A Social Constructivist Perspective on Achieving Successful Career Change at Thirty-Something

Amelia Wise BSc (Hons) MA MSc

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Psychology
School of Human Sciences
University of Surrey

December 2006
CONTAINS

PULLOUTS
Abstract

This thesis addresses the contemporary phenomenon of career change at thirty-something. Research across three empirical studies aims to extend an understanding of personal perceptions of career change and contribute to extant career theory. The ambiguity arising from career change is interpreted through the lens of a sensemaking framework and an epistemological position of social constructivism is adopted. This theoretical stance provides a dynamic and holistic perspective on the experiences and evaluative processes occurring during career transition. Qualitative methodologies are employed. This research provides the first published application of interpretative phenomenological analysis in vocational psychology. Additionally, it offers a novel use of cause maps outside of an organisational context, representing cycles of development arising from the career transition experience in boundaryless careers.

Partial support for traditional age-defined development theories is offered by the findings. Evidence for development tasks associated with the thirties such as self-actualisation and achieving consolidation is found, however, evidence for stabilisation is not found. Other characteristics, including levels of identity development, high perceived control and perceived time pressure, also appear to be linked to age. The presence of these characteristics suggests a disposition favourable to effective coping with the contemporary demands for self-reliant career management. Extant research proposing the significance of subjective values on boundaryless careers is supported. The finding that these appeared to shape the careers of men as well as women provides to a contemporary understanding of men's adjustment to boundaryless careers. In relation to transition theory, this research contributes by identifying a contemplation stage early in career change, and the benefits of completing certain tasks at this time in order to achieve a subjectively meaningful career. The findings also contribute to career success theory by identifying processes of evaluation and offering further clarification of career competency concepts, such as career maturity and career resilience, including their affective component. An integrated theoretical framework for the study of career is proposed comprising of three key elements, the first is process-orientated, the second is action-theoretical and the third is emotion.
Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: THESIS OVERVIEW ............................................. 13
1.1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................... 13
1.2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .......................................... 15
1.3 THE FOCUS OF THE THESIS .................................................... 17
1.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS ............................................. 20

PART I THEORIZING ................................................................. 24
CHAPTER TWO: A THEORETICAL CONTEXT .................................. 25
2.1 OVERVIEW ............................................................................ 25
2.1.2 A Historical Perspective on Career Theory ...................................... 25
2.2 TRADITIONAL THEORIES OF CAREER ....................................... 27
2.2.1 The Cultural Context Relevant to Traditional Theories of Career ........... 27
2.2.2 Characteristics of Traditional Theoretical Approaches to the Study of
Career Development ...................................................................... 29
2.2.3 Characteristics of Traditional Transition Theories ............................ 33
2.2.4 Limitations to Traditional Theories of Career .................................. 36
2.2.5 Challenges to Traditional Structural Concepts and Definitions of Career... 40
2.2.6 Summary ............................................................................. 43
2.3 EMERGING THEORIES OF CAREER .......................................... 44
2.3.1 Overview of Emerging Theories of Career ................................... 44
2.3.2 The Cultural Context Relevant to Emerging Theories of Career ............. 46
2.3.3 Characteristics of Emerging Theories of Career ............................... 48
2.3.4 Contributions of Emerging Theories of Career ................................. 52
2.3.5 Limitations of Emerging Theories of Career ................................... 54
2.4 AN INTEGRATED THEORETICAL APPROACH ......................... 57
2.5 RESEARCH THEMES ............................................................. 58
2.5.1 The Current Research ............................................................. 58
2.6 SUMMARY .......................................................................... 61

CHAPTER THREE: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ...................... 63
3.1 OVERVIEW .......................................................................... 63
3.2 POTENTIAL INFLUENCES ON CAREER CHANGE DURING THE THIRTIES ................................................................. 64
3.2.1 The Significance of being Thirty-something .............................................. 64
3.2.2 Identity Issues in Career Change ............................................................. 67
3.2.3 The Role of Values ................................................................................ 72
3.2.4 The Influence of Emotion ..................................................................... 74
3.2.5 Decision-making, Goal-setting and Motivation ....................................... 78
3.2.6. The Role of Individual Differences ................................................... 82
3.2.7 The Influence of Context ...................................................................... 88
3.2.8 Role-Related Issues in Career Change .................................................. 93
3.3 SUMMARY ............................................................................................ 96
3.4 RESEARCH AREAS ........................................................................... 101

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH ............................................. 103
4.1 OVERVIEW .......................................................................................... 103
4.2 THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ......................................... 105
4.3 THE INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK ..................................................... 107
4.3.1 Social-Constructivism ......................................................................... 107
4.3.2 Sensemaking ....................................................................................... 111
4.4 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY .............................................................. 115
4.4.1 Qualitative Data .................................................................................... 115
4.4.2 ESTABLISHING THE QUALITY OF THE PRESENT EMPIRICAL STUDY ......................................................................................... 118
4.4.3 The Use of Narratives for Investigating Career Change Experiences .... 122
4.5 OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION OF EACH STUDY ........................................................................ 129
4.6 EXPLORATION AND ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES ................................ 132
4.6.1 Exploration Technique One and Three: The Semi-Structured Interview ... 132
4.6.1.1 The Theoretical Bases for the Interview Method .............................. 132
4.6.1.2 The Semi-Structured Interview Guide ............................................. 133
4.6.2 Analytical Technique One: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis... 136
4.6.2.1 The Theoretical Bases for IPA ..................................................... 136
PART II: EXPLORATION.................................................................................. 156

CHAPTER FIVE: THE EXPERIENCES OF VOLUNTARY CAREER
CHANGE AT THIRTY-SOMETHING ................................................................. 157

5.1 OVERVIEW.................................................................................................. 157

5.2 INTRODUCTION........................................................................................ 158

5.2.1 Motivations for Voluntary Career Change........................................... 158

5.2.2 Making Sense During Voluntary Career Change.................................. 159

5.2.3 Coping with Challenges During Voluntary Career Change.................. 162

5.2.4 Sources of Validation in the Boundaryless Career Context.................. 163

5.3 METHOD..................................................................................................... 165

5.3.1 Participants............................................................................................. 165

5.3.2 Procedure................................................................................................ 168

5.4 RESULTS..................................................................................................... 169

5.4.1 Sensemaking Processes During Voluntary Career Change.................. 169

5.4.1.1 Responses to Continuity and Discontinuity During Transition............ 172

5.4.1.2 Re-evaluations of Expectations as a Learning Outcome of Change..... 180

5.4.1.3 The Impact of Being Thirty-Something on the Perceptions of the
Voluntary Change Experience........................................................................ 181

5.4.2 Values....................................................................................................... 184

5.4.2.1 Motivation to Change......................................................................... 185
5.4.2.2 Pursuing Career Change in Accordance with Values....................... 191
5.4.2.3 The Influence of Values on Interpretations of Outcomes.............. 193
5.4.3 Social Context............................................................................ 195
5.4.3.1 Social Support........................................................................ 196
5.4.3.2 Perceived Constraints............................................................. 198
5.4.3.3 Social Comparison................................................................. 200
5.5 DISCUSSION............................................................................... 201
5.5.1 Career Pattern.......................................................................... 202
5.5.2 Age-Related Issues.................................................................... 208
5.6 STUDY LIMITATIONS................................................................... 211
5.7 REFLECTION............................................................................... 212
5.8 CONCLUSION............................................................................... 215

CHAPTER SIX: THE EXPERIENCES OF INVOLUNTARY CAREER
CHANGE AT THIRTY-SOMETHING...................................................... 217
6.1 OVERVIEW................................................................................ 217
6.2 INTRODUCTION........................................................................ 219
6.2.1 Sensemaking During Involuntary Career Change.......................... 219
6.2.2 Identity Issues......................................................................... 222
6.2.3 Perceived Control................................................................. 224
6.2.4 Personal Characteristics......................................................... 225
6.2.5 The Influence of Context.......................................................... 228
6.3 METHOD.................................................................................. 230
6.3.1 Sample................................................................................... 230
6.3.2 Procedure............................................................................... 232
6.4 RESULTS................................................................................. 233
6.4.1 Analysis of Repertory Grid Constructs.................................... 234
6.4.2 Analysis of Top Views............................................................... 239
6.4.2.1 Top View One: ‘This was a positive experience of change’...... 239
6.4.2.2 Top View Two: ‘I felt in control’......................................... 245
6.4.2.3 Top View Three: ‘I felt that I adjusted to the change before the change took place’.................................................. 250
6.4.2.4 Top View Four: ‘This had positive effects of how I felt about myself’ ................................................................. 256

6.5 DISCUSSION .................................................................................. 260

6.5.1 The Role of Emotion in Experiences of Involuntary Career Change ............................................................. 260

6.5.2 Perceived Control ...................................................................... 264

6.5.3 Personal Characteristics ............................................................... 266

6.5.4 Identity Issues ............................................................................ 268

6.6 STUDY LIMITATIONS ..................................................................... 271

6.7 REFLECTION ................................................................................ 272

6.8 CONCLUSION ................................................................................ 274

6.8.1 Similarities and Differences between Involuntary and Voluntary Career Change ......................................................... 276

CHAPTER SEVEN: EVALUATIONS OF OUTCOMES OF CAREER CHANGE AMONGST THIRTY-SOMETHINGS ................................................................. 282

7.1 OVERVIEW ................................................................................ 282

7.2 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................... 284

7.2.1 The Distinctiveness of the Concept of Career Success ......................................................................................... 284

7.2.2 An Interdependent Approach to Career Success .............................................................................................. 287

7.2.3 The Influence of Career Success Within the Transition Cycle ........................................................................... 290

7.2.4 Career Success Meta-Competencies ................................................................................................................... 292

7.2.5 The Concept of Success for Thirty-Somethings ......................................................................................... 295

7.3 METHOD ...................................................................................... 298

7.3.1 Sample ...................................................................................... 298

7.3.2 Procedure .................................................................................. 301

7.4 RESULTS ...................................................................................... 302

7.4.1 Antecedent Variables ..................................................................... 305

7.4.1.1 Self-Awareness ........................................................................ 305

   i) Self-Awareness and Occupational Choice ............................................ 305

   ii) The Search for a Single Theme .................................................................. 307

7.4.1.2 Personal Responsibility .................................................................... 309
i) Contributory Factors to the Perception of the Need for Personal Responsibility 
ii) The Use of Strategies for Promoting Personal Responsibility Throughout the Career Change Process 

7.4.1.3 Summary of Antecedent Variables 

7.4.2 Intervening Variables 

7.4.2.1 Realistic Goal Setting 
  i) Having a plan 
  ii) The Right Time to Change 

7.4.2.2 Cohesive Career Structure 
  i) The Perceived Need for a Cohesive Career Structure During Career Change 
  ii) The Incremental Development of Skills and Experience 
  iii) Continuity of Self 

7.4.2.3 Improved Work-Life Balance 

7.4.2.4 Connection with Other People 
  i) Perceived Benefits of Connecting with Others 
  ii) Networking 
  iii) External Motivation to Succeed 
  iv) Social Support 

7.4.2.5 Summary of Intervening Variables 

7.4.3 Outcome Variables 

7.4.3.1 Progress 
  i) Progress in Personal Development 
  ii) Progress in Work-Life Balance 
  iii) Progress in Relationships with Other People 

7.4.3.2 Success 
  i) How Subjective Evaluations of Success Were Made in the Process of Career Change 
  ii) Factors that Contributed to Perceptions of Success 

7.4.3.3 Summary of Outcome Variables 

7.4.4 Summary of Results 

7.5 DISCUSSION
Appendix V: Rep Grid Procedure. ..................................................... 468
Appendix VI: Table of change events in working life discussed by
participants in study two. .......................................................... 470
Appendix VII: Example of completed repertory grid. ....................... 471
Appendix VIII: Interview schedule for study three. ............................ 472
Appendix IX: Email to participants in study three, sent a week
before their interview................................................................. 473
Appendix X: Example of an individual cause map............................ 474
Appendix XI: Variables from Individual Cause Maps .......................... 475

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant Information for Study One................................. 167
Table 2: Participant Information for Study Two................................. 231
Table 3: Themes Deriving from Repertory Grid Analysis with the
Number of Contributing Constructs............................................. 234
Table 4: Sub-Themes of the ‘Feelings’ Theme with the Number of
Contributing Constructs............................................................. 235
Table 5: Participant Information for Study Three.............................. 300

List of Figures

Figure 1: Cross-case Cause Map: Factors Influencing Evaluations of
Success in Career Change............................................................ 304
Acknowledgments

This thesis is dedicated to the thirty people who took part in this study. While they remain anonymous, their spirit of courage, dedication, and optimism is clearly evident. Their stories provide an unending source of inspiration for me, and I hope that they will contribute towards assisting others in accomplishing successful career changes. For the thoughtful, candid, and illuminating insights offered by all the participants, I am grateful.

The opportunity to pursue this research came at the right time for me. It has fulfilled my needs for challenge, intellectual stimulation and knowledge, it has also confirmed my interest in a field I am excited to be taking up as a new career. For having had this opportunity I am indebted to many people.

Firstly, to Lynne Purvis, without whose interest and acknowledgment of the potential of this research I would never have commenced this journey. Her relaxed supervisory style has offered me an environment in which to develop in my own way and build confidence. Her advice and encouragement have been constant and perfectly pitched to maintain my motivation levels throughout.

Yehuda Baruch and anonymous editors at Career Development International provided further motivation. Their advice, and acceptance of my paper for publication in May, 2005 offered reassurance of the topical value of this research area, and also provided a rite of passage for me in my academic development (see Wise, A. J., & Millward, L. J. (2005). The experiences of voluntary career change in 30-somethings and implications for guidance. Career Development International, 10 (5), 400-417). Correspondence I have received from readers of the paper since, has further served to encourage my research.

For providing a complimentary work environment while I have been studying I am grateful to both Melanie Taylor and Liz Arnott. Mel’s admirable approach of ‘where there’s a will there’s a way’ provided me with a flexible employment...
structure that has given me peace of mind over the past four years. Liz’s understanding and interest have been wonderful.

Constant interest, support and encouragement from those around me have contributed to me completing my thesis. Reon’s endless kindness, patience and support have been inspirational, I only hope I can do the same for you whenever you need me to. My mother has provided my favourite place to study, found thoughtful ways of keeping me cheerful, and has been a constant source of encouragement. The interest and recognition of my efforts by my brother and father have also been an important help. Finally, the belief of my friends both in me, and in my research has been motivational. Their friendship has also provided the necessary balance to my books and has got me through.

Thank you all.
CHAPTER ONE

THESIS OVERVIEW

1.5 INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to investigate the apparent current phenomenon of career change amongst the thirty-something age-group. While it is thought likely that thirtysomethings have always changed career to some extent, a number of indicators suggest its increased prevalence. Anecdotal evidence and numerous journalistic accounts of individuals in their thirties shifting lifestyle, and more specifically, their career, suggest frequency of occurrence as well as topicality (see appendix I).

Further confirmation for the focus of this thesis can also be inferred from established areas of study in the psychological literature as varied as redundancy and work life balance, as well as from the more recent recognition of the trend for second and multiple careers (Feldman, 2002). These contemporary issues, that appear to affect workers of all ages, are considered as potential contributing factors to thirty something career change. However, to date, no research has been carried out that focuses specifically on the career change experiences of this particular category of people.

In this research the focus is not only on understanding why individuals are currently changing career in their thirties, it is also to understand how they experience the transition process. If change among this age-group is increasingly common, it then seems opportune to understand ways in which the experience may be optimized, both in terms of the transition process being perceived in positive terms and the outcome being perceived as successful. The subjective definitions of the evaluative terms ‘positive’ and ‘successful’ are investigated.

Focusing firstly, on the reasons why individuals in their thirties would make a significant life change by switching career appears somewhat puzzling in terms of traditional expectations of their developmental goals. Super for instance, suggested the priorities of ‘stabilisation’, ‘establishment’, and ‘consolidation’ at this age (Super, 1980). Life change has never been associated with the thirties as it has been
with other decades. For instance, the mid-life crisis (Levinson, 1978), thought to pertain to individuals in the forty to forty-five age range, involves the reappraisal of “previous life structures with an eye to making revisions ‘while there is still time’” (Huyck, 1997, p. 390). While the quarter-life crisis (Jaques, 1969; Robbins & Wilner, 2001) associated with the twenties, is characterised by factors likely to provoke change such as identity confusion, insecurity and job disappointment. The characteristics of these crises suggest that the changes now seen in the lives of thirty-somethings may also stem from psychological motivators that are as yet unidentified. Another possible explanation for this apparent phenomenon is the influence of external factors in the current environment.

Features of the contemporary environment, including developments in multiple areas such as the economy, technology, and society in general, do indeed appear to provide a turbulent context in which change is an ever-present factor of life for all individuals. In the career theory literature the vocational consequences of this context have been reflected in the emergence of a range of structural definitions of career (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth & Larsson, 1996; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Feldman, 2002; Gouldner, 1957; Hall, 1976; Hall & Moss, 1998; Sturges, 1999). The first of these representations that spans traditional corporate and social boundaries was the notion of the boundaryless career (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). This perspective suggests that in the current context individuals are able to take control of their careers (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999), and implies a desire for high levels of personal responsibility, mirrored in a broader cultural trend of individualism (Watts, 1996). In contrast, however, contemporary organisational trends such as de-layering, downsizing, and outsourcing are likely to lead to career change for some individuals that is not under their control. The potential for both voluntary and involuntary types of career change stemming from the current environmental context is therefore considered likely to contribute to the trend of career change among thirty-somethings.

Within this current vocational context, the question is raised as to what comprises the psychological motivators for change. It is suggested that the scope (Evans, Gunz & Jalland, 1997) and relative desirability (Hall, 2002; Reitman & Schneer, 2003) of traditional objective indicators of career development (e.g., hierarchical progress
through promotion and financial remuneration) are reduced. This is further supported by research showing that the attainment of objective career factors is not necessarily linked to positive affect or perceptions of success (Bandura, 1997; Burke, 1999; Hall, 2002; Korman, Wittig-Berman & Lang, 1981; Schein, 1978). Instead, an understanding of the particular subjective career criteria held by an individual can illuminate their reasons for career change and the evaluations that they make of it. However, a recent claim will be considered that challenges the influence of subjective careers by suggesting that career choice in boundaryless careers is strongly driven by market forces that may counter the ability to find meaning and purpose (Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, 2006).

Investigating the ways in which individuals interpret and evaluate various experiences during their career change, including what they consider as the outcome of the change process, will extend our understanding of what constitutes positive and negative subjective judgments in such situations. In this research such knowledge is thought to contribute to the stated objective of furthering an awareness of how career change for thirty-somethings may be optimized. Motivation for this objective is two-fold. The first comes from wishing to achieve convergence between theory and practise, a need identified in the career literature by Kidd (2004) citing Savickas and Walsh (1996). The second motivation comes from the recognition that for interventions to be effective, specialist understanding of the particular needs of specific groups is beneficial.

In order to shed light on the diverse aspects of career change that are of interest in this research, a holistic perspective is adopted that captures the individual meaning of the experiences encountered. An overview is now provided of the theoretical framework of this research including some discussion of the methodological approach employed.

1.2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
This section outlines the theoretical framework of the current research, where a more thorough exploration is provided in Chapter Four. The three areas introduced here are the phenomenological level of study, the underlying constructivist principles and the interpretative framework of sensemaking.
Traditionally, career change has been studied within the context of an organisational setting. However, extending an understanding of the issues involved in career change within a boundaryless career context implies the need for study focused at the individual level, capturing the subjective experiences of those enacting them, in a manner that fully encompasses the myriad of potential influences. The philosophical approach of phenomenology is based on understanding the world from the individual viewpoint based on the assumption that people actively construct their worlds. As a consequence of the individual nature of interpretation, each person's view of 'reality' is regarded as unique.

In this research the experiences encountered in relation to career transition and the subsequent creation of meaning is studied through the lens of sensemaking theory, and in particular Karl Weick's interpretation of the process. Weick (1995) proposes that action, or enactment, i.e., what we do in reaction to an experience, should be the focus of attention. This is thought to reveal the meanings that are attached to the experience, that are created by cognitive schemes, or what Weick refers to as "retentive systems", developed through past learning. The sensemaking process is viewed as an iterative one, involving the individual forming unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions [schemes], which serve as predictions about future events. These then shape the interpretation of the events when they are experienced, but enactment also contributes to these schemes being recreated. The attribution of meaning is regarded as the outcome of sensemaking. When events are experienced that may be discrepant from predictions Weick suggests that the process of sensemaking is challenged. Such events are described as trigger events, since they trigger a need for explanation, and, correspondingly, for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed (Weick, 1995). Emphasis on the cognitive nature of these disruptions has recently been supplemented by acknowledgment of the fundamentally emotional nature of these threats (Millward & Kyriakidou, 2004).

The nature of the contemporary working environment that is characterised by career change and the "weakening" of organisational situations (Weick, 2001, p. 211) suggest twin challenges in sensemaking terms. Firstly, the novelty of career
transition experiences is thought likely to act as a triggering event, requiring a process of interpretation to understand them. Secondly, the environmental sources from which meaning may be derived are less salient than in a structured organisational context. Weick suggests that these potential threats may be overcome to make adaptation possible, and proposes a number of guides for action within the boundaryless career context. Instead of career planning and advancement, improvisation and learning are considered more effective, and with reduced options for marking hierarchical development, greater reliance on subjective milestones becomes appropriate (Weick & Berlinger, 1989). Weick (2001) has also drawn on Marshall’s (1989) concepts of agency (i.e., independence through self-assertion and control over the environment) and communion (i.e., interdependence through openness and integration of oneself with the environment) to further refine ideas on enactment in this context. He proposes that although the concept of enactment suggests individuals as agents of their own development, this is not simply because they are active, controlling and independent it is also because they organise cooperatively in order to learn. These two types of responses are considered complimentary and both invaluable in adapting to the boundaryless career environment.

To capture the sensemaking processes and adaptive responses involved in career change it is necessary to engage participants in the reinterpretation of their experiences (Bougon, Baird, Komocar, & Ross, 1990). Qualitative methodologies are considered the most appropriate way to gain access to these subjective interpretations of events (e.g., Maxwell, 1996), and narrative-based techniques in particular are thought to be uniquely placed for illuminating and examining the duality of career (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). The individual case studies obtained by these methods are analysed separately, and attempts to build generalised claims of relevance to a wider group are undertaken with caution.

1.3 THE FOCUS OF THE THESIS
From the brief introduction provided so far, it is apparent that the possible range of influences on the career change experiences of individuals in their thirties is wide-ranging. It is also evident that an insight into these varied influences is possible by the methodological approach employed. Achievement of the objectives of this study
will be possible by adopting a broad perspective to the study of career change, for a number of reasons. Since no previous research has focused specifically on career change experiences amongst this age-group only a general understanding of potentially relevant issues can be garnered from immersion in the career and developmental literature. Therefore, an initial exploratory approach to the investigation was appropriate to first determine the factors significant to the individuals concerned. From this base, that has subjective validity to those involved in the research, a justification is made for subsequently focusing on areas found to be significant.

A holistic perspective to the study of career change allows not only individuals to identify those factors that are subjectively meaningful to them, it also contributes by illuminating the complex interactions between these factors that affect the way in which they are experienced, interpreted and made sense of. A view of the career change experience from the situational context within which the individual is operating is therefore provided. This reference to context enlightens an understanding of the cognitive, behavioural and affective challenges faced during career change. For example, a temporal perspective to the career transition under investigation is possible since it can be placed within the context of the individual’s career as a whole. An insight into the particular environmental opportunities and constraints that are perceived as influencing the career changes of thirty-somethings is also possible. A final example relates to the relational perspective on career change that is provided.

In terms of the type of career change under investigation in this research, those that stem from voluntary and involuntary sources are included since both will contribute to career change among thirty-somethings, as indicated in section 1.1. Career transition literature identifies that the pivotal role of control contributes to these being fundamentally different experiences, suggesting the need for them both to be investigated. Another distinction made in classifying types of career change is based on the level of complexity it entails. This is defined by the extent to which the change involves a new employer, task or job function (Neal, 1999). A ‘complex’ type of career change, characterised by a move to a new occupation that requires fundamentally different skills, daily routines and work environments from the
present one (Feldman, 2002) relates to the type of career change that is of interest in this research.

The reasons for the particular focus on complex career change in thirty-somethings and the research objectives of this thesis are now summarised.

The first reason to focus on complex career change in relation to the thirty-something age-group is to investigate why it is occurring. Voluntary complex career change in this age-group is at odds with the traditional developmental tasks outlined earlier. The aim therefore, is to achieve an understanding of what is motivating such actions in the current context. In relation to involuntary career change amongst thirty-somethings, the objective is to identify whether the discontinuities experienced are perceived to be particularly challenging, since change has not generally been associated with this age-group.

The second reason for the focus on complex career change is that the high degree of novelty in the experiences encountered are likely to involve the greatest challenges in terms of sensemaking. As a consequence it is expected that the need for intervention in assisting the process of adjustment to such change is significant, thus making the objective of contributing to practise in this research particularly pertinent. Recognition of this need is identified in the career development literature in calls for greater understanding of the factors that account for variations in individual’s capacity to adjust successfully to change in the contemporary workplace, and a greater practical understanding of associated theoretical concepts such as career adaptability (Heppner, 1998; Savickas, 1997).

The final reason for focusing on complex career change is to extend an understanding of how it is evaluated. In the context of boundaryless careers the limited relevance of objective career indicators in defining progress and success has been identified. An insight into the criteria that thirty-somethings use to evaluate their career change will contribute to the nascent literature on the subjective meaning of success in this context (see Journal of Organisational Behaviour, Volume 26, 2005, Special Edition on Career Success). From this point forward the term career
change used in reference to the experiences of research participants implies career change of a complex type.

To conclude this introduction, a brief summary identifies that:

- The current research is prompted by the apparent contemporary phenomenon of career change amongst thirty-somethings that remains unexplored in psychological terms.

- The aim is to access the subjective meaning of the various individual, social and cultural factors that affect career change for this age-group, and to develop an understanding of the interpretations and evaluations of these factors.

- The findings will both contribute to the development of theory that adequately engages with the current ways in which individuals in their thirties are enacting their careers, and identify ways in which the process of career transition for this age-group appears to be optimized.

1.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS
The thesis comprises of three sections and eight chapters. The first section ‘Theorising’, consists of Chapters Two, Three and Four. The aim of this section is to provide a theoretical overview of the relevant career literature. The theoretical and methodological approach to the current investigation developed from this foundation.

Chapter Two reviews the extant literature that addresses areas relevant to career change in thirty-somethings. The structure of this chapter is in two main sections reflecting distinct theoretical approaches in career theory, namely, traditional theories based on positivist principles and emerging theories derived from constructivist beliefs. The contemporary relevance of the latter theories means that their contributions to this investigation are significant. However, the powerful argument in favour of adopting an integrated theoretical approach to the study of career (Guest & MacKenzie Davey, 1996; Maguire, 2002) means that potential contributions from classic career theory are also referenced. A critical stance is adopted in relation to both approaches, the key benefits and limitations of each are assessed with relevance
to the contemporary phenomenon under investigation. The relevance of four broad
categories of research are identified within these two major approaches as relevant to
the current investigation. These are i) the criteria that define career, ii) patterns of
career experience, iii) developmental influences on career, and iv) transition theories.

The literature review identifies a lack of research in a number of areas including
phenomenological experiences of career change, the role of emotion in career, and
the absence of any specific work on career change in the thirty-something age group.
Chapter Two concludes with an endorsement of the constructivist perspective and
defends a research paradigm centred on a phenomenological level of analysis within
a social constructivist framework.

Chapter Three establishes the theoretical framework of the thesis. Parameters are
defined to provide focus within the holistic approach to career change that is
adopted. In accordance with the phenomenological perspective these relate to
individual factors and to subjective interpretations of the context. A dynamic
understanding of the career change process is achieved through the sensemaking
processes involved, the influences of age factors within a life course framework, and
the malleability of some individual differences over time. The final section of
Chapter Three summarises areas of interest for further investigation, if and when
they arise during the research.

Chapter Four outlines the methodological approach to the thesis. The purely
qualitative methodology employed is justified on the basis of its appropriateness for
accessing the multi-faceted nature of the subject matter and in order to retain the
philosophical integrity of the research. The quality of the research is defined by
qualitative principles, and the criteria used to achieve the required ‘trustworthiness’
in the findings are outlined. The aim of accessing the dynamic sensemaking
processes involved in career change are set within a constructivist framework, and
lead on to the choice of data-gathering techniques that are used to elicit career
narratives. The reasons for the use of the semi-structured interview, and the
repertory grid as data-gathering techniques are provided as well as a guide for their
application. The analytical tools of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis,
grounded theory and cause maps are described. The use of these techniques
represents a logical development in moving from an exploratory approach focused at the individual case study level of analysis in Study One, to some specific focus on certain subject areas and a greater level of cross-case analysis in Study Two, to the presentation of findings in individual and cross-case causal maps to capture findings relating specifically to the way career change is evaluated.

The next section, named ‘Exploration’ comprises Chapters Five, Six and Seven. These chapters report research studies conducted on career change in thirty-somethings.

Chapter Five presents the first study in this thesis. The focus of this study is on the experiences of voluntary career change in thirty-somethings. An exploratory approach is adopted in order to achieve an understanding of the issues of subjective relevance to the participants. Overall a positive impression of voluntary career change is gained. Predominantly self-constructed identities and an awareness of subjective values achieved by the thirties appear to provide motivation to enact career change. The process of change seems to be assisted firstly by elements of continuity, for example, in terms of transferring skills and maintaining expectations of achievement levels. Secondly, subjective motivation and perceptions of control appear to be linked to the context being viewed in terms of opportunities rather than constraints. The findings highlight the contemporary relevance of career theory. Omissions, such as the apparent significance of a time-out period between the two careers are noted.

Chapter Six reports the second research study. The focus is on the involuntary career experiences of thirty-somethings. Expectations that the lack of control and frequently unwanted nature of this type of career change would result in it being perceived as a predominantly negative experience were not unanimously met. The ability of some individuals to overcome initial negative affect by cognitively reframing events in positive terms identifies ways in which such an experience can be rectified. The significant role of emotion is identified in influencing cognitions, behaviours, and ultimately the evaluation of the career change experience. The study also extends an understanding of perceived control, identity issues and the subjective criteria valued by thirty-somethings, in relation to an involuntary career change.
setting. Chapter Six closes with a review of the similarities and differences found between voluntary and involuntary career change experiences, thus providing a recap of the key findings from this, and the previous study.

Chapter Seven consists of the final research study. The aim of this study is to further extend the findings from the previous two studies by focusing on the outcomes of career change and how they are evaluated. The rationale for this focus is to understand the subjective meaning of success in the boundaryless career context for thirty-somethings and to further define the attributes of the competencies that contribute to effective career change. Key findings are represented as cause maps to provide clarity and enhance understanding of the complex inter-relationships leading to evaluations of career change outcomes. The study contributes to the literature on subjective meanings of success by identifying the presence of feedback loops representing cycles of development arising from the transition experience. A more refined understanding of career competencies is also achieved.

The final section, 'Implications' comprises of Chapter Eight. This chapter provides a summary of the three empirical studies and addresses their implications for theory.

Chapter Eight draws the thesis to a close. Firstly, it provides an overview of the current research and identifies the key findings. Then the perspective of career change offered by this research is differentiated from the extant theoretical literature. The discussion is also broadened to address the implications of the findings to psychological research in general. In the following section, a number of paths for future research identified during the course of the research are discussed. The chapter concludes by affirming the potential for thirty-somethings to thrive in a boundaryless career climate.
PART I

THEORIZING
CHAPTER TWO

A THEORETICAL CONTEXT

2.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter seeks to provide an outline of relevant career theory to enable this research to be positioned within a suitable theoretical and empirical context. The chapter structure is divided into two main sections, based on the categorisation of psychological career theory into two groups (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002; Zunker, 2002) labelled as "established theories" and "emerging theories" (Brown & Brookes, 1996). This provides a historical perspective that traces the development of psychological career theory. The first section, introduces established or traditional theories of career. An understanding of these theories is valuable since they form the basis of our understanding of career, provide the benchmark against which all later theory has developed and remain largely influential. Due primarily to changes in the working climate and developments in research techniques the limitations of these theories have become apparent. Since the mid-1990s they have been superseded by a wave of new research in the form of "emerging theories".

The perspective at the time of the current research, ten years since this shift in thinking began, marks an interesting time for reflection. It is believed that an integrated approach that draws on the relevant findings from both approaches is beneficial (Cohen & Mallon, 2001; Guest & MacKenzie Davey, 1996; Maguire, 2002). The approach adopted in this thesis that is proposed in Chapter Three, derives from the recommendations of contemporary career theory, thereby ensuring the contributions made are at the forefront of career research. However, a broad and inclusive theoretical scope will be adopted in relation to understanding the career change experiences of individuals in their thirties.

2.1.2 A Historical Perspective on Career Theory

The division of psychological career theories into established and emergent classifications is based on two major schools of thinking, termed "objectivist" and "constructivist" approaches respectively (Savickas, 2000). Traditionally research on
careers has been largely based on the philosophy of logical positivism (Brown & Brooks, 1990; Savickas, 1992). This places an emphasis on objective reality where an individual’s traits, such as ability or personality can be measured or quantified, and viewed in terms of their occupational implications (e.g., Holland, 1973; Strong, 1943). At this time conceptions of adult development and career were viewed in terms of stages, with varying degrees of reference to life activities beyond that of work (e.g., Levinson, 1978; Super, 1957). Contributions from sociological theories identified the influences of objective aspects of career such as social class determinants on career outcomes (e.g., Blau & Duncan, 1967; Chinoy, 1955; Roberts, 1968). Career was defined predominantly in objective terms, with reference to the institutional forms of participation in the social world, consisting of identifiable positions, statuses and situations. These markers gauge a person’s movement through the social environment and the structure of this development can be studied in terms of career lines. Until the shift in the mid-1990s a stable rather than a changing environment was assumed and empirical studies emphasised intra-organisational rather than inter-organisational transition (Arthur, 1994).

Although a two-sided representation of career, acknowledging its objective and subjective components had been in existence for many years (Hughes, 1937) the subjective aspect received scant attention from traditional theories. The strongly quantitative methodological approach most often employed, provided only a partial perspective on the meaning of career. This limitation, together with the inadequacy of the prevailing linear representations of career development to depict contemporary changes in the social and working environment prompted a new theoretical approach to the study of careers. The need to be more individually-focused and flexible was recognised, and this was facilitated by qualitative methodology. The theoretical foundation of this new approach is social constructivism, that has been described as providing a second perspective to career research (Savickas, 1992), by addressing in a clear, straightforward and illuminating way those areas which previously had not been systematically acknowledged, or only indirectly (Savickas, 1997; 2000).

The social constructivist perspective suggests that “…human functioning cannot be reduced to laws or principles, and cause and effect cannot be inferred” (Brown & Brooks, 1990, p. 11). It therefore assumes that there is no fixed external reality to be
objectively known but instead a fluid social reality is co-constructed. This allows an insight into the ways individuals subjectively interpret their lives and ascribe meaning to the various facets of their career as they change and unfold. Not only does this approach address the need for understanding the subjective career, it also places the individual in a central and more powerful position by viewing them as actively constructing and influencing their own lives. A dynamic and flexible approach to development is adopted in contrast to earlier deterministic life stage models. Contextual action theory, rooted in the social constructivist paradigm (Young & Valach, 2000; Young, Valach & Collin, 1996) focuses on the notion of meaning in career psychology, describing it as an ongoing, ever-changing and holistic experience of contextual meaning making. The dynamic and interactive contributions of behaviour, cognition and social meaning are therefore recognised in relation to career.

An overview of the context in which each of the school of theories was established, their characteristics, and their relevance and limitations in relation to the subject area under investigation are now presented.

2.2 TRADITIONAL THEORIES OF CAREER

2.2.1 The Cultural Context Relevant to Traditional Theories of Career

The major shift that has occurred in career theory thinking is, at least in part, a reflection of the cultural context affecting the lives of individuals. A useful perspective on this views culture as an interactive process comprising of two main components the creation of shared activities or cultural practices and the creation of shared meaning or cultural interpretation (Greenfield, 1997). As well as being the products of action these cultural systems also provide the conditioning elements of further action (Kroeber & Kluckholm, 1952). As such they provide a basis of ideas with attached values that come to have a historically derived context. Motivation for adopting prevailing cultural mores is offered by a social psychological perspective that considers that its value comes not from the actual number of people who think in the same way but in the belief that others think in a similar way to oneself. Jodelet (1989, p. 50) remarks “The idea that others think like us consolidates our beliefs and makes them more powerful, it also gives a feeling of togetherness, both of these things make culture important for people.” In career terms, this perspective suggests
that cultural influence is likely to be reflected in, for example, vocational choice
decisions, goal-setting and evaluative processes that incorporate time and place in
both their specificity and breadth.

Up until approximately twenty-five years ago the prevailing social and organisational
cultural influences affecting careers, and consequently career theories in the western
world were significantly different in a number of key ways to those that have
increasingly influenced contemporary careers since. Prior to the effects of
globalisation, competitiveness and significant technological developments,
traditional careers theories were based on assumptions of strong and enduring
organisational structures that provided the security of long-term, permanent
employment and psychological contracts based on lasting relationships. The stability
of organisations and the role of the employee within inherently hierarchical
structures are reflected in the traditional definition of career as a meaningful
progression through a series of related jobs, with upward advancement being seen as
the key to progression within an organisation. The structural descriptions of career
development such as ‘steady state’ and ‘linear careers’ (Driver, 1982) reflect these
assumptions of the worker holding a common work role for life and striving for
upward mobility. Although the relevance of this type of career structure has
diminished, it remains the dominant model in some organisations (McDonald,
Brown, & Bradley, 2005) and retains an influence identifiable in cultural references
reflecting the notions of role continuity and vertical mobility (i.e. evident in terms
such as career ladder, plateauing and lateral transfer).

The study of career at this time was predominantly focussed within an organisational
context, leading Kanter (1989) to describe such a career type as a “bureaucratic
career”. In the lifespan development model careers are viewed as a series of social
adjustments to the larger organisational culture, concluding in job permanence
(Miller & Form, 1951). Models of organisational culture such as that of Schein
focus on what he described as “a basic set of assumptions that defines for us what we
pay attention to, what things mean, and how to react emotionally to what is going on,
and what actions to take in various kinds of situations” (Schein, 1992, p. 22). These
assumptions will clearly reflect the culture at a societal level and are therefore best
understood in terms of a broad societal context, such as a national culture.
At the societal level of analysis the theory of opportunity structure (Roberts, 1968) focused on the influence of homogenous contexts such as class, educational experiences, and family background on vocation. It provided a predominantly deterministic view of occupational entry being constrained by the system of social stratification. While this sociological approach emphasised the constraints that were believed to govern career choice it omitted an individual level of analysis, not therefore considering the possible influence of factors such as intelligence or effort. This perhaps reflects a culture less individualistic than that of today, where a person’s future was considered ordained by the situation of their birth. It suggests a predictable world, where an individual’s expectations were limited by their direct social world and career choice was less concerned with the fulfilment of subjective values.

The characteristics of traditional theoretical approaches to career development and transition are introduced in the following two sub-sections of this chapter.

2.2.2 Characteristics of Traditional Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Career Development

Until the 1950s career theories that were concerned with the psychological characteristics of individuals enacting careers were dominated by a trait and factor approach, originally proposed by Parsons (1909). This suggests that individual characteristics (traits) can be measured through testing, and that certain characteristics are required for successful job performance (factors). From this perspective the key to successful occupational choice is matching personal traits with job factors. This differentialist position, focusing on matching individual differences with differences in jobs, was continued in the form of two theories that remain highly influential, namely, Super’s (1954) theory of vocational choice and development and Holland’s (1958) work on person-environment fit. These two theories combine elements of trait and factor theory with self-concept theory and developmental psychology.

An introduction to the component of identity known as the occupational self-concept, or what Schein (1978) later referred to as a ‘career anchor’ is perhaps necessary here.
This has been described as comprising of three types of self-perception: the person’s self-perceived talents and abilities, their self-perceived motives and needs and their self-perceived attitudes and values. Within this framework, it is assumed that each type of self-perception is shaped over time in relation to work experience, and comes to form the individual’s core internal meaning of career. The development of a career self-concept helps the individual assess past career experiences and focus on future goals and aspirations, thus enabling their ‘potential’ to be used more effectively. Both Holland and Super proposed that individuals strive to implement their self-concept by choosing to enter an occupation seen as most likely to permit self-expression. Holland (1973; 1985) identified six types of personality and occupations in his RIASEC theory, proposing that classification in these terms would contribute to the identification of an environment that was congruent with personality. Congruence he predicted, would lead to vocational satisfaction, stability, and achievement whereas incongruence would result in dissatisfaction and stress.

The developmental aspect of self-concept relates to defined age-related stages through which individuals are thought to proceed. In career terms each development stage is characterised by different career priorities depending on the self-concept at the time, and this is thought to have repercussions as the individual seeks to implement their self-concept in occupational terms. Super (1980) identified an establishment stage for individuals aged between twenty-five to forty-four years old, following on from a stage of exploration and preceding one of maintenance. During the establishment phase the individual is thought to stabilise, consolidate and advance in their occupation. Stabilising in a job was considered to occur between twenty-four to thirty five years old and consolidating one’s position between the ages of thirty-five to fifty-five years old (Neville & Super, 1988). The concept of vocational maturity was used to describe the developmental prerequisites necessary for “readiness to cope with developmental tasks of one’s life stage” (Super & Jordaan, 1983, p. 4). In the career rainbow concept, Super (1980) provided a framework for viewing careers within the individual’s total life-space and by referencing their various roles, recognised the occupational role in a position of equal influence amongst a range of other roles that interact and, at times conflict. The later ‘life-span, life-space’ conceptualisation incorporated the psychology of individual
development and how it combined with these roles (Super, 1990). While it remained prescriptive of stages, these now being the priorities or concerns an individual may have at any point in his or her adult life, it recognised the likelihood of re-exploration and re-establishment during life transitions, therefore, moving on from a purely linear developmental perspective and providing a more explicitly integrative view of career development. The career pattern potentially resulting from this is reflected in Driver’s (1982) spiral configuration. This reflects the influence of both work and non-work experience and represents progression upwards within one field, then a change of area and movement up within that.

Levinson’s (1978) stage theory has many parallels with Super’s work. He also identified stages that were closely linked with age and the associated personal issues relevant to that period. Levinson’s theory was based on Erikson’s (1968) theory of life stages and developmental tasks. Levinson offered three perspectives with which to contrast development periods. The first relates to changes in biological and psychological functioning, the second relates to the sequence of generations, and the role of each generation in terms of the particular function they have in the overall work of society; and the third relates to the evolution of careers. Levinson conceived adulthood in terms of a sequence of age-linked development periods of approximately twenty years, each featuring a relatively stable structure involving decision-making, implementation and psycho-social adjustment. Between these times relatively unstable transitional periods of approximately five to seven years are thought to occur, involving commitment to critical choices that provide the basis for developing the next phase of life structure, perhaps involving psychological upheaval and conflict.

The decade of the thirties, the focus of this thesis, was regarded by Levinson as a ‘novice phase’ up until the age of thirty-three. During this time he considered the key task to be the development of a dream based on a personal understanding of the self in the world, composed of both conscious and unconscious elements. He proposed that this dream is implemented in occupation and in the formation of personal relationships, and that it is projected into the future, providing both direction and motivation. At the end of this stable period Levinson suggests a transition point that occurs approximately between thirty-two to forty years of age.
This he proposes involves tasks focused towards settling down, and gaining individuality, authority and respect.

Levinson addressed the influence of gender and suggested that in general the nature and timings of developmental tasks are similar for men and women but that the manner in which the tasks were worked through differed. This was found to be particularly evident at the transitional period in the thirties. Women’s dreams were described as generally being more complex, reflecting the importance of relational attachments as well as professional success whereas men’s dreams were considered to focus more on autonomy and occupational achievements (Gilligan, 1980; 1982; Miller, 1976). Levinson suggested that women who opt for marriage or forming a close partnership in their twenties, may see their thirties as a period of individuation and separation as they pursue their career. However, women who focus on career goals in their twenties, may give priority to relational goals in their thirties. This suggestion was reiterated in the work of Bardwick (1980) who similarly suggested that women require much more than career and professional success, and that during mid-life, careers may become unsatisfactory as managing multiple professional and familial roles become too demanding. Moreover, concerns about significant relationships may become paramount, resulting in a major reassessment of career and life patterns.

One final perspective that has contributed significantly to traditional theories of career development is that of behaviourism. Krumboltz and colleagues suggested that while genetics play a role in influencing an individual’s career path, the role of social learning also plays an important part (Krumboltz, Mitchell & Jones, 1976). Consequently, environmental factors (e.g., family experience and cultural values), learning experiences (e.g., positive reinforcement), cognitive, and emotional responses are all considered to contribute to career. This perspective differs substantially from differentialist approaches and from the determinism implied by the notion of opportunity structures. Despite certain environmental constraints people are assumed to have considerable freedom in their career development once they are engaged in social learning.
2.2.3 Characteristics of Traditional Transition Theories

Transition theories seek to understand how individuals respond to environmental change. The central concern is identifying the internal psychological dynamics that emerge when individuals move from one relatively stable state or life pattern to another. In relation to career transition theory, the prevailing view, until the 1980s, was of any transition as a single and infrequent event, which predominantly occurred within the same organisation. These time-bound events were associated with negative affect, a connection that derived from the generalisation of findings from research on adaptation to bereavement. For instance, the Kubler-Ross (1969) phase model of coping with loss was applied as a general framework of reactions and feelings considered to accompany a range of transition events. Hopson and Adams (1976) proposed a seven-phase sequence of experiencing a disruption (immobilisation, minimization), gradually acknowledging its reality (depression, acceptance of reality and then letting go), testing oneself (testing), understanding oneself (searching for meaning), and incorporating changes in one’s behaviour (internalisation). Jaffe and colleagues developed a model of change that they derived from people recovering from a personal crisis. The transition curve they proposed moves from attachment to the past, to attention on the future, and from focusing on the exterior (the environment) to attending to the self (Jaffe, Scott & Tobe, 1994).

Early transition models relating specifically to a vocational context (e.g., Bridges, 1980; Schlossberg, 1984) tend to depict the stages an individual passes through when entering a new role or job as an evolutionary continuum. If change is associated with the loss of an established job, a grief-like process may follow (Fagin & Little, 1984; Hill, 1978; Parkes, 1971) identified as a preoccupation with, and urge to search for what was lost (Parkes, 1972) along with less specific reactions such as increased anxiety and depression. Variables that have been described as affecting the nature and course of grief include the degree of forewarning of the loss; the reasons offered for it; the individual’s personal history of other losses, family circumstances and the degree of social support (Parkes, 1985; Parkes & Weiss, 1983).

Movement into the transition involves encounter with novel situations and experiences. Louis (1980), for example, suggested ways in which sensemaking at this early stage involved coping with a new role, contrasting current experience with
prior experience, and dealing with surprise arising from disconfirmed expectations and/or unanticipated novelties. The middle period is represented as a time involving the readjustment of career and personal identity perceptions, the main objective being to minimise person-job misfit. This period has the potential to be emotional turbulent and confusing (Borgen & Amundson, 1984; 1987; Schlossberg, 1984). The subsequent stage is characterised by a more settled relationship between the person and their role as they move beyond the transition process. The outcome, whether it is judged to be positive or negative, is often seen as the re-establishment of a new sense of stability in terms of the individual’s position on their career path (Ladd, 1993). Once stability is achieved, it is suggested that rather than progress being a continued priority, issues of stability are of paramount importance. It is also proposed that there may be a restriction of opportunities at this time, likely to result in career plateauing (Hall, 1976). However, later revisions of career development theory (e.g., Greenhaus, 1987; Levinson, 1978) suggest a phenomenon of mid-career reappraisal that identifies issues of boredom, obsolescence, or involuntary career change challenging the person to reassess their career.

Nicholson (1987) also described the transitional process of job change in terms of distinct phases, although in addition to the encounter, adjustment and stabilisation stages he proposed an initial stage prior to the actual change that he described as one of preparation, involving expectation and anticipation. He also furthered the approach to transition by proposing that it was a cyclical process, and that at some later stage following stabilisation the individual then returns to the first stage. This notion of recursion suggests that the last stage of one cycle is the first of the next, and indeed that if change is rapid then cycles may short-circuit one another. For example, adjustment in one cycle may be interrupted by the preparation and encounter stages of a new cycle.

The transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska, DiClemente, Velicer & Rossi, 1992) derived from health psychology, has been applied to organisational change (Prochaska, Prochaska, & Levesque, 2001), but its relevance to broader occupational settings has not yet been assessed. The model identifies five stages: pre-contemplative, which ends when the problem is identified; contemplation, considered to be the motivational force for change; preparation, when the action plan is
developed; action which reinforces new behaviour, and finally, maintenance. The model integrates a number of theoretical constructs, highlighting the notion of readiness for change, which comprises of a demonstrable need for change, self-efficacy, and an opportunity to participate in the change process (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993). It is thought that movement through the stages is governed by decisional balance (Janis & Mann, 1977), i.e., the anticipated risks of change versus the potential benefits of change. This suggests that individuals prepare for action when the perceived benefits of change outweigh the anticipated risks of change (Prochaska, Norcross & DiClemente, 1994).

With regard to the management of transitions, Hall (1976) highlights the importance of success and failure cycles. He suggests that if exploration leads to experimental changes in behaviour that in turn lead to success, then these are likely to be integrated into identity and may encourage future explorations and adaptations. Failure cycles, on the other hand, are thought to occur when an individual’s self-esteem is damaged, leading to a narrowing of their perception in the opportunity structures available, thereby preventing them from dealing effectively with the demands of uncertainty. Potential influences that are thought to affect whether the outcome of change is perceived in terms of success or failure, include initial expectations, the degree of socialisation assistance such as induction processes, task factors, feedback, supervisory style, and perceptions of career development contingencies. Other research on adjustment levels has considered the influence of factors such as the degree of continuity between the roles a person has before and after the transition (Biddle, 1979; Bloom, 1964) and the amount of emotional support the career changer receives from family and friends (Nicholson, 1984). These findings that acknowledge the influence of contextual factors are in accordance with Nicholson and West’s (1988) recommendation that for careers to be meaningfully studied, a thorough analysis of transitions and the intervening periods is needed. This requires attention to both the psychological constructs that impart meaning to individual lives and shape their futures, and acknowledgment of the influences of elements from the particular cultures and sub-cultures in which they are set.
The following section provides a critique of traditional career development and transition theories, identifying their limitations and questioning their methodological foundations.

### 2.2.4 Limitations to Traditional Theories of Career

The assumptions implicit in much of classic career research have provoked criticism in terms of both their theoretical and applied limitations. A key criticism relates to the predominant representation of career in terms of vertical movement through the hierarchical structure of an organisation. The views of researchers, who identified vertical mobility as one among many types of career, and others who actively sought to dispel the notion that vertical movement was necessary for an individual’s ability to formulate a meaningful career (Becker, 1952; Hughes, 1937; Roth, 1963) received minimal attention.

However, arguments against a position in which vertical movement in careers predominate are powerful. Firstly, such a view might limit researchers on a priori grounds as to the type of work that the concept can be meaningfully applied. In other words, a substantial sector of the working population would be ignored if vertical advancement were considered the only type of viable career. Secondly, this position ignores numerous occupations that recognise meaningful careers involving no movement through a hierarchy of power or control. In the absence of such stratification, members of occupations have been shown to construct meaningful careers in terms of movement between work settings (Becker, 1952), mobility across geographical space (Weiss & Faulkner, 1983), and in gaining a strongly defined identity from staying in one position but demonstrating an increasingly superior command of the work itself (Bailyn, 1984; Schein, 1971; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). Finally, an emphasis on vertical movement implies a moral notion that success is equivalent to upward mobility, whereas, career success may be defined in subjective terms, as has been suggested is increasingly likely in boundaryless careers. Alternatively success criteria may be derived from a sub-culture (Becker, 1953; 1961), artists for example, who perform “art for art’s sake” (Caves, 2000, p. 4) are likely to define success more in terms of the gratification they receive from their work than in terms of objective rewards from the sale of their work; and teachers...
have been described as often framing their career success in the learning and attainments of their students (Parsons, 2002).

The focus of traditional theories on organisational stability suggests the permanency of employment with a single organisation and transition predominantly within it. Varied types of employment contract (e.g., core employee, temp, consultant, contractor) have been considered as a differential in the job change process (Watts, 1981), however, minimal attention appears to have been paid to the career experiences of those who work outside organisational settings, such as the self-employed. Complex career change involving inter-organisational transitions and complete occupational change were also rarely considered.

The association of change with negative affect in many traditional transition theories, largely due to their derivation from studies of bereavement, is valuable in drawing attention to affective responses in such circumstances. The link has since been supported by findings on organisational change (Bridges, 2001; Woodward, Bucholz & Hess, 1987; Zell, 2003). However, the extent to which links can be made between the trauma of human loss and the emotions involved in job change remains questionable. Transition theories may also be criticised for emphasising the role of the organisation in shaping the destiny of the employer, thereby limiting an understanding of the individual’s influence on their own career. Focus on objective indicators of development and success in these theories has also limited an understanding of the subjective career.

Developmental theorists in general have also been criticised for failing to give an adequate account of the role of autonomy and self-consciousness in directing career patterns (Blustein, 1981). Instead emphasis has been placed on opportunity structures and the influence of the organisation in shaping careers. Some references to individual effort are captured in concepts such as the ‘creativity’ career anchor (Schein, 1978), the ‘getting high’ career success motivation (Derr, 1986) and the personality type of ‘enterprise’ (Holland, 1973). However, Hall (1994) notes that these have been regarded as one of several options rather than a necessary element for consideration in relation to career behaviour. He argues for distinctive, personally relevant opportunities to be addressed. Some early researchers, such as
Shephard (1984) focused on ideas of human potential and uniqueness, and the associated discomfort with externally defined goals. Axelrod (1984) highlighted the search for alignment between enlightened self-interest and communal interest, summed up in the agency versus communion dichotomy. Similarly, Kirzner’s (1992) work focused on individual discovery and Freeman and Gilbert’s (1988) suggested that personal enterprise is a path to expression of deeply held identities and values, identifying that enterprise should perhaps be viewed as more of an integral rather than an optional component of people’s career behaviour.

In relation to age and development stages, a few theorists avoided making specific links (Baird & Kram, 1983; Dalton, Thompson & Price, 1977). However, influential theorists, such as Levinson and Super, have been heavily criticised for their emphasis on specific age ranges. In response, Levinson protested that his model should not be viewed as a blueprint for the concrete course of an individual’s life (Levinson & Levinson, 1996, p. 414), while Super (1980; 1990) adopted a revised, more flexible approach to the link between age and stage in his concepts of the career rainbow and the ‘life-span life-space’ concept that followed. These propose that careers may follow a sequence and also exhibit distinct periods, but they emphasise that the stages are a consequence, not of chronological age per se, but of society’s age-related roles and expectations (Kohli & Meyer, 1986).

However, such approaches have also been criticised for a number of reasons. Rothstein (1980) criticised stage theorists for not sufficiently acknowledging the unpredictable way that opportunity structures may unfold. Hall (1986) highlighted the difficulty in identifying what career stage a person is in, especially, for instance, if they entered a career relatively late in life, thus emphasising the irrelevance of linking career development stages with certain life stages as careers become more fluid and diverse. A more general criticism that may be levelled at stage theories relates to the difficulties of attempting to represent the diversity of individual development in a definitive manner. From this position, stage theories, however broadly construed, may be criticised for exhibiting a prescriptive quality of indicating not only what life is, but also what it ought to be at a particular point in the life course.
Another common criticism, particularly aimed at development theorists, questions the validity of their findings due to the limited sample populations on which they were based. Both Super (1954) and Levinson’s (1978) studies for instance, employed small numbers (n= forty to fifty) of American, white males as their research samples, thereby raising the issue of the wider relevance of their findings in terms of gender, race and culture. Critics of traditional approaches to career have taken particular issue with their implicit male orientation, both empirically and ideologically and called for a more explicit emphasis on the careers of women (Gutek & Larwood, 1987; Marshall, 1989; Pringle, 1996; Woold, 2000). However, another angle of attack has come from researchers who have argued that influential theories (e.g., Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978) focused on the career stages of men, have a limited heterosexual orientation, and inadequately represent the development issues of gay men (Cornett & Hudson, 1987).

Finally, research on person-environment fit has been reviewed on numerous occasions (e.g., Spokane, 1985; Tranberg, Slane & Ekeberg, 1993) and the validity of Holland’s six-fold model of personality types has been questioned (e.g., Prediger, 2000). A deficit of such approaches that has been identified is that they have predominately been concerned with the measurement of initial career preference and entry. Most of the empirical studies on which Holland’s theory were based had student samples and used intentions and preferences rather than actual career decisions and destinations as dependent variables (Nicholson, 1987). Few studies based on a differentialist approach have examined later decision-making, actual behavioural outcomes and on-going job histories. As a result, a fairly static impression of occupational choice has been provided and insight to be gained from Holland’s theory appears limited to the early stages of a career, with little reference to on-going change. On this basis its relevance to contemporary careers therefore appears questionable (Herriot, 1984; Super, 1981).

One further critique in relation to Holland’s work is that while subsequent studies have generally supported the proposition that individuals make occupational choices that are congruent with their interests (Spokane, 1985), others have cast doubt on the assertion that congruence results in satisfaction and stability (Tinsley, 2000; Tranberg et al., 1993). Also, Holland does not consider what happens to employees
in incongruent occupations over time. Based on Hall’s (1976) suggestions regarding factors that contribute to perceived outcome success outlined earlier, it may be expected that interests and occupations become more congruent as the individual becomes socialised into an organisation. Holland also failed to consider the role of external factors influencing feelings of congruence and in affecting occupational choice.

In summary, a critique of traditional career theories reveals their limited relevance to contemporary career transition experiences, due primarily to their narrow focus on careers as the prerogative of a limited set of people, in a particular organisational context, and characterised by a defined linear developmental pattern. The questionable assumption that transition experiences in an occupational setting bear much resemblance to phases of bereavement is also raised. The range of influences that have challenged the contemporary relevance of many of these theories are now discussed.

2.2.5 Challenges to Traditional Structural Concepts and Definitions of Career
Economic, technological and societal developments have radically transformed the structure of the working environment and the expectations of individuals over the last quarter century. From an organisational perspective, on-going processes of restructuring, often accompanied by redundancies, have weakened traditional bureaucracies (Baruch, 2004) and replaced them with the phenomenon of the boundaryless organisation. This is characterised by flatter structures, reduced barriers between the organisation and the environment, and reduced geographical boundaries, at both the national level (e.g., alternative working relationships and ‘virtual organisations’) and at the international level (in terms of globalisation) (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick & Kerr, 1995). In this context, careers have become increasingly transitional, flexible and dynamic in nature. From an individual perspective, a job for life is generally no longer expected (Kerr & Slocum, 1987), and the life course is characterised by an increasing lack of predictability, thus replacing the assumptions of Super’s (1957; 1980) sequence of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline. Instead a range of occupations, employment contract types and workplace settings may be experienced during a career history. In the last decade or so, career theory has increasingly represented
different aspects of the response to transitions as coexisting, unique and on-going events rather than separate, universal and time-bounded. In relation to this research, the recognition of a sense of continuity during transition, rather than the breaking of bonds reflects compatibility with the processes of sensemaking and the notion of narrative coherence.

While traditional career theories were based on the assumption that people expected to work for an organisation for their entire working life, it is now recognised that organisations should be regarded as short-term providers of current jobs (Tiedeman & Miller-Tiedeman, 1984) that offer 'opportunities for development' rather than the security of long term employment (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995; Rousseau, 1995; 1996). The consequential shift in psychological contracts from being long-term based career relationships to transactional, short-term based ones between individuals and their employing organisation, has been termed the 'new deal' (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995). This has a number of implications for both parties. For instance, while organisations may offer development opportunities as part of their contribution towards the psychological contract they are less involved in the planning and management of their employee's careers (Arnold, 1997; Baruch, 2004). This suggests that careers are increasingly the 'property' of individuals and there is greater need for personal responsibility in relation to career development (Stickland, 1996; Sturges, Simpson & Altman, 2003). The increased ownership of careers has also been associated with broader and more subjective definitions of the meaning of career that may involve multiple commitments corresponding to various areas of the individual's life, the significance of which may relate to their life stage (Cohen, 1991).

In terms of career outcomes the traditional reliance on objective measures of success has, as mentioned in Chapter One, been challenged by awareness that their attainment is not necessarily linked to positive outcomes. For example, findings suggest that receiving high pay and promotions do not necessarily make people feel proud or successful (Hall, 2002; Korman et al., 1981; Schein, 1978), they may generate work and personal alienation (Burke, 1999) and depressive reactions (Bandura, 1997). In addition, the relevance of former measures of success defined within the context of predictable, linear career paths has been over-turned, forcing a
new perspective of career success. Subjective measures of success such as inner satisfaction, life balance, autonomy and other measures of self-perception have come to be recognised alongside, or to hold greater value, than traditional external success criteria. An extensive international study by Finegold and Mohrman (2001) identified 'life balance' as the most highly rated subjective criterion. Another large-scale study found that the meaning of career success among business professionals was influenced by five criteria: status, time for self, challenge, security, and social (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). With the exception of status, these findings reveal the significance of subjective career success criteria to be over and above objective criteria such as prestige, power, money and advancement. Various other subjective success criteria have been identified, such as a sense of meaning (Wrzesniewski, 2002), purpose (Cochran, 1990), transcendence (Dobrow, 2003) and contribution (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Another emerging theme in vocational psychology that has challenged established career theories is a growing recognition of the need to reference previously underrepresented populations. Research on women's careers (e.g., Bardwick, 1980; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Marshall, 1989) for instance, has focused attention on the link between work and personal lives, and made this harder to ignore than in previous studies based predominantly on male experiences. Consequently, this has contributed to greater recognition of the influence of various non-work factors on careers. This is illustrated for example, in Savickas's (2002) substitution of an individual development worldview for a contextualist worldview in updating Super's (1957) theory of vocational development. Lent and colleagues highlighted the mutual relationship between the individual and environmental factors in their social cognitive career theory, "supportive or oppressive features of the interpersonal environment affect and are affected by cognitive and behavioral person factors" (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994, p. 117). Some contextualist theories address one or more properties of context, whereas others look specifically at how factors, such as roles, are woven together (Leong & Hartung, 2000; Patton & McMahon, 1999; Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg, 1986). Lent and colleagues suggest that a contextualist perspective has significant potential in addressing career development in specific populations, such as women and ethnic groups, since their situations can be defined precisely.
A final trend that has emerged in career theory and has resulted in revisions to traditional developmental theories is the notion of themes rather than stages in models of the life course. Themes consider not only biological developmental factors but also normative socio-cultural influences and non-normative events such as unique career and life changes. This offers a more flexible view of the possibility of behavioural change at any point in the life cycle than was accounted for in established career developmental theories. Acknowledging the combination of these factors in this way contributes to an understanding of the complexity of each individual's status at any particular time. While it may be difficult in research to address the broad range of differences that may be identified, such an attempt improves the credibility of the findings and provides a balanced view of an individual's agency, since the perception of their position among unequal social positions is considered (Savickas, 2002).

2.2.6 Summary
In summary, the predominant view of career as a static concept that is represented in traditional career theories has been challenged by socio-economic changes that require career to be depicted as a dynamic and ever-evolving concept. Traditional notions of transition as defined periods of disruption and discontinuity no longer appear to provide a representative picture of actual responses. Instead elements of continuity have been noted in sensemaking terms, in themes or retrospective reconstructions of experience (Weick, 2001) and in identity terms, in a person's ever more clearly emerging self-concept (Schein, 1978; Super, 1963).

Understanding the meaning attributed to events necessitates an understanding of the individual perspective that was rarely addressed in early career theory. Super's recognition of this is clear in his replacement of self-concept dimensions with a social constructivist framework. As he put it, "self-concept theory might better be called personal construct theory" (Super, 1984, p. 207) thereby emphasising the process of constructing representations of reality that enable a subjective understanding of career development. This more internal-orientated approach to the study of careers also highlights the earlier omission of the role of the individual as a self-determining force shaping their career, not only with regard to their
interpretations but also in behavioural terms. Increased ownership of careers resulting from reduced organisational responsibility for career development also focuses attention on individual agency and the need for on-going career management skills. This is reflected in further modification of Super’s theory, with the notion of career maturity being replaced by one of career adaptability that offers a bridging construct for integrating the diverse segments of Super’s life-span concept (Savickas, 1997).

The inclusion of a broader sample population in the study of careers and the need to address alternative motivations for career other than those presented within a linear organisational context has highlighted the inadequacy of focusing predominantly on objective elements of career. Movement towards a contextualist approach to career acknowledges the influence of the person’s social world, the diversity of individual situations and personal meaning of the context. This approach enables the study of career to more accurately reflect the range of influences affecting career histories. It also allows for the study of all types of working life, whatever their context, thereby democratising the concept of careers.

At this point in the chapter, the focus now turns to 'emerging theories' of career. The introductory overview section identifies ways in which research has begun to respond to the limitations outlined in this section and attempt to more appropriately reflect contemporary career experiences.

2.3 EMERGING THEORIES OF CAREER
2.3.1 Overview of Emerging Theories of Career
The social constructivist perspective, at the core of what have been termed ‘emerging theories’ of career enables an insight into individual psychological processes and supplements this by an understanding of context, in terms of both temporal context (for example, the sequence of events prior to a career transition) and social context (for example, the significant events and individuals influencing the career change). This therefore offers the potential to reveal the meaning of events or phenomena that would otherwise be ambiguous or unavailable. A thorough discussion of social constructivism is provided in section 4.3.
Contemporary definitions of career provide flexible interpretations of its meaning. For instance, a widely accepted definition of career is "a sequence of employment related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person" (Arnold, 1997 p. 16). This carries with it a number of assumptions that have contributed to shaping the approach adopted in the current research. Firstly, it is assumed that the career actor owns their career, and it is shaped by their subjective interpretation of the events they experience. Secondly, it is assumed that career inherently involves change since it consists of a sequence of events over time. Thirdly, career is assumed to occur within a loosely defined work-related context and can be played out in a variety of such contexts. Finally, it is assumed that the perceived success of career elements can be gauged against potentially any subjective (e.g., satisfaction, life-work balance, efficacy, meaning) as well as objective criteria (e.g., status, position, financial recompense). Effectively, this provides a range of broad parameters within which to proceed and develop a holistic understanding of the meaning of career change experiences.

The diversity of career type is acknowledged in emerging theories of career. These include bureaucratic careers with a linear form, focused on progressive upward steps in an organisational hierarchy to positions of greater authority (Brousseau et al., 1996; Kanter, 1989) or non-linear career types that encompass boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), portfolio (Handy, 1989), expert (Brousseau et al., 1996; Sturges, 1999), protean (Hall & Mirvis, 1996), transitory (Brousseau et al., 1996) or self-realiser (Sturges, 1999) careers. These variously involve a lifelong commitment to developing a high level of skill in a particular field or speciality, periodic shifts between related occupational areas, specialities or disciplines, or regular changes between often seemingly unrelated careers.

Hall (1993; 2002) has argued that, because of the increased complexity and turbulence in the contemporary work environment, the traditional notion of a single life-long career cycle, with a series of stages, has been replaced with a series of shorter learning cycles. This is reflected in the more central position given to career change and the process of transition in emerging concepts of career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan, 1999). The shorter learning cycles involved in job and role transitions in contemporary career development have been compared to mini-
careers, since they appear to share the same stages of career development, exploration, trial, decision, establishment and mastery, although within a more compressed timeframe (Hall, 1993). It is thought that within each learning cycle yet smaller cycles of development may be identified as the person gains experience and achieves a high level of performance and mastery, in terms of goal-setting, effort, psychological success and identity change. As the end of each learning cycle nears, the person is thought to start exploring again, prompted by external changes, for example, in technology, economic factors or life situation or alternatively by personal values or needs.

In this context, it is suggested that career transition should be viewed as natural and inevitable, and individual growth be dependent on responses to changes in the self and the environment, and on the ability to adapt to crisis (O'Connor & Wolfe, 1987). The focus on individuals constructing and managing their own careers has previously been mentioned. Maguire (2002) suggests this derives from a context in which employees are encouraged to pursue more self-interested careers, and Hall and Moss (1998) describe individual psychological contracts in the ‘new deal’ as learning and development contracts with the self. Savickas (2002) suggests that starting-over and resilience are now more pertinent tasks than the maintenance stage suggested by Super in his vocational development theory. As a result new theories are increasingly focusing on adaptability for transitions, including coping with changes that are unexpected. This emphasis on the role of learning, as with behaviourism (see section 2.2.2) assumes the malleability of personal characteristics, and contrasts to the stability implied in differentialist approaches described earlier.

2.3.2 The Cultural Context Relevant to Emerging Theories of Career

The contemporary culture to which emerging theories of career relate is characterised by two key features, those of rapid change and complexity. These features relate to aspects such as new technologies; new interactions between economic, social, political and private spheres; from people having more life roles to combine, and sometimes from having more than one job (Hall, 1993). Common features of organisational life now include short-term contracts, the use of freelance staff, multi-skilling, and redundancy. As a consequence of reduced employment security and growing individual ownership of career development, diverse career patterns are now
increasingly common, often characterised by what would be regarded in traditional
terms as lateral or downward moves. Such career paths may be enforced upon
individuals due to organisational requirements or they may reflect personal choices
made in response to their situation. For example, the trend for career downsizing
may be seen as a rejection of economic and organisational cultural pressures to work
long hours and at great intensity, and a reflection of the value placed on achieving
life work balance.

The cultural trend that favours the independent self is one of individualism.
Characteristics of an individualistic society include the promotion of individual
differences, the reward of personal goals and achievements, and social relationships
18) suggests that the cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism “express
normative, collective, and societal imperatives from which people develop strategies
of self-presentation and evaluation”. For instance, it is argued that identity
principles such as distinctiveness are drawn from different sources in accordance
with cultural imperatives (Vignoles, Chryssochoou & Breakwell, 2000). Evidence
from within-culture research however, suggests that individuals vary in their degree
of individualism and collectivism (Coon & Kemmelmeier 2001). This is exhibited,
for example, in the degree to which individuals value self-fulfilment and believe they
can achieve it.

In our society at the current time individuals appear to shape their careers having
greater choice than ever before. For example, individuals in their thirties have the
option to have families later in life, resulting in less family responsibilities, greater
financial freedom and consequently greater opportunity to pursue varied career
options. The prevalence and growth of multiple careers is now a recognised
phenomenon although it has been the focus of little theoretical or empirical work
(Feldman, 2002). The rise of multiple careers has been viewed largely as a liberating
force for untapped human potential (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). However, the
current generation is the first to respond to the implications of accelerated
environmental change and pursue such careers in any great numbers. The question
of whether second or multiple careers are subjectively experienced as a force for
good or whether they are perceived as challenging and associated with disadvantages
remains largely unanswered. Arthur and colleagues imply that the “economically disadvantaged, and those marginalized in insecure, low-skill jobs” (Arthur et al., 1999, p. 11) are excluded from benefiting from boundaryless careers. Issues of concern in this thesis, such as who is able to pursue such careers, what are the defining opportunities and constraints that enable them, and what it takes to subjectively succeed, remain as yet, largely unresolved.

2.3.3 Characteristics of Emerging Theories of Career
The boundaryless career (De Fillippi & Arthur, 1994) was the first concept to provides a context for conceptualising careers without traditional boundaries, notably corporate boundaries of hierarchy and status, occupation, trade and job boundaries of specialist skill and function, and social role boundaries, thus separating work considerations from those of family and home (Arthur et al., 1999). In this context a variety of contemporary career experiences may therefore be addressed, for example, in terms of employment contract (e.g., part-time, self-employed, contract or full-time), and employment context (e.g., home worker, blue-collar worker or organisational employee), thus democratising the ownership of the concept of career, away from a defined group of organisational employees to every type of worker. In boundaryless careers both involuntary as well as voluntary career changes are addressed (Fierman, 1994). The boundaryless career also stresses the contributing value of networks and information from outside the organisation and suggests that individuals may achieve validation and marketability from these sources. It acknowledges the influence of personal issues such as family in shaping careers, and also the interpretation of the career actor, who may perceive their career as boundaryless despite contextual constraints.

This framework acknowledges the likelihood of change in career and the suggestion of many shorter learning cycles over the span of a person’s working life (Hall, 1993) as described in section 2.3.1. According to a constructivist approach each cycle will be influenced by those cycles that have been previously experienced. This may be considered from an identity exploration and development perspective whereby a person becomes increasingly complex and mature as they learn from experience (Lifton, 1993). It may also be approached from a knowledge perspective, which is described as involving “accumulations of information and knowledge embodied in
skills, expertise and relationship networks acquired through an evolving sequence of work experiences over time” (Bird, 1994, p. 325).

Following the concept of the boundaryless career, Hall and Mirvis (1996) proposed the protean career. This describes an individual voluntarily taking responsibility for their own career path and change being undertaken on the basis of their personal values. As a consequence of these characteristics the requisite personal qualities for a successful protean career are considered to include personal responsibility, autonomy, self-awareness and continuous learning (Hall, 1996; 2004). The challenge of how individuals shape their career structure and create meaning in a boundaryless career context is met in protean career terms by emphasising the value of subjective criteria from both work and non-work domains. Subjective criteria identified as currently significant are outlined in section 2.2.5. The desire to achieve a better balance between work and personal lives is highlighted (e.g., Holmes & Cartwright, 1993; 1994).

It is suggested that values play a central role in forming various aspects of a person’s career path (Brown, 1996) since they reflect beliefs and, what Frankl (1978) calls a sense of meaning in life. The meaning inherent in value systems is likely to influence career choices, planning and decision-making. In addition, Chen (2001) notes that ultimately values convey and transcend rich meanings to a higher level of self-awareness, directing and managing one’s vocational coping behaviour and therefore, well-being. To understand the role of values in career development, it would appear advantageous to study them in context to enable an insight into their development and meaning to the individual, their relationship to any objective criteria valued by the individual, and to assess their relationship with any constraints that may result in them not being fully realised.

An area that until recently has been neglected in the study of career, is the role of emotion (Briner, 1999; Fineman, 1993). However, the individual and contextual perspectives offered by emerging theories of career have contributed to its investigation. Kidd (2002) suggests that since responses to specific work events involve emotions there is scope for the recognition and analyses of their role within a sequential notion of career development that links earlier experiences made up of
cognitions, feelings and behaviours with later ones. Several researchers have suggested that rather than looking at a simple cause and effect model in understanding emotions, the importance of the relationship between the person and their context and how this unfolds over time is of central interest in understanding the dynamic component of emotion, and goes beyond identifying only proximal causes or immediate effects (Briner, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Kidd (2002) also points out that since emotions are both formed by social relationships and given expression within them (Herriot, 2001) they are likely to increasingly feature in the emerging literature on relational approaches to career development.

Research acknowledging the affective component in career development has begun to look at its influence in adaptation to an uncertain and insecure working environment (Kidd, 1998). Initial research has focused on how emotions are experienced in response to specific events in career development, and the impact they have. For example, Weiss and Cropanzano’s (1996) affective events theory suggests how individual events of emotional significance lead on to a series of sub-events. They suggest that a more meaningful understanding of the reasons for behaviour or cognitions may be achieved by understanding these events as social, coherent episodes, rather than by simpler predictor-outcome relationships (i.e., stable characteristics of people and situations). The affective response to change events has been debated. It is widely proposed in the change management literature that individuals are expected to display resistance to change (e.g., Kanter, 1985; Woodward et al., 1987). However, others have argued that humans have senses and processes that encourage development and progress, and are strongly motivated towards change (Brown, 1986; French & Delahaye, 1996). This view suggests that while anxiety is a natural response to change, in general, resistance to change is not, unless a threat is perceived (Brown, 1986).

Emerging career theories have attempted to investigate ways in which individuals adapt to the ever changing world of work and discover the qualities needed to cope and progress. Blustein (1997) highlighted the importance of on-going adaptation in response to a continually changing environment when he concluded that exploratory behaviour is an important coping skill relevant throughout the lifespan. Self-awareness is regarded as a key contributor in the concept of the ‘intelligent career’
(Arthur, Claman & DeFillippi, 1995), and Nohria (1992) also noted the importance of skills that reduce dependence on a single organisation, such as networking and learning, thus increasing 'employability' (Kanter, 1989). Kidd (1996, cited in Kidd, 1998) proposed a three-fold model of effective career development characterised by the possession of decision-making skills, proactive career management skills, and the emotional capacity to cope with insecurity and uncertainty. The latter was summed up in the term 'career resilience' (London, 1993; Waterman, Waterman & Collard, 1994) that describes the qualities of toughness and flexibility considered necessary for contemporary maintenance or persistence of career development. In this model the interplay between personal values and interests, motivation to work, skills and knowledge, learning and relationships are all considered.

