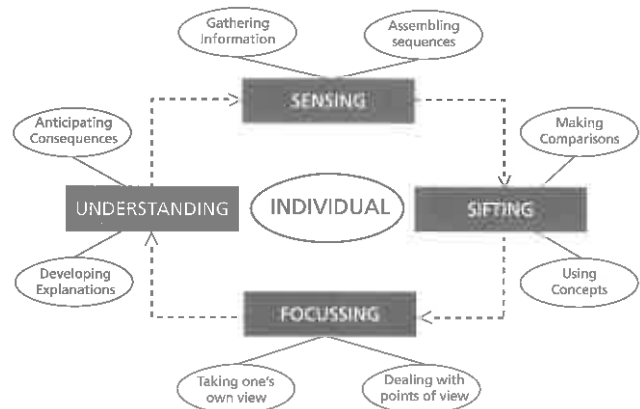
Watts (1998, p.4) also suggests that "increasingly, people need the more advanced capacities in order to manage their careers effectively. But these more advanced capacities cannot be developed unless the more basic capacities have been built to support them".

This theory gives both counsellor and client a clear process as to what the client needs to do to make an appropriate career decision and, for this reason, provides managers and their reports a sound process for enabling effective career conversations in professional environments. It also complements the meta-theory of career development presented in the previous paper in this series – see figure 1 adapted from the work of Bill Law (King, 2007) – by adding a third dimension. Law contends that "the third dimension discriminates between *differentialist* theories which assume that the important differences are between people, and *progressive* theories which assume that the important differences are between different stages of learning progression" (1996, p.67).

Besides the importance of this 'third dimension' a distinct advantage of this approach is that it focuses individuals on what is important to them and concentrates their thinking on the pertinent issues that they need to explore in order to make a sound career decision; as Law *et al* (2002) note "career-learning theory points to a 'bridge', by showing how learning occurs in such a way that what a person says about work and self are aspects of one process" (p.436). This means that an individual can, by reflecting on their past experiences, identify salient features (such as job achievements, preferences and working environments) and see whether they can replicate them in their new employment thereby connecting their past with their future experience.

Assessing the organisational value of career development models

How do these different versions compete in terms of relevance and appropriateness? In professional service organisations each of the career models have different applications and relevance/appropriateness to the original purpose for which they were designed. The Cambridge Dictionary (2005) defines the two terms as – appropriateness, "suitable or right for a particular situation or occasion"; relevance, "the degree to which something is related or useful to what is happening or being talked about". Figure 2 shows the relevance and appropriateness of each career development model.

Figure 2: Organisational Value of Different Career Development Models
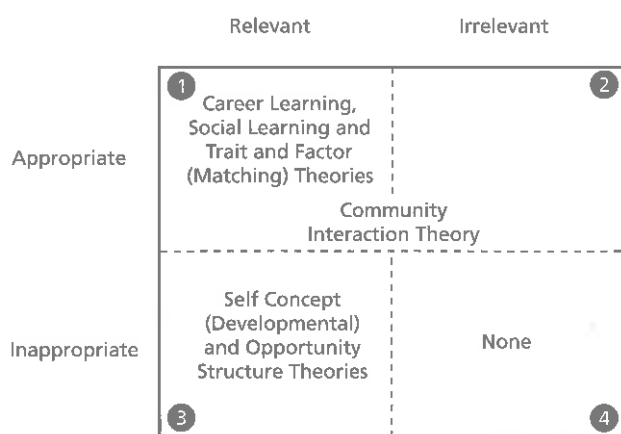
Theories in 'quadrant 1' (Career Learning, Social Learning and Trait and Factor Matching) are both relevant and appropriate in organisational settings as they offer the following benefits in a professional culture:

- Career Learning – most professional firms conduct performance management reviews which include 'career conversations' and, although not well known, this theory gives professional organisations a set of skills which will enhance an individual's ability to make optimal career choices

- Social Learning – is the traditional way in which professional consultants learn by role modelling more senior consultants and developing their own behaviours to reflect those of a successful consultant. This is a natural socialisation process, but might be strengthened if organisations sought new ways of reinforcing this process through structured learning interventions such as job shadowing, role reinforcement etc.