In relation to career transition, researchers have proposed a number of competencies that are considered necessary for this to be successful. Competencies include planfulness (future orientation) and reality orientation (realism about personal and contextual factors) (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven & Prosser, 2004). Career adaptability is defined as being forward looking and behaving proactively (Super & Knasel, 1981). Mattes (2004) identified successful mid-life career changers as having a strong sense of identity, manifested in resourcefulness, a creative spirit, and a belief system that served to pull them toward a deeper, more satisfying life. Three career meta-competencies have been proposed that describe bundles of skills considered necessary for effective career management by an individual (De Fillippi & Arthur, 1994). They are knowing why (career motivation, personal meaning and identification), knowing how (career-relevant skills and expertise, including formal qualifications and informal knowledge derived from work experience), and knowing whom (work and personal relationships that may enhance career by providing support or information). Jones and DeFillippi (1996) later added three further elements of knowing what (opportunities, threats and requirements), knowing where (entering, training and advancing) and knowing when (timing of choices and activities). The interactions between these aspects of an individual's career situation has been likened to a process of building non-financial "career capital" over time (Arthur et al., 1999). Mirvis & Hall (1994) equated the outcome of 'psychological success' with people's abilities to "make sense" of their constantly changing work circumstances and to integrate their work experiences into a coherent, integrated
identity. The sensemaking involved, shaped by the career competency of knowing why is likely to involve occupational or non-work identification or achievement. For instance, it may involve the achievement of personal values such as a balance between work and family demands, or achieving a level of independence from an organisation that previously determined the nature, content or hours of work (Bailyn, 1993).

The ways in which the emerging theories have extended an understanding of career are now outlined.

2.3.4 Contributions of Emerging Theories of Career
The key contributions made by the emerging theories to the concept of career that are discussed in this section include their relevance to a variety of career patterns, an insight into the subjective career, a contextualist perspective that provides a more holistic understanding of how careers are experienced, including the role of emotion; and the perspective of career as an on-going feature of life, together with the identification of competencies to manage this effectively.

Firstly, the more generalised definitions of career and the broader representations of career patterns described in the emerging theories of career compared to traditional theories, means that they are better able to represent the diverse nature of contemporary careers. A benefit arising from these varied notions of career is that they may be applied more universally and are not limited to an elite element of the working population (Arnold & Jackson, 1997). This more democratic approach to the study of career has opened up research on specific groups in the workforce (e.g., women, non-organisational workers, older employees) and career types (e.g., boundaryless careers, protean careers, second or multiple careers) that were previously rarely acknowledged. For instance, the inappropriateness of much of traditional career theory to the lives of women has been noted because of its focus on a single bureaucratic type career. However, broader conceptualisations of work, such as the protean career path, that encompass an understanding of the context in which career operates, including both work and domestic lives, are considered more relevant to the lives of women (Reitman & Schneer, 2003). Such concepts of career are also able to reflect the finding that women are thought more likely than men to
pursue career goals focused on individual learning and growth rather than organisational rewards (Still & Timms, 1998; Sullivan, 1999; Tolbert & Moen, 1998).

The constructivist perspective has refocused research at the phenomenological level of analysis which has had a number of implications on the understanding of career. It has contributed to further understanding of concepts such as the subjective career, the notion of the individual as a self-determining agent, and the sensemaking processes involved in relation to career. A view of career in which change and adaptation are on-going has also been gained. From this temporal perspective careers are increasingly regarded as a sequence of cognitions, feelings, and behaviours with an interest in how experience in one position affects the next. The traditional deterministic trait and factor approach has also been supplanted by a view of individual differences as relatively malleable and responsive to learning and experience.

Kidd (2004) notes that a phenomenological perspective also contributes to research on relational approaches to career development. She cites for example, Phillips, Christopher-Sisk and Gravino’s (2001) study on career decision-making in a relational context, and Higgins’s (2001) work on the influence of social context on career change. Another influence on career that is acknowledged as a consequence of attending to the relational aspects of career is the role of emotion. This may be inevitable since emotions are both formed by social relationships, and given expression within them (Herriot, 2001). A temporal perspective to studying career allows for the recognition and analysis of emotion as a dynamic force, influencing cognition and behaviour in the past, present and anticipated future (Kidd, 2004).

A holistic approach to the study of careers therefore provides a more accurate reflection of careers in the context of people’s lives than earlier relatively detached views of career. It reveals a web of influences on career that were not previously acknowledged including personal and domestic factors, and an individual’s subjective values. Their meaning and relevance to the careers of individuals across the whole lifespan is addressed, and facilitates an understanding of the key aspects of their career configuration (e.g., career anchors, values, personal characteristics); age-
related career implications; and the balance between work and non-work life. Nicholson (1990) notes that the notion of careers as sequences of events and experiences are potentially better able to explain the causes and consequences of change than traditional models. This is illustrated for example, in studies on cause and effect direction in relation to the issue of work-life balance. In general, studies have focused on how people adjust by adapting themselves to their jobs (e.g., Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), rather than how people adjust by moulding jobs to fit their personal requirements. Exceptions include Bailyn’s (1978; 1992) pioneering research on work and family and the effects this has on career, and research on entrepreneurs (Starr & Bygrave, 1991) who specifically form new organisations thus self-determining their careers.

Research on career management skills relevant in the current working climate has arisen from the recognition by emerging career theories of the demands of the environmental context and a view of career development as an on-going, lifelong process. Emphasis is on the individual as a self-determining being, with issues such as control and autonomy being considered significant. The individual is also assumed to have the ability to learn and adapt. An understanding of the competencies identified as relevant to coping with the demands of the ever-changing environment is believed to be beneficial to several parties. Firstly, to employees who are increasingly responsible for shaping their own careers, secondly, to career counsellors who may assist them in effectively managing this process, and finally to employers to enable them to understand the motivations of their workers.

To ensure an appropriate application of the emerging theories to the research in this thesis, and to identify areas warranting further investigation a critical analysis of their position is now undertaken.

2.3.5 Limitations of Emerging Theories of Career
A note of caution should be made in relation to discussions focusing on emerging theoretical concepts of career, such as the boundaryless career and protean career. While they appear to represent the working lives of a growing number of individuals as a result of social, economic and technological changes altering the world of work, it is acknowledged that the bureaucratic career nonetheless remains the career pattern
for a diminishing proportion of the working population. Emerging theories do not however, make a claim for universal applicability of a single type of career; instead they seek to represent the diversity of careers. Johnson and Cassell (2001) highlighted the benefits of this position, "postmodernism must accept diversity and be concerned to gain knowledge of variable and socially contingent understandings so as to ...refine our sensitivity or differences and reinforce our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 25).

The benefits of broader and more inclusive representations of career experiences represented in the emerging concepts of career have been discussed. However, a criticism that may be levelled at these theories as a consequence of this is that they tend to offer descriptive generalisations rather than specific analytical predictions, compared to traditional notions of career. This criticism implies positivist principles that are not relevant to emerging theories of career, since the aim of these theories is often not to make predictions. However, it is reasonable nonetheless to expect a degree of focus and purpose. For example, Kidd (1998) notes that the concept of career resilience omits descriptions of what it feels like or how career interventions might help individuals develop it. She also recommends that research should focus on the way in which interventions early in life may enhance career resilience since this is particularly necessary in today’s working environment.

Another example of emerging approaches being vague and non-focused is in reference to explanations of women’s careers. These have been criticised for consisting simply of bundles of influencing factors (e.g., Gutek & Larwood, 1987) rather than coherent models (Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003). Despite this limitation a holistic approach to the study of women’s working lives has contributed to its influence on the study of career in general. It appears therefore, that a balance needs to be struck between achieving a holistic impression of career while also addressing specific issues in a targeted way and making meaningful sense of the findings. Further research from this perspective would seem necessary to understand the changing working lives of men as well as women. For instance, recent research suggests that rather than a division along gender lines differences in working lives among couples are now more influenced by economic factors. This is thought to contribute to decisions such as which partner is the predominant breadwinner and
which predominantly takes the child-rearing role (Eby, Allen & Douthitt, 1999; Stephens & Feldman, 1997).

That emerging theories of career increasingly acknowledge the interests of previously under-represented populations has been highlighted. Research continues to extend an understanding of diverse sample groups, for example based on sexual orientation or ethnicity (e.g., Juntunen, Barraclough, Broneck, Seibel, Gennea, & Winrow, 2001; Morrow, Gore & Campbell, 1996). However, in order to comprehensively reflect the diversity of working lives it appears necessary to continue to expand an understanding of the careers of specific groups across career stages, across occupations, and across gender, ethnic and socio-economic categories.

In terms of the methodology employed, the development of emergent career theories has been accompanied by a shift from an almost exclusive use of deductive and predominantly quantitative methodology to a broader range of methodological approaches suitable for accessing the concepts under investigation. In relation to studies employing qualitative techniques, traditional quantitative notions of methodological rigour such as reliability and validity have been replaced with alternative sets of criteria (e.g., Flick, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). While these criteria define the standards by which to judge qualitative research, there are a number of potential limitations to consider that may result from employing this type of methodology. For example, the majority of qualitative research on career change has been based on self-report measures and has been cross-sectional. Self-report findings raise a number of concerns that need to be addressed by the researcher, such as the potential for impression management and attribution errors, such as a tendency to externalise the factors associated with failure (Kelly, 1973). Possible improvements that have been suggested include supplementing cross-sectional findings with archival data, since longitudinal designs are considered to provide greater confidence in casual inferences (Feldman, 2002). Studies that provide a longitudinal retrospective and prospective perspective (e.g., those employing a narrative technique) are valuable to investigating how individuals produce their own development, and in particular, how people fit work into their lives rather than how people are fitted into occupations (Savickas, 2002).
In summary, this critique suggests that while the noted benefits of adopting a holistic approach to the study of career recommend its continued application, the potential for producing generalisations as a result of this approach should be addressed. For current research to be meaningful, research questions and the means of interpretation should be focused and purposeful. In addition, the continued need for understanding the careers of men and women in response to on-going environmental changes is recognised, as is the recommendation for further research on the careers of specific groups. Methodological considerations for qualitative research include the use of appropriate criteria for ensuring its quality, and awareness of potential limitations.

2.4 AN INTEGRATED THEORETICAL APPROACH

The previous discussion on emerging theories of career identifies their increasing significance. However, a large proportion of research remains predominantly positivistic. In recent years the separation between these two distinct sets of career theories, embodying divergent theoretical schools of thought and methodological approaches, has been criticised for resulting in unhelpful divisions. Cohen and Mallon (2001) suggest that each approach has provided only a partial picture of career because it focuses on either the individual or the organisation; career as a subjective or objective experience; the career as an external or an internal phenomenon, and now the old career or the new. Several writers have suggested that an integrative perspective that acknowledges the benefits of both approaches and transcends these polarised delineations would benefit an understanding of career. For example, it is suggested that the dichotomy between 'old', 'bureaucratic' careers and 'new', 'boundaryless' careers should not be pursued since both feature in the contemporary workplace (Guest & MacKenzie Davey, 1996; Maguire, 2002), and methodologically, both the traditional positivistic and the newer constructivist paradigms contribute towards our understanding of contemporary careers (Chen, 2003; Cohen, Duberley & Mallon, 2004; Kidd, 2004).

On the basis of the issues outlined in this chapter, it appears that a critical acceptance of both approaches is helpful in illuminating the meaning of career experiences. In this vein, research would be conducted using the most appropriate approach for the subject matter under consideration, with a full awareness of the potential limitations. Feldman (2002) goes one step further to suggest that since career is a concept studied
across a number of academic disciplines, such as economics, sociology, anthropology and psychology, research may also benefit from integration at this level in order to provide methodological rigour as well as increased theoretical sophistication.

2.5 RESEARCH THEMES
A number of research themes emerge from this critique of the relevant extant career literature. However, before these are discussed, it is necessary to briefly locate the research interests of this thesis in theoretical terms so as to contextualise the themes that have been identified for further investigation. A more detailed theoretical and methodological justification for the approaches chosen in the current research is provided in the following chapter. However, at this point three key reasons are given for an alignment of this research with emerging theories of career. Firstly, the specific research population of this thesis is individuals who have changed career in their thirties. Their career patterns are represented by more contemporary definitions of career rather than the traditional bureaucratic career experience. As such, the issues discussed by emerging theories potentially have more relevance in this research than those considered by traditional career theories. Secondly, the current research is focused at the phenomenological level of analysis, and is interested in the cognitions, feelings and actions of the individual. The individual's active engagement in these processes leads to the adoption of a constructivist position that aligns the research with the emerging career theories. Thirdly, the objectives of the current research are to investigate from a holistic perspective the individual experiences of a complex transition event. It is thought that this is best achieved by employing qualitative methodologies. This brief outline of the theoretical position of the current research provides a context in which to position the following discussion on the areas identified for investigation.

2.5.1 The Current Research
The current research focuses on individual experiences of career change and employs purely qualitative methodological techniques: it does not therefore offer an integrated approach to studying career, as suggested in section 2.4. However, while locating the research in the constructivist camp the contributions of the positivist school are not dismissed. This research shares the objective of the integrative position, by
aiming for a holistic rather than a partial picture of an individual’s career change experiences. The research begins by adopting an exploratory approach to investigate areas of significance to the participants. These findings then influence the direction of the subsequent research. The choice of career narratives as a means of accessing participant’s experiences allows for the discussion of both objective and subjective aspects of career, and for their relative value to be analysed. Theoretical and empirical contributions from both constructivist and positivist approaches are used to elucidate findings. The contributions of this research may extend theory from both these approaches. For instance, issues that have arisen from the constructivist position and remain undeveloped as a consequence of its relatively short history may be addressed, and positivist research may be supplemented by an insight into concepts that were not accessible by quantitative means.

Six general research areas relevant to this thesis are identified from the critique of the extant literature offered in this chapter. They relate to: i) the research population, ii) age-related themes, iii) the influence of context, iv) coping with transition, v) values in a boundaryless context, and vi) the individual significance of concepts such as emotion, control, and autonomy within this context.

Firstly, it has been noted that career theory has predominantly been based on a narrow section of the working population. The process of rectifying this has begun with recent research focusing on more diverse sample groups. This is necessary not only in theoretical terms but also in an applied setting, since career counsellors are now faced with a diverse range of clients of all ages and at all stages of their careers, each bringing a unique system of influences (Patton & McMahon, 1999). Purposive, theoretically driven sampling will be adopted in the current research to ensure a diverse range of career experiences is investigated. For example, participants will be of different gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, geographical location, marital status, and employment type. However, this is not claimed to be a representative cross-section of society.

Secondly, all of the participants in the current research changed career in their thirties. By focusing on these specific individuals the current research aims to assess the existence of potential age-related development themes or tasks that may be
contributing to the phenomenon of career change in this age-group. The research does not adopt a deterministic age-defined model of adult development inherited from the positivist paradigm, but it seeks specificity in terms of the flexible development themes proposed by constructivist researchers.

Thirdly, a meaningful understanding of career experiences may only be achieved by viewing the individual within "the constraining or enabling aspects of the social context" (Bailyn, 1989, p. 478). Research has increasingly acknowledged the influence of the personal life on the working life, the current research will focus on this reciprocal relationship, and may illuminate the limited research on the way careers are moulded to fit individual requirements. The current research will also provide a temporal context to understanding careers, assessing for example, the significance of certain roles and their potential for influencing career change. To date, the influence of family on work has predominantly related to the lives of women. Based on the findings discussed in section 2.3.5 on the influence of economic factors rather than gender shaping career decisions in families, it is of interest to extend this contextual approach to the study of men's careers as well as those of women.

Fourthly, the type of transition experience that is the focus of the current research does not conform to intra-organisational or indeed always to, inter-organisational transition that has been the predominant type of change experience studied. Instead it involves a change in occupation and employer, and in several instances change is towards a self-employed scenario. The transition is studied from the individual perspective and by addressing career as a sequence of events it is believed that potential insights into causes and consequences of factors may be ascertained. Of particular interest is how the uncertainty of change is dealt with, how it is made sense of and the coping strategies employed. For instance, it is of interest whether a sense of continuity is important for the purposes of adjustment, and if so, how is this created. In addition, the influence of the age of the participants on their career transition experiences is of interest, including whether this might assist or hinder them in any way. Heppner (1998) notes the limited research addressing the psychological resources necessary for adult career transition and suggests a growing need for such knowledge. An objective of this research is to contribute towards
addressing this need by providing specific contributions to the existing literature on effective career management concepts.

The fifth general area of research interest relates to the role of values in career change. Research has suggested the limited relevance of objective criteria influencing boundaryless careers. Of particular interest in this research is the type of values motivating career change as well as those used to evaluate progress and define success within this context. The historical context of the current research at a time when boundaryless careers are increasingly the norm also prompts an interest in whether participants appear to accept the predominantly subjective values associated with new definitions of career or whether they are experiencing these careers but retaining objective values associated with more a traditional career type.

The sixth and final research area derives from a focus on the individual. The current research views the individual as a self-determining agent and the aim is to further understand their perceptions in relation to their career change experiences. This will include not only how they make sense of the discontinuities prompted by the transition but also the significance of relevant concepts such as perceived control and autonomy. Another research area that has received minimal attention, but will be addressed in the current research is the influence of emotion. To date, the majority of research in this area has focused on job loss and unemployment. However, the current research will contribute an understanding of the role of emotion in voluntary and involuntary career change experiences. Again, the sequential approach to career will contribute to identifying the influence of emotion on cognition and behaviour. Consideration of the context of the individual will also provide an understanding of emotion in relational terms.

2.6 SUMMARY

Following this review of the extant literature pertinent to the career change experiences of thirty-somethings, it is apparent that career theory is currently at an interesting stage. Traditional theories provide a solid, if partial base of knowledge, while emerging theories are increasingly identifying gaps for further exploration to encourage a more holistic understanding of career. The integrated perspective provides a seemingly sensible path for future development, preventing over-
compensation for historical bias and acknowledging the value of both positivist and constructivist approaches.

The current research, focused on understanding the individual experience of career transition, is located in the constructivist tradition. This approach allows an understanding of subjective experience, and also provides an understanding of transition embedded within its social and cultural context. This enables the investigation of issues that cross the boundaries that have previously separated the study of work issues from the rest of an individual's life. It also allows transition experiences to be placed within a temporal perspective, as part of a career narrative. In this way the transition event is viewed as one of a sequence of interconnected events in a career, and a context is provided for sensemaking and the understanding of patterns in these events.

Finally, this chapter has outlined the contemporary need for increased personal responsibility for career development, and has suggested the subjective need for learning and personal development. These two factors have contributed towards the development of concepts relating to effective career management, and a knowledge perspective that focuses on developing and transferring experiences and skills. In this context, the interest of the current research is on understanding the ways in which individuals in their thirties use their existing knowledge to assist them in their career transition, and to investigate other strategies used. This has relevance to career transition support that is specifically focused on the experiences and needs of the thirty-something age group.

This chapter has positioned the current research in the context of the relevant career literature, and has identified a number of research themes for further investigation. The following chapter progresses an understanding of these themes, and on the basis of this analysis develops a theoretical framework for the current research.
CHAPTER THREE

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 OVERVIEW

Following the critique of traditional and emerging theories of career provided in Chapter Two, this chapter seeks to formulate a theoretical approach appropriate to investigating the meaning of career change experiences amongst thirty somethings. Recognising the numerous potential influences on the meaning of these experiences a holistic stance is adopted. An endeavour is made to achieve both a detailed understanding of what appear to be key influences of the career change experience and the inter-relationships between them, while also providing an informative overview perspective.

The selection of issues focused on in this chapter is based on their expected contribution to furnishing an insight into the career change experiences of thirty-somethings. For each, consideration of the relevant theoretical positions and empirical findings will be discussed. This analysis will provide the platform on which the current research will proceed. It will also highlight previously unexplored issues to be pursued in this research. The concluding section of this chapter provides an integrated perspective on the various aspects discussed, outlines the theoretical approach proposed for this thesis, and summarises the key research interests of concern for the ensuing studies.

The issues covered in the following sections fall into two categories. The first of these is concerned with individual attributes, and includes age-related factors, identity issues, values, emotions, decision-making, goal-setting and motivation, and concludes with a discussion on the role of individual differences. The second category of issues is concerned with the influence of context. This is discussed firstly in general terms and then specifically in relation to roles, with a particular emphasis on gender differences. This chapter therefore provides the basis for an understanding of the issues that may be discussed by participants during the research
and proposes an initial framework in which the findings can be assessed. As such, it acts as both a valuable base upon which this research can be established and a relevant context in which its contributions can be gauged.

3.2 POTENTIAL INFLUENCES ON CAREER CHANGE DURING THE THIRTIES

3.2.1 The Significance of being Thirty-something

This research has at its focus an apparently age-related phenomenon. It aims to understand the particular issues that contribute to the apparent trend for career change in thirty-somethings, and identify the ways in which the process can benefit this age-group. The limitations of prescriptive life-stage theories and the preference for more generalised themes have been discussed in section 2.2.5, suggesting the need for a more flexible approach to the study of age-related issues. The life-span developmental perspective provides a view of people “existing at the centre of a matrix where life events combine and conspire with the aging process to present each person, at any one time with a unique set of challenges” (Woolfe, 2001, p. 347). This approach acknowledges the influences of specific age-related maturational processes, and social, cultural and cohort influences. Rather than offering age-defined life stages however, it recommends the concept of the life course as a framework for exploring flexible biographical patterns within a continually changing social system (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1989).

The life-span developmental approach recognises that despite the uniqueness of each person’s life story there are common life events that influence the life course and that many of these events correlate with age. It is suggested that there is “a prescriptive timetable for the ordering of life events” (Neugarten, 1977, p. 645). However, it seems that many of the social norms defining the age for certain events, such as getting married, having children and completing education, are increasingly challenged and less rigid than in the past. Therefore, there appears to be a growing need for the timetable to be flexible in terms of the ordering of events in people’s lives. Since these social changes have occurred only in the recent past it is proposed that there is a need to recognise the psychological implications in any theoretical approach to life stage development. For instance, a pressure to conform to prevailing age-graded conventions may remain and show its influence either in directing
behaviour towards the norm or in provoking worry when deviation from the norm is perceived. Comparison to the norm may occur in relation to a "social clock" against which the timing of significant life events are evaluated as either 'early', 'on-time' or 'late'. Deviations from age norms have been found to result in both negative self-assessments and criticism from others (Neugarten, Moore & Lowe, 1965).

Adopting the concept of the life course for the purposes of this research provides a framework within which the individual biography can be acknowledged, while at the same time providing the opportunity to establish the extent of shared age-related phenomena. In the contemporary context described, characterised by what at least superficially appear to be looser conventions than in the past, it is of interest to understand the impact of this flexibility on all aspects of career (e.g., definition, structure, value, opportunities and constraints) for this age-group. It is also of interest to assess the extent to which individuals in their thirties feel a sense of freedom in terms of their age-related opportunities or whether they feel pressure to comply with social norms. In addition, an insight into which norms are considered significant by this age group is of interest and whether the "social clock" is a relevant measure of progress and a contributor to their evaluative processes.

The life course framework also allows for the relevance and limitations of concepts developed in relation to the life stage of thirty-somethings to be explored. Examples include the developmental tasks focusing on inner growth conceptualised in the theories of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943), ego-integrity (Erikson, 1963) and individuation (Jung, 1969; Singer, 1994). An exploration of the role of these concepts in terms of career is also enabled within the context of contemporary social influences and allows for any interactions between the two to be addressed. The potential role of developmental processes during the thirties and the role of social influences in contributing to career change will be addressed by means of comparing the experiences of individuals who have chosen to change career with those who have undergone involuntary career change. This comparison will afford clarification on the contribution of the role of development processes and social influences on career change for this age-group, and provide insight into the interaction between these two forces. Moreover, it may further an understanding of whether potential developmental tasks at thirty-something are assisted or hindered by the particular
characteristics of the social setting, and identify any possible psychological consequences.

A particular developmental concept this research aims to address is that of career maturity in relation to thirty-somethings. From a developmental perspective this is understood as the readiness of the individual to deal with the developmental tasks and the career decisions that are required by society at his or her particular life stage (Phillips & Blustein, 1994). However, it is not age specific. In this research it is of interest to identify the elements that constitute career maturity and to consider those factors that contribute to their development. One key continuum along which development models differ is that of independence and dependence. At one end the benefits of a state of independence are promoted "that minimizes dependency on others and stresses the ability to objectively evaluate, problem solve, and self-nurture when necessary" (Nelson, 1996, p. 339). At the other end of the continuum the importance of affiliation is stressed (e.g., Maslow, 1943; Miller, 1976), defined as the need for community, and expressed in connectedness, relatedness and interdependence (i.e., independence within the context of a relationship) (Hancock, 1989; Miller, 1976). The position of individuals in their thirties along this continuum and the factors that contribute to their particular state will be ascertained, as will the influence on career change. Such findings may contribute to understanding the most appropriate state for optimal career change experiences and the means by which this state can be nurtured and achieved.

The contribution of the developmental psychological approach to the current research allows not only for the life-span perspective on the development of the individual but also encompasses an action-theoretical perspective on intentional self-development. Specifically, this contributes by firstly offering an insight into both what is valued in terms of self-development by an individual in their thirties undergoing career change, and the processes involved in their attempts to achieve their goals. Secondly, this interactive perspective is believed to be crucial in understanding the regulative processes governing development. It allows an insight into the interaction between the self-development occurring as a result of career transition and age-related developments, for instance, in terms of personal characteristics (e.g., perceived control, discussed in section 3.2.6) and values. An
example is that as a result of career change individuals may perceive threats to the continuity of their identity. The degree to which continuity is valued by individuals in their thirties may be assessed, and therefore if, and how they take active steps to attempt regulating their development to address this value, while also balancing this with adjustments to their changing psychological and social environments. Finally, this perspective provides an ongoing view of development since developmental processes can be seen as both the driving force behind individual adaptations to developmentally relevant tasks and threats, and also as the product of these adaptations. Investigations achieved by means of this interactive perspective will contribute to an understanding of the individual processes and resources employed in coping with the challenges raised not only by the career change in question, but also in ongoing developmental tasks.

3.2.2 Identity Issues in Career Change

The notion of some kind of ‘self-idea’ would seem necessary in relation to the study of careers which assumes conscious attempts to identify occupations that will be within one’s capabilities, and will also be considered rewarding. The self-concept, introduced in Chapter Two, is the cluster of beliefs that people hold in relation to themselves, the main exponent of which, in career psychology has been Super (1953; 1957). He proposed that self-concept is based on self-observation, and to some degree comparison to others. This has affinity with a social constructivist framework in which the individual is regarded as an agent actively influencing their identity within a social environment. The various components of self-concept for this age-group will be investigated, including the influences of both occupational and personal identity on career transition. The contributors to self-concept in the context of contemporary working practices (i.e., where individuals need to adapt themselves to certain demands and where there is often less scope for direct social comparison with colleagues) will also be identified. One possible effect of individuals holding various professional identities over time may be that they are increasingly unable to answer the question “Who am I?” It may be that in response they rely more on their personal identity in influencing who they are, since work is not necessarily reliable, long-term or permanent. The transformation of identity in relation to career change and the particular challenges of this for thirty-somethings, as well as the coping
strategies employed in response, are therefore of particular interest to the current research.

A constructivist perspective on identity underlies Identity Process Theory (Breakwell 1986; 1993; 2001). This theory views identity as a psychological process manifested through action, thought and affect. Two processes are identified as the means by which individuals are considered to ‘self-construct’ their identity. The first is the process of assimilation-accommodation that deals with how identity absorbs new information and how this information is accommodated within the structure of identity. The second process is one of evaluation that occurs continuously and confers value on the contents of identity. The theory suggests that there are universal psychological processes that interact to affect the content and the value of identity over time and these are guided by four motivational principles. The first of these principles is continuity, i.e., the sense that despite changes, the self is the same over time. Second is distinctiveness i.e., a sense of feeling unique and separate in relation to others. Third is self-efficacy, i.e., a sense of agency, competency and control. And fourth is self-esteem, i.e., a sense of self-worth. It is suggested that the importance of these principles may be historically and culturally influenced.

In terms of contextual influence on identity processes, Super (1953; 1957) attributed increasing importance to the role of social comparison in relation to significant others in contributing to self-concept. Blustein (1997) noted that this recognition has been reflected in the career development literature in general, with more emphasis now placed on the role of relational and cultural factors in contributing to identity. Another way in which context contributes to identity is highlighted by the concept of “social identity” (Tajfel, 1981). This is defined as “that aspect of an individual’s self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 255). It is understood that the processes of categorisation and social comparison “provide the parameters within which socio-historical factors, or more accurately, subjective understandings of these factors operate” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 54).
The self-concept is arguably fundamental in contributing to the process of an individual making sense of their experiences, together with other factors such as personal characteristics, emotional patterns of response, fantasies, and dreams (Mezirow, 2000). The role of the self-concept in this process will for example influence which objects in their experiences are given attention, what interpretations are made of them and what behaviour they elicit. In relation to career this can be seen to involve a continual process of sense-making regarding the self in connection with the world of work and a negotiation of this relationship in terms of the past, present and into the future. Career is therefore not only self-defining in terms of providing an identity, but at the same time it also expresses and protects the self in its attempt to achieve temporal continuity, coherence and positive evaluation or esteem (Breakwell, 1986).

When this self-protective function is obstructed for any reason then the cause is likely to be interpreted as a threat to identity. A threat may occur on a number of levels, for instance, it may bring into doubt a fundamental sense of self, it may threaten valued beliefs, or it may question the emotional basis for a relationship, for example, a psychological contract based on assumptions of trust and good faith. Chryssochoou (2004) suggests that there are two types of psychological threat with regard to identity. The first type relates to self-evaluation, and occurs when people have no positive feelings about one or more of their self-descriptions or self-categorisations. This particular threat is a core issue for social identity theory. The second type occurs when life events disrupt the continuity in the way people perceive themselves, which then demands accommodation and a revaluation of self. This is a particular concern of identity process theory. Both theories assume that when an individual's prevailing conceptions of self are challenged then coping strategies will be employed. These coping efforts will attempt to reduce a threat in two ways. Firstly, by either altering or moving away from the social context that is provoking the threat or alternatively, by undergoing identity changes that strive towards achieving the end-states characterised by the four motivating principles described earlier. It therefore appears that in response to challenges to identity, individuals tend to reaffirm the self, thereby maintaining its stability and positive evaluation (Markus & Kunda, 1986; Millward, 1995; Swann, 1985). Breakwell (1986)
nonetheless suggests that self-consistency rather than self-enhancement is the most important outcome.

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) contributes to identity theory by proposing that individuals hold additional self-beliefs in addition to what is termed the ‘actual self,’ i.e., relating to the attributes an individual believes he or she possesses. These include value-laden conceptual views of the self that include the ‘ideal self’ representing the attributes an individual would like to possess; and the ‘ought self’ representing the attributes an individual perceives they are obliged to possess. Particular emotional responses have been associated with discrepancies deriving from relationships between the three types of self. ‘Actual–ideal’ self-discrepancies have been empirically associated with dejection-related emotions, while ‘actual–ought’ discrepancies have been linked to agitation-related emotions (Shah & Friedman, 1997; Strauman, 1989; Strauman & Higgins, 1987). In contrast to these findings, other abstract representations of self when compared with the current self may have more positive outcomes. For example, the concept of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) representing an individuals ideas of what they might become or what they are afraid of becoming, are believed to provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation. The process of anticipatory restructuring of identity, i.e., thinking about what it will be like in a new role, is likely to contribute towards adjustment.

In relation to accommodating the demands of a new role as a result of job change Nicholson (1984) suggests that either minor or major identity changes are made, or that the work role or context is changed in line with allowing the preservation and enactment of valued aspects of identity. Both of these processes, personal change and role innovation are considered to be theoretically and practically important outcomes of the job change process (Toffler, 1981; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

From a social identity perspective if social identity is de-valued, then self-evaluation is threatened at both a personal and a collective level (Tajfel, 1974; 1978; 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This is likely to result in the individual engaging in strategies to protect that part of the self that is attached to their social memberships. The way this is achieved is thought to depend on their belief systems. If he or she
holds a belief in the permeability of boundaries between groups then a strategy of individual mobility will be chosen, i.e., they will try to improve their status by attempting to become a member of a higher-status group. However, if he or she believes that the boundaries between groups are impermeable then other strategies are likely to be employed, such as finding new dimensions of comparison, redefining the value of the existing dimension of comparison, or abandoning the comparison with the high-status group and looking for lower-status out-groups for comparison.

An area distinct from identity threat but one in which the degree of social influence again affects identity outcomes is in the concept of explored and non-explored identities (Marcia, 1993). These distinct types of identity are said to result from different developmental processes and are considered particularly relevant in terms of career exploration. Individuals who take an active role in the process of self-definition are described as having a self-constructed identity that is likely to be autonomous and flexible. This is regarded as an explored identity. Berzonsky (1992) described such individuals as being information-oriented and characterised by a motivation to seek out and evaluate relevant information prior to making decisions. They are also said to exhibit a tendency to be self-reflective, question their self-constructions, and maintain openness to self-relevant information. In terms of career choice, Berzonsky (1996) suggested that all of this translates into an active approach to exploration and decision-making. This is believed to derive from holding internalised goals and values that are integrated with the core sense of self. In this way, self-regulatory processes are associated with self-determination and intrinsic motivation. In contrast, individuals who hold a conferred identity, based largely on the expectations and norms of others (particularly authority figures, such as parents) are described as having unexplored identities. Their career decisions and plans are likely to be closely related to the expectations of significant others and be motivated by the need to gain their approval, and a sense of guilt. Such people are described as typically holding clear, rigid plans and not relying on such plans for the maintenance of their self-esteem. They tend to be closed to new information that does not reinforce their values and beliefs, and in turn this reinforces their rigid self-systems. Findings suggest that individuals who hold self-constructed identities are more likely to decide to change career and follow their decision through relative to individuals with conferred identities. It is of theoretical interest to assess whether this distinction
is borne out in the current research. It may be anticipated that individuals voluntarily changing career in their thirties may be doing so partly to move away from a conferred identity that influenced early career choice and into a career that more closely represents their self-constructed identity that has been achieved as a result of age, experience and independence. If this is the case for some individuals it is of interest to assess the factors that have contributed to the move from one type of identity to another; the implications of each type of identity on career change experiences and the effects in terms of the valuation of outcomes.

3.2.3 The Role of Values
Understanding the values of individuals is integral to comprehending career change experience since values, together with beliefs, personal characteristics and social norms are understood to comprise the antecedents to attitudes. These attitudes subsequently lead to intentions, inclinations and tendencies that in turn, generate actions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980). Values are thought to play a central role in forming various aspects of an individual's career development path (Brown, 1996) and their influence is expected at all stages of career change, for instance, in terms of career choice, goal content, motivation, planning and decision-making, and evaluating outcomes.

In order to achieve a holistic appreciation of the value systems of the participants in this research, an integrative approach, that considers the role of both objective and subjective values, is believed appropriate. This reasoning is based on research suggesting the erosion of behavioural and psychological boundaries between work and personal life (Hansen, 1997). It is also thought that repeated occupational transitions break down the established and differentiated mindsets that result from being locked into habitual structures and routines (Bird, 1994). As such there is likely to be an increasing integration of values from various life domains having an influence on career.

For individuals to evaluate their career change as successful implies that they have acted in a manner, and have also achieved results that are valued. However,

"achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains, ...requires personal resources such as energy, time, and commitment to be well distributed across domains"
The focus on time as a resource necessary for achieving values and hence life satisfaction relates to the concept of "time famine" (Banks, 1983) whereby people feel they have too little time. Researchers however, have noted the inaccuracy of this perception since they claim that the desired increase in free time has been witnessed over the last fifty years (Harvey & Pentland, 1999; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). Reasons given for this paradox lie in the way that leisure time is now used in ways that are rated as unenjoyable. These include time spent on passive activities; time spent recovering from the more intensified nature of working life (Green, 2001), and it is suggested, leisure time being experienced in an intensified fashion. Tyrell (1995) notes how significantly less time is spent engaging in activities rated as most pleasurable, such as socialising and outside activities. This suggests therefore, that although people may value having more time, they will not evaluate having more time positively unless they choose activities that contribute to their well-being and satisfaction with life. Questions for the current research then include whether participants perceive the fulfilment of their values to be compromised by lack of time, and whether gaining more time to further the interests of their values is a motivator for career change.

In terms of values that are deemed relevant to those in their thirties, Erikson's (1956) mid-life psycho-social development stage focuses on the need for achieving generativity in contrast to stagnation/self-absorption at this age. Reference to these needs suggests a set of values that may influence the career change for this age-group. In general terms generativity is described as the ability to look outwards from the self and care for others, and is therefore associated with the affiliation end of the developmental continuum described in section 3.2.1. Achievements at this stage are exhibited by marriage and parenting, but also by working productively and creatively in spheres such as teaching, writing, invention, and social activism. It is suggested that generativity is satisfied by feeling success in terms of contributing to the welfare of future generations and having 'made a mark'. This would indicate the potential significance of values such as 'wanting to make a difference', creativity and altruism to individuals in their thirties changing career.

A further value considered relevant to this age-group is that of authenticity (Critelli, 1996). This relates to being oneself, the main attribute being the capacity to make
choices. It is suggested that for some individuals this is a developmental need deriving from the recognition of having had a non-authentic way of life and the dissatisfaction that results. Authenticity in this context does not mean the search for a true self, as in the concept of explored identity discussed earlier, but rather an opening-up to the various possibilities available. In terms of career change this would involve individuals deciding to take account of their lives and making their own choices and plans. The ability to do this relates to the concept of career maturity and tends towards the self-determining end of the independent/dependent continuum also described earlier in section 3.2.1. Critelli points out that when discussing authentic choices, other influencing factors are not ignored, such as unconscious issues or social or economic pressures, but that an emphasis is placed on the active nature of individuals constructing their history, even though they may not have full control or knowledge of their motives. This approach fits into the social constructivist framework of this research and benefits it by focusing attention on the contribution of values affecting the processes of career change within a context, as well as enabling a further understanding of the concept of career maturity.

To conclude this section, a key question to be addressed in this research is whether there are any themes in the values held by thirty-somethings that influence their career change experiences. The possible influence of values deriving from developmental concerns, such as generativity and authenticity will be assessed. It is also of interest to see where values are derived from, and whether there are changes over time to values held in response to transition experiences.

3.2.4 The Influence of Emotion

Another key aim of the current research is to respond to the call for further attention to be paid to the role of emotion in vocational psychology (Briner, 1999; Fineman, 1996; Kidd, 1998; Pekron & Frese, 1992). It is thought that an understanding of cognition and behaviour can only ever be partial without an understanding of the emotional component that underlies much of human functioning. Inclusion of the role of emotion in understanding the perceptions of individuals experiencing career change is therefore considered to be crucial. Emotion is regarded as a dynamic process, occurring in the form of an episode clearly delineated by time rather than a static characteristic. In this research, focus is on the experience of affective states
and how these are linked to precipitating events in the change process, and their influence in terms of cognition and behaviour. This reflects the theoretical approaches to the study of emotion by Morrison and Robinson (1997) and Weiss and Cropanzano (1996). The role of previous affective experiences and the role of anticipated emotions (Kidd, 2004) will also be assessed.

In terms of sensemaking, Mezirow (1978; 1991) proposes that emotion is the first step in the meaning making process involved in the structuring of cognitive schemes. Emotional responses are generally considered to be habitual and a learned habit that is socially derived (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Burkitt, 1997). For example, findings consistently relate long-term plans and goals to positive emotions, suggesting a link to individual growth and an overall ability to form some sense of what one's life should be (Averill & More, 1993; Frederickson, 2001). Emotions will in particular "suggest a line of action that we tend to follow automatically unless [deliberately] brought into critical reflection" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18). This is likely to be instigated by an interruption in meaning making, such as a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1991) or a triggering event (Weick, 1979). "Emotion is what happens between the time that an organized sequence is interrupted and the time at which the interruption is removed, or a substituted response is found that allows the sequence to be completed" (Weick, 1995, p. 46). Job loss and career change would be predicted to be an emotionally turbulent time since habitual affective responses are challenged by novel experiences and meaning is sought at a time that is ambiguous and unsettling. This research aims to enhance an understanding of the role of emotion during both voluntary and involuntary career change experiences. However, it is questionable whether it is possible to capture the emotional responses that occur concurrently with the change experience by asking an individual to reflect upon them, as in this research. Weick asserts that "these emotions affect sensemaking because recall and retrospect tend to be mood congruent. People remember events that have the same emotional tone as what they currently feel" (Weick, 1995, p. 49). Rather, it should be understood that what will be discussed in retrospect, is an interpretation of the emotions felt, affected by intervening sensemaking and current emotional state.
Traditionally, the experience of transition has been viewed as a stressful life event (Brett, 1980). This may be because research relating to coping with major transitions such as bereavement has tended to be applied to other life changes, such as job change, resulting in an aggregated view of them being viewed as stressors (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). However, empirical studies provide inconclusive evidence relating to the nature of the emotional experience involved in job change. Some research suggests that prior to a change anticipatory anxiety occurs, but this is a minor sub-theme in relation to the more general and positive anticipation of future challenge and new experience (Arnold, 1985; Nicholson, 1987). The settling-in period following change has been described as a stressful experience, but it too has been found to be highly correlated with reports of challenge, freedom, authority, satisfaction and fulfilment (Nicholson & West, 1988). The researchers point out the importance of looking at the intensity of the affective response and its duration to determine its meaning. For example, a negative response of low intensity and temporary nature may be seen as problem-solving or direction-finding rather than an indication of stress. The point in the transitional process at which the emotion is experienced is clearly relevant to understanding its meaning. For example, low self-esteem and uncertainty about performance during the early stages of job change have been found to contribute towards feelings of stress, however, these effects were found to reduce over time as a sense of mastery was accomplished (Werbel, 1983).

In the change literature it appears to be generally accepted that the two most extreme and undesirable work role transitions are downward status moves and job loss. In general these are associated with negative outcomes (Nicholson & West, 1988). However, researchers have drawn attention to the fact that in some cases individuals are able to find unexpected and positive outcomes in such an experience and new directions may come out of it (Fineman, 1983; Hartley, 1981; Latack & Dozier, 1986). In this research it is expected that career change instigated by involuntary factors will be more stressful than voluntary change but it is also expected that both transition experiences are emotionally challenging times. The questions of which aspects of the process are found the most and the least emotionally demanding will be addressed. Looking at this issue may contribute towards counsellors and significant others knowing when support is most needed and the type of support that would be most effective. Such knowledge may also help an individual undergoing
career change to know what to expect and to let them know that theirs is a common reaction, which may be found reassuring and contribute to adjustment. It is also the aim of this research to further understand the ways in which emotion can contribute to the perception of career change as an opportunity, be it voluntary or involuntary, thus enabling challenges to be undertaken with a sense of self-directedness that yields future fulfilment.

A number of studies suggest that job change is related to various positive affective outcomes like for example, increased satisfaction (Burke, 1974); heightened performance, innovation and autonomy (Keller & Holland, 1981); reductions in stress symptoms (Kirjonen & Hanninen, 1986); and increased psychological adjustment and satisfaction of higher order needs (Nicholson & West, 1988). The role of several mediating factors in influencing such positive affective responses to job change are discussed in the literature. Together, these contribute to an understanding of ways in which an individual’s context may be manipulated or where they may need particular support in order to promote a satisfactory experience of change. These factors include the presence of support and resources (West, Nicholson & Rees, 1987); the person-environment fit, and a sense of predictability and personal control (Karasek, 1979). The job changer’s life circumstances have also been found to affect emotional response, with individuals who relocate found to be particularly vulnerable during adjustment (Brett & Werbel, 1978; Pinder, 1977).

Perhaps the most important mediating factor influencing positive affect as a response to job change is individual differences in psychological disposition. This is illustrated, for example, in terms of evaluating life satisfaction. A study by Diener and colleagues found that happy individuals weighed their best life domains (e.g., health, finances, friends, self, education) more heavily than did unhappy individuals, whereas unhappy individuals weighed their worst domains more heavily than did happy individuals. These findings suggest that happy and unhappy people use different information when constructing satisfaction judgements (Diener, Lucas, Oishi, & Suh, 2002). Recognition of the role of psychological disposition in affecting reactions to career change contributes to an understanding of an individual’s subjective experiences.
It has also been highlighted that individuals differ not only in relation to the “amount” of emotion they exhibit compared to one another but also in terms of the amount the same individual may exhibit depending on situational factors (e.g., general mood) at the time of decision making (Anderson, 2003). It is therefore important to consider changes in emotion in response to contextual triggers and to have an awareness of its influence. For example, the potentially stressful time directly following redundancy may not be considered the most favourable time for making key long-term decisions. It is also expected that an individual’s emotional reaction will be affected by their interpretation of their affective responses to previous relevant experiences, and (as discussed earlier in this section) will, to some extent be socially derived. It therefore appears necessary to have an insight into an individual’s past experiences and their social world in order to fully understand their emotional responses.

3.2.5 Decision-making, Goal-setting and Motivation
In this section an overview of the research relating to the inter-related issues of decision-making, goal-setting and motivation is provided, with reference to career change. In relation to decision-making, image theory proposes that decision makers have three images that guide or limit the decisions that they make. The first image is their set of values and beliefs, the second is the specific goals towards which they are striving, and the third is defined operational plans for reaching their goals (Beach, 1990; 1993). This loose framework, similar to those proposed in the naturalistic decision making literature (Klein, Orasanu, Calderwood & Zsambok, 1993; Lipshitz, Klein, Orasanu & Salas, 2001; Salas & Klein, 2001; Zsambok & Klein, 1997) allows a basis from which to explore the various components of the decision making process. The emphasis on goal-oriented behaviour implies the value of goals in helping to direct attention, mobilise effort, optimise performance and formulate strategies towards desired outcomes. The various goals that give impetus to behaviour appear to result in different types of motivation, and these are considered to have important implications for healthy behavioural regulation and psychological well-being, according to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).
Self-determination theory suggests that one significant way in which motivation varies is dependent on the amount of autonomy that an individual has. Those who have real or perceived restrictions and/or pressures affecting their choices are likely to be motivated to achieve external incentives, focusing for example, on the avoidance of guilt, anxiety or disapproval from self or others, rather than on more intrinsically satisfying rewards. In contrast, some empirical evidence suggests that intrinsic feelings of self-determination, perceived competence, internal locus of control, self-efficacy expectations, self-esteem and moderate levels of stress are motivators related to career exploration intentions and/or activation behaviour (e.g., Betz & Voyten, 1997; Blustein, 1988, 1989; Solberg, 1998). It therefore appears that there are motivational and psychological advantages to self-determined decision-making and goal setting.

In an extensive review of the career development and management systems, London and Mone (1987) examined the importance of career motivation. This is defined as the ability 'to make the most of your career' and is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of three domains, career identity, career insight and career resilience. In addition, self-efficacy is deemed critical in the initiation and persistence of behavioural performance in every aspect of development (Bandura, 1982). In this research the components of these three constructs will be explored in the context of the current working environment. For example, it has been suggested that a contemporary characteristic of career resilience may be achieving 'employability' rather than employment security (e.g., Kanter, 1989). An understanding of the ways in which an individual comes to understand the relevance of certain career motivation factors to their situation and the means by which they achieve them would contribute to the literature on career enhancing strategies (Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2000; Nabi, 2003) and may be used in applied settings in assisting career activities.

Much previous research on the contributions of motivation theory in relation to career transitions has implicitly or explicitly relied heavily on need theory, expectancy-valence theory, and stress theory (Feldman, 2002). These theories contribute to an understanding of the processes involved in influencing career transition behaviour. Need theory proposes that career has the potential to fulfil
certain psychological needs. These include recognition, self-esteem, self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943), and power, achievement and affiliation (McClelland, 1961). An individual is assumed to be motivated to satisfy these fundamental needs and will either move towards an occupation that they consider will provide this or will move away from an occupation that they feel no longer satisfies their needs. In a review of the literature, Wrightsman (1994) identified three key sources of dissatisfaction that resulted in a profession being abandoned. These were the individual feeling a lack of control over their own work-scheme; experiencing a conflict between their professional self-image and those that others attributed to them; and finally, feeling the absence of challenges in their work. It is expected that the needs that are valued will be unique to each individual, and that they will change over time and in relation to the individual’s role (Alderfer & Guzzo, 1979).

A further theory of potential relevance to the motivation of career changers is that of integrated value systems (Schwartz, 1992; 1996). This theory differentiates between ten categories of values according to their content and the type of motivational goal that is expressed as a result. For example, the value of universalism is expressed in pursuing the welfare of other people and the environment. Value in self-direction is expressed in agency, creativity, independent thinking and choice of actions. Schwartz suggests that the values can be organised according to two dimensions, the first of which is openness to change versus conservation. Values that may be attributed to openness to change include self-direction and stimulation and those that relate to conservation include conformity/tradition and security. The second dimension is self-enhancement versus self-transcendence. Values that may be attributed to self-enhancement include power and achievement while those that relate to self-transcendence include universalism and benevolence. According to the theory, some motivations cannot be pursued simultaneously since they conflict, for example, achievement values and benevolence values. Conceptions, such as those defined by Schwartz, contribute to the analysis of work-related values and the rewards that people seek from work, and can be regarded as referring to the content of decision models.

Expectancy-valence theory (Vroom, 1964) addresses the influence of value systems on the comparative evaluation of rewards and the consequential impact on decision-
making. It suggests that occupational decisions are motivated by the individual's calculation of the probability of obtaining higher rewards in alternative situations and the value of those rewards to them. Studies based on expectancy-valence theory suggest that the activation of career exploration is associated with work role salience, the importance of preferred career domain, attainment of valued career goals, decision satisfaction, and the instrumentality of career exploration (Blustein & Flum, 1999; Flum & Blustein, 1999; 2000; Taveira, 2001).

Elizur and colleagues distinguish work rewards according to a tripartite classification, identifying instrumental (e.g., pay), affective (e.g., peer recognition), and cognitive rewards (e.g., job interest, feeling of self-achievement) (Elizur, Borg, Hunt & Beck, 1991). Ryan and Deci (2000) distinguish rewards along the dimension of whether they are perceived as intrinsic or extrinsic, thus emphasizing the source of the rewards affecting value. It has been suggested that goals that have life-style orientations, such as those relating to career, are particularly likely to have consequences for self-definition and evaluation (Millward & Flynn, 1998). As such the motivational impetus to achieve them might be sustained by intrinsic factors (Manderlink & Harackiewicz, 1984) such as the ability to envisage the ultimate dividends of goal achievement together with an appreciation of the need to delay gratification accordingly. This illustrates the relationship between goal content, reward type and the implications on motivational behaviour. It is proposed that when careers have implications for long-term behaviour change and where their pursuit has high intrinsic value in and of itself, distal goals are likely to hold ongoing motivational influence. The achievement of proximal goals, on the other hand afford greater flexibility and freedom of choice (Croppanzano, Citera & Howes, 1995; Stock & Cervone, 1990).

An aim of this research is to ascertain the needs and rewards affecting career change for individuals in their thirties. This is linked to understanding their value systems firstly and then the ways these values define goals and the processes of attempting to achieve them. The emotional component of motivation is addressed in stress theory underlining the importance of the role of emotion in either contributing or hindering career change. Stress theory (Nicholson, 1984) is concerned with the difficulty that an individual may experience in deciding on and activating a career change. This
may be largely attributable to the degree of uncertainty associated with such transitions and the adverse emotional and physiological reactions associated with that uncertainty.

Another concept, with a clear emotional component that is thought to have the potential to affect the motivation of thirty-somethings in their career change is that of time perspective. This is defined as “a cognitive operation that implies both an emotional reaction to imagined time zones (such as future, present or past) and a preference for locating action in some temporal zone” (Lennings, 1996, p. 72). In this research it is of interest to assess the role of time perspective among individuals in this age-group. It may be that their age is associated with a sense of time scarcity that results in a preference for career exploration involvement in the present. Further clarification on the relationship between time perspectives and psychological well-being will also contribute to the debate regarding this interaction. For example, a future time perspective, and especially possession of long-term goals, has been positively correlated with virtually all aspects of well-being, meaningful life, social self-efficacy, and realism/persistence (Zaleski, Cycon, & Kurc, 2001). However, other researchers have warned of the drawbacks of excessive future orientation including workaholism, minimizing the need for social connections, and not taking time for occasional self indulgence (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2003).

This research aims to extend an understanding of the complex inter-relationships apparent between decision-making, motivation, goal setting, values and emotion in the career change process. The role of factors such as autonomy that are expected to be influential in promoting the pursuance of intrinsically valued goals and career exploration and/or activation behaviour will be investigated in relation to the experiences of thirty-somethings.

3.2.6. The Role of Individual Differences

The degree to which individuals possess attributes that favour the positive evaluation of their career change and contribute to career adaptability in a contemporary work context will clearly differ. For example, individual differences in psychological disposition have been described as contributing to positive affect as a response to job change (see section 3.2.4). It is also expected that rather than attributes being stable
characteristics there may be intra-individual variations over time that reflect the experiences of the individual. This constructivist approach suggests the alterability of attributes that imply opportunities for enhancing the career change experience. Among the many individual characteristics that appear to have a significant effect on career change experiences, this particular discussion will focus on the impact of variations in attribution style, self-efficacy and perceived control.

Individuals appear to differ in their style of attributing causes to events that happen to them (e.g., Weiner, 1985). In terms of career change this relates, for instance, to the attributions made in relation to the factors that instigate change and also to the outcomes of change events. In terms of the process of social attribution, this involves seeking to establish permanent but not directly observable structures that explain directly observable effects. As a consequence, the environment is constructed as something stable and coherent. This then allows expectations to be built, predictions to be made and effects reactions to events. Heider (1958) suggested that people commonly use either external causes that are outside the career actor (e.g., the characteristics of the situation, the influence of others, luck), or they use internal "dispositional" causes that refer to personal characteristics of the individual (e.g., abilities, mood, attitude).

Attribution theory has since distinguished two basic styles in which an individual may feel they are responsible for the outcome of an event (e.g., Anderson, Miller, Riger, Dill, & Sedikides, 1994). The first offers behavioural explanations by attributing the cause of an outcome to a modifiable source in the self (e.g., effort). By contrast, the second style favours explanations based on character, attributing the cause of an outcome to a relatively stable source in the self (e.g., ability). In general, behavioural explanatory styles have been shown to be more adaptive (e.g., associated with reduced depression) than character explanatory styles (Anderson et al., 1994). To summarise, if individuals feel they have caused an effect on the environment and they perceived this as being the result of some aspect of themselves over which they have control, this is predicted to be psychologically beneficial.

A second characteristic, described earlier as critical in the initiation and persistence of "behavioural performance in all aspects of human development" and therefore an
important component of career motivation, is that of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). This is defined as a person's expectancy about whether a particular behaviour can be successfully accomplished (Bandura, 1997). Its relevance in terms of career change may therefore be seen at all stages of the process, from choosing a goal, following it through, to attaining it. Self-efficacy has for example, been found to influence perceived career options (Betz & Hackett, 1981) and provide the motivation for action to change if coupled with career dissatisfaction (Millward, 2000). It is thought that the confidence implicit in the definition of self-efficacy derives from the belief of possessing the relevant knowledge, skills and abilities to achieve a chosen goal. This belief is derived from previous achievements and positive experiences in relation to these attributes. It may therefore be expected that there is an association between the similarity of the goal in relation to one's existing knowledge, skills and abilities and a greater sense of efficacy, with confidence as the mediating variable. It is also expected that with age and the accumulation of positive experiences, self-efficacy will increase. However, negative relevant experiences are likely to result in reduced feelings of self-efficacy.

Efficacious beliefs have been found to influence psychological well-being and the ability to cope with stress (Meece, Wigfield, & Eccles, 1990). They have also been found to affect emotional responses to situational demands by moderating two types of cognitive appraisal processes, namely, primary and secondary appraisal (Lazarus, 1991). In primary appraisal, an individual evaluates the harm or benefit of an event. In secondary appraisal, the individual evaluates the coping resources and assesses the potential for control (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For instance, if an individual is made redundant, feelings of self-efficacy in relation to finding a new job are likely to influence secondary cognitive appraisal of the job loss and perceive it as less threatening and therefore less stressful, than those with perceived low self-efficacy. This concurs with Bandura's (1987) argument that individuals who perceive inefficacy in coping with potentially adverse events will experience more anxiety and stress.

A construct related to self-efficacy that also has a significant impact on career change is that of perceived control. This relates to assumptions about the relationship between the agent (i.e., self), the means (e.g., effort, competence) and the end result
In terms of the current research it relates to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as effecting career change outcomes perceived as successful. This includes perceptions about self-related causes that lead to the goal outcome such as self-efficacy. Here perceived control is viewed as a motivational resource that fuels self-regulation in the accomplishment of goals.

Self-regulation in the accomplishment of goals involves assessing contextual opportunities and constraints and adapting perceptions of control appropriately. The life-span theory of control (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995; Schulz & Heckhausen, 1996) is a theoretical and empirical framework that focuses on constraints and opportunities as being age-related. Specifically, it proposes age-graded control processes to strive for the attainment of chosen goals and to cope with the negative affect resulting from failure. It advocates the concept of developmental deadlines associated with age phases, in which interfaces are highlighted between periods of opportunity that allow goal pursuance and periods of reduced opportunity during which it recommends goal striving should be reduced and re-directed in alternative directions. Based on the inverted U-shape trajectory of primary control potential across the life span (Heckhausen & Schultz, 1995) it is proposed that thirty-something individuals will primarily display enhanced primary control strategies. That is, thirty-something individuals will behave in ways that change the environment to fit their needs and desires as a response to feeling capable of influencing outcomes in the external world. Secondary control, (i.e., the modification of personal desires) is only employed when changes to the environment are experienced as impossible. The concept of developmental deadlines allows the investigation of an individual’s response to changing opportunity structures over time in terms of personal goal setting and control striving. In this research the perceived opportunities and constraints of individual’s in their thirties will be explored, along with the control strategies used to optimise their development.

In addition to age, there appear to be a number of other factors that affect individual differences in relation to control. People with a high need for power and dominance are concerned with control over their own environment and with influencing others (Porter, Allen & Angle, 1981). This therefore affects their attitude towards risk, (i.e., the extent to which they are willing to test the environment by attempting to change
or control it). In theoretical terms, it would be expected that individual's attitudes to control at work would be related to their occupational self-concept, or career anchor (Schein, 1978). Individuals who hold a career anchor of 'stability and security' would be expected to make relatively few efforts at personal control whereas those at the other extreme, those with the career anchor of 'creativity' would be expected to engage in a lot of control activity.

Individual differences in the need for achievement also appear to be related to attempts at personal control. Mowday (1978) suggested that people with a high need for achievement would be more self-confident, and therefore more likely to risk an influence attempt. Other researchers have suggested that people who are high in their need for achievement are task-orientated, and attempts to control contingencies in the environment may be necessary in order to succeed at many work tasks (Kanter, 1977; Staw, 1986). If work is held as a central life interest, this is associated with the individuals perceiving themselves as more decisive and taking more initiative than others who have a neutral or non-work central life interest. This was found to influence their likelihood of initiating control attempts (Dubin & Champoux, 1975). Finally, the person's history of control should affect future influence attempts. Having made previous control attempts, this develops an understanding of what is involved, learning is achieved in relation to the sorts of attempts that have high probabilities of success, and feelings in relation to different outcomes are experienced. Depending on the extent to which these attempts have been rewarded will then influence feelings of self-efficacy in relation to future control attempts.

In general, research findings suggest that having a sense of control over one's development, including one's career, is a critical component of being adaptive and psychological resilience (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996; Baltes, Stuadunger & Lindenberger, 1999); results in greater satisfaction with career and perhaps in greater career involvement (Hackman & Oldman, 1980), and contributes to improved well-being throughout the life cycle (Bandura, 1997; Grob, Little, Wanner & Wearing, 1996; Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe & Ryan, 2000). One reason for the link between perceived control and psychological health might be that when individuals perceive themselves as mastering developmental goals or tasks, they are encouraged to engage in striving for more desirable goals, and in
consequence, are more likely to experience success and thereby feel better. It has also been argued that individuals who have a strong sense of control may also be better at capitalizing on positive life experiences (e.g., Langston, 1994). For example, those who believe in their general abilities to achieve success may also be more likely to perceive themselves as being more deserving or as generally more lucky when experiencing pleasant events in everyday life. Consequently, perceived control may be associated with increased subjective well-being when positive life events occur.

However, life-span studies of perceived control and development suggest, that it may not be associated in uniformly positive ways with subjective well-being throughout adulthood (e.g., Clark-Plaskie & Lachman, 1999). Burger (1989) suggests that a strong sense of control may result in negative affective responses when individuals perceive a great responsibility to use their potential, an urgency to be successful, and a strong attentional focus toward prevention of undesirable events. Research indicates that enhanced perceptions of control may only be adaptive when suited to the individual’s potential for experiencing success in life (Bandura, 1997; Heckhasuen & Schultz, 1995). One explanation put forward is that individuals who hold strong control beliefs are less flexible in adjusting their cognitive appraisals of their life situation when confronted with failures or loss (e.g., Clark-Plaskie & Lachman, 1999).

In contrast, a lack of control or learned helplessness has been associated with clinical depression (Overmier & Seligman, 1967; Seligman, 1975). However, certain psychological factors are thought to intervene between the experience of helplessness and depression (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978). These relate to interpretations of the perceived causes of the helplessness in terms of three key dimensions; whether the causes were viewed as being global or specific, chronic or transient, and personal or universal. It is thought that helplessness resulting from lack of control or failure leads to depression if the person’s causal explanations for it are global, chronic and personal.

In attempting to understand the factors that contribute to career change being thought of as successful the concept of perceived control in relation to age and various
individual differences appears to be crucial. It is of interest to assess whether participants in general have an enhanced perception of control as is expected for their age, and if so, whether this assists adaptation to change or whether it leads to any negative psychological affect being experienced.

3.2.7 The Influence of Context
The influences of the social and cultural context are viewed from the phenomenological perspective of the career changer in this research. Ontologically, the mutual relationship between the individual and their context is acknowledged. The individual is regarded as an active agent altering the environment around them through their actions and constructing a subjectively meaningful world through their sensemaking processes. This however, occurs within a context that is constituted through a network of socially defined typifications, such as group norms, group meanings, and group language that express its systematic and coherent 'grammar'. This reflects, and in turn forms the culture (or system of shared meaning) in which the individual is located, and influences the structural and institutional constraints they operate within. Therefore, the focal point of this research may perhaps best be summed up as "the individual, embedded in a network of relationships and statuses, as the irreducible unit of analysis" (Matthews, 1977, p. 37).

An individual's construction of their meaning of career illustrates the interplay between their subjective interpretation of the world and the various influences of their social context. Not only are an individual's subjective perceptions of their career interpreted according to their internal inclinations but also according to their own cultural lenses. The social and cultural context may also provide a measure against which the individual may assess aspects of their career, therefore making a more objective contribution. The following discussion focuses on the role of the social context in terms of identity, the psychological need for social validation and the notion of opportunities and constraints that an individual may perceive as influencing their career.

In terms of identity the value placed on the principle of distinctiveness has been discussed in section 3.2.2. A sense of uniqueness however, may only be interpreted within a social framework that allows for comparison, as identity theorists argue, the
intrinsic value of one’s self-concept is partially grounded in the perceptions of others (Felson, 1992; Weigert, Teitge, & Teitge, 1986). Harre (1979) points out that the very attributes that characterise the seemingly “free-standing” person are entirely relational, having their terms in other people and other features of the environment. However, the characteristics of the contemporary working culture appear to offer reduced relational opportunities compared to the old ‘job for life’ scenario. Instead work is increasingly undertaken in a variety of independent scenarios, for example, working at home or in non-structured work situations, where there is less provision for social interaction and little or no organisational context in which to pursue objective success criteria. In such a setting problems of self-definition and possible normlessness (Mirvis, 1995) may occur. This draws attention to the psychological need for validation of the self within a social environment. People are thought to establish a healthy self-structure and feel more confident and satisfied with their self-worth as a result of receiving unconditional regard in their social ties according to social validation theory (Rogers, 1959). It therefore appears that if favourable social validation is achieved then this is conducive to higher self-esteem and this in turn has been found to relate negatively to stress (Corning, 2002; Jex & Elacqua, 1999). This is in accord with the finding that suggests that social support, consisting of intimate communication and genuine concern, is one of the two main buffers (the other being coping strategies) that mitigates against the intensity of stress experienced by individuals (Cunningham, Brandon, & Frydenberg, 2002; LaRocco, House, & French, 1980; Woodward, Shannon, Cunningham, McIntosh, Brown, Lendrum, & Rosenbloom, 1999). Thus, emotional support and social validation appear important for psychological well-being. However, their potential for being addressed appears to be reduced in the isolated contexts of contemporary work experiences. In the current research the consequences of the potential loss of a significant social context will be explored, and any sources of social validation and support that are achieved within this context will be investigated.

The benefits of social validation that have been described are however dependent on the individual perceiving this validation in positive terms. The social context is therefore used not only in terms of validation but also in terms of evaluation. This is achieved by comparison with others, and generally with others that are perceived as
more or less similar (Festinger, 1954). In consequence, the process of social comparison is thought to contribute to the formation of social groups by defining ‘similar people’ and increasing pressures for homogeneity. Various types of social comparisons can be seen. For example, comparisons may be at an inter-personal, intra-group or inter-group level, or may be made against an abstract standard, a norm of an ideal (Brown, Novick, Lord, & Richards, 1992). Comparison may also have a temporal perspective, for example, comparing a current situation, with a past situation or one that is aspired to in the future. Comparisons may also be made in different directions, upwards where the point of comparison is better than oneself, downward where the point of comparison is worse than oneself, and lateral when the point of comparison is of equal status.

One of Festinger’s (1954) nine hypotheses in relation to social comparison states that comparing oneself with others is accompanied by hostility and derogation if continued comparison has unpleasant consequences for oneself. However, it would seem that in general such psychological harm is guarded against by the way in which social comparison is undertaken. Empirical findings suggest that people tend to select dimensions of comparison in a way that allows them to be seen in a better light when they have the opportunity (Lemaine, 1974; Lemaine, Kastersztein & Personnaz, 1978). Also, dimensions of comparison have different levels of importance and can be used in subtle ways to put others in an inferior position. For example, by emphasising difference from others, a sense of superiority may be implied (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984). Hinkle and Brown (1990) argue that particular people and groups might be less inclined to use social comparisons as a strategy for evaluation, and that they might instead evaluate themselves using abstract norms. An abstract norm that may be relevant to individuals in their thirties is that of the “social clock” (Neugarten et al., 1965) discussed in section 3.2.1, with which life events or careers are assessed as being ‘on or off schedule’ against the social norm (Lawrence, 1984).

Studies also indicate different motivations at the root of the type of comparison used. For instance, people appear to use comparisons with others when they want to evaluate themselves, and use temporal comparisons when they want to gratify themselves (i.e., a self-enhancement motive) (Wilson & Ross, 2000). It has also
been suggested that temporal comparisons are more commonly used later in life (Brown & Middendorf, 1996; Sulls & Mullen, 1982). The current research will assess the types of social comparisons made by individuals in their thirties, to assess whether they feel these have changed over time and what factors they feel may have caused any changes. The implications of different types of comparisons will be investigated and whether particular kinds of comparison are thought more or less likely at certain stages in the transition process. For example, it is expected that if an individual perceives that they are behind in an aspect of their career in terms of the social clock this may result in a sense of urgency to achieve their goals that provides a motivating element to their career change.

Another way in which context can be understood to influence an individual’s career is in terms of the opportunities and constraints they perceive it holds. Theoretical approaches to the study of social processes in relation to work have often been defined according to a two-dimensional option set. The vertical dimension corresponds to the socio-economic status of occupations and the horizontal dimension corresponds to occupational activity types. The later is the concern of theorists concerned with interests and choice such as Holland (1985) while the former dimension, is predominantly the concern of sociologists, and focuses on the systematically differentiated social environments of individuals and the implications these have on career. This is the focus of structural theory (Roberts, 1968) that suggests, for example, that family social position determines a confined information and friendship network. As a result social classification determines the type of career an individual is likely to have.

Many career psychologists however, propose that the external context does not play quite such a deterministic role. Instead, they suggest that progress and success is largely the result of general intelligence and effort, perhaps mediated by aspects of the individual’s self-esteem and self-efficacy. It is thought that the latter approach is more relevant to this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, in general terms, the consequences of exposure to only a limited amount of information, as discussed by Roberts may now be outdated. In a world dominated by television and the Internet the majority of people now have access to a broader network of information. This is
thought to influence expectations and opportunities in relation to career beyond the confines of the individual’s immediate social environment. Secondly, and of particular relevance to individuals in their thirties, it is expected that the influence of an individual’s socio-economic status may persist but will be less deterministic than when they made their initial career choice. For instance, educational qualifications obtained as a young person and familial expectations may play a role in influencing initial career choice and expectations. However, the older adult may choose to return to college and achieve more qualifications, and it is expected that they are likely to feel less pressure from their family, and be more self-determined.

Although it is suggested that individuals in their thirties have greater opportunities in influencing their careers than the confines implied by structural theory, it is recognised that there are many potential constraints that may influence their career decisions. Stern’s (1986) career model recognises a broad range of influences, both contextual and internal that interact with the individual and affect their career options over time. The model suggests that opportunities are enhanced as a result of being a mature worker and having a developed knowledge base and set of abilities. Past experiences result in adaptive learning that brings about changes in attributes such as performance, adaptation, confidence and self-esteem. Inner changes are also brought about by maturational developments such as changing attitudes in relation to work. In terms of constraints, external barriers considered to influence career development include access to jobs and promotion, and the possible impact of family and economic factors are also cited (Osipow, 1986). Gottfredson (1981) focuses on the influence of class and gender in circumscribing occupational decisions. She suggests that people “will tend to sacrifice interest in a field of work to maintain sex-type and prestige, and to some extent will sacrifice prestige level for sex-type, if this is also necessary” (Gottfredson, 1981 p. 572). Once compromise has been made then a process of adjustment to this state is thought to occur. Compromise is the relaxation of a stipulation about the tolerable range of one or more option attributes (interests, work values, abilities) when an ideal option is not located (Gati, Shenhav, & Givon, 1993). In this research, the opportunities and constraints perceived by individuals in their thirties will be explored together with the ways in which they adapt to their perceived circumstances.
From the discussion in this section it appears that the boundaryless career within which the career changers in this research are operating presents some potential challenges in terms of the social context provided. The sources from which the socially derived component of the self-concept are derived will be investigated, and the ways in which social validation and evaluation is achieved will be addressed. It is also of interest to see if there are any changes in the need for social comparison at the various stages of career transition. Finally, a critical factor affecting positive career change experiences appears to be the perception of contextual opportunities and constraints. The factors that appear to influence these perceptions will be investigated. The influence of the various social roles held by individuals on their career change experiences will now be discussed.

3.2.8 Role-Related Issues in Career Change

Following on from earlier discussions focusing on identity and social influence it is apparent that identity is a dynamic, multifaceted construct that mediates the relationship between individual behaviour and social structure (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; McCall & Simmons, 1978). The multiple components that comprise the self are referred to as role identities. These, it is suggested, define who one is and how one ought to behave (Thoits, 1986). Role identities, being defined partly by the individual and partly by the social structure, may therefore be regarded as conceptions of the self that arise from the social roles that the individual occupies (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). In relation to individuals experiencing career change in their thirties it is expected that two key role-related issues will arise. Firstly, the experience of career transition involves adjustment to a new professional role that may be experienced as a stressful process. Secondly, conflicts may arise between the demands of the broad scope of roles held by individuals at this age, for example, between those relating to work and those relating to domestic life. Differences in gender roles also suggest that men and women may have dissimilar experiences of career change.

In terms of possible conflict stemming from the demands of enacting multiple roles, a number of research studies indicate the likelihood of inter-role conflict between working life and home life. Negative spill-over effects have been identified in both
directions, with work seen as intruding on family relationships (Small & Riley, 1990; Repetti, 1987; Wallace, 1997) and domestic demands affecting professional life (Crouter, 1984; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Williams & Alliger, 1994). A meta-analytic review of inter-role conflict research by Kossek & Ozeki (1998) further affirmed that work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts do affect job and life satisfaction negatively. Findings have also linked the demands of coping with multiple roles to somatic complaints, role strain, and psychological distress (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Menaghan & Parcel, 1990).

However, a considerable body of research studies have identified a number of psychological benefits to be gained from holding multiple roles, thus providing empirical support for identity-accumulation theory (Thoits, 1983). This suggests that benefits, including status security and enhancement, ego-gratification, and increased self-esteem, might outweigh any stress that may be caused as a result of juggling multiple roles (Baruch, Barnett, & Rivers, 1983; Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993; Barnett, 1998; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002). Ruderman and colleagues (2002) went on to argue that multiple roles confer more energy and resources to some people because “time and energy are resources that can be shared, integrated, and expanded across domains” (Ruderman et al., 2002, p. 370). Six types of what were labelled ‘cross-role synergies’ were elicited from their qualitative study. These were opportunities to enrich interpersonal skills, psychological benefits, emotional support and advice, multi-tasking skills, enrichment of personal interests and background, and leadership skills. Thoits (1983) suggested the reason that a higher number of role identities were associated with better mental health is because they provide a stronger sense of meaning and of purposeful existence. While, a reduced number of role identities on the other hand were associated with feelings of anxiety and despair.

Findings suggest that holding multiple roles also has beneficial consequences in relation to coping with the challenges of adjusting to role change as a result of a job transition. Boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) proposes that individuals achieve efficiency in assuming multiple roles by minimizing role transition difficulties and undesirable role interruptions. Since flexible work arrangements afford variable spatial and temporal work and life boundaries, the distinctions between various roles
becomes more flexible and permeable. Latack (1984) also found that less role overload was experienced after major transitions compared to after minor transitions, thus adding further support to the argument against the generality of the stress model.

Two reasons have been offered to account for the inconsistent findings in relation to the psychological effects of holding multiple roles. Firstly, it is suggested that common method variance may have influenced the findings of studies that employed subjective self-report measures (Hurrell, Nelson, & Simmons 1998; Steffy & Jones, 1988). The second reason is that differences in the subjective interpretations of work and non-work roles may moderate the role-stress relationship (Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Williams & Alliger, 1994). This research hopes to discover whether, for individuals in their thirties, the holding of multiple roles is perceived as positively contributing to their career change or having a deleterious impact. It is hoped that sources of conflict between demanding roles may be identified, and further insight gained into the possible ways in which a number of roles may assist adjustment to a new professional role.

Traditional career development models based on the professional lives of a select category of men have been criticised as inadequate in addressing the broader range of influences affecting women's careers. Since the 1970s there have been calls for specific life-career models for women's development that reflect their varied roles in a contemporary context (Bardwick, 1980; Gilligan, 1980; Gallos, 1989; Marshall, 1989). It has been argued that these models should be "inclusive of a multitude of experiences, and flexible rather than deterministic" (Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003, p. 5). It now seems that traditional models are also inadequate in reflecting the changing roles of many men and the influence this has on their working lives.

Family power theory (Eby et al., 1999; Stephens & Feldman, 1997) suggests that partners in a relationship have control over career decisions to the extent they make the majority of the household income and have the fewest responsibilities in the household. Therefore the traditional role of breadwinner and child carer may now be more dependent on earning power rather than gender. The theory also asserts that the study of career decisions must take account of other family members and circumstances to have meaning. This research will address the question of whether individuals will differ, on the basis of gender in the degree to which domestic roles
are discussed, and the degree to which they are considered to be an influencing factor in career decisions and behaviour.

In brief, this research will investigate the responses to losing an established professional role at thirty-something and the process of adopting a new one. The potential benefits or challenges of having multiple roles during career change will be assessed. A comparison of the experiences of individuals with children and those without may assist in understanding the impact of multiple roles during career change. The impact of multiple roles along gender lines at the current time will also be considered.

3.3 SUMMARY
The theoretical positions and empirical findings discussed in this chapter suggest appropriate parameters for achieving the aims of the ensuing research, namely to understand the factors that contribute to the perceptions of both positive career experiences and successful outcome in thirty-somethings changing career. The combination of approaches adopted in this thesis are summarised in this section.

Arising from the challenges described in relation to traditional definitions of career and the flexibility inherent in contemporary theories is the issue of what comprises a personal configuration of career for individuals in their thirties in the current context. Understanding the meaning of career for the participants of this research is an essential starting point for this research and influences the choice of adopting an exploratory approach to the first study. In order to achieve this insight a phenomenological perspective is adopted throughout the research. Narrative methodology is employed to enable insight into individual meaning making in their career stories, and this is analysed using a sensemaking framework. A holistic approach to career aims to achieve a comprehensive representation of the range of influences described by participants as being meaningful to their career, and provide an understanding of their inter-relationships. During this chapter a number of ways have been identified in which it is expected that this rarely used approach to the study of career change will contribute to research. One example is the expected contributions to understanding the role of emotion in cognitions and behaviour during involuntary and voluntary career transitions.
In order to understand the particular age-related factors relevant to the age group being studied a life-span development framework is adopted. This provides a theoretical context in which the influence of maturational and contextual factors on career change can be addressed in a manner that is flexible and allows for the idiosyncratic nature of individual biography.

In recognition of the subjective meaning of career, and the notion that this reflects the individual's life circumstances as they change over time, a dynamic approach to both the nature of career and the sensemaking processes of the agent are considered necessary. A social constructivist paradigm incorporates these requirements. It allows for an understanding of the development of concepts such as identity, emotion and motivation, and places point-in-time sensemaking within a temporal context, recognising the impact of both past experiences and future aspirations. From this perspective it is also possible to assess the range of factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of these concepts, and the relationship between the individual and the influence of their social context in terms of self-regulation. The earlier discussion on the role of individual differences identified variations in the factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of these concepts, both between individuals and intra-individually over time, thus suggesting their malleability. A comparison between these variations is thought to allow for an understanding of those constructions that are the most adaptive in terms of career change. For example, in terms of identity, the link between autonomy, explored identities, intrinsic motivation, and effective career-related behaviour is seen (see page 71). In the current research unravelling the relationships between the construction processes of relevant concepts, their components, career-related cognition and behaviour, and the evaluation of outcomes may therefore contribute to understanding ways in which the career transition experience may be enhanced.

Constructivist and sensemaking perspectives on career change offer a view of the individual striving for the attainment of continuity, coherence and positive evaluation required for self-definition, while facing potential threats to gratification as a result of the discontinuities embodied by the change experience. Whether change is initiated by the need for on-going development, identified in the action-theoretical
approach to life-stage development, or by external forces, self-regulatory processes appear to militate against a sense of discontinuity. The novelty of experiences brought about by career change is not only a challenge in terms of identity but also in terms of the disruption they pose for what tend to be habitual emotional responses. The study of the disruptive effects of change and the protective mechanisms employed to reduce its impact provide an insight into the dynamic nature of various concepts and suggests a number of mediating factors that effect the impact of the change event. Ward (1997) suggests that it is precisely how people make sense of their change experience and how they deal with change and unfamiliarity that will influence their psychological adjustment and participation in their socio-cultural environment.

Understanding the sensemaking processes of individuals contributes to an understanding of the protective processes that are utilised in response to the threats that derive from a change experience. As a consequence this may provide an indication of the ways in which a career change experience may be optimized. Optimising the experience is viewed in terms such as minimising the severity of distress experienced, reducing the recovery time, being able to move on, minimising the risks of giving up the career change, achieving fulfilment and personal transformation, operating to potential, and feeling rejuvenated. Since this research is oriented towards understanding the experiences of thirty-somethings changing career in today's working environment and how this experience can be optimized an ameliorative stance is adopted. Therefore, factors that are considered to contribute to positive evaluations of change are analysed to provide a guide towards which cognitions and behaviours may be directed. The factors that are perceived as resulting in negative evaluations of change are also analysed since they may not simply be taken as the direct opposite of those that contribute to positive evaluations. Another reason why it is thought important to acknowledge the factors that contribute to negative evaluations of change is that this may lead to an understanding of the strategies used for overcoming them. The approach adopted in this research is therefore guided towards affirmative principles however, the discussion of negative experiences is not excluded in order to provide a representative interpretation of career change experiences.
Recurring themes are identified in the literature linking certain states with psychological well-being. These are summarised in Ryff's (1990) proposal that psychological functioning should be assessed in terms of self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy. This is in accordance with the findings discussed earlier on the mediating factors that contribute towards positive affective responses to job change including support and resources, a sense of predictability and personal control, and person-environment fit. In this research the aim is to further an understanding of the role of these factors during career transition while considering potential variances in the needs of the career actors according to individual differences and developmental states. In addition, the inter-relationships between these factors and with other characteristics such attribution style will also be considered, as well as the impact of real or imagined structural constraints (e.g., socio-economic; family; gender; past history).

The focus of this research relates to both outcomes of change and experiences of the transition, it therefore has a process-orientated approach to the study of career change. Once again a holistic perspective is necessary to comprehensively capture the inter-relationships between the wide range of potential factors that may contribute at each stage of the transition. These factors include needs, values, the evaluation of rewards, the influence of identity, emotion, social context, the role of individual differences and age-related factors. This approach will enable for instance, the identification of factors that contribute positively during the process of change. For example, the potential motivation derived from pursuing a development goal such as generativity that is found intrinsically rewarding.

The extant career literature suggests some multi-dimensional concepts that are considered to contribute to career development and effective coping strategies within a working environment that is characterised by change. From the life-span developmental perspective the concept of career maturity is contributed, while the concept of career motivation comprising of career identity, career insight, career resilience and self-efficacy are derived from the motivational literature. In this research it is of interest to assess the components of effective career change strategies in the current climate and the factors that contribute to their development. This
extends an understanding of career change competencies, such as career adaptability and career resilience that has been called for in the literature (Heppner, 1998; Kidd, 1998; Savickas, 1997). Insight into the coping strategies used to handling career change tasks will be achieved by listening to the experiences of participants who have been involved in adaptive decision making, a technique recommended by Phillips (1997).

One of the critical components identified as assisting in adaptation to change is an attitude that regards development as on-going and consequently fosters continual learning. Indeed, learning is regarded as an aspect of life that provides a valuable sense of continuity in boundaryless careers (Bateson, 1994; Weick, 2001). However, Hall (1986) suggests that early adult success can reinforce a stable routine of behaviour and lifestyle that may put the person at risk of being closed to learning later in their career. This suggests that on-going learning and development may therefore be a particular challenge for individuals in their thirties. Whether this is the case will be looked at in the current research. A recommendation, derived from the sensemaking literature, is that an experiential learning approach is beneficial in career counselling. This is based on the notion that active engagement in learning experiences enables connections to be made and meaningful conclusions to be created that will subsequently be learnt from (Feuerstein & Feuerstein, 1991).

In conclusion, this research proposes that the individual is viewed as an active agent constructing their interpretation of themselves and the world around them through a process of sensemaking. This suggests a dynamic view of individual characteristics and also of the subjective nature of career. Through their actions the individual’s social context is altered but this relationship is reflexive with environmental factors affecting, to some extent, the cognitions and behaviour of the individual. A flexible life-span development framework is adopted within which potential maturational or age-related contextual influences on career change may be assessed. A holistic view is taken of concepts such as emotions, values, and roles in order to attain a comprehensive understanding of the range of influences affecting their nature and the inter-relationships between them. This research takes an action-theoretical perspective to development, viewing self-development as an intentional and on-going activity, governed within the parameters of opportunities and constraints by a
self-regulatory system. Change, whether agent-led or externally instigated, is viewed
as a disruptive event to established and habitual psychological processes and
behaviour. Adaptive responses that promote psychological well-being in the face of
change are considered to relate to the possession and utilisation of a number of
strategies and personal characteristics, which it is believed, may be acquired through
learning in a relevant environment.

3.4 RESEARCH AREAS
The overall aim of this research is to discover, from individuals in their thirties who
have undergone career change, what they perceive to be the factors contributing
towards it being a positive experience with a successful outcome. Each of the
following studies in this research is focused on answering particular research
questions. However, during this chapter several areas of interest have been
highlighted and these will be addressed if, and when they arise during the research.
In summary, these relate to the following three broad questions:

- What factors contribute to career change experiences?
  Including the relationships between:
  ➢ age-related factors
  ➢ value systems (reflecting needs and rewards) including time perspective
  ➢ the role of emotion
  ➢ individual differences
  ➢ the effect of multiple roles including possible gender differences
  ➢ opportunities and constraints

- What are the characteristics of the contemporary environment and what
  influence do these have on factors relating to career change?
  Including the relationships between:
  ➢ the definition of career
  ➢ self-concept
  ➢ self-validation
  ➢ emotional support
  ➢ opportunities and constraints
• What coping strategies and evaluative processes are employed in response to the challenges relating to change, what are their components, how are they achieved and how do they relate to psychological well-being?

Including the relationships between:

➤ Adaptive self-regulation processes interacting with self-development
➤ Identity-accumulation
➤ Career maturity
➤ Career motivation
➤ Individual differences e.g., self-determined versus conferred identity types, level of perceived control, self-efficacy, and attribution style.

In this chapter the theoretical scope of the thesis has been defined and key research areas have been identified. The following chapter will now clarify the epistemological position of the research, and discuss social-constructivism and the sensemaking framework as a context for the subsequent studies. The second half of Chapter Four focuses on the methodology employed in this thesis. This includes theoretical justification for the qualitative approach and practical guides to the techniques used in each of the studies.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

4.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter outlines the epistemological position of the current research, and then provides an overview of the interpretative framework employed. The use of qualitative methodology is then discussed. Firstly, to provide some context to the approach adopted a brief historical perspective to career research methodology is necessary. From the descriptions of career theory in the previous chapters it is evident that this thesis is undertaken at a time when research is at a crossroads. Despite an awareness of the limitations associated with traditional theories of career and a purely quantitative paradigm they remain the prevailing forces in vocational psychology. Their appropriateness for addressing questions concerning "prevalence, generalisability and calibration" (Lee, Mitchell & Sablynski, 1999, p. 183) are identified but the so-called emerging theories of career, based on constructivist principles and qualitative methodology, have identified gaps in the understanding of the concept of career as a result of this historical bias. Qualitative methodology, considered appropriate for eliciting "description, interpretation and explanation" (Lee et al., 1999, p. 183) has been employed with increasing frequency. However, while the benefits of this approach, in terms of elucidating aspects of career not previously researched, are recognised it appears that they have often been accompanied by a sense of having to justify the use of such methods. Qualitative methodology has also adopted the standards of the dominant quantitative approach in attempts to gain credence with the majority, however, there are now nascent endeavours to establish parameters for the qualitative paradigm that reflect its epistemology, thus providing a coherent and truly alternative research approach.

The current research responds to numerous calls by constructivist theorists for further study from this perspective (e.g., Cohen et al., 2004), to contribute to an understanding of issues that have previously been largely ignored, and to further
redress the balance in favour of qualitative research. A qualitative approach is thought appropriate for the subject matter of career change since it is a complex area best addressed from a holistic perspective. The aim of achieving a holistic impression of the transition experience raises a number of issues. Firstly, the researcher considers this objective worthwhile so the findings resonate with both the participant’s own experiences and consequently provide readers with an insight that is both coherent and meaningful. The findings may therefore also be of greater relevance in assisting others undertaking their own career change. However, this issue brings into question the generalisability of qualitative findings, discussed in more detail in section 4.4.1.

Attempting to achieve a holistic and therefore more credible picture of career change also inevitably means that a broader and more general coverage of issues will result. This is advantageous since it allows access to components of career change that are of subjective significance to the participants, such as the role of emotion. However, the researcher recognises her role in ensuring that the plentiful and diverse data collected is not only interpreted and displayed in a way that retains its idiographic meaning, but is summarised in a form that makes it meaningful and accessible. This is achieved by the effective use of data-gathering techniques and the selection of appropriate analytical tools. The theoretical reasons for choosing the particular techniques used and the way in which these were administered is discussed later in this chapter. The guidelines adopted for ensuring the quality of the research are those defined by a sympathetic epistemological position.

The complimentary contributions of both qualitative and quantitative methods in research are recognised. However, there appear to be contradictory views as to whether the two approaches may be used effectively together. For example, Ponterotto and Grieger (1999) suggest that using mixed methods in research unites approaches with varying worldviews that are different but complementary. Lincoln and Guba (2000) on the other hand, propose that positivist principles upon which quantitative methods are based are philosophically contradictory and mutually exclusive from those represented by the constructivist/constructionist paradigms inherent in a qualitative approach, thereby preventing the methods from being simultaneously combined. The potential for combining both approaches within the
current research was considered and the value of the quantitative approach is not
dismissed, however, at this point in vocational research history there is much to be
gained by following a purely qualitative paradigm. Formative research adopting this
approach has yielded an understanding of areas not previously recognised. However,
as the phrase ‘emerging theories’ implies these are burgeoning but as yet not fully
developed theories. Therefore, it appears that there is a need to add to this body of
research by further investigating concepts that have to date been predominantly
studied from a quantitative perspective, or concepts that are only accessible by
adopting a qualitative perspective. The focus of this research is to provide a holistic
and subjectively meaningful perspective on the career change experiences of
individuals in their thirties. It is hoped that this will contribute to various fields of
vocational research, such as the meaning of career, the transition experience and
adult development concepts. By combining a range of appropriate qualitative
techniques a unique insight into the subject matter is made possible.

The first third of this chapter seeks to convey the epistemological position taken in
this research and to provide a thorough overview of social constructivism and the
sensemaking perspective that form the interpretative framework. The second third of
the chapter focuses on qualitative methodology. This includes the guidelines
followed to ensure the quality of the research and a discussion on the use of
narratives as an investigative tool. The final part of the chapter introduces the
various data-gathering techniques and analytical tools used in each study. A
theoretical perspective first outlines their appropriateness and contribution to this
research, then a guide section details their practical application.

4.2 THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Epistemology refers to the core assumptions about the bases or possibilities of
knowledge. Smith (1990) suggests that the epistemological position of the
researcher is central to understanding a piece of research since epistemology,
methodology and research questions are inextricably entwined. The epistemological
underpinning upon which this research is based, comprises of five core assumptions
that affect the direction of the investigation and the analytical approach. Firstly, the
dualistic nature of career is assumed, comprising the subjective and objective career,
consistent with Hughes' (1937) initial conceptualisation of the concept of career. Secondly, an idiographic perspective is assumed because the subjective career derives from the career actor interpreting his or her life and ascribing meaning to the various facets of career as they change and unfold over time. This position implies two further assumptions, thirdly, that the career actor is actively engaged in the process of interpretation and fourthly, that it is a dynamic, on-going process. The final assumption is that these subjective meanings are influenced by social context. Ontologically, this places the research within a social constructivist paradigm.

This epistemological position informs the research questions that have been constructed in terms that acknowledge the principles of the social constructivist worldview. They attempt to access the participant’s subjective realities and gain a holistic understanding of their experiences of career change. In turn, the epistemological position and the research questions prescribe the methodology employed. To achieve the desired in-depth understanding of participant’s experiences, qualitative methodology is required. The aim of qualitative methodology is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of individuals from a phenomenological perspective, as they encounter, engage, and live through situations, in the case of this research, career transition experiences.

In order to fully understand participant’s constructions of meaning, attention must be paid to the situational context and culture in which they are experiencing the event, and also to the temporal context. Cochran (1990, p. 73) suggested that attempting to understand career transition without placing it in the context of the individual’s whole life is akin to walking in to the last scene of a film and attempting to understand the plot. It is also thought necessary to consider the participants context at the time of telling their career narrative, for example, their rapport with the researcher (Morrow, 2005) since this is likely to affect what is recalled and how it is reported. This approach therefore assumes there is no fixed external reality to be objectively known but a fluid social reality that is co-constructed. The role of the researcher is acknowledged in this process, it is seen as their task to construct (or deconstruct) versions of this social reality.
It is suggested that a narrative-based approach, supported by complimentary qualitative research techniques enables a holistic view of career that can take account of time and place, and allows the finding of patterns in retrospective study (Collin, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988). It is thought that by allowing participants to author their own stories insight may be gained into the processes by which they make meaning of their experiences, and the significance they place on both objective and subjective aspects of career.

From a historical context, the rationale for this epistemological position is derived from the wider debate in social science disciplines about epistemology and its methodological imperatives. As has been noted previously, positivistic epistemological positions have increasingly been undermined and there has been a gradual and partial re-orientation towards a social constructivist paradigm (Johnson & Cassell, 2001). In terms of extant theory and empirical study, there is an acknowledged need to re-dress the balance of research in the area of career psychology (Chen, 2003; Cochran, 1990; Kidd, 2004; Ornstein & Isabella, 1993), and particularly career change (Teixeira & Gomes, 2000), in favour of the qualitative approach, towards which this research will contribute.

At this point, social constructivism and then sensemaking are discussed to outline the interpretative framework of the research.

4.3 THE INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK

4.3.1 Social-Constructivism

The theoretical framework of constructivism proposes the view that knowledge is constructions of reality (Pope & Denicolo, 1997) and the individual is an active agent involved in this cognitive construction through “self-conceiving, self-organising processes” (Savickas, 1997, p. 150), influenced by their own, and socially determined understandings of the world. Kidd (2004) notes that, somewhat confusingly, the term ‘constructivist’ is often used interchangeably in the social sciences with ‘constructionist’. It is argued that the two paradigms share certain assumptions, such as there being multiple realities, that individuals are purposefully involved in making sense of their worlds, and that the researcher and participant “co-create” understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). However, the terms differ in that
the ‘constructionist’ perspective relates more to the idea that “descriptions and accounts are themselves constructed” (Potter, 1996, p. 97), the main concern is with the social processes involved in creating accounts of social phenomena and the role of language in these processes. Constructivism, on the other hand is more concerned with individual psychology (Kidd, 2004) and how, from a phenomenological perspective the construction of accounts of the world are created. Savickas (1989) used the terms ‘constructive-developmentalism’ and ‘the meaning-making paradigm’ to describe the perspectives offered by constructivism. This is the concern of the current research, thus a constructivist theoretical framework is adopted.

The addition of the prefix ‘social’ to the constructivist perspective indicates the contribution of the social context to an individual’s constructions of reality. Social constructivists (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) recognise the role of social relationships on individual constructions of meaning, which to some extent addresses criticisms of constructivism being overly individualistic (Martin & Sugarman, 1999). The individual is not viewed in isolation from their context, but in a holistic way that illuminates both the individual and social influences that contribute to their perceptions of each new situation they encounter, in the light of conceptual models built up from past experiences. This suggests the need for the holistic perspective adopted in this research, to encompass the influence of context and a full understanding of the individual’s interpretation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain this when they say “Context is crucial in deciding whether or not a finding may have meaning in some other context as well” (p. 38). The holistic position recognises the individual as a self-determining agent but also reflects their social nature. There are two implications of adopting this position. Firstly, that the phenomenon being investigated (since it is a product of both individual and social processes) is likely to be complex, multi-faceted and may contain contradictions and inconsistencies. Secondly, that the individual account is a unique and subjective interpretation. Claims of accuracy or truthfulness are not made since meanings “do not merely reflect the world as it exists, but are produced or constructed by persons within cultural, social and historical relationships” (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994, p. 109).

The co-creation of understanding between participant and researcher when interpreting meaning from accounts reflects the social constructivists acceptance of
humans having a shared ‘mental’ reality and thus sharing meanings. These meanings represent the essence of the construction of this social reality, whereas language functions as the primary way of communicating meanings and understandings. These communications (e.g., in words or pictures) may be analysed, however, they are understood to be akin to a translation of the processes of meaning making, they are what are available to the individual and, if communicated, to the external world. Social constructivism is a reflexive theory, in that the researcher, as described earlier, is not independent from the process, instead their social influence is acknowledged, both affecting the content of the participant’s account and in the interpretation of the data. To ensure interpretations reflect the meanings conveyed by participants as far as possible, researcher reflexivity is required, involving questioning, articulating and evaluating the basis on which research has been carried out and interpreted.

The social constructivist paradigm has provided what has been regarded as a second perspective on career research (Savickas, 1992). It can be seen to offer illumination on aspects of career that are more obscured by traditional positivistic approaches, in that it is able to offer definitions of career in more “local and provisional terms” (Mignot, 2000, p. 515) rather than only fragmentary and reductionist explanations (Collin & Young, 2000). It allows for more embracing notions of career based on the accumulation of skills and knowledge, and the integration of personal and professional lives (Cohen, et al., 2004). The contextual focus of the social constructivist perspective has also provided a relational aspect to the study of career. For example, several researchers have demonstrated how career change is socially embedded (e.g., Higgins, 2001; Kidd, Jackson & Hirsch, 2003; Siebert, Kraimer & Liden, 2001).

The dynamic nature of the constructivist approach is reflected in Morgan and colleagues description “Everyday life must be seen as an ongoing ‘accomplishment’ which takes particular shape and form as individuals create order and make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves...” (Morgan, Frost & Pondy, 1983, p. 24). From this viewpoint a career story has a “moving perspective” (Hughes, 1958, p. 67) and the subjectivity in people’s career planning and decision making processes is recognised (Young et al., 1996). As such the constructivist approach provides an insight into the construct of career that
previously had not been explicitly acknowledged (Savickas, 1997; 2000). This relationship is conveyed, for example, in contextual action theory (Valach & Young, 2002) rooted in the social constructivist paradigm. It perceives what is described as “life career action” as an ongoing, ever-changing and holistic experience of contextual meaning making, involving a dynamic interaction between behaviour, internal processes and social meaning. This reflects a philosophical assumption of constructivism that individual’s constructions of reality influence the behaviour they adopt (Field & Morse, 1985). This is encapsulated in Kelly’s (1955) postulate “A person’s processes are psychologically channelled by the ways in which they anticipate events” (Bannister & Francella, 1986, p. 7). Thus this research assumes that the way a person gives meaning to their sensemaking interpretations markedly influences his or her feelings, thoughts and actions. It is assumed in particular that participant’s interpretations of their various career change experiences will affect their responses and actions later in the transition process and in relation to potential future change.

Thus, adopting a social constructivist perspective, this thesis is about how participants experience career change, that is, what interpretations and meanings they develop to understand the change. This perspective enables a complex, dynamic and subjective interpretation of career change events to be examined. It also affords an understanding of the influence of context on these interpretations, including the temporal position of the change within a sequence of life and career events and the role of social influences. The objective is not to build a complete process led description of the individual change experiences but rather, to use participant’s experiences (as construed by them) to inform theoretical development, in particular the issues pertaining to the evaluation of the change experience and subjective success.

The next section introduces sensemaking, the framework employed in the current research for understanding the individual process of constructing meaning in relation to career change experiences.
4.3.2 SENSEMAKING

A sensemaking perspective provides a suitable framework for understanding the processes that individuals undertake to interpret and therefore make sense of their experiences when they encounter ambiguity (Weick, 1979, p. 130). This is described as engaging in “ongoing processes through which they attempt to make their situations rationally accountable to themselves and others” (Morgan, Frost & Pondy, 1983). The a posteriori nature of the current research, whereby the participants have already experienced their career change, accords with sensemaking assumptions “An individual cannot know what he is facing, until he faces it, and then looks back over the episode to sort out what happened” (Weick, 1988, cited in Isabella, 1990, p. 305). The individual is therefore viewed as being actively involved in this process, as they seek to achieve a feeling not only of rationality, but also of order and clarity (Weick, 1995). The active element of the sensemaking process leads Weick (2001, p. 460) to describe the outcome of ‘sense’ as an accomplishment rather than simply as a discovery. Theoretically, the origins of sensemaking lie in constructivism.

Where it is used as an analytical tool, as in the current research, the narrative of the participant becomes a text that is analysed. Analysis is focused on what people do rather than on detached deductive theorizing and the interruption that prompts sensemaking should be described in detail with careful attention to what people were doing before the interruption, what became salient during the interruption, and what happened during resumption of the activity (Weick, 1999). Both the individual perspective and the shared meaning across individuals may be identified, implying the researcher is operating within a social constructivist worldview.

Weick’s contributions to the sensemaking literature came at a time when dominant positivist principles in organisational research were beginning to be examined (e.g., March, 1998) and qualitative research methods were becoming more accepted. This movement, characterised by an acknowledgement of subjective meaning in a vocational context meant that sensemaking became a valuable framework within which it could be explored. The majority of the sensemaking literature remains concerned with individuals within an organisational, and therefore a collective setting, rather than focusing on the perspective of the individual moving inter-organisationally, or to or from self-employment, as in this research. Therefore the application of sensemaking theory is applied cautiously here to ensure its relevance
to the individual scenario. However, consistent with the social constructivist approach adopted in this research, Weick views sensemaking as grounded in both individual and social activities. The theory of sensemaking therefore refers not only to the process of how people reduce uncertainty or ambiguity but also of how they socially negotiate meaning during sensemaking events. As a result the study of sensemaking must include the systematic consideration of the individual’s social and cultural context. In this research, Weick’s perspective on sensemaking is able to provide a holistic insight into the processes involved when individuals face the discontinuities of career change.

The inherent instability and uncertainty involved in career transition leads the individual involved to engage in sensemaking activity. According to attribution theorists, the main motivations of the sensemaking process are to understand why the events occurred and to predict when they might occur again, in order to render the environment more controllable (e.g., Heider, 1958). This involves events being interpreted in terms of cause and effect relationships. It is thought that attributional search is generally triggered when individuals encounter novel, surprising, unexpected or potentially threatening events (e.g., Baucom, 1987; Weiner, 1985; Wong & Weiner, 1981). This then leads to the production of causal attributions that are stored as causal schema in long-term memory, providing a cognitive framework that contributes to the mastery of similar situations in the future (Kelley, 1967). Consequently, when individuals encounter familiar or routine situations, such processing can be replaced by the automatic accessing of relevant causal schema already present in long-term memory (Louis & Sutton, 1991; Weick, 1979) leaving the individual’s attention free for other tasks.

In Weick’s terminology, sensemaking is induced by changes in the environment that create discontinuity in the flow of experience that engages an individual (Weick, 1979). These discontinuities constitute the raw data that have to be made sense of. This involves interpreting the environment through connected sequences of enactment, selection, and retention (Weick, 1979). In enactment, people are said to actively construct the environments they are attending to by bracketing, rearranging, and labelling portions of the experience, thereby converting the raw data from the environment into equivocal data to be interpreted. For Weick (1995, p. 27)
sensemaking was defined as a matter of "equivocality" which relates to the notion of multi-meaning synthesis. In selection, people choose meanings that can be imposed on the equivocal data by overlaying past interpretations as templates to the current experience. Selection produces an enacted environment that provides cause-effect explanations of what is going on. Weick (1995) argues that past experiences are constructed differently depending on whether the outcomes are seen as good or bad. As the creation of meaning is an attentional process, the individuals will attend to events that correspond to their view of outcome. Finally, retention relates to the storing of these meaningful interpretations or successful sensemaking attempts so that they may be retrieved in the future.

This pattern is reflected in other sensemaking models, such as Gioia's (1986) stages of attending, comparing, attributing, relating, reflecting and retaining, and Peterson and Smith's (2000) sensemaking process that proceeds through the linking of events to existing interpretative structures. These personal cognitive structures for the activity of meaning making have been termed as 'theories-in-use' (Schon, 1987; 1995), the "plan" behind communication (Schutz, 1967, p. 130), 'organizing circumstances' (Spear & Mocker, 1984), 'reorganizing schemas' (Weick, 1995), and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). To summarise, these describe the accumulation of past meanings in the form of personal schema that provide the basis for future action. As such they contribute to the understanding of how individuals (and groups) attempt to structure the unknown by placing stimuli into cognitive frameworks (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988).

Mezirow (1978; 1981) adds a further useful perspective to meaning making in that he views it as synonymous with adult learning and therefore, adult development. This highlights the implications of sensemaking and the benefits of self-awareness for development,

"... becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions [meaning schema] have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective, and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings." It is suggested that critical reflection and awareness of "why we attach the meanings we do to reality ... may be
The enactment and selection elements of the meaning making process described by Weick are affected by the individual’s cognitive structures. These comprise of an individual’s existing beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions, including those based on prior retention systems (Weick, 1979) or they may be driven by actions (Weick, 1995). In belief-driven processes, people start from an initial set of beliefs that are sufficiently clear and plausible, and use these as nodes to connect more and more information into larger structures of meaning. Beliefs may be used as expectations to guide the choice of plausible interpretations, or their relevance may be contested if they conflict with current information. In action-driven processes, people start from their actions and grow their structures of meaning around them, modifying the structures in order to give significance to those actions. People may create meaning to justify actions that they are already committed to, or they may create meaning to explain actions that have been taken to manipulate the environment.

As well as asking questions of themselves when faced with a situation requiring sensemaking, individuals are also thought likely to ask them of others (Bougon et al., 1990). Meanings or interpretations may be derived from interaction with colleagues, parents, friends, and in a wider context, from cultural demands. This produces intersubjective accounts (Weick, 1995) of events and is considered to be indicative of the social world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). When theorising, Weick (1999) emphasises the importance of preserving the context in which people are acting and reflecting, and attributes a holistic awareness to the individual. He also suggests a sense of time urgency in meaning making, and suggests time is treated as part of the context. Reflection is not treated as temporally separate from the action, although the synthesis of meanings is thought likely to come later. If meaning is not resolved then the individual may employ the use of abstract tools to solve it in a detached manner, as a coping strategy, although Weick suggests this strategy is a last resort rather than the first and primary means of coping.

One final point of relevance in relation to the goal of sensemaking analysis is that "accuracy is meaningless when used to describe a filtered sense of the present."
linked with a reconstruction of the past, which has been edited in hindsight" (Weick, 1995, p. 57). The instability inherent in the career change experience is likely to result in the individual turning to a “combination of selective noticing, selective shaping, and serial self-fulfilling prophesies” (Weick, 1995, p. 153) to seek validation of individual beliefs (Mezirow, 1991; Schutz, 1927; 1982; Weick, 1979). And the role of affect is likely to confound accuracy by hindering rational thought (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2000) and interpretation (Weick, 1995) in such a scenario.

In this research the goals for sensemaking theory outlined by Weick (1999), and discussed here, are adopted. The aim is to achieve a holistic and on-going insight into the individual’s attempts to make sense of the disruptions prompted by their career change experiences, and to discover what they find to be a personally rational interpretation of events. Attention will also be focused on Mezirow’s conceptualisation of meaning making and adult learning and development. The potential for self-awareness development arising from the sensemaking experiences generated from the change events will be noted as well as its implications. In order to achieve insight into the sensemaking processes of individuals, qualitative methodology is necessary. The benefits of this approach will now be discussed.

4.4 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

4.4.1 Qualitative Data

Since this research takes a constructivist view focusing on individual’s sensemaking, and the dynamic and interactive relationship between various social, societal and cultural dimensions, qualitative methodology is appropriate for several reasons. Firstly, qualitative research focuses on the interplay between the environment and the individual. Secondly, it emphasises collaboration between the investigator and the research participants, allowing for heightened understanding of individual process and the meaning that participants attribute to their behaviours and circumstances. Finally, qualitative research allows for exploratory investigation, since it is open to identifying unanticipated phenomena as participants are given an element of choice in what they discuss.
The aptness of qualitative research for "description, interpretation and explanation" (Lee et al., 1999, p. 183) has been described in the introduction to this chapter. In terms of the data achieved from this approach, one of the implications of the constructivist position is that qualitative researchers believe that "...human functioning cannot be reduced to laws or principles, and cause and effect cannot be inferred" (Brown & Brooks, 1990, p. 11). Therefore, claims are not made to generate "universal truths or scientific laws, but rather are striving to build meaningful local knowledges" (McLeod, 2002, p. 75). In other words, phenomenological analysis does not aim to reveal any ultimate true meaning, instead the intention is to enable the researcher to open up an area of human experience, to produce an authentic and comprehensive description of the way in which a phenomena is experienced by an individual or a group, and thereby illuminate and clarify the meaning of social actions and situations. At a fundamental level the outcome of qualitative research is understanding rather than explanation.

The rationale for qualitative research is therefore idiographic and emic, in that it focuses on one or a very few individuals, finding categories of meaning from the individuals studied. The essence of this approach is not concerned with generalising from the findings, although the question of whether this is possible is a contentious issue. Qualitative research is characterised by small participant numbers, in-depth data collection and analysis for the purposes of understanding the participant's cognitions, emotions and behaviour in relation to the research subject. From a conventional, positivist viewpoint the small sample size and absence of statistical analysis of the data prevents generalisability.

Some writers, however, argue that generalisation is achievable using qualitative techniques. For example, Elliott and colleagues suggest that qualitative research findings are not only situational, and that commonalities may be drawn within and across situated studies. They emphasise though, that findings should only be extended with restraint, in terms of their scope and nature, and that their application must always be thoroughly grounded in the particulars of the participants and their situations (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). This suggests that sufficient information is provided about the context of the participant to enable the reader to decide how far the findings may transfer. Stake (1998) suggests that generalisation may be achieved
from qualitative research findings if a particular case is examined in order to provide insight into an issue or refinement of a theory, and the case itself is of secondary interest. He also suggests that the ability to generalise is dependent on appropriate sampling.

In the current research a range of individuals is selected to provide an insight into a variety of career change experiences, including those of women and men, professional and manual workers and organisational employees and the self-employed. This is not considered to be a representational cross-section of society but it is an effort to reflect a democratic understanding of career ownership. The aim is to understand the particulars of each individual's meaning of their career experience and to be able to draw comparisons between the cases. The similarities and differences noted provide further illumination on the issues of particular relevance to each sub-group.

A purely qualitative approach was undertaken in this research since the nature of the results obtained were broad-ranging and detailed, and did not therefore lend themselves to quantitative follow-up. It was also thought that the inclusion of a quantitative perspective would weaken the cohesion of the philosophical rationale of the study as a whole, and reduce the meaningfulness of the findings that had been achieved through focusing on a flexible, open-ended, holistic, and non-statistical qualitative approach.

Each of the qualitative methodological and analytical approaches used in this research are briefly introduced here, but are discussed in further detail later in the chapter. Constructivist approaches emphasise empowerment of the participant and this is reflected in the techniques used. The value placed on participants and their individuality is acknowledged in this research by using pseudonyms to preserve anonymity but to provide a sense of the person, this is a presentation approach borrowed from Smith (1999). The use of semi-structured interviews as a means of data collection in the first and third studies provides a loosely defined and flexible structure within which participants discuss their career experiences. This gives them control over what they discuss and also allows an insight into what is of personal importance and relevance. In Study One, the use of Interpretative Phenomenological
Analysis (Smith, 1995) was considered an appropriate method of analysis predominantly because of its suitability for accessing issues that are highly personal and complex (Smith, Jarman & Osbourn, 1999). It therefore meets the requirements of enabling an understanding of personal perceptions of events rather than an eliciting an objective account, it is also considered ideal for addressing the myriad of factors influencing career change experiences. In order to develop and refine the findings achieved from the exploratory approach taken in Study One, the repertory grid was selected as a means of data collection, and grounded theory was employed to analyse the findings in Study Two. The repertory grid provides a level of structure, in terms of top views, that enables focus on key issues, while also fostering participant inclusion and an element of choice in what is discussed.

For Study Three, causal maps were chosen as a means of data analysis because they offer a clear and accessible graphical means of summarising the complex inter-relationships between the factors affecting career change. This is in accordance with the guidelines of good practise for qualitative research described by Elliott and colleagues. They recommend an integrated summary of the analysis, with a graphical representation explaining the relationships among categories. They also suggest providing a verbal description of the model and organising the presentation around a rich, memorably named 'core-category' (Elliott et al., 1999). In this research, the core-category relates to the main research question, namely, the factors that are considered to relate to feelings of progress and success in career change experiences. Further criteria were followed for ensuring acceptable standards in the qualitative research undertaken here, as discussed in the following section.

4.4.2 ESTABLISHING THE QUALITY OF THE PRESENT EMPIRICAL STUDY
Over the last two decades, with the relative increase in qualitative research, several writers have suggested guidelines for good practice, and have produced criteria for quality in an effort to establish a benchmark of standards and hence a greater acceptance of the value of qualitative work (e.g., Cobb & Hagemaster, 1987; Elliott et al., 1999; Morrow, 2005; Stiles, 1993). Critics from a positivistic background often question the rigour of validity, credibility and generalisability in qualitative research and suggest that as a result the findings should not be taken seriously.
Largely in order to make qualitative research more palatable to conventional audiences, there has been a tradition of using parallel criteria. However, this has been criticised and claims made that qualitative research should be judged on different terms from those that relate to positivistic principles, since the goals are distinct and different kinds of knowledge claims are made (Morrow, 2005). Instead, she recommends moving away from extrinsic parallel criteria and adopting intrinsic standards of trustworthiness that have emerged directly from within the field of qualitative research.

Morrow (2005) suggests ensuring trustworthiness by grounding the research in a substantive theory base, then deriving research questions from this and ensuring that a suitable paradigm is applied to guide the research. She also suggests a number of research practises to ensure quality. These are “sufficiency of and immersion in the data, attention to subjectivity and reflexivity, adequacy of data, and issues related to interpretation and presentation” (Morrow, 2005, p. 3). In terms of the sufficiency of data obtained, in qualitative research this refers to the richness of individual descriptions rather than the number of participants involved. The number of participants is not considered meaningful, instead “validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative enquiry have more to do with information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (Patton, 1990 p. 185). The sample in qualitative research is always purposeful, i.e., participants are chosen to provide to most information-rich data possible. The choice of participants is based on the specific criteria that is guiding the research, for example, in this research, all participants had changed career during their thirties. Also, as described in the previous section a range of people were selected to ensure a broad perspective on career change experiences.

To ensure that sufficient and credible data is collected, certain data-collection procedures are recommended. As a starting point for research Cobb and Hagemaster (1987) recommend a single, broad research question, followed, if necessary, by further research questions, and the scope of the question(s) being manageable within the timeframe and context of the study. This means that consideration is given to whether it is possible to achieve the aims of the research in a thorough manner within
the parameters available. To ensure the quality of the data, sufficient engagement with participants is necessary in order to obtain in-depth material. In this research questions are structured to be open-ended and flexible to allow participants freedom in what they discuss and to elicit answers that are complex and rich. The researcher considers the context of the participant as this is thought to be crucial to understanding the meanings they make of their experiences. The criterion of authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) refers to the researcher’s responsibility to represent each individual construction as fairly and accurately as possible. In this research, efforts to achieve this include audio-taping and transcribing interviews. One other significant recommendation for achieving data quality is to obtain a variety of data from a number of sources. In the current research a number of qualitative data collection methods are employed to achieve data that is rich and broad in its scope.

In terms of immersion in the data, analysis involves the researcher attempting to remain grounded in the data by checking and re-checking to ensure that a comprehensive and accurate representation of what has been said is provided. This relates to the notion of ‘verstehen’, which implies enhanced and deep understanding, and also of particularity, (i.e., “doing justice to the integrity of unique cases”) (Patton, 2002, p. 546). Peer researchers, or in the case of this thesis, the researcher’s supervisor and another experienced qualitative researcher contributed at this stage by challenging, supporting and/or suggesting the development of further themes from the data. In addition, the use of participant checks is recommended to verify the authenticity of the interpretations, and any feedback may be integrated into the findings. This process was carried out with two participants from each of the studies undertaken.

To further ensure an accurate interpretation of the data it is recommended that the presentation of findings include thorough descriptions of source data, expressed as “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973; 1983). These involve detailed, rich descriptions not only of participant’s experiences of phenomena but also of the contexts in which those experiences occur. These allow the reader to obtain first-hand the descriptions given by participants and to assess for themselves the validity of the researcher’s interpretation. Two ways in which the researcher may enhance the interpretation of
the findings is firstly, by emphasising the influences that may have affected the data. Alvesson (2003, cited in Kidd, 2004) highlights a number of factors that may influence data-collection in interview scenarios, including participant’s expectations about what the researcher is interested in, impression management and the use of available cultural scripts which may be used to ‘distance’ their accounts from ‘genuine’ experiences. Secondly, qualitative researchers may enhance an understanding of the findings by ‘re-contextualising’ interview-based data by examining contextual issues that may impact it. For instance, this could involve identifying the cultural and societal influences potentially affecting the career change experiences of the participants.

In order to guard against subjectivity and to ensure the quality of the qualitative research, Patton (2002) cites the criterion of dependability. This involves “a systematic process systematically followed” (p. 546). This may include tracking the emerging research design and keeping a detailed audit trail of the research activities and processes as they proceed, including possible influences on the data collection and analysis. This then provides an evidential account involving reasoning and possible influences that may then be assessed by interested parties. In the current research notes were kept during the period that data was gathered and the findings were analysed, issues considered relevant are discussed in the Reflection sections of each study.

While attempts are made to minimise the influence of the researcher’s subjectivity on the research, their role is acknowledged in the constructivist position as co-constructor of meaning and as integral to the interpretation of the data. Fine (1992, p. 220) wrote of the importance of “positioning researchers as self-conscious, critical and participatory analysts, engaged with, but still distinct from our informants”. While it is acknowledged that research is never objective, the integrity of the findings is thought to lie in the data. To achieve this, the researcher must aim to adequately tie together the data, analytic processes, and findings in such a way that the reader is able to confirm the adequacy of the findings for themselves. A strong component of this is for the researcher to describe their theoretical, methodological and personal orientations that are relevant to the research (Elliott et al., 1999) and to make implicit assumptions and biases overt to themselves and others. Watson (2000,
cited in Cohen & Mallon, 2001, p. 55) identifies this need for honesty in his comment that states “to reveal the hand of the puppeteer in one’s writing can help achieve a degree of objectivity, in that the reader can make up their own mind about the biases or spins of the writer”. In this research, these considerations are again discussed in the Reflection sections of each study.

This process of researcher reflexivity, defined as “self-awareness and agency within that self-awareness” (Rennie, 2004, p. 183) provides an opportunity for the researcher to understand how their own experiences and understandings of the world affect the research process. This may be achieved by keeping a self-reflective journal throughout the study, noting experiences, reactions and thus aiming to increase self-understanding. As mentioned, in this research these personal thoughts are incorporated in the reflection sections of each study. In addition, reflexivity may be promoted through “critical and sustained discussion” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) with independent qualitative practitioners to increase exposure to alternative propositions. The benefits of discussions held with the researcher’s supervisor and another experienced qualitative researcher have previously been described. Morrow (2005) also suggests that while the investigator will inevitably hold beliefs about the phenomena in question, extensive grounding in the relevant literature mitigates against bias by expanding the researchers understanding of multiple ways of viewing the phenomena. In this thesis, the researcher’s thorough immersion in the relevant career literature is evident it is hoped, in the analysis offered in the previous two chapters.

The methodological techniques selected to investigate career change experiences are now discussed. The overall approach to data-gathering across the three studies is to elicit career narratives, although these are supplemented by ratings of repertory grids in Study Two. The reasons for using narratives as the means by which to understand participant’s experiences are outlined first.

4.4.3 The Use of Narratives for Investigating Career Change Experiences
As part of the sensemaking process people construct narrative accounts as a way of ordering, structuring and understanding. Weick (1995, p. 128) describes this in the following way “when people punctuate their own living into stories, they impose a
formal coherence on what is otherwise a flowing soup”. These accounts are also a means of preserving information for the individual themselves. That is, they may just be internal narratives or they may also be used as a way of communicating information to others. As such stories may be viewed as both processes and products. As processes, in the context of this research, qualitative interviews work as dynamic, sense-making developments during which each participant retrospectively constructs a version of their career story. As products, stories have the potential for capturing the richness and ambiguity of social life while at the same time providing a sense of order and sequence (Weick, 1995). For the researcher they are also thought to offer a glimpse of “the sense of reality that people have about their own world, stories are a fundamental source of knowledge about how people experience and make sense of themselves and their environments” (Musson, 1998, p. 11), in this case, their careers and the transitions within them. Despite the acknowledged advantages of the narrative approach, outlined in this section, to date there have been few empirical studies in career research employing this technique, notable exceptions being Marshall (2000) and Arthur and colleagues (1999).

Firstly, some clarity is needed regarding terminology, since distinctions have been made regarding the way narrative accounts are described. Arthur and colleagues distinguish stories and narratives from ‘career scripts’ that describe “institutionally rather than individually determined programs” (Arthur et al., 1999, p. 42). However, it is suggested that the two interact, for instance, aspects of the institutional script may be interwoven into the personal narrative. The perspective of the current research is phenomenological, therefore it is stories and narratives that provide the focus here. Following on from previous organisational research where the terms ‘stories’ and ‘narratives’ are used broadly (Polkinghorne, 1988; Weick, 1995), they will be used interchangeably here to describe participant’s accounts of their career. It has been argued that the term ‘story’ should be delineated from other literary forms in order to retain its analytical strength (Gabriel, 2000), and Cohen and Mallon (2001, p. 50) highlight the benefit of the term in that it has “familiar and everyday connotations – a commonsense resonance missing from much of the career literature in its attempts to be “scientific””. They define ‘story’ as the “complex, baggy, sometimes contradictory, often circuitous accounts of their careers that people construct in the course of research conversations or qualitative interviews”.

123
However, the terms ‘stories’ and ‘narratives’ are both used in this research to reflect a routine and familiar process but one that may also be analysed to reveal intricate psychological processes.

The dynamic nature of career and the on-going characteristic of sensemaking processes have been discussed. In order to investigate these concepts adequately, it is necessary for this active component to be reflected. Career stories are suitable since they are able to provide the personal “moving perspective”, described earlier, on who we are and what we are able to do (Hughes, 1958, p. 67). Cohen and Mallon (2001) emphasise the value of stories as a tool in “illuminating the ways in which individuals make sense of their careers as they unfold through time and space, attending to both the holistic nature of career as well as to specific career transitions”.

Insight into the holistic nature of career that the narrative approach allows, refers to the potential for elucidating the subjective perspective and the relationship between individual action and wider social and cultural contexts (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). Cochran (1990, p. 74) highlights the unique way in which narrative-based research allows an integrated approach to the study of objective and subjective aspects of career, “If we use different types of explanation, we must find some way to make these types cohere onto an integrated account. Narrative appears to be the only structure that seems capable of such integration, and it does so with such ease and naturalness that understanding can virtually be equated with a complete story”.

From an empirical perspective, Arthur and colleagues found the advantages of narrative in illuminating the dual nature of the career concept “A career story is based on events, such as job moves and job titles of the objective career, but also includes memories of subjective career phenomena such as satisfactions, emotions, and ambitions” (Arthur et al., 1999, p. 42).

From a social constructivist viewpoint, narratives are regarded as subjective but not purely individualistic since they are deeply embedded in social and cultural context. As Collin and Young (1992, p. 8) observe, narrative “is built from history, culture, society, relationships and language. It embodies context”. In enacting their career
the individual negotiates the influences of their context. Their narratives illustrating the way they reflect or defy dominant external influences in their values and beliefs. As such the dialectic relationship is recognised between the process of the individual, through their actions, imposing themselves upon, and creating their world, but acting within a defined cultural and social context, which in turn reflects and is constituted by their actions.

Several writers have suggested that narratives give form to the development and maintenance of an individual’s identity (McAdams, 1985, 1989; Sarbin, 1993). For example, McAdams’ (1989, p. 161) life history concept is defined as “an internalised narrative integration of past, present and anticipated future which provides lives with a sense of unity and purpose”. He suggests that people’s narratives develop a characteristic narrative tone, such as generally optimistic or pessimistic, and characteristic motivational themes organised around the need for agency and communion. Stories expressing agency may be enacted in career behaviours involving the pursuit of independence and autonomy, while those expressing communion, may be enacted in behaviour involving the nurturing of relationships and connectedness. However, it is proposed that most career stories are mediated by elements of both agency and communion (Arthur et al., 1999). As such narratives implicitly reflect the life histories of the teller in both the way they are told and in their content, providing a fundamental source of knowledge about how they have experienced and interpreted events in the past and how they are likely to in the present and future.

The narrative approach therefore places the individual’s sensemaking in a temporal context that would seem crucial in this research in providing a holistic understanding of career transition experiences. Indeed a key requirement of a story or narration is its sequence “a narration is the symbolic presentation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time. Without temporal relation we only have a list” (Scholes, 1981 p. 205, cited in Weick, 1995, pp. 128-129). For Weick (1995), the sequence is the source of sense, hence, how participants chose to tell their stories forms part of the analytical process. He suggests the importance of telling a story from beginning to end to make sense of it as a whole, before being comfortable with taking it apart. In this research, participants were encouraged to give an
overview of their career history, before discussing more detailed aspects of their career change. However, while sequence can be seen as central in providing the ‘sense’ of the story, what is also important is the meaning that is used to weave the events and circumstances together, therefore through the introduction of emotion, subjectivity and meaning the career facts are translated into career stories.

A distinction has been made between the temporal perspectives of narratives. They have been classified as either progressive or regressive depending on whether they are describing events as they move towards or away from valued end points (Gergen, 1988). In the context of this research, participants were interviewed following their career transition and were therefore asked for regressive or retrospective accounts of their experiences. However, they were also asked about their views prospectively, particularly in relation to their attitudes towards future change in the light of their previous experiences, therefore encouraging progressive narrative. In interpreting narrative accounts two significant issues to consider are that firstly, career is a continuous story merging past, present and future (Weick, 1995; Collin & Watts, 1996; Arnold, 1997) therefore insight may only be gained into the personal meaning of career at the particular point-in-time of asking. Secondly, the process of making sense within narration and retrospection should not be seen as a neutral or objective activity, rather it involves the constant process of sifting and sorting events and memories, and establishing cause and motive, in the context of past and current circumstances (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). This suggests that the narratives that provide the text to be analysed in this research are dependent on what the participant remembers, what they can articulate, what they wish to discuss, and also what makes sense to them at the time.

The subjective nature of stories has raised the question of their ‘truthfulness’. Gabriel (1998; 2000) draws on Benjamin’s (1968) distinction between “facts-as-information” and “facts-as-experience”. In storytelling the teller is concerned with sensemaking, interpretation, and emotional response in relation to their experiences. As such Gabriel (1998) concludes that ultimately the truth of a story lies not in its accuracy, but in its meaning. It seems that the meaning an individual derives from stories is in seeking to provide themselves with identity and direction, and to signal to others who they are and what they are able to do. McAdams (1997) uses the
expression ‘personal myth’ to describe the unfolding story of an individual’s life that they tell themselves in order to provide a sense of psychological unity and to manage life choices. Autobiographical stories therefore not only report and interpret action, but also shape the action of these stories.

Another distinction made in terms of narrative relates to the motivation for its telling. Baumeister and Newman (1994) examined both “interpretative” and “interpersonal” motives in their analysis of why and how people create narratives about their lives. Interpretative motives are seen as a response to the narrator’s need to make sense of his or her experiences, while interpersonal motives are thought to reflect the teller’s wish to make a particular impact on the listener. The aim in this research is to access participant’s interpretative accounts and to reduce stories reflecting interpersonal motives. Interpersonal motives, such as impression management, are regarded as confounding factors, and although they may to some extent be regarded as inevitable, attempts will be made to minimise their impact and to acknowledge their possible influence. One other issue to consider, whether intentional or unconscious on the part of the interviewee, is the possibility that they may respond “through the use of familiar narrative constructs, rather than by providing meaningful insights into their subjective view” (Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 101). The aim of the researcher is to achieve ‘meaningful insights’ rather than ‘familiar narrative constructs’ and attempts will be made to achieve this by means of communications with the participants and the use of appropriate questioning.

One final point of relevance to this research relates to the potential benefits of storytelling to the narrator. From a career counselling perspective, encouraging an individual to develop a coherent account of their career, is thought to enable them to move forward effectively (Killeen, 1996). It appears that this process contributes to the individual feeling increased ownership of their career, enhances an understanding of it, and thus allows them to progress. In general, career stories may remain unspoken and unwritten, except in the limited confines of a job interview or CV. Therefore, the researcher is aware that the participants are expressing, probably for the first time, the personal meanings of their career stories. This activity may alter the interpretation of meaning and this must be considered. For example, Taylor (1989) suggests that articulating a narrative enhances its development. In terms of
coming to terms with career change, for example, in telling stories individuals attempt to develop their own 'theoretical' positions on the transitions and work out the emergent rules (Cohen & McMahon, 2001). As Weick (1995) suggests, we are all inveterate theorisers, and given to inductive generalisations, therefore, the story approach gives space to the theorising of participants as well as that of the researcher. In telling their stories in the research context, this forms part of the participant’s cumulative pattern of experience and adaptation. The process may highlight and aid comprehension of, and response to, career-relevant stimuli such as current job characteristics and opportunities.

In conclusion, the narrative approach provides a phenomenological perspective on the meaning of career and its construction, thus contributing to the return of the individual as the focus of career theorizing (Ornstein & Isabella, 1993). It enables the researcher an insight into the processes and products of sensmaking, in a way that is meaningful to the narrator. The narrative approach also allows for a holistic view of career that can take account of temporality and place, and can enable the finding of pattern retrospectively (Collin, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988). The effectiveness with which the career story is elicited depends on the way in which the story-telling process is facilitated, including the nature of the interview schedule and the role of the researcher. The means by which this is achieved are discussed next. The aim of the research is to generate a subjectively meaningful account of the career transition experiences of participants. That these data are filtered and situated is not in the researcher’s view problematic. What is of interest however, are narrative elements such as the themes that participants chose to identify; the aspects of context they highlight as significant; and the sources of their meaning making. Attention will be paid to both the form, (i.e., the narrative flow of the account) and content, (i.e., the stories people tell and the themes that arise) since this enhances the analysis (Silverman, 1993). In addition, further illumination will be sought by analysing interview data for ambiguities and contradictions within individual cases and also between accounts (Jones, 1983).

The following section provides a rational for the choice of methodology used to gather data and analysis the findings in each of the three studies of this thesis.
4.5 OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION OF EACH STUDY

Each of the three studies in this research had different and specific aims. The choice of methodology for data-gathering and analysis in each study was based on its suitability in contributing towards these aims.

The objective of the opening study was to answer a broad research question aimed at identifying the feelings and experiences involved in career change during the thirties. An exploratory approach was taken in this study since it is the first study to investigate career change at thirty-something. Rather than making a priori assumptions the aim was to enable participants to convey their perspective on the change process. However, some structure was considered necessary when accessing participant’s experiences both to prompt their memories and for the researcher to achieve some points of comparison between individual narratives. In order to achieve this structure a semi-structured interview schedule was devised. The content of the questions was based on issues that were considered to have potential relevance to the career change experience of this age-group following immersion in career theory. To reduce potential constraints on the scope of the narratives the question design was open-ended to allow participants an element of choice in what they discussed. In addition, participants were initially asked for an outline of their career history and at the close of the interview were given the opportunity to discuss anything they considered significant that had not been covered. The researcher followed up any unanticipated issues.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used as an analytical tool in the first study. This was considered suitable because it is primarily concerned with exploring the individual’s account. The insight it allows at a phenomenological level is an aim of this research and it was considered particularly important to capture at this stage of the research before building up to establishing communal themes. Analysis was rooted in the idiographic origin of the findings by providing contextual information and participant quotes. However, following the identification of themes within individual transcripts shared themes from across cases were elicited to produce a thematically organised narrative. This highlighted the issues that appeared to be significant to a number of participants. The debate concerning the generalisability of
qualitative findings and an outline of the necessary guidelines for doing so is presented in section 4.4.1. With reference to these guidelines, the shared themes were contextualised within existing theory in the discussion section of this study. The aim was to assess how well they integrated and to identify where they may offer novel insights and refinements to theory.

The objective of the second study was to further an understanding of the involuntary career change experience for thirty-somethings. Again, the aim was to offer an element of choice to participants in order to draw out what had subjective meaning to them. However, to further inform theory it was considered beneficial to introduce themes that had been found significant in relation to voluntary change in the first study, and to assess how these were perceived in involuntary career change circumstances. In this way the findings from the first study partly informed the second study and provided a logical development to the research. The methodological tool that allowed both participant freedom and researcher focus was the repertory grid. The participant was able to choose their elements, within broad-based guidelines laid down by the researcher to ensure there was an element of focus to the research. The participant had complete choice in the constructs they chose and in the ratings of their grids. Only after the participant had completed the basic grid did the researcher present, for their consideration, the Top Views relating to the theoretical issues highlighted in the previous study.

The process of participants forcing distinctions between elements when completing the repertory grid was found to prompt in-depth narratives. These were considered to complement the interview data gathered in the two other studies. The repertory grid ratings provided an additional numeric aspect to the findings in this study but the follow-up analysis was undertaken in the constructivist spirit in which the grid was designed and in line with the philosophical framework of this research. These findings were interpreted using grounded theory. The researcher stayed close to the data and provided contextual information and participant quotes gathered from the transcripts of the participants narratives that accompanied their completion of the repertory grid.
In the third and final study individuals who had changed career at least two years prior to the interview were asked to reflect on the transition process and its consequences, including how they perceived it to have an on-going impact on their lives. The research aim was to further an understanding of what was valued in the transition process, why it was valued and the evaluative processes used. At this stage in the research it was hoped that the findings would offer an overview of the transition cycle and the factors considered to be significant in shaping it in positive ways. Semi-structured interviews were again considered to be suitable in achieving an understanding of the subjective meaning of the transition process. They were also considered a suitable tool for the aims of this study in enabling participants to provide a holistic impression of their experiences and describe the complex inter-relationships between the factors they considered meaningful.

Analysis of the data in this study was undertaken using cause maps. The rationale for this choice of methodological tool was derived from the guidelines for presenting qualitative data outlined in section 4.4.1. The advantages of cause maps in this study were in offering a means of assembling the complex and inter-related factors identified by participants in an organised and meaningful way. The arrows between variables were able to depict the perceived relationships between factors in a temporal order. The map is therefore able to represent the process of transition. The graphic representation was considered beneficial for the researcher to clarify what was happening and to assist in drawing justified conclusions or not. This type of presentation was also considered to benefit the reader in terms of its accessibility and compact form. Both individual and cross-case cause maps were developed, these were empirically grounded but enabled a higher order effort to derive a testable set of propositions about the network of variables and interrelationships. As with earlier studies the process of theory building was contextualised in existing theory and reference to individual cases was recommended.

In the following section the theoretical background to each of the exploration and analytical techniques is provided, followed by a description of the way in which they were applied in the research.
4.6 EXPLORATION AND ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES

4.6.1 Exploration Technique One and Three: The Semi-Structured Interview

4.6.1.1 The Theoretical Bases for the Interview Method

An interview is taken as "any interaction in which two or more people are brought into direct contact in order for at least one party to learn something from the other" (Brenner, Brown & Canter, 1985, p. 3). A range of theoretical positions may be adopted when conducting an interview study (Smith, 1995). In this research the position adopted is phenomenological, in that the researcher is attempting to capture the participant's own perceptions and constructs. This reflects the belief that the individual is a valuable source of information for discovering more about their lives. It is thought that what the interviewee chooses to discuss has some on-going significance for them, and that there is a relationship, though not necessarily a transparent one, between what they say and the beliefs or psychological constructs that they hold (Smith, 1996). At the same time it is recognized that meanings are negotiated within a social context (including the interview itself) and that therefore interviewing draws on, or can be seen from a social constructivist perspective. Once the interview data is collected, it may then be transcribed and examined by applying a type of content analysis.

Allport (1942) pointed out that if you want to know something about people's activities the best way of finding out is to ask them. This simple approach however, permits the exploration of issues that may be too complex to investigate through other means, such as quantitative methodology. It allows access to subjective meaning and an open-ended interview technique is process-orientated, revealing something of the flow of the person's construing. In addition, this approach is able to capture a holistic view of meaning making encompassing the myriad of influences that affect it. Kelly (1955) extended the work of Allport, developing Personal Construct Theory and the methodological tool of repertory grids. Kelly and later researchers (e.g., Harre & Secord, 1972) have emphasised the expertise and experience that is unique to the respondent in research, and the viability of using the respondent's own accounts as scientific data.
To ensure the effectiveness of interviews in a research-based context guidelines need to be followed to ensure that techniques are strengthened and possible weaknesses minimised. The manner in which this was carried out in this research will now be discussed.

4.6.1.2 The Semi-Structured Interview Guide

In this research, data for the first and third studies was collected through researcher-generated, in-depth, relatively unstructured, biographical interviews. Preparation and effort was involved in the design of the interview schedule. The questions were piloted on at least two volunteers to assess clarity and effectiveness in prompting relevant and rich responses. Any changes were incorporated at this early stage. Attention was paid to the interview being the appropriate length ensuring that it allowed a detailed and exhaustive investigation into the research area while not being a tiring or off-putting experience for the respondent. The tone required for the interview setting was one of a participatory event and not in any way exploitive, this was reflected in the way the interview was conducted at a number of levels.

Firstly, the questions were structured in an order to encourage the interviewee to feel comfortable and to facilitate the articulation of their sensemaking processes. The researcher introduced her position in relation to the research area, providing a brief biographical summary and her own interest in, and experience of career change. However, care was taken not to provide value statements to prevent respondent’s answers being influenced. Instead, it was hoped that this provided a rapport to develop between the interviewer and interviewee, and for the interviewee to feel that they were talking to someone who was empathetic and understanding of their experiences. As a result they feel able to answer openly and honestly without fear of judgement or incomprehension. As such there is an explicit sharing and/or negotiation of understanding in relation to the topic under investigation.

The aim of the first question was to allow the interviewee to provide an overview of their career history and situate their career transition event within a meaningful context. This has been described as a ‘grand tour’ question (McCracken, 1988). For the opening questions in the interview schedules of Studies One and Three see appendices IV and XII. If the interviewee asked what was meant by ‘career’, they
were told that it should include anything that was considered significant to them, it
didn't have to relate only to a working scenario. The context provided in
respondent's answers may reflect both temporal elements (the sequence of events
leading up to the decision to leave the organisation) and social elements (including
the important people and events which were seen to influence the decision). This
positions the career transition event as an episode in the respondents overall
life/career story, an episode that was seen to make sense in terms of this unfolding
narrative. Placing the career transition in context is valuable for two reasons.
Firstly, it appears beneficial in allowing the participant to tell their story from
beginning to end, to make sense of it as a whole before taking it apart, as
recommended by Scholes (1981). Secondly, how participants chose to tell their
stories forms a valuable part of the analytic process since it allows an insight into the
sequence and the context as sources of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). The interview
process therefore has the advantage of allowing both parties to explore the meaning
of the questions and answers involved.

From the broad focus at the beginning of the interview the ensuing questions are then
funnelled down to explore in detail the experiences of career change and in particular
the personal meaning of these experiences. The questions were ordered in a
sequence with their content reflecting the chronology of career change, again to
assist the participants to articulate their sensemaking process, however the questions
were used flexibly to reflect the experiences of the individual. Since the research is
phenomenological the aim is to enter the subjective world of the participant, the
questions therefore need to be open-ended and non-directive (Willig, 2001). The
construction of the questions influence what the respondent will think and talk about,
they thereby influence what the investigator discovers. From a social constructivist
perspective, the researcher acknowledges that the use of language is not neutral but
rather reflects cultural assumptions. Care was taken with the language and
construction of the questions so that they did not impose assumptions and therefore
potentially alienate interviewees and/or skew their responses. Open-ended and non-
directive questions also enable the respondent to be involved on an equal footing
with the researcher, rather than having unequal power in the dynamic. They are
provided with a context of choice in which they are able to discuss what is of
significance to them. From the researcher’s perspective it allows the possibility of insight into unanticipated phenomena.

In this research a semi-structured interview schedule allows for open-ended and non-directive questions within a flexible structure. This structure appears necessary for a number of reasons. It provides a level of consistency between interviews that provides coherence to the research and the possibility of comparison between cases. It also provides both parties with a focal point, and allows the researcher, if necessary, to reign in the respondent to keep the discussion relevant and within an appropriate timeframe. The interview schedule structure also provides participants with a context in which to tell their story, thus assisting them in the often novel and perhaps testing task of articulating a detailed and subjectively meaningful career narrative. Semi-structured interviews therefore provide a structure, but this can be adapted in a flexible way by both parties. It allows the researcher the use of intuition, and the opportunity to tailor questions appropriately and add supplementary questions to prompt discussion, elucidate points of interest and follow-up on unanticipated issues. The interviewer is free to probe and to shift the ordering of questions, they are not totally bound by codes of standardisation and replication. However, the researcher must achieve a fine balance between obtaining sufficient quality data and not being interrogatory. The semi-structured interview therefore provides a flexible and open research tool that can document perspectives not usually represented and sometimes not even envisaged by the researcher.

In section 4.4.3 the potential for “interpersonal” motives (Baumeister & Newman, 1994) in narratives confounding access to “interpretative” accounts was discussed. In a face-to-face interview setting, as employed in this research, there is opportunity for bias (Hyman & Sheatsley, 1954), such as impression management to occur. This relates to interviewees slanting their responses in order to present themselves in a certain light. The importance of providing a relaxed and non-judgemental relationship between researcher and participant in the interview scenario has been mentioned. While attempts are made to reduce the influence of the interviewer in affecting the subjective narratives recounted, the role of the researcher is acknowledged in the social constructivist perspective. To assess this influence, researcher reflexivity is needed at all stages of the interview process including
devising the research questions, selection of the participants, the interview procedure, and interpretation of the data. This is discussed in the reflection sections of each study.

One further issue that may initially be considered to limit the findings is that interviewees are put on the spot and their narrative is only a reflection of what they remember at that point-in-time, and as a consequence there may be some unreporting of past events. In this research all participants were sent an e-mail briefly outlining the research area one week before they were interviewed. This was accompanied by a message (see appendix III) indicating that the researcher was interested in their personal stories and that the research area was for them to interpret in a way that was meaningful to them. The aim of communication was to enhance their memory of the career change events they had experienced by locating their thoughts in the relevant area. However, participants sometimes forgetting aspects of their change process was not considered a disadvantage since a complete and accurate representation of events is not the aim of the research, rather an understanding of the individual's subjective meaning and the processes that have contributed to this achievement at the time of the interview are the main focus. A final point in relation to the interview method is that they generate a substantial amount of data. This is beneficial in providing comprehensive accounts but means that the data must be treated in an organised and methodical way to prevent it becoming unwieldy and meaningless. To prevent this, interviews were audio tape-recorded and then transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the narrative was preserved. Appropriate detailed analysis was also considered necessary to ensure that the findings were represented accurately and were enhanced by insightful interpretations. The method chosen for this analytical process in Study One was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

4.6.2 Analytical Technique One: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

4.6.2.1 The Theoretical Bases for IPA
IPA (Smith, 1996) was considered an appropriate analytic tool for the data collected from the participant interviews of Study One for two key reasons. Firstly, as the name suggests it is theoretically located in phenomenological philosophy and is
concerned with subjective meanings, with the individual’s personal perception of an object or event, as such it is suitable for interpreting participant’s sensemaking of their career change experiences. As far as the researcher is aware this is the first time IPA has been employed in relation to the study of career. Jonathan Smith, the founding father of IPA, read Study One and complimented its application in this area. IPA is also positioned within a social constructivist framework, thus recognising the role of the researcher’s conceptions in the interview and interpretative processes.

Study One is an exploratory study, seeking access to the factors that participants view as significant in their career change experiences. An analytical approach that places the individual and their subjective interpretation at its heart is therefore considered necessary. In IPA participants are viewed as “experiential experts” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 57) therefore a semi-structured interview technique is a natural fit in generating data for IPA (Smith, 1995) since interviewees are able to convey their own personal experiences with minimal direction from the researcher. Smith (1996) suggests that empowering the participants in this way also improves rapport that in turn tends to produce richer data. Therefore, IPA is a theoretically appropriate analytical tool and its focus on achieving subjective insight into participant’s sensemaking makes it ideal for this research.

The second key reason why IPA is appropriate for Study One relates to the analytical aims of the approach. IPA involves an attempt by the researcher to unravel the meanings contained in participant’s accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with the transcripts. From this, meanings are then integrated from across cases into a coherent thematically organised narrative that simultaneously distils, whilst also taking care to represent all cases, without losing sight of their fundamental idiographic origin. In analysis “one is aiming to respect convergences and divergences in the data – recognising ways in which accounts from participants are similar but also different” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 73). Therefore, the intention is not to build up a necessarily generalisable account of these meanings (in this case, the transition experience), but to produce a legitimate account for the sample in question, that is accountable both to the participants themselves (i.e., it resonates with them as a way of understanding their personal experiences) as
well as to external readers of the account (i.e., there is sufficient evidence provided from individual accounts to assure readers of its credibility). In terms of Study One IPA provides analysis at an individual level but also generates themes from the diverse data obtained as a result of an exploratory investigation. These themes are then able to provide a focus for ensuing studies and do not preclude the potential for insights to be drawn about how career change experiences can be constructively managed by individuals and organisations.

In terms of theoretical generalisation from the findings, it is suggested that there is some scope for this "albeit founded in a detailed examination of specific cases" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 54). Smith (1996; 2003) suggests the importance of awareness of existing literature to ensure sensitivity to the context of the research being undertaken. This research is grounded in theoretical concepts such as identity, perceived control and adult psychological development, identified as potentially relevant from an extensive review of the career literature. Findings that do not integrate into these concepts are researched to illuminate them further. Findings that highlight processes discussed in the extant literature and are implicit to these concepts (e.g., threats to identity, social comparison as a mechanism for self-validation) are considered to have generalisability potential.

To contribute to an understanding of career change experience from a variety of perspectives participants were purposively selected as discussed in section 4.4.1. This is in accordance with IPA sampling strategy that seeks to find relevant and varied exemplars within an otherwise fairly homogeneous or "closely defined group" to capture different in-depth perspectives on the same phenomena (Smith, 1996, p. 53; Willig, 1999).

IPA has its methodological limitations including the assumption that participants have the necessary language skills to accurately convey the subtleties of their subjective experiences and feelings in their interviews. In this study, the participants were considered articulate, appearing to find it easy to express themselves. Nonetheless, the problem remains of knowing whether or not what is manifest in language does actually provide a valid representation of the experience being described. The meanings discussed in individual accounts may not necessarily be
directly conveyed or easy to access therefore they have to be actively extracted through a process of interpretation by the researcher. This involves both an ability to empathise with the respondent (an "empathetic hermeneutic") as well as the ability to make sense of the 'making sense process' (a "questioning hermeneutic") (Smith, 2003, p. 51). In order to acknowledge the level of interpretation by the researcher and their potential influence in other ways, Smith proposes that the researcher's role and their relationship with the participant, during the interview as well as the analytical process, must be explicitly discussed. In addition, it should be understood that IPA can only offer an 'interpretation' not a description or explanation of lived experiences (Willig, 1999). The researcher may gauge the relevance of the interpretations by asking the participants to reflect on them and provide feedback as to whether they make sense to them, and also to assess whether they resonate with those previous empirical findings. Theoretically, the findings can also be grounded in terms of some useful analytical concepts with potential use not only in formulating the transitional process but also in actively managing it from a distinctively psychological viewpoint. As such the findings derived from this approach are considered to be potentially useful and significant.

Finally, the recommendations of Morrow (2005) for ensuring quality in relation to qualitative research in general have been discussed. Here, the specific, but not substantially different, criteria recommended for ensuring quality relevant to IPA are outlined. Smith (1996; 2003) proposed the criteria of 'sensitivity to context', 'rigour, transparency and internal coherence' and 'impact and importance' to enhance the quality of qualitative research relevant to IPA analysis. The first criterion of sensitivity of context pertains to awareness of existing literature; attention to the socio-cultural context of the research; acknowledgment of the relationship between researcher and participant; and the integrity of the rationale for the investigation. The second criterion refers to the thoroughness in the way the study is conducted, justified and reported; the transparency of the research process, especially the interview and analysis process, and engagement with the method. Smith proposes that the reader should be given access to adequate evidence from the participant interviews to enable questioning of the legitimacy of the interpretation. In this research an effort is made to provide as many examples of participant's narratives as possible within the confines of the space afforded. Moreover, the analytical process
has been transparently described and as such is open to an accountability check. The level of researcher engagement has been reviewed by three experienced psychologists throughout the research process, and may be assessed by the reader through the integrity of the interpretations and their reporting.

The procedure for carrying out IPA in Study One is described next.

4.6.2.2 The IPA Guide

After each interview was conducted the tape-recorded narrative was transcribed verbatim to produce a transcript. Treatment of the data closely followed guidelines outlined by Smith (1995), this involved the three steps of description, reduction and interpretation. According to IPA principles, individual cases were analysed first before attempting any integration of a full set of cases. Therefore, each transcript was initially looked at separately. The first reading of interviews and any accompanying notes, together with preliminary analysis were carried out in accordance with a “24 hour rule” to capitalise on the immediacy of the data (Mischler, 1986, p. 32). Each of the transcripts was then read several more times, and thoughts and connections were progressively noted in the left hand column of the transcript. Emerging themes were added later in the right hand column. A contact summary sheet was drawn up for each interview listing the key themes to emerge. A comprehensive list of illustrative examples was given for each theme. This was an initial attempt to reduce the data to its core meaning and to form a structure based on the researcher’s first responses. Then the data was referred back to numerous times, and additions were made to the summary sheet until it represented an exhaustive coverage of the data.

Then the interviews were analysed collectively. Conceptual themes were generated, and these were then clustered into broad groupings. Themes that overlapped were amalgamated. At this stage, the researcher considered that “piecing together the overall picture is not simply a question of aggregating patterns, but of weighing up the salience and dynamics of issues, and searching for a structure, rather than a multiplicity of evidence” (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 54). At this point in the analysis the ‘master themes’ were identified, with their subsidiary ‘constituent themes’. In writing up the findings, the researcher’s interpretations were
supplemented by illustrative evidence in the form of excerpts selected from the interview transcript. Quotes are referenced by the participant’s pseudonym and by the relevant page number of the transcript from which they are drawn. This follows the recommendation that findings must always be thoroughly grounded in the particulars of the participants and their situations (Elliott et al., 1999). It also serves to provide as authentic a representation of the subjective reality of participants as possible, and allow the reader sufficient information about the context of the participant to enable them to judge the accuracy of the interpretation.

The use of semi-structured interviews and IPA in Study One allowed for an exploratory investigation and an idiographic level of analysis. This approach is developed in Study Two by the choice of the repertory grid to elicit data on specific themes, and grounded theory to make cross-case comparisons. The theoretical background to these techniques and the process of applying them are now described.

4.6.3 Exploration Technique Two: The Repertory Grid

4.6.3.1 Theoretical Bases for the Repertory Grid

The repertory grid was used as a data-gathering tool and analysis was carried out using grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) to investigate the experiences of involuntary career change in Study Two. The repertory grid was able to capture the participant’s own perceptions and constructs, therefore providing a phenomenological perspective. By using the grid as a “conversational technology" (Gammack & Stephens, 1994, p. 76) the respondent was empowered to discuss what was significant to them, but the researcher was also able to effect an element of structure in the use of Top Views (Millward, personal communication, 2002), to focus on specific factors. The repertory grid may therefore be viewed as a structure-orientated constructivist technique. This was considered ideal for Study Two, since the research required broad and subjectively meaningful accounts from the participants as in Study One, but also required a more detailed follow-up of factors found to be significant in career change in the previous study.

The repertory grid derives from Kelly’s (1955) personal construct psychology (PCP). A key notion within PCP is that the individual is an inquiring person (Bannister & Fransella, 1977). This implies human behaviour is governed by the need for
meaning, including the need to make sense of the world. To achieve this individual’s develop constructions or theories of themselves and their world. An individual’s construct system is made up, not only of these cognitive structures, but also of value systems, scripts and life-themes (Shank & Abelson, 1977). These constructs change as events are experienced that confirm or disconfirm previous predictions based on the existing construct system. This is based upon the philosophical assumption of “constructive alternativism” that states “all our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement” (Kelly, 1955, p. 15). The interpretative construction of knowledge is viewed as a process meaningful to the person involved in producing it, and is not concerned with an objective sense of ‘truth’. Kelly therefore adopts an explicitly ontological and epistemological stance, and implies that for the repertory grid to be meaningfully employed, it should be done so within a constructivist framework. Salmon (1978) suggested that Kelly’s psychology is all about the sensemaking process, about how we come to know what we know, and how we live out that knowledge. She suggests that the central feature is the “absence of any, single version of reality” (Salmon, 1978, p. 43). In seeking to understand the processes of personal sensemaking, PCP recognizes that constructs develop in a context and through negotiations with others. Kelly also stresses that our construct system is often unarticulated or implicit, and the exploration and elaboration of these systems is therefore a key theme.

The repertory grid technique provides a way of accessing an individual’s unique set of personal constructs, and therefore enables the researcher to gain insight into an individual’s view of reality (Gammack & Stephens, 1994). The grid “provides a representation of the individual’s own world; it is not a model imposed by an outsider” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Holman, 1996). The value of the repertory grid is that it offers a structure in which the enquiry can proceed in the participant’s own terms. The fact that the structure is not imposed but represents the subject’s own construction makes the data more credible since it reflects an authentic representation of the participant’s thoughts. In practice, this freedom may engage the participant and encourage them to give fuller responses.

A central component of the construing (or sensemaking) process Kelly believed is the development of a system of bi-polar personal constructs. The bi-polar nature of
each one of an individual's constructs is thought to present a "pathway of movement" (Kelly, 1955, p. 128). The choice in direction being influenced by movement away from anxiety associated with the inability to anticipate events. This important aspect of PCP highlights the essentially anticipatory nature of human functioning, as described by Kelly (1955) "A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events" (p. 4). This provides a useful temporal perspective on the construing processes.

Kelly did not employ a concept of the unconscious, but acknowledged that an individual's constructions are at different levels of cognitive awareness. Consequently, they may not always be aware of the bases for their choices. Dependent on the cognitive awareness of a particular construct is its position within a hierarchical system. The position of the construct will affect the influence they have on the construing process and will therefore influence the predictions made about the world. Kelly termed the higher, or super-ordinate constructs 'core constructs' and believed them to be central to an individual's identity. He also considered them to be particularly resistant to change since "threat is the awareness of imminent comprehensive change in one's core structures" (Kelly, 1955, p. 489). This suggests that protective processes ensure a sense of continuity in the way the world is interpreted and therefore viewed.

The repertory grid has been increasingly used in an occupational context in the last thirty years, for example, studying graduate careers (Arnold & Nicholson, 1991) and work transition (Fournier & Payne, 1994), before which it was predominantly employed in therapeutic contexts (Easterby-Smith et al., 1996). The technique is commonly used to supplement or replace the interview (e.g., Anderson, 1990; Arnold & Nicholson, 1991; Furnham, 1990), and is recommended for its comparative flexibility, efficiency and ability to engender reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990). Easterby-Smith et al. (1996, p. 6) summarise the qualities of the repertory grid technique grid thus

"The fact that perceptions of nebulous relationships can be written down rigorously by someone who is not a trained psychologist, is itself significant. The visual representation helps to focus the analysis and makes communication about them easier. It also involves verbalising constructs which would otherwise remain
hidden... at a personal level it may be a way of generating self-insights. Most importantly, the grid provides a representation of the individual's world; it is not a model imposed by an outsider. As such the individual can explore the world by him/herself."

The relatively simple format of the repertory grid does allow the participant direct involvement in its production thus making the process of data-gathering more engaging. With the researcher's assistance the participant is also able to understand the meanings reflected in the grid, emphasising participation and fostering a sense of inclusion in the product of knowledge. Engaging participants in this way is thought to encourage fuller and more in-depth narratives.