- Trait and Factor Matching – offers assessments which appeal to professionals who prefer to see structured feedback giving personal meaning to their challenging and complex existence; most organisations have made extensive use of psychometric profiling and, therefore, professionals are keen to experience this type of career review tool.

Next, looking between 'quadrant 1 and 2' (Community Interaction) theory, this is appropriate because it talks about how individuals are influenced by their local community when it comes to making a career choice and that, for professionals, it is both relevant and irrelevant to the organisations they find themselves in for the following reason: although the theory is largely irrelevant for the organisation itself professionals will be strongly influenced by the professional institution which they will have become members of, usually by qualification. This professional community will influence how an individual behaves within their organisation so the theory applies to the professional community rather than the organisational one. Finally, 'quadrant 3' (Self Concept – Developmental and Opportunity Structure) theories are very relevant to professional organisations as they, if properly understood, would be useful to organisations. However, in the current global business environment they are arguably less appropriate, even inappropriate, as the opportunities for matching individuals to the organisation are limited as a consequence of organisational restructuring, delayering etc. In the old 'traditional' careers, professionals advanced by moving up the organisational career ladder as proposed by Dalton et al (1977) in their model of career stages, but today there are fewer appointments for them to aspire to and the consequent opportunity structures do not exist within or without their local labour economies. This means that these two theories, although well grounded in professional organisations for many centuries, are no longer appropriate to contemporary professional business.

The future of organisational career practice in the 21st century

Finally I look at some of the future challenges likely to impact on the 21st century professional organisation. Knowledge is the principal asset that PSFs trade in the post-modern world, so how are professional firms adapting to accommodate their professionals' careers in this 'knowledge economy'? The traditional approach to career education has evaporated as global economics have changed the way in which organisations transact business and hence the opportunities that exist for employees hoping to advance in their career. Littleton et al (2000) note that "…a shift from 'bounded' careers – prescribed by relatively stable organisational and occupational structures – to 'boundary less' careers – where uncertainty

and flexibility are the order of the day – is increasingly common" (p.101). In PSFs this is particularly true as the 'knowledge' of such organisations has become increasingly codified and captured by technology systems; this suggests a dilution of the professional's role and a subsequent change in the career framework of professional organisations. However, in her study, Södergren (2002) found that knowledge intensive workers "not surprisingly, focus on the possibilities of learning and knowledge creation more than on formal positions in their perception of a positive development at work" (p.38).

Figure 3: Managerial and Professional Competence

Professional competence
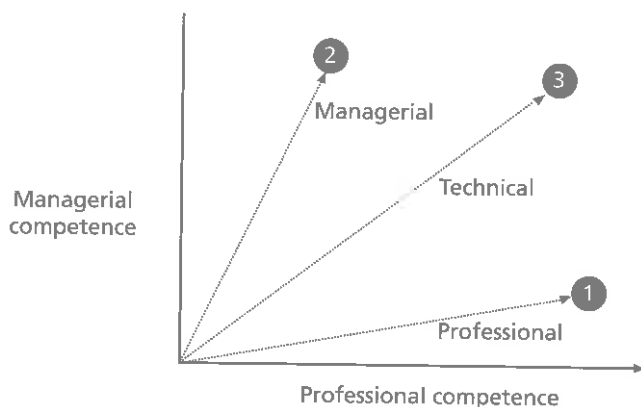
This suggests that organisations should be focusing their career education programmes on a dialogue about how best to develop their professionals' competence ('route 1') by creating "new career opportunities, reward systems, employee contracts, and so on" (Södergren, 2002, p.52) rather than the more traditional path of constructing managerial careers ('route 2'). This may mean focusing on the content and meaning of an employee's job rather than the position/role they occupy and will necessitate a greater emphasis on those career development models which are both relevant and appropriate – primarily, I suggest, career learning and social learning theories as identified in figure 2. Regarding 'route 3', Södergren (2002) states her opinion that "many knowledge-intensive organizations would be better off if they could find ways to reinforce and develop competence-based strategies, knowledge-based careers, and a leadership that maximized learning and knowledge creation" (p.53) – perhaps this is the route that PSFs should promote to achieve optimal business performance.