From this discussion the suitability of the repertory grid in eliciting subjectively meaningful career narratives is evident. The constructs generated are considered to provide insight into the cognitive prioritisation of factors associated with career change. The feelings associated with these factors, identified by their position on the bi-polar continuum of the grid, and the influence on anticipations and possible behaviour may be interpreted. The aim of using this technique is to encourage participants to generate connections between events, to articulate fresh understandings, and to provide rich descriptions of their career change experiences.

**4.6.3.2 The Repertory Grid Guide**

In terms of methodology, the principle concerns of the repertory grid technique, based on the tenets of personal construct psychology, are to elicit the participant's view of the world, and to explore this world in their own terms rather than in terms imposed by the researcher. Gammack and Stephens (1994, p. 76) suggested that, although there are variations to repertory grid techniques, they all contain three basic stages. The first stage involves the elicitation of elements, which is the identification of the entities in the area of construing to be investigated. The second stage is the elicitation of constructs, and the identification of the distinctions that can be applied amongst these elements. The final stage involves the construction of a grid consisting of elements and constructs.
In Study Two the researcher followed the procedure provided in appendix V. Firstly, the participants were asked to think of six events involving change in their working lives that were of varying significance to them. These provided the elements of the grid. The use of participant-generated elements has the advantage of focusing the interview, and allowing the respondent to ‘hook’ their accounts, enabling issues to be viewed in context. It also provided the researcher with a rich source of information on the conscious reflections of the participant, their frame of reference, feelings, attitudes and perspective on matters that are of critical importance to them. Once the six elements had been selected a process of comparison between the events ensued. This involved the elements being written on cards and numbered from one to six. The cards were then presented to the participant in triads and they were asked to separate them into two cards that were similar in some way and one that was different, and to explain why. This process of comparing and contrasting generated plentiful data and allowed the researcher the opportunity at a later stage to make intra-individual comparison of events. The bi-polar constructs produced were charted on the grid until it was complete. The participant was then asked to rate the relatedness of each construct with each element on a five point Likert scale, with one indicating the least related and five indicating the most related. Interviewees were encouraged to use the extremes of the scale to prevent central tendency.

Finally, four top views were presented to the participant and they were requested to rate these against each element. The top views were researcher-generated statements deriving from the findings of Study One. They related to: i) change as a positive experience, ii) control, iii) the timing of adjustment, and iv) self-concept. These were presented after the participant had completed their grid in order not to influence the constructs that they generated. The aim of presenting the top views was to assess whether these issues were significant to the participants and if so, to elicit further relevant data. The discussion that occurred during completion of the grid involving descriptions of experiences and explanations for ratings was tape-recorded to provide further context for the data generated by this technique.
4.6.4 Analytical Technique Two: Grounded Theory

4.6.4.1 Theoretical Bases of Grounded Theory

In terms of analysing repertory grid data, there is a choice between using various quantitative means to elicit common constructs or, alternatively a more qualitative, interpretative approach may be adopted (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). The latter type of analysis is more in accordance with Kelly’s (1955) original intentions for its use. In this research themes of common constructs are produced but this is achieved using a qualitative approach. Initially, the scores are calculated across all of the grids, for each grid the six constructs with the highest score are noted. These are then analysed in line with the processes of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). The name ‘grounded theory’ is said to express the idea that the theory is generated by a close inspection of the data, rather than emerging from some pre-existing theoretical concerns (Henwood et al., 1992). This is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings and general philosophy of the repertory grid (Cassell, Close, Duberley & Johnson, 2000). However, while grounded theory involves discovering theory from the data, this does not occur in a vacuum, rather it occurs within a theoretical framework established by the methodological orientation selected by the researcher. Without the orientation provided by such a framework no sense could be made of the data. Accordingly, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 3) acknowledged that “the researcher does not approach reality as a tabula rasa”. A later ‘constructivist’ revision of grounded theory suggests that theory is generated as the result of a constant interplay between data and the researcher’s developing conceptualisations (Charmaz, 1990, cited in Henwood et al., 1992). The researcher in the current study employs a grounded theory approach within the framework of social constructivism.

4.6.4.2 The Grounded Theory Guide

The repertory grid provided a very structured form, both for eliciting and presenting data. The relatively simple format of the grid is said to embody and display meaning (Harri-Augustsein, 1978), therefore, each repertory grid produced is a rich source of data in itself. Initially, the researcher computed the grid scores according to the calculations outlined in appendix V. The scores identified those constructs that the individual considered most significant in relation to each element. The top score ratings indicated the relationship between the subject area provided and the
constructs. The six highest scores from each grid were noted. These were then
categorised in line with grounded theory, with each construct being examined in turn.
In the early stages, a stance of maximum flexibility in generating new categories was
adopted while ensuring that the categories ‘fitted’ (i.e., provided a recognisable
description of) the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The categories that emerged
directly from the data, are referred to here as themes. A theme with a large number
of constructs was further reduced into a number of sub-themes.

The findings were analysed initially according to the number of constructs in each
theme. It is suggested that the themes that contain the most constructs were the
themes that were considered by the participants to be the most important in relation
to their change experiences. Aggregating participant responses into themes with the
aim of suggesting shared meanings calls into question the epistemological position of
the research. Cassell and Walsh (2004) however, argued that counting which are the
most common constructs is not necessarily a deviation from Kelly’s constructivist
approach, in that the main focus remains on how the participants construct and make
sense of their world. A key advantage of the grid is the representation of individual
constructs, yet in order to provide clarity from large amounts of data it is inevitable
that the researcher wants to claim some patterns in the analytic process. Harii-
Augustein (1978) among other writers has criticised the process by which the
description of meaning from a grid is achieved as tending to be reductionist, with
constructs categorised together in convenient ways to make a whole. While this
criticism may be offset by reference to the underlying epistemological basis of the
technique, awareness of this issue is important for the researcher analysing repertory
grids.

In addition to aggregating responses from the repertory grid into themes, the findings
are presented with quotes from participants detailing their individual experiences.
These derived from the participant narrative that accompanied their completion of
the grid. In this way the aim of grounded theory, to seek out diversity in relation to a
particular subject, is preserved. From this basis comparative analysis occurs
ensuring the breadth and complexity of the data is explored.
The ratings provided against each of the top views were calculated next. The scores identified the participant's view of each element in respect to the given subject area. These scores were interpreted by the researcher in the context of the findings from the grid and also from the participant's narrative generated while they were rating the top views. The findings of this study therefore benefit from the scores derived from the repertory grid, the interpretation of participant's responses to the top views and the support of textual quotes from their narratives. The objective has been achieved of focusing on the subject areas of interest while also preserving subjective accounts of career change experiences. In Study Three, semi-structured interviews were used once again to elicit career narratives (see section 4.6.1). Cause maps were then employed to generate graphic representations of the findings. The reasons for this choice of technique are now provided.

4.6.5 Analytical Technique Three: Cause Maps

4.6.5.1 Theoretical Bases for the Analytical Use of Cause Maps

The decision to use cause maps in this study was both theory-driven and based on the advantages of the graphic representation that they offer. In terms of theory, cause maps are able to address individual sensemaking structures (Walsh, 1995), consistent with Weick's (1979) sensemaking framework, and are in accordance with the phenomenological perspective of this thesis. This study is focused on understanding the process of sensemaking involved in evaluating the outcomes of career change, the factors that contribute to these evaluations and the relationships between the factors and outcomes. Cause maps were considered a suitable way to represent this complex data in a logical and accessible graphical form. This type of presentation of the findings also meets the recommendations of best practise for qualitative research discussed in section 4.4.2, by providing an integrated summary of the analysis with a graphical representation explaining the relationships among categories (Elliott et al., 1999). The researcher firstly produced and explored individual cause maps based on participant interviews and then attempted to further clarify the structure of shared associations and causations by a process of cross-case causal networking to produce a consolidated cause map.

The cognitive schema of participants (i.e., the order and interrelationships of meaning that provide the reference points by which they understand their
environment) may be accessed by the use of cause maps as a data-collection methodology. This has predominantly been achieved using the self-Q technique (e.g., Bougon, 1983) that allows participants to generate their unique set of concepts and then organise them according to their own meaning systems. In so doing, it is ensured that the original content of the cognitive schema are captured and that the meaning system used is not constrained by the researcher’s imposed framework. An alternative method however, employed in this study, is for participant’s cognitive schema to be accessed by other qualitative means, such as the semi-structured interview.

The decision not to use causal maps as a data-gathering tool in this study was due to three main concerns. Firstly, a concern was noted following research on the use of cause maps regarding the ease with which participants might grasp the concept of the map. In a study testing the methodological effectiveness of cause mapping Nicolini (1999) suggested that although they were very rich in content and revealing to researchers, they could be baffling to participants. The researcher was also cautious of using a graphical technique with participants since an earlier attempt to employ career lines in a pilot study was unsuccessful, with volunteers reporting difficulty representing their career in this way, and being unable and unwilling to simplify their experiences diagrammatically, preferring instead to describe them in narrative form. Finally, on a practical level the self-Q technique is conventionally undertaken as a series of three interviews with each participant. The time and commitment this would necessitate was considered unfeasible for the participants in this study. On the basis of these considerations it was decided that semi-structured interviews would be used to elicit the causal beliefs of the participants. This is one of the data gathering techniques suggested by Weick (2001) and was also considered suitable since interviews had yielded rich and complex data earlier in Study One and appeared to be a methodology that participants were comfortable with.

In attempting to elicit relationships between specific factors and outcomes, Weick (1979) highlighted the limitations of relating two elements simply as ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ and proposed the more complex and realistic set of connections that could be inferred and represented between a set of variables in a cause map. The analytical power of graphically structuring material is highlighted by Weick (2001, p. 312)
"When variables are connected, they become meaningful because meaning flows from relationships ... Structures such as cause maps remove equivocality, both because they place concepts in relation to one another, and because they impose structure on vague situations. Since structures are simpler than the qualities on which they are imposed, they reduce equivocality. These are the basic mechanisms by which a cause map operates, and these mechanisms define the basic properties of a cause map: namely, variables and cause ties." Weick goes on to say that by reducing equivocality this does not mean that connections made can be either clear or certain. Instead he suggests that there are two or more clear, distinct meanings for several related variables because the relationships among them differ. Cause mapping is able to represent the fact that for an individual "an experience often means both one thing and its opposite and that what varies is the proportion of time each relation occurs" (p. 313).

Cause maps therefore offer a means to examine requisite variety and the development of complicated thinking (Bartunek, Gordon & Weathersby, 1983). The two components of cognitive complexity that cause maps are thought capable of illustrating are differentiation and integration. Differentiation is the number of characteristics or dimensions relating to the issue under investigation, and integration is the number of connections among these differentiated concepts. However, while cause maps may be useful in giving order and graphic representation to the overt statements of participants, it is acknowledged that they cannot claim to capture their thought processes (Axelrod, 1976; Eden, 1988; 1992; Cossette & Audet, 1992). Instead, it is argued, they should be seen as "essentially a higher order effort to derive a testable set of propositions about the complete network of variables and inter-relationships. The principle is one of theory building" as the researcher aims for "developing one or more meta-networks that respect the individual case networks from which they have been derived" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 228).

The cause map therefore goes beyond gaining phenomenological insight to a higher level of structural analysis. It allows for content to remain intact but for illumination to be gained on the associations between variables and on the influence of one variable on another. It can therefore be seen as a summary of the cause-effect inferences of individual sensemaking processes (Gilmore & Murphy, 1991; Weber &
Manning 2001; Weick & Bougon, 1986). As such maps are well-suited to conveying the complexity of the factors perceived to contribute to outcomes of career change and capturing the developmental processes described in the participant’s narratives.

A literature review of the use of cause maps suggests that they have predominantly been used in organisational settings on either an individual or collective basis (Weick, 2001). By providing an idiographic perspective of the sensemaking processes involved in career transition, beyond the confines of an organisational context, this study offers a distinctive contribution to the literature in methodological terms. One characteristic of cause maps noted by Weick (2001) from his analysis of their use in an organisational context may be questioned by its use out of this setting. This is the feature that the relationships they convey rarely feature feedback loops. He suggested two reasons for this. Firstly, he drew on evidence that suggests individuals do not perceive feedback loops when they act, particularly at times of uncertainty, rather a clear, categorical, linear structure is imposed on interpretations of their experience (Steinbruner, 1974). Weick also suggested this may be a reflection of an organisational context, characterised by frequent turnover and constant change. In such a setting he suggests linear relationships are sufficient to get things done when the effects of an action seldom affect the originator, who has left by the time the consequences become clearer. It is however, expected that feedback loops will feature in the cause maps generated in this study since the individuals are not bounded by these organisational effects and are being asked to reflect back on both their career transition and outcomes. As a result of both the process of retrospection and the extended period of time under consideration, it is expected that participant’s sensemaking will include feedback loops that will be reflected in their cause maps.

One final comment relates to a further use of cause maps, relevant to career change, that of a counselling tool. In a career counselling scenario cause maps may be produced and used alone by the client. Axelrod (1976) suggests that “do-it-yourself” mapping has several advantages over mapping with someone else present. These include the participant being more honest in stating beliefs and connections, being less influenced by the preferences and values of an outsider, and being in a position to evaluate their representations and be aware of their personal meanings.
Alternatively, cause maps may be used in collaboration with a counsellor, providing the client with the opportunity to interact with a description of the ways in which certain classes of phenomena are interpreted. This may then become the basis for a self-reflection experience that is associated with the potential for learning and change (Nicolini, 1999).

4.6.5.2 The Cause Map Guide

The aim of producing cause maps in this study is to reflect the sensemaking involved in evaluations of career change, and to clarify the nature and patterns of relationships between the variables identified in this process by producing graphical representations consisting of nodes and arrows. To produce individual and then cross-case cause maps the researcher followed the guidelines set out by Miles and Huberman (1994). Firstly, the individual cause maps were produced by detailed readings of each transcript. The data was coded and memoed until exhaustive groupings of core variables were produced. The variables were then displayed in a series of boxes or nodes. The process of linking the variables with arrows was achieved by successive references to the data and by “abstracting induction” involving a process of identifying when “some of these variables are coming into play before others, varying with others, or having an effect on others, and that effect seems to change when other variables are taken into account.” (Duncker, 1945, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 156). Reference back to the transcripts ensured that each connection accurately represented the participant’s view of the causal flow described in the data.

This arrows used to link the nodes are categorized to represent various types of relationship. The relationship may be lineal, represented by an arrow, with an arrow at either end indicating the direction of influence or it may be reciprocal, represented by an arrow at both ends.

This graphical representation of the factors identified by participants allows for the identification of those variables considered to be the most influential in accounting for a given outcome and for the ‘stream’ of variables leading to, or affecting that outcome. It also allows streams that are similar or identical to be recognised and those that differ to be noted and analysed. The results section consists of interpretation of the maps accompanied by textual quotes from the transcribed
interviews. Participant quotes detailing the subjective reasons for the connections made provide supporting evidence for the links outlined on the maps. A verification process was undertaken on completion of the individual cause maps whereby the researcher explained the relevant individual cause maps to two participants and asked for feedback regarding whether they felt the maps accurately represented their narratives. No revisions were found to be necessary.

The next stage of analysis involved aligning the individual cause maps to produce a cross-case map containing more general causal explanations for outcomes. This was achieved using the lists of core variables, the individual cause maps and the transcripts. The casual ‘stream’ for each variable was isolated across each case, they were then analysed as either matching or contrasting. The process of coding and making links was then repeated as in the individual mapping procedure. As a further process of verification all of the individual maps and the cross-case cause map were given to an independent mediator (i.e., the researcher’s supervisor) for feedback and comment, again no revisions were necessary.

When using cause maps as an analytical tool a number of issues were considered that are outlined here. Since the data for maps is derived from interviews the issues discussed in section 4.6.1 apply. For example, the influence of impression management on accounts was considered during analysis. Secondly, the role of the researcher in interpreting the data was considered, and the possibility of the cause map being imbued with meaning at variance to that meant by the participant. The researcher took steps aimed at reducing this occurring by remaining grounded in the data and asking two participants to check their own cause maps and an independent mediator to check the consolidated map to ensure it represented their statements. Weick (2001), however, drew attention to the possible differences that may be observed in maps produced by an expert or a novice. He questioned whether experts differentiate and integrate factors more, and have less hierarchy and more loops, or whether the reverse is the case, and interestingly whether the expert may place ‘self’ in positions with greater control over causality flows. This suggests that maps interpreted by a researcher may be different from those produced by the individual themselves. It is therefore acknowledged that in each case the meaning of a cause map is not only a function of the map itself but of the way in which it is executed.
The third and final issue to note when using cause maps as an analytical tool is that while the main reason to use them is to structure and clarify, this should not be at the cost of an authentic portrayal of the data.

In summary, the use of cause maps as the analytical tool for the last of the three studies of this thesis appears to provide a suitable way in which to distil the findings and provide a clear and accessible representation of the numerous factors that influence the evaluations of career change experiences and outcomes, and the complex inter-relationships between them.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The approach taken in this research treats people as “heroes of their own drama” (Brenner, Brown & Canter, 1985 p. 3). The epistemological position upon which the research is based assumes the existence of subjective meaning and the ability of individuals to reveal it. Not only do individuals provide the focus of attention in terms of the subject matter of the research, they are valued as sources of particular information, and as such their role is considered in the methodological techniques adopted. Techniques such as semi-structured interviews and the repertory grid are considered to empower the participant while also providing sufficient structure to enhance their articulation of the sensemaking process. The analytical tools selected for the interpretation of data from the three studies are employed to provide meaningful and accessible findings that enhance empirical knowledge, and potentially extend theoretical research, while at the same time preserving the idiographic perspective.

One key aspect of studying sensemaking processes is recognition of the dynamic nature of the individual and of their context. The findings of this research reflect only a point-in-time perspective on the participant’s interpretations of their world. A temporal perspective on sensemaking is achieved as participant’s provide accounts that are retrospective, current and future orientated, however, it is acknowledged that these accounts reflect their circumstances at the time of their recounting, including the act of being involved in the research process. While, this is not considered a problem, for the reasons described in section 4.3.2, it is recognised that the research could be furthered by a longitudinal approach to the investigation. This would
provide an additional temporal perspective on individual’s sensmaking in relation to their continued career development. The value of longitudinal studies is often recognised but the practical and financial resources necessary often preclude them from being implemented. In the scope of this research such an approach was, unfortunately, considered impractical.

The interpretative approaches and qualitative research adopted in this research are generally considered to be sympathetic to the values that are exemplified in counselling psychology. One example of this relates to the emphasis of mutuality and the empowerment of the participant or client that is shared in both constructivist approaches and counselling practice (Kidd, 2004). These approaches are also thought to have more potential than positivist methods to further integrate theory and practice in therapeutic and career counselling (Collin, 1996; Morrow & Smith, 2000). In terms of this research it is important for the methodology to reflect a position that is aligned with the counselling perspective since it is hoped for the findings to have relevance in this context.

The following three chapters are dedicated to the three studies undertaken by the researcher providing varying perspectives on the career transition process for thirty-somethings that together form an evolutionary investigation. The first study offers an exploratory investigation into the factors considered significant for participants who have experienced voluntary career change, employing semi-structured interviews and IPA. Study Two focuses in more depth on particular aspects of the change process experienced by participants who have undergone involuntary career change, by use of the repertory grid. And finally, Study Three employs the use of interviews and cause maps to summarise and represent the findings associated with positive career change experiences and outcomes.
PART II

EXPLORATION
CHAPTER FIVE

THE EXPERIENCES OF VOLUNTARY CAREER CHANGE AT THIRTY-SOMETHING

5.1 OVERVIEW

The focus of this study is the career transition experiences of thirty-somethings who have voluntarily chosen to change career. An exploratory phenomenological approach to this opening investigation is adopted to elicit the issues that are subjectively meaningful to the participants. This is an approach rarely used in career change research (Teixeira & Gomes, 2000). Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the themes generated will provide a foundation for the ensuing studies.

Of the thirty-somethings contributing to the current phenomenon of career change, a proportion of them are undoubtedly acting voluntarily. Voluntary and involuntary change experiences are considered to be fundamentally different in a number of ways, some of which are discussed in the following introductory section. As a consequence it is thought worthwhile to address each one in separate studies to ensure a comprehensive insight into both types of career change.

This study is a broad-ranging investigation attempting to answer the question: 
"What are the feelings and experiences involved in voluntary career change during the thirties?"

To obtain accounts of transition experiences involving a range of influences the sample group were purposively chosen to provide a variety of socio-economic and occupational backgrounds.
5.2 INTRODUCTION
In this introductory section four areas are discussed in terms of their potential relevance to the voluntary career change experiences of thirty-somethings. The first area relates to the motivations for such change, the second focuses on the sensemaking processes considered to be involved, and the third relates to coping strategies for dealing with the challenges of voluntary career change. The final section is concerned with the issue of validation for beliefs and actions in the boundaryless career context in which the participants are acting.

5.2.1 Motivations for Voluntary Career Change
Several research areas were identified at the end of Chapter Three (section 3.4) relating to the potential influences on career change; the influence of context on change experiences and the strategies employed to make the transition a positive experience. The question of what has motivated voluntary change is of particular interest since traditional developmental theory suggests that this age is associated with tasks focused on achieving stability. Reference to the context of the contemporary workplace where a job for life is no longer the norm and individuals are encouraged to pursue their own interests, suggests that 'voluntary' career change should not always simply be considered as a straightforward direct choice. Instead, it is likely that in some circumstances contextual influences may influence the decision to 'voluntarily' change career either through expectations or coercion. However, because of the pervasive nature of these influences the individual career actor may be interpret their change as voluntary.

When change is voluntary it is assumed that there are likely to be push and pull motivating factors. In general, research has focused on the push factors motivating career change. These suggest that if person-work fit is not optimal, then the person will be inclined to leave their job for one with a better fit (Wanous, 1980). Factors identified as being responsible for person-work fit not being optimal are: low role compatibility (Schaubroeck, Cotton, & Jennings, 1989); limited variety, autonomy, feedback and low task importance (Hackman & Oldman, 1975); and excessive work pressure (LaRocco et al., 1980). Emphasis on the work context as the primary motivation for career change reflects the limited conceptualisation of career associated with traditional career research. A broader reach is possible however, by
adopting a phenomenological approach, in which factors such as personal characteristics and the influence of domestic issues in motivating career change can be explored.

The notion of pull factors contributing to career change is addressed in the contemporary concept of the protean career (Hall & Mirvis, 1996), introduced in section 2.2.3. The concept of protean career assumes that career change is motivated by the individual's own vision and values (for example, personal growth, creativity, variety, and independence) (Brousseau et al., 1996). The subjective nature of visions and values however, means that for each person there is a unique set of reasons motivating the career decision. One objective of this study is to investigate the objective and subjective factors that participants use to explain their career change.

The opportunity for self-directed career paths, such as the protean career exists within the context of the boundaryless career (De Fillippi & Arthur, 1994). In Chapter One, a caveat to this idea was identified, in that economically disadvantaged and low-skilled workers may be marginalised from pursuing the potential benefits of a boundaryless career (Arthur et al., 1999). This implies that financial resources and a strong skill base underline the perception of opportunities. In this research it is expected that individuals will differ in their perceptions of opportunities and constraints, and that these perceptions will derive from both differences in individual characteristics and in context. An insight into both these sources of potential influence is possible from the phenomenological perspective. In this study the sample consists of a variety of individuals from various socio-economic and occupational backgrounds. The data will therefore reflect a range of different perceptions of choice, the analysis of which will identify factors that contribute to these perceptions.

5.2.2 Making Sense During Voluntary Career Change

In a model of change using a sensemaking framework (Isabella, 1990) the use of prospective and retrospective sensemaking is implied in the four stages that represent the interpretations of key events as they unfold during the transition process. The stages identified are anticipation, confirmation, culmination and aftermath. The sensemaking processes expected to occur in voluntary career change are discussed
here. It is thought likely that the voluntary nature of the career change under consideration will assist sensemaking processes due to a sense of control and predictability in the career actor, thus contributing favourably in terms of adjustment and psychological well-being (Karasek, 1979). In sensemaking terms, according to attribution theorists (e.g., Heider, 1958), a voluntary change is less likely to prompt the need to seek a cause for the event, in order to render the environment more controllable, because the individual is personally responsible for the change and holds subjectively meaningful justifications for it. However, while the perception of control appears to assist the transition, the inevitable challenge of unfamiliar experiences remains. These provoke the individual to undertake processes to interpret, and therefore, make sense of their experiences. Berry’s (1997) work on the process of acculturation suggests that it is precisely how people make sense of the change experience and how they deal with change and unfamiliarity that will influence their own psychological adjustment and participation in a socio-cultural environment. At the same time, their presence and actions transform their environment. This iterative process is neatly summarised in Weick’s (1995) statement, “people act and in so doing they create the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face” (p. 30).

One of the key challenges faced in response to the discontinuity experienced in a complex career change is the maintenance of identity, and the preservation of psychology needs such as self-enhancement, self-efficacy and self-consistency. The component of identity concerned with work, the occupational self-concept, introduced in Chapter Two (section 2.2.2) does not appear to be the only part of identity affected in career change. Super’s (1963; 1980) proposition that the choice of an occupation reveals the attempt to translate a personal self-concept into vocational terms, suggests that career change may impact on personal as well as professional identity components. In this study, participants are encouraged to discuss their career change in holistic terms, enabling the implications of career change on various aspects of identity to be assessed.

According to Wiley (1995), the continuous process of identity development involves not only the integration of past experiences but also the anticipation of what is yet to come. The notion of prospective sensemaking (Gioia & Mehra, 1996), described as
an attempt to make sense of the future, may be actualised in identity terms by the
individual identifying their potential or bringing into concrete existence what
previously was only thought a possibility. Consideration of prospective sensemaking
appears fundamental in the study of career change for two key reasons. The first is
in relation to the benefits it may offer in terms of providing continuity of identity.
The second reason is in terms of goal-setting, thus creating meaningful opportunities
for the future (Gioia et al., 1996).

The concept of possible selves is perhaps useful here to provide a framework for a
future oriented identity. Possible selves are “individuals' ideas of what they might
become, what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provides a conceptual link
between cognition and motivation” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). They are
thought to represent a set of self-conceptions that are currently active in an
individual’s thoughts and memory processes, and allow the self-concept to become
dynamic. As discussed in section 5.2.1 as well as moving towards positive
incentives or goals, individuals may attempt to move away from negative incentives
or threats. Possible selves symbolise these motives by giving detailed cognitive form
to the end states (goals and threats), associated plans of accomplishing them and
values and affect associated with them.

Millward (2000) made the case for placing goal-setting principles within this self-
system to explain not only the motivational aspect of goals, but also an
understanding of the self-regulatory aspect of different types of goals, including what
Emmons (1992) referred to as “personal strivings”, such as those involved in career
development. It is argued that most goals can “occasion the construction of a
'possible self' in which one is different from the now self, and in which one realises
the goal” (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989, p. 212). The motivating potential of a possible
self is thought to be particularly effective when the representation is concrete, vivid
and elaborated (Meara, Day, Chalk, & Phelps, 1995). Millward (2000) suggests that
the link between goals as future end states and possible selves as representations of
future identity provides a useful means of exploring the potential for goal
considerations to be applied to the analysis of career.
This section therefore, proposes possible stages in sensemaking that accompany the transition process, and suggests the benefits of the change being voluntary in terms of interpreting experiences. The relevance of these propositions will be assessed in relation to the career narratives of participants. The value of retrospective sensemaking in terms of adjustment has been identified, but the potential for prospective sensemaking to assist transition while it is occurring also appears significant, particularly in terms of offering continuity of identity. The framework of possible selves is adopted in this study to assess whether this type of sensemaking is employed, and to identify potential implications.

5.2.3 Coping with Challenges During Voluntary Career Change

Few studies have focused on the early and late stages of transition, the objective of this research however, is to focus on the factors that contribute to the experience being perceived as positive at all stages. While possible selves have been described as having the potential to contribute to the continuity of identity, research also suggests that the continuity of roles a person has before and after the transition assists adjustment (Biddle, 1979; Bloom, 1964). In complex career change however, there is no occupational role continuity, suggesting there may be a particular challenge in terms of adjustment, and perhaps a greater dependence on other non-occupational roles to provide a sense of continuity and identity preservation.

Feldman (2002) notes that the personality dimensions of Extraversion and Openness to Experience from Costa and McCrae’s (1985) NEO Personality Inventory have been studied the most in relation to change. He notes that extraversion appears to facilitate both the ‘breaking-in’ and ‘settling-in’ periods of new careers since they require initiative, seeking out new information, networking, and making new professional relationships. While, openness to experience is thought to assist in dealing with the uncertainty, ambiguity and ambivalence that accompany change. More complex and inclusive cognitive structures allow greater flexibility in adapting to internal and external career-related changes. Consequently, the individual is more likely to cope effectively with change, master new environments, and persevere in the face of initial adversity.
A number of concepts related to the skills and attitudes of the individual enacting the career have also been suggested as contributing to successful career change. For example, planfulness (future orientation) and reality orientation (realism about personal and contextual factors) are considered to be necessary particularly in the preparation stage. Acting with planfulness is associated with a reduced likelihood of feeling a sense of personal crisis when experiencing a career transition (Ebberwein et al., 2004). Career adaptability, a behavioural attribution style, efficacious beliefs and high perceived control are all factors described in Chapters Two and Three as contributing to coping with the challenges of career change.

The question of whether the age of the participants helps or hinders them in dealing with change will be investigated in this research. It is expected that the high level of perceived control associated with this age group, and the amount of prior experience and skills accumulated should facilitate coping. However, traditional development theories suggest the potential for conflict between the psychological need identified for this age-group in terms of stability and the disruptions presented by the career change experience. To explore this further, career change is studied here in conjunction with individual history and the interactions between the various life roles that the individual performs.

In addition to research on individual attributes that are considered to assist the process of career change, a number of situational factors have been identified as enabling successful transitions. In brief, these include: economic security, emotional security, good health, a supportive work environment, and the provision of transition counselling (Williams, 2001). The factors that participants consider to be of assistance in coping with the challenges of career change, both internal and external will be assessed in this study. The issue of whether individuals who choose to change career necessarily possess the personal attributes to assist in the process will be addressed, and whether any of these attributes are particularly associated with being thirty-something.

5.2.4 Sources of Validation in the Boundaryless Career Context
The vocational experiences of the participants in this study, characterised by voluntary and independent movement between occupations, are reflected in the
notion of the boundaryless career. In boundaryless careers the issue of where individuals source validation for their actions and achievements is questionable. Without clear-cut objectives to mark progress (as in more traditional linear career paths) the challenges are two-fold. Firstly, the individual following a boundaryless career path is more likely to have followed subjective values, the outcomes of which are personally meaningful but may have less relevance to other people. Secondly, in boundaryless careers the individual acts more independently and may work for multiple employers or be self-employed. In this nebulous context the individual has a choice of where to seek validation.

In the case of individuals who have chosen to change career and have followed self-directed careers based on subjective values, it is expected that they will evaluate the outcomes positively for a number of reasons. The first possible reason is that the change may have been motivated by push factors such as the inadequacy of a previous job. When this is compared to the new career and against more subjective values the outcome is likely to be favourable judged and as such, validate their choice. Another reason for positive evaluation of outcomes is that, according to control theories, voluntary transition experiences will be affirmative because they provide personal validation. A third reason may be due to being personally responsible for the career change. If the outcome was not considered positive, and failure was conceded or the issue of whether the change had been worthwhile was raised, then this would be experienced as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). In sense making terms a continual process of validating actions is apparent in action-driven processes. This involves the individual starting from their actions and growing their structures of meaning around them, modifying the structures in order to give significance to those actions. Meaning may be created to justify actions that they are already committed to, or they may create meaning to explain actions that have been taken to manipulate the environment.

Validation from external sources has been described earlier in relation to Festinger's (1954) notion of social comparison (see section 3.2.7). This may occur directly with others, for example, peer group-defined 'careers of achievement' (Zabusky & Barley, 1996) that are concerned with peer-assessed occupational expertise. Alternatively, it may be derived from abstract norms that are meaningful in social or cultural terms.
(Hinkle & Brown, 1990). Who the participants select as referents for validation and the weighting that is given to particular referents is of interest in this research. Research suggests different objectives for social comparison (i.e., upward comparison (to a perceived superior) when the goal is learning or development, and more downward comparisons (to those perceived as having achieved less) when the immediate goal is self-enhancement (Wood, 1989). On this basis it is expected that participants will employ different types of social comparison at different stages of the transition process in order to satisfy their particular needs at the time.

In summary, in response to the research question relating to the feelings and experiences of thirty-somethings during voluntary change career, it is expected that advantages deriving from the elected nature of the change are considerable. However, two key challenges are highlighted. Firstly, the challenge deriving from the perception of discontinuity, particularly in relation to the change in occupational role, that is expected to be threatening. Secondly, the challenges associated with sourcing validation for beliefs and actions have been identified. The ameliorative potential of both possible selves in providing continuity of identity, and of personal and external factors in assisting the transition are highlighted.

5.3 METHOD

5.3.1 Participants

The sample for this study consisted of ten participants (see Table 1). This is the highest recommended number for studies employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), due to the extensive and detailed interpretation of data involved at the analysis stage (Smith, 1995). The researcher decided to interview the highest number of participants suggested to obtain a broad variety of career change experiences. They were selected as a purposive sample, nine through word of mouth and one was followed up by the researcher after hearing her on a radio interview. Three key criteria were used in the selection process. The first was that the individual had experienced a complex career change, defined as “entry into a new occupation which requires fundamentally different skills, daily routines, and work environments from the present one” (Feldman, 2002, p. 76). The second criterion was that this career change took place while the individual was in their thirties. The final criterion was that the individual considered their change to have
been voluntary. The researcher attempted to achieve a diverse range of individuals in the sample. According to qualitative principles the objective was not to provide a sample that was considered to be representative in any way, rather it was to encourage wide-ranging data to allow the findings to illustrate a broad depiction of career change experiences.

The sample consisted of five males and five females. Two of the female participants and four of the male participants had children. At the time of the interview the participants were aged between thirty-one and forty-six years old. Some of them had experienced multiple career changes during their teens and twenties, but for the purposes of this study they were asked to focus on their experiences during their most recent career change that had taken place in their thirties (although the researcher encouraged this to be discussed in the context of the participant’s life history). At the time the interviews were conducted some of the participants considered themselves to still be involved in the later stages of their career change, for example, they were in probationary periods. Others had recently completed their career change, and some had been in their new career for several years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age at time of interview</th>
<th>Age at time of career change</th>
<th>Marital status at time of career change</th>
<th>Number of Children with ages at time of career change</th>
<th>Previous occupation(s) in chronological order</th>
<th>Current occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Arts administrator, Advertising executive</td>
<td>Classical singer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seb</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>One aged 3</td>
<td>Holiday tour guide, Marketing and advertising manager, Sub-editor, PR consultant</td>
<td>Probationary teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Neuropsychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Two aged 3 &amp; 5</td>
<td>Actress</td>
<td>Hypnotherapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Divorced and remarried</td>
<td>Two aged 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Community worker, family business, missionary society representative</td>
<td>Vicar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliet</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Magazine editor</td>
<td>Vintage clothes business owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Two aged 6 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Shop assistant, cleaner</td>
<td>Deputy head teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Divorced and single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Apprentice mechanic, Military police officer, Paramedic</td>
<td>Police officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Financial researcher, Fund manager, Marketing manager</td>
<td>Lifestyle manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Two aged 3 &amp; 5</td>
<td>Supermarket assistant, security guard</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Participant Information for Study One
5.3.2 Procedure

The researcher drew up the interview schedule (see appendix II) following extensive immersion in the extant career literature. The production and piloting of the schedule followed the processes outlined in section 4.6.1. The aim was to achieve a comprehensive and clear set of questions that facilitated the articulation of the interviewee’s sensemaking processes.

Each participant was telephoned before the interview, consent for the interview was obtained and the nature of the research was briefly discussed. One week before the interview was conducted, participants’ were e-mailed a list of fifteen questions selected from the interview schedule, (see appendix III). This was to relieve potential pressure or surprise during the interview, since the role of affect is considered likely to confound accuracy by hindering rational thought (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2000) and interpretation (Weick, 1995). The interviews were conducted in a private setting, at either the interviewee’s home or place of work. The researcher explained prior to each interview that the questions were a guide only, and they should feel free to discuss their experiences as they wanted. They were also urged to describe both positive and negative experiences, and to be honest in their answers. The participants were briefed on ethical considerations and permission requested to audio-tape the interview for later transcription. Participants were assured of confidentiality and told that the tapes would be destroyed following the research. During the interview the researcher used the schedule in a flexible manner, re-ordering questions to reflect the flow of the individual’s account and omitting questions relating to areas that had already been covered. The interview schedule however, provided a valuable checklist to ensure that all the key areas of interest had been covered. Each of the interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours.

The analytic process carried out followed the principles of IPA (Smith, 1995). This is outlined in ‘The IPA Guide’, section 4.6.2.2.

As a check for the credibility of interpretations of the data, several procedures were undertaken. Firstly, during the interview process and analysis the researcher remained alert to her potential influence and followed the guidelines for ensuring ‘trustworthiness’ (Morrow, 2005) outlined in section 4.4.2. The researcher’s
thoughts on her role in the research process are presented in the reflection section of this chapter. During analysis, the researcher attempted to remain grounded in the data by checking and re-checking to ensure a comprehensive and accurate representation of what had been said was achieved. Once the findings were written up two experienced qualitative researchers were asked to challenge the findings, thus prompting the researcher to analyse the data further. Finally, two participants were sent the results section of this study and asked for their comments. They supported the interpretations offered. The assumption here is that if the participants make sense of the study and the findings, then it must have some credibility (Willig, 1999).

5.4 RESULTS
The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of thirty-somethings during voluntary career change. Analysis of participant’s stories describing their experiences resulted in three ‘master themes’ that wholly represented the findings. The first master theme relates to participant’s sensemaking processes during voluntary career change. The second master theme covers the role of values in influencing various aspects of the transition experience. The final master theme deals with the influence of the participant’s social context on the change process. To contribute to a thorough analysis and to ensure clarity in the portrayal of the findings each master theme was further divided into subsidiary ‘constituent themes’. Coincidentally, each master theme was sub-divided into three constituent themes. The first master theme was sub-divided into themes relating to ‘responses to continuity and discontinuity during transition’, ‘re-evaluations of expectations as a learning outcome of change’ and ‘the impact of being thirty-something on the perceptions of the voluntary change experience’. The second master relating to values was further divided into constituent themes relating to ‘the role of values in motivating career change’, ‘pursuing career change in accordance with values’, and ‘the influence of values on interpretations of outcomes”. The final master theme relating to social context was divided into themes focusing on ‘social support’, ‘the influence of perceived constraints’, and ‘social comparison as a source of validation’.

5.4.1 Sensemaking Processes During Voluntary Career Change
Participant’s responses reveal sequences of cognitions, feelings and behaviours that illustrate the constructivist process of creating and making sense of a career
narrative. Weick's account of the perceptual changes relating to a boundaryless career as "work experiences that rise prospectively into fragments and fall retrospectively into patterns - a mixture of continuity and discontinuity" (Weick, 2001, p. 207) was found to aptly describe the reflections of career change experiences in this study. Participants did indeed appear to retrospectively contextualise separate experiences or 'fragments' in a holistic framework representing the whole change experience, which gave them meaning. However, another level was also identified. While, Weick's comments may be interpreted as suggesting that sensemaking processes result in a prevailing sense of continuity in retrospective interpretations, and that this replaces any sense of discontinuity, this was not always found to be the case. These findings suggest that in retrospect participants also described fragmentary experiences as discontinuities. Although they appeared to have made sense of them and were able to see them as part of a bigger picture they continued to describe them as they had experienced them at the time. Therefore, individual's reflections seem to have two levels. At one level these appear to consist of retrospective interpretations of events that provide a sense of continuity, but alongside these at another level, memories exist of the contemporaneous feelings that the event provoked, providing a sense of discontinuity. These two levels of reflection can be identified in participant's descriptions of a time-out period that is discussed later in this section.

Three key stages were identified in the participant's experiences of the change process involving an evolutionary momentum of adaptation from a period of perceived stability in one setting, through a time of upheaval, to another relatively stable state in a new environment, thus reflecting the general pattern outlined in transition models of change, including that of Isabella (1990). The first stage identified relates to contemplating the career change. While it appears that limited attention has been paid to this stage in the transition literature it was emphasised as significant by participants. They identified it as being associated with an increasing awareness of personal issues they wanted to address (e.g., pursuing a talent; following a vocation; doing something personally meaningful) or external factors they wanted to change (e.g., better quality of life; time with children; become self-employed), which they felt would improve their life.
The duration of this period varied greatly among participants, from several months to many years. This appeared to depend on the external circumstances being considered appropriate for change, and also on the individual achieving a state of psychological readiness for their career change. It seems that attaining psychological readiness consists of two cognitive stages. The first stage involves a development of the conscious awareness of the feelings associated with the need for change. The second stage involves deriving meaning from these feelings, and forming clearly defined occupational goals. These goals appeared to evolve from either one or a combination of the following: an internal need, an over-riding value, previous experiences or existing skills or interests. It is of interest that all these factors derive from known experience or knowledge, they are not generated from an external source, implying that the direction of a new career change is invariably towards a field known to the individual to some degree. That the new career area is known to some degree appears to contribute to a sense of continuity, and enables the setting of defined and realistic goals that appeared to help maintain motivation at this early stage. One final factor that appears relevant in affecting the length of the contemplation stage is the existence of personal qualities in the career actor that contributed to pro-active behaviour. These assist the individual in responding to their feelings for a need for change, and turning their goals into actions.

It was found that the middle stage in the transition process was characterised by uncertainty and challenge for many participants despite the change being initiated voluntarily. Participants reported feeling anxiety about whether they had made the right decision to change, "Everyone said I take my hat off to you, I felt both brave and like, 'what am I doing? Am I making the right decision?' A bit silly." (Lauren, p. 6) and "I was incredibly motivated and incredibly anxious in equal amounts." (Christina, p. 11b). These ambivalent and contradictory feelings of doubt and exhilaration appeared to result from the temporal orientation of participants at this stage, caught mid-way between reflecting for the first time on having given up what they knew, while also moving forward, on a path of their own volition, towards the unknown.

The next stage of the transition was characterised by experience in the new role and becoming accustomed to it. Participants at this point however, did not describe their
change as being complete. Instead, it appeared that one of the key outcomes of the transition experience was a realisation that future change was inevitable. For the majority of participants this represented a shift in perception from their career transition being a one-off event to achieve a set of subjectively meaningful goals, to a view of continuous personal development. In consequence, cognitive representations were found to be re-defined and expectations, goals and evaluation criteria were modified. This is discussed in more detail later in this section (see 5.4.1.3). The apparent acceptance of the role of change in their life going forwards seems to be assisted by feeling that the experiences gained during their career transition will enhance their ability to cope with future change. In particular, this relates to feeling they have created more opportunities for themselves, they have increased their confidence levels and they are also more adaptable. Participants appear to view the future in terms of these qualities, and their development appears to provide a prospective sense of continuity. The emphasis on outcomes of one career change feeding into future development provided by this perspective supports the cyclical model of transition.

In summary, these findings propose a sequence of interpretative processes relating to career change that may be divided into three stages. The first stage, identified as involving the contemplation of change, although not always acknowledged in models of transition is significant. Its particular value appears to be in developing self-awareness and prioritising values that then contribute to goal-setting. Progress from this stage to the next requires pro-active behaviour to turn cognitions into actions. The next stage, characterised by a mix of positive affect and doubt appears to be followed by a stage involving progressive adjustment to the new circumstances. At this point the individual appears to hold a sense of continuity in terms of their own development that connects the past, present and future, while also retaining some memories of the discontinuous experiences of change. The next sub-section focuses on the feelings associated with these stages.

5.4.1.1 Responses to Continuity and Discontinuity During Transition
Feelings contemporaneous to the early stages of career transition were generally positive, as expected for change that is voluntary. All participants described feeling in control of their decision to change career, and this seemed to be associated with
perceiving it as a positive experience. Paul compared an earlier enforced career change with his latest voluntary career change, "It was devastation, it caused huge disruption to my life, having no salary. I had had a job house so I lost my home. I was in a relationship at the time that also broke apart. The whole incident was traumatic. This time was definitely more controlled." (Paul, p. 5). This comment implies that the unwanted nature of the change events, their speed, severity and breadth all made it a worse experience compared to one that was wanted, planned and controlled. However, despite all participants feeling that they had made the decision to change career voluntarily, several ‘push’ factors were identified, that they felt were not under their control, and contributed to them feeling that they had to change career. These included bullying at work, low pay, professional disillusionment or family responsibilities.

Investigation of the factors affecting voluntary career change decisions therefore suggests that the definition of voluntary change is not clear-cut. It appears that change is described as voluntary if an overall sense of control is perceived, however, there may be elements contributing to the decision to change career that the individual does not feel in control of. Therefore, an assumption that voluntary change is entirely controlled and consequently positively experienced appears to be inaccurate. Instead, voluntary change appears to involve varying perceptions of control that differ throughout the stages of the transition process. While participants describe positive interpretations of their experience they also portray voluntary career change at times as a challenging, exhausting and demanding experience. "I felt overwhelmed in the first week because it was just so much." (Lauren, p. 7b)

One of the key ways in which push factors were found to influence the change experience was in terms of the timing of its occurrence. Not all participants felt in control of when their career change took place as a result of circumstantial factors. For example, Jason waited ten years from initially wanting to changing career until he felt able to carry it out. Limited financial resources, his wife’s study, and childcare for their two young children were the reasons he felt that precluded him from re-training earlier. When circumstances were considered appropriate for career change and the individual felt ready this appeared to result in a sense of the change feeling a natural and unforced process, that was accompanied by a sense of things
falling into place and that it was meant to be. Participants described “relief” (Lauren, p. 6), from having left jobs they were unhappy with, and a sense of hope and optimism for what was to come, this was likened to the beginning of a journey full of possibilities (Ralph, p. 4). At this point, participants appeared to relish the freedom associated with ideas and dreams. They felt able to consider various options without having to commit to them or act upon them, “at the moment I’m still in those initial stages and it sort of feels very open and people say ‘What do you think you’ll do?’ and I say ‘I don’t know’ and I like that, I like that sense of openness, things aren’t fixed or settled.” (Ralph, p. 4)

A period of ‘time-out from real life’ was noted by several participants as being valuable at this early stage of the career change process. This appeared to be perceived as a period isolated from the rest of their life, and for some participants, it had a sense of unreality about it. It was experienced in various ways, but generally appeared to be a self-allocated amount of time defined by the suspension of everyday pressures such as financial prudence, career-building, or customary lifestyle demands. Lauren identified the trial period she had chosen to spend pursuing a low paid but enjoyable new career “I’m not really facing up to the fact that I can’t afford to live where I’m living but in a way I’m seeing it as a year off” (Lauren, p. 3b). The objective of this period appeared to be space for the contemplation of values, time to experiment by pursuing interests, and opportunity to decide on a direction before moving forward. For some participants this period lasted a few months and did not involve employment, for others it involved trialling a new career to assess how they liked it. For other participants a stopgap job, free of certain pressures was taken for a period of up to several years until they felt ready to pursue work that more closely matched their personal goals.

While this time-out period appears to be interpreted as a fragmentary experience at the time, in retrospective sensemaking, it was associated with assessing past experiences and providing an essential platform upon which to base future change. However, even in retrospect its distinctive nature marks it out as defined period or ‘fragment’, removed from the rest of their life experiences. Ralph, for example, described his time-out period when he worked for his family business. This followed a pressurised job and divorce, and was prior to training as a vicar
"I see those four years as time-out where I re-jigged a lot of things personally and re-captured my vision of what I felt my working life was all about, as well as my personal life...I suppose at the point where I felt more settled I was then able to respond to the thing that had been nagging me from way back". (Ralph, p. 1b & p. 4)

This time-out period was found particularly necessary by participants who had experienced a negative situation prior to their career transition, such as bullying at work (e.g., Juliet and Lauren) or a relationship breakdown (e.g., Ralph). For them, the time was regarded as a recovery period.

The pace of the career change process varied greatly among participants. For the majority of participants a period of training was undertaken for their new career, on a full-time or part-time basis. Although this period was experienced as part of their new career it was considered as a transitory and indeterminate state that allowed a period of adjustment. This included adjustment to their new work identity, their newly acquired skills and a new working culture. Lauren, despite several months contemplating and preparing for her career change experienced a swift transition, leaving her old job on a Friday and started her new career the following Monday. She described demarcating her own ‘settling-in’ period based on prior experience “I found it quite hard to be myself straight away, but I suppose that always takes a bit of time. I was giving myself, there’s usually a three month mark where you feel like you’ve fitted in.” (Lauren, p. 7b).

Several participants described a sense of impatience at the time of their career change, as they wanted to hurry the pace of change. An outcome of the transition process however, was a realisation that controlling the pace of change wasn’t always possible. In retrospect, the benefit of a flexible attitude towards the pace of change was noted, particularly in non-linear type careers. “Personally I wanted it all to change very fast and for it all to be solved and tidy, again that’s not how music works, and I had to discover that for myself, that you absolutely can’t impose pace on it.” (Christina, p. 11b). The benefit of a relatively slow pace of change was also noted in retrospect, and the need for a longer adjustment period for more complex changes. Ralph describes the feeling among he and his fellow theology students “...we just wanted to get out there and do it, so it [the training course] was too long
but it wasn’t too long because you need that, you’re not just learning a skill you’re learning a whole way of being, with a diverse set of skills required.” (Ralph, p. 9)

Participant’s narratives revealed that the greater the difference between their previous experiences and their new career the greater the challenges they faced. If an individual had a prior understanding of their new career that was grounded in experience, they were found to have more realistic expectations and fewer difficulties adjusting than those who did not have this prior knowledge. Work experience was identified as a way of promoting this understanding and providing a useful basis for career decision making and assisting later adjustment. For instance, Ralph noted that his understanding of the organisational culture of the church and the demands of his new career, gained by earlier work for ecclesiastical organisations, helped him form realistic expectations. He felt this assisted transition to his new role, and made it easier for him compared to his fellow students who had not had previous relevant experience. For participants who experienced a complex career change of which they had no prior experience, adjustment appeared to be more challenging and took longer. For example, Seb recalled moving from a career in PR to teaching, involving training on the job “I still walk along the school corridor and think ‘God, what am I doing here?’ but not as much as I did a few months ago.” (Seb, p. 7b)

It appeared that participants were realistic in expecting their new career to involve an initial period of lower expertise and status. However, this period was expected to be shorter than when they were younger since it was considered that their skills and experience should hasten the learning and development process. For individuals who became self-employed or worked in relatively non-hierarchical jobs such as teaching, academic research, or car mechanics, taking personal responsibility for their progress did not seem to present any problems. However, for participants who moved into bureaucratic organisations, two key challenges emerged. Firstly, the hierarchical nature of the institutional structure made evident their loss of status. Secondly, the participants appeared to have developed their own goals and personal standards for achievement and success that provide them with a subjectively meaningful structure to their career. However, they found limited opportunity to act on them since the highly structured organisational context was felt to influence their rate of progress,
and offer them minimal control. Paul, for example, joined the police force and over a two-year training period felt his previous experience in the police force, military police and ambulance service was ignored. "Immediate supervisors will, to an extent, blank your opinion in favour of somebody that may be younger and less experienced but has been in the job longer, which I find unprofessional and rude." (Paul, p. 4). As a result he did not feel he was achieving his potential or his subjectively-defined goals. This appeared to result in frustration and the potential for reduced organisational commitment, "If I feel I'm not progressing then I get frustrated and that frustration in turn will be a determining factor for me to leave." (Paul, p. 8b)

Transferring the use of skills, experience and interests in a new career appeared to be valued by participants in providing a sense of continuity in terms of their achievements, rather than dropping to the level of a novice they wanted to build on what they had already achieved. "Success is important to me. To feel successful in what I'm doing I think I'd have to take with me experience and skills that I've achieved" (Paul, p. 11b). Using existing achievements seemed to be valued because progress could be faster, there was no sense of former achievements being wasted, and it also appeared to enhance confidence levels. For example, Laura had a strong feeling that the skills she had developed as an actress, together with her character traits would make her effective in her new career as a hypnotherapist "With the hypnotherapy it sort of ticked all the right boxes, it was training I already had, so voice fine, I could do that, it was using script writing skills that I already had, it was using that nosiness that I already had" (Laura, p. 6b).

For three participants, confidence came from having a sense of vocation. For Christina this involved becoming a singer, "When I entered music, I, as you need to be, was convinced I had the wherewithal to do extremely well at it" (Christina, p. 2). For Maggie, her sense of vocation involved becoming a teacher and for Ralph, it involved becoming a vicar. Their confidence in their choice of career came from a feeling of their natural aptitude for the job and a sense of having to attend to powerful feelings that were almost disassociated from the self and were regarded as dictating their career path. For example, Christina described a motivation to pursue her singing career as a physical need, "the need to sing became a really kind of
physical thing, the need to do this singing was like suddenly realising that you could run, and that if you don't go for a run everyday you'll feel unwell” (Christina, p. 7b). In turn, the sense of aptness about their new career provided confidence that appeared to contribute to motivation and perseverance during their transition.

The sense of continuity provided by goals and goal-pursuance also appeared to contribute to motivation and perseverance, “I've managed to hold on and stick through and well hopefully I can stick through until I can get to where I want to get to...I've set myself a focus, I'm focused on what I need to be doing and hopefully if I achieve that I will get to where I want to go” (Paul, p. 10). Participants described coping with hardships in their career change by viewing them as short-term and necessary for achieving their end-goals and the associated long-term benefits. This understanding of deferred gratification appeared to provide motivation to get through difficult times, “…getting two kids to school, getting them up and ready, and then having to go and stand at a bus stop in the rain in the winter, it's hard going and you've got to keep looking at that job at the end of the line and think “Yes, that's what I want so I've got to go through all this, and those days were hard” (Maggie, p. 6).

In some instances, the sacrifices made by participants were themselves described as providing an extra incentive to succeed. For example, Christina’s relinquishment of a well-paid job in advertising to pursue a freelance career as an opera singer, motivated her to succeed. “...because I gave up quite a lot of things, and it was quite a complicated move to make and it was financially punitive for the first couple of years, so I think...it partly motivated me but also just feeling that it was an active choice. “ (Christina, p. 3) The majority of participants experienced a reduction in their salary as a result of changing career. However, as stated by Christina, justification for the financial loss came from the knowledge that their position was voluntary, from the significance of the values being pursued, and also from a hope that it was a temporary state. This was described by Rob, who identified where he wanted to work, and was prepared to volunteer in anticipation of being offered a paid position, “…you're working long hours for absolutely no money but I was just convinced I was doing the right thing in terms of increasing my chances of coming here on a full-time basis, and that's exactly what happened. It's a loss leader I think
they describe it as in the advertising industry, be prepared to do a little bit for nothing but hopefully in terms of gaining something back in the long run” (Rob, p. 13). This example illustrates again that the end-goal again appears to provide a sense of purpose for current actions and sacrifices.

The career change outcome of recognising and accepting change in their lives going forward that was identified by several participants appeared to contribute to a relaxed and non-controlling approach to the future. Individuals appeared to be more concerned with ‘being’ than ‘doing’ and were more integrated with their environment, characteristics identified in the concept of communion (see page 17). For example, Juliet described her attitude to the future after her career transition, “I think organically something will happen, and I’m not going to put pressure on myself by giving myself a plan or anything. just as time goes on and the more I do it...I’m learning how I could do things better and differently in the future.” (Juliet, p. 5b)

In summary, participants appeared to favour having a sense of control over the pace of their change to enable them to adjust at a rate they felt comfortable with. For instance, having the opportunity to take time for recovery from negative experiences and/or for contemplation were valued. A process of retrospective benefit-finding was evident in relation to elements of the change process that had dictated their pace of change, consequently on reflection, they were generally viewed in positive terms. A learning outcome derived from this appeared to be a greater acceptance of their interdependence with the environment, characteristic of the concept of communion. Other elements that appeared to assist transition (e.g., in adjustment, motivation and goal-setting) were prior knowledge of the new occupation and confidence that was derived from existing skills or experience. As a result of their career change experiences participants did not appear to view potential future change in terms of discontinuity, instead they appeared to accept it as something they would encompass as part of an on-going adaptation process. This altered perspective appeared to derive from familiarity with change, confidence in having coped and adapted to change, and having learnt skills perceived to enhance the ability to cope with the challenges of change. The next section considers the implications of this outcome.
5.4.1.2 Re-evaluations of Expectations as a Learning Outcome of Change

The altered perception of change identified in the previous section was one of a number of revisions made by participants in response to their experiences of career change. Initially, participants exhibited different levels of expectations regarding their new career that appeared to be influenced by their personal characteristics and their previous experiences. For example, Ralph described himself thus "I'm not somebody who builds huge expectations – it's got to be like this. I just tend to go with the flow and see how it is, and try to enjoy things as much as I can while I'm in them." (Ralph, p. 12b). Christina in contrast said "I think, partly to give myself motivation, the kind of career element was very important, and I really wanted to climb the ladder as fast as I could" (Christina, p. 2). These two approaches suggest the need for different levels of sensemaking during the change process. Participants like Ralph, who had an open and flexible attitude to his change experiences appeared to encompass novelty more easily than participants like Christina, who had to re-interpret her defined expectations when she encountered unpredictable aspects of her career change.

Recognition of the limitations involved with having defined expectations was an outcome of the career change process. For example, Christina in retrospect said "I think my initial expectations were really wrong, and I think that since I've become more realistic and had a better understanding of what it was appropriate to expect then they have been entirely met" (Christina, p. 12b). Defined expectations relating to objective success appeared to be replaced with a broader and more subjectively-defined set of criteria following career change "I didn't really think that any of the things that are now important and fulfilling could be. I had this exalted idea of how only the grandest and best things were worth having, and it's rubbish, which is brilliant." (Christina, p. 13)

These criteria were recognised as being more appropriate to a non-linear career structure and they defined a new understanding of career opportunities and the meaning of success "I've realised that career is not linear in the way that one might initially expect and that actually there's excellent stuff to be done in all sorts of directions...There isn't really an end point, it's always in flux, and I think that's something I needed to understand, that there will be times when I'm working as a
soloist, and times that I'm working in the chorus, one is not necessarily more successful in career terms." (Christina, p. 2b). As a consequence of retrospective interpretations, it was found that the outcomes of career change were discussed in positive terms even if they were different from what had initially been expected or desired. It is possible that this was a justification for what was acknowledged to be a voluntary experience, since accepting failure would result in cognitive dissonance as described earlier. However, it appears that outcomes are viewed positively as a result of being re-defined in terms that are subjectively valued by the individual.

In summary, participants appeared to learn from their career change experiences that a flexible and open-minded approach to change assists adaptation. Participants who had held defined expectations also appeared to learn that these were inappropriate in light of the unpredictability of change. Instead, adaptability was considered to be necessary to cope with on-going change and to take advantage of opportunities presented.

5.4.1.3 The Impact of Being Thirty-Something on the Perceptions of the Voluntary Change Experience
Participants discussed aspects of their age that affected the interpretation of their experiences. For those who were able to compare their career change in their thirties with one at an earlier stage in their life, they described feeling that in their thirties it was more disruptive and harder to cope with. This appeared to relate to unsettling an established lifestyle and challenging known ways of doing things. However, Seb, a probationary teacher, who had lived and worked in several countries in his twenties, also described his excitement and sense of rejuvenation in facing new challenges and breaking away from routine in his thirties, "this time was almost harder because you can do anything when you're young, but when you get older it becomes harder. The nice thing about it is you do feel alive, you're living on your wits a bit." (Seb, p. 8)

The unpredictability inherent in career change, although challenging was considered something that could be handled better as a result of maturity. For example, Rob described being able to accept changing the direction of his goals.

"In the very early days of reading psychology I imagined I would be a clinical psychologist working in a hospital or community setting, that myth was dispelled
quite quickly, by myself. It didn't upset me when I found out it wasn't going to be for me. Certainly for me aging, getting older has conferred the ability to look at things quite objectively now and say that is the way it is, no amount of being upset about it is going to change it so I'll have to find another way of doing things.” (Rob, p. 9b).

It appears that the scope of past experience allows for a flexible response to unexpected events that assists in the adaptability necessary for change.

In some instances, however, participants reported that they had to learn this flexibility, and that initially they had attempted to respond to novel situations with familiar patterns of behaviour, that they later realised were inappropriate. For example, Christina discussed imposing organisation and structure, inherited from her previous life as an advertising executive, on to her first few months as a freelance singer, “I had all these acres of free time, not all the jobs I was expecting so actually I had to create my own structure. And I was very controlling about it initially and I don’t think that was particularly helpful. But it gave me a way to hang on to something when actually it wasn’t going terribly well.” (Christina, p. 11).

Although, in retrospect Christina was aware that being controlling was incompatible with her new lifestyle and ineffective on a practical level, the continuation of a known framework within which to operate appeared to provide psychological comfort at a time when many other things were unfamiliar. This illustrates the response to psychological vulnerability that arises from a situation characterised by lack of structure proposed by Bell and Staw (1989) in which behaviour becomes guided by tightly coupled structures to strengthen situations and redefine boundaries. Christina’s realisation however that, on a practical level this had been unhelpful, identifies a learning outcome of the change experience and illustrates an acceptance of when responses associated with the concept of communion would have been more appropriate than responses associated with agency.

As well as providing psychological comfort, continuing familiar patterns of behaviour also appeared to enhance confidence in the early stages of transition. This seems to result from feelings of self-efficacy derived from using known skills. Several participants described over-compensating for their lack of experience in a new area when preparing for their new career. For example, Rob felt he worked harder on his course than his younger fellow students, and Christina described
learning an unnecessarily extensive musical repertoire. Feelings of inadequacy deriving from their inexperience in their new career appeared to be exacerbated by feeling they were behind others of their age, which relates to the concept of the “social clock” (Neugarten, 1965), discussed in section 3.2.1. As a consequence, they seemed to respond by using transferable skills such as organisational abilities that they had experience of and confidence in, in attempts to promote their rate of progress.

Participant’s lack of confidence in the early stages of their new career appeared to relate to their lack of experience rather to their perceptions of their inherent abilities. All the participants appeared confident in their abilities to do their new occupation, either as a result of an inherent skill and/or as a result of previous experience. For example, Christina’s natural musical abilities and her familiarity with singing gained as a student provided her with the confidence to pursue it as a profession. Laura also noted the range of sources from which she developed her confidence to pursue a new career in hypnotherapy following a career in acting. Awareness of existing skills, knowledge and natural aptitude all contributed to feeling that a new career could be confidently pursued. Maturity and associated life experience therefore seemed to be linked to enhanced self-confidence. Confidence in ability appeared to be significant in the early stages of career change because it enabled the individual to imagine themselves doing the new career, it therefore contributed to goal-setting and motivation. As well as contributing cognitively, confidence in ability also appeared to encourage feelings of self-efficacy that encouraged proactive behaviour.

Participants felt that some types of career were more suitable for late starters than others. Seb and Ralph described their respective new professions of teaching and being a vicar as suited to older entries. This was because they considered the necessary job skills to be associated with maturity, and importantly this was recognised by the relevant employer. Other participants felt their career was not suited to older entries, this appeared to result in a sense of time pressure related to their career change, evident in descriptions of time running out. This was a motivator for action, as illustrated by Christina’s decision to start her singing career.
"I was approaching thirty and thinking 'Well, there's a real time limit on it.' Singing is the one thing you can start late but there is a sort of limit as to how late you can leave it, and I was aware that I had quite a lot of catching up to do. (Christina, p. 4).

This feeling appeared to be derived primarily from their own sense of inadequacy in terms of lack of experience and from social comparison. In Christina's case, after changing from being employed to becoming a freelancer, her expectations altered in terms of what she thought she should achieve and when. This appeared to be influenced by having reduced opportunities for direct social comparison since she was no longer part of a clear hierarchical structure, and an understanding that she could measure her progress according to subjective criteria. For participants in more formally structured organisations, employer recognition of the needs of mature entries was considered important in terms of adaptation. The church and the educational system were described as supportive environments, both emotionally and practically. The police force however, as described in section 5.4.1.1, was not.

In conclusion, it appears that characteristics relating to the thirties suggest certain advantages and certain disadvantages in relation to how career change is perceived. The breadth of previous experience in individuals of this age appears to provide a range of alternatives that offers the potential for a flexible and open-minded approach to novel experiences. However, past experiences and existing skills may also result in the individual responding to a novel experience in an inflexible and inappropriate manner because it is known and is therefore found psychologically comforting. The latter approach appears to be adopted by individuals who have no past experience of significant change and respond in this way due to feelings of insecurity. In contrast the former approach appears to be learnt as a result of previous change that has promoted an understanding of the need for flexibility and has also contributed to their self-confidence in the face of change.

5.4.2 Values
The values of participants appeared to play a number of roles during the career change process. The expectation outlined in section 3.2.3, that they would be influential at all stages of career change, for instance, in terms of career choice, goal content, motivation, planning and decision-making, and evaluating outcomes, was borne out in these findings. Values were also found to influence when career change
took place, for example, Laura’s decision to stop acting and become a hypnotherapist was predominantly due to wanting to spend more time with her young family. Values also appeared to influence the way participants enacted their career change, as they tended to make independent plans and choices, suggesting the relevance of the notion of authenticity (Critelli, 1996), also discussed in section 3.2.3.

Participants described a complex combination of factors that contributed to their career change. This included experiencing some ‘push’ factors, (i.e., negative aspects of their life that they no longer wanted to tolerate) and ‘pull’ factors, (i.e., positive aspects in their life that they valued and wanted to move towards) that allowed them to develop a comprehensive and subjectively meaningful value system. Participants appeared to use their values system as a basis from which to shape their decisions, and they described the need to act on these values as being more significant during their thirties than it had been earlier in their lives.

5.4.2.1 Motivation to Change
Although participants in this study changed career voluntarily, they described several ‘push’ factors that contributed to their decision to change. In some cases change was precipitated by a major life event such as the breakdown of a marriage, having children, or suffering injury that resulted in the re-evaluation of their lives and prompted change. Negative work conditions were frequently cited as contributing to a situation that could no longer be tolerated, these included excessive work demands leading to stress and burn-out, bullying, boredom, being undervalued or underpaid. These situations seemed to result in the individual searching out a new work context that provided an alternative existence. For example, Juliet suffered bullying by her boss and poor health as a consequence. In her new career her main objective was to be self-employed “The only thing I was trying to avoid was having to answer to somebody... It’s all on my terms now”. (Juliet, p. 8).

For Paul however, his job as a paramedic in the ambulance service provided him with high levels of personal satisfaction, but he felt he had to leave because of low pay, “The main reason for going was financially I could no longer afford to be employed as a paramedic, the salary was just atrocious, with the cost of living, and I had to move, I had to do something as a single person to survive” (Paul, p. 4b). This
suggests that it is not always a simple matter of making a choice between push and pull factors but rather, it involves a negotiation process between the two. Paul changed to a better paid career as a police officer but one he finds less rewarding. Basing career change predominantly on objective criteria such as salary, clearly has risks in terms of the attainment of subjective rewards, such as enjoyment and satisfaction. For Paul, the implications of achieving objective success but not subjective success included a lack of identification with his new role, doubt concerning his decision to change and low organisational commitment, “If I compare the most rewarding job I’ve had was working as a paramedic. I felt satisfaction with that. With the police I do not feel satisfaction with what I do at the moment. Whether that will change as I progress along I don’t know, and that’s something I’m thinking about at the moment.” (Paul, p. 2b)

In contrast, participants identified several ‘pull’ factors that motivated their decision to change career. These included achieving a balance between the demands of home and work life that was considered subjectively acceptable; finding an occupational identity that offered an improved fit with their self-concept; being true to themselves and attempting to fulfil their potential, and being of use to society.

The values described by participants as motivating them to change career, as predicted by Hansen (1997) on page 72, derived from both their work and personal life, illustrating the lack of a boundary separating the two. For example, Ralph described how, in the past, the demands of work had negatively impacted on his home life and had contributed towards his divorce. Now re-married, the way he is pursuing his new career is influenced by the value he places on his role in the family, “The experience of marriage breakdown is quite a lesson to try and re-apply the second time around, so I put in a lot of time and effort and my work partly revolves around my family commitments... and that flexibility reflects a set of values” (Ralph, p. 2b).

The value placed on domestic issues, and the resulting influence on work seemed as significant for the men in this study as for the women. For example, the timing of Jim’s career change was affected by childcare responsibilities, while his wife being the higher earner, stayed at work, thus reflecting the proposals of family power.
theory discussed in section 3.2.8. Seb’s decision to teach was influenced by finding a profession he could pursue outside of London. This appeared to be largely influenced by external rewards that benefited his family, such as providing a better quality of life for his child, long holidays and gaining an understanding of education. As a consequence, Seb described teaching as the most suitable option for him while he had a young family, and he placed value on it as a profession, however, he did not consider it his ideal or long-term choice.

For some women, such as Laura, re-training in a profession that allowed her more independence and flexibility in relation to the hours she worked was the main reason to change career, enabling her to spend more time with her family. Half of the participant’s described wanting more flexibility over their time as a reason to change career. This included participants with children and those without. For some participants this was not discussed as being a significant factor. Maggie for instance, rather than pursuing freedom from the time-pressures of working life, felt the need to pursue a career rather than being at home full-time with young children. “I’d always been used to being around adults and suddenly having these kids I’d lost my identity in them because your children are your life, and I’d lost that other part of me...and I thought I need to get back to meeting people... I just thought I need to get out and do something because I’m going to get lost in this world of kids, the only way round it, I looked for a part-time job.” (Maggie, p. 2). She identified work as being beneficial in terms of providing a significant component of identity, structure and adult companionship. It appears from this sub-section that factors from domestic and working lives inter-relate in influencing career change for both men and women, and that values are derived from both sources. It seems that an individual’s satisfaction with the proportion of work and non-work elements in their life depends on their psychological needs at the time, and cannot simply be predicted by their circumstances.

The need to pursue an occupational identity that was subjectively valued was cited by several participants as motivating their career change. Various factors were found to contribute to this need. For instance, Rob’s career history supported the expectation, cited in Chapter Three, that moving away from a conferred identity that had influenced early career choice may be a reason for later career change. Rob
spent the first decade of his working life as an accountant, in accordance with his parent’s wishes and the expectations of his teachers. Although he disliked it from the beginning he did not change career because he focused on his semi-professional sporting life that he continued outside of work. However, when he had an injury that prevented him from playing further, he addressed his work concerns, “It’s all very well to say to people I’m an accountant, I think I just thought I had more in me. I just felt it was unfulfilled potential, there was something gnawing away at me that said you can do better than this. There are things out there and you owe it to yourself to at least explore them, even if you decide at the end of the day not to jump, not to make the move, you need to see what else is out there, because you’re going to wake up one day and find you’re fifty-something and you’ve done this all your life, and you’ll regret it.” (Rob, p. 7)

Christina’s need to pursue a new career with an identity she valued, stemmed from feeling an incongruity between her self-identity and her professional identity in advertising. She described having “to wear a certain sort of mask” (Christina, p. 1) at work and the discomfort this invoked, “…that was an industry which required a certain persona which wasn’t a particularly comfortable one for me to acquire, wasn’t essentially a very good fit with my own personality” (Christina, p. 1).

Lauren and Jason felt that their jobs prior to their career change did not accurately reflect their self-identities, and represented them negatively, which was a source of humiliation. Lauren said “When anyone asked me what I did I’d always cringe and I’d blush, actually be embarrassed because I couldn’t see myself doing it.” (Lauren, p. 4). Jason, felt ashamed of his unskilled work as a security officer in comparison to the jobs held by other members of his and his wife’s family. “I just felt worthless in a way. A lot of our families have got qualifications, sometimes I felt embarrassed if it was ‘What do you do for a living?’” (Jason, p. 4). This contributed to him becoming a mechanic and achieving qualifications he felt proud of. As previously described, some participants felt that they had a vocation or a talent that they needed to attend to, “It’s hard to describe, but a sense of vocation, there is a sense that there are some things you are drawn to, almost against your feelings or part of your instinct, but ultimately for me vocation is about being true to your deepest instincts, not going against them at all but it’s maybe stripping away some of the things you’re resisting. To do the thing that is most essentially you.” (Ralph, p. 3b)
Anticipated regret appeared to be a common feeling motivating career change at this age. Participants seemed to be at a point in their life where they could reflect on negative past experiences, including feelings of dissatisfaction, unfulfilled potential, or of having unfinished business to complete, but still feel that they had time to rectify this, indicating high perceived control. Lauren described her motivation to change career as “a determination not to end up being a sad and miserable old cow in a job she hates and being bitter and twisted. Just being determined not to disappoint myself.” (Lauren, p. 9). The need to test the reality of their ideas and prevent future regret appeared powerful enough to outweigh any worries. Christina mentioned having a fall-back option if she was unsuccessful, however, the act of endeavour and discovering the outcome seemed to be as significant as the outcome itself in motivating the career change “it was sort of about the need to know and thinking well if it all goes wrong I know I can do advertising...I can always retreat again but actually it’s going to be really frustrating to miss the moment and not know.” (Christina, p. 4)

As well as wanting to avoid potential failure, the motivation to find a career that was a true reflection of their values and for this to be reflected in terms of their identity and abilities was significant for many participants. This seemed to be particularly relevant to thirty-somethings because they were aware of what they didn’t want, based on past experiences, and they were no longer prepared to tolerate compromise. They described being more self-aware, and having a greater understanding of themselves and what they wanted to do. At this age they were likely to be more independent of external pressures such as parental wishes, although other pressures, particularly family responsibilities were described as constraints on their behaviour. As such these individuals could generally be described as having self-constructed identities, and as proposed by Beronsky (1996), this translates into an active approach to exploration and decision-making based on internalised goals and values that are integrated with the core sense of self. Therefore, participants were self-determined and intrinsically motivated. Also, as a consequence of not wanting to accept compromise they appeared to be prepared to take risks and make sacrifices in pursuit of their goals.
For some participants, a value considered important to satisfy in their new career was altruism. This involved pursuing a career that was considered socially beneficial, it included becoming a vicar (Ralph), a lifestyle manager (Lauren), a car mechanic (Jason), and a teacher (Seb and Maggie), "I wanted to work in a working class area where I’d come from, because although along the way I’d met teachers who I’d look back and say inspired me there were not that many, and I wanted to see if I could make a difference in somebody’s life" (Maggie, p. 4). This appeared to meet a psychological need of wanting a sense of purpose and direction in their lives that was personally meaningful. It also reflects the development goal of generativity associated with this age group by Erickson (1956), described as the ability to look outwards from the self and care for others (see section 3.2.3). Generativity did appear to be a value that these participants came to regard as increasingly significant over time, until it became important enough to express at a certain point.

In summary, subjective values such as being true to one’s self-concept; achieving a sense of purpose through altruistic acts; accepting challenge; developing and learning; maximising their potential appeared to be significant for thirty-somethings in influencing their career paths. As well as simply being motivated by a need to satisfy internal needs of happiness and pride, "I want to do something that I feel good about, that I enjoy, that everyday I’m happy doing, and will fit in with my life" (Juliet, p. 5). Achieving these subjective values was associated with expectations of satisfaction and positive affect. These values predominantly eclipsed more traditional, organisational benchmarks of career development, such as advancement in a hierarchy or financial remuneration, in contributing to career change decisions. Indeed the majority of participants experienced a loss of income as a result of changing career, and accepted that this was a sacrifice they were prepared to accept to enable them to pursue what was subjectively important to them. This indicates the prioritising of subjective values over objective criteria and identifies why participants appear to accept risk and incur objective losses. The value systems of these voluntary career changers correspond to those identified in Kanchier and Unruh’s (1989) empirical study, in which autonomous career changers also tended to see their professional positions as a means of self-expression and personal development. In contrast, their findings relating to the values used in career decision-making by individuals who did not change career, (placed greater value on security, power,
position and other situational factors, such as family responsibilities), did not appear to be priority values for the career changers in this study.

5.4.2.2 Pursuing Career Change in Accordance with Values

Participants described valuing several personal characteristics that they held and identified them as assisting in their career change. In general, these characteristics reflect those associated with the concept of agency (see p. 21). Participants demonstrated proactive behaviour in a number of ways. For example, Lauren realised that she needed to actively search for work, "I was trying to find that age old question that people say "But what do I really want to do?" And I was looking for the answer. I was looking for the job to be advertised...and I'll apply and I'll get that job and of course that doesn't happen, you have to create it or tailor it." (Juliet, p. 8b)

In conjunction with being proactive, the importance of being open-minded was also recognised by participants, this enabled the questioning of their current position and allowed them to consider a range of possibilities. For example, several participants described writing lists consisting either of possible careers or of more general likes and interests. This process assisted them in focusing on what was personally important, and in some cases elicited a flash of recognition of what they should pursue in their new career. Juliet for example, described this process, "I'd pictured everything separately but when I saw them on the list altogether its like 'Of course, I'll do that!'" (Juliet, p. 4b). Bateson has termed such an occasion as a "triumph of adaptation" (Bateson, 1994, p. 83).