How can professional organisations develop their career practices and, in the 21st century, best achieve an 'appropriate' approach to career education and development? In the first paper of this series we looked at the possible elements of an organisational career system and noted many of the possible career interventions that an organisation might employ to facilitate career education and guidance programmes. In his 'postscript' Arnold (1997) suggests that "perhaps the most sure-fire way to achieve this is to combine developmental work

assignments with self-reflection aided perhaps by personal development planning, mentoring or career workshops" (p.206). This combination of approaches will create, for each individual, an opportunity to reflect on their own career preferences and make the occupational choice that is most appropriate in their current personal and organisational context.

This approach also supports the conclusions of Arthur et al (1999) who contend that "for present and future career actors, our evidence suggests that personal survival and growth through careers will increasingly depend on flexibility, versatility, improvisation and persistent learning" (p.170). It seems that the most relevant and appropriate career development models for professional organisations will be those that enable individuals to be adaptable within their careers and understand what that means as a result of continual career learning throughout their life. Career education remains important to 21st century professional organisations, but, in the light of global changes, continues to present many challenges for those organisations seeking to genuinely invest in their employees' career education.

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Geoff Ford: An Obituary

Geoff Ford died in his sleep on Thursday 24 January 2008. He was 69. He had been in hospital for some weeks, suffering from a variety of liver and other problems.

Geoff read philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) at Oxford, and subsequently trained as a careers officer at Swanley. After practising as a careers officer in the London Borough of Ealing, he was Principal Careers Officer for Leeds from 1970 to 1984. Subsequently he was responsible for pioneering adult guidance services in Leeds, before joining the Employment Department as a Training Standards Inspector. On leaving the Department in late 1993 he became a self-employed consultant specialising in career guidance and related issues. In 1995 he was elected a NICEC Fellow, which he remained until he was elected an Emeritus Fellow a few weeks before his death.

Geoff was responsible for a great deal of innovative development work in the field of career guidance, particularly for adults. He played an important role in the establishment of the Counselling and Career Development Unit at the University of Leeds, and in 1984 wrote a significant report for them on *Meeting the Educational, Training and Counselling Needs of Adults*. This led to his joining the UDACE Development Group on adult guidance, where his wise contributions assisted in the drafting of the 1986 report *The Challenge of Change*. But he also had great interest in young people, particularly those at risk, and his evaluation of the Institute of Career Guidance Mentoring Action Project was an important piece of work at a time when the needs of such young people were being largely neglected.

It was however his later work on guidance for older adults – for the 'third age' – that was his most distinctively significant contribution to the field. He was responsible for a series of reports – including *Career Guidance in the Third Age: a Mapping Exercise* (1996), *Challenging Age* (2003) and *Am I Still Needed?* (2005) – that were genuinely ground-breaking, not only in the UK but internationally. Issues relating to active ageing and phased retirement are now being increasingly recognised as critical policy issues in most developed countries. It was largely Geoff's work, linked to NICEC, CeGS and the Third Age Employment Network (TAEN), which established and documented the critical role that guidance services can play in relation to such issues.

Geoff was passionately committed to the role that good-quality career guidance can play in helping people to develop and sometimes transform their lives. He had a deep concern for disadvantaged people, young and old. But he also saw the importance of addressing their distinctive needs within universal services that addressed the needs of all, on a lifelong basis.

All his work was characterised by total integrity and dedication. His research was diligent and painstakingly thorough. His knowledge of his field was encyclopaedic, and the main difficulty he experienced in his writing was deciding what to leave out. The clarity of his thinking and the range and depth of his experience shone through all his written work.

He was a true gentle-man, in both senses of that word. He was unfailingly courteous to all he met, no matter who they were. He was also a generous colleague, always willing to give his time to help and mentor others. His modesty, his warmth, his wisdom and his humanity were gifts he gave to all of us who knew him, and which remain to inspire us through our memories of his life.

Tony Watts

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