Another characteristic that several participants described valuing was their individualism. This appeared to influence the type of occupation and the work context they considered would be appropriate for them. Seb considered his individualism to be an inherent character trait, "I don't think I'd do very well in a corporate environment, I'm a bit too individualistic." (Seb, p. 1b). Rob however, shared the goal of working in a setting where he could express his uniqueness, but his motivation derived from the 'push' factor of previously having worked for a large bureaucratic organisation where he felt this had been subjugated, "I did not want to find myself in a setting where I would inevitably have to tow the company-line"
blindly without having to think about what I was doing... anywhere that was autonomous that allowed people to think on their own two feet, and try to do things their own way, that was a key criteria in deciding not just where I was going to work but also what kind of career I was going to attempt to retrain for.” (Rob, p. 8b)

Many participants described having high standards and being conscientious which appeared to be a motivating force displayed in the values with which they pursued their career change. For example, Christina, described herself as having always been a high achiever. As a consequence, her decision to become a singer had to be at a professional level to meet her own demanding standards “...it was a quality thing and I simply had to work with really, really good musicians so I chose to do it professionally” (Christina, p. 10). Paul, also described his own exacting standards, and how he felt, as a mature entry in the police force, that his standards were above those of his fellow probationary officers and the expectations of his supervisors “I like things to be done properly... I would say that definitely in my work life I feel let down by colleagues often. That they don’t seem to, or my perception is, that they don’t have the same drive as I do, or professionalism.” (Paul, p. 1b)

As a consequence he described setting his own standards of achievement that appeared to guide his development more than those defined by the institution, “I set my own time-frame, I don’t think it realistically falls with what my supervisors expect, but I don’t know whether I should put that down to whether my own self-drive is greater than theirs or they are still in the dinosaur-era.” (Paul, p. 10b) The implications of this are discussed further in section 5.5.1.

In summary, the way in which participant’s pursue their career change appears to be based on subjective standards that define their personal development agendas, these seem to relate to their previous levels of achievement and to an apparent need for continued progress. Although progress appears to be defined in predominantly different terms from those held prior to their career change, with subjective values being more significant, the standards by which progress is measured appears to be continuous.
5.4.2.3 The Influence of Values on Interpretations of Outcomes

As mentioned earlier, Paul, whose career change had been motivated by the need to increase his salary found less satisfaction in his new career. Seb who had chosen teaching as a profession because it fitted in with his family needs, felt that it provided a stepping-stone to future career changes that he would like to make when he had more personal freedom. However, for participants whose career change was motivated predominantly by their subjective values, the only loss they perceived was financial, and they considered this to be outweighed by the gains they achieved. Participants felt improvements had occurred in many areas of their lives including their personal relationships, enhanced body image, self-development, maturity, increased confidence, a more balanced life and greater happiness. Those participants who had found a more comfortable fit between their self-identity and their professional role associated this with significant personal growth and a new freedom of expression. For example, Juliet described her feeling of having a more integrated identity, rather than having to adopt a separate work-identity “I just feel I’m myself for the first time ever, it’s like the real me all the time. I don’t have to switch on to ‘work-me’ on the bus or something.” (Juliet, p. 4). Rob described feeling a sense of satisfaction and integrity in having pursued his subjective values and avoiding anticipated regret, “that I think I can look myself in the mirror now knowing that I’m hopefully fulfilling my potential.” (Rob, p. 13b)

Christina described the unexpected nature of the outcomes of change and how the position of being in a profession that provides an ideal ‘fit’ provides the opportunity for unforeseen growth, “The choices about the singing were yes, partly about just wanting to be a singer and wanting to know, but actually was about satisfying all kinds of other desires that I wasn’t really aware of at the time...even how I would describe myself as a personality is sort of changing at the moment, which I think is a very direct function of this career, as opposed to, although probably partly also just about finding the thing that I really want to do, I suspect that sort of balancing and settling goes on once you find the thing that you most enjoy” (Christina, p. 5).

The iterative process of sensemaking is illustrated by participants describing their expectations about what they thought would be found satisfying in their new careers and how these expectations were challenged by unexpected outcomes, leading to a re-definition of their values and concepts of success, “I didn’t really think that any of
the things that are now important and fulfilling could be. I had this exalted idea of how only the grandest and best things were worth having, and it's rubbish, which is brilliant.” (Christina, p. 13)

During their career change participant's demonstrated behaviour associated with the concept of agency, for example, they attempted to control the pace of the change and described particular expectations about what they were hoping to achieve. However, in response to the challenges and unforeseen aspects of change that they experienced they appeared to gain an understanding that this approach was not always appropriate, and consequently adopted a more flexible attitude, akin to the concept of communion. A further development was the appreciation of aspects of the change process beyond the confines of their own expectations, "When I started out, when there were gaps I was really actively seeking to plug them with things because I thought they were a symptom of not being a success. And what's changed is that actually I really want those gaps now and I realise that it is one of the great benefits of living the life I do. I can bale out in the middle of the week for a day off because many weekends I'm working...it makes you more responsible I think...certainly for me my values had to change...in order to realise that banging away making everything useful all the time is just not how it works and isn't very fruitful actually, and that it's not good for me, I need more time actually." (Christina, p. 7)

As a consequence of participant's structuring their career development around subjective values and learning to accept the unpredictable nature of change, they appear to gain subjective criteria for judging their progress. For example, Ralph describes the potential for psychological distress in not having tangible measures that define achievements, and the process of finding his own subjectively meaningful criteria, "Nobody can really say what's success and I think that's what leads to a lot of clergy disillusionment and depression, in that you never really know how well you are doing, there is nothing by which you can judge yourself or others judge you...I think I'm called not to be successful but to be faithful. To do the job to the best of my ability whether that brings apparent success or apparent failure.” (Ralph, p. 13) Ralph describes a number of subjective factors that give meaning to his career, "I look for progress and change and challenge, fulfilment, where I feel I've got
something to contribute, and where the relationships with those I work with are fulfilling and good." (Ralph, p. 3)

As a consequence of the parameters that define the meaning of career becoming more personalised the structure of participant's careers appear to become increasingly amorphous. This seems to be compounded by a further outcome of career change, that of change being viewed as part of on-going development rather than as a self-contained one-off event. This also appears to contribute to redefinitions of expectations, goals, and evaluations, thus altering the personal meanings of career. Although subjective values appear to dominate the career transitions of participants, this does not exclude the significance of their social context, which is discussed in the following section.

5.4.3 Social Context

The social context of the participants was found to influence their career transition in a number of ways and appeared to be significant in affecting how they coped with the challenges of change. Some participants experienced a significant change in their social world as a consequence of their career transition. The greater the discontinuity this presented the greater challenge appeared to be. The most discontinuous change seemed to involve moving from being an employee in an organisational context to becoming self-employed and working alone. Juliet described this type of change, "I'd only been on my own for set periods of time, now it's everyday, and sometimes you don't talk to anybody. That was quite hard to get used to at first...it is a big adjustment." (Juliet, p. 12). For all the participants the initial period in their new job was described as involving the most adjustment and was therefore experienced as the most exhausting and demanding time. As well as social challenges of adapting to having no colleagues or to new colleagues, other challenges described included adapting to being at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy and acquiring new knowledge and skills. This initial period of adjustment therefore seemed to be when participants felt they needed the most social support.

Another way in which the social context influenced the career change experiences of participants was in terms of perceived constraints that had the potential to affect occupational choice and the timing of career change (see p. 194). Apart from the
practical support offered by others that was viewed in positive terms, participants tended to interpret their social context in terms of constraints that they had to adapt to. Individuals who felt constrained by others, appeared to display secondary control (i.e., the modification of personal desires) and to prioritise values that had external rather than intrinsic meaning.

The final issue to be discussed in relation to social context is that of social comparison. The challenge of sourcing validation in a boundaryless career context has been raised in the introduction. However, these findings suggest that for thirty-somethings changing careers for predominantly subjective reasons, this is not a significant issue. Subjective criteria are found satisfactory for validating careers although frustration appears to result in bounded contexts that restrict personal expectations of achievement (e.g., Paul in the police force), and some self-justification appears necessary for careers that are perceived as significantly different from the norm.

5.4.3.1 Social Support
Participants described social support from those around them as helpful in dealing with both the psychological and practical pressures associated with career change, however, they did not believe it was a pre-determinant of change taking place. All participants said that they would have undertaken their career change had they not had the backing of others. Support from a range of sources was considered important in contributing to participants being able to fulfil their ambitions, for example, state financial aid and training schemes tailored to the needs of mature students. Assistance from a variety of individuals such as a therapist, a spouse, a role model or a sympathetic colleague was also described as important. This assistance involved helping to structure ideas, providing information, listening, providing financial support, or giving encouragement. It appears that support and encouragement were particularly beneficial to individuals who felt ready to change career but were suffering from feelings of low self-worth as a result of negative working conditions, such as bullying or under-utilization, that made them feel change was harder to instigate.
In practical terms, social support eased the demands of career change in a number of ways. Firstly, career change resulted in reduced earnings for the majority of participants for varying degrees of time. Several participants, both male and female, said that without their temporary dependency on a partner their change would have been extremely difficult. Financial support and emotional support also contributed to whether individuals were able to have a time-out period, and influenced when it could occur and how long it could be sustained for. Maggie described the support from her husband and friends, particularly in the provision of child-care, as invaluable in allowing her to re-train as a teacher while her children were young. The significance of employer support (financial and emotional) for mature entries in affecting adjustment and organisational commitment was also apparent.

Emotional support appeared to be particularly important for promoting feelings of confidence. The circumstances when this appeared to be most critical were when the individual had experienced negative experiences that had reduced their self-esteem. For example, Lauren left her previous job partly because she was bullied, the support from a colleague and other people outside of work made her feel able to pursue her career change, "I'd lost a lot of confidence during that time, both me and this other girl were bullied to pulp, so we were pepping each other up...it was nice because all my friends and family were really supportive during that time and I had loads of support which made me feel a lot better, and it was summer time and it was a really nice time to be doing it. Everything felt right...it literally clicked." (Lauren, p. 7)

Support also appeared important during the early stages of the transition when learning new skills. For example, Laura described how her mentor, who she was allocated by her hypnotherapy course, helped her gain confidence, "I had a lovely mentor who just said you have to believe in yourself. So you’d sort of sit there and do it and you’d wait for the giggles, and when they didn’t come it sort of makes you more confident" (Laura, p. 12b). Later, when participants achieved tangible outcomes in their career change, they described other people saying how proud they were of them, and this appeared to encourage beneficial feelings including confidence, satisfaction and pleasure.

The constant process of re-evaluating expectations and goals that was undertaken by participants in response to unanticipated aspects of the transition process also
appeared to have a social impact. For instance, Christina noted that she felt the need to manage the expectations of those around her to ensure their understanding and support. This involved controlling their expectations of her objective career success and informing them of her subjective criteria for progress, "even people who don't know very much can listen to me talking about it and understand that it's not the easiest or most stable of careers, and therefore I think they are able to understand it is quite up and down and therefore you can't really expect that much of it. I think people have come to terms with that reasonably well." (Christina, p. 6). For significant others to offer effective support to the career changer it therefore appears that they also need to adopt an approach characterised by flexibility and aspects of the concept of communion, and to understand the significance of the individual's subjective criteria that are guiding their career development.

5.4.3.2 Perceived Constraints
While the early stages of career change were mainly associated with feelings of expectation and possibility, participants identified a number of constraints that they thought limited what they could achieve and/or when they could achieve it. Perceived constraints included limited educational qualifications, low self-worth resulting from previous negative work conditions, limited career opportunities due to geographical location, and family responsibilities. It appeared that the more constraints an individual felt they had placed on them the further away they had to move from their ideal choice of career. Their new career was therefore regarded as a means to an end, in that it provided a suitable option in terms of their current situation, but more subjective ideals where retained for a time in the future when their circumstances may be more liberating, this appeared to foster hope that the current self is not irreversible. Jason, who delayed his career change for ten years because of perceived financial and child-care constraints, described imagining future change as a coping strategy "I think wanting to change career helped. The thought of it lifted me out of being miserable and depressed." (Jason, p. 6)

As described in section 5.4.1.3 several participants felt an imminent need to act on their desire to change career, motivated by a sense of time pressure from being in their thirties. The sense of there being a right time to change career was described by Paul who felt that he had missed the perfect time to change earlier in his life due to
domestic considerations “I suppose I allowed domestic circumstances to over rule my direction because my belief has always been that work will always be secondary to life, and I allowed that to take control” (Paul, p. 1b). Making a career change later on, in his thirties, when these constraints were removed, however was considered too late, “Without being conceited I wonder if perhaps I should have been doing something different, something that was slightly above what I’m doing.” (Paul, p. 6). Ralph's decision to become a vicar was perceived as more satisfactory. He chose a career considered suitable for mature entries, and was able to put into practise the lifestyle lessons he had come to value as a consequence of re-evaluating his priorities in response to his earlier divorce. Both these career stories identify the importance of understanding the historical context of career change and the influences this has on expectations and outcomes.

The various conflicts deriving from the interaction of social roles was particularly evident in the stories of participants with children, who combine parenting and work roles, among others. The traditional expectation that women would invariably subjugate their professional role to their domestic role to a greater degree than men was not identified in these findings, except when children were very young. The career development patterns of Ralph, Seb and Jason suggest the influence of domestic life on the careers of men.

By comparing the responses to the demands that arise from these social roles various reactions can be identified. Some parents, for example, Seb and Laura, appeared to seek congruence between their roles by diminishing the significance of work and the contribution this made to their self-identity, instead gaining their core identity from their domestic role. In this scenario work was described as having become a means to an end. However, for other participants with children, such as Maggie and Ralph, a balance of work and domestic roles was sustained and each was regarded as vitally important in terms of identity and value, “To me teaching is a wonderful job. Not just a job, it’s my life. A life apart from my kids and my husband, that’s another life I’ve got there.” (Maggie, p. 12). Participants without children also appeared to value their non-work roles and these were considered in their career-making decisions. However, work was not regarded as a means to an end by any of the participants without children, it was considered particularly important for identity reasons.
In summary, the phenomenological perspective of this research affords an insight into the variety of ways in which participants have addressed their unique combinations of multiple roles. This emphasises again a range of individual differences in the expectations and needs relating to the balance between professional and domestic lives, and the priorities placed on each.

5.4.3.3 Social Comparison

Although participants were predominantly motivated to change their career based on subjective values, some still felt a pressure to achieve in line with what they felt was a societal norm, illustrating another example, of the influence of the 'social clock'. For instance, Seb, Rick and Paul all said that they did not feel their age. They interpreted this feeling negatively, as being immature, and distancing them from what they perceived as being 'normal' for their age. It also appeared to prompt a sense of failure about what they had not achieved, "I think that it's just that society in general, it's expected that at my age I should be settled, in a relationship, well established in my career and life should be pretty settled...I felt that I'm under pressure for time for some reason, that I need to be making a decision as to what I'm going to do." (Paul, pp. 3,11). Seb recognized that he in fact may be the source of this pressure, "maybe I've imposed that upon myself, because that's what I think people expect of you." (Seb, p. 2). Juliet also described feeling a sense of pressure to conform, not in terms of an age-related issue but in having to justify her new freelance lifestyle in the face of what she perceived as the working norm, "It's OK to not be working all these hours, it's OK to sit in bed and read...I can do that, it's my life...I think everybody deserves that, they just don't think they do, there's some pressure out there or some rules which says you must work as hard as possible otherwise you're not a good person." (Juliet, p. 11)

Although participants sensed a pressure to conform, it did not appear strong enough to influence their career decision-making. Independence from these perceived pressures appeared to be age-related. In general, participants said that they compared themselves with others less during their thirties than they had when they were younger. Greater self-reliance at this age may be due to the dissatisfaction experienced earlier in their lives as a consequence of living according to external
pressures that were not in accord with their own values. These included the confines of a bureaucratic career structure (Rob; Juliet); values and goals imposed by the organisation (Seb) or parental expectations (Rob). After having changed career several participants felt that their reliance on others for validation had diminished, this was attributed to greater maturity and being more content. More specifically, this appeared to derive from an enhanced awareness of their personal values and satisfaction from the integrity of having been faithful to them.

In conclusion, the challenge of finding sources for validation in a boundaryless career appeared to less important than anticipated since these individuals appeared to rely less on others and were largely satisfied by achieving their subjective goals during their thirties. Even participants, such as Paul who moved into a hierarchical institution appeared to place more value on his self-generated standards than on those set externally. The organisational norms were referred to however, but in negative terms, as representing the antithesis of his personal development goals. Christina’s story illustrates that as a self-employed singer she learnt to gain greater validation from her subjective goals over time. However, she also made sense of her experiences in the context of a collective norm derived from other freelance colleagues. This did not involve a like-for-like comparison on an individual basis since she recognised that each person’s experiences were different, rendering a comparison meaningless. However a more generalised sense of professional possibilities was achieved from observing others, and this context contributed in setting goals and achievement standards.

5.5 DISCUSSION
The results section of this study illustrates the inter-related nature of many of the factors influencing the career change experience. In an attempt to relate the findings to extant theory and focus on the particular contributions arising from this research this section is divided into two general themes: career patterns and age-related issues.

Analysis of the transition experiences of the participants identifies some elements of their careers that concur with the representations of career in traditional theories. However, their experiences predominantly show these theories to be anachronistic, while unsurprisingly, contemporary career theories appear to have more relevance.
The following discussion attempts to elicit the pertinent findings from both traditional and contemporary career theory in relation to the experiences of these thirty-somethings, in order to provide a comprehensive theoretical interpretation. At the same time this process will identify the relevance of particular theoretical approaches to contemporary employment experiences of this age-group. Therefore, it is hoped to achieve both further clarity on understanding the voluntary career experiences of thirty-somethings and on the current relevance of traditional and contemporary career theory.

5.5.1 Career Pattern

The trajectory of participant's careers do not reflect traditional linear models of career development, instead they reflect Hall and Mirvis's (1995) understanding of the contemporary career in terms of a succession of mini-stages and Hall's (1976) notion of a Protean career as an on-going series of experiments and explorations. A learning outcome of the change process for participants appeared to be a recognition that career was a process of continual change and did not adhere to the notion of an end-state of equilibrium. This on-going aspect of change is not represented in traditional transition models that view career change as a discrete event with a clearly defined resolution. Instead the experiences described here are less clearly defined, and although outcomes of the transition process may be identified, they also have a role in contributing towards defining the next stage of change. Therefore, the experiences of change described in this study are more complex and in a form that do not correspond to the neat representations of many traditional transition models.

Each stage appeared to be interlinked in a manner again not identified in traditional transition models (e.g., Lewin, 1947; Nicholson & West, 1988; Van Gennep, 1960). For instance, the initial stage identified by Van Gennep as 'separation' and Lewin as 'unfreezing' in their models of organisational change involved for example, withdrawal of employee commitment. In this study however, some participants suggested that they became increasingly emotionally dependent on colleagues during transition, and that they therefore often retained links within the organisation, suggesting that the withdrawal process is more complex than that first identified.
The sequential evolutionary process of adaptation reflected in many transition models (e.g., Bridges, 1980; Gelatt, 1962; Schlossberg, 1984; Tiedeman & O’Hara, 1963) does not depict the experiences of all participants. In particular the models do not account for blocks, time-out periods or indeed regression. Participants however, recognised these elements as part of their experiences. For example, those who underwent a period of re-training or studying, identified it as a time of feeling in-limbo, in which they acclimatised both to what they had left behind and what they anticipated for the future. Other participants noted a time-out period as being significant to them. This was a moratorium in their lives in which normal pressures were suspended, providing time for reflection, re-evaluation of priorities and career decision-making. This endorses Cherniss’s (1989) findings in which such a period was found to be one of the factors primarily associated with the decision to leave among the public service professionals he interviewed. In terms of conventional expectations of transition stages and career progress, the notion of time-out appears incongruous and likely to be interpreted in terms of plateauing or stagnation. However, participant’s descriptions of what occurs during this period suggest that it is not a time of inactivity, but instead is one of “incubation or regeneration” (Marshall, 1989). The significance of this period for participants implies the need for its inclusion in future transition models.

In the same way that established transition theory does not recognise the cognitive changes and developments associated with a time-out period, the traditional development theories, with their emphasis on development according to objective criteria that are visible to the outside world, may not recognise inner growth and progress that is subjectively defined. For the participants in this study however, subjective values appeared to drive their career decisions and predominantly subjective criteria were used to evaluate progress.

The value that participant’s placed on subjective criteria appeared to be influenced by their age. Reflection on past experiences identified both what was valued and what was not wanted in their new career. The value of choosing a career that complimented the self-concept and allowed for self-expression appeared paramount, thus supporting the work of Holland (1959) and Super (1953). As Berzonsky (1996) suggested, the internalised values and goals, integrated with the core sense of self,
that comprise self-constructed identities are translated into an active approach to exploration and decision-making. The motivation for several participants in changing career was to enact their values and their self-concept, and not to accept compromise. A time perspective characterised by time scarcity appeared to motivate participants to act with some urgency. However, they had a sense of sufficient time in the future to perceive making the change as worthwhile.

As a consequence of participant's careers being subjective, their career development patterns were more varied than the traditional notion of upward movement through a hierarchical structure. Participant's stories also suggested that there was a level of continuity, in terms of skills and knowledge, between the stages of development. This is in contrast to the traditional view of each new stage involving the need to discard behaviours and values associated with a lower status. This continuity included the need to maintain the same standards of achievement that they had achieved prior to their career change, even if this was in relation to a different set of criteria. This finding emphasises the significance of achievement levels that appears to have been over-looked in discussions of subjective career. For this age-group, maintaining their standards of achievement in their new career appeared to be significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it seemed to provide a continuous sense of identity. For example, as a result of her previous accomplishments Christina's self-concept includes seeing herself as a high achiever, and she expects this to continue. Secondly, setting standards provides a goal to aim for, and this in turn appears to offer structure and motivation. Finally, maintaining their levels of achievement after their career change seemed to contribute to participants feeling that they were building on their existing attributes.

The importance participant's placed on transferring skills and experience as they move from one career to another is represented in cyclical notions of career development. When barriers were placed in the way of participants carrying over existing skills and experience, they exhibited frustration that their potential was not being maximised. This is illustrated by the example of Paul's experiences in joining the police force. This suggests the need for employers to recognise the age of new entrants and their attendant skills and experience. There appears to be a need for this to be reflected at the level of individual working relationships (e.g., for supervisors to
communicate appropriately with mature entries) and at the level of organisational structure (e.g., offering fast-track career development schemes). These suggestions present an example of where individual career development could have an effect on the structure and processes of organisations, a direction of causal flow that is rarely discussed in the career literature but one that Weick (2001) suggests should become more recognised if organisations are to adapt to the growing number of subjective careers. Currently, however, participants who pursue careers, motivated to some degree by subjective principles, within a conventional organisational framework appear to suffer inconsistencies between their own development expectations and those offered by the institution.

The potency of the need to enact their subjective values is revealed in the way participants interpreted factors that might be expected to be obstacles to change. For instance, the knowledge that their income would reduce as a consequence of their career change did not prevent participants from going ahead. While this was considered a loss, participants interpreted it as a relatively minor loss compared to what they perceived as more significant improvements in their lives. Justification for financial loss therefore seemed to be achieved by viewing the pros of their career change as outweighing the cons. Alternatively, they viewed financial loss as a temporary sacrifice that was necessary for progress towards their goal. In this instance, justification for their current loss appeared to be achieved by means of deferred gratification.

Participants who perceived obstacles in the path of achieving career change appeared to employ possible selves to provide them with hope for what they may achieve in the future, once their circumstances were more favourable. Their possible selves seemed to be hardy constructs, capable of enduring over time and powerful enough to contribute to motivating change even when the individual was suffering from low self-esteem. In addition, the influence of negative possible selves was also seen as an effective motivator for change. Several participants described not wanting to disappoint themselves and had a negative vision of what they might become when they were older, if they didn't change career. These also appeared to be potent constructs, and because of their association with age they appeared to instil a sense of urgency in the motivation to change career.
Various types of possible selves were identified, and they appeared to play different roles. Only one participant (Seb) described, what is termed here as several ‘idealised’ possible selves, these were felt to be unrealistic visions of his future self but represented his interests and longings. They did not appear to have any influence over his behaviour. He also held other possible selves, similar to those described by other participants that were considered more achievable, in terms of his abilities and potential contextual circumstances. These appeared to provide motivation and direction for current behaviour.

The content of possible selves appeared to be shaped by an individual’s previous experiences. For example, Maggie described how her background had limited her expectations of what she could become, and how immersion in her children’s school and work as a cleaner in an adult education centre, widened her experience and enabled her to think of, and learn about how she could become a teacher. This depicts the proposition by Markus and Nurius (1986) that the form and content of possible selves are limited in their range by social constraints, and that the type of identity that can be envisaged is similarly limited by socio-cultural norms and expectations, the influence of family and friends, what the individual feels they ought to do and past experience (Cantor, Markus, Niedenthal & Nurius, 1989; Markus & Nurius, 1987). The result, they suggest is a self-concept that has been called the “most probable self” (Curry, Trew, Turner & Hunter, 1994). However, this does not emphasise, as Maggie’s story indicates, that perceived constraints and opportunities fluctuate during an individual’s lifespan and their possible selves alter to reflect this. Therefore, while the structuralist approach to career theory (e.g., Gottfredson, 1981; Roberts, 1968) usefully provides an understanding of the limitations affecting expectations of potential, it does not have a dynamic perspective that recognises the influence of experience over time. This appears to result from the majority of such studies focusing on school leavers and graduate entries in the job market. However, this study, by concentrating on the careers of thirty-somethings, illustrates that experience can, to a significant extent, alter possible selves. The findings suggest that an attitude of openness to opportunities contributes to the range of possible selves considered over time, and that immersion in relevant experience assists in these being realistic.
The re-interpretation of possible selves over time can be viewed as part of the sensemaking process involving adaptation to the on-going accumulation of knowledge, skills and experience. In retrospect, participants identified the on-going nature of this process, and this appeared to alter their perspective on their career change from being an isolated event to part of a process of development and progress. From this perspective, skills and knowledge were viewed in terms of continuities that were held on to and these were felt to assist adaptation to future change. However, it has also been noted that a learning outcome of change was the need for flexibility, both cognitively (e.g., in terms of expectations) and behaviourally (e.g., in terms of not attempting to hasten the pace of change). This suggests that following change there is a fine balance to achieve between using previous experience and skills but not being over assertive. Weick (2001) identified this issue, questioning how people simultaneously know and doubt, yet mobilize sufficient confidence to act rather than deliberate. He suggests this is made possible by the capability for integration of agency and communion. This means that the person has wisdom in the sense that what is known is seen as only a portion of what is knowable. Thus knowledge is seen as both fallible and substantial, which he considers is the ambivalent compromise that is optimal for sensemaking and action.

It is therefore suggested that existing knowledge may be effectively employed if used flexibly. The participants, as a result of experiencing the unpredictable in their career change appear to realise that their knowledge is partial and may not be applicable to all future challenges. Awareness of these possible limitations also identifies adaptability, since by being attentive to the different and the unexpected, the individual seems to question the reasons for their choice of action, and rather than simply adapting what they already know they may improvise. In addition, participant’s previous experiences appear to provide a sense of confidence in relation to coping with future change, that is thought likely to enhance their resilience to change.

In summary, participant’s career transition patterns highlight the importance of a time-out period for establishing a foundation for change. This emphasises the state of readiness to change and the need for a period of contemplation, both identified in
the transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska et al., 1992). It also offers a perspective on development that acknowledges the value of inner growth rather than focusing purely on what is evident externally. The importance of subjective values in shaping career change appears particularly relevant to this age-group. Thus contradicting the claim outlined in section 1.1 by Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, (2006) that at least for thirty-somethings, meaning and purpose in boundaryless careers is not restricted by the influence of market forces. The attempts to impose continuity, for instance in personal standards and the development of existing skills and interests, suggests ways in which meaning is established in this context, and also identifies the significance of this to be recognised by employers. Finally, these findings present a learning perspective on career change, identifying the development of wisdom and the understanding of change as part of a process of on-going development.

5.5.2 Age-Related Issues
The findings of this study raise a number of issues in relation to developmental stage theories. Firstly, the question was raised in Chapter One of whether the developmental priorities of thirty-somethings are focused on stabilisation and that therefore the phenomenon of career change amongst this age-group may primarily be the consequence of environmental pressures. However, the act of voluntarily choosing to change career and the significance of subjective values suggest that an emphasis on stabilisation is not necessarily appropriate for this age-group. A further criticism relates to Levinson’s (1978) suggestion that transition periods are the basis for developing a completely new life structure, thus excluding the elements of continuity described by participants and obscuring their value in terms of adjustment and adaptability. His theory also omitted to consider the impact on career development of non age-specific life events such as divorce, however these were found to be critical in shaping participant’s careers. These theories therefore appear to have little relevance to the actual life experiences of thirty-somethings in the current occupational climate.

Super’s (1980; 1990) career rainbow concept, consisting of one of a range of roles taking precedence over others during an individual’s life, was reflected in the lives of some of the participants, particularly where parenthood revolutionised attitudes
towards work, and altered what was their major source of self-identity. However, this was not the case for all participants, for some a balance of roles was sustained over a long period of time with each being considered important in terms of identity and value simultaneously.

These findings highlight the various types of relationship between the multi-faceted contributions to identity, and contribute to more recent developmental models that have called for an understanding of individual’s numerous roles and experiences (e.g., Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003). It is argued therefore, that Super’s suggestion of one role taking precedence over others is not necessarily always the case. Similarly, empirical findings are contested that imply finite psychological resources in terms of attending to either family or work (i.e., an inverse relationship between psychological involvement in family and psychological involvement in work has been suggested by Freidman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Howard, 1992; Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996). Instead, phenomenological analysis identifies the various proportions that each role contributes to identity for different individuals. It is also interesting to note, that at a time when work-life balance research often focuses on the negative impacts of work in relation to control over time and stress (e.g., Cartwright & Cooper, 1997) several participant’s identify the significance they place on the value of work (e.g., as a source of identity, structure and adult companionship). Also, if work is valued and enjoyed the proportion of time it takes up appears to be less relevant. These findings, to some degree, appear to reassert the role of work in the work-life balance equation.

Finally, in attempting to understand a broad range of career experiences, the findings contribute to understanding not only issues relating specifically to the age of the participants but also to their gender and employment type. For instance, the career stories of several male participants in this study have highlighted the significance of the subjective values associated with non-work issues (e.g., quality of life, time with family, personal fulfilment) and the implications these have on their career structure. Therefore, values, career choices and career patterns previously thought to have particular relevance to women, appear to be pertinent to an increasing number of men who are, or would like to be, involved in non-work activities to a greater degree.
This finding contributes to a small body of research that recognises this influence in men's lives. For example, Gerson's (1993) found that many highly involved fathers turned towards self-employment to gain flexibility in order to balance their work and family lives, and Becker and Moen (1999) discovered that one third of the dual-career fathers in their study chose work that was less demanding and also turned down work that involved either substantive travel or relocation, in order to be with their family.

The predominant research focus on intra-organisational or to a lesser degree inter-organisational career change has meant there is little understanding of the issues faced by the self-employed when changing career. Achieving independence from an employer appeared to be valued at this age, particularly by individuals who had faced negative experiences within an organisational context. As the results identify, the greatest social adjustment was for individuals who moved from an organisational setting to working alone in a self-employed capacity. Most models of career change place importance on socialisation processes in affecting successful adjustment. However, the experiences of participants who became self-employed in this study suggest that socialisation processes are fewer than in an organisational context, are less structured and are largely at the initiative of the individual concerned. Therefore, the adjustment process for self-employed individuals is distinct from that within an organisation. It may be slower because there is less imposed structure and less guidance from others; it may be easier for the individual since they have greater personal control over their situation; and social support from personal sources may be more significant, including work-related contacts and non-work influences such as family and friends. It is thought that the experiences of the self-employed during career change, particularly in terms of adjustment during the transition stage is an area that warrants further study.

These findings therefore, relate not only to the specific experiences of thirty-somethings changing career, but are also explicit in addressing the particular experiences of two further groups. Firstly, they acknowledge the apparent significance of subjective values in men's career choices, offering a more hopeful view of their development in a boundaryless career climate than that offered by Arthur and colleagues (1999, p. 175) who labelled men as their "unlucky" group due
to the dependence on illusory company career structures. Secondly, the significant adjustment necessary by self-employed individuals is highlighted as they acclimatise to a new social setting. In relation to development goals, the need for stability is not recognised in the lives of these individuals who have chosen to change career, however, evidence for consolidation is suggested in the need for continuity. It therefore appears that some aspects of traditional development goals are being adapted and pursued in the context of a boundaryless career.

5.6 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The participants in this study were interviewed once, and were asked for their views on their career currently, retrospectively and prospectively. Consequently, a 'point-in-time' view of their careers is achieved. While this is unavoidable owing to the ongoing nature of sensemaking processes it does mean that interpretations are at the mercy of memory, mood and the context in which the story is being told. Attempts were made to minimise these influences in a number of ways (e.g., by providing participants with an outline of the questions before the interview to serve as a memory prompt, attempting to make them feel relaxed, and structuring the interview schedule appropriately). However, to reduce the impact of these influences further and to represent an individual’s changing constructions of career over time the contribution of longitudinal studies is acknowledged.

Participants were at different stages of their career change at the time they were interviewed. Some were still in probation stages of their new career while others had completed their career change several years previously. This was thought to benefit the findings in providing a variety of perspectives that would contribute to the richness of the data and it was not considered to be particularly problematic since direct comparisons between participants were not the aim of study. However, a potential consequence of this factor is that participants may have displayed different levels of recall in terms of their experiences and have had differing lengths of time in which to re-interpret events and construct their career narratives. While reduced recall in participants who had changed career a number of years previously was considered a possibility, none of them described finding it hard to remember their experiences and they were able to provide rich descriptions. A final point in defence of the range of time lapses between career change and the interview amongst
participants, is the underlying belief in the value of narratives proposed by Gabriel (1998, p. 136) that “the truth of a story lies not in its accuracy, but in its meaning”. From this position, it may be argued that participant’s stories are valuable as long as they have meaning to the individual at the point of telling, regardless of when this occurs.

Issues associated with the role of the researcher both in terms of data collection, such as impression management, and in the interpretation of the findings, are described in the reflection section. Researcher reflexivity (see section 4.4.2) was carried out, and potential influences are acknowledged during the research. In addition, efforts were made to minimise the impact of the researcher by adherence to recommended standards for qualitative research, also outlined in Chapter Four. Consequently, procedures were followed to ensure the trustworthiness of the results and sufficient information is provided to enable the reader to independently assess the interpretations.

5.7 REFLECTION

In general discussions on eternal themes such as happiness, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and turning interests into careers, I am always fascinated by the differences between people who act on their beliefs and feelings and make a significant career change, and those that just talk about it. Amongst my contemporaries, I recognised a trend for dramatic life and career changes, both amongst friends and acquaintances and in the media. I too, decided to slowly instigate my own career change from television producer to occupational psychologist, aged thirty-three. This was my first career change and it was an interesting experience. Recognition of possible change at other ages seemed apparent, however, change during the thirties, and the particular challenges and opportunities it entailed wasn’t an area I’d heard discussed. A literature search revealed no specific research on the career transition experiences of this age group. Yet it seemed that career change amongst thirty-somethings was a significant and growing occurrence. The aim of the research then was to both further theoretical research in this area and to contribute in an applied sense, by identifying the specific needs of this age-group in career change, for use in intervention settings.
I felt that relating a brief history of my own career and interest in career change to participants prior to their interview assisted in building rapport and encouraging an atmosphere of empathy. Participants appeared to have high levels of recall about their experiences and were impressively thoughtful and articulate in their descriptions. They also appeared to be open and honest, several times participants said they were describing feelings that they had not previously discussed with others. The novelty of exploring their career in such an in-depth manner was described by a number of participants as an interesting and useful experience that served to illustrate the progress they had made and to remind them of the values that had provided their motivation for change.

While every effort was made to ensure minimal researcher influence, and to generate an atmosphere of understanding during the study, I was aware of the possibility of impression management by participants. This was highlighted by a brief chat with the spouse of one participant after their interview in which she gave a less tolerant view of her husband’s career change compared to the entirely supportive stance he had suggested during the interview. This raised the question of whether the research would be improved by interviewing significant others, connected to the participants. This was primarily rejected on theoretical grounds since the epistemological position of the research is focused on understanding individual experiences, and as such is underpinned by qualitative principles not concerned with discovering an objective ‘truth’. On a practical level it was also rejected since the issue of who else to interview prompts a number of problems, a spouse may reveal one interpretation, but who would provide an equivalent perspective for single participants? And how many other people should be interviewed to provide what may be considered a ‘representative’ view? I also doubted the potential value of gaining a number of perspectives on one person’s career change, this would require quantitative analysis of the data, and consequently, would entail a less rich and complex insight of the experience. Finally, I felt participants might be uncomfortable having other people discuss their personal experiences with me. I felt this could negatively affect their attitude towards the research and their relationship to me, which would have deleterious consequences for what they were prepared to discuss.
The greatest challenge experienced in this study was attempting to provide a coherent and representative interpretation of participant’s narratives. The interview questions derived from a thorough immersion in the relevant career literature appeared relevant to participant’s experiences and generated rich and diverse responses. Since this study was exploratory in nature, the quantity of data collected was significant and the range of data was extensive. Inevitably, the confines of this study resulted in feeling a tension between portraying the unique and complex detail of an individual account while also wanting to extract unifying themes across the interviews. It is hoped that an appropriate balance has been achieved that gives an insightful understanding of the individual experience and a coherent overview of the key issues relating to voluntary career change for thirty-somethings.

The decision to focus this study on understanding voluntary career change experiences was undertaken for several reasons. Firstly, it stemmed from anecdotal evidence that voluntary career changers comprise a significant portion of the thirty-something career change phenomenon. It also derived from my interest, mentioned earlier, on why some people act on their desire to change career and others don’t. Secondly, it was decided to focus only on those who had changed career rather than to also interview those who had contemplated change but had not acted on it. The voluntary element of the decision to enact career change is assumed to represent a positive event, associated with the potential for personal fulfilment. An insight into the factors that contributed to this appeared to have a potentially positive contribution to make to understanding how voluntary career change may be optimized. Finally, the extant literature suggests that voluntary career change and involuntary career change are significantly different experiences, therefore necessitating them to be studied separately.

A final point relates to the overwhelmingly positive evaluations of their career change experiences by participants in this study. While it was expected that individuals choosing to change career would initially view it optimistically, it was thought that the challenges faced and the unexpected nature of change would contribute to some negativity. However, in retrospect all of the participants were content with their decision to have changed career for the time being, even though two thought their current career might not be long-term. All the participants
described feeling that their change had been an important process in terms of self-development and broadening their opportunities. Overall the experience of change and the outcomes of change were evaluated in predominantly positive terms, regardless of whether their expectations had been met or not. None of the participants felt they had failed in their new career, or felt that they had made a mistake, or suffered serious losses as a result of their change, despite some having encountered significant challenges and difficulties. That this study does not include the experiences of individuals who felt they had failed in their voluntary career change is thought to largely be because of the interpretation processes of the type of individuals who choose to change, rather than an omission in the sample. Among the many possible interviewees for this study none would have fitted this category. This may be because failure is less discussed so the chance of hearing of such cases is reduced, or because perceived failure among voluntary changers is indeed rare. It is acknowledged there are likely to be individuals who have undergone voluntary career change and felt that they had failed, but on the basis of the findings of this study such an evaluation does not appear to be characteristic.

5.9 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study have illuminated several aspects of significance to these individuals experiencing voluntary career change in their thirties. An insight into individual sense-making processes in relation to career change highlights the ways in which continuity is sought and discontinuity is coped with during this time. An understanding of the values significant to this age-group illustrates the dominance of the subjective career in motivating and shaping career change. And finally, an awareness of the interacting contextual influences perceived by the participants as constraints and opportunities can be seen to profoundly influence their career paths. The qualitative approach taken in this research has provided a holistic, dynamic and multi-layered insight into the career change process of these individuals that would not have been possible in a positivistic framework. As a result, the findings suggest several limitations and some redundant aspects of traditional theories of career.

Overall participants appear to perceive their voluntary career change experiences positively, even if the outcomes are different from what they had expected. This
seems to be a consequence of the process of change itself being associated with aspects of personal growth, challenge, and progress, all of which are regarded in a positive light. These evaluations seem to be part of a cyclical process of acceptance and adaptability to change. The benefits attributed to the outcomes are regarded as rewarding and appear to lead to feelings of self-efficacy. The individual therefore appears to feel more confident in relation to future change.

The positive outcomes associated with voluntary career change found in this study concur with the benefits described in the extant literature (e.g., Clarke, 1980). Numerous advantages have been described in this study associated with the career change being voluntary (e.g., choosing a job that fits values and personal characteristics, assisted adjustment during the transition process, and increased confidence as an outcome). The challenges associated with those aspects of the change that were perceived as beyond the control of participants have also been discussed. These findings suggest that if change occurs voluntarily psychological adaptation can proceed under the control of the individual and they can predominantly respond pre-emptively to change events, including external constraints. On this basis it could be assumed that the characteristic nature of involuntary career change events, (i.e., unexpected and not necessarily wanted) will lead to efforts at psychological adaptation after the experience, and hence involve feelings of low perceived control, strain and reduced adjustment. However, it may not be that the experiences of involuntary career change will simply be the reverse of those experienced in voluntary career change, and indeed the extant literature on involuntary career change provides little consensus on whether it has overall positive or negative consequences. Therefore, the question of how thirty-somethings experience involuntary career change provides the focus of the following study. This will allow for differences between the two types of change experience to be illuminated, and it will identify any distinctions in the manner in which individuals who chose to change career and those who do not, deal with the challenges of career change.
CHAPTER SIX

THE EXPERIENCES OF INVOLUNTARY CAREER CHANGE AT THIRTY-SOMETHING

6.1 OVERVIEW

Many people change career in less controlled circumstances than those discussed in Chapter Five. Factors such as redundancy, health problems, or a job no longer being tenable, may force an individual to experience a job change over which they feel they have little or no control. Each of these situations provides a different context in which to understand involuntary career change experiences. Characteristics of the current working climate described in Chapters One and Two have resulted in involuntary career change becoming a more common experience. It is therefore considered likely that a proportion of individuals who are part of the phenomenon of career change amongst thirty-somethings have been influenced by this trend. Their experiences are the focus of this study.

The benefits associated with perceived control in voluntary career change and the apparently high perceived control generally exhibited by individuals during their thirties are described in Chapter Five. This suggests that the lack of control characterising involuntary change is likely to be perceived as a threat and experienced in negative terms, particularly for this age group. The extant literature however, suggests that overall involuntary career change may not always be perceived this way. For example, while Wanous (1980) suggests that redundancy has negative consequences for the individual concerned, other researchers argue that all job change, regardless of the motives, results in positive experiences (Keller & Holland, 1981; Nicholson & West, 1988; Newton & Keenan, 1990). In terms of the outcome of job transition it seems that no predictions can be made, if the person succeeds in finding a new job, this job may be either better or worse than their former job. The aim of this study is to understand the experiences of the involuntary career changer from a phenomenological perspective. This perspective, it is thought,
will contribute to knowledge on what affects these different interpretations of the involuntary career experience and its outcomes.

The depth and richness of descriptions achieved in Chapter Five is an on-going objective of this study. However, rather than continuing a purely exploratory approach, this study will also focus on the areas previously found to be significant in affecting change experiences, in the hope of extending an understanding of their influence in a different context. It is believed that the repertory grid is an ideal methodological tool to achieve these aims. While it offers the interviewee the opportunity of choice in discussing their experiences during completion of the grid, it also allows the researcher the opportunity to present a series of Top Views, thus achieving data on particular areas of interest. Further justification for the methodology and analytical approach adopted in this study is provided in sections 4.6.3 and 4.6.4.

The findings from Chapter Five and a review of the extant literature on involuntary change suggest the potential threats to sensemaking processes and identity for the individual involved in enforced career change. The factors considered to have an influence on the impact of this threat are perceived control, personal characteristics, and context. This investigation of a variety of involuntary career experiences extends an understanding of these issues and also identifies the overwhelming influence of emotion on involuntary career change experiences. The findings from this study are contrasted to those relating to voluntary career change in order to emphasize the critical differences between the two scenarios.

In conclusion, the three research questions for this study are:

- What factors contribute to the experience of involuntary career change being perceived as positive or negative?
- What are the similarities and differences between voluntary and involuntary career change experiences?
- What issues are of potential benefit in managing involuntary career change?
6.2 INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of individuals who have involuntarily changed career and thus been forced into ambiguous sensemaking situations. The challenges faced in both finding meaning in their experiences and in coping with threats to identity are discussed first. The subsequent sub-sections focus on the factors of perceived control, personal characteristics, and perceptions of context respectively. The potential influence of these factors in affecting the appraisal of the situation, the coping strategies employed, and ultimately the evaluations of the career change experience are suggested by the findings in Chapter Five and extant literature on involuntary change.

6.2.1 Sensemaking During Involuntary Career Change
The cognitive schemas used in daily life are constructed on the basis of a set of personal assumptions and theories. Their nature has been described as conservative, since they tend to resist change and disconfirmation, in response to the apparent need for meaning and coherence in life events (Frankl, 1985; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Berg, 1998; Janoff-Bulman & Schwartzberg, 1991; Weick, 1995). However, as seen in Chapter Five, when an event is encountered that is novel, surprising, unexpected or potentially threatening, these schema are challenged, presumed interpretations of the world are questioned, and sensemaking is initiated in an attempt to understand this new experience and attribute meaning. An event such as job loss is likely to elicit this process. It would be expected that the more distinct the experience is from anything previously known to the individual, the greater the process involved in the accommodation of these new realities, and the more extensive the resulting personal change.

Involuntary career change that is unpredictable and unwanted is likely to be interpreted as threatening. The process of adjustment to a threatening event has been described in a three stage model, involving firstly, the search for meaning in the experience, then attempts to regain mastery of one’s life, and finally, attempts to enhance self-esteem, typically manifested in downward social comparison (Taylor, 1983). While this model has yet to be validated in relation to an occupational setting, it appears relevant due to its emphasis on the importance of perceived control, particularly in the second stage of adjustment, which was found to be a critical factor
in adjustment in the previous study. It also reflects the same goals as those identified in survivors of traumatic events "survivors emphasize benevolence over malevolence, meaningfulness over randomness, and self-worth over self-abasement" (Janoff-Bulman, 1992, p. 133). Whether this model does provide an accurate representation of the adjustment processes of individuals experiencing involuntary career change will be assessed in this chapter.

Weick (1995; 1999) and others have noted the influence of emotion in an event such as involuntary job loss on the subsequent constructing of personal meaning. They consider that it may confound accuracy by hindering rational thought (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2000) and interpretation (Weick, 1995). Negative affect, such as anger, fear, and a sense of guilt, has been identified in survivors of organizational downsizing (Allen et al., 2001; Noer, 1993; 1998). However, this has been described as a discrete response to the stressful life event, and the issue of whether it has a deleterious long-term impact on the individual is thought to depend on a number of factors. For instance, job loss may trigger a host of secondary stressors such as financial strain and family stress that have been linked to depression (Dooley & Catalano, 1984; Frese & Mohr, 1987; Kessler, House & Turner, 1987; Vinokur & Schul, 1997; Whelan, 1992). Job loss may also precipitate a change in coping strategies that may subsequently impact on mental health and functioning (Dooley & Catalano, 1984; Price, Friedland & Vinokur, 1998). And finally, a critical factor associated with longer term psychological disorder is the length of unemployment (Price, 1992; Price, Friedland, Choi & Caplan, 1998; Vinokur, 1997). Long-term unemployment has been associated with psychological disorder such as depression, loss of confidence and reduced expectations of success (Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Herr, 1989; Tiggeman & Winefield, 1984; Warr, 1987). This is linked to work-related losses in a number of areas, identified both in the literature and also by participants in the previous study. These include structured time experience, valued relationships, status and identity, meaningful life goals and purpose, (Jahoda, 1979) opportunity for control, use of skills, and the provision of economic resources (Warr, 1987).

The conceptualization and measurement of coping strategies used to manage these challenging life events and reinstate a sense of meaning, include both intentional
cognitive interpretations and behavioural actions (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Lazarus et al., 1984; Stone, 1995). An adaptive strategy identified in the literature on coping with adversity, is that of positively reinterpreting negative life events (Taylor, Wood & Lichtman, 1983; Thompson 1991). For example, it has been related prospectively to heightened psychological adjustment (Tennen, Affleck & Mendola, 1991). Theoretical analyses of such cognitive interpretations involving selective evaluation suggest effortful processes of coping (e.g., Taylor, 1983). One such process identified in a wide range of theories of coping with trauma (e.g., Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Taylor, 1983) is that of benefit-finding (Affleck & Tennen, 1996). An example of a benefit that individuals describe achieving in response to suffering trauma is personal growth (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Berg, 1998; Taylor and Armor, 1996), also referred to as stress-related growth (Park, Cohen & Murch, 1996). Several studies suggest that such changes may not only be perceived by the individual but may be observable in a range of their personal characteristics (Park et al., 1996; Taylor & Armor, 1996).

Due to the effort required in the process of benefit-finding it may be expected that it would be influenced by differences in the severity of the problem itself. However, research in health psychology (e.g., Tennen et al., 1991; Thompson, 1991) suggests that benefit-finding predicts emotional well-being and is unrelated to objective measures of the severity of the problem. This finding therefore suggests that individuals who are better adjusted to their problems may find it easier to construe positive aspects of their experiences. It also highlights the potential value of emotional support in promoting psychological well-being during challenging events. Finally, the question has been raised as to whether benefit-finding indicates denial and a lack of acknowledgment of the true severity of the problem that may prevent effective coping behaviour (Lazarus, 1983). Breznitz (1983) suggested if this were the case then an individual would be reluctant to report the severity of the stressor as well as any emotional distress. However, a study by Tedeschi and colleagues on appraisals of recent psychological traumas refuted this hypothesis, and instead found that any apparently positive adaptive consequences of benefit-finding in traumatic experiences does not come at the cost of denying their adverse effects (Tedeschi, Calhoun & Gross 1993).
6.2.2 Identity Issues

The findings in Chapter Five identify the challenges of adjusting to the loss of a known occupational identity and to gaining a new one in a voluntary career change situation. The adjustment process appeared to be assisted by efforts to maintain continuity of identity during the transition. In an involuntary career change scenario however, it is expected that the opportunities to retain aspects of identity will be reduced, primarily because the pace of adjustment is out of the control of the individual. The findings in Chapter Five also highlighted the psychological benefits of achieving an occupational identity that was considered a good ‘fit’ with character and values. In involuntary change, it is likely that some individuals experience the enforced loss of a cherished professional identity that they consider a good fit.

Research suggests that the closer the relationship to the job and the more central it is to the person’s self-definition, the greater the distress at this loss (Archer & Rhodes, 1987). Adapting to a new professional identity that is valued less than the previous one is also thought likely to be challenging whether it is temporary, for example if a period of unemployment is experienced or stop-gap job taken, or if it is permanent.

Two types of psychological threat are associated with identity issues (Chryssochoou, 2004). The first relates to self-evaluation, and occurs when the individual has no positive feelings about one or more of their self-categorisations. This is a core issue for social identity theory. The second type of threat occurs when subjective perceptions of self are challenged by life changes that demand accommodation and a re-evaluation of self. This relates to the disruption of the known cognitive schemas that form an important part of self-definition, as described in the previous section, in relation to the implications for identity issues, this is the concern of identity process theory. Both theories assume that a series of coping strategies will be employed to eliminate the threat.

In relation to involuntary career change, the extant research suggests other factors that are considered to contribute to perceived identity threats. For example, violations to the psychological contract by the employer has been found to result in employee disappointment and loss of trust in management which in turn impacts on sensemaking processes (Ashforth, 2001; Noer, 1993). In addition, social representations may be altered as a response to experiencing involuntary career
change thus affecting the individual's self-conception both directly and indirectly, via the reactions of others. This suggests that individuals who are forced to leave a job held in high esteem, and who value this social recognition, may feel particularly threatened by the loss of their status. Finally, research suggests that if an individual remains unemployed after more than six months of repeated unsuccessful attempts to find new work, they experience discouragement (Borgen & Amundson, 1987) and may develop an identity in which the concept of 'worker' is absent or greatly diminished in strength (Schlossberg, 1984).

Thoits' (1995) work on the impact of involuntary career change in identity terms suggests associated feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness. A characteristic of identity associated with mitigating such effects is that of high cognitive complexity, that is a greater number of discrete roles or identities used to organize self-schemas (Scheier & Carver, 1985). This has been found to share the benefits of dispositional optimism described earlier in terms of contributing towards the ability to regard threats as an opportunity to change life goals, values, or priorities in desirable ways. Harvey's (1966) original theorizing suggested that cognitively complex individuals are able to achieve this because they are better able to pursue alternative goals and find more flexible ways of achieving experiences. Linville (1985; 1987) later suggested that those with high self-complexity adapt better to adversity because they are less likely to suffer global effects on self-representation. This would suggest that individuals with low cognitive complexity, who define themselves predominantly in terms of their professional identity are likely to suffer more greatly from the identity-threatening effects of enforced career change. Morgan and Janoff-Bulman (1994) went on to specify that positively evaluated self-representations best predicted adaptation to events that threaten personal identities and roles. They found that psychological adjustment to traumas was superior among those who continued to hold many independent positive self-representations (e.g., "hard working", "focused", "imaginative", "motivated") compared to those with fewer independent positive self-representations.

The following three areas to be discussed, namely, perceived control, personal characteristics and context are considered to be potential mediating factors in the appraisal of the involuntary event as threatening.
6.2.3 Perceived Control

The findings in Chapter Five suggest the value of perceived control in contributing to adjustment and the positive evaluation of voluntary career transition experiences. This corroborates Thompson's (1985) finding that personal control mitigates the aversive nature of threatening events and prompts the question of how individuals will interpret and cope with the lack of control experienced in the context of forced career change. It is expected that if the event precipitating change is unexpected and the individual has minimal control over the pace at which their transition occurs their adjustment will be negatively affected. Research focusing on personal control over life events has sought to understand the stress process and the possible links between stressors, psychological well-being and functioning.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive-phenomenological model of stress and coping, recognises the balance between the demands of the situation and the abilities and resources of the person. They conceptualised stress, therefore, as not only a function of the environment but also a function of the individual's appraisal of congruence among environmental demands, personal beliefs, and his or her capabilities. Subjective judgement of a situation involves an assessment of its relevance to personal levels of well-being (Folkman, 1984). This primarily cognitive appraisal influences the initial extent to which the situation is experienced as stressful. The secondary appraisal is more problem-focused in assessing what can be done to manage the situation. This may compromise of two separate judgements: the perceived controllability of the situation, and the person's efficacy expectations (Terry, 1991; 1994; Terry, Tonge & Callan, 1995). Perceived control over the impact of a stressor has consistently been found to reduce its impact on both physiological and psychological indices of well-being (Lazarus et al., 1984) and facilitate the development of effective coping strategies (Terry, 1991; 1994).

However, in situations characterised by uncertainty, adjustment to stress is likely to be impaired because of difficulties in accurately evaluating the significance of the event in relation to personal well-being and also because the ambiguity interferes with the development of appropriate coping strategies (Lazarus et al., 1984). Research suggests that in situations of perceived low control, people are likely to use
more emotion-focused coping strategies compared to more problem-focused forms of coping in situations of perceived high control (e.g., Carver et al., 1989; Coyne, Aldwin & Lazarus, 1981; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; 1985; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986; Forsythe & Compas, 1987).

The concepts of primary control and secondary control (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder, 1982) provide another view of the cognitive reappraisal process in relation to job-related stressors. Primary control, when direct action is taken to affect the environment, appears to be beneficial in making the individual feel better about a situation. However, when this is not possible, secondary control appraisals are used to cope, involving personal interpretations of the stressor, as discussed in the earlier section on sensemaking. This may involve benefit-finding that provides a comforting alternative to feelings of helplessness deriving from the loss of a sense of direct personal control over an uncontrollable event. Participants in Chapter Five, for example, displayed retrospective benefit-finding with respect to aspects of their career change that they had been unable to control.

6.2.4 Personal Characteristics

The findings of the previous study suggest that for individuals who choose to change career it is important to apply their subjective values to their new profession, this appears to provide motivation to change, affects the way they pursue change and reduces their perceptions of constraints. Individuals who experience involuntary career change however, may not necessarily share these values. The findings of the comparative study by Kanchier and Unruh, (1989) cited in section 5.4.2.1, of individuals who chose to change career and those who did not identified the values of security, power, position and other situational factors, like family responsibilities as characteristic of individuals who chose not to change career. It is expected that individuals forced to change career will present both types of values, and that this will influence their experience and evaluations of their transition. The advantages of holding subjective values independent of an organisational framework in a change environment are identified in Chapter Five. However, it is expected that individuals who prefer security and for whom objective values are significant are likely to be more threatened by the uncertainties of change and removal from organisational career arrangements.
In a stressful situation such as involuntary career change, personal characteristics appear to affect the responses generated and the coping styles adopted. Parkes (1994) proposed that personal characteristics might modify the relationship between stressors and strain in two ways. Firstly, in relation to a person-environment (P-E) fit model, if there is congruence between personal and work environment characteristics this is likely to lead to a positive outcome. Therefore, an environment characterised by high control would be beneficial for certain individuals while low control would suit others. However, where there is a P-E fit mismatch this is more likely to result in unfavourable outcomes, for example, an individual with an internal locus of control, and an active coping strategy in a low job control scenario such as redundancy, is more likely to suffer the effects of stress. Secondly, Parkes suggests that certain personal characteristics could reflect a vulnerability or resistance factor that would make them differentially susceptible to the effects of the P-E fit. For example, certain individuals would benefit from high control, while for others high control would have no moderating effects.

Another key characteristic affecting an individual’s response to a stressful situation is the appraisal of their problem-solving abilities, i.e., a general sense of self-efficacy, as identified in Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) model discussed earlier. Problem-solving appraisal has been linked to a broad array of cognitive, affective and behavioural variables in the coping process, such as attributional style, irrational beliefs, expectations of success, perseveration, resource utilization, self-esteem and hopelessness (Hepner, 1988). Moreover, problem-solving appraisal seems to moderate the harmful effects of negative life events (Dixon, Hepner, Anderson, & Wood, 1991; Nezu, 1987) and is related to a number of indices of psychological health (Hepner, 1988). An internal locus of control has been associated with higher levels of self-efficacy and thus positive adjustments to stress, Wheaton (1983) suggests this may be a result of fewer doubts concerning the efficacy of attempts to confront a problem compared to individuals with external control beliefs.

Several other personal characteristics have been associated with coping in stressful situations. For example, individuals with low levels of neuroticism have been found to rely more on problem-focused coping strategies and to have less adverse reactions
to work stress compared to those with high levels of neuroticism who rely more heavily on emotion-focused coping strategies (Bolger, 1990; Carver et al., 1989; Parkes, 1990). One explanation may be the tendency for high neurotics to focus on their emotional state that interferes with the development of goal-directed behaviour (Carver et al., 1989; Watson & Pennebaker, 1989). In addition, there is evidence that people with high self-esteem are less likely than people with low self-esteem to experience difficulties adjusting to both general (Folkman et al., 1986) and work-related stress (Ashford, 1988; Israel, House, Schurman, Heaney, & Mero, 1989). Chan (1977) suggests that these results reflect the fact that people with high self-esteem have a past history of coping successfully with stress and may therefore be impervious to the ego-threatening nature of many stressors. Sonnenberg (1997) found people who are more flexible and autonomous are able to cope with changes in working patterns more effectively.

The cognitive adaptation to threat seen in the process of benefit-finding can also be seen to be predicted by differences in personal characteristics that affect whether benefits will be construed, as well as the number and the type of benefits (Affleck & Tennen, 1996). Although there are relatively few empirical studies in this area, benefit-finding has variously been linked to an internal locus of control (Wollman & Felton, 1983), a persistent belief in a just world (Kiecolt-Glaser & Williams, 1987), dispositional optimism (Litt, Tennen, Affleck, & Klock, 1992; Thompson, 1985), and to the personal characteristics of extraversion and openness to experience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). These characteristics seem to allow individuals to ‘draw strength from adversity’ as a style of coping with threat, by adopting a cognitive reorientation of their experiences and achieving new direction in terms of future plans.

The notion that these personal characteristics may, to some degree, develop in response to the experience of involuntary career change is expected, based on the development of characteristics such as flexibility and openness to experience apparent in the narratives of participants in Chapter Five. In addition, research suggests that by a process of accommodation (Block, 1982) a change in personal characteristics may be an outcome of the transition process since this has been shown to occur in association with life experience (Bursik, 1991; Helson & Roberts, 1994)
particularly when the environment fails to conform to expectations (Kegan, 1982) or when 'difficult times' are encountered (Helson, 1992). Park and colleagues (1996) identified that more personal growth was reported by their participants in relation to the most negative event they experienced during the six month research period, and significant increases in both dispositional optimism and positive affect were found during that time. In this research however, it should be noted that it is the personal attributions of self-development that are the focus of study rather than personal characteristics per se.

6.2.5 The Influence of Context

In Chapter Five the consequences of negative work experiences such as bullying were identified as low self-esteem and depression. While such circumstances provided motivation to move away, the effects were described as making change harder to instigate. Emotional and practical support, and holding possible selves were cited as factors that helped overcome this barrier. In terms of redundancy, the likelihood of perceptions of psychological contract violation leading to psychological strain has already been mentioned. A contextual variable that has been found to affect this is the participatory approach taken by the organisation. A participative approach characterised by collaborative and consultative communication has been found to be a key factor that characterises successful change. This contrasts to a non-participatory approach that is directive or coercive (Dunphy & Stace, 1990).

The benefits of involvement in the process of change appear to relate to issues of control and the active job construct derived from Karasek's (1979) job-demand-control model. Empirical evidence suggests that employees in active jobs that allowed for high decision latitude and control over challenging tasks reported higher readiness for organisational change. This was shared by employees who had high levels of job change self-efficacy and displayed an active approach to job problem solving. Active work environments are thought to benefit individuals in adapting to change since they increase learning opportunities and contribute to desirable stress, which increases motivation and the development of new behaviour patterns (Theorell & Karasek, 1996). Active work environments are also thought to foster personal empowerment, improve performance, and increase initiative that contributes to workers feeling more confident in their ability to manage change (Spreitzer, 1995).
It therefore seems that encouraging an active approach to job problem-solving contributes to the development of strategies needed to manage change successfully and enhance job change self-efficacy (Cunningham, Woodward, Shannon, MacIntosh, Lendrum, & Rosenbloom, 2002). For individuals who have passive jobs on the other hand, which limit opportunities for decision-making and control, the anticipated risks of change may be compounded by lower self-efficacy and reduced readiness for change.

Other practical factors that appear to ameliorate the effects of involuntarily career change are the provision of financial resources, and practical and emotional social support. It is suggested that offering a redundancy package is the most obvious and practical way that an employer can assist an individual in their transition, given the financial pressures accompanying job loss (Ebberwein et al., 2004). Feldman and colleagues also noted the importance of financial support, without this they suggest, the individual is more pressured to find a new career path, and the likelihood of taking one that does not appropriately use their skills and abilities is increased (Feldman, Leana & Bolino, 2000). In terms of support, findings show that individuals who were offered career transition services expressed no animosity towards their previous company in response to their redundancy, whereas those who expressed the most intense negative emotion towards their previous company who had laid them off had not been offered career transition services (Ebberwein et al., 2004). Individuals experiencing redundancy also describe social support from colleagues as valuable in dealing with the associated stress, and this was found to be more valued than non-work sources of support (Ganster, Fusilier & Mayes, 1986; Terry, Nielsen & Perchard, 1993; Terry, Rawle, & Callan, 1995). Possible reasons for this are that colleagues are closer to the source of stress and may therefore be able to offer more relevant support, empathy and understanding. They may also provide a point of reference for social comparison and hence evaluation of the validity of a person’s response to the event (Terry et al., 1995; Thoits, 1986).

In summary, the potentially unpredictable and unwanted nature of involuntary job loss suggests a negative emotional response and disruption to sensemaking, requiring a process of adjustment. However, it seems that coping strategies involved in positive adjustment, such as benefit-finding, are predicted by emotional well-being.
and are therefore likely to be challenged in such circumstances. The influence of certain personal characteristics appears likely to contribute to an optimistic appraisal of the situation and the possibility of benefit-finding, thereby assisting adjustment. For individuals though who lack these characteristics the process of transition and the implications for the outcome of their career change appears to be bleaker. It is hoped that the phenomenological approach adopted in this study will identify the relevance of these issues to thirty-somethings, and thus contribute to an understanding of the ways in which the threats of involuntary career change may be ameliorated.

6.3 METHOD

6.3.1 Sample
The sample for this study consisted of ten participants (see Table 2). They were selected as a purposive sample. All of the participants were found by word-of-mouth. As with the previous study, three key criteria were used for selecting participants for this study. The first was that the individual had experienced a complex career change. The second criterion was that this career change took place while the individual was in their thirties. The third criterion was that the individual considered their change to have been involuntary. The researcher attempted to achieve a diverse range of individuals in the sample. Participants were selected whose change had been precipitated by different factors, including redundancy, illness or their career no longer being perceived as tenable. This was not to achieve a sample that was considered representative of involuntary career change experiences rather the aim was to encourage a broad understanding of such experiences. The sample consisted of five males and five females. One of the female participants and two of the male participants had children. At the time of the interview the participants were aged between thirty and forty-two years old. Some participants had experienced involuntary career change on more than one occasion. At the time the interviews were conducted one of the participants was still involved in the change process and was looking for a new career, one was just starting her new career and the others were well established in their new careers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age at time of interview</th>
<th>Age at time of career change</th>
<th>Marital status at time of career change</th>
<th>Number of children with ages at time of career change</th>
<th>Reason for involuntary career change(s)</th>
<th>Previous occupation(s) in chronological order</th>
<th>Current occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Redundancy x 2</td>
<td>Brand manager, film developer</td>
<td>Freelance consultant and writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Redundancy</td>
<td>Investment banker</td>
<td>Self-employed. Handbag manufacturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Two aged 16 and 14</td>
<td>Redundancy</td>
<td>Banker, self-employed financier</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Four aged 3, 5, 7 and 10</td>
<td>Redundancy x 2</td>
<td>Factory worker, Administrator</td>
<td>Self-employed sports therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Redundancy</td>
<td>Secretary, self-employed typist</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jemma</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>Physiotherapist, secretarial temp</td>
<td>Life coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Two aged 3 and 5</td>
<td>Financially untenable</td>
<td>Professional golfer</td>
<td>IT manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Redundancy</td>
<td>IT manager</td>
<td>Property developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlin</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Redundancy</td>
<td>PR Consultant</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Redundancy</td>
<td>New Media Development Manager</td>
<td>Arts Administrator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3.2 Procedure

The repertory grid technique was employed as a means of data gathering. Justification for the use of this technique and a detailed analysis of the methodology are provided in section 4.6.3. A pilot study was carried out on two individuals. One amendment to the procedure was required as discussed later in the limitations section of this study (section 6.6).

The researcher selected three categories of change experience: i) significant and voluntary, ii) significant and involuntary, and iii) insignificant, as the basis for discussion. Participants were asked to think of two examples from their working lives for each of these categories, including their involuntary career change in their thirties where they felt appropriate. These examples formed the elements of their grid. To allow participants time to think of examples they were emailed this request a week before their interview (see appendix IV).

The researcher also prepared four ‘top view’ subject areas for participants to rate. These areas were related to issues that were found to be significant to the change experience in Chapter Five. This allowed for data to be gathered on specific areas of interest, thus enabling further study of these issues, on this occasion in an involuntary change context. The top view constructs were:

Top View One: ‘This was a positive experience of change’.
Top View Two: ‘I felt in control’.
Top View Three: ‘I felt that I had adjusted to the change before the events took place’.
Top View Four: ‘This had positive effects of how I felt about myself’.

The interviews were conducted in a private setting. The researcher introduced herself and outlined the research objectives. Attempts were made to be non-judgmental in the language used and to be sensitive to possible feelings of vulnerability in discussing the matter of involuntary career change. An assurance of confidentiality was provided and a request made for permission to tape-record the session. The participants were informed that the tapes would be destroyed on
completion of the research. The researcher explained the repertory grid technique and emphasised that participants should feel free to discuss their experiences in detail, to describe both positive and negative experiences, and to be honest in their answers. The procedure followed in producing and analysing the repertory grids is outlined in appendix V.

Ten constructs were elicited from each participant to complete their repertory grid. Ratings for the grids and top views were gathered. Concurrent descriptions associated with the constructs and explanations for their ratings were tape-recorded. Each interview took approximately two hours to complete. It was felt too time consuming to calculate the grids in the presence of the participant so this was carried out after the interview session, and the findings emailed to each participant.

The constructs generated by participants and their ratings of the top views are analysed in the results section, according to the principles of grounded theory outlined in section 4.6.4. These are supported by illustrative quotes from the tape-recorded conversation.

6.4 RESULTS
All of the participants cited the experience of involuntary career change in their thirties as one of the examples of significant involuntary change when listing their six elements. The comparison of this event with other change events in their working lives offers a context for their perceptions of the involuntary career change experience. The types of change event selected by participants as their grid elements could be divided into three main areas:

i) change events that occurred within an organisation such as moving departments, changing role or experiencing a change of company culture.

ii) change events that occurred as a result of moving between organisations or away from an organisation such as changing company, or industry or becoming self-employed.

iii) change events that were precipitated by personal circumstances such as illness, divorce or having children.
These change events were variously regarded as being voluntary and significant, involuntary and significant or insignificant. A complete list of the change events discussed by participants is provided in appendix VI.

Initial analysis of the repertory grids (see example grid, appendix VII) involved identifying key themes and attributing constructs to these themes. The suggestion that the themes that have the most constructs are the issues most important to the participants provides an epistemological quandary, detailed in section 4.6.4.2.

In this section an analysis of the constructs generated from the repertory grids is presented first. This is followed by analysis of the participant's ratings and associated explanations for each of the top views.

6.4.1 Analysis of Repertory Grid Constructs

Analysis of the constructs elicited from the repertory grids identified nine themes (see Table 3). These themes are feelings, control, opportunity and progress, relationships, finances, scale, environment, pace and identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Constructs in this Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity &amp; Progress</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The theme containing the most number of constructs is “Feelings”, this was subdivided into six sub-themes to provide greater clarity (see Table 4). These sub-themes are general, confidence, risk, resignation, reality and sense of future.

### Table 4: Sub-Themes of the ‘Feelings’ Theme with the Number of Contributing Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Number of Constructs in Sub-Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resignation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of future</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While career theory has predominantly been concerned with cognitive issues these findings emphasise the significance of the affective aspect of career in involuntary career change. Together with the influence of subjective values on career change experiences found in Chapter Five, this further validates the qualitative approach adopted by this research, without which they would not have been identified.

The feelings derived from participant’s constructs that were categorised under the sub-heading “General” feelings illustrate the range of emotions experienced and their powerful nature. Participants described feeling emotions such as fear, shock, excitement, fragility, sadness and inspiration. Involuntary career change was associated with emotional turbulence in contrast to the lack of emotional attachment associated with insignificant change (Jemma) or feelings of natural progression linked to voluntary change (Jana). Disappointment and anger directed at the management responsible for involuntary change was common. If change was involuntary but desired after varying periods of time it came to be regarded as positive and liberating (Caitlin).

Many participants described associating their involuntary job loss with a loss of confidence. This appeared to derive from feelings of rejection and the event being
perceived as their first experience of failure, resulting in confusion and doubt (Matt),
of worthlessness, being incapable and having all confidence and self-esteem
undermined (Susie). In addition, Matt described the loss of a work-setting following
redundancy as significant because he no longer had a context in which to succeed
which led him to question his abilities.

Participants associated risk with changes that were considered as large-scale,
characterised by experiences being significantly different before and after the change
event, and where the impact of the change was high. Risk was associated with
feelings of being tested in contrast to not feeling any impact (Caitlin). Some
participants viewed risk in positive terms if it was considered exciting or worthwhile
(Jemma). While voluntary change was generally linked to feelings of challenge or
hope, involuntary change was associated with feelings of frustration, resignation and
the lack of future, particularly for participants who had experienced it multiple times.

Control related issues were the second most frequently discussed area by
participants. Having control was viewed as positive, whereas not having control was
regarded as damaging and destructive (Jana), being a failure (Susie) and resulting in
feelings of emptiness (Susie) and resignation (Jackie). Participants appeared to
perceive lack of control deriving from factors such as management decisions
affecting them in an organisational context (Jana, Jackie, Andy), limited finances
(Matt) and restricted opportunity structures (Jackie). A limited sense of control
appeared to be associated with situations being regarded as unpredictable (Andy) and
feeling disconnected from what was familiar (Oliver).

In some instances participants linked their involuntary career change to a sense of
opportunity soon after their job loss if they had been dissatisfied with their previous
life in some way (Casey, Caitlin). However, a more frequent initial response to
involuntary change was a feeling of moving backwards and having to start again
(Matt, Susie). For these participants they described questioning their own abilities
and having their self-esteem and sense of security damaged. Varying periods of time
after the job loss some participants described regarding their new situation as an
opportunity, this was found to depend on factors such as having a positive attitude
towards risk (Casey, Oliver), feeling inspired in terms of knowing what to do, feeling
confident in one's abilities (Caitlin), having a support network (Susie) and not having dependents (Andy).

Participants described the impact of involuntary career change on relationships as another significant issue. In terms of professional relationships this was associated with feelings of alienation from management (Matt, Jemma) as well as disappointment, frustration and anger towards the organisation (Jana, Matt). For participants who were made redundant, all of them complained about the manner in which it had been handled, none reported receiving any formal help or guidance through the change process. As a consequence, Susie described being left with a sense of bemusement following her redundancy.

In terms of relationships with colleagues, participants who lost their job as part of a redundancy programme reported feeling concern for those similarly affected and worry in relation to the consequences for teams they had created and work they had been responsible for. Participants reported feelings of loneliness and of losing friends in their workplace as a consequence of redundancy (Jackie). However, the experience was also described as strengthening important relationships. This occurred through the support received from colleagues during the change process and from the maintenance of long-term contact after they had left the organisation (Jana, Matt, Casey). For participants whose career had been influenced by illness contrasting experiences of their relationship with colleagues were described. Jemma said she had felt on her own and as if she were going 'against the flow'. Jana however, experienced tremendous support and affection from her colleagues. The difference in reaction appeared to depend on the nature and the duration of the illness and the coping strategies employed by the individual (i.e., whether they disclosed their illness to colleagues as in the case of Jana or whether they kept it private, such as Jemma).

The impact of involuntary change on personal relationships varied amongst participants. For men with children in particular, involuntary change appeared to result in pressure from their family, especially from spouses, to regain their earnings as soon as possible (Matt, Andy). If the individual was happier in their new career
compared to their previous career then this was associated with improved family relationships (Casey).

In relation to the theme of finances, involuntary change was linked to financial loss and insecurity (Susie, Andy). For some participants this was a stressor, particularly for sole breadwinners (Matt, Susie) and also for men with families, whether they were the sole income earner or not (Matt, Andy). For other participants their reduced income was regarded as acceptable and was outweighed by a sense of greater freedom in their new life (Casey, Caitlin, Oliver).

Other relatively minor themes that emerged from the constructs were those concerned with the scale and pace of the change. Participants viewed voluntary change as entailing progressive and gradual adaptation that they considered to be relatively easy to cope with. In contrast, involuntary change was often associated with substantial changes that involved many adjustments and at a fast pace. Involuntary change was also associated with being removed from a comfort zone and a known environment, often rapidly, which was described as upsetting and frightening (Susie). In participant’s retrospective descriptions of their change experiences, Caitlin noted that while she had expected to feel dislocated following her job loss this did not occur, and indeed, Adrian and Casey welcomed their change of environment. The variety of responses to environmental change appeared to depend on personal characteristics and whether the new situation was felt to be an improvement.

Finally, Jemma and Oliver used constructs relating to identity issues. For Jemma, involuntary change caused by illness was associated with a negative identity relating to being the “sick one”, which was directly opposed to feeling empowering. However, for Oliver involuntary change bought about by redundancy was linked to a sense of liberation from the demands of a pressurised job, and the opportunity to experience a wider range of personas.

Analysis of the constructs therefore reveals the experience of involuntary career change to be characterised by an initial sense of threat. This appears to derive primarily from four key areas. The first being participant’s perceptions of the change
being substantial, immediate and out of their control. The second being the removal from what is known, leading to a reduced sense of security. Third, is a sense of moving backwards, and finally, the threat from a sense of failure leading to negative affect, exacerbated in redundancy by minimal communication from the employer. Involuntary career change appears to have a negative effect on family members when financial pressure is experienced, thus compounding the stress felt by the individual. Some participants exhibited a process of re-interpreting their situation in more positive terms. Factors that appeared critical in contributing to this re-interpretation included negative perceptions of the previous occupation, self-confidence, having goals for the future, and focusing on opportunities in their situation rather than constraints.

The next part of the analysis focuses on the findings in relation to each of the top views. The first top view is concerned with the appraisal of the involuntary career change experience.

6.4.2 Analysis of Top Views
6.4.2.1 Top View One: 'This was a positive experience of change'
The findings in this section corroborate the extant literature that there is little consensus on the effect of an involuntary job change on the experienced quality of the work situation. However, the findings do indicate which factors contribute towards the involuntary career change experience being viewed as either positive or negative. They also show the difference in evaluations at various stages of the change process.

Participant's initial responses to the involuntary change event were mixed in terms of how positive or negative they felt the experience to be. For some it was an affirmative experience. For example, Adrian described his redundancy as a “one-off moment of joy”, this seemed to derive from his sense of liberation from a difficult time at work “it was a huge relief because it had turned into a nightmare working there” or for other participants it appeared to stem from long-term dissatisfaction with their job (Jana, Chris). However, this positive response to the relief of escaping past events appeared to be short-term, and only occurred when the future was considered as a time of opportunity and possible constraints were temporarily
ignored. This dream-like and unrealistic stage ended when the future was considered in more concrete terms, "there was a moment when you thought hurray, the whole world is at your feet and those are lovely moments but they don't carry on forever" (Adrian).

The majority of participants described their initial reactions to involuntary change only in negative terms. These reactions included shock, confusion, fear, anger, worthlessness and vulnerability. They appear to be a response to the threat to their assumptions of personal control, meaning, and self-worth. Several participants discussed feeling dislocated from normal life at the point of change. For example, Jana described the unreality and consequent negative affect she felt in response to her known life being taken away abruptly, "I did feel terribly vulnerable...having got my black bin liner in the [car] boot with all my belongings and that was the end of fifteen years of my life, it was just so final and shattering, very brittle, it was surreal". The sense of rejection Jana felt from her employer was associated with a range of powerful emotions "Redundancy is that hollow husk, that excretable-type feeling, that you're rubbish...[I] felt shocked, angry".

For many participants redundancy was the first time they had felt personal failure. For example, Jana said "I suppose you feel a failure, you've always been the best at what you've done and failure of any description wasn't really in my vocabulary". Matt also described feeling "doubt for the first time and a feeling of confusion". The novelty of this experience and the associations with failure appeared to lead to self-doubt and loss of confidence. In the majority of cases this seemed to be short-term but for Matt who had been unemployed for more than a year, this self-doubt continued because of not having a work environment in which to validate his actions and because of his wife's response, "the pressure I've found hardest to deal with is being at home, being questioned about why? You begin to question your own ability, and there's no room for that, but when you get it drilled into you everyday that you've failed and you're letting the family down then you do begin to question yourself".

For participants who had experienced multiple involuntary changes, they described feelings of resignation, of knowing oneself, and of an inner search being necessary to
cope with the demands of the change process, “This is the third time around, it felt that I know I have the strength, but how many times do I have to go deep, deep down inside myself to find it” (Jemma).

Many participants felt that poor management decisions were the reason for their redundancy and this appeared to affect the way they felt about their change. Matt described feeling disappointment and isolation, “[it] felt like working on my own against management”, and Jackie described “being let down”. Participants, such as Jana, Matt and Andy felt that they, and their work, had not been valued by their employer and this led to feelings of frustration and pointlessness in relation to their work. Feelings of disillusionment and alienation from management appeared to contribute to a reduced sense of control. The negativity associated with this led some participants to seek self-employment, a scenario perceived as providing greater control of their working life “this was to be my ticket out of the rat race” (Casey).

Other perceived losses that were incurred as a result of involuntary job loss, particularly if the individual had been satisfied with their job was the loss of a valued professional identity, loss of status and financial security, and of a known social and physical environment. For example, Jackie described some of these losses that she perceived as a result of redundancy “I’d been there from college, I was the queen bee there, I knew everyone, I knew everything, I felt very comfortable. All of a sudden that was taken away, that comfort and easiness.” The financial loss and uncertainty about the future resulting from involuntary job loss also appeared to be significant and prompted feelings of fear. Jana described her anxiety about the future following her redundancy as an investment banker. Her predominant fears appeared to be in terms of practical survival, however, at a deeper level a fear of the unknown was also revealed, “It’s the fear factor of how am I going to survive for the rest of my life? Where’s my next meal coming from, almost. I knew I had enough money to last for a certain amount of time, it’s just a fear that one day that could come to an end and then what would you do? Would I be working down at Tesco?”

For participants with dependents the most worrying aspect of redundancy was the loss of income, particularly for sole bread-winners, such as Susie, a single mother without a redundancy package, “It was devastating, how was I going to feed my
children, what was I going to do, how was I going to pay the mortgage?

Immediately it was all financial really...not only had I lost my job I lost my house as well, and I became very, very depressed.” Participants who received a financial redundancy package described having a degree of freedom for a period of time. This time was regarded as beneficial in a number of ways. Oliver described the advantages of having time to contemplate and evaluate the past, “The six or seven month period of time when I was out of work and suddenly I was away from a working environment and pretty much working at home doing my own thing. At that point you take a breather and in that instant you think ‘Wow, that was really knackering. I’m not sure if I really want to do that again’”. It also provided the opportunity to experience a new lifestyle, to follow interests and gain experience in different areas. Caitlin described being able to lead a more balanced life during the time that she didn’t work following redundancy, and her aim of achieving work-life balance in her new career, “I just ended up getting involved in all sorts of things and just living, and actually for the first time I thought there’s a life outside of work, because up until that time I’d been incredibly career-orientated.” This period of voluntary unemployment, made possible by financial resources appeared to contribute towards clarifying values and identifying future goals.

Participant’s decisions in relation to new occupational choices appeared to relate to either their own ideas or to derive from opportunities that were available to them. Evaluation of their choice appeared to be more positive if it was subjectively valued, if it was considered an improvement on their previous career, if they had put personal effort into achieving it, and if it involved developing new skills and opportunities. Negative experiences in previous jobs, such as perceived excessive demands on time and energy, lack of control or working for values considered meaningless, acted as a ‘push’ factors to find a career that was different in specific ways. For example, Casey described his decision to become self-employed following his dissatisfaction with corporate life, “It was a decision. Do I go back into the big world of corporate or do I do something else in a completely different way? And the thought of going back into corporate industry was just horrifying. I’d sooner slit my throat than do the whole ‘I tell you what, you work for us all year and we’ll give you twenty days off and we’ll give you some money, but not much, and you do that till you die’, no way!”
However, Caitlin described the difficulty of taking the step to do something different. For her, the challenge appeared to be exacerbated by not having a clearly defined goal to aim for “It’s whether you can do that one extra stage...don’t just get sucked back into what you were doing, see if you can find something else that will make you more fulfilled and happier”. Unlike other participants Susie described deciding what she really wanted to do when she reached an extreme low, at this point she realised she could either give up or move forward. At first this appears to contradict expectations that depression would reduce problem-solving coping strategies however, it appears that at this stage the situation was less ambiguous. She felt she had two clearly defined options to choose between, and seeing this choice prompted her recovery.

If the individual had liked the job they lost, if they felt their situation following the forced change was limited in terms of future options, and they were moving backwards or not progressing, then their career change was likely to be perceived in negative terms. For example, Andy lost a job that he enjoyed and valued highly, he replaced it with one that was offered to him by an acquaintance. While it met financial pressures it was not internally rewarding. In a grid construct he described financial pressure and family commitments as the key obstacles to his progression, “children and family hold you back” and the resulting “emotional resignation” rather than “real challenge” he feels in his new career. His interview reveals the unhappiness and pointlessness he felt in this situation, “I just don’t believe I’ll ever be able to understand what my true working potential is while I’m in this scenario that I’m involved in, putting two kids through paying school. I don’t think it’s ever going to be possible for me to do what I really want to do and that stinks. All the time running to stand still, for what? This isn’t the way life is supposed to be”. Andy discussed an idealised possible self but this was considered unobtainable in his situation. The comparison between this and his actual life appeared to increase feelings of hopelessness and depression.

During the mid-stages of the change process, it was found that participants experienced a complex and contradictory set of feelings. The depression that was found to be a common reaction to the involuntary career change event persisted for varying amounts of time amongst participants. Jana described its re-occurrence over
a sustained period, "When I was dealt the redundancy card I didn't feel excited at all at that stage, when I got over the first few days then it was exciting and the start of a new life potentially, but it was masked many times by the depression of the whole situation which did sit on me for months." Factors associated with long-term depression resulting from involuntary job loss appeared to be the continuation of stressors such as limited financial resources, the lack of a work setting for validation, and the lack of a goal that would provide purpose, direction and the potential for a valued identity.

The constructs most closely related to the top score of whether this was a positive experience of change indicate marked differences in the way participants responded to change. For instance, Jemma interpreted risk as positive if it was "exciting or worthwhile". She felt that the reason that she was more risk accepting than other people was because she valued job satisfaction highly and she would take risks to pursue this, "I'm prepared to take those risks to find job satisfaction in a way that a lot of other people aren't and it doesn't feel so much of a risk to me as it would to other people". Casey also felt risk taking was necessary in order to progress, and his positive interpretations of the outcomes of having taken risks encouraged him to take further risks, "the biggest risk you can take in life is to take no risks at all...if it involves risk, and sometimes it involves failure, but at least its more interesting and exciting. I've got much more to say about what I've been doing in the last four years than the previous twelve years that all blurred into one."

Susie also described having developed a greater acceptance of risk after positively evaluating the outcomes of risk-taking, "If you're not forced to do something by extrinsic forces then why take that risk? I'm not a huge risk taker, although I would now because it's made me learn if you really want something bad enough you can achieve it". Jackie appeared to be risk-averse. Consequently she found her involuntary career change a frightening experience. The key difference between individuals who were risk accepting and risk averse appeared to be their levels of self-confidence. Jackie described her lack of confidence in her skills, in her ability to fit into a new environment, and to cope with the challenges she faced, "When I knew I was going to be made redundant, because I'd only ever done secretarial work, I guess it's the confidence thing again, I was nervous because I'd been in the same job
In reflecting on his involuntary career transition Adrian described in one of his constructs that it was “easier to hold in memory as unmixed good versus more difficult contradictory experiences”, which suggested a preference for affirmative and consistent memories. However, despite this stated preference, participants discussed both positive and negative elements of their change experiences in this study implying that their memories do not only hold this partial view of their experiences. This suggests that while benefits may be found in traumatic experiences, these do not come at the cost of denying their adverse effects.

To summarise the findings in relation to the first top view, it appears that involuntary career change is evaluated in purely negative terms at all stages of the transition by participants who have continued stressors, particularly financial, do not have a subjective goal to pursue that they feel is achievable, or if they experience long-term unemployment and therefore do not have a work-setting in which to achieve self-validation. For other participants evaluation of their involuntary career experience improved over time. Initial negative appraisals were focused on the self, the employer (in the case of redundancy), and their situation, in relation to losses and also worry about the future. A gradual transition towards a more positive evaluation of their position appeared to stem from values that focused on progress rather than security, and self-confidence. While some participants considered these to be enduring personal characteristics, others recognised that such characteristics also developed in response to positive experiences of change.

6.4.2.2 Top View Two: ‘I felt in control’

Evaluations of the change experience as positive or negative appeared to be highly associated with the degree of perceived control. Positive evaluation of change was associated with perceived control and with change that was expected and that occurred in incremental stages over time (Adrian, Susie, Oliver). This appeared to assist gradual adjustment to the new situation and provide time to evaluate, make decisions and plan for the future. Adrian described the benefits he perceived of changing career in incremental steps, “Incremental change is great because...it's not
as destabilising, and there's a sense you're moving in a particular direction... but with a big change you think hang on a second, in a way my life's changed massively but in another way it hasn't changed at all, and what the hell am I going to do now, I've got to build up to the next thing”. Caitlin evaluated her redundancy in positive terms even though it was out of her control because she had been unsatisfied with her previous life and because her employer provided notice of the redundancy and a redundancy package. In these circumstances she viewed it as an opportunity, “I was beginning to feel quite discontented with my life and with my lot that I had created, and the redundancy almost forced my hand... the decision was taken out of my hands and it was a good thing”. Participants who worked in industries such as banking and IT, described organisational change and redundancies as common. High financial rewards were regarded as recompense for the potential risk of job loss, and the expectation and acceptance of this risk appeared to contribute to adjusting to redundancy (Matt, Casey).

In contrast, negative evaluation of change experiences occurred when there was a lack of perceived control over change events and the change was unexpected. Jana described the lack of control stemming from the unexpectedness of redundancy “Redundancy is such a bundle of raw emotions and something that has total lack of any control for me. Redundancy is such a horrible, uncontrollable bolt from the blue”. She felt that the unpredictability and inability to control redundancy made it worse than having cancer, which she had experienced and learnt how to actively manage, thus making her feel more in control of it. “Cancer doesn't feel half as threatening as that word redundancy. It's very funny, I no longer fear it because I'm so vigilant, now I know what to look out for in my body and if you catch things early you've got a damn good chance, it's not as ugly as it looks”.

Financial security appeared to be linked to perceived control, to opportunity and choices. A redundancy package was viewed as a temporary safety net that allowed time to explore various options. Caitlin described this, “For the first time I felt utterly free... I just thought ‘Wow, what an opportunity!’” In contrast, the financial strain and subsequent impact on his family resulting from being out of work for a year was described by Matt, “The effect on the family is massive and that affects your choices as well... my wife feels the security of the family is threatened and that puts a
huge amount of pressure on me”. As a consequence he felt less able to explore options because his main priority was financial “If you are in the comfort zone financially you can be much more committed and much more confident about what you’re doing”. Limited financial resources were associated with limited choices (Matt, Andy) and feeling vulnerable (Adrian, Jana, Susie). Jackie’s changed lifestyle, returning to live at her mother’s house, following career change and divorce made her feel a failure, “Having had beautiful homes here and in the States, here I am back in my little room, what a bloody failure. I felt a bit cheated. I did well...then all of a sudden gone. It was very much starting again”.

Participant’s constructs related feeling in control to “feeling good about myself” (Casey) and psychological states of empowerment, self-belief, confidence and being positive they would succeed (Matt, Susie, Jemma, Casey). In contrast feeling out of control was associated with fear (Jana), lack of confidence and questioning of abilities (Matt), emptiness, failure and lack of self-esteem (Susie). As a consequence of lower self-confidence and reduced self-efficacy Jackie described taking the easy option and just falling into a job that came along rather than actively pursuing a career that interested her. This avoided the need for risk taking but limited her opportunities and she was aware that she was not fulfilling her potential. Andy described his response to his perceived lack of control resulting from the demands of his family as one of “emotional resignation”.

Participant’s narratives suggest that lack of perceived control over career has a number of implications in relation to identity. Jana described feeling that in response to redundancy she needed to re-invent herself in order to improve her opportunities in a competitive arena, “I realised there were too many managers with the takeover, so it was back to having to re-invent oneself”. Jemma was forced to leave her career as a physiotherapist because of illness. She then worked as a secretary until she felt her health was strong enough to take up a new career as a life coach. During this intermediate stage she felt uncomfortable both with her health and professional identity that were conferred by her illness. However, once her health improved she described feeling more in control of her life and able to choose a career and construct her own identity, “there was a lot of not feeling I was me, whereas I’ve got more got more of a balance – of well, this is me, and I’ve also got used to being judged by my
job and perhaps not minding it so much, and also because I'm doing it for a reason, it feels under my control now".

Caitlin described a long-term discrepancy between her self-identity and her professional identity. She felt that her success in career terms had come from the acceptance of opportunities that she had been offered, but this had been at the expense of other aspects of her life that she valued. As a consequence she felt that her professional identity inadequately conveyed her true values “I do need something that’s going to challenge me but I think the thing that gradually started to bug me, and I felt so misunderstood because people automatically put that label on me that said ‘Well she’s got to be career-orientated hasn’t she... There’s something in my character that has driven me forward even though I’ve subsequently become quite frustrated about it. It’s like if the hurdles there I can’t help myself but jump it.”

Adrian described the reality of career change as having less impact on him than he had expected “You’re always the same person, you do have this fantasy that everything’s going to change...and discovering it doesn’t actually work like that”. This continuity of identity in retrospect appears to be a disappointment to him, instead of the complete change experience he had dreamed of.

One final identity implication arising from the lack of control associated with involuntary career change is a positive one. It appeared that the lack of control did not threaten identity because responsibility was not attributed to the self. Matt described his feelings after experiencing redundancy as a banker, “I think the stigma of being redundant through no fault of your own is zero, because its no fault of your own, that’s business and you have to be pragmatic about that but what’s difficult to handle is justifying it to people at home.” Matt described accepting the risks to his job associated with working in this industry, however, the effects of redundancy on his family appeared to have a negative impact on his identity in several ways. Not being able to provide for his family in financial terms appeared to reduce his status as provider. This appeared to be further reduced by his wife’s questioning of his abilities that made him feel responsible for their position. Matt also described missing his workplace and the status and sense of worth he achieved from successful accomplishments within it.
The lack of control associated with involuntary career change, particularly the experience of having decisions imposed by management, was a key motivator for participants to regain a sense of control in their new careers. Independence from others was the major reason for becoming self-employed for several participants (Adrian, Susie, Jana and Casey). The advantages of self-employment were described by Adrian and then by Susie, “One of the reasons I love freelancing is because I’m so sick of working for other people, my experiences are... that there’s no real sense of loyalty in the modern workplace” and “It put me out of my comfort zone again but I had my own space, I was my own boss, nobody could tell me what to do, and so I got to where I wanted to be. It feels very good because I’m in control”.

The significance of subjective career criteria for participants who had experienced involuntary career change appeared to develop in one of two scenarios, the first arising out of not feeling in control and the second from feeling more in control. Firstly, participants who chose to become self-employed following previous negative work experiences valued the opportunity to work in accordance to their own standards and values rather than these being imposed by others (Adrian, Susie, Jana, Casey). Casey described his shift in values and his subjectively defined measurement of progress in a self-employed setting, “before I just wanted to be more senior and more senior and earn more. Now I have a much more clearly defined strategy about what I want to do”. Secondly, participants who had the opportunity to spend a period of time experiencing a different lifestyle after their job loss (Jemma, Oliver, Caitlin) were able to reflect on their previous working life, trial new ways of living, reassess personal values and decide on their future goals. Achieving more of a balance between home and work appeared to be a priority for these participants in their new careers. For example, “the decision not to be as hungry for my career or for a career, looking for promotion, gave way to more space in my life, more space to do other things – see friends, have a home life” (Oliver). Jana also described wanting a career that meant she could spend more time with her husband, which she felt was a value associated with her age. Andy described subjective career values in terms of possible selves but felt unable to realise them in his current position of being in a job he disliked predominantly due to financial pressures. Matt retained his objective values from his previous career in banking and Jackie appeared to be consistently motivated by finding security above other values.
To summarise, the initial period following job loss was predominantly associated with lack of control, this was due to it being unexpected. In practical terms this meant no opportunity to prepare, particularly in financial terms. The consequence of then needing to regain an income immediately led to further low perceived control relating to having reduced options. Low perceived control was associated with having to adopt conferred identities and negative feelings about the self. However, one factor associated with not having control over the job loss that did not add to these negative feelings about self was having no sense of personal responsibility for events. The loss of control experienced in redundancy was associated with being in a vulnerable position, and in many cases led to wanting to assert control by becoming self-employed. Participants appeared to perceive control in involuntary career change when they felt they could influence the pace of the change and if they wanted the change. This was associated with being able to pursue subjective goals and feeling positive about self. Expecting the change appeared to increase a sense of perceived control to some degree however, this appeared to have minimal influence if the situation after the job loss was characterised by factors that contributed to low perceived control.

6.4.2.3 Top View Three: ‘I felt that I adjusted to the change before the change took place’.

Participants described varying degrees of knowing about or expecting their enforced career change. For example, Casey described in a grid construct that the start-up IT company he worked for was “destined to fail - the writing was on the wall”. However, Susie, was given her redundancy notice with no prior warning, and was told by her employer to leave that day. She described this as a drastic change that gave her no time to prepare. Psychological adjustment prior to a change event appeared to be influenced by several mediating factors. These were that if the individual felt in control of the event to some degree, if they wanted the change, and/or if they considered it worthwhile. In the majority of cases if these factors were present then adjustment appeared to occur regardless of the severity of the change (e.g., in terms of different environment, daily routine, work type) or whether it was perceived as a risk (Adrian, Jemma, Casey).
Even if participants knew about, or expected their redundancy an initial powerful emotional response was commonly described. This appeared to be overwhelming, and led to feelings of pain and confusion. Matt described his early response to redundancy, "It was like I'd been let down and it was out of my hands...I think I was confused". Jana described the gradual change in emotions from the point of redundancy, "something that conjures up quite a violent vortex of emotions of the wrong type, not the positive type, although it does gradually become positive, but that's only when you get over that initial hurt and anguish".

The period following redundancy was found to be an emotional vulnerable time, not only because of the response evoked by the job loss but also because it was often a time of contemplation. Unresolved issues that may have been repressed during the individual’s busy working life had the opportunity to surface, and were compounded by their emotionally fragile state. For example, following redundancy Jana described facing, for the first time, the fact that she was unable to have children as a result of the cancer that she had survived two years earlier, “I think that's why I was so emotional, most unlike me. I was crying for myself, for not being able to have children, it wasn't just the redundancy, all the unbottling of what I'd bottled up, it just came tumbling out”. It therefore appears that the experience of enforced career change may raise other issues that require attention, thus prolonging the subsequent adjustment process. Two years after her redundancy Jana acknowledged the emotional adjustment that had taken place during this period, “My pace and my whole outlook has changed and I've faced the ghosts I suppose, but if you'd have met me a couple of years ago straight after the events I don't think I'd have worked out what I'd gone through.”

Following Jana’s severe negative reactions to her redundancy she chose to change her lifestyle completely. Although her new lifestyle was wanted she still experienced a strong sense of loss in relation to her previous life that she had not chosen to give up, and this appeared to slow her adjustment to her new circumstances, “everyday I have to get used to that feeling of isolation. I'm still getting my head round the pleasure of having a view and being able to be creative in the right environment... I suppose I'm in my life-phase where I'm in search for the real meaning of life, whatever that is in myself, to get my balance.” During her interview Jana
commented on what she had been discussing and appeared surprised by how much her concerns had changed. “It’s funny how everything keeps coming back to emotions, far more than money. I was driven by money when I was in the city, my only guilt is that I’m not making stacks of money”. Jana’s adjustment to her new life suggests that the process is assisted if the new lifestyle is wanted, but also that learning to value it takes time. In addition, it appears that devaluing the previous life aids adjustment.

For participants who had experienced involuntary career change multiple times adjustment seemed to be harder each time. Susie described the shock of facing redundancy for a second time and the negative implications this has

“I think it was worse the second time because you never think it’s going to happen again. You think you’ve done it before, but it was another knock, another set back...you think it’s your fault, what have you done for it to happen twice”. Jemma also described the extra effort required to cope each time she had to change her career as a result of illness (see page 241).

Forced career change often appeared to result in sudden changes in life circumstances. However, following job loss the pace at which change occurred was perceived as more gradual, this shift from a sudden complete change to more gradual change appeared to be a surprise and something that participants adapted to, “I used to think in terms of extreme change but ...change tends to be incremental, you don’t tend to say I’m going to be completely different tomorrow, you tend to do lots of little things over a long period” (Adrian). Typically, a pragmatic approach was taken when evaluating this outcome in comparison to expectations, “It’s good enough, I may not be stepping into this huge golden vision but my life’s OK”. Caitlin reflected on how she had attempted to ease the transition out of her working life during redundancy, but had found that this was unnecessary, “I went back into the office for two weeks following redundancy to tidy up loose ends and also because I knew I couldn’t go from one day having all that responsibility ...and then the next day you were meant to go out for lunch with friends. But when I left I had no worries, I shouldn’t have worried at all, I had a ball, it was wonderful”. In contrast, Jackie felt the need to maintain a sense of continuity between her previous work in an office with her new career working predominantly from home “[My husband] used to say
'Why are you tarted up?' I said 'This is my job, I wouldn't go to work wearing slippers and...just because I'm working from home, same thing.' I felt better because I felt I was going to work'.

The differences in the pace with which participants adjusted to their new life and the degree to which they were willing to embrace the differences appeared to depend on personal characteristics relating to their openness to experience and their positive perception of risk. Individuals who exhibited these characteristics appeared to accept and adjust to what were perceived as progressively bigger challenges. For example, Casey described the development of his acceptance of risk as a result of his experiences of change, "Taking I.T. work now would be treading water in my life and I'd rather just go for it and get on with something bigger and more exciting...I have a different attitude to failure now. Failure just inspires me to want to succeed rather than stop. It's the opportunity to learn, I guess, failure. I've always been up for trying to do things... 'I'm much more do or die now rather than do and be a bit safe and not really do and just regret it'.

Following redundancy participants appeared to revaluate their lives and then adjust to this new level of awareness. Both Jana and Oliver described needing time to provide a sense of perspective on their lives, "I was offered a couple of jobs almost instantly but they didn't feel right and I thought 'No, I need to stand back from all this and actually assess what I want’ (Jana) and ‘It did require a long period of time of me being out of work to look at it with fresh eyes’ (Oliver). It appears that time is required to reduce the influences of their previous career and their redundancy, and to discover their own subjective values. Jana described the challenges and losses associated with redundancy as contributing to self-awareness and acting as a motivating force to achieve what is personally meaningful, ‘If there's one thing redundancy does for you, it makes you discover yourself, and what you really want in life, you may not necessarily get it but you'll have a damn good try at getting there’. This supports Hall’s work (cited in Hall & Chandler, 2005 p. 167) on unemployment that suggests that when people have ‘reached bottom’ they were able to discern their true calling.
Participants had to come to terms with the loss of their professional identity resulting from enforced career change, Jana described her experiences of losing a professional identity that had been a significant component of her self-concept, "All the things that made up me, ... it's quite frightening, it's quite liberating, it's quite inspiring to have that completely stripped away because all you are left with is you, and in some ways it's quite terrifying particularly when so much has gone into work you don't actually know who is left after all that's been stripped away." Participants described various challenges adjusting to their new working identities. Jana described threats to her self-evaluation from her own perception of the reduced importance of her new career and from reduced social validation, "I struggled with it mentally, the thought of being a serious, heavy-hitting investment banker to girlie handbags. I didn't want to talk about my new career to anybody at first at all, it took me a long time to get over that, and I know some people in the city still think it's a joke." Andy, who had to give up being a professional golfer and became an IT consultant, described feeling resigned to his circumstances and gradually becoming accustomed to a new identity that he did not want or like, this was accompanied by frustration and anger. "I went from this fit, healthy person who was always out in the sun, was always eating the best food, the best of everything to someone who was housebound, deskbound, slave. Couldn't help but be pissed off... After a while you get used to it and find your level".

Adjustment to a new life appeared to be assisted by having goals that were subjectively meaningful and a notion that they may be achievable. Adrian compared two experiences of involuntary career change, the first when he had had no idea of what to do next and the second when he had a dream of pursuing his interest in writing. "They were two very different periods of my life. That [the first redundancy] was 'What the fuck do I do now?' And that [the second redundancy] was very much a new beginning, when I left there I had a dream, I had an ambition, and even if you never fulfil your dreams it's nice to be able to say 'I want to do that'". Initially, it therefore appears that whether these goals are clearly defined, or idealised possible selves they contribute towards adjustment. Caitlin described the dilemma she faced as a result of not being able to clearly define a new career from her awareness of her skills and values "How could you turn those skills into something that would be a much more pleasurable experience, and then on the other hand I've got this pull because it's what I know, it pulls the money in, so I'm really
totally torn down the middle and I wish I could put my finger on what the other thing was”.

Awareness and acceptance of the conditions and the challenge that have been taken on in a new career appear to assist adjustment. Oliver said that he had accepted a salary decrease because he wanted the challenge of a new job in a new industry. He also accepted that there was “a need to recognise from the outset that a different industry meant a different working style”. Transferring skills where possible also appeared to aid adjustment, Susie described using skills she had gained from performing in helping her cope with the challenges she faced at college, “We had to do presentations to a whole tutor group which made me shake with fear at the thought of doing it, but once I was actually doing it I pulled on the skills from when I was dancing on stage... Overcoming a stumbling block in my life, my personal life as well as my working life”. Accomplishing challenges and learning from them was described as rewarding and providing the motivation for future progress “I got inspiration from breakthroughs in my own learning because you just know nothing basically.” (Casey)

In summary, the process of adjustment to involuntary career change appeared to be an extended process. In some cases, the turmoil and the time for contemplation following job loss led to suppressed issues surfacing, therefore adding to the matters that needed to be made sense of, and contributing to further negative affect, thus reducing effective coping strategies. In contrast to individuals who had only experienced involuntary career change on one occasion who did not accept personal responsibility for their situation, individuals who experienced multiple involuntary job losses appeared to make self-attributions, thus increasing negative affect. The process of adjustment appeared to be assisted by having subjective goals, using existing skills and experience, and having personal characteristics of openness to experience and acceptance of risk. However, adjustment to a new situation appeared to take time even when these factors were present. If these factors were not present then the individual appeared to feel their situation was a compromise, this was adjusted to but it was accompanied with feelings of frustration, anger and resignation.
6.4.2.4 Top View Four: ‘This had positive effects of how I felt about myself’.
The period participants associated with feeling most negative about themselves was
directly following the job loss. Susie described her feelings during this time,
“It took the carpet from under my feet and it really took away all my self-esteem and
security in one fell swoop, and it was ‘Why me? What did I do wrong?’”
These negative feelings appeared to be related to a lack of perceived control, not
being able to find a justifiable reason to account for their change, and a sense of
rejection and loss. Susie’s description of redundancy above contrasted to another
experience of redundancy when her employer had offered her an alternative position,
on this occasion she “still felt valued”. Negative feelings were perceived as being
intensified if the involuntary change event occurred simultaneously with other
change in the individual’s life, such as the breakdown of a relationship or the loss of
their home, (Adrian, Susie).

The degree of perceived control experienced by participants appeared to relate to
how they felt about themselves. Although Caitlin experienced redundancy she
thought the change would be beneficial, and consequently this made her feel in
control of events, “I probably felt in control because I just felt it was the right thing
for me so I didn’t actually feel negatively about it, and because I didn’t feel
negatively about it I felt I was completely in control, it’s like one big circle”.
Perceived control appears to be linked to self-confidence, having a purpose, and
achieving a satisfactory identity. Lack of control on the other hand, appears to relate
to feelings of reduced progress, frustration and dissatisfaction with identity. Jemma
described the consequences of her illness, including enforced career change, as
having a number of negative consequences, “I wouldn’t say I’m ambitious but I like
moving on, I like change, I like learning and that’s one of the big frustrations I’ve
had. It’s not just my identity ‘I am a physiotherapist healer’ rather than a typist, it’s
the fact that I like changing and learning and I’m held back from that, and that’s not
my choice.”

The loss of a career that was valued appeared to have a number of negative
consequences on how individuals felt about themselves. Andy described the changes
he had experienced, “My personality changed, my physical... everything about me
changed when I left playing golf. My mental state I think changed – anger,
frustration...The physical impact on me in the last 7/8 years has been phenomenal, stress levels, exercise, physical fitness, it all suffers”. For Matt who experienced a period of unemployment, the loss of a work setting in which he could succeed led to self-doubt and loss of confidence. He also felt this was exacerbated by the negative reaction of his wife.

Commitments to others appeared to be significant in terms of whether the involuntary change experience made the individual feel positively about themselves. Participants with dependents, particularly sole bread-winners, described the loss of earnings associated with redundancy as making them feel that they had failed in their responsibilities to provide. “My feelings are not really important actually, it’s the feeling about my wife and children, and the structure they have. You carry a terrible burden as the main money earner to keep the family together, and I think one of the things that breaks families up is redundancy, because of the lack of salary” (Matt). Perceived constraints appear to contribute to participants feeling unfulfilled. Andy described the tension he felt between the emotional and financial needs of his family “What [my wife] and the kids need me to do is to be around a lot but what our bank balance needs is for me to work a lot, the trauma of that decision is just staggering. So what do you do?” He acknowledged that he has some personal responsibility for not overcoming these obstacles, “Do I think I’ve missed my calling? ...Yes... What holds me back? ...It’s that cheque every three months for school. Part of me wishes it wasn’t so obligatory, it would allow me the opportunity to go for it, but there’s that little element of “Do you want to risk it all?” The fear of potential losses and responsibility for dependents appear to prevent him from progressing.

Participants such as Susie, Casey, and Jemma who felt they had taken risks described feeling more positive about themselves and more fulfilled in their new careers than those who did not take risks, such as Jackie and Andy. Susie was motivated by wanting to pursue a subjective career, “Searching from within to find something that I wanted to do, that I was interested in, that I had knowledge in, that I liked. And getting out of that trap of not being happy at work, if you’ve got to work for a long time you’ve got to be happy.” She identified the need for self-confidence and a proactive approach in accepting risk and pursuing her goals, “Risky but I had the confidence to know that I would be successful at it if I really wanted to do so I could
make it work. I was determined to make it work for me. So I gained a lot of experience, confidence and my self-esteem improved because of going back to college. I think I matured as well, I was doing what I wanted to do. Then it was just down to me to push myself to do it”.

Caitlin and Oliver had breaks from work following redundancy, they both described this as a time when, instead of work being a priority in their life, they were able to focus on themselves. In a grid construct Caitlin described this as “Pleasurable personally (liberating)”. In her interview she described feeling that she wanted to achieve a better work-life balance in her future career, and particularly time for a partner, a value she associated with her age. Oliver discussed a “change in control over aspects of my life”. A consequence of this was that he was able to have a more balanced life and to define his identity from a wider range of roles, not just his professional identity, “the business card is only a part of who I am. Looking at work differently allowed me to free-up time elsewhere in my life”. A break from work was also regarded as beneficial in terms of commitment to new values, and feeling rejuvenated in terms of energy, clarity and enthusiasm. However, participants felt that a time-limit of approximately six months was acceptable for such a break, and that some degree of control as to when it would end, as well as sufficient funds were necessary to make it beneficial.

Some participants described the process of benefit-finding in the challenges they had endured as a result of involuntary career change. For example, Jana described the development of personal characteristics of flexibility, openness to experience and adaptability in response to her change experiences, “that’s the wonderful thing about redundancy and what it does to you, it actually doesn’t make you proud anymore, if I had to go and work at Tesco I’d be cross because I think it would be a shame that I’d waste talents I have in other directions but by the same token, if I needed to pay the bills I’d go and do it... I think I’m more open, I think I was quite closeted”. If the participant’s new career was considered an improvement on their previous job this was interpreted as personal progress and “a huge sense of achievement” (Susie). Some participants found careers that they felt were much more suited to their values and their identity, this appeared to have positive effects on how they felt about themselves. Casey described this, “It’s much more ‘me’, it’s much more relaxed and
laidback and fun. It's also hard physical work that made me fit and strong...there was a sense of satisfaction and pride as well in what we'd done. It was a period of learning and I just love learning new things so it was great.”

As discussed earlier the majority of participants did not feel social stigma associated with their involuntary career change. For those who were made redundant the reasons provided were that it was a common occurrence in the contemporary workplace and that it was the consequence of a business-based decision rather than a personal one. To maintain their self-esteem participants also appeared to make upward social comparisons with people they respected who had also been made redundant. Matt was the only participant who discussed feeling stigma and this appeared to result from the impact on his family, “People say there’s no stigma in being out of work these days, well there is, you can’t afford to do some of the things you were doing in groups before, you have to cut down...and that affects every member of your family, and I think that’s the hardest thing to deal with”.

In summary, the initial period following job loss was associated with feeling negative about the self. Feelings of failure, and of rejection in the case of redundancy, were particularly associated with self-doubt. A lack of control was also associated with negative feelings about the self, in particular, a lack of progress, frustration and dissatisfaction with identity. This appeared to occur after job loss and also in response to perceived contextual constraints. Negative feelings about the self also appeared to be precipitated by the loss of a job that was positively valued and related to self-esteem. Feeling positive about the self appeared to result from having time to think about the self, which led to renewed energy and clarity about values that in turn led to subjective goal-setting. Acting on these goals was associated with acceptance of risk that derived from confidence, being proactive and determined. This behaviour was also associated with positive feelings about the self. Finally, outcomes of the involuntary career change experience that were associated with feeling positive about the self were personal growth and having new careers that were valued.
6.5 DISCUSSION
Discussion of the findings is arranged in four sections, each section relates to an area that appears to have a significant influence on the involuntary career change experiences of participants. The first area to be discussed relates to the role of emotion. The negative affect in voluntary career change appears to have wide-ranging implications that have the potential to influence evaluations of the change experience and its outcomes. The subsequent three sections relate to the influence of perceived control, personal characteristics, and identity and values respectively.

6.5.1 The Role of Emotion in Experiences of Involuntary Career Change
The findings of this study indicate the significant effect of emotion on the experience of involuntary career change, thus confirming Weick’s (1995; 1999) suggestion of its impact on sensemaking following an unpredictable event such as job loss. Taylor’s (1983) three-stage model of adjustment to a threatening event, introduced in section 6.2.1, involving the search for meaning in the experience, attempts to regain mastery of one’s life, and finally, attempts to enhance self-esteem, typically manifested in downward social comparison, appears to offer a simplified and limited description of the complex and varied experiences described by participants. A process-orientated approach to the role of emotions in sensemaking is taken here to provide a more comprehensive account of the transition experiences in involuntary career change.

The extreme negative response to involuntary career change described by the majority of participants did not appear to be mediated by whether the individual expected the precipitating event or not. This confirms Kasl’s (1979) finding that the period of anticipation can be as threatening as the event of redundancy itself. Uncertainty about the future seemed to contribute to negative affect at this stage, and the ambiguity of the situation appeared to prevent planning. Once the job loss occurred, the individual’s assumptions of control, meaning and self-worth were further challenged. As Taylor suggests, meaning for the event is sought. In this study the events were attributed to external causes. Lack of personal responsibility appeared to reduce the threat to identity, preventing participants feeling stigmatised. However, it did not resolve the common query of why they had personally been affected in this way. Since there generally were no reasons found for this, the search for meaning that had personal relevance was unresolved. This appeared to contribute
to a sense of ambiguity and prevented meaning being made of the event. Only temporal distance from the job loss was described as reducing the need for an answer to this question and the associated negative affect diminishing.

It appeared that repeated exposure to the challenges of involuntary job loss did not accustom individuals to the negative emotions experienced. Indeed it seemed to prompt earlier memories of similar experiences, thus strengthening the negative impact making each time progressively more challenging to cope with. The expectation that learning from change experiences would assist in coping with future change is therefore confounded when emotions are taken into consideration. This finding also refutes Chan's (1977) proposition that people with high self-esteem have a past history of coping successfully with stress and are therefore likely to be impervious to the ego-threatening nature of many stressors. Instead it seems that any learning from similar previous experiences is outweighed by a sense of having reduced emotional resources to deal with the challenges again. Participants who had experienced job loss on only one occasion did not appear to be aware of their emotional vulnerability in relation to future involuntary career change. They only discussed how their new attributes, such as greater flexibility and risk acceptance, would assist them in relation to potential future change, they did not discuss how they would cope with negative affect. This suggests that individuals who have experienced involuntary career change once are likely to anticipate feeling more competent because of their acquired competencies, although in actuality these skills do not appear to assist emotional adjustment, and negative reactions to this type of change appear inevitable. However, if the individual faces future voluntary change it would be expected that their competencies would benefit in a similar way to those described by participants in Chapter Five.

The responses of participants who had lost a career they valued were similar to those proposed in transitional models of loss and grieving, although denial was not described in this study. Negative affect endured for extended periods if certain variables were present. These variables included: the individual having other emotionally demanding issues to cope with resulting from contemplation during this time; other negative change (e.g., relationship breakdown) occurring in their life simultaneously; monetary strain particularly if they had sole financial responsibility
for dependents; a continued sense of loss; the lack of a personally meaningful goal providing future direction, purpose and the potential for a valued identity; and finally, the lack of a work setting for personal and social validation.

In contrast, a minority of participants described positive affective responses to redundancy if their previous work situation had been negative and if they had expectations that their future situation would be an improvement. The various emotions displayed by participants were found to have cognitive implications, for example, in terms of self-confidence and self-efficacy, risk acceptance, assessment of opportunities and constraints, perceptions of occupational choice, motivation and evaluations of the future. In turn, these appeared to affect behaviour, for example, in terms of the amount and kind of exploration participants engaged in, the amount and kind of goal-setting activities they attempted, and the coping strategies they employed.

In the majority of cases, attempts to regain mastery occurred once powerful negative affect had subsided. This involved reframing events in positive terms, and looking forward, viewing their position as an opportunity. It appeared that this could not be accomplished while the individual was dealing with negative affect because it requires a problem-solving rather than an emotional coping strategy. That is, the individual needs to refocus from the past to the future, and they need to be aware of their values to enable goal-setting: a process of self-discovery that was described as taking time and requiring emotional stability. This finding is in accordance with a substantial body of research that suggests a focus on the future is fundamental to well-being and positive functioning (Kahana & Kahana, 1983; Kazakina, 1999; Wessman & Ricks, 1966; Wills, Sandy & Yaeger, 2001). Zaleski, Cycon and Kurc (2001), noted that a future time perspective, and especially possession of long-term goals, positively correlated with virtually all aspects of well-being, including a sense of having a meaningful life, social self-efficacy, realism and persistence. These findings indicate that once the implications of the involuntary event were perceived as desirable then a perceived sense of control was reasserted and participants described feelings of hope associated with a sense of progress. Other variables that appeared to assist in individuals interpreting their situation as an opportunity included de-valuing aspects of their past career or lifestyle that they had lost;
optimistically appraising opportunities and constraints, feeling self-confident and self-efficacious, being proactive, and having social support. Individuals who did not reframe in this way or felt unable to enact their goals described feelings of resignation and compromise that were associated with perceived stagnation. Psychological adjustment in these cases appeared to involve adapting to a particular level of satisfaction, described in the concept of the ‘satisfaction treadmill’ (Kahneman, 1999), although this was accompanied by continued negative affect such as frustration and helplessness. These findings support research that suggests an active approach to coping is associated with less concurrent distress and fewer relevant problems in the future, whereas avoidance coping strategies are associated with greater concurrent and future distress (Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996).

Taylor’s suggestion that individuals attempt to enhance self-esteem by downward social comparison was not found in this study. Instead several individuals described rationalising their situation and maintaining their self-esteem by making upward social comparisons with individuals they admired who had also experienced involuntary career change. Evaluation of their new career appeared to be more positive if it was subjectively valued, if they felt in control of the pace of change, if it was considered an improvement on their previous career, if they perceived an identity fit, if they had put personal effort into achieving it, and if it involved developing new skills and opportunities.

In retrospect the majority of participants regarded the experience of involuntary career change as an emotional roller coaster. While the extreme negative emotions felt in the initial stages of transition were not forgotten benefit-finding was also reported, thus supporting the finding of Tedeschi and colleagues (1993). The benefits described can be categorised into a three main themes. The first is the development of personal characteristics including self-awareness, tolerance and empathy. The second is satisfaction with a career based on subjective values and the enhanced fit with self-identity. The final theme relates to the strengthening of relationships with colleagues, friends and family that were found to result from a new career and/or a lifestyle that was perceived to be an improvement.
In conclusion, the powerful influence of negative emotions during involuntary career change is clear in the findings of this study. It appears that only time diminishes the negative affect resulting from the initial response to job loss. However, the example of individuals who had experienced multiple enforced career changes suggests that the emotional effort of coping in such a scenario reduces psychological resources long-term. At a point in the career transition when negative affect reduced then a shift in perspective seemed possible that involved a re-orientation from focusing inwards on the self to outwards on the situation, and from focusing on losses in the past to opportunities in the future. This new perspective appeared to be associated with positive emotions such as feeling in control and having a sense of progress. However, if the focus remained on the self and in the past then negative emotions appeared to continue including frustration and lack of fulfilment.

6.5.2 Perceived Control
The loss of control involved in involuntary career change appeared to be perceived extremely negatively by thirty-somethings. The desire by many participants to move to a self-employed position following redundancy illustrates the attempt to reassert control and suggests the high level of perceived control that has been challenged. The ambiguity of the situation that hinders sensemaking and leads to difficulties in rationalising why they have personally been affected appears to contribute to a continued a sense of being out of control after the job loss. Feelings of helplessness and distress also appear to be exacerbated by the loss of an established career and/or way of life that was valued. Some participants were able to reassert a sense of control in their lives after experiencing involuntary job loss, the ways this was achieved are discussed in this section.

There appears to be a reciprocal relationship between the emotion felt towards an event and the sense of perceived control over it. It has been seen that reframing involuntary career change in positive terms increases perceived control. This sense of control has cognitive, affective and behavioural implications that appears to contribute to further positive emotions. Therefore perceiving control seems to act as a buffer against the potential negative affect associated with enforced change. In contrast a lack of perceived control is associated with negative affect and the implications of this were found to result in feelings of compromise and resignation.
The only benefit of not feeling in control of events was in identity terms, where perceived lack of responsibility for the situation appeared to mitigate any sense of stigma. Therefore, emotion appears to be a key influence affecting the cognitive appraisal of perceived control in a situation.

The shift in perception towards one of perceived control for individuals who were able to reframe had numerous benefits. For example, instead of having the pace of change imposed on them they felt able to influence it, thus making the environment appear more predictable and assisting their process of adaptation. Adequate financial resources and a self-defined period of time off work appeared to contribute to this. Slower paced change in incremental stages was associated with continuity of behaviour that was considered reassuring and enhanced confidence levels. It was also associated with time to explore various options. In addition, perceived control was associated with a sense of having a wider range of opportunities available compared to when they had not felt in control. This period of exploration, combined with perceived autonomy over decision-making and goal-setting, increased the likelihood of the individual finding a new career that was subjectively satisfying and appropriate to their existing skills and abilities. The outcome was then perceived in terms of fulfilment and progress.

Individuals who did not reframe their experience in positive terms perceived a lack of control due either to contextual factors or to aspects of their character that they perceived as constraints preventing them from becoming fulfilled. The main contextual barrier was considered to be inadequate financial resources, particularly for those with dependents who were sole-breadwinners. This was felt to limit opportunities by increasing the urgency for decisions to be made and for a new career to be taken to restore income. It was also associated with increased stress that appeared to derive from worry about survival, a sense of failure in not meeting the perceived expectations from self and others, not fulfilling the role of provider, and the potential implications for changes to lifestyle, particularly for others rather than for self. Some participants perceived their dependents as a constraint to fulfilling personal goals, this seemed to stem from a sense of not wanting to put them at risk. It appeared that the frustration felt as a consequence was predominantly directed at
the family rather than at the self, this reduced personal responsibility for their unsatisfactory position, thus maintaining self-esteem and reducing identity threat.

Individuals who predominantly favoured security appeared to pursue this at the expense of exploring other options of potential interest, thus limiting their opportunities to find fulfilment. This risk-averse behaviour also appeared to result in frustration, although, in this scenario, it was directed at the self. It appeared that even if the goal of security was achieved frustration was experienced because other needs relating to personal development and progress had not been fulfilled. Frustration appeared to be accompanied by a lack of perceived control over their personal characteristics. Expectations of how they would react in the future appeared to be based on self-awareness and on their responses in previous situations, resulting in a sense of resignation that this is how they were, and feelings of low self-worth and depression. Whatever the predominant sources of low perceived control, individuals did appear to consider their new career a compromise and focus on emotion-focused coping strategies rather than problem-focused forms of coping, as suggested by earlier research discussed in section 6.2.3.

In brief, the findings highlight the link between control and affect, and suggest the importance, not of actual control but of perceived control in affecting how the career change is experienced. If the situation is reframed in positive terms as an opportunity then this is associated with perceived control, and appears to lead to further positive affect. The ability to reframe the situation appeared to be one of a number of aspects of the change experience that was influenced by personal characteristics, other aspects are discussed in the following section.

6.5.3 Personal Characteristics

Individuals in similar circumstances initially appeared to appraise their opportunities and constraints in a similar way, for example, acknowledging their responsibility to their dependents. However, how they then interpret the potential impact of these factors on their career change appeared to vary significantly. Acceptance of risk appears to be the critical variable contributing to whether a situation is perceived as an opportunity, thus leading to the positive implications of perceived control. The decision-making process involved in taking risks appears to involve weighing-up the
pros and cons. Theoretically, this reflects the conceptualisation of decision-making as a decisional "balance sheet" (Janis & Mann, 1977) of comparative gains and losses. Decisional balance represents the cognitive and motivational aspects of an individual’s decision to change behaviour. Since risk involves projection into the future, these judgments involve expectations rather than reality: pros are anticipated gains and cons are potential losses. Differences in subjective interpretations of similar circumstances appears to result from individuals who accept risk focusing on potential future benefits and those who do not take risks focusing on the possible losses of what they have.

Focusing on the future with optimism appears to be linked to apparently high levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy. This seems to be enhanced by previous successes, being open to experiences, having developed subjectively meaningful goals, and feeling emotional stable. In contrast, for individuals who are not risk takers notions of future progress and self-fulfilment appear to be obstructed by low self-confidence, low perceived control, emotionally-focused coping strategies, and dominant values relating to emotional needs such as security, and reduced exploration of options. For such individuals possible selves did not appear to be motivating constructs, instead they served as a negative source of comparison with their current situation that provoked distress. This is in accordance with the finding linking dejection-related emotions and ‘actual–ideal’ self-discrepancies described in section 3.2.2.

The development of personal characteristics associated with risk-taking was apparent in this study. The process by which this seems to occur involves outcomes of risk-taking being positively evaluated by means of benefit-finding, as outlined in section 6.2.1. The benefits, in terms of personal characteristics, associated with involuntary career change experiences include the development of personal growth, such as self-awareness, tolerance and empathy. These were associated with the hardships experienced and were distinct from those aspects of personal growth discussed by individuals who had experienced voluntary career change. Other developments in personal characteristics viewed as benefits however, were the same as those described by voluntary career changers, these were attitudes relating to adjustment to change such as flexibility and openness to experience. Positive evaluation of
outcomes of risk-taking by benefit-finding appears to reinforce cognitive acceptance for further risk-taking, identified in intentions to take risks in the future or evident in on-going behaviour perceived as involving risk. These findings therefore suggest that some individuals feel their personal characteristics are altered as a consequence of contending with challenging events, and that personal characteristics are potentially influential factors in the process of benefit-finding during an aversive experience such as involuntary job loss.

This section therefore identifies the personal characteristics considered to be associated with the ability to reframe the involuntary job loss in positive terms. Firstly, acceptance of risk in the appraisal of a situation is proposed as being key in whether reframing occurs. The personal characteristics on which acceptance of risk appears to be predicated are confidence, self-efficacy and openness to experiences, these may be inherent and/or enhanced by benefit-finding in previous experiences.

6.5.4 Identity Issues
The expectation that individuals experiencing involuntary change in their professional lives may have identity concerns about the perceived self (Schon, 1995) and self-identity (Weick, 1995; 1999) appeared to be validated in the early period following job loss. Threats to self-definition seemed to be a particular issue for individuals in their thirties, particularly if they had lost a career that significantly contributed to their identity, provided a source of status and was highly valued. For individuals experiencing redundancy, feelings of rejection by the employer appeared to prompt threats to self-identity, and self-evaluation was characterised by failure and self-doubt. As discussed in section 6.5.1, the lack of perceived control over events appeared to prevent the threat of social stigma deriving directly from their job loss. However, other identity threats indirectly associated with their job loss were apparent. For instance, the negative impact of job loss on an individual’s dependents appeared to contribute to feelings of failure as a provider, and if family support for the individual made redundant was limited, this seemed to reduce their status within their domestic setting and have deleterious consequences for their self-esteem. This finding contradicts Linville’s (1985; 1987) suggestion that individuals with high self-complexity adapt better to adversity because they are less likely to suffer global effects on self-representation. Instead the negative consequences of job loss
appeared to have a wide-ranging impact on both professional and non-work roles. At this time social support from colleagues and family members appeared vital for restoring self-worth and maintaining a sense of personal continuity.

Whether individuals experience a long-term negative impact on their identity appears to depend on whether their new professional identity is perceived as an improvement compared to their previous one. A number of factors appear to hamper the positive evaluation of a new identity. These are if individuals highly value their previous professional identity, if they experience a sustained period of unemployment (over approximately six months), if they are unable to fulfil other roles such as providing for their dependents, if their new career is not valued, or if they feel the fit between their identity and their new profession is worse than before.

Enforced job loss was associated with the stripping away of everything that was known, leaving just the core self. This was described as revealing, liberating, and associated with a new sense of openness to experiences. Whether the individual was receptive to a process of rejuvenation having this new self-knowledge appears to be depend on whether they view the future optimistically, and are able to assess their prospective identity as potentially being an improvement on their past identity. There appeared to be two components to this being achieved, the first way in which the process of evaluating a new professional identity in positive terms appears to be assisted was by the previous identity being rated negatively. For example, when a conferred identity is replaced by a new identity representing values that are subjectively meaningful. The need for the future identity to be based on subjective values is the second way in which individuals appear to view it positively. The findings illustrate that the opportunities for individuals experiencing involuntary career change to discover and decide on the values on which to base their future career are often reduced. Time and financial resources to contemplate, develop self-awareness and experience alternative lifestyle options were found to assist the process.

The two key values shaping the future career decisions of participants in this study were independence from employers and improved work-life balance. Improved work-life balance was important for participants who felt they had predominantly
defined themselves by their professional identity prior to their enforced career change. They described achieving career success by long working hours and high involvement in work goals, with minimal involvement in non-work roles. This was described as being unsatisfying both at the time and in retrospect, their involuntary change was considered an opportunity to change their lives to reflect other values that they expected to be more satisfying. Having more time to focus on personal relationships was a goal identified by two female participants, and was a value they associated with their age. This finding supports Bardwick’s (1980) proposal that significant relationships become of paramount importance to women at a certain life stage. As such the process of involuntary career change appears to be responsible for increasing cognitive complexity in some individuals.

Finally, individuals who perceived their new professional identity in positive terms appeared to retrospectively focus on aspects of continuity. This appeared to provide reassurance that despite all the changes forced upon them and early expectations of the global effects of this change, they had a sense of permanence in their core identity.

In summary, the main threats to identity in involuntary career change appear to derive firstly from the threats to self-evaluation as the result of feelings of failure, and secondly, from the loss of a valued past identity, an issue of particular relevance in the thirties when the losses may be perceived as substantial in terms of the investments made, the status achieved, the high level of skills learnt, and the sense of familiarity. Threats from the social context however, appear limited, stigma does not appear to be a concern, although the views and hence the support of family members do seem crucial in relation to non-work as well as occupational aspects of identity. Achieving a new occupational identity that is evaluated highly appears necessary for successful adjustment. This positive evaluation appears to be assisted by de-valuing the previous occupational identity, and in the new career fulfilling subjective values (particularly independence from employers and an improved work-life balance), and perceiving continuity of identity.
6.6 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The researcher became aware of an issue concerning the definitions of voluntary and involuntary career change when listening to the experiences of a participant in this study. Andy felt he was forced to leave his job as a professional golfer because his income was insufficient for his family needs. In the previous study, Paul cited the main reason for leaving his job as a paramedic as an inability to survive on the salary; however he interpreted his change as being voluntary. This highlights the influence of perceptions on change experiences that is discussed in relation to the reframing of the involuntary career event in this study. Objectively the inclusion of these participant’s experiences in the respective studies may be considered to not wholly represent the voluntary and involuntary career change experience. However, from a phenomenological perspective they are justified. Paul felt he chose to change career and Andy did not, the factors influencing these different views of similar circumstances are discussed in each of the chapters. The voluntary/involuntary nature of the change experience for the remaining participants in each study was less ambiguous.

Two minor problems were encountered in relation to the interview procedure. During the pilot study, it was found that individuals had difficulty thinking of an ‘insignificant change event’. Something that was insignificant was not considered memorable. The researcher further defined the meaning of an insignificant change event as one that had not had any impact on them personally in terms of the way they felt or behaved, but may have been perceived as significant by others which stimulated them to think of such an event. As a preventative measure in the actual study, participants were emailed before their interview with a list of the event types to be discussed and this definition of insignificant was provided, thus enabling them to prepare. Secondly, while the majority of participants found the grid an engaging tool as suggested by Harri-Augustein (1978), one participant initially described a sense of frustration with its format, feeling that it restricted his narrative. In response the researcher gave him the opportunity to choose his own triads from early on in the interview thus providing him with greater flexibility in the way he told his story.

A possible criticism that could be levelled at the researcher in this study is that the repertory grids were not calculated and interpreted in the presence of the
interviewees. There were two reasons for this decision. The first reason was that this process demanded an excessive time commitment on the part of participants. The second reason was that this practise is derived from the use of the repertory grid as a counselling tool, and it was not considered necessary for the purposes of this research. However, the participants were sent feedback on the findings derived from their grids, both for their interest and for the purposes of ensuring the trustworthiness of the interpretations.

Finally, using the repertory grid generated copious amounts of data, and as in the previous study, a tension was felt in adequately portraying detailed analysis of individual stories and providing an overview of the involuntary career change experience for thirty-somethings.

6.7 REFLECTION

Researching the area of involuntary career change experiences was found to offer a number of particular challenges. For instance, sourcing participants for this study was more difficult than for Study One. A number of possible reasons for this were considered. Firstly, perhaps due to the negative associations linked with involuntary career change people were unwilling to discuss their experiences. Secondly, it is thought likely that individuals forced to change career were satisfied with the job they had and will then choose to find another in the same field, therefore, not experiencing a complex career change, a criteria for this research. A final possible reason was revealed in the comments of some participants who described only feeling able to participate in the study when they had reached a certain point in their transition, where they felt they had a sense of direction and a professional identity they felt comfortable with.

Another challenge that related to the negative connotations associated with involuntary job loss was the perceived need for sensitivity when interacting with participants. Attempts were made to create a supportive and non-judgemental interview environment. These included building rapport with the participants and wording the introduction to the study and the questions in a neutral manner. Two male participants made some defensive comments at the beginning of their interview, suggesting the vulnerability they felt in discussing their perceived feelings of failure.
and loss. However, as the interview progressed they appeared to become more relaxed and less guarded. Due to the nature of the subject matter the role of impression management was considered in attempts to preserve self-esteem. While it is impossible to assess what participants did not discuss it was felt that impression management was limited since the interviews encompassed descriptions of extremes of emotion, including suicidal feelings, depression and severe family disharmony.

The interviews were an intervention in participant’s sensemaking processes, prompting them to provide in-depth descriptions of their careers. At the end of the majority of interviews, participants commented that they had found it a thought-provoking and positive exercise that had promoted a deeper understanding of their experiences. Using the repertory grid was found to encourage connections to be made between experiences, suggesting that verbalising their experiences and also comparing events in a systematic way contributed to their sensemaking processes. Participants also appeared to appreciate the transparent nature of the grid and were intrigued by its power at eliciting connections. This aspect of the grid therefore seemed to engage the individual and also appeared to promote trust in the researcher. With the assistance of the researcher they were able to understand the meanings reflected in the grid, thus emphasising their participation and inclusion in the product of knowledge. Towards the end of the interview participants were asked to choose their own triads of cards, this was thought to encourage a sense of control in relation to what they were discussing, and further elicit what was personally meaningful. The positive comments received in relation to the use of the repertory grid provide support for its therapeutic application and potential benefits as a tool in career counselling.

Finally, the apparently significant positive impact of cognitively reframing the involuntary career change event generates a personal interest in counselling approaches focusing on cognitive behavioural techniques in assisting involuntary career transition. The potential contribution of these findings to such an approach is identified as an area for future research. However, within the parameters of this research further understanding of the factors that contribute to positive evaluations of the change process provide the focus for the next study.
6.8 CONCLUSION

The findings highlight the significant role of emotion in the experience of involuntary career change, an understanding made possible by the qualitative techniques employed. The influence of powerful negative emotions that occur either directly after, or soon after the job loss appears to differentiate the involuntary career change experience from the voluntary career change experience. These emotions appear to influence cognitions, such as perceived control, that in turn affect behaviours, such as the coping strategies employed, thus affecting how the career change is ultimately evaluated.

It also appears that the negative emotions experienced in response to involuntary career change mitigate the benefits of learning in adapting to future involuntary career change. Although negative affect appears to be an inevitable part of the involuntary career change experience, which worsens with progressive exposure, a number of factors are identified that appear to reduce its intensity. In the case of redundancy, it appears that communication from the employer to reduce uncertainty would assist in reducing the ambiguity of the situation, thus assisting sensemaking and reducing feelings of confusion. In addition, social support, particularly from colleagues appears to be a buffer against identity threats.

The findings suggest the importance of reframing the situation from one that is perceived as negative and uncontrolled to one that is viewed as a wanted opportunity, which in turn appears to lead to perceived control. This interpretation process appears to be influenced by context to some degree, with limited financial resources and dependents being the main factors that reduce the likelihood of reframing. However, not all individuals were found to perceive these factors as constraints, suggesting that fundamentally whether a situation is viewed as an opportunity or not is a matter of perception. This perception appears to be affected by an individual's attitude to risk that in turn appears to be affected by their temporal orientation and their weighing up of anticipated future gains and potential losses of what they currently have.
Previous experience appears to influence the weighing process. For instance, individuals who have taken risks in the past and positively evaluated the experience are likely to view further potential gains from repeating this behaviour, thus tipping the balance towards increasing their risk-acceptance and further risk-taking behaviour. The positive evaluation of involuntary career change is based on benefit-finding in relation to personal growth, strengthened relationships and improved career-identity fit. The relationship between benefit-finding and risk acceptance therefore appears circular, and suggests the plasticity of attitude towards risk.

The findings indicate that a holistic approach is necessary to achieve a comprehensive understanding of involuntary career change. The negative impact of the experience appears to extend beyond the occupational setting into the domestic lives of those affected. A negative influence on family members appeared to provide an identity threat to roles beyond that of worker, feelings of failure as provider, parent and spouse were also seen. Such negative impacts only appeared to reduce if their situation was evaluated to be an improved alternative to their previous life. If individuals were able to base their new career on values that were subjectively meaningful this was considered an improvement. The values of improved work life balance and independence from employers, identified as shaping new careers, derived partly from previous negative work experiences and partly from age-related priorities.

For individuals in their thirties involuntary career change therefore appears to be an intensely negative experience due to challenges to an established self-identity and the lack of perceived control. Participants with dependents appeared to suffer the greatest stress linked to financial strain and threats to the role of provider, parent and spouse. Coping with the emotional challenges at thirty-something also appeared to be particularly difficult for those who had experienced enforced change before. Therefore, some characteristics associated with the thirties appear to contribute to involuntary career change being experienced particularly harshly. However, other characteristics associated with the thirties appeared to have the potential to assist coping in this scenario. For instance, high perceived control was seen to lead to efforts to restore control, apparent in values for independence and the choice of a self-employed career. Limited social comparison minimised further identity threat,
and self-awareness, evident in self-constructed identities at this age, contributed to future careers that were subjectively meaningful. The characteristic of risk-acceptance that appears to differentiate whether individuals pursue their subjective goals appears to be linked to age by the degree of exposure to previous experiences, either positive or negative, that influence confidence, openness to experience, and knowledge of subjective values. The potential for involuntary career change during the thirties to be experienced at least partially in positive terms was evident amongst the majority of participants.

In this analysis some aspects of the career change experience appear familiar from the findings in the previous chapter, while other aspects appear distinct. The next section draws on the findings of the two studies with the aim of elucidating the similarities and differences between involuntary and voluntary career change experience in thirty-somethings.

6.8.1 Similarities and Differences between Involuntary and Voluntary Career Change

The findings of this study suggest that involuntary career change is a significantly different experience to voluntary career change, however some similarities between the two types of transition have also been noted. While attempts have been made to refer to key differences and similarities during the course of this chapter, the focus has predominantly been on achieving an insight into involuntary career change experiences rather than evaluating the two types of experience. This research is not concerned with making quantitative comparisons however, for the purpose of clarity it is thought that an overview of the similarities and the differences between voluntary and involuntary career change experiences found in the two studies so far provides a useful summary at this stage. The categories that appear significant when comparing and contrasting these experiences are values, emotions, identity, context and age.

- **Values**

  **Differences:** Involuntary job loss, particularly without financial resources is characterised by urgency to find a new job, thus limiting the discovery of values and the setting of personally meaningful goals. In such circumstances,
involuntary career changers therefore tend to base their new careers on values such as security and income, a contrast to the predominantly subjective values that voluntary career changers base their new careers on. Some involuntary career changers who did not have financial resources and time off work to discover their values, were found to base their new career on subjectively defined values. However, these were achieved by reaching a low point at which stage they realised the alternative paths they could follow, an experience not described by voluntary career changers.

**Similarities:** Both voluntary and involuntary career changers identified the need for a period of time in which to discover and assess the values on which to base their new career. Involuntary career changers who had adequate financial resources were able to experience a similar process of self-discovery to that of voluntary career changers. Several values were shared by both sets of individuals, these included values associated with learning, development and progress, the value of a work-setting for personal and social validation, and values derived from previous negative work experiences, such as valuing independence from an employer that encouraged a shift to self-employment.

- **Emotions**

**Differences:** Involuntary career change experiences were initially characterised by negative emotions that derived from perceptions of loss and from the ambiguity of the situation. This led to emotional coping strategies and an additional level of adjustment compared to that experienced by the majority of voluntary career changers. Those voluntary career changers who experienced poor work conditions in their previous job also suffered negative affect. However this emotional response generally appeared to be chronic rather than acute, as was more commonly seen amongst involuntary career changers.

Adjustment to involuntary career change appeared to be impaired by negative emotional response particularly if it had been experienced before. In contrast, voluntary career changers appeared able to use their acquired career change competencies effectively without the mitigating influence of negative affect.

**Similarities:** Individuals who experience involuntary career change appeared to have a more similar emotional experience of transition to voluntary career
changers if, after the initial period of negative affect, they did not perceive their previous career in terms of loss, if they held subjectively meaningful goals, and if they perceived their situation as an opportunity.

Adjustment to future voluntary career change appeared to be enhanced by experience of previous voluntary or involuntary change due to the learning of career change competencies.

- **Identity**

  **Differences:** Involuntary career change appears to present a number of threats to identity that are not present in voluntary career change experiences. In some instances, involuntary career change was associated with not achieving a satisfactory identity. This was associated with depression and emotional resignation. This contrasted to voluntary career changers who were predominantly satisfied with their new professional identity, however, if they were not then benefit-finding in other areas led to an overall positive evaluation of their career change.

  **Similarities:**

  In retrospect the majority of voluntary and involuntary career changers noted that change had not been as all-encompassing as they had first expected and they noted continuity of identity that was found reassuring.

- **Context**

  **Differences:** Some involuntary career changers perceived contextual constraints that prevented them from viewing their career change as an opportunity. In contrast voluntary career changers did not perceive these factors as obstacles. This appears to be because they could choose when to change career and were thus able to prepare for it. For example, by accumulating financial resources and making childcare arrangements. However, since some involuntary career changers did not perceive these factors as obstacles either, the evaluation of whether something is perceived as a constraint also appears to relate to a low acceptance of risk, low perceived control and the lack of a subjectively meaningful goal.

  Involuntary career changers appeared to have less social support than voluntary career changers. Again the unexpected nature of the event may have prevented
preparation and the setting up of a support network. This contrasts to some voluntary career changers who had the support of mentors and therapists. It also appears that some involuntary career changers experienced hostile reactions from their family who were also negatively influenced by their experiences. Voluntary career changers on the other hand only described receiving positive support.

**Similarities:**
Both voluntary and involuntary career changers described the value of social support. Involuntary career changers and voluntary career changers who experienced previous negative work conditions identified the value of emotional support, this appeared important for coping with negative affect. Voluntary career changers also described the importance of practical support that was not discussed by individuals who experienced involuntary career change. As described in the values category, both voluntary and involuntary career changers recognised the importance of a work context, particularly for validation purposes.

- **Evaluations**

  **Differences:** Involuntary career changers who perceived their new career to be worse than their previous career did not undertake benefit-finding, this contrasts to all voluntary career changers and also to involuntary career changers who considered that their situation was an improvement on their previous career. Involuntary career changers who did find benefits described some that related to their experience of hardship, such as greater tolerance and empathy, these were not described as outcomes of voluntary career change.

  **Similarities:** Some categories of benefit-finding were shared between voluntary and involuntary career changers, these included improved relationships, improved identity-fit with career, and aspects of personal growth.

- **Age**

  **Differences:** Involuntary career changers did not appear to base their new careers on values, such as altruism that were influential amongst voluntary career changers and were associated with their age. Possible reasons for this are that involuntary career changers expressed their values in their original career.
and having lost this did not have other values to pursue, or perhaps this was because of the limited opportunities for self-discovery in the involuntary career change scenario.

Involuntary career changers appeared not to consider continuity of skills and experience in their new career, perhaps because these had been devalued by their experiences. However, voluntary career changers appeared to value continuity of skills and experience to maintain a sense of progression.

**Similarities**: Values deriving from previous negative work experiences such as independence from employers and having more time to spend on personal relationships were discussed by both voluntary and involuntary career changers. Both voluntary and involuntary career changers appeared to use their previous skills and experiences to assist adaptation.

In conclusion, while several characteristics of the thirty-something age group appeared to assist voluntary career change (e.g., high perceived control, future orientation, awareness of subjective values, resources of existing skills and experience) it seems from this study that these age associated factors have less influence in the involuntary career change scenario. Negative affect, apparently an inevitable component of involuntary career change initially, appears to negate the influence of any existing skills or perceived control that individuals at this age may possess, and lead instead to emotionally-focused coping strategies. Indeed, the emotional vulnerability of individuals who have experienced multiple involuntary career change has been discussed. The frequently unexpected nature of job loss appears to reduce the opportunity for practical and psychological preparation. Therefore, the accustomed lifestyle of the career actor and their family is potentially threatened by the loss of an income. The opportunity to discover values and make subjectively meaningful goals that assist in leading to future careers that are positively evaluated is limited. However, for some individuals this was possible and they were able to reframe their redundancy as an opportunity. The thirties appeared to benefit change in this scenario because individuals tended to have self-constructed identities and self-awareness of their values. For others who felt they had lost a career they valued and had no meaningful alternative, their focus remained in the past and on the constraints of their current situation.
This chapter and the previous one have contributed to an understanding of how involuntary and voluntary career change is experienced, and the various factors that influence whether it is perceived positively or negatively. In the next chapter these findings are extended, by focusing in particular on how the outcomes of career change are evaluated.
CHAPTER SEVEN

EVALUATIONS OF OUTCOMES OF CAREER CHANGE AMONGST THIRTY-SOMETHINGS

7.1 OVERVIEW
The findings from the previous two studies have provided a detailed insight into the career change experiences of thirty-somethings in both voluntary and involuntary circumstances. The aim of this final study is to investigate the factors that influence evaluations of career change. An understanding of the elements of career change that are valued and the process of their evaluation is necessary to effectively contribute to a framework of affirmative career change experiences that is an objective of this research.

The title of this chapter describes the evaluations of outcomes as the focus of this study, however, outcomes are not considered only in terms of the final consequences of the career change, instead outcomes are considered to occur throughout the transition process and to have an on-going influence. The participants in this study completed their career change at least two years prior to the interview. This perspective allows for an appraisal of the career change experiences, an understanding of the relatively long-term influences of their career change, and of how it affects their view of the future. This relates to Weick's comment stated in Chapter Four, that “An individual cannot know what he is facing, until he faces it, and then looks back over the episode to sort out what happened” (Weick, 1988, cited in Isabella, 1990, p. 305). This study therefore aims to provide a dynamic perspective of career change outcomes and their evaluations, and an understanding of the on-going influences they have.

In an effort to further understand ways in which career transition for thirty-somethings may be a positive experience, this study focuses on two topical concepts in the extant career literature, those of subjective success and career competencies in
boundaryless careers. The challenges of defining subjective success in a boundaryless career at the current time are illustrated in the findings of this study that show value is placed on a consolidated career structure and the continuity derived from incremental development of skills and experience, a perception of the permanence of self-identity, and established relationships. In terms of career competencies, the thirties appear to contribute to these skills in a number of ways, particularly in acceptance of personal responsibility, the use of extensive social networks, and having a cognitive level of development and significant prior experience that allows for self-awareness, including an understanding of effective strategies, and an ability to innovate, associated with the development of "wisdom" (Weick, 2001) that appears beneficial for adaptation to change.

While the focus is therefore on further understanding positive interpretations of the career change experience in order to assist in the ameliorative aims of this research, a partial view is not adopted in this study. Participants are also encouraged to discuss perceived failure in relation to their career change, since this is crucial in providing a comprehensive understanding of the evaluations of career change. As with investigating both voluntary and involuntary career experiences earlier in the research, the reason to consider both positive and negative evaluations of outcomes is because they are considered to have the potential to be distinct experiences, not simply the direct opposite of one another.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as an appropriate method to elicit the career narratives of participants in this study and achieve an insight into the sensemaking involved in the process of evaluating career change outcomes. Cause maps were chosen as a means of presenting and analysing the extensive and complex data gained from the interviews. The advantages of a graphic representation were in offering an understanding of which factors were valued as most significant, and indicating the dynamic inter-relationships leading to evaluations of career change outcomes. The clarity afforded by the use of cause maps in distilling the findings was also considered an appropriate way to provide focus at this stage of the research. The application of cause maps in career research was furthered in this study by its use in reflecting sensemaking outside of an organisational setting. A theoretical contribution derived from application in this setting was the identification of
feedback loops representing cycles of development arising from the transition experience in boundaryless careers.

The following introductory section introduces the concepts of career success and career competencies, and attempts to assess their potential relevance to thirty-somethings changing career.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

7.2.1 The Distinctiveness of the Concept of Career Success

Arthur and colleagues (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005) noted the paucity of research on career success within the leading psychological and managerial journals over the last decade, however, in the last year it has received greater attention (see p. 24), thus identifying it as an area of topical interest. In general terms career success may be defined as the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person’s work experiences. This definition encompasses potential subjective and objective criteria as contributors to evaluations of career success, suggests the dynamic nature of evaluating career, and also offers an open-ended interpretation of outcomes. This undefined reference to ‘work-related’ outcomes would seem appropriate in light of the findings from the previous two studies, therefore, an inclusive interpretation of outcomes is considered in this study. Indeed, Heslin (2005) suggests that people may conceptualise and evaluate their career success across different realms, for example, in terms of contribution, fulfilment or work-life balance, and that this is undertaken not only in an organisational setting but in a wider occupational or cultural context. In this section and the following one these aspects of career success are outlined with the aim of providing an understanding of the issues that may be raised by participants in their discussions on evaluating their career changes.

Commonly accepted objective measures of career success are advancement (e.g., hierarchy, power, professionalism, status, autonomy); learning (e.g., gaining new skills, abilities and competencies), and physiological and survival factors (e.g., money-making, employability), whilst the subjective view of success has been termed psychological success denoting less tangible things like satisfaction, recognition, self-esteem, self-actualisation and career resilience (Baruch, 2004).
Psychological success is commonly defined as a "feeling of pride and personal accomplishment that comes from knowing that one has done one's personal best" (Hall & Mirvis, 1996, p. 26).

A finding of interest to be pursued in this study is the suggestion that gender differences play a significant role in contributing to the success criteria that are valued. A meta-analysis of the relevant literature suggests that men most value objective career outcomes such as money and advancement, while women tend to evaluate their career success in broader and more subjective ways, using criteria such as feelings of accomplishment, growth and development, challenge in their work, interpersonal relationships, and opportunities to help others (Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb & Corrigall, 2000). From this finding the implication may be drawn that men may experience more challenges in a boundaryless career than women because their values are less relevant in this context. As mentioned in section 5.5.2, Arthur and colleagues found this to be the case in their extensive qualitative study of boundaryless careers, in which men were identified as the "unlucky contestants" in this climate due to their dependency on illusory company career structures (Arthur et al., 1999, p. 175). Whether this is the case for thirty-something men will be assessed in this study. It is possible, based on previous findings, that they may value subjective criteria more highly than at other ages and that this would assist in them being more adjusted to a boundaryless career climate.

Career success definitions are also considered to depend fundamentally on an individual’s prime reason for working and what they most seek from work (Schein, 1990). Three distinct orientations to work have been described (e.g., Schwartz, 1986; 1994; Wrzesniewski, 2002; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). Firstly work may be seen primarily as a job, focusing mainly on financial rewards rather than pleasure or fulfilment. Secondly, a career orientation exhibits a deeper personal investment with the predominant goal being to maximise income, power and prestige within the occupation. And finally, a calling orientation is where the individual strives to experience fulfilment as a result of performing their work. This 'calling' is regarded as an inherent part of life and as an end in itself, rather than merely as a means to income or advancement. Dobrow (2004, p. 20) describes this approach to work as having a "subjective, self-relevant view of (the) meaning" of
career activities. Having a calling or what has been defined as a ‘purpose in life’ (Hall & Chandler, 2005) has been associated with the highest life and job satisfaction, and with the lowest work absenteeism (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

A further difference in the way individuals evaluate their success is thought to relate to the types of goals they pursue. For instance, Dweck and Elliott (1983) distinguished between performance goals and learning goals. Performance goals are concerned primarily with demonstrating and validating competence, and are typically based on the assumption that abilities are inherent attributes that are mainly fixed and difficult to develop, a notion represented in entity implicit theory. The aim of learning goals however is to acquire new knowledge or skills, this is based on an assumption that abilities are changeable and can be developed with persistent effort, a perspective embodied in incremental implicit theory (e.g., Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Erdley, Cain, Loomis, Dumas-Hines, & Dweck, 1997; Robins & Pals, 2002; VandeWalle, 1997). Dweck and Leggett (1988) reasoned that goal orientation resulting from these two types of “implicit theories” would affect the criteria used to evaluate success. They suggested that those pursuing performance goals achieve self-validation of their presumed fixed abilities by comparing their achievements with others and therefore relying strongly on external referent criteria. In contrast, those with a learning orientation and underlying incremental beliefs concerning their abilities are thought to evaluate their success based on their own perceived development and achievement of goals, and are relatively unconcerned about their performance relative to their peers.

The findings of the previous two studies suggest that individuals changing career in their thirties do conceptualise and evaluate their careers across the various realms outlined by Heslin (2005). The non-linear nature of their careers appears to mean that conventional indices of success associated with advancement, such as progress through a hierarchy and increasing financial rewards, have less relevance. However, learning, physiological and survival factors, and subjective or psychological success all appear to be important. While researchers suggest that the ‘new deal’ (see section 2.2.5) with employers means more concern with independent rather than organisational goals (Cappelli, 1999) and the elevated significance of the subjective career in this context (Arthur et al., 1999; Hall, 2002), findings from the previous
studies suggest that other characteristics, associated with the thirties, further contribute to the role of subjective values in career change at this age, including the likelihood of self-constructed identities and high perceived control. It may therefore be expected that in terms of evaluating success, individuals following boundaryless careers in their thirties are likely to set their own career agenda and establish personal benchmarks against which to measure their achievements. Weick (1996) suggests that individuals in this context may measure success in terms of increases in competence, affirmations from respected others, and opportunities for new learning (Weick, 1996).

7.2.2 An Interdependent Approach to Career Success

While it is proposed that subjective criteria may be particularly salient for individuals experiencing boundaryless careers, and especially for those in their thirties, the meaning of these criteria are considered to have significance beyond the individual. The socially constructed nature of careers suggests that these subjective interpretations of success display patterns of shared understanding amongst individuals from the same social contexts. For instance, these may derive from perceived societal norms, or from professional or familial expectations. They may be unconsciously embedded in the individual’s value system or be consciously perceived as external pressures. The findings in Chapter Five suggested that thirty-somethings seek minimal external validation for their subjective values, however, in this study the issue of the social influences that shape the meaning of success criteria will be pursued, to identify the sources of influence and assess their impact.

Subjective career success is arguably defined by an individual’s reactions to his or her unfolding career experiences (Hughes, 1937; 1958). It is comprised not only of personal preferences but also accommodates individual life circumstances such as health, family or other issues of life-work balance (Clark, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Heslin (2005) noted that while subjective career success is most commonly operationalised as either job or career satisfaction, it is a distinct conceptualisation because it includes reactions to actual and anticipated career-related attainments across a broader time-frame than immediate job satisfaction (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2000) and also across a wider range of
outcomes, such as a sense of identity (Law, Meijers & Wijers, 2002), purpose (Cochran, 1990) and work-life balance (Finegold & Mohrman, 2001).

Research suggests various coexisting but interdependent dimensions of the subjective career and in turn therefore of subjective markers of career success (Parker & Arthur, 2002; Eby et al., 2003). Consistent with Schein’s (1996) notion of individual’s aligning themselves with certain career anchors at particular times in their life, career actors have described managing different aspects of their careers, for example, maintaining a satisfactory income, finding time for their families, and pursuing new learning. This suggests that they are thinking in terms of multiple dimensions of career success (Arthur et al., 1999). The career narratives in Chapters Five and Six identify the various roles pursued by participants and the apparent integration of work and non-working aspects of life (e.g., the value placed on work-life balance by participants who had experienced involuntary career change). This lends support to the notion of multiple dimensions of the subjective career for thirty-somethings, and suggests that they will look for success across these various realms.

Hall and Chandler’s (2005) subjectivist view suggests that the individual should be in control of the extent to which the subjective career takes prominence in the objective/subjective success balance. They regard subjective success as psychological success. Accordingly, successful career progression is described as one in which the individual increasingly disassociates objective and subjective career criteria and ultimately becomes comparatively indifferent to their objective success, thus typifying someone with a so-named ‘calling’ orientation. Parker and Arthur (2000, p. 101) clarified their position on the subjective career, in discussing the “intelligent subjective career”, emphasising that how an individual feels about their career accomplishments is more important than objective indicators such as salary growth. However, in taking such a purely subjectivist position, questions arise regarding the process by which individual’s decide on their meaning of career success. For example, do they rely purely on internal standards of what’s important to them or do they derive their standards by making social comparisons? And how easy is it for them to develop their ‘own’ unique standards in the face of pervasive social influences? (Bandura, 1986)
An objectivist approach to career success on the other hand considers outcomes such as job satisfaction, intention to quit, job involvement, satisfaction with career progress, and anticipated career progress (e.g., Burke & McKeen, 1995). It also reflects shared social understanding rather than distinctively individual understandings of career success, as careers are not framed outside of the social context (Higgins, 2001). The notion of social comparison is also considered in this approach (Festinger, 1954), by which an individual attempts to obtain comparative information by referencing their actions and outcomes to others, particularly when objective information concerning their adequacy is not available. In this study the issue of where participants derive their meaning of career success will be addressed, and the relevance of internally and externally generated standards will be assessed. If and when social comparison does take place, it is of interest what the objectives of the social comparison are as well as who is selected as a referent and the weighting given to the referent. To date, these questions have not yet been addressed with reference to subjective aspects of career success such as work-life balance or contribution to society.

The literature on career success identifies a number of considerations when studying evaluations of career that will be noted in this research. Firstly, Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews (2005) propose the primacy of the objective career and suggest that subjective success should not be seen as a substitute of equal value and functionality to objective success. They accept that there are many individuals who appear content despite not seeming to have succeeded in life (low objective success but high subjective success) as well as some for whom high objective success leaves them still striving and unfulfilled (high objective success, low subjective success). However, they suggest that much of the contentment of the former group arises from what they call an "[evolutionarily functional] inner rhetoric of self-regulation...[an] ex-post rationalization of experienced success or failure [that] is the stuff of career sense-making" (p. 143). They therefore propose that people manipulate their feelings of subjective success in the light of their objective situation to act as a buffering mechanism. This is a contentious, but interesting proposition, particularly in relation to thirty-somethings for whom subjective values have been identified as a priority, and therefore, for whom subjective success is also expected to be significant in their new careers. In Chapter Six doubt in relation to new career based on subjective
criteria and the process of learning to value it may be interpreted in terms of rationalisation (e.g., Jana). However, many other stories indicate complete satisfaction with new subjective careers and research has identified that people may be capable of transcending their concern with objective outcomes or they may, for example, value self-satisfaction from acting in accordance with their personal standards even more highly than material rewards (Bandura, 1997; Hall, 2002). These findings highlight the importance of considering self-referent subjective success, and suggest that subjective career success can be of equal, if not greater value and functionality than objective success.

Another factor to consider when studying career evaluations at the current time is the historical emphasis and value placed on objective success that may continue to reduce the acceptance of subjective success. The timing of this research is well placed to consider this possibility. In this study, analysis of participant's evaluations of their career success will therefore focus on their interpretations of subjective and objective aspects of their career, the possibility of rationalisations of subjective career and also question whether success in one sense comes at the cost of success in the other. In order to address these issues, an interdependent perspective on career success is adopted that recognises that individuals "are not mere puppets responding to the firm tug of social strings" (Van Maanen, 1977, p. 18), whilst at the same time recognising the socially mediated nature of subjective reality. The individual is viewed as continually interpreting and reinterpreting their work experiences and career successes over time. This process involves experiencing objective reality, creating understandings about what constitutes career success, and then individually acting on those understandings, regardless of their predictive accuracy.

7.2.3 The Influence of Career Success Within the Transition Cycle
Another consideration of relevance to studying career success within the context of career change is that evaluations are thought likely to vary at different points in the transition cycle. The short learning cycles characterising boundaryless careers (Hall, 1993; 2002) have been described in section 2.3.1. In this context it may be expected that at the end of one career cycle an individual is likely to feel objective success from mastery of their existing career, but in moving to the early stage of the next career cycle where they are not yet competent it is unlikely that they would feel
success. For thirty-somethings this may be a particular challenge, since the differences in competence, and therefore of feelings of success at these two stages are likely to be significant. An aspect that may assist this is focus on the future and the new skills that need to be developed, providing anticipated subjective success. Thus objective success in one phase of work might motivate moving on to explore a new area in which subjective success is not yet felt. Hall and Chandler (2005) propose that the divergence between objective and subjective career will be the greatest during periods of transition between career learning cycles – i.e., at the end of one cycle and the beginning of the next. Further, they argue that when the person has moved through the transition and has settled into a more stable period of mastery and high achievement, subjective and objective views of career success will become more congruent.

Within the short learning cycles of boundaryless careers it appears that psychological success develops in a cyclical fashion as a result of the individual independently setting challenging and meaningful goals, exerting effort to achieve them and then going on to succeed in attaining them (Locke, 1990). Various studies over the years have generally shown support for a cycle of success, Austin and Klein’s (1996) review of the literature identified that most goal-setting studies assume a feedback loop from success outcomes back to factors such as self-esteem, motivation and goals. This is illustrated, for example, in the “calling model of psychological success” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 155) that shows the relationship between a calling, self-esteem, goals/effort, objective and subjective success, and identity change. Taken together, the dynamic interplay of these factors comprises a success cycle that describes adaptive, self-directed career performance. The selection, optimization-compensation model (Wiese, Freund & Baltes, 2002) also illustrates a similar web of influences on effective career management. In this model selection involves “developing, elaborating, and committing oneself to personal goals”, optimization is “the acquisition, refinement, and application of goal-relevant skills or resources”, and compensation is “maintain[ing] one’s goals in the face of losses in goal-relevant means” (p. 322). In a longitudinal study over a three year period, strategies of proactive life and career management, such as commitment to personal goals and focusing resources and effort, were found to predict how emotionally balanced and satisfied people would feel three years later. In addition, it has also
been hypothesised that success leads to an increase in the person’s level of self-esteem, a more competent identity, and increased involvement in that area of career work (Hall, 2002; Hall & Foster, 1977; Hall & Hall, 1976; Hall & Schneider, 1973).

This suggests, together with the findings of the earlier studies in this thesis that competencies associated here with contributing to career success may change over the period of an individual’s career. For example, insofar as it taps into a person’s perceived ability to perform a task, levels of self-confidence can change. Bandura (1991; 1997), Hollenbeck and Hall (2004), and Betz (1992; 1994) have all described how self-confidence develops in positive cycles, based on taking risks by pursuing challenging goals (despite fear of failure and provides the resilience to weather any temporary set-backs), exerting significant effort, and achieving results. Therefore, self-confidence can operate as both an influence on goals, effort and career success, in addition to being an outcome of success. In short, confidence can act as the trigger to a success cycle, it can get work started on pursuing a career goal and can also be the result of an identity-enhancing psychological success experience. In this research, evaluations of success will be considered in relation to the stage to which they refer, and the links between cycles will be assessed to identify those factors that contribute to perceptions of success.

The next section goes on to further describe the attributes that have been identified as contributing to career success.

7.2.4 Career Success Meta-Competencies

In previous chapters separate personal characteristics such as confidence, self-efficacy, and high perceived control have been associated with positive experiences of the career transition process. Concepts such as career adaptability and career resilience have also been identified as significant in adaptation to the demands of the contemporary workplace. Kidd’s (1996) three-fold model of effective career development described in section 2.3.3, highlights the need for individuals to possess decision-making skills, proactive career management skills, and the emotional capacity to cope with insecurity and uncertainty. Career decision-making is described as involving the specific knowledge and skills to relate self and opportunity awareness. Career management is viewed as comprising of identity
clarification, ongoing assessment of values and goals, monitoring and exploring self and situation, and the interpersonal and negotiating skills to manage organisational career systems. While career resilience (London, 1993) is seen primarily as attitudinal and emotional, concerned with tolerating uncertainty and developing flexible aspirations as well as optimism, self-esteem and self-reliance.

In this section, a series of three classes of variables, referred to as career meta-competencies are introduced. These comprise of ‘packages’ of personal characteristics and skills that relate to three distinct areas that researchers have identified as important in predicting perceived success for individuals pursuing a protean career, as well as contributing towards what has been called a “career resilient workforce” (Waterman et al., 1994). These meta-competencies are ‘knowing why’, ‘knowing whom’, and ‘knowing how’ (DeFillippi et al., 1994; Arthur et al., 1999; Jones & Lichtenstein, 2000; Parker & Arthur, 2000).

The first competency is ‘knowing why’ and it “answers the question ‘why’ as it relates to career motivation, personal meaning, and identification” (DeFillippi et al., 1994, p. 117). This competency may be particularly important in the early stages of career transition and is associated with an individual’s motivation to understand themselves, explore different possibilities, and adapt to constantly changing work situations (Arthur et al., 1999). ‘Knowing why’ is also thought to allow individuals to separate their identity from that of their employer and remain open to new possibilities and career experiences (Arthur et al., 1999; Bridges, 1994; Mirvis et al., 1994). Within this competency several variables may act as predictors of success. For instance, the variable of career insight relates to the extent to which an individual has realistic career expectations, knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, and specific career goals (London, 1983; Noe, Noe & Bachhuber, 1990). Another variable is being proactive. This refers to a dispositional tendency toward proactive behaviour. It is said that highly proactive individuals identify opportunities and take action on them, demonstrate initiative, and persevere in the face of setbacks (Bateman & Crant, 1993). In Chapter Six, its benefits were noted in relation to realising goals, particularly in turning cognitions into actions and in continued determination. The personal characteristic of openness to experience is a third variable. Individuals who demonstrate this characteristic tend to be imaginative,
curious, broad-minded and active (Barrick & Mount, 1991); they also seek out new experiences and are willing to entertain new ideas (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Again, openness to experience has been cited in the previous studies as a critical component of positive career transition, for example, in contributing to an attitude of acceptance of risk (see section 6.4.2.3). Finally, the variable of self-efficacy is likely to be an important factor in contributing to promoting adaptability and gaining identity. It has been found to be particularly critical if the career task is one that is new and involves some degree of risk to the individual (Betz, 1992; 1994). It is therefore particularly salient to an individual’s resilience in coping with unfamiliar situations during career transitions, and influencing career success in the current workplace (e.g., Betz, 1992; 1994; Hollenbeck & Hall, 2004).

The second career competency is ‘knowing whom’ which refers to career-related networks and contacts (Arthur et al, 1999; DeFillippi et al., 1994). For individuals in a boundaryless career contacts from a diverse set of communities are considered to have potential influence in providing both career support and personal development (Parker et al., 2000). There are likely to be benefits of having a broad resource base at all stages of career transition for access to expertise, to further new contacts, for possible job opportunities, for reputation development, and for learning and keeping up to date with new developments (Arthur, 1994; DeFillippi et al., 1994; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Hirsch, 1987; Lado, Boyd & Wright, 1992; Parker et al., 2000). The importance of emotional support from a range of sources including work colleagues, professionals, such as therapists and mentors, and from family and friends has also been evident in this research, particularly in relation to assisting involuntary career change.

The final category of career competencies is ‘knowing how’ which refers to career-relevant skills and job-related knowledge that accumulate over time, contribute to both the individual’s and the organisation’s knowledge base, and are transferable across organisational boundaries (Arthur et al., 1999; Bird, 1996; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). This competency is enhanced by an orientation towards continuous learning (DeFillippi et al., 1996) that is reflected in the construct of career identity (London, 1993; Noe et al., 1990), a “directional component of career motivation” (Noe et al., 1990, p. 341). That is, high career identity would direct individuals
towards spending time and energy developing skills and competencies which should increase their value within an organisation and externally in the marketplace (Arthur et al., 1999). Eby and colleagues (2005) suggest that those with extensive skill sets and a propensity to seek out new learning experiences report more satisfaction in their career because they feel well rounded and have a strong professional identity. This is consistent with Hall and colleagues work on the importance of developing an integrated self-identity that is not tied to any one organisation and instead is linked to one’s profession (Mirvis & Hall, 1994; 1996). Participant’s experiences of voluntary career change in Chapter Five, particularly illustrate the outcome of an orientation towards continued learning and personal development.

In summary, from the description of these meta-competencies it appears that individuals who are self-starters and take personal responsibility for their careers and build personal networks are more likely to thrive in an unstable and ever-changing work environment. The need for flexibility and adaptability to new experiences also appears critical. Finally, awareness of strengths and weaknesses, and constantly being on the lookout for ways to build new skill sets also seem to be necessary. In this study, the relevance of these attributes to thirty-something’s perceptions of their career change success will be assessed, and any other potential competencies will be identified.

7.2.5 The Concept of Success for Thirty-Somethings
For thirty-somethings pursuing a boundaryless career the expectation that less reliance is placed on objective success criteria associated with advancement and that more reliance is placed on subjective success criteria has been described in section 7.2.1. It is suggested that the reasons for this are because of both the irrelevance of advancement criteria in this type of career and also because of age-related factors. The age-related factors that may contribute to the influence of subjective values and subjective success criteria in career change amongst thirty-somethings are the focus of this section.

An initial possible explanation comes from identity development theory that suggests with age and self-awareness individuals are increasingly able to perceive and integrate higher levels of cognitive complexity. This is thought to occur as certain
elements of experience such as emotions change from being "subject" (i.e., part of the person) to "object", where they can be observed with some level of detachment. Therefore at a higher level of identity development, an individual's subjective view of success is less affected by the feedback and cues from external referent criteria, such as those that contribute to objective success (Kegan, 1982; 1994). This independence from the views of others also suggests that greater value and confidence may be placed in subjective criteria.

Arthur and colleagues (1999) proposition that individuals are likely to have multiple dimensions of career success also appears to have particular relevance to thirty-somethings who have a range of career anchors. In a recent study examining the different facets of objective success, it was suggested that these vary in their strengths and patterns of inter-correlation across the lifespan and in response to a variety of other contingencies. It is noted that an understanding of these patterns is critical for individuals to manage their career strategies effectively (Nicholson & de Waal-Andrews, 2005). This endorses the focus on a specific age-group in this research and highlights the need for understanding their particular career anchors and associated perceptions of success.

The influence of previous experiences on evaluations has been identified in the earlier discussion on the success cycle. However, the importance of a historical perspective on an individual’s values and subjective evaluations can be seen in terms of understanding disillusionment with work, as well as success. For example, frustration and failure early in a career, has been associated with low commitment and a shift in focus of values away from work into other spheres of life (Faulkner, 1974). The same end result has also been described in response to an executive job with high levels of objective career success that may become tainted with bitterness at its high costs in personal terms (Korman et al., 1981). The use of narratives in this research will allow the necessary historic context for a comprehensive understanding of participant’s evaluative criteria.

In conclusion, it would seem that there are a number of challenges in the management of career success for individuals in their thirties. For instance, the achievement of perceived success across a range of career anchors, valuing
subjective criteria despite the continued pervasive cultural influence valuing objective criteria, and recognising and employing the use of skills from one career cycle to the next. However, certain factors associated with the thirties are considered to have the potential to benefit career success. For example, higher levels of identity development that contribute towards the meta-competency of 'knowing why', the likelihood of an extensive social network to provide a support resource, relating to the 'knowing whom' meta-competency. And finally, past experience and knowledge that is likely to contribute to the 'knowing how' meta-competency.

On the basis of the extant literature discussed in this introductory section a number of areas are identified that are considered to further an understanding of the sensemaking processes involved in the evaluations of career change outcomes by thirty-somethings. Firstly, an insight into the referents used in the evaluation process is of interest, including the referents used throughout the transition process, the reasons for the referents used and the weight allocated to them. While the findings from Chapters Five and Six suggest minimal social comparison or use of external referent criteria by participants, it is of interest to further investigate the influence of social context on measures of career success, and to assess how these are reconciled with subjective measures. Secondly, it is expected that participants will evaluate the various interdependent dimensions of their subjective career separately. It is of interest therefore to assess on what basis these dimensions are differentiated. Thirdly, the attributes that participants describe as significant in affecting the outcomes they perceive as successful will contribute to an appreciation of career meta-competencies, and will highlight those that are considered of particular relevance to career change success in this age-group. Finally, the narratives of the participants enable an understanding of when particular competencies are considered relevant during the transition process, and those that may develop from one career experience and contribute to the next, thus suggesting those factors that have potential influences in future career change experiences.
On this basis the following four research questions are outlined:

1. What career change outcomes are perceived as successful by thirty-somethings?
2. What factors are perceived to contribute to these outcomes?
3. What defines career success and how is it evaluated?
4. What influences are these outcomes expected to have in the future?

7.3 METHOD
7.3.1 Sample
The sample for this study consisted of ten participants (see Table 5). They were selected as a purposive sample. All of the participants were found by word-of-mouth. In this study the criteria used for selecting participants were that firstly, they had experienced a complex career change. Secondly, that this career change had taken place in their thirties. Thirdly, that they considered their career change had taken place at least two years before the interview. The researcher attempted to achieve a diverse range of individuals in the sample. Participants were selected whose change had been precipitated by different factors, five participants considered their career change to have been voluntary (Mark, Priscilla, Zara, Henry, and Simon), two participants changed career primarily as a result of illness (Bena and Candice), and the remaining three participants (Joanna, Harvey, and Patrick) changed in response to perceptions that their previous jobs were no longer tenable. The reasons cited were a stressful lifestyle (Joanna), work overload (Howard) and unsuitable working conditions (Patrick). The study of career transitions motivated by a range of motivations was considered valuable in providing a broad perspective on understanding later evaluations of career success. Combining the study of voluntary and involuntary change experiences was considered possible at this stage of the research for two reasons. The first is that the division between the two types of career change does not appear to be clear-cut for many individuals (see p. 180). The second reason is that the previous two studies have raised an awareness of the factors that affect the experiences of each type of change. As a consequence, these understandings can be bought to bear when interpreting the various aspects of change that each participant in this study perceives to have been under their control or not
under their control in their career change. The sample consisted of five females and five males. One of the female participants and one of the male participants had children. At the time of the interview the participants were aged between thirty-three and fifty-two years old. Some of the participants had experienced several career changes but were asked to focus on their experiences during their most recent career change that had taken place in their thirties.
Table 5: Participant Information for Study Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age at time of interview</th>
<th>Age at time of career change</th>
<th>Marital status at time of career change</th>
<th>Number of Children with ages at time of career change</th>
<th>Previous occupation(s) in chronological order</th>
<th>Current occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Actor, TV producer</td>
<td>Business consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>HR consultant</td>
<td>Executive coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Two aged 8 &amp; 14</td>
<td>Dancer, ballet school owner/ teacher</td>
<td>TV &amp; video producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Marketing consultant</td>
<td>B&amp;B owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>IT consultant</td>
<td>Health product business owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>One aged 1</td>
<td>Academic, banker</td>
<td>Script writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bena (female)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>New Media manager for a charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candice</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Careers Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvey</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Charity worker</td>
<td>Gardener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Musician/music teacher</td>
<td>Primary school teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

300
7.3.2 Procedure

Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews, according to the guide in section 4.6.1. The areas of questioning were based on the findings from the previous two studies, as well as the extant literature on career cycles and career success. The objective of the questions was to further an understanding of outcomes of change, the factors perceived to have contributed to them, and the perceived values placed on these outcomes. A further aim was to capture the dynamic nature of how these outcomes and the value placed on them were perceived during the transition process and in relation to the future.

An interview schedule was drawn up consisting of questions arranged in three sections (see appendix VIII). The aim of this a priori framework was to provide the focus necessary to effectively find perceived causal relationships and produce a cause map. The first section was concerned with the similarities and differences between participant's expectations of career change outcomes versus the subjective reality of outcomes. The aim of these questions was to elicit the changing perceptions of success and failure and also the factors that contributed to these perceptions. Questions also addressed the value systems of participants to gain an understanding of how they rated subjective and objective aspects of their career over time. The second section was concerned with the process of career transition, including issues of identity, learning and perceptions of continuity/discontinuity. The aim of these questions was to assess the impact of these issues on later evaluations. The third section was concerned with enactment and focused on career competencies, psychological well-being during the change process and the perceived influence of outcomes of the change process in the future. The sections were ordered to reflect their relevance to the various stages of the transition process in an attempt to assist participants in discussing their career narrative. The wording of the questions was open-ended and non-directional to allow the researcher to access what was considered subjectively meaningful to the participants. At the end of the interview participants were also offered the opportunity to discuss anything else that had been of significance that had not been covered in the interview.

The interview schedule was piloted on two individuals. The findings of the pilot suggested that the questions adequately covered their experience of career change,
and provided the scope and depth of findings wanted by the researcher. However, the wording on two questions was amended to ensure clarity of meaning. The ten participants were contacted by telephone and then sent an email a week before their interview giving an outline of the issues to be discussed (see appendix IX). This was to encourage a general reflection on their experiences but not detailed preparation for the interview.

The participants were then interviewed in private. An assurance of confidentiality was provided and a request made for permission to tape-record the session. The participants were informed that the tapes would be destroyed on completion of the research. The researcher emphasised that participants should feel free to discuss their experiences in detail, to describe both positive and negative experiences, and to be honest in their answers. Each interview lasted between one and a half to two hours. The interviews were later transcribed for analysis using cause maps.

### 7.4 RESULTS

The individual cause maps drawn up for each participant (see example, appendix X) yielded the variables in appendix XI. These variables were identified by participants as significant in contributing to their evaluations of the outcomes of their career change. They were then used to produce the cross-case cause map (see Figure 1). The following results are based on an analysis of the structure of this cause map.

For the purpose of presenting a clear written analysis the variables are compartmentalised into distinct categories derived from the cross-case cause map, these represent the dynamic nature of the process of evaluation during the transition process. The three categories of variable are antecedent variables, intervening variables, and outcome variables. The two antecedent variable nodes are self-awareness and personal responsibility. The four intervening variable nodes are realistic goal-setting, cohesive career structure, improved work-life balance, and connection with others. The two evaluation outcome variable nodes are progress and success.

The allocation of variables to each of these three categories represents where they were perceived to be most influential in contributing towards evaluations of success.
during the transition process. However, as identified in participants narratives the variables are often inter-related and have an influence at more than one stage in the transition, where this occurs it is identified and discussed. Therefore, the time at which the variables are considered most influential during the transition process provides the basic structure to this results section, however, this is not a completely fluid journey for the reader since there is an attempt to reflect the complex interaction of variables throughout the transition process. It is hoped that with the aid of identifications throughout this section relating to when variables are influential, and with reference to the cross-case cause map, sufficient clarity is provided in relation to the complex interactions that contribute towards evaluations of career change outcomes. To provide an individual perspective in the results section and support the interpretations made, examples are drawn from the individual cause maps together with quotes from the associated interview text.
Figure 1: Cross-case cause map: factors influencing evaluations of success in career change
7.4.1 Antecedent Variables
The two antecedent variable nodes in the composite cause map are self-awareness and personal responsibility. These variables were classified as antecedent variables because they were described by participants as particularly significant in contributing positively at the initial stage of their career change process. However, in addition, their influences at other times during the change process are described reflecting the feedback loops and inter-connections illustrated in the cross-case cause map. These antecedent variables suggest the combination of factors that influence whether career change will take place, when it will take place and how it will be experienced.

7.4.1.1 Self-Awareness
The first antecedent variable to be discussed is self-awareness. Some aspects of self-awareness that were considered to be influential in successful career change appeared to be associated with being thirty-something. For instance, participants felt that their life experiences had provided them with a sense of independence derived from having an awareness of their individual strengths and weaknesses, and several participants felt that this understanding led to a growing realisation that they had a unique contribution to make in some way. Participants also noted that their life experiences had contributed to the formation of their subjective values, and that at their age they felt a determination to fulfil these values, seen in the value of authenticity (Critelli, 1996). It appeared that the development of self-awareness was associated with increased empowerment that in turn appeared to be linked to vocational search.

This section on self-awareness at the antecedent stage is divided into two further subsections, these are: i) Self-Awareness and Occupational Choice ii) The Search for a Single Theme.

i) Self-Awareness and Occupational Choice
The cause map identifies that the exploratory process involved in finding what to do in terms of a new career considered to have the potential to be fulfilling appeared to be influenced by self-awareness. Some participants described this process as initially involving an assessment of their fit in previous work settings. This was then described as contributing to their current values and providing a subjective measure
of the suitability of various work settings. For example, several participants described feeling that they would be unable to fulfill their subjective values within the corporate environment that they had been working in. Zara described how she had become increasingly aware of the value she placed on personal relationships and felt she could not fulfill this value by continuing to work in, what she had experienced as an impersonal culture. Candice described her belief that she would find future fulfillment in an environment that focused on altruistic goals rather than in one which predominantly focussed on business goals. Henry described the increasing value he placed on control over his time, and his understanding that the flexibility he craved would be met in a self-employed scenario rather than by continuing to have a desk-bound office job.

For all participants, the choice of their new career had been influenced by an awareness of their subjective values. Several participants specifically said that their change was not money-motivated, but that instead they had been concerned with achieving more valued goals (Mark, Zara, Joanna, Simon, Candice). In some cases these were long-standing values that had previously not been addressed, or they were values that had developed over time. Joanna for example, described how work-life balance had always been important to her but that it had become a priority in her thirties, "I think the most important thing in my life is spending quality time with family and friends, and making ends meet...I think they're probably values I had before but I didn't get enough time to fulfil [them]." The values described by participants as motivating their career change were wanting to find fulfillment (Mark, Simon), wanting a balanced life (Joanna, Candice), wanting to help others (Priscilla, Henry, Candice, Harvey, Patrick), wanting to contribute (Mark, Priscilla, Simon, Bena, Candice, Harvey, Patrick) and wanting to develop personally (Priscilla, Simon, Harvey, Candice, Patrick).

While participants did not consider money to be a significant motivating force in their career change, financial security (rather than an increase in salary per se) was valued both during the change process and longer term. Zara described her need for financial independence following divorce, particularly in relation to providing for her children. Simon also identified the value he placed on financial security for his family, and felt this was a priority that he could not put at risk in the pursuit of his
personal ambition. Joanna and Henry, described being motivated to own their own business which they felt would provide them with financial security and an ability to control their workload and future development. For Henry working independently and creating diverse income streams was expected to be more reliable and thus provide a greater sense of financial security than what would be offered by an organisation.

ii) The Search for a Single Theme

Three participants articulated a belief in there being 'a single thing' that each person is capable of excelling at, and contributing to in a unique way "there is a sort of inner-most thing which perhaps you’re life experiences have transpired to make you do ultimately." (Harvey) and "I’m looking for a big thing to do, one thing to do, and to work on that and do it well and to focus on that" (Mark). Mark described the continuing need to find what he ultimately wants to do as a personal imperative, "I yearn to find something that I absolutely love doing that loves me back, and I haven’t found that balance yet." (Mark)

Participants recognised that it was not until their thirties, when they felt that they had significant life experience and thus a certain level of self-awareness, that they had begun the process of searching for this "one thing". This is identified on the cross-case map as a consolidation. Mark described this, "I’m convinced that everyone has got a thing that they do fantastically brilliantly. Well, if you can find what that is then you’ll be fulfilled I suppose, I believe that very firmly. For me I don’t seem to have found what that thing is and I feel that’s its only in my thirties that I’ve started exploring what that is, give myself a break I suppose, if you don’t like doing that, fine go and find something else to do, something different in order to find what that talent is". It appears that the appraisal of strengths and weaknesses contributed to the self-awareness that then leads to the search for this "one thing". An understanding of their personal attributes and therefore of occupations where these would be appropriate appeared to contribute to participant’s confidence levels, and in turn to appropriate goal-setting, and a greater sense of control over their development.
The perception that the search for this “inner-most thing” involves a requisite level of self-awareness that is only reached during the thirties, is paradoxically linked by Mark, to a sense of there being a time-limit to the fulfilment of his potential.

“I frequently have the sense of having missed the boat somehow because it's taken me a while to get to the position I'm in now and I wish I had the learning and understanding of myself now fifteen years ago.”

In addition to fulfilling “a talent”, the search for this single thing was also associated by participants with the subjective value of wanting to find a unifying framework that would provide a meaningful structure to their careers (Mark, Simon, Candice, Harvey). These participants mentioned that, as a result of having changed career at least once, they perceived a lack of structure in their working lives. Two main reasons for earlier change were given. The first was having an inherent liking for change and the stimulation this provides. The opportunity to pursue this type of lifestyle was associated with freedom, and in particular with having no family responsibilities. Two gay participants both felt that their lack of personal commitments gave them the chance to follow their interests and change when they wanted to (Mark, Harvey), “I've always liked doing different things and I don't know how that fits in with the norm. I think if I was married and had children, I don't think I would have had this sort of freedom. And who knows, maybe I would have become much more successful in one particular area if I hadn't thought let's try this because it looks interesting” (Harvey). The second factor that was described as being responsible for having had a lack of career structure relates to not having known what they want to do, and therefore not being able to establish clear goals and a sense of direction. “I've never really had a career ladder in mind, consequently, I've never climbed one.” (Harvey)

While a lack of structure at certain stages of career appeared to be beneficial for some individuals, overall participant’s responses suggested that they were striving towards what was perceived as a more structured life, “Other people have structure in their lives from the norms of college, meeting a partner, getting a house, having children. I see this big void and have attempted to put structure in my life by work maybe, doing courses or work or occupations.” (Mark). It seems that not only is there a need for greater structure and order in terms of lifestyle, but also in terms of
skills and experience. Participants indicated that by their thirties they wanted to unify and consolidate their existing skills and knowledge. The main reason for this appeared to be to provide a sense of progress (Mark, Henry, Candice, Harvey). "I think it's natural to be more consolidatory when you get older to think ok I really want to make this bigger...It make me think I've got to work on those strengths and bodies of knowledge that I have a vast amount of; I think maybe doing something that's easier for me... things I've done for years and have a more natural aptitude at" (Harvey).

In summary, self-awareness at this antecedent stage of career change appears to be age-related since it stems from a reflection of past experiences, and an appraisal of fit in different situations. This contributes to an understanding of personal attributes and the prioritisation of values. The iterative nature of this process is identified in the feedback loop represented in the cross-case cause map as career change experiences inform greater self-awareness. The value of establishing a unifying theme in career change appears to stem from having a level of self-awareness, it also often appears to be accompanied by a sense of urgency associated with a perception of having a limited amount of time. A unifying theme appears important in providing a sense of stability, particularly for those who have experienced frequent change, to provide a sense of conforming to a perceived norm, and to consolidate existing skills. This need seems to reflect the development goal of consolidation associated with this age, also noted in the findings of Chapter Five.

7.4.1.2 Personal Responsibility
The second antecedent variable to be discussed is personal responsibility. This section is divided into two sub-sections. The first sub-section deals with factors that appeared to influence career change at the antecedent stage, and the second sub-section deals with strategies employed both at the antecedent stage and at other stages of the transition. The two sub-sections are: i) Contributory Factors to the Perception of the Need for Personal Responsibility, and ii) The Use of Strategies for Promoting Personal Responsibility Throughout the Career Change Process.
i) Contributory Factors to the Perception of the Need for Personal Responsibility

The cross-case cause map identifies several factors that appear to contribute to an understanding of the need to take personal responsibility for career management such as a time pressure, the value of authenticity, a sense of independence and growth in self-confidence. In participant’s narratives the need for taking responsibility was considered to be particularly significant in contributing to the shift from a cognitive awareness of values and goals to their active implementation (Mark, Henry, Bena, Candice, Harvey), “I’ve learned that I need to make the changes happen rather than relying on someone else to do that.” (Mark). Awareness of this need was described as age-related, “As you get older you realise your dreams are only going to stay as dreams unless you make them reality. You have your dreams but then you think actually I could do this, that’s kind of exciting” (Candice). Various events appeared to prompt awareness of the need for personal responsibility to make things happen in the time available. For Candice this stemmed from a reassessment of her life arising from turning thirty; for Bena becoming thirty and having survived serious illness gave her a sense of how precious life is and a desire to optimise it; and for Mark the death of his father during his thirties offered him a sense of mortality, an appreciation of his life and again, a desire make the most of it.

Other age-related factors that were also found to contribute to a sense of needing to take responsibility included perceptions of a socially defined time pressure to sort out career in order to maximise earning potential and feel fulfilled. This relates to expectations derived from the concept of the ‘social clock’ (Neugarten, 1965), also seen in earlier studies and discussed in section 3.2.1. Mark described this pressure, “My fear is that your forties are your big earning years, when you’re at the top of everything, if you don’t get it sorted out in your forties, by your mid-forties or so, its all done, then you’re going to be scraping round, making a living rather than having a career” (Mark). Simon’s need to take control and maximise the use of time allocated to work stemmed from a time-pressure deriving from both his age and the value of wanting to be with his family. “I think my biggest fear, and it goes back to the issue of age was I don’t feel I have time to waste, time is really precious. Partly because of my age and also because we have a kid, and we hope to have another one and there’s a lot of things I could be doing with my free time with family which is
taken up staring at a computer screen. So I think my biggest fear has been that I might end up wasting my time." (Simon)

The sense of there being limited time to achieve goals appeared to be linked to a growing sense of needing to be honest with oneself in terms of making frank judgements of abilities and achievements. Some participants described this as a contrast to possibly having deluded themselves in the past (Mark, Henry, Simon). This sense of personal honesty or authenticity (Critelli, 1996) suggests the independence and career maturity needed to act in accordance with personal values (see section 3.2.3). Simon’s description of having chosen not to face up to certain issues in the past by keeping busy, but of now not wanting to waste time pursuing inappropriate goals, particularly highlights the role of career maturity. Henry’s narrative reveals that his career maturity developed from experiencing business failure that made him face up to his weaknesses, “It’s doing your own investigation, taking responsibility, taking a step back and looking at exactly what it is that’s going on”.

Further factors considered by participants as relevant in contributing to self-confidence, which in turn led to taking responsibility for achieving subjective goals, were self-belief, focus and determination. These internal strengths were described as necessary to outweigh any external obstacles or pressures, “...you need to be fairly strong within yourself and decide right I’m not going to worry what people think, if it’s the right decision for me to move forward then trust that it is.” (Priscilla) and “...maybe just determination and thinking, not being beaten and not giving up probably, yeah, just not wanting to give up and just getting on with it, I’m a bit of a getting on with it kind of person.” (Zara)

A consequence of the link between a sense of independence and increased confidence identified on the cross-case cause map appeared to be a reduced need for social comparison and instead a focus on what personally was considered appropriate. Participants described realising that what superficially appears attractive in other people’s lives was not necessarily relevant to their own lives (Zara, Henry, Candice). It was also evident in an understanding of subjective values requiring subjective measures, thus making social comparison meaningless (Priscilla,
Zara, Joanna, Henry, Candice). “I don’t compare myself to others but I’m sure there’s lots more successful coaches and lots more less successful ones, I just feel you’ve got to do what’s right for you... I think everyone has to find their own niche, in line with their values, their gift and talents and things.” (Priscilla)

However, the cause map identifies that in some cases social comparison was used for validation purposes. Simon, for example, described assessing his future life in banking by making negative social comparisons with his colleagues who were on the next stage of the career ladder. He felt that their unhealthy lifestyle and lack of family life did not correlate with his values and this provided validation and motivation for the decision to leave his job.

ii) The Use of Strategies for Promoting Personal Responsibility Throughout the Career Change Process

In terms of effecting personal responsibility, participant narratives revealed that a number of strategies were used. These appeared to contribute positively to perceptions of career change and are linked in the antecedent stage on the cross-case cause map to ownership/empowerment. However, over the period of the career change process participants noted that they learnt what they were able to control, when control should be instigated, and that some aspects of life were not directly controllable. This outcome is identified on the cause map as the perception of having a more realistic view of the future. Examples of aspects of life perceived as not directly controllable were finding a partner (Joanna) or achieving spiritual fulfilment (Simon). However, participants appeared to retain some sense of personal responsibility for reaching these goals by perceiving that there were things they could do that could indirectly lead to achievement. For instance, having more time to socialise (Joanna) and having peaceful surroundings and time to appreciate them (Simon). In terms of when control should be instigated, the cause map identifies a sense of time pressure felt by some participants that contributed to a sense of motivation and to taking personal responsibility. Mark, for example, perceived that opportunities had time-limits and therefore needed to be proactively responded to. However, he also noted that in some situations he was able to relinquish personal responsibility by placing greater trust in the judgements of others, as a result of his own developed levels of self-awareness, “I think I trust that more, if I go for
interviews and don’t get it it’s because they’ve seen something in me or not seen something in me that is a prerequisite for the job, in which case fine I shouldn’t go and do it. I’ll go and do something else.” In addition, Priscilla perceived a need to be attuned to the environment to understand when was the right time to pursue opportunities. These examples, suggest the achievement of an effective equilibrium between the concepts of agency and communion (see section 1.2).

Some participants also noted that at certain points in their career history there was a discrepancy between what they felt they wanted to do and what they actually did, that meant they were unable to fulfil their goals (Mark, Zara, Bena). In these cases the strategies to be described did not appear to have an influence. This appeared to promote a sense of puzzlement and an analysis of why this discrepancy was occurring. For example, Bena described her current position in a new career as having become unchallenging, but while she felt she should be proactively looking for a new job she was doing nothing about it. Due to her previous experiences she recognised the need for personal responsibility in being proactive, but her explanation for not doing this was her enjoyment of a period of stability following sustained uncertainty, that had resulted from enforced change. This suggests that in this case the discrepancy between cognition and action may be transitory, and relates to the notion of there being a right time for change. Once a sufficient period of stability has been experienced or the loss of job stimulation becomes overwhelming, then cognition and action may become more aligned. Mark’s career narrative revealed that the variance between his goals and his actions that had characterised his earlier life was not a pattern he expected to continue in his thirties since having become aware of it, “my head is saying I want to write and yet I’ve done very little about it this year until now, and I did have the conversation with myself that if you want to be a writer you need to make that happen and go and do it. I think too often in my life I’ve had a mismatch between the two that I’ve said I want to do this but then my actions have not supported that, my actions have supported something else which I find peculiar because I’m much more aware of it now in my thirties.”

In terms of the strategies that were used effectively by participants, one strategy was to make deals with themselves (Mark, Joanna, Simon). This encouraged them to ensure that their actions contributed towards the fulfillment of their goals and
contributed towards them proactively responding to opportunities. Mark this involved forcing himself to say ‘yes’ to every opportunity he was offered. Similarly, Joanna made herself socialise when she moved to a new country to start a B&B, at a time when she felt isolated and unsure about her decision in moving there, “...every time I got invited to go anywhere I forced myself to go whether I wanted to go or not and then through doing that, just naturally I got to know more people who are here all year round”.

Simon described having made a series of deals with himself during his career that had been instrumental in his decision-making to pursue certain occupations for a certain period of time. For example, his decision to change career in his late thirties related to a deal that he had made when he first started working as a banker, that he would leave before he was forty, having made enough money to allow him to then pursue something that made him happy, “I have to say part of me was quite proud that I'd actually followed through the deal I'd made with myself because it very rarely happens” (Simon). Having changed career and found a new direction, he then gave himself a year’s deadline in which to achieve certain goals, motivated by an awareness of not wanting to waste time pursuing avenues that were not going to be successful. The content motivating these deals reveal changing, age-related values, firstly, establishing financial resources during the thirties, and then to pursuing subjective values in the forties, combined with a sense of time-pressure to find fulfilment.

Taking personal responsibility by making deals appeared to be motivated by focusing on the future and attempts to avoid anticipated regret. Indeed, knowing the outcome of goals even if they were unexpected is identified on the cross-case cause map as being linked to perceptions of progress. Mark also highlighted the benefit of imposing a deal on himself as taking control initially, but then being able to relinquish control and simply follow the rules set by the self-imposed deal. He described this as liberating him from the restrictions in his life that derived from fear. He felt this tactic had resulted in him accepting opportunities that he would not otherwise have done, and in his life being filled his life with variety. On the cause map this perceived relationship is identified in self-awareness leading to openness to opportunities.
Strategies for developing personal responsibility in career development appeared to assist in overcoming the challenge of feeling older than most entrants in a new profession. Bena, for instance, felt that her inexperience could be overcome by sufficient interest in her new career, by consolidating existing knowledge through working in a sector she was familiar with, volunteering to build up experience, and doing “a lot of homework”. Zara, similarly reflected on the understandings she had gained through her experiences, “if you’re interested enough in whatever job you’re doing you pick that up gradually, I think I can do it, if I put my mind to it I probably could do more than I do”.

Being thirty-something was associated with certain advantages in coping with some challenges of career change that helped foster a positive attitude (Zara, Simon, Bena, Candice). For example, Bena felt that retrospective contemplation of her accomplishments and failures, together with the knowledge that she had survived them enhanced her confidence and ability to take personal responsibility and to achieve in the future, “it’s an age thing again because you feel a lot more confident the older you get... since turning thirty I’m a lot more confident that I can get up to speed with things quickly and even if I don’t know anything about it I can be confident that I will teach myself enough or more to get the job done.”

In Joanna’s narrative the perception of taking responsibility for the direction of her life and the sense of time to experiment is similar to that seen in career narratives in Chapter Five. Both these factors that positively contribute to career change being accomplished appear to be linked to age. Johanna described her decision to give up a stressful job in London to start a B&B in France as at least providing her with the opportunity to learn new skills, “I think other people saw moving abroad as a life sentence and you’ve got to stick with it, I just saw it as well, if it doesn’t work I’ll come home and I’ll enjoy it while I’ve been there hopefully.” Bena drew on her past experience to foster a positive attitude which she believed was necessary, even in the face of set-backs, to take full advantage of opportunities and to move forward, “Things are possible if you focus your attention on it and not to dwell on things when they go really wrong... its nice to wallow but you can’t get stuck, you’ve got to keep going... I felt good ... I was coming into a new career and I had to focus and I
couldn't just think too much, too hard about these things I just had to get on with it otherwise things would have taken a lot longer time or maybe not have happened because you have to seize the opportunities.” In retrospect, Bena describes the confidence she has gained from adopting a self-reliant and positive attitude that appears likely to have implications for her achievement and perception of success in the future, “I think there's nothing too difficult to surmount, no hurdle is too difficult. I think that is the biggest, biggest lesson.”

The need to limit external influence in order to be authentic and achieve subjective goals was described by two participants. This involved revealing their ideas to only a few people, particularly during the early stages of their career transition. This was considered to have been important to prevent the dilution of their ideas and to avoid any negativity that may have affected their attitude or action in response to the change. Bena described the protective sense she felt towards her ideas, “I think it's good to keep a lot of it to yourself because you need to be really sure, but it's yours, it's like writing a novel or something, it's your baby, it's your idea, it's your creation... whether it's the transition or just managing my career, it's like if I've got ideas, let me just mull it in my head so it forms and germinates and develops until I'm ready and clear in myself.” Priscilla described how she trained part-time for her new career as a business coach, while continuing to work as a hotel manager, and decided not to tell her colleagues until she had completed the training, “I think you've got to be careful of who you tell so that you get the total support of what you need. If you listen to those who question you, you begin to doubt yourself”. She perceived the early stages of the transition process as being a time of vulnerability in terms of feelings of doubt. She also described the benefits of paralleling her early steps in a new career and gradually building confidence and a new professional identity while maintaining her established career. This was found to minimise threats while adjusting to her new occupational identity by providing continuity of identity. It also allowed her to tell others of her career change once she felt secure enough in her own decision and in her new identity, and in a position of being able to be informative about her new choice. Regulating the pace of external influence on her new career therefore appeared to assist Priscilla’s adjustment to the loss of one professional identity and acceptance of the next.
Other participants however, described having used external influences to enhance a sense of responsibility that assisted in achieving their goals later in the transition process. This is identified as extrinsic motivation on the cross-case cause map. For example, both Joanna and Henry said that their decision to work with business partners was a way of compensating for their own low self-motivation, by establishing an external incentive for action. The need for self-awareness is evident prior to making such an arrangement.

To summarise this section on personal responsibility, it appears that it is significant in contributing to the initiation of action, both at the early stage of career change in prompting goals to be enacted, as well as during the transition to ensure that opportunities are taken up and the experience is maximised. The thirties appear to contribute to the acceptance of personal responsibility for a number of reasons. These include, the realisation that no one else will make their dreams a reality; the desire to follow subjective goals that derives from a level of self-awareness; personal characteristics such as confidence that develop from earlier accomplishments, and reduced social comparison. Some participants appeared to feel a time pressure in their thirties while others perceived they had time to experiment. This difference appeared to be linked to their previous experiences. Individuals who felt pressured by the social clock appeared to have previously experienced frequent changes, leading to their need for social inclusion. However, those who had led a more conventional career appeared to feel they had time to experiment. The strategies used by individuals to help them take on personal responsibility appeared to be effective in encouraging development and promoting a sense of control, although with time, participants understood ways they could effect change and when they could not. In general, early in the transition personal responsibility appeared to be intrinsically motivated and independence was valued for enabling a focus on establishing subjective goals. However at later stages in the process it appeared that the social context was sometimes used for promoting a sense of personal responsibility.

7.4.1.3 Summary of Antecedent Variables

In summary, it appears that the variables of self-awareness and personal responsibility perceived as significant early in the transition process were associated
with having reached a level of personal development achieved through life experience and thus associated with age. The cross-case cause map identifies the link between self-awareness of abilities and values with a perception of career ownership/empowerment, a consolidation of existing attributes and being open to opportunities which in turn leads to finding a suitable future career. The reasons for perceiving a need to take personal responsibility for achieving goals appeared to develop for a number of reasons including wanting to pursue subjective values. Participant's narratives revealed various strategies that were used in effecting personal responsibility. Evaluations of progress and success were identified as a result of furthering or achieving subjective goals. In turn the map illustrates how these evaluations are perceived to contribute iteratively to developments in confidence, self-awareness and an understanding of the need for taking personal responsibility.

7.4.2 Intervening Variables
The four intervening variable nodes in the composite cause map are realistic goal-setting, cohesive career structure, improved work-life balance and connection with others. While these variables were considered to have primary significance at this stage in the transition process, where they were perceived to be influential at other times is also identified in the following analysis.

7.4.2.1 Realistic Goal-Setting
The first intervening variable to be discussed is that of realistic goal-setting. Two distinct elements appeared to be considered as significant in effective goal-setting, these comprise the following sub-sections: i) having a plan and ii) the right time to change.

i) Having a Plan
Several participants identified finding what they wanted to do and having a clearly defined plan as important in providing a goal and a pathway to achieve it. This is identified on the cross-case cause map in the link between finding what to do and setting realistic goals. Candice described how "It was much easier finding a job once I knew what I was looking for." Henry also described the benefits he had found from goal-setting, "being able to describe where you're going in a clear
form... if you’re able to communicate it, the more and more I do it the more productive it becomes.” However, Simon described how he had not wanted to have a plan in the early stages of his career transition, “I actually wanted to re-acquaint myself with boredom, I wanted to re-acquaint myself with not having a plan, in the hope that something would come out of that which would be meaningful rather than actionful”. However, in retrospect Simon was aware that he had been unable to fulfil this goal of being inactive and had inadvertently imposed a new structure on his life, albeit in a new career that he valued, “one of the things I’ve learnt about myself and actually its only talking to you that I’m starting to articulate it, is that I have found a way, in a non-structured way to keep busy. Now I don’t begrudge that because I’m keeping busy at something that actually is important for me.” The dilemma of wanting to live without structure to see where this leads in terms of personal development and opportunities, and an apparent inherent psychological need to impose structure for perceived control and direction is evident in the interpretation of achievement in having survived a self-imposed period of uncertainty “I’m not very good with uncertainty so living with two years of a question mark has not been easy for me. So in one sense that’s a personal success” (Simon).

Both Joanna and Harvey said that in hindsight, they felt the planning they had carried out for their career change was insufficient, indeed Joanna said that she may not have gone ahead had she been more fully informed. However, neither felt that the outcome of their career change had been unsuccessful as a result, although Harvey felt he had failed in achieving a job in forestry that he had trained for, “I might need to research things more thoroughly before I go into something, if I’m expecting certain things out of it” (Harvey). This finding is a contrast to the finding in Chapter Five relating to participants who felt they had over-compensated for their lack of experience when preparing for their career change. The difference in preparation levels between the participants across the studies therefore suggests that rather than preparedness simply being a consequence of age it is also significantly affected by personal characteristics.

ii) The Right Time for Change
During the preparation stage of their career transition several participants had identified indicators that suggested when the time was right for them to move
forward. However, views conflicted on whether they had been aware of these indicators at the time of change or only in retrospect. For instance, Priscilla described being aware of these pointers concurrent with her change experience, “I started questioning, you’ve already started to question and think what else could you do to develop and move on. It’s not rushing it. I do believe you do get significant indicators, a time to change, a time to move on.” On the other hand, Mark appeared to be less aware of the influences that were contributing to his career change at the time, although retrospectively he identified them, and became consciously aware of the sensemaking process he was experiencing, “With hindsight I can point to all sorts of little triggers of things that happened to me. I mean talking to you, I was thinking, oh, I can make sense of some of the things now, I can impose a sort of pattern on it, but at the time it seemed completely random.”

The cross-case cause map illustrates the link between a sense of completion and the right time to change career. Simon described gaining a sense of completion after having achieved what was wanted in a previous job. Other factors that appeared to contribute to a perception of a right time to change were a decision to move on (Joanna, Simon); identifying a need for personal development (Priscilla, Candice), and a sense of psychological readiness, such as having achieved a necessary level of self-confidence, “I almost felt like I was ready to make that change when I did it because I’d achieved what I’d always wanted to achieve and that was to have confidence in my own ability.” (Joanna). For participants who experienced enforced career change these issues appeared to be less relevant, although in some cases involuntary job loss was followed by a period of reflection that gave rise to an awareness of such indicators (Bena).

Priscilla described her perception of a right time to change as being associated with a combination of heightened awareness of opportunities, a greater self-awareness of her personal attributes and a desire to consolidate her skills, “I think I do appreciate more synchronicity, or the understanding of opportunity, to actually take it without being afraid when it presents itself because it can lead to your next thing. But it’s also being very aware of your natural talents and skills, I think I’ve looked at that more and listened to people as well, as I really do believe you’ve got to follow your passion, and your natural skills are there to assist you with that.” (Priscilla)
The sense of right timing for career change therefore appeared to be a combination of being open to the opportunities available, being aware of personal attributes and feeling readiness for change. Participants also discussed the need for agency in order to develop and succeed, this relates to taking personal responsibility described in the previous section. They perceived this was achieved by preparation, the incremental development of skills, and building confidence through cycles of success. Priscilla described how “every time, as long as you prepare, it’s always really worthwhile, you’ve got to push yourself. I think that’s it. It’s not about things being...easy, it’s about that fear factor initially, so that it’s that little edge, to grow to do something different.”

To summarise this section on the variable of realistic goal-setting, it appeared that goals were particularly valued for providing clarity and direction. The understanding of when to change career and begin the process of goal-setting was associated with a sense of readiness for change that involved a level of self-awareness and being attuned to the environmental opportunities available.

7.4.2.2 Cohesive Career Structure

Participants described wanting to establish a unifying theme in their new career. This is represented on the cross-case cause map as the intervening variable, a cohesive career structure. Perceiving that this type of structure had been achieved was evaluated in terms of success while not achieving it was considered as a current failure. The map illustrates that the incremental development of skills and experience appeared to contribute to achieving this sense of cohesion. Some participants described how they reflected back on their experiences and perceived self-identity continuity that also contributed to achieving this variable. The following section addresses: i) The Perceived Need for a Cohesive Career Structure During Career Change, ii) The Incremental Development of Skills and Experience, and iii) Continuity of Self.

i) The Perceived Need for a Cohesive Career Structure During Career Change

Participant’s narratives revealed that a cohesive career structure seemed to be associated not only with a central unifying career theme, but also a lifestyle routine.
Both these consequences were described in positive terms and were associated with a number of benefits. The cross-case cause map identifies these as making a contribution, gaining meaning and purpose and finding direction/focus. The latter was linked to intrinsic motivation, achieving a clear professional identity, and routine, in turn these were linked to psychological well-being. Patrick described the benefits of having a structure, "[it's] just about having a routine, going to do something everyday, automatically makes you feel better about yourself." Candice contrasted her old life with the benefits she perceived in relation to her new career structure, "I feel like I've got my teeth into it much more and I'm on a much clearer path. I feel more relaxed about my career, less stressed and worried about it, about the future...I feel there are more opportunities for me and I know how to reach them now and maybe that's about the career I'm in because I feel like I'm using my potential to better advantage."

Participants did not appear to relate the structures of their career to the parameters of a traditional career. Instead, they described establishing structure in their own career by focusing on a single, personally meaningful area. This was perceived as important in defining self and in promoting self-worth. The negative feelings of not yet having achieved this were described in particular by two gay participants, Mark and Harvey. "No I don't really feel a sense of success...I feel as lost now as I was then. Just as, if not more confused about what I should be doing or where I should be going. I still have a sense somehow that I haven't really found what I should be doing, kind of back to that 'What do you do for a living?' I don't have a sense of pride, and saying I do X or Y. I do a bit of this and a bit of that. I can talk about it and it can I suppose to other people sound quite interesting but to me it's all a bit of a mess" (Mark).

For Mark and Harvey, not having consolidated their career paths, even if there were elements that were subjectively meaningful, was associated with a lack of clarity regarding both direction and purpose. This was associated with being responsive to the requirements of others, rather than being in control of their time or the content of what they were doing. "My danger now I see is that I've got all these disparate bits of work going on my energy can be diffused. So, I'm back to being responsive. Are you free that day, I get my diary, yes I'm free that day and I get back to the same
position I was in before rather than taking control of the situation” (Mark). On reflection, these two participants felt that had they focused on one aspect of their career rather than having had a varied career, they may have been more successful “And who knows, maybe I would have become much more successful in one particular area if I hadn’t thought lets try this because it looks interesting, now I’m going to try this because it looks interesting” (Harvey).

Harvey described the effect of having changed career several times as challenging his sense of self, suggesting the psychological need for continuity of identity. He described feeling puzzled by his need for change, “I sometimes find it hard to relate to myself, here I go again, you know” and uncertain about whether to perceive it as a symptom of a disturbance or simply joie de vivre, “I sometimes wonder, I’ve not been clinically diagnosed, if I’ve got some sort of attention deficit thing where I hop around from thing to thing and I get very passionate about it and then I think I’ve had enough of it now and then go off and do something completely different. But I think that’s probably unnecessary pathologising, quite an excitement about life really.”

Participants described using social comparisons to contribute towards evaluations of their career structure. This is represented on the cross-case cause map by the link between direction/focus, social acceptability and validation. In cases where the referent group had more traditional career structures participants perceived their boundaryless career in negative terms, leading to feelings of being different, of self-doubt and the need for presentation management. This was particularly evident for participants such as Mark and Harvey who considered their career paths to be unconventional. Mark for instance, described feeling distanced from the rest of his family, “following the path I’ve done has left me feeling separate from them all, and I’m aware that one bunch of cousins particularly are just a bit threatened by it all and they see me as being aloof and arrogant. I try not to talk about what I’m doing when I’m there because it always sounds like I’m doing something new, which for me, it might be me being neurotic, that oh he’s doing yet something else, I know that people who jump from career to career to career that they are going from crises to crises, I’m thinking am I going from crisis to crisis, is that what they’re saying about me?” This resulting sense of isolation and self-doubt also appeared to derive from
social comparisons with others who were perceived to have found a unifying theme and purpose, whether this was objectively or subjectively defined (Mark, Zara, Harvey).

The task of forming a career into a structure that felt subjectively successful (for example, in terms of variety, flexibility and productivity), was seen as a process that required time and a process of learning, “I think you’ve got to learn, at the beginning you take on quite a lot because it’s your own business then you want to hone it down... I quite like to plan things like that so it’s not rigid but you know what your doing. It’s not just to do with balance it’s to do with productivity.” (Priscilla). When this had been achieved participants described a sense of peace and of feeling settled that was considered to be an indicator that they were now doing something they felt content with (Joanna, Candice). For instance, Johanna described her new life as “a lifestyle that is much more what I wanted, totally what I wanted really, more balanced, and one I enjoy and I’m very relaxed”.

ii) The Incremental Development of Skills and Experience

The incremental development of skills and experience appeared to relate to a sense of cohesion, and was described as contributing to perceptions of success both during the transition process and to later career outcomes. The advantages of gradual development that were described included reducing fear of the unknown, building confidence levels, and maintaining a connection with aspects of previous work experience that were valued and enjoyed, all of which appeared to assist adjustment and contribute to an outcome that was perceived in positive terms, “You have to be quite careful about building up gently, and not push yourself, sometime people can push themselves but I think you have to be quite confident in your ability. I did it my way because it suited me, building things up slowly, it’s nice to look back and see how far I’ve come.” (Candice)

The pace of incremental development also appeared to be significant in influencing adjustment and a sense of progress that was associated with perceived success. The benefits of maintaining links with a previous career particularly during the early stages of career transition where seen earlier in identity terms in Priscilla’s narrative. Another advantage of doing this was to provide a sense of security, with the previous
job being regarded as a fallback option in case their new career wasn’t successful. While this security blanket was welcomed and offered a sense of control over the opportunities they had available (Zara, Joanna, Henry, Simon, Bena, Harvey), the thought of actually returning to their previous career was associated with negative emotions of regression, “I remember having really sleepless nights worrying whether I’d made a big mistake and whether I’d ever get work in this sector, in something new, and I was always thinking well I can still go back to publishing, I can still go back into academia but that was fall-back position, feeling really disappointed that I was thinking that way because it felt like a step back. It was a step, it didn’t need to be a step back but that’s how it felt.” (Bena)

Several participants described a stressful period of continual questioning over whether they had made the right decision to change career, particularly during the transition stage (Zara, Joanna, Simon, Bena). However, a key coping strategy described was addressing tasks associated with progression in the new career instead of being self-reflective (Zara, Joanna, Bena). This again suggests the advantages of a future orientation in assisting adjustment and proactive behaviour. When challenges such as this were faced, incremental development appeared to assist by contributing to a sense of progress, providing a sense of continuity, and enhancing confidence (Priscilla, Henry, Candice). For example, Priscilla described the benefits of using her existing skills to assist in her development in a new role, “...when I thought I needed to grow and develop away from that particular role I had to use all the skills I’d learnt running a business to set up and run my own business, so yes, I moved on.”

The process of incrementally developing skills was also described as assisting in the growth of self-awareness, particularly in terms of how these skills might facilitate progress by means of the confidence, motivation and direction they engendered, “I was much better at applying for jobs because it was much more clear...maybe that was about confidence too, but it was definitely much more focused about what I wanted to do. I was getting a lot of interviews... I could understand the process of their recruitment and I could see what skills I had to match, it was a realisation of what process and what steps I had to take to go through” (Candice). In addition to contributing to success in the job market Candice also described that she felt
confident enough to take more qualifications in the future, and as a result, anticipated further psychological success in terms of progress, personal development and enjoyment, “I will add more strings to my bow and I will expand and I will develop. I feel like I’m going somewhere now whereas before I didn’t feel I was going anywhere which affects your emotional state and affects how much you enjoy the work as well.” As a result of the development of his skills and accompanying self-awareness of his own capabilities Mark described a sense of both liberation and of greater responsibility for his own career path, “I’ve thought about it a lot because of my growing awareness that I could do anything if I wanted to do it probably. The freedom and responsibility that actually gives me to make a decision and then actually going and doing it.”

Some participants (Zara, Simon, Bena) described how they envisaged their careers in terms of cycles of change that built incrementally on skills and experience. These were seen in comforting terms, as an opportunity to return to aspects of work that they had enjoyed in the past, but had not used recently. In retrospect, several participants were aware of a process of consolidation of their skills and experience that had lead them to their current position, even if they had not been conscious of this at the time. For example, Priscilla said “I suppose I’d never imagine that I’d specialise in this sort of process but when you look back it makes sense because of all my learning, it’s fascinating.” However, participants who felt they had not achieved this cohesion, sense of stability, and perceived sense of progress, viewed their position in negative terms. Harvey, for example, described how he felt after having changed career, “Difficulty in making money, that’s the same and I had hoped that that would change, that I’d have more of a solid career and it hasn’t happened, so that feels the same and it’s slightly depressing in a way.”

iii) Continuity of Self
As participants established their new professional identity some reflected and identified feeling a continuity of self over time (Zara, Simon, Candice, Patrick). This was described as comforting at some points in their career transition, and at other times the lack of change was considered disappointing. Simon described, in retrospect, his realisation that his three careers to date had emphasised different aspects of the same person, “...comforting to find is that although the career changes
I'm still essentially the same person, its just different aspects.” He described this awareness of self-continuity as reassuring and providing a sense of control in that he felt less defined by his occupation and that instead he was able to negotiate his own role with himself that provided a sense of liberation in terms of giving him the choice to try different things. However, he also discussed his disappointment that his hope of finding inner fulfilment as a writer in his most recent career had not happened, and the realisation that external change such as a career change does not necessarily impact on inner changes in any direct or controllable way, “...ultimately I think disappointed but perhaps not surprised to find out that a change of career doesn't fundamentally change you inside whatever people say.”

Zara described resignation in that she remained a workaholic, although she perceived an increasing awareness of her desire for a better work-life balance and a sense of peace. She felt a tension between feeling that she could address these issues if she became seriously unhappy with them, but also sensing that her personal characteristics and childhood conditioning prevented her from doing so, “I think now I'd like it if I didn't want to have changes because I think it would be nice doing this for a while and not keep thinking what's the next thing, what's the next thing. But I probably will keep doing that because it's my nature, I'd like it if I didn’t but we are how we are aren’t we? You can’t just make yourself not like that.”

Patrick perceived continuities in his personal characteristics, such as low self-belief, laziness and not being self-motivated, that he felt held him back from achieving his ideal career and pursuing instead a career that he valued but regarded as a compromise. In this case, it appears that progress is prevented if a situation is perceived as tolerable although not completely fulfilling, and when the factors contributing to the situation are considered to be predominantly unchangeable.

In summary, maintaining existing aspects of their life through their transition appeared to have a number of practical and psychological advantages. On a practical level continuing to use existing skills allowed participants to be self-efficacious in some aspects of their new life that enhanced confidence levels. It also maintained some connection with their previous career that provided a reassuring safety blanket. Developing skills incrementally appeared to assist with participants psychological needs of having a structure and a unifying theme in their lives that provided purpose,
direction, progress, an expression of identity, control and a sense of social inclusion. Progressing in a gradual manner provided a future orientation that assisted coping with doubts about their decision to change, a sense of affirmation that validated their actions, and a perception of security. In retrospect, participant’s noted that they had remained the same person throughout the changes they had experienced, a sense of continuity that was generally perceived as comforting. The ways in which structure is imposed and cohesion interpreted retrospectively suggests its psychological significance in the careers of this age-group.

The next two sections discuss values that appeared to have increasing significance during the career change process. Their role in contributing to perceptions of success is described in the section on outcome variables. The first value relates to an improved work-life balance and the second value relates to achieving a greater connection with other people.

**7.4.2.3 Improved Work-Life Balance**

A reason that contributed to the career change of a number of participants was their desire to improve their quality of their life (Joanna, Henry, Simon, Candice, Harvey). On reflection all these participants felt that they had succeeded in attaining this to some degree. Some participants were motivated to make dramatic changes in lifestyle to achieve more time for themselves. The process of adjusting to their new pace of life was described in participant narratives. This involved regaining energy levels after the demands of a previous job and not feeling guilty about perceived relative inactivity (Simon). It also involved coming to terms with the values that they had based their change on and learning to understand the implications of what they would mean in practise, “it took me a good year and a half to really relax into the lifestyle, not feel guilty..., I did eventually relax into it and now I find I have quite a nice happy medium” (Joanna). The links between gaining more time and perceived benefits in terms of having renewed energy, improved relationships and psychological well-being are illustrated on the cross-case cause map.

**7.4.2.4 Connection with Other People**

The value of connecting with other people was a goal for some participants, while for others its achievement was an unanticipated outcome of their career change. For the
sake of clarity this section is divided into four further sub-divisions to describe the various aspects of this variable: i) Perceived Benefits of Connecting with Others, ii) Networking, iii) External Motivation to Succeed, iv) Social Support.

**i) Perceived Benefits of Connecting with Others**

Central to the career change goals of many participants was a desire to connect with others (Mark, Priscilla, Bena, Candice, Harvey, Patrick), which may be associated with Erikson’s (1956) concept of generativity (see section 3.2.3). As Erikson proposed this did appear to be linked to age, whether it stemmed from the development of altruistic values (Priscilla, Candice) or whether it was due to external influences, such as a reaction to previous negative experiences such as having felt isolated in a previous role (Mark, Bena, Patrick). Patrick described his aim of having a career that involved social interaction, “I wanted to have a job that would force me to be out there more and less in my own head... The main thing was to feel part of a workplace and to have colleagues and to go to one place and to feel part of something... I had workmates, I had colleagues, I had people I built relationships up with”. The benefits he attributed to having colleagues to interact with for the first time in his new career as a primary school teacher included being less self-focused, feeling recognised for his work and appreciated by others, which made him feel his contribution was worthwhile. Mark described how he had replaced his isolation as an actor with work as a consultant which had made him more connected to others in a work-setting and had also made him more involved in the world around him and more sociable. This appeared to enhance his feelings of self-worth and fulfilment; “I wanted to do more, I wanted to be more involved... I generally take part in the world more now than I did before, I read, I watch television, I have opinions, I have values and take part because I think they’re worthwhile.”

The next three sub-sections detail the various ways in which other people assisted career change, in the form of networking, providing an external motivation to succeed, and in offering social support. These factors appeared to be of varying degrees of significance at various stages during the transition.
ii) Networking

Networking was described as an aspect of connecting with others that was significant in influencing the availability of opportunities and in contributing towards emotional and professional support throughout participant’s careers. (Mark, Priscilla, Zara, Joanna, Henry, Candice, Harvey). Networking was considered a skill that could be learnt. For example, as a freelancer Mark had found networking difficult until his mentor from his MBA course taught and encouraged him to use some effective strategies, “I found it very hard to network but this guy has shown me how I can look at the people I know, the friends, work colleagues and how I can use that network, or be a part of that network because I can help other people and they can help me, and even though I’m not within a traditional organisational structure I can still plug myself in with an external network of people and use that to get work.” Candice noted the value of networking in progressing her career to date and as a technique she will use in the future, “I think you can find jobs much more easily through people, all of my other jobs, there’s hardly any where I didn’t have a contact. It’s about networking, letting everybody know you’re looking for a job.” In contrast, Harvey’s narrative revealed that he felt his failure to get a job in the area he had retrained in was because of his lack of contacts in this new field.

In addition to opening up job opportunities, networking was considered to benefit personal growth, “I think certainly it’s certainly opened up access to new people and I really believe that widens your knowledge, it allows you to become a better, more rounded person and I think its exciting, it opens up new possibilities, it really assists your growth, certainly it has a knock on effect for those around you.” (Priscilla)

A final benefit of networking, described by Henry, related to expectations of more objective business gains resulting from consolidating and maximising the use of contacts; “it’s linking it together and everyone’s going to win, I’ll link all the companies and organisations we’re working with.”

iii) External Motivation to Succeed

As briefly mentioned in section 7.4.2.1, some participants described extrinsic motivation for goal success, this was described as not wanting to let various significant others down (Mark, Henry, Bena). Mark described having always felt like an outsider and that this had given him an excuse for failure, which he had found
both liberating and frightening. However, when he attended an MBA course and discovered, to his surprise, that his skills were valued, he then felt part of the group and he did not want to let them down by failing (Mark). This case suggests the need for a social context from which to draw meaningful reference points to benchmark achievements, and in turn provide motivation to succeed. Bena discussed feeling that she did not want to let her new organisation down. When she felt that her lack of experience was insufficient for its needs, particularly in the early period of her job, this motivated her to further her contribution, “Sometimes I do feel like a charlatan in terms of ‘am I not going to be found out?’ In terms of somebody could give a whole wealth of experience to this job and push it and really make a go of it...but when I actually find myself thinking that way I become a lot more motivated in doing things like trying to start a new project or focus my energies on something new. It’s less so now than it was at the beginning when I really felt that a lack of experience.” Henry described how he felt he had let his wife down and lost her trust as a result of a business failure he was responsible for. As a result he felt an increased sense of self-motivation not to let people down again, particularly his wife, and he was aware of his need for external motivators to push him forward. “...I do need that prod from behind to get on with things, that prod now will be children and it’s also within myself now”. As well as having developed greater awareness of his responsibilities through this experience he also described putting further external motivators in place in his work that he felt would encourage him to succeed, such as ensuring that his salary was partly performance-related, that he had a mentor to provide objective advice, and that his wife was involved in aspects of running the business.

iv) Social Support

Support from other people was considered significant in both the process and outcome of career change. Support was derived from a number of sources and in a number of ways. Firstly, being part of a work group was considered to contribute to success in terms of providing an environment in which the participant felt an identity-fit (Mark, Candice, Patrick), where they were given support (Mark, Priscilla, Zara, Candice, Patrick), routine (Candice, Patrick), visibility (Priscilla), recognition of contribution and respect (Mark, Simon, Candice, Patrick), a team-setting (Priscilla, Zara, Joanna, Henry, Simon, Patrick), and reward and feedback (Priscilla, Henry, Candice, Patrick). Mentors in a work context were also found useful by three
of the participants (Mark, Henry, Candice). Henry described the benefits he found in having the objective judgement of a mentor in evaluating his performance and achievements, "One of the biggest lessons I've learnt is get someone in as a mentor who can grab me by the scruff of the neck and pull me out and look at the raw hard facts of what I'm doing." Role models, either friends or colleagues, who had experienced successful career change were described as motivational, encouraging and confidence inspiring (Bena, Candice), "I think I thought whatever happens I'm going to have to make it work and it will work in some way so I think it's just that confidence because a lot of my friends had changed as well... I think it was really good having those positive role models, really, really important." (Bena)

Beyond the work environment the support of friends and family were considered important for emotional support, and in contributing to the success of career change experiences. As previously stated, some participants found it important to tell only a core group of people about their change and seek support from them (Priscilla, Bena). However, the support and continuity of this small group was valued in terms of emotional support, continuity of identity, and validation for their new career. The value of support and understanding received from family and long-standing friends was particularly poignant for participants who had moved location as part of their career change (Joanna, Harvey), "it's really nice to have the support of your friends and family, people that you can phone up and be honest with and you don't have to lose face if your having a horrible time and things are really difficult". (Joanna)

The approval of friends was also used as validation of attainments, "...there is a good sense of achievement. When my friends come and visit they all go 'wow, what a wonderful life'" (Joanna).

Family was considered important in providing not only emotional support but also financial assistance during career change. As identified on the cause map by the link between social support and right time to change, a partner's financial resources sometimes influenced when was considered an appropriate time for career change to take place. Family support was described as reducing stress (Candice), and providing a sense of freedom (Simon). The enduring relationships with family members during a time of change appeared to provide a reassuring sense of continuity, "your identity, you have to be able to let go of that and that can be quite
isolating. I was very lucky because I had the support of my husband, without that I think it would have been quite difficult actually." (Priscilla) Family members were also considered valued working partners for those running their own business in providing a team setting and, as has been described, providing an external source to be accountable to. They were also described as an important source of emotional support and encouragement, "I was a bit afraid that I might give up too easily and my wife never believed that I would" (Simon).

To summarise, individuals appeared to value connecting with other people, either due to altruistic reasons or because they had suffered isolation in the past. The significance of this variable was associated with Erikson’s developmental goal of generativity. Other people were considered to enhance career change by contributing both practical and emotional support, by furthering personal growth, such as the development of empathy, and in increasing motivation levels, by the participant not wanting to let them down, or by being a role model. Different types of social support were described, for instance, mentors were valued for offering an objective view of the participant’s development. This was appreciated for being challenging and encouraging further development, while emotional support on the other hand was valued for being unchallenging.

7.4.2.5 Summary of Intervening Variables

In summary, the significant intervening variables appear to be associated with setting realistic goals that provide a sense of direction, developing a career that has a unifying theme that is aligned with subjective values, complements self-identity, promotes self-worth and provides the opportunity for the fulfilment of potential. Having a cohesive and subjectively meaningful focus within a boundaryless career appears to provide an antidote to the lack of direction and control implied by the looseness of the structure, as well as reducing a sense of exclusion from the perceived social norm. A growing awareness of personal potential was associated with incremental skill development that was controlled, emphasised continuity and provided security for progression. In contrast to the initial stages of transition where participants appeared to be more self-focused, it appears that at later stages other people played a more significant role, either in terms of shaping the definition of
goals (such as wanting to establish a greater work life balance or as a source of motivation to succeed) or in performing various roles of guidance and support.

7.4.3 Outcome Variables
The two evaluation outcome variable nodes in the composite cause map are progress and success. Factors contributing to the progress variable node relate to notions of development such as learning and personal growth, and the furthering or achievement of goals. Participants noted a sense of progress in three main areas: personal development, work life balance, and relationships with other people. Factors contributing to the success variable node relate to positive feelings derived from the subjective evaluation of progress in relation to goals and perceived social validation. The variable nodes of progress and success are interlinked, as the two concepts appear to be mutually influential. In addition, perceptions of progress and success are seen to impact on variables at other stages of the change process in a recursive fashion. For example, achieving a feeling of success as an outcome appears to enhance a sense of independence and the future likelihood of taking personal responsibility. As discussed in section 7.2.4, proactive behaviour is likely to be associated with further success outcomes. This cycle of success (Hall, 1976, see section 2.2.3) implying a spiral of progress is identified in the feedback loops marked with red arrows on the cause map.

7.4.3.1 Progress
This section is divided according to the three areas that participants described as contributing most significantly to their perceptions of progress. These were in furthering or achieving goals associated with: i) personal development, ii) work-life balance, and iii) relationships with other people.

i) Progress in Personal Development
The link between perceived personal growth and a sense of progress is indicated on the cross-case cause map. Personal growth seemed to be achieved in various ways. Some participants described managing their personal development, for instance by the incremental development of skills and experience, this was then associated with greater self-confidence. Other developments appeared to occur unintentionally as a result of the change experience. For example, participants described improved
relationships with others, particularly becoming more tolerant and empathetic, as a consequence of being exposed to a diverse range of people during their career transition. As discussed in section 7.4.1.2, participants were aware, or became aware that some aspects of personal development were not directly controllable. For example, Simon interpreted some aspects of his new career as successful but perceived failure in not having achieved his goal of finding an inner life from his new career. Since he felt this was partly because he had again imposed a demanding structure on his new life he developed a sub-goal of establishing a future lifestyle that he believed would be more conducive to achieving it. This illustrates the process of re-defining the means of achieving goals in the light of new understanding.

While participants generally discussed a sense of continuity of self during their career transition, this seemed to co-exist with a feeling of inner transformation resulting from their experiences. It appeared that participants felt their self-identity remained unchanged, but that they altered on an emotional level. In retrospect, Zara and Henry noted with astonishment the contrast between the changes they felt internally and the continuity they perceived externally in their environments, “Nothing feels the same as then, it almost feels like another life... There are physical things but emotionally everything feels really different.” (Zara) and “My wife and I, although older are in exactly the same life situation, same car, different house, its crazy, it’s like we’ve had five years of growing internally, not externally. So a lot has changed but physically nothings changed.” (Henry)

To provide himself with a sense of the scale of his personal development, Mark compared where he thought he would have been if he hadn’t changed career and his current position. This appeared to provide him with a measure of his progress and confirmation that his journey had been worthwhile. The emotional change he had undergone was considered significant enough to have been life-saving, “if I hadn’t have done anything at all, if I’d have stayed on the track I was there I would quite possibly be dead by now, not an exaggeration because I would have gone out of my mind, I may have killed myself, maybe that’s sounding a bit dramatic but I think I would be profoundly unhappy and I’m not, I’m actually quite happy at the moment.” Joanna also retrospectively described the rejuvenating effects of her career change,
"I think I became really weary of life and I do feel like I've gone back to being like I was when I was twenty-one. The world is my oyster and I can make things happen and I do socialise more and organise people."

The process of career change was associated with developments in self-awareness that were found rewarding. They also appeared to be an important basis for other facets of personal development that were then found to contribute to the personal and working lives of participants, "I have much greater self awareness of how I'm feeling and what I'm thinking, beginning to get more pride and sense of achievement out of some of the things I do because I've faced up to the demons and gone and done it in a way. And I think I'm probably more confident in who I am now and that's probably in the last year or so, just willing to give myself a bit of break maybe." (Mark) Personal development appeared to be regarded in terms of a continuum rather than having an end-point, and was therefore seen as an ongoing theme motivating the individual to move forward, "I've realised that it's important not to stagnate, not to stay in your comfort zone, to really push yourself. I would want to continue to develop." (Priscilla)

In retrospect, having experienced the process of career change, participants mentioned several factors that felt made them feel positively about themselves. Dealing with challenges was seen as a strengthening experience, that on reflection was associated with a sense of pride, "Because it's a lot to go through really, really a lot of pressure. I knew it at the time, I'm quite pleased that I was able to cope with it, maybe I didn't always cope with it the best way but it made me a lot stronger and I think that sometimes you need things to almost break you to rebuild you and make you stronger like that, I'm kind of proud of myself I suppose." (Candice) Several participants linked change to a growth in confidence, an improved ability to face future challenges and greater openness to opportunities, "I feel I can cope with the unexpected. It's not so scary wanting to leap out and do something different so that feels very good." (Bena). Increased confidence levels that were achieved from coping with past challenges also appeared to encourage a sense of ability to adapt, even to unknown situations. It is thought that this may be due to a sense that existing skills and coping strategies could be transferred to new circumstances, or it may be due to an awareness of having the ability to learn new skills, "I'm a lot less likely to
feel a fraud than I did before, even in a situation where I don't know something about a subject, I can confidently go in there and say actually I don't know very much and feel that that's fine. I think its come from an awareness that there's an incredible amount of knowledge out there in the world and just because I don't know it, all it means is I don't know it because I haven't come across it. I'm a lot more confident in knowing how to find out how to do things if I don't know which is probably something that research gives you.” (Harvey)

ii) Progress in Work-Life Balance

In attempts to achieve a subjectively acceptable work-life balance, issues such as flexible working hours, good management, holidays, and earning enough money were considered important long-term goals. Candice discussed her awareness of an on-going process of self-justification for her loss of salary in order to achieve a lifestyle that she enjoys and that is suitable for her delicate health. She described it as natural for her to make comparisons between her own and her friend's situations, contrasting salaries was found particularly challenging. However, she addressed this by focusing on what she values most, and in a weighing up process she felt the gains she had achieved outweighed the losses. In retrospect, Harvey also felt that his working structure had resulted in a lower income than he would have liked, but he offset this against the freedom and variety he has achieved, both of which he values highly; “I'd like to make more money but it also feels as if I've managed to create this past which I rather like, I like the things I've done, generally. If it's going to be more of that well that's fine.” (Harvey)

Once the process of adjusting to a new lifestyle had been completed, the perceived benefits of an improved quality of life following career change were numerous. Joanna described her new life in rural France running a B&B as simpler with less need for disposable income and less social pressure to be competitive. She therefore felt that her priority was only to make ends meet. She believed that her lifestyle was healthier. This was predominantly associated with having more time that allowed for relaxation, appreciation of her surroundings, for socialising, for thinking about her values, and for exploring ideas and being creative in finding ways to further her business, “...it is life with the usual responsibilities that go with everyday life but at the same time it is a lifestyle that is much more what I wanted, totally what I wanted
really, more balanced and one I enjoy and I’m very relaxed. I can’t believe it, I feel very lucky”.

Having a less stressful life was perceived to be responsible for improvements in psychological well-being that had implications for relationships with others (Mark, Priscilla, Joanna, Simon, Bena). Joanna considered that her new environment, characterised by having more time and less stress, allowed her to return to an emotional state where she was able to conduct relationships that she had always placed value on but had not previously been able to achieve, “I think I was a different person because I was so stressed and strung out all the time and I don’t think I was a lot of fun to be around. So I think in the back of my mind... get back to my old self, be much more happy go lucky and hope that I might actually meet someone and now... I’ve finally got that as well and so I am now living the dream life that I always wanted.”

For Candice, work life balance was not affected by having more time but by the sense of fit she felt with her job, and the enjoyment she gained from it. While she worked about the same amount of hours in her new career compared to her previous career she felt that she had an improved work-life balance because the new field was more suited to her character and her interests. As a result she felt her working life was more enjoyable and invigorating. Also, she no longer felt resentful towards work taking up her time. She described herself in her new career as “Happier, more in-line with my personality, more confident, easier to do my job because I don’t feel as much resistance and I don’t feel like it’s a chore at all... Work-life balance is really important still, although in this career now I feel I’m prepared to give more because I enjoy it more so I don’t mind, in my spare time I might read books and things”.

For several participants, having a more balanced life was directly linked to creating what was perceived as an improved fit between work demands, and the values and priorities at their particular life stage. For example, Simon had wanted to spend more time with his young daughter, and Mark had come to realise that he wanted to focus attention on aspects of his life other than work. There was a perceived need for taking personal responsibility to ensure success in achieving this goal, “I’m taking
control of my life in as much as seeing life in a more holistic view rather than my twenties which were much more about work...Now I have a greater control over the various parts of my life and a willingness to take responsibility for that and do the things I want to do." (Mark)

Feeling that they had succeeded in improving the quality of their lives, participants described a growing awareness of new aspects (previously not considered) that they perceived would further enhance it, “I've learnt that I couldn't not have mental stimulation. I always thought I'd be happy to turn my back on any kind of working life but I've definitely learnt that I quite enjoy responsibility and a challenge.” (Joanna). Therefore, as an outcome of change and experiencing their new career, not only do participants re-define ways of achieving their goals, they also re-define the goals themselves. Joanna described how she had discovered that without her professional status she now felt insignificant, so she accepted her need to do occasional consultancy work using her skills from her previous career to maintain a valued sense of professional identity. She also described that while she relished the challenge of such consultancy work, it served as a reminder of what she disliked about her previous career, thus providing reassuring validation for her decision to change. Another way she addressed the issue of reduced mental stimulation in her new career was by creating tasks focused on the development of her new business, and maintaining her motivation levels by working as a team with her partner.

Other participants described the process of finding a correct balance in their lives as being a protracted one (Priscilla, Zara, Henry, Harvey). Henry felt that he had succeeded in achieving an improved quality of life on a daily basis as a result of running his own business from home that enabled him to have relative control over his own time. However, he still does not feel that he has achieved a perfect balance since he has been unable to take any holiday time during the first years of working for himself. Participants were found to prioritise their values concerning work-life balance issues at different stages of the career change process. For example, Henry felt that a lack of holiday time was regrettable, but nonetheless an understandable and tolerable part of starting a new business. He regarded it as a relatively short-term loss, and it was a goal that he continued to hold and considered achievable.
Participants also described the process of understanding and prioritising their values in order for them to achieve a balance in their lives that they considered satisfactory. For example, Harvey described how he had reconciled living in London to his original goals, "... it doesn't fit the requirement of living out in the country or of having more money but it's quite a workable thing, it gives me some of those bits and it allows me to be in London with my partner and people I know." Candice described how she viewed her current position, "I just think I haven't pushed myself far enough so I feel a little bit like I've let myself down in terms of the salary side of things. But then I think no because I've got a good lifestyle and I like what I do and I'm getting job satisfaction, I'm not getting as ill as I used to, if you look at the whole picture. I just have to keep reminding myself that it's not all about money anyway."

iii) Progress in Relationships with Other People

The objective of developing and deepening relationships with other people through career change has been described in relation to a number of participants. While this was not a goal for all participants it was described as an outcome for all of them. Participants who had given up a team environment described missing it and attempting to replace it in other ways, such as working with partners or becoming affiliated to a professional body (Priscilla, Zara, Joanna, Henry, Simon). For those who had moved from an isolated work setting to a more social one this was predominantly perceived as positive. Several participants associated their age and experiences with a growing awareness of the value of close relationships with family and friends (Mark, Priscilla, Joanna, Henry, Simon, Bena, Candice, Harvey, Patrick), and dedicating time to developing these relationships became an on-going goal. This appears to be a contributing factor to the value placed on work life balance by individuals in their thirties.

Whether a change in the social nature of the workplace was experienced as predominantly positive or negative appeared to depend on the personal characteristics of the participant, and the culture of the new environment. For example, Bena felt only benefits in moving from an isolated role to becoming a team member. However, Mark, who described himself as being naturally withdrawn, found such a change demanding and challenging. Having associated the isolation in his previous job with periods of depression he felt the need to connect more with
others. When he felt he was in a supportive environment he found this an enjoyable experience that also made him feel more alert and focused in his thinking. However, when faced with a more challenging environment, such as being the victim of bullying from a head teacher during his probationary year as a primary school teacher, he found the experience particularly stressful.

For participants who were motivated by the value of altruism in their career change, the social context of work was found a rewarding experience that led to unexpected gains in terms of growing networks, expanding opportunities and personal development. Priscilla described how she had benefited from her new career as a business coach, "It exceeds anything I ever dreamed of. Amazing. I think the most important thing is the new people you meet and come into contact with and the connections you make, its fascinating, it allows you to grow, to develop, to become more who you are, it expands your whole consciousness."

Participants who valued making what were perceived as creative and unique contributions to others reported feeling proud of their achievements (Joanna) and gaining satisfaction from seeing others benefit (Joanna, Henry). Patrick placed increasing value on his role as a primary teacher, as he realised the extent of his contribution, "I've learnt how much you can contribute in being a primary school teacher, in terms of contributing to society. There aren't many jobs I wouldn't have thought, moulding thirty children over a year is an incredibly responsible and important job." Several participants felt an on-going need to be creative and to make a unique contribution that would be of interest or value to others (Mark, Henry, Simon). This appeared to be important both in terms of fulfilling a value of contributing to others, and also for social recognition of their achievements that contributed to their evaluations.

Participants reported that the process of career change led to various improvements in their relationships with other people. Firstly, they felt that the personal development they experienced as a result of their career change strengthened and deepened their relationship with others. This appeared to occur in response to having been brought into contact with a diverse group of people during the change process that resulted in them becoming more tolerant, understanding and broadminded. As a
consequence participants felt they were able to get on with a wider range of people (Mark, Priscilla, Zara, Simon, Candice, Harvey), and were less judgmental of other people's lives (Henry, Simon). This appeared to result in feeling less insular and less selfish than before (Mark, Priscilla, Simon, Patrick). These benefits were described as contributing to both their personal and professional lives. For instance, Priscilla felt that her improved connection with other people enhanced her capabilities as a coach since her empathy skills had developed, and she was able to be "authentic" by using her own development experiences when relating to those of her clients.

Another benefit of career change that was felt by participants to have a positive impact on their relationships with others was their increased confidence levels. This appeared to make them feel more relaxed and open in a variety of social situations (Mark, Joanna, Bena, Harvey, Patrick). Bena described this, "I think my confidence has grown, so I think I'm a lot more relaxed about small talking which I wasn't before, I used to find it a bit of a drag and I'm a lot more confident about being around lots of different people". Mark described that while increased confidence levels enabled him to be more socially engaged and outward-looking, they also further developed his confidence as a result of feeling less of an outsider and more knowledgeable, self-aware and secure in himself. He also felt more able to trust the opinion of others which he believed improved his relationships with others "I have a greater sense of self-worth I think from having done the things I've done, a greater self-awareness...It helps me certainly build relationships with other people because I often meet people who might have done something very similar and I say I remember doing that or I've been in something very similar to that, so it helps to empathise and build relationships with people.... And thinking actually I'm not as boring as I used to think I was, and that other people are in a similar boat...I'm a little bit aware of what's going on in the world and I can be supportive in that respect. But in my twenties and even early thirties I never really found myself very interesting, never really thought I'd done anything."

Another reason given by participants for improved relationships with others following career change, was having more time, as discussed in the section on work-life balance. This was thought to allow for developing relationships that had previously not been possible, and when combined with enhanced personal
development, this was found to bring new depth to relationships, “I probably have a lot more time for other people. I think I’ve always been quite chatty and like company but I feel a lot more open now, but I think the main one would be how I am in a relationship. I’m happier in myself, I believe in myself more so yeah, I think in a lot of my past relationships I probably didn’t believe I deserved the love that much, and now I do and therefore I have a much healthier and better relationship.”

(Joanna)

As a result of their career change, participants described a number of learning experiences concerning their relationships with others that they felt would contribute to improved working practices in the future. For example, Bena felt that in adapting to team working she had learnt how to contribute and also how to compromise with her colleagues. Henry said that as a result of feeling he had failed to manage people in his previous business, he had learnt from these experiences, and would make improvements in the future, such as prompt and continual communication with others and establishing accountability. Finally, Patrick described his experience of being the victim of bullying during his career transition. As a result of this, he felt that he had learnt to recognise signs of bullying, and that in the future he would respond more assertively and not tolerate it.

In summary, progress was considered to be made in relation to three inter-related areas, these were personal development, work-life balance and relationships with others. Career change was associated with progress in terms of learning, such as learning development skills (e.g., what is considered controllable) and learning to innovate as a response to having coped with new situations. Progress in terms of personal growth included increased levels of self-awareness that enhanced confidence, and led to further progress in relation to work and in developing personal relationships. Progress also stemmed from benefit-finding, participant’s described how they had become stronger in response to the challenges they had overcome. When perceptions of progress were threatened by identifying potential failures, such as a drop in salary in order to achieve improved work life balance, individuals appeared to emphasise the subjective suitability of their new position and stressed the value they placed on what they had gained.
Participants also described associating progress with having taken personal responsibility and pursing what was valued, since this offered a sense of increased career ownership, greater autonomy and control, and a sense of cohesion. Progress in work-life balance was associated with leading a healthier, less stressful and more sociable life, it was not necessarily found to be associated with having more leisure time. If the new work was enjoyed and valued then the time it took up was not resented. However, having sufficient time for developing meaningful close personal relationships was important. This section emphasises the significance of personal development, pursuing subjective values and developing bonds with other people in contributing to perceptions of progress, however, participants described all of these as aspects of their lives that they wanted to continue to develop.

7.4.3.2 Success

The cross-case cause map identifies success as an outcome variable node, however, this section illustrates that evaluations of success are made at various stages of the transition process. The findings relating to success are divided into two sub-sections are: i) How Subjective Evaluations of Success Were Made in the Process of Career Change and ii) Factors that Contributed to Perceptions of Success.

i) How Subjective Evaluations of Success Were Made During the Process of Career Change

Instead of waiting until the end of their career change cycle to evaluate their career change, some participants discussed making evaluations at self-imposed times during their transition (Mark, Joanna, Henry, Simon). They described setting a deadline at which time they would assess their achievements and decide whether they should continue on their established path or make some alterations to it. For instance, Simon described this process, "I'm at that point I think I know what I like and I know what I don't like, now I think I know what I think works and what doesn't work. But I've given myself about a year from now to follow through on that". Such an approach appeared to be adopted in order not to waste time on things that were not going to be successful. This seems to relate to a time-limit awareness associated with the age of the participants, a level of self-awareness regarding values, the need for self-honesty as discussed in section 7.4.1.2, and also being a recognised strategy in assisting with the completion of goals.
For several participants the method of evaluating success appeared to involve a weighing up process comparing the losses from their previous career against the gains achieved in their new career. For example, Simon described implementing such a weighing up process that involved factors relating to time, values, opportunities and learning in deciding whether he felt he was right to change career, "there's the concept of opportunity cost, how much I've not learnt over the last two years if I'd stayed in the city, but all that does, is rather than saying to me, 'god you made the wrong decision, it says you've got to make sure that what you're doing right now is really what you want to do because you'd be really stupid to give up all that money to do something that's not actually meaningful to you".

When evaluating success it appeared that participants compartmentalised aspects of their change which meant that some aspects would be regarded as successful and others not. Rather than providing an evaluation based on a generalised overview of their outcomes, participants tended to provide evaluations linked to specific goal outcomes. For example, Simon described his lifestyle following his career change as "immeasurably better" although he felt he had failed in achieving the spiritual fulfilment he had hoped for, "...my external life is much, much better without a doubt but my internal life I'm not sure that it is...One of the things I had hoped is having quit banking and having had more time that I would have become maybe a bit wiser, a bit more spiritual, and I don't think I'm wiser, I don't think I'm more spiritual, more experienced, but that's been a disappointment, and I don't quite know what to do about it but we'll see... if I don't somehow develop more of an internal life there's part of me that will think I'm a failure."

In response to experiencing the outcomes of career change, whether they were perceived as successes or not, participants described developing an increased understanding of what further things they felt they wanted to achieve, and what they considered possible to achieve. This led to a process of participants refining their expectations of future change in terms that they perceived to be more realistic. For example, Simon's failure to achieve spiritual fulfilment as a result of changing career led to an understanding that such a goal was beyond his direct control, although he maintained the expectation of achieving an environment that he felt may encourage
its development. Harvey also reported having more realistic expectations following his experience of career change that he felt would influence how he approached his continued development, "I think now my expectations are probably more realistic. I'm just realising how much is involved in a career change which is why when life seems to be giving you one thing... then those are the things to go towards."

Zara described having experienced unexpected life changing events such as divorce that she felt made her appreciate the uncertainty of the future, and thus made expectations irrelevant. Perceiving a lack of control in directing her future she felt that being open to opportunities was a more realistic approach to take. This may be seen as taking a reactive approach to environmental demands, but addressing them with a positive and proactive attitude that is perceived as being an effective approach in coping with the challenges of career change, "I'm open to whatever happens and I think that's probably the best way to be so you don't get disappointed, that's maybe a safety thing."

ii) Factors that Contributed to Perceptions of Success

The cross-case cause map identifies the link between perceived progress and evaluations of success derived from achieving major goals. The consequences are shown as pride, contentment, and independence. Both personal evaluation and social validation appear to contribute to perceptions of success. Mark described his feelings in relation to completing his MBA, "...that was hard going, and actually I was really proud of myself that I stuck with it and took an adult decision to plug on with it, I wouldn't have dropped out but I could have easily taken a back seat in it I think."

In contrast, participants who had not completed specific goals reported feeling a sense of failure, "a sense that I've failed...If and when I finish my probationary year, which I hope I will do, then I think I'll feel that I've succeeded."

(Patrick)

Participants discussed a number of perceived benefits deriving from the achievement of goals that were considered to be the result of them taking personal responsibility and being proactive. These included having knowledge of, and confidence in using successful strategies to set realistic future goals, and the ability to be less responsive to the demands of others (Mark, Henry, Candice). Henry described how he could evaluate various strategies in retrospect, "...looking back I can see where I did well
and where I didn't do well. It's only now that I'm beginning to get clearer goals on where I want to be going. In a vast number of things I've done it's just been reacting to my environment.” This appears to benefit future development in terms of offering direction, greater autonomy, enhanced career ownership, and therefore an increased opportunity to fulfil subjective values.

As well as enhancing perceptions of control and career ownership, taking personal responsibility was found to provide a sense of freedom and empowerment. It enabled Mark to make a decision and act on it and offered Candice a sense of influencing the characteristics of her work setting, “I think better because I can manage my own time a lot better, I'm a lot more in control of my own job and I really love the admin side of it but it's much more my job, I've got the ownership of it and that is really empowering.” Henry highlighted an overall sense of psychological well-being from having taken responsibility for his career, “…now I'm more proactive and it's good for my own piece of mind”. Mark noted that this responsibility, while beneficial to overall development, came at a cost in terms of feeling personal accountability for his achievements, “In some ways it's not as good because I was a happy moron then, everything was just lovely I didn't worry about anything whereas now I'm much more aware of where my concerns are and a much greater understanding of what I want to do and also a greater understanding of how I can go about doing that.” However, a sense of ownership, derived from being proactive and acting according to subjective values was associated with feelings of success, “I feel like I've really got something now which is mine...whether what I'm doing now fails or succeeds, and I've become more and more confident that it will succeed it'll be my failure or my success.” (Simon)

Apart from achieving goals another significant contributor to the evaluation of success was knowing that a challenge had been accepted and knowing what the outcome was. This appeared to relate to wanting to maximise opportunities, fulfil potential, avoid future regret, and satisfy curiosity. Harvey described the importance to him of having taken up the challenge of career change, “I've often thought when I'm eighty-five and can really no longer do quite a lot of things, what would I have liked to have done? ...and I can say I've done those things now and I'm glad...I
know that I've done them and I've seen what they have to offer. So that feels good to have done that."

In retrospect, several participants noted that some of the outcomes of their career change were unexpected gains and supplemented those that they had intended, these were also evaluated as successes (Mark, Joanna, Simon, Candice, Harvey). Such benefit-finding in the situation after career change was described by Harvey, "On the face of it I've failed to make the exact change that I wanted to make but what I have succeeded in doing is making changes in other ways I hadn't expected...I think my confidence improved, so that's a success." In another case however, desired outcomes had been achieved indirectly as a results of other goals. Joanna proactively changed aspects of her life that she felt were controllable, such as improving her work life balance, by achieving this goal she also achieved what she had previously considered a goal beyond her control, that of meeting a partner and developing a long-term relationship. She compared her current position to her earlier expectations, "Really positive that we can keep evolving every year and build up the business and become more secure and getting the other things that I want in life, starting a family, whereas a couple of years ago I'd have thought I can't do that."

Several other participants reported feeling that accepting the challenge to do something that was meaningful to them and doing it to the best of their ability resulted in different criteria for influencing success than those they initially held. The value placed on effort and personal fulfilment appears to correspond to Hall and Mirvis’s (1996, p. 26) definition of psychological success that was believed to result from "knowing that one has done one's personal best". In these findings it appeared that the experience and learning gained through change was associated with a sense of progress, and that this, together with the fulfilment of subjective values, were key in contributing to evaluations of success, "...what I try to do now is to do things and to do them as well as I can but also get a sense of satisfaction from it" (Mark) and "If what I want to do doesn't work and I decide to call it a day, I'm not sure actually, will I necessarily view it as a failure? It was something I had to do and the deal I've had with myself has always been, I don't want to be on my deathbed saying why didn't I? And if I've given it my best shot and it still hasn't worked, actually that's good enough. Obviously I hope with all my soul it will work but I'm not going to be
putting a bullet through my brain if it doesn’t because in one sense, whether it’s age related or family, or whatever, as I’ve got older I’ve got less and less defined by what I do. I kind of feel there’s lots of things I could do, so if one thing doesn’t work I’ll find another” (Simon).

This view redefines an understanding of failure from one that is concerned only with a sense of negativity and loss to one in which insight is gained, Simon termed this “failing in a creative way”. Participants described the maturity and self-confidence necessary in learning to come to terms with the process of trying things out and accepting if they don’t work (Mark, Simon). For Simon, failure was seen as a frustrating but inevitable part of progression. However, repeated failure appeared to be taken as an indication of the unsuitability of the goal that would provoke reassessment of the direction he was taking, “I mean I’m going to make loads and loads of mistakes, I’ve already made lots of mistakes, that’s not the issue, the issue is do I fit here?... ultimately can I do something that other people can’t. I think that’s what I’m looking for, to have made a contribution in my own way... the real question is do I have the respect of my peers, and am I doing enough that’s right that it overcomes what I do that is wrong?”

Zara and Simon were aware that although they achieved their goals and also succeeded in terms of objective measures of success, they did not feel success subjectively because they felt they were constantly focusing on the next challenge. Zara described this, “I always thought whatever I’m doing there’ll always be something else that I’ve got to succeed at.” She perceived that childhood conditioning made her feel the constant need to achieve and set new challenges. Simon also described having a temperament that constantly wants challenge, “I’ve enjoyed my life much more and I think a part of me thought I would be happier than I am but another part of me thinks I’m just not that sort of individual because the minute something is going well is the minute I start to get bored so I seem to put myself into situations where I’m always trying to learn and starting at the bottom.”

While this lack of satisfaction with their achievements appears to provide them with motivation to progress and succeed, it does not seem to be psychologically beneficial.
Another reason for the achievement of a goal not being evaluated as a complete subjective success appeared to derive from a disparity between the subjective values of the individual and those they perceived in their social context. For example, Bena based her new career on achieving her subjective value of having a balanced lifestyle. While she considered she had been successful in obtaining this outcome, she felt that it was not valued by society, this had a negative impact on her measure of subjective success “one part of me does feel that’s a sense of failure in terms of the British work ethic but actually my social life is much better now, I’ve got better relationships.”

In relation to the evaluation outcome variable of success, it was found that evaluations were made at various self-imposed stages during the career change, as well as retrospectively once the career change had been made. Intermittent evaluations appeared to stem from the age-related reason of assessing achievements periodically to ensure time was not wasted pursuing goals that were perceived as inappropriate. Success appeared to be evaluated in response to separate aspects of career change, in relation to specific goals. A more open-minded and realistic approach to evaluation was considered to be an outcome of having experienced the unexpected nature of career change. Four areas appeared to contribute to evaluations of success. The first was the achievement of goals, associated with greater confidence and autonomy that was considered empowering and psychologically beneficial. In addition, reflection on the route taken to achieve successful outcomes was perceived to contribute to strategies that could be employed effectively in the future. The second area was accepting the challenge of needing to change and knowing the outcome, thus preventing anticipated regret. The third area was pursuing subjective values and fulfilling one’s potential. The final area was the achievement of unplanned outcomes that were valued. Positive evaluations depended on the individual’s capacity to interpret and accept the outcomes as achievements, which was affected by personal characteristics including their need for social acceptance.

7.4.3.3 Summary of Outcome Variables
In summary, evaluations of success appeared to be most effectively carried out when they could be based on specific outcomes that could then be used as the basis for
future goal-setting. With the knowledge gained from their experience of career change, participants felt that goals became increasingly realistic, and therefore more likely to be achieved. Evaluations of subjective success were not only made with respect to the achievement of expected outcomes, but also to unexpected outcomes, to having accepted opportunities, to having acted in accordance with subjective values, and in attaining personal progress. The processes involved in change and development, as well as valued outcomes appeared to contribute to a measure of subjective success. This has implications for the concept of failure. Participant’s appeared to regard failure predominantly in positive terms associated with learning, unless it was a repeated experience with no progress that was then evaluated negatively.

Varied emotional changes and developments in personal characteristics were associated with career change. Perhaps the most significant factor influencing perceptions of progress, fulfilment and success, was the increased confidence levels that many participants described as an outcome deriving from a number of aspects of their career change. This was seen to transfer across situations and appeared to benefit participants in maximising the opportunities available to them, assisting adjustment to new situations and improving personal relationships.

Assessing the furthering or achievement of goals associated with work life balance issues appeared to involve the weighing up of subjective losses and gains before and after career change. Achieving an ideal lifestyle seemed to be regarded as an on-going process based on the continual assessment of values and priorities and their relation to work-life balance issues.

7.4.4 Summary of Results
The structure of the results section mirrors the representation of the variable nodes on the consolidated cause map. This graphical presentation identifies at which stage the participants perceived the variables to be most significant in their career change and provides some structure to the findings. However, textual analysis identifies the inter-relationships of many of the variables throughout the transition process. For example, participants suggested that significant antecedent variables included a level of personal development, associated with their age and experience that was
characterised by self-awareness of their abilities and values. This appeared to be associated with a desire for the consolidation of subjective values and skills, and recognition of the need for personal responsibility. The ensuing process of instigating and achieving goals in line with these values appeared to result in a number of outcomes that were perceived as subjectively successful. Participants discussed ways in which these outcomes were considered beneficial. Outcomes were thought of as learning experiences that were used to refine their future approach to many aspects of their lives. If participants felt they had learnt from an outcome then it was considered a success. Aspects of personal development were also regarded as outcomes of career change, such as increased confidence levels. The benefits of confidence in leading to a proactive and positive approach to future change appeared to be influential in cycles of success. Participant’s descriptions of future goals indicated an awareness of the on-going nature of their personal development. Also, in retrospect they appeared to understand and appreciate the outcomes of change, the strategies used to accomplish them, and their contribution in feedback loops that would enhance effective change in the future.

In the following discussion, these results are interpreted in a theoretical context with the aim of furthering an understanding of how career change is interpreted as successful. In these findings it is evident that evaluations are not only made retrospectively on completion of career change but that they are also made during the transition. This outcome is achieved from having adopted a constructivist perspective that places an emphasis on process and this is interpreted from a sensemaking perspective in the first section of the discussion. In the second section, an analysis is made of the criteria that contribute towards evaluations of success, and these are then considered in relation to their role specifically within a boundaryless career. To contribute to the research on career meta-competencies the attributes of the participants that appeared to assist in successful outcomes will be assessed. Finally, the potential influence of success on future development will be discussed.

7.5 DISCUSSION

7.5.1 A Sensemaking Perspective on Evaluations of Success in Career Change
The results indicate that the participants hold personal definitions of success, and that these definitions change overtime. The unique and dynamic nature of these
definitions appear to be a consequence of the continuous sensemaking processes undertaken as experiences are encountered and responded to, influenced not only by individual cognitive interpretations, but also by behavioural and attitudinal or emotive reactions to change. This is consistent with the writings on sensemaking by Weick and others (Gioia, 1986; Weick, 1979; Weick & Quinn, 1999). The particular contribution of these findings is in understanding the interpretations of thirty-somethings of the variables that contribute to their perceptions of perceived success at particular stages of the career transition and the outcomes that may then contribute to the next cycle of development.

In reflecting on their career transition, participants have arguably reconstructed the past in the narratives they have told in this study. When analysing such retrospective sensemaking it is necessary to address issues of remembering (see the limitations section of this chapter), and possible psychological defence strategies such as “buffering” (Nicholson & de Waal Andrews, 2005) that may affect an understanding of the processes being described. The findings of this study however, suggest that participants did not employ strategies such as “buffering” when dealing with aspects of change that may potentially be evaluated in negative terms, and this had consequences for their subjective evaluations. Participants appeared able to acknowledge feelings of failure in relation to specific aspects of their career that they had not achieved such as reaching a certain goal (Simon, Harvey and Patrick). Participants even reported feeling a sense of failure in relation to goals that in retrospect they perceived having no control over, such as Simon’s failure to achieve spiritual fulfilment. However, rather than focusing on the difficulties of the goal’s attainability and feeling an inability to effect its outcome, if the goal was still valued then revised efforts were pursued to achieve it, such as establishing sub-goals that were perceived as controllable, accompanied by a more tempered expectation of whether the ultimate goal may be achieved. By extending the timeframe for accomplishment and creating sub-goals, intervening achievements could be evaluated as successful, and the failure status attributed to the ultimate goal could be given a ‘short-term’ status and the evaluation of success could be given a ‘potential’ status. This corresponds to Heslin’s (2005) suggestion that subjective career success includes reactions to anticipated, as well as actual career-related attainments, and therefore has a broad timeframe. Therefore, in summary, participants were able to
acknowledge perceptions of failure and integrate these in their sensemaking with perceptions of success. This ability reflects a cognitive complexity that allows a sense of ambiguity. The drive to turn perceived failures into perceived successes however was evident, with the creation of sub-goals that represented alternative approaches to accomplishment and extended timeframes for evaluations.

Overall, in retrospect participants tended to evaluate their career transitions in terms of perceived success. A number of reasons were considered for this, the first two, were the extended timeframes in which evaluations were sometimes based, and the management of expectations both previously discussed. Another explanation that relates to a combination of these two reasons is that evaluations of success do not appear to be considered in a generalised fashion. Instead, each specific outcome of career change is assessed and evaluated separately. Participants discussed a wide variety of aspects of their lives in relation to their career change. The acknowledgment of unanticipated outcomes of career change as successful also suggests that the dimensions of success criteria were extended in response to the career change experience. These findings correspond to the notions that success has multiple, interdependent dimensions that co-exist (Eby et al., 2003; Parker et al., 2002), and that they are assessed in realms (Heslin, 2005).

The extension of criteria contributing to evaluations of success that appears to occur during the transition process seems to be as a consequence of developments in self-awareness, associated shifts in understanding of what is personally significant and the introduction of new factors that arise from the transition process. Factors relating to progress, some of which inevitably seem to occur as a result of change, such as learning and personal development, appear to become highly associated with evaluations of success during the change process. For example, Harvey, perceived failure in not finding a job in the field he had re-trained in but felt success in relation to several other outcomes, some of which had been goals (e.g., living abroad during his course), and some of which were unexpected benefits of his career transition (e.g., increased self-confidence and improved personal relationships). This case illustrates not only that success is evaluated in relation to different aspects of career change but that evaluations of failure and success can be held concurrently. It also demonstrates the dynamic nature of the evaluation process during career change, and
indicates the way that changes in values contribute to perceptions of success outweighing perceptions of failure in relation to outcomes of the change process.

The last and related reason considered in relation to participants considering their overall transition in terms of success appears to be because they value subjective success more highly than objective success. As a consequence they are able to transcend their concern with objective outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Hall, 2002) and highly value their achievement of subjective values, and the associated outcomes of change (e.g., learning and personal development), even if they were not intended. This is evident in the cases of participants who described placing more value on the process of trying to change career in a manner that was personally meaningful to them than on the outcome. While, it was considered that this interpretation might involve a post-hoc rationalisation of outcomes, the fact that participants also suggested that it was important for them to attempt challenges and discover the outcome regardless of what it might be in the future, discounted this possibility. Instead it is proposed that the notion of intrinsic motivation, i.e., motivation for an activity that is innate in the activity itself, explains the positive evaluations of pursuing subjective values. Intrinsic motivation has been identified as associated with activities that serve essential psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, engaging in activities that satisfy these needs, according to self-determination theory, leads to happiness and self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and it would appear, to evaluations of success.

Therefore, the significance of subjective values to participants, and the evolutionary process of valuing factors associated with the change process appear to be key contributors in evaluating career change as predominantly successful by participants. The criteria that contributed to participant’s definitions of success are described in the following section.

7.5.2 The Criteria Contributing to Evaluations of Success

In line with expectations based on the previous findings the participants appeared to use subjective criteria for evaluating career success. These included connection with other people, quality of life, and personal development. However, some objective criteria also appeared to contribute. These included accomplishment, autonomy and
competence. However, advancement in terms of hierarchy, power and status did not appear significant. A facet of their career that had both subjective and objective significance in contributing towards evaluations of success was that of coherent career structure which was valued in subjective terms for providing a sense of direction and stability, and in objective terms for providing a career form that was perceived as sociably acceptable. This suggests that external sources did, to some degree, influence the evaluation process. Perceived social norms relating to age expectations appeared to influence evaluations. The recognition of accomplishments from colleagues in a new career contributed by validating competency thus providing affirmation for the career change decision. This supports both the proposed importance of validation from others in relation to performance goals (Dweck et al., 1983) and the influence of affirmation from respected others (Weick, 1996), it also furthers an understanding of why this is important to individuals during career change. If an individual doubted the social value placed on an outcome, this appeared to have the potential to reduce their evaluation of success. This particularly appeared to be the case in relation to work-life balance issues, which often came at the cost of objective success criteria. In relation to the questions raised in the introductory section of this chapter concerning the relationship between what participants defined as subjective and objective success, it appeared that objective success did not necessarily imply subjective success, nor conversely did subjective success imply objective success. In addition, the findings suggest that achieving subjective career success often did result in a loss of objective career success (e.g. the loss of earnings or status) although this was not always the case if subjective values were recognised and valued externally.

During the early stages of career transition subjective values appear to be of over-riding importance to participants, in terms of finding and pursuing something that is personally meaningful. Attempts to resist external influences at this stage were apparent in order to focus on accomplishing these subjective values, such as limiting the number of people who were told about decisions to change career. However, at later stages, particularly at self-appointed deadlines for appraising accomplishments, there appeared to be a greater need for social recognition and validation in terms of evaluating performance and outcomes. The finding that external referent criteria were employed in contributing to the evaluation of subjective values is perhaps
surprising, however, their use did not appear to relate to a need for status, instead it appeared to be specifically targeted to validate accomplishments and reaffirm decisions, to provide a reassurance and motivation to continue in the new field.

In terms of deriving standards of success from social comparison, participants did describe some examples of this. Referents used were friends, family, colleagues and ex-colleagues, business competitors and a perceived societal norm. The perceived social understanding of success appeared to derive from a number of sources that were physically and emotionally close to the participant such as childhood conditioning and the views and experiences of significant others. If the outcome of the comparison was negative (for example, a sense of isolation felt by Mark in response to comparing his career structure to the perceived norm) then it was taken as a failure at that point in time. However, if the negative outcome was viewed as a learning experience, then focus was placed on how it could contribute to potential success in the future. Participants also displayed self-justification in response to negative social comparison that involved emphasising subjective gains in comparison to perceived objective losses. This process of adjusting the values placed on factors following negative social comparison is another example of the changes in values described earlier as occurring throughout the transition process. If the social comparison had a positive outcome, then this was considered confirmation for decisions made and contributed to evaluations of success.

An outcome of the career transition process that appeared to contribute to low levels of social comparison was a greater understanding and tolerance of others that was achieved through contact with a diverse range of people. This appeared to lead to an appreciation of individual differences, their subjective needs, and therefore an awareness of the irrelevance of social comparison.

Perceptions of success for individuals in their thirties appeared to be influenced by their history and their resulting values. For instance, in terms of historic influences participants who had had experienced many career changes in their past then placed significant value on achieving a unified career framework to provide cohesion, direction and a sense of meaning in their thirties. Meaning in life appears to involve having a sense of purpose and a feeling that one’s life matters. Meaning in life has
been strongly associated with subjective well-being (e.g., Antonovsky, 1987; Ryff, 1989; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). This appeared to be of particular significance to two gay male participants who described that knowing they would have no family responsibilities gave them freedom to pursue various career options. However, by their thirties they wanted to impose some restrictions by finding a single theme to provide meaning and consistency to their lives. While other participants identified this need it appeared to have particular significance to these men. It is perhaps of such significance to them because of their awareness that meaning will not come from having children, considered significant in developmental theories in contributing to tasks such as generativity (see p. 78). This finding highlights the benefit of adopting a holistic perspective to the study of career since it allows for an understanding of the significance of its meaning in an individual’s life. It also identifies the need for specific understanding of developmental and career issues for the gay population.

The expectations for differences in evaluations of success between men and women highlighted in section 7.2.1 were not met. The criteria found by Konrad and colleagues (2000) to relate to women’s evaluations of career success were found to also be of significance to the men in this study. The value they placed on values such as inner growth, accomplishments and personal relationships, that appear to be achievable in boundaryless careers, seems to offer a more positive picture of men’s development in a boundaryless career climate than that found by Arthur and colleagues (1999), who found men loosing out as they clung to objective criteria in evaluating career success. Possible reasons for the difference between these findings may be that men’s values have shifted to reflect those more appropriate to boundaryless careers in the last five years, or it may be due to cultural differences, since their study was conducted in New Zealand.

When participants made evaluations they appeared to take account of their circumstances at the time, including their physical and mental health, work-life balance issues, age, and their stage in the transition process. For example, Bena did not perceive a current lack of progress at work as a failure since she regarded herself to be in a stage of recovery from previous radical change that has resulted from serious illness. She appreciated and enjoyed her new-found sense of stability and the
opportunity to develop non-work aspects of her life. Contextualising evaluations in this way appeared to make them realistic and meaningful.

These perceptions of success shaped by life history and current life circumstances, represent a point-in-time evaluation of actual accomplishments in a continual process of re-assessment, and appear to encompass a timeframe that includes perceptions of anticipated career-related attainments as well. However, for thirty-somethings evaluations of future goals appeared to be influenced by an awareness of the finite amount of time they had left to achieve them. As well as motivating action, this awareness also appeared to encourage the use of deadlines as points at which to assess and evaluate outcomes. Justification for this strategy was to prevent time being wasted pursuing goals that would not be successful. It therefore appears that for this age group, evaluations of success may be achieved over an extended period but this is likely to have a self-imposed time limit. Therefore, the timeframes used in the evaluation of success appear to vary between individuals and may be foreshortened with increasing age. Imposing a deadline for evaluations to be made appears to contribute to perceived control and the maximisation of remaining time.

In conclusion, evaluations of success appear amongst thirty-somethings appear to be primarily concerned with subjective criteria. Therefore, in response to Bandura’s (1986) query relating to the ease with which subjective standards may develop in the face of pervasive social influences, it appears that it is possible. It also appears that the use of social influence was to a large degree under the control of the participants as to when, how much and to what purpose they used it. This was illustrated by the use of external referents during the later stages of transition in contributing towards evaluation of subjective criteria for validation purposes. The interpretation of negative social comparisons as indicators to be learnt from appeared to minimise psychological harm associated with failure and instead assisted in refocusing on potential future success. Consideration of contextual factors by participants appeared to contribute to what were perceived as appropriate and realistic expectations that in turn shaped evaluations. These findings suggest that the factors that contribute towards definitions of success and the processes used in its evaluation were under the control of participants.
7.5.3 Perceived Success within a Boundaryless Career

The previous section suggests that success is defined primarily by subjective values for these individuals operating within a boundaryless career. The significance of these values is discussed further in this section. Firstly, the identified need for a unified framework appeared important on a number of levels. It appeared that participants felt a sense of social isolation from having a varied career path that resulted from their comparison to a perceived social norm, and a perception that others viewed it in negative terms. This finding addresses the query raised in section 7.2.2 regarding the current influence of objective success due to its historical prevalence rather than its contemporary relevance. It suggests the continued influence of the bureaucratic career path as the standard benchmark, and the negative affect resulting from its inappropriate use as a comparison for evaluating boundaryless careers. In addition to leading to negative affect this comparison appeared to contribute to some participants evaluating their career structure in negative terms with regard to both objective and subjective success. It also appeared to lead to value being placed on the consolidation of skills and to contribute towards the type of career chosen in an effort to foster feelings of acceptance and inclusion.

The need to consolidate previous skills and experiences, particularly if participants had had a varied career path to date also appeared to be associated with age. This link seemed to be the consequence of a number of inter-related factors. Participants appeared to link consolidation of skills and experience with achieving a sense of direction and therefore, of progress. This was evaluated in terms of what was perceived as appropriate in terms of the needs and expectations from both personal and social sources, including those associated with their age group. The results suggest that consolidation was also felt to offer a lifestyle that offered stability in terms of routine, income and control, which again appeared to be considered relevant at this age, and the achievement of which contributed to perceived success. Benefits associated with the achievement of these factors included psychological well-being, the opportunity to achieve personal goals, and gain social approval.

The findings suggest several issues associated with identity relevant to perceived success in a boundaryless career. Participants who had experienced a number of careers appeared to have constructed a self-schema that provided a sense of personal
continuity. Different careers were viewed as having elicited different roles and emphasised different aspects of their identity while at the same time they felt they remained the same person. This sense of identity permanence was considered to be psychologically reassuring. It was also described as contributing to a sense of liberation regarding future change since the perception of being less defined by role and more by enduring personal identity meant that potential changes in career would be considered less threatening and therefore more acceptable. This finding suggests that this development in identity awareness provides a basis that is likely to contribute to future change being evaluated in positive terms.

Participants evaluated the outcome of having deepened relationships with other people, as a success, that they achieved by means of having more time to spend with them, having greater self-confidence, and a developed sense of empathy. It is thought that this outcome might have particular relevance in a boundaryless career climate where the social context is not constant and opportunities for meaningful interaction may be reduced. Other people were found to be valued a range of purposes that were considered to contribute to evaluations of success such as validation of career-decisions, recognition of contributions and to assist in motivation.

In summary, three criteria identified as contributing to evaluations of success appeared to have particular relevance in boundaryless careers. The first was a unified career framework that offered a sense of order in work and lifestyle, a sense of direction that allowed for progress to be assessed, and a sense of social inclusion. The later reason for having a unified career was thought to have particular significance at this point in time when bureaucratic career patterns may still be considered the norm. The second criteria was identifying continuity of identity, this aspect of personal development appeared to assist psychological well-being, and guard against the threats to identity in a constantly changing environment, it also appeared to assist adjustment to potential future change. The final criteria that was evaluated as successful and appeared to be particularly relevant in boundaryless careers was establishing deep relationships with others that may help maintain a sense of continuity during change.
7.5.4 Career Competencies in Thirty-Somethings

The findings indicate many career competencies that appeared to be associated with the thirties and many that developed in response to the experience of career change. Three age-related factors appeared to contribute to the development of career competencies. The first was that at this age individuals could reflect on a significant work history to increase self-awareness (e.g., of strengths, weaknesses and values). Secondly, strategies could be identified that were perceived to have assisted in contributing to successful outcomes and effective career management. Thirdly, many individuals appeared to be motivated to develop and use career competencies to maximise the use of what they perceived to be a limited amount of time to achieve their goals.

In terms of the 'knowing why' competencies, participants exhibited identity growth achieved through learning and self-reflection. This heightened self-awareness included an understanding of existing skills, experiences and values, which provided a basis for future development. At different stages of the transition process this self-awareness appeared to be inter-linked with a number of other factors, such as having greater control, providing direction, openness to opportunities, greater self-confidence, realistic goal-setting, and improved relationships, in contributing towards evaluations of perceived success.

One aspect of self-awareness associated with the thirties was a realisation that proactive behaviour was necessary in order to achieve subjective values. The pressure of personal responsibility was acknowledged but increased self-reliance was associated predominantly with positive outcomes such as perceived control, direction, and having a purpose. The links between self-reliance and these outcomes appeared to be cyclical. Although at a cognitive level the value of being proactive was widely acknowledged, putting it into practise was considered challenging, particularly for individuals who had low self-esteem or low motivation levels. Participants described devising a variety of strategies to encourage and ensure they acted in a proactive way. Being proactive was linked to positive outcomes including a sense of satisfaction and pride in achieving something that might they not have been accomplished previously. It was also associated with doing something in a personally meaningful way and to the best of one's ability. These outcomes were
perceived as subjectively successful regardless of the objective nature of the outcome.

In terms of the 'knowing whom' meta-competency the results suggest that individuals in their thirties tend to benefit from a wide range of professional and personal networks due to their varied roles, life histories and the value they place on relationships with others, these provide emotional and practical support. It appeared that participants were selective in their social support to ensure that they remained unchallenged and focused on their subjective goals in the early stages of career change. Emotional support contributed towards continuity of identity, reassurance and motivation. Professional support included networking which was considered a skill that could be learnt. Networking was associated with opportunities such as job-finding, and consolidating previous contacts, both of which were thought to lead to development and progress.

In terms of the 'knowing how' meta-competency, individuals in their thirties had accumulated knowledge from previous experiences that contributed towards their career transition. For instance, in some cases, participants illustrated an effective balance between agency and communion, termed "wisdom" (Weick, 2001), that was also noted in Chapter Five. Heightened self-confidence that was described as coming with age and having successfully met the challenges of career change appeared to contribute to an optimistic view of coping with future change. This, together with the proactive attitude described as typical amongst these thirty-somethings, reflects the concept of career resilience (London, 1993).

In summary, thirty-somethings appeared to have, and to develop meta-competencies that contributed to effective career change. Primarily, their self-awareness allowed for the identification of effective strategies, and their wisdom contributed to these being employed in an innovative way. Their willingness to accept personal responsibility and be pro-active, that was associated with having a limited time-frame, assisted in accomplishing subjective goals. Finally, the extensive and varied social support network that many individuals used, contributed by offering a range of practical and emotional resources.
7.5.5 The On-Going Influence of Success

The cause maps indicate the interdependence of factors that contribute to outcomes and the feedback loops that lead to cycles of success. For example, many participants described the developed sense of self-confidence they associated with being in their thirties. This was considered to lead to self-reliance and an assurance of recognising the right time to initiate change. A reciprocal casual relationship was also seen between self-confidence and the incremental development and consolidation of skills and experience. This in turn contributed towards a more cohesive career structure, which then resulted in a number of perceived positive outcomes such as progress. This led to the perception of success that in turn increased self-confidence, and other psychological benefits such as greater opportunities, pride and ownership. These outcomes then fed back to the beginning of the loop, as well as contributing towards other feedback loops. This finding provides support for earlier findings that describe how self-confidence develops in positive cycles (Bandura, 1991; 1997; Betz, 1992; 1994; Hall et al., 2005; Hollenbeck et al., 2004;).

It is evident that participants anticipated some outcomes of their career change but that others were unexpected. Participants described rating outcomes as particularly satisfying when they had felt directly responsible for them. However, it seemed that participants also felt responsibility for outcomes that were unexpected, whether they were perceived in positive or negative terms. If an outcome was perceived as a failure, liability was acknowledged but the outcome was seen in terms of some kind of learning experience that had the potential to contribute to future success. Unexpected outcomes that were perceived as successful were discussed in terms of amazement and excitement. The benefits of positive unanticipated outcomes were increased self-awareness and motivation for further development, promoting openness to opportunities, and positive attitudes towards change. Participants appeared to continually evaluate both expected and unexpected outcomes throughout the transition process that then contributed to both their ensuing behaviour and their psychological state as they entered the subsequent stage.

While Weick (2001) notes that research suggests feedback loops are rare in cause maps (Axelrod, 1976), the presence of feedback loops in the cause maps deriving
from this study is clear. The suggested reasons of individuals in an organisational context not perceiving feedback, particularly at times of uncertainty and within short time frames may not be relevant to this research. It appears that the characteristics of career change in a boundaryless career such as self-reliance, individual control, and the role of subjective values, all contribute to individuals perceiving their career in its totality and encourage links to be made across an extended period of time. Consequently, individuals in this context appear to be aware of feedback loops in their career development. For instance, Candice described how incremental skill development raised her self-confidence levels, this then led to the development of a cohesive career structure that further increased her confidence, and in turn contributed to continued skill development. A further consideration regarding the occurrence of feedback loops in the cause maps of this study is that they may be a response to participants being asked to reflect on their career history. Some participants described perceiving patterns in their cognitions and actions retrospectively. Some comments by participants suggest that they were not aware of some of these links until they were articulated for the first time to the researcher.

The findings suggest there are a number of benefits from having an awareness of the patterns and inter-relationships of factors that contribute to outcomes perceived as successful. Advantages include empowering the individual by providing a template for positive behaviour patterns, and contributing to psychological states that are conducive to enacting change, such as self-confidence and motivation. This corroborates Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews’ (2005) proposal that for individuals to manage their career strategies effectively an understanding of these patterns is critical. The findings suggest that the participants were aware that change was inevitable in their surroundings. Proactive behaviour informed by learning experiences from both successful and unsuccessful outcomes, together with the psychological benefits gained from having been subjectively successful, were considered crucial in future career resilience.

In summary, this research offers an optimistic view of future development following career change that has been evaluated as successful. Firstly, feedback loops were identified in the causal maps that suggest the on-going development of personal characteristics such as self-confidence. Secondly, the learning identified in career
change suggests enhanced efficacy in future career management. The identification of feedback loops in cause maps relating to boundaryless careers is a contribution of this research, made possible it is thought, by asking participants to reflect on their career experiences thus prompting connections to be made as a consequence of sensemaking processes and because of the extended time-span they were asked to reflect on.

7.6 STUDY LIMITATIONS
The possible differences in cause maps generated by professional and those produced by clients has been discussed in section 4.6.5.2. The issue of how much cause maps that have been generated by a researcher reflect the voice of participants and how much is researcher interpretation has been debated in the literature (Huff, 1990). In this study, the researcher constantly checked back to the data when producing the cause maps to ensure they provided an accurate representation of what had been discussed. In addition, illustrative quotes were provided in the results section to provide evidence for the links made and to retain a sense of the individuality of the cases. However, the researcher did experience tension in the quest to give sufficient attention to the varied experiences of participants, and provide detail of individual interpretations in the search for a more generalized but meaningful overview.

A related concern regarding the accurate portrayal of data is the debate around how maps should be aggregated across individuals, and consequently whether cross-case maps can be thought representative of collective cognition (Binkhorst, 1977; Bougon, Weick, Schneider & Angelmar, 1993; Nicolini, 1999). In this study the cross-case cause map was produced by careful reference to the individual cause maps, and again an iterative process was employed whereby more general insights were traced back to their individual cause, as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). The aim of producing a meta-network that summarized and clarified the key variables and casual links involved in career change outcomes was felt to be achieved with the cross-case cause map. It was considered that the inevitable loss in detail and complexity could be balanced by reference to the individual cause maps and the supporting text.
In terms of the participants selected for the study, the criteria for inclusion are detailed in section 7.3.1. An effort was made, as in previous studies, to have an equal number of male and female participants to assess possible gender differences, but no other attempt was made to follow the quantitative principles of a representative sample. A possible limitation of this study was that only two of the participants had children. While, from a phenomenological perspective this was not problematic, it did mean that issues associated with attempting to balance the demands of children and work were discussed by only a small proportion of the participants. The inclusion of two gay male participants provided an insight not addressed in the previous two studies.

When interpreting the results it is important to consider the effects of remembering on the participant’s narratives (Singer & Salovey, 1993; Weick, 2001), and to note that participants reflected back on their career change over different lengths of time. This is influential in terms of selective memory and attribution errors that may affect the ‘accuracy’ of accounts (Wren, 1991). The process of reflection may also involve cognitive dissonance and other post-host rationalisations. These aspects of retrospection are of interest in studying sensemaking and their influence is acknowledged during this study.

The influence of the researcher is also acknowledged during the study. Firstly, comments by several participants indicated that the process of reflecting on their career history for the purpose of the study affected their sensemaking process in terms of being able to make connections and perceive patterns in previous thoughts or actions. This illustrated the influence of the researcher and also indicated the potential benefits of career history discussions focusing on outcomes in a counselling scenario. Secondly, although participants discussed perceived failure as well as success and appeared to be candid in their interviews, the possibility of impression management should be considered when interpreting the results.

7.7 REFLECTION

On completion of the analysis for this study the researcher felt that the findings had contributed a sense of cohesion to the overall body of research. It was felt that this contribution had been made in three ways. Firstly, in addressing the key findings
from Chapters Five and Six, this study was able to provide a more focused and in-depth understanding of these areas. Secondly, this study concentrated on the later stages of the transition cycle, specifically the outcomes of career transition and their perceived influences on the future. This provided a more thorough understanding of the links between the stages of the transition process and the links between one cycle of change and the next. Finally, this study addressed issues of perceived success and failure.

Interviewing participants at least two years after their career change had been completed was found rewarding. It was considered that the timeframe participants were asked to consider was suitable for effective reflection. In the words of Blanshard (1967, p. 323), they were able to "consider events and beliefs in the light of their grounds and consequences". This allowed for a "mode of knowledge that tries to understand the ultimate consequences of events in a holistic, systemic way" (Czikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990, p. 32). The ability to reflect and interpret in a holistic way enabled participants to discuss the multiple connections that they perceived had contributed to their career change. This provided the data suitable for producing cause maps and clarifying the causal interdependence of the subjectively meaningful variables.

The researcher was aware that the findings represented a point-in-time representation of the participant's views. This was emphasized when several participants described, for example, that their evaluation of the future depended on their mood. An awareness of the continuous nature of sensemaking however, accepts the value of existing knowledge.

The methodological approach employed in this study was considered effective. The reasons for not interviewing participants using the self-Q technique and asking them to produce their own cause maps are discussed in section 4.6.5.1. If it were possible to overcome the concerns raised there, it would be of interest to compare participant-generated maps with those produced by the researcher. The use of cause maps as an analytical tool taking a phenomenological perspective and using sensemaking as an overarching framework to consider transition experiences in boundaryless careers was considered by the researcher to have made a novel contribution to their
application. Earlier attempts to reflect sensemaking with the use of cause maps have been based within an organizational context (Weick, 2001). The contributions of this study in relation to cause maps are considered to be in terms of representing and extending an understanding of sensemaking and in identifying the role of feedback loops in this context.

It was considered that participants displayed high levels of insight into the challenges they had faced, the techniques they had adopted and the learning they had achieved. These appeared to derive from reflection on their experiences, and from surprisingly honest self-assessments of their experiences, and acknowledgement of their perceived failures as well as successes. This was found in contrast to Weick’s (2001) suggestion that the attitude of wisdom is relatively rare because people find it hard to doubt what they know, or to admit to themselves that the knowledge they possess is only a small portion of what could be known. It may be that the distance offered by time contributed to participant’s apparent insight and honesty. It may also be associated with the age of the participants, the perceived need to avoid delusion, and endeavour to achieve what is subjectively meaningful. This will also be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

7.8 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has identified the significance of evaluations of both success and progress as contributing to participants feeling positive about their career change. It has also emphasised the role of these evaluations in feedback loops that make a positive self-reinforcing cycle of career development. A number of elements, associated with this age-group, appear to assist in career change being positively evaluated. These include firstly, the importance of subjective goals that contribute by being appropriate to a boundaryless career climate, and that, despite their outcomes, appear to offer intrinsic rewards from pursing them. Secondly, they have a time perception that offers a sense of the future to rectify failures, implement learning, and offer the potential of anticipated successes. The level of identity development at this age also appears to assist positive evaluations by primarily relying on subjective evaluations, and only limited and controlled use of external referents. Finally, the level of previous life experience of thirty-somethings appears
to contribute to career meta-competencies. The potential for successful career change during their thirties therefore seems highly possible.

This concludes the ‘Exploration’ segment of this thesis. In the final chapter an analysis of the three studies will be presented. The findings will be contextualised in the extant theory and the contributions of this research clarified.
PART III

IMPLICATIONS
CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION
There are several aims to this, the concluding chapter of the thesis. In the first instance a summary review of the findings from the three empirical studies is provided with the aim of clarifying the progressive contribution made by each. The next objective is to assess the contribution of this research in the context of the relevant theory discussed in Chapters Two and Three. The implications are then broadened to assess how this research may extend current thinking in the field of psychology. The fourth aim of this chapter is to address the implications of this thesis for future research. A final concluding section provides a reflection on the implications of this research.

8.2 SUMMARY REVIEW OF THE STUDY FINDINGS
The aim of study one:
The aim of study one, reported in Chapter Five, was to provide an exploratory insight into the factors that were perceived to influence the experience of complex career change at thirty-something. Semi-structured interviews as a data-gathering tool provided a context of choice for participants to express their career narratives. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis enabled an in-depth understanding of individual experiences, and allowed the identification of shared themes. The findings suggest the primary reason for voluntary career change amongst the thirty-something participants related to a psychological need to express identities and subjective values in vocational terms. The stages of the transition process were identified with a contemplation period early on appearing particularly significant for establishing a new career that was considered subjectively meaningful. The contemplation tasks that appeared to be especially important included developing awareness of, and prioritising subjective values, planning, and achieving a state of readiness to change. This contemplation period also seemed to be important as a time to regain emotional stability following negative work experiences. For study one participants, the stage
following this could be described as ambiguous, involving mixed feelings of exhilaration and uncertainty stemming from an unknown future. Later in the transition process two significant elements of realization were discernible in participant accounts. The first was a new conceptualisation of career change (i.e., a retrospective reframing) as part of an on-going cycle of development rather than a discrete event with a defined ending. The second was an understanding of the need to apply known behaviours and cognitions in a flexible manner and to innovate when necessary.

At thirty-something, challenging established cognitive and behavioural patterns via career change was generally perceived by study one participants as disruptive but rejuvenating. Certain characteristics that were considered to be associated with age were also described as being beneficial during the transition. Firstly, continuing to use existing skills and experience appeared to contribute towards confidence and self-efficacy, identifying a new vocation, realistic goal setting, subjective standards for evaluation, and a sense of progress. The level of identity development at this age appeared to assist in self-awareness and in an active approach to career self-management. Valuing authenticity and perceiving time pressures appeared to provide powerful sources of motivation.

The aim of study two:
To progress the findings of study one the relevance of the factors that were found to be influential in voluntary career change were next assessed in relation to change that was considered to be out of the control of the career actor. To achieve both this level of focus and an insight into what was considered subjectively meaningful to each participant the repertory grid was chosen as an appropriate data gathering tool. After the main grid had been completed the researcher introduced specific issues from study one as ‘top views’. The findings of study two, reported in Chapter Six, highlighted the emotional impact on participants who perceived their career change to be involuntary and the potential this had for shaping their experiences. The majority of these participants described powerful negative affect as an immediate response to job loss, even when they had some warning. This appeared not only to be related to surprise and shock but to a sense of rejection (in the case of redundancy) and loss of control. Low perceived control seemed to give rise to ambiguity, as existing career
meaning and coherence had been challenged. Negative emotions were consuming and appeared to have cognitive implications, such as reducing confidence, limiting perceptions of occupational choice and lowering motivation levels. In turn, these appeared to affect behaviour, for instance, in terms of the amount and kind of vocational exploration engaged in, the amount and kind of goal-setting activities attempted, and the coping strategies employed. The duration and intensity of the negative affect experienced appeared to be exacerbated by also having to cope with other emotional issues or having experienced involuntary job loss previously. Negative affect however in all cases appeared to subside with time and emotional support.

It was clear that for study two participants, some sense of emotional stability was necessary before they could cognitively reframe the job loss as an opportunity. This was interpreted as involving a re-orientation from the past to the future, and the perception of the possibility of an improved life, and could be associated with regaining a sense of control and choice in the new career. This re-orientation appeared to require values of personal fulfilment taking precedence over values of security, confidence based on past successes, a focus on anticipated success, and a devaluing of the past. Personal insight into subjective values appeared to also be necessary as a basis for constructive goal-setting. The most common values evident in participant accounts that could be understood as directing their career paths were independence from an employer and improved work-life balance. The former illustrates a powerful response to a lack of control and the desire to reinstate it by being self-employed. Participants whose new job was not perceived as an improvement described feeling compromise and frustration. However, participants who interpreted their career change in positive terms identified gains, some of which were the same as those described by voluntary changers in study one, such as satisfaction with a career based on subjective values and an enhanced fit with self-identity. However, involuntary career changers were found to identify additional gains, exhibited by benefit-finding, in which developments associated with the adversity they had experienced were valued, including aspects of personal growth and stronger social relationships.
The aim of study three:

The aim of the final empirical study, reported in Chapter Seven, was to build on the earlier studies in two ways. Firstly, by providing an overview of the transition process and its implications. This was achieved by asking participants to reflect on the career change they had experienced at least two years previously, to assess the outcomes and how their on-going views of development and change had been affected. Secondly, this study aimed to focus more specifically on how career change was evaluated, in order to understand subjective meanings of career success and the strategies used in achieving these positive interpretations. Individual's narratives were represented as individual cause maps that were then analysed to produce a cross-case cause map. At this stage of the research this graphical representation of the findings was considered appropriate in providing a concise and accessible overview of the transition experience, and the complex inter-relationships between the factors perceived to contribute to successful career change. The results section of study three also offered a detailed textual analysis of the map. The findings from participants interviewed in study three illustrated that what was evaluated positively and how evaluations were made was subjective and dynamic. In the initial stages of the transition process participants appeared to value self-awareness, responsibility, and realistic goal setting. Later, progress in achieving a cohesive career structure, improved work-life balance, and connection with others was valued. Finally positive interpretations were strived for and evaluations of progress and success were made. Three strategies were identified that contributed towards positive evaluations being made. These involved extending the timeframe for success, thus allowing anticipations of success to be included in evaluations; broadening the criteria for evaluations of success as a response to developments in self-awareness and learning; and finally, the minimal and managed use of social comparison.

Evaluations of success could be linked in participant accounts to a sense of progress from furthering or achieving goals, or when unplanned outcomes were achieved that were valued. Success was also attributed by these participants to pursuing subjective values and the intrinsic satisfaction that was gained. Acceptance of the challenge of needing to change career and knowing the outcome, was also deemed a success and was perceived as preventing regret in the future.
In this final empirical chapter the overview perspective of the transition process and the insights gained in terms of its evaluation contribute further to an understanding of cycles of development and success in boundaryless careers. A more refined understanding of career competencies at thirty-something was also achieved by reference to the strategies employed by participants. This is discussed in the following section as the findings of this research are contextualised in existing theory and the contributions made are further elucidated.

8.3. THE THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Theoretical Implications of the Research Findings.

This thesis responds to the call from constructivist theorists, discussed in Chapter Four, for more qualitative research to redress the prevailing reliance on positivist methodologies (e.g., Cohen et al., 2004). A phenomenological perspective on career change has been presented that has previously rarely been offered (Teixeira & Gomes, 2000). A contribution is also made to the research area of multiple careers that has received little attention (Feldman, 2002). The issue of identifying the implications of this research for career theory is framed by an awareness of the debate concerning the value of theoretical generalisations from qualitative findings. In Chapter Four it was noted that generalising is a primary objective of quantitative methodologies while qualitative research aims to describe, interpret and explain. The outcome of qualitative research is therefore considered to be a legitimate account of the experiences of the sample in question that resonates both with the participants themselves and the readers (i.e. there is sufficient evidence to ensure credibility). In this research these experiences are presented in the results section of each study. However, as described in Chapter Four several writers argue that rather than remaining focused at the individual case level in qualitative research it is possible to draw out communal themes and then to contribute novel insights and refine existing theory (e.g., Elliott et al., 1999; Smith, 1996; Stake, 1998).

An attempt to achieve this level of interpretation is motivated at this stage of the research by wanting to provide a focused and tangible account of the key findings that conveys a meaningful message and to propose potential contributions of the research in a theoretical context. Such theoretical generalisations are approached tentatively and are only achieved by following two key guidelines: firstly grounding interpretations in existing theory, secondly, reference to individual cases. The first
guideline is achieved by using the theories introduced in Chapters Two and Three as a framework for interpreting the findings. If the findings integrate well with existing theory, it is argued that some confidence may be given to extend them at a theoretical level. With regards to the second guideline the reader is provided with the option to refer to the individual cases from each of the studies in the previous three chapters from which the tentative generalisations were derived, for an understanding of their particular context.

Assessment of the potential implications of the findings is now discussed in four sub-sections. The first concerns the implications for the development of theory, the second concerns the implications for career patterns and transition theory including the influence of emotion, and the third focuses on implications for theories of career success and career competencies. The final sub-section presents a theoretical framework for the study of career development.

8.3.1 Implications for Development Theory.

In Chapter Two the value of defined age-stage models of development, such as those proposed by Super (1980) and Levinson (1978) were questioned. In particular the incongruity between the tasks associated with the thirties of stabilisation and settling down and the apparent contemporary phenomenon of voluntary career change at this age was highlighted. Other significant limitations cited were the minimal recognition of the influence of unpredictable events on career development (Rothstein, 1980), and the initial omission of the individual as a self-determining force in shaping their career, although Super (1984) did encompass this in later work. The social constructivist approach appeared of more relevance to the research area in emphasising the role of the individual in directing their career and acknowledging contextual influences, thus providing a more loosely defined and individualistic pattern of career development less influenced by maturational factors.

As suggested the act of changing career in the thirties appears to offer little support for the tasks identified in the age-related stages of traditional development theories. Instead it appears to endorse the constructivist view of independent and on-going development, supporting the argument raised in section 2.3.3 that humans have senses and processes that encourage development and progress (Brown, 1986; French et al.,
In this research, progress, in the context of boundaryless careers, was found to be associated with self-fulfilment. However, it was also found that participants strongly valued continuity of their skills and experience and were motivated to achieve a coherent career path. This suggests that changing career in the thirties does not conform to the proposed development stage of stabilisation (associated with the age of twenty-four to thirty-five) in Super and Neville's (1988) theory of vocational development. However, it does lend support to the subsequent proposed stage of consolidation.

The findings clearly indicate the perceived benefits of maintaining continuity and establishing a sense of coherence in boundaryless careers. Interestingly, however, it was noted that individuals who perceived their career change as predominantly involuntary rarely described efforts to maintain continuity during their transition. This suggests that while an appreciation of earlier knowledge is likely to be linked to age, certain conditions may be required for it to be a consideration. Possible explanations are that reduced opportunities for contemplation and hence for the tasks associated with such a period prevented links being established between their previous life and their new life. Alternatively, it may be that the negativity surrounding involuntary job loss influenced perceptions of their previous career and motivated the search for a new unrelated career path. This identifies the need for understanding the context of the individual and the potential implications this may have.

The phenomenological perspective of this research and the interpretative sensemaking framework offers an insight into the learning achieved during career change. This can be interpreted in relation to Weick's (2001) notion of wisdom as agency, complimented by the awareness and practise of principles of communion, (i.e., interdependence expressed through openness and integration with the environment). It is also aligned with Mezirow's (1978; 1981) view of meaning-making as synonymous with adult learning and development. Many participants positively evaluated learning outcomes of flexibility, openness and realism in assisting adjustment to change. They noted how definitive expectations were replaced over time with shifts in what was valued, how evaluations were made, increased openness to experiences, and a sense of hope in relation to uncertainties in the future. It was
found that these new communion-type representations were accompanied by on-going active attempts to integrate past achievements and maintain a sense of progress, thus neatly encapsulating the balance of agency and communion that defines the concept of wisdom.

These findings extend an understanding of the concept of wisdom by identifying the factors that appear to contribute to its development for this age-group during career change. The first element that appears to contribute to the development of wisdom is the experience of novel and unstructured environments that challenge existing schema. The second element is having time to reflect on these experiences and learn from them in order to create solutions for the future, which supports research that links reminiscing with the development of wisdom (Kramer, 1990; Webster & McCall, 1999). The third element is a level of maturity that allows for these cognitively complex representations to be made meaningful.

This perspective on career change, in which individuals are viewed as having the ability to adapt and learn, is aligned to the notion, identified in section 2.3.3, of careers in a boundaryless career context as repositories of knowledge that are added to and expressed over time in different work experiences (Bird, 1994). This offers a positive view of adult development that contrasts to Hall’s (1986) claim, outlined in section 3.4, that early adult success may reinforce a stable routine of behaviour and lifestyle that may put the person at risk of being closed to learning later in their career. Instead, the learning achieved during career change appears to contribute to the quality of flexibility identified as necessary for contemporary maintenance or persistence of career development in the concept of ‘career resilience’ (London, 1993; Waterman et al., 1994).

This learning perspective also suggests that while the influence of context on career change is undeniable it is inappropriate to consider it in the deterministic manner suggested by structuralist theory (e.g., Roberts, 1968; Gottfredson, 1981). Instead it appears that a dynamic model of opportunity structures is required, in which the influence on career of contextual and internal factors over time are recognised, such as in Stern’s career model (1986) (see page 92). On the basis of this research such a model would reflect the influence of social, cultural and occupational expectations
(e.g., individualism, autonomy); maturational characteristics (e.g., high perceived control, cognitive complexity); particular characteristics associated with being a mature worker (e.g., a developed knowledge and skills base, career competencies, self-confidence); and cognitive developments over time (e.g., learning, wisdom, the broadening of criteria considered for subjective evaluation, changes to personal characteristics as a consequence of benefit-finding).

In this research the maturational characteristics displayed by thirty-somethings interviewed for the current thesis, and their attitude of on-going development would suggest they may be able to overcome the constraints they face. In Chapter Five educational qualifications were described as potentially restricting occupational choice. However, some participants who felt limited by their qualifications or finances were found to prepare for their career change by furthering their education and/or saving, sometimes over an extensive period of time. Individuals who experienced involuntary career change and had limited financial and educational resources described these as constraints, but in some instances they were able to overcome these perceived barriers and achieve subjectively meaningful career changes. The example of Susie in Chapter Six admirably illustrates this possibility. Therefore, in general, this research contradicts the suggestion, raised in section 5.2.1 that the low-skilled and economically disadvantaged are necessarily excluded from the opportunities offered by the boundaryless career climate (Arthur et al., 1999). Instead a focus on the developmental and adaptive aspects of the individual suggests that these opportunities are potentially available to the majority of individuals in their thirties.

A characteristic described by a number of participants in this study was their reduced reliance on social comparison. This partly seemed to be a consequence of learning, in that reflections on social comparisons made at a younger age were considered inappropriate and a cause of unhappiness. It also seemed to be a response to identity development, in that they had achieved a self-constructed identity and were now content pursuing what they considered meaningful, therefore social comparisons were considered less necessary. This supports research proposing that higher levels of identity development contribute to reduced feedback and cues from external sources (Kegan, 1982; 1994; Hall & Chandler, 2005). It is also aligned with
Beronsky's (1996) view on self-constructed identities translating into an active approach to exploration and decision-making that is based on internalised goals and values integrated with the core sense of self. This research contributes to an understanding of how this level of identity development assists in the context of boundaryless careers. Firstly, since the primary use of subjective criteria appears more appropriate for evaluating subjective goals and secondly, since such self-reliance overcomes the likelihood of reduced opportunities for social comparison in such careers.

In relation to what motivated career change at thirty-something it was found that many participants described the significance of wanting to express their identity in vocational terms. This reflects the proposition that individuals strive to implement their self-concept by choosing to enter an occupation seen as most likely to permit self-expression (Holland, 1973; 1985; Super, 1980). At thirty-something having a self-constructed identity and previous experience of either good or bad fits between occupations and identity appeared to give this striving a priority. In addition, the task of gaining individuality emphasized by Levinson (1978) in the transition stage (from approximately thirty-two to forty years of age), appeared to have resonance in the value participants placed on expressing their self-concept. Maslow's (1943) self-actualisation, Erikson's (1963) ego-integrity and Jung's (1969) individuation stages of development all described in Chapter Three also appear to explain this finding. However, other tasks that Levinson proposed for this age-group, such as settling down, and gaining authority and respect were found to have no relevance to the concerns of participants in this research.

In general terms, individuals in their thirties appeared to exhibit beliefs and behaviour that placed them at the independence end of the independence/dependence continuum outlined in section 3.2.1. They tended to demonstrate the characteristics of independence outlined by Nelson (1996) of minimal dependency on others, the ability to evaluate objectively, problem solve and "self nurture". Interestingly however, affiliation, a value associated with the opposite end of the scale was also found to be of significance to participants. This was illustrated for example, in the value of altruism that contributed to occupational choice decisions and the value of work-life balance that in some cases involved wanting to spend more time with
family and friends. These values have been associated with the psycho-social
development stage of generativity (Erikson, 1956). It therefore appears that thirty-
somethings display the characteristics of independence while their values often relate
to dependence. This combination appears to be complimentary since it allows
individuals to pursue their subjective values in a proactive manner.

The participants also tended to exhibit enhanced primary control during their career
change, a characteristic associated with their age in the inverted U-shape trajectory of
primary control potential across the life span (Heckhausen & Schultz, 1995)
introduced in section 3.2.6. However, the notion of having only a limited timeframe
for achieving goals was illustrated in the urgency described by some participants and
evident in their strategies to maximise the use of time thus suggesting that the thirties
is at the peak of such a trajectory. However, a sense of urgency in pursuing their
career change was only described by some individuals in response to perceived time
pressures deriving from a range of internal and external sources. For instance, the
death of a parent or having survived a serious illness, were both found to prompt a
sense of urgency, as was a realization that no-one else would make their dreams
come true and that they needed to take personal responsibility for this to happen.
Also important seemed to be the perception among some participants that success in
certain jobs had age-limits. Some male participants described feeling inadequate and
immature for not yet having established what they perceive to be a stable career, thus
reflecting perceived social pressures to conform to age and gender-related norms.
Individuals who did not appear to be influenced by perceived social pressures and
who chose careers where maturity was considered a benefit did not express time
pressures. These findings therefore suggest that the length of time an individual
displays high primary control appears to relate not only to their age but also to their
perceptions of their ability to succeed in a chosen context. This relates to research
that indicates that enhanced perceptions of control may only be adaptive when suited
to the individual’s potential for experiencing success in life (Bandura, 1997;
Heckhausen & Schultz, 1995).

The holistic perspective of individual’s lives captured in Super’s (1980) career
rainbow concept in which various roles were seen to interact and at times conflict
was supported in these findings. In Chapter Two research suggesting gender
differences between the values shaping careers was outlined. In general, men have been considered to focus on autonomy and professional achievements and women to have a more complex interaction of values associated with work and relationships. (Gilligan, 1980; 1982; Miller, 1976). In Chapter Five, this difference between the sexes was also described with regard to the criteria used to evaluate career success, with men primarily found to use objective criteria and women a broader and more subjective range of criteria (Konrad et al., 2000). However, in this research subjective values appeared to be the predominant influence shaping career development for both women and men, and both sexes appeared to use subjective criteria for assessing the success of their career with improvements in work-life balance and relationships with others as examples. These findings contribute to limited research on the influence of family on men’s careers (e.g., Becker & Moen, 1999; Gerson, 1993). It also suggests a more positive view of men’s ability to adapt in the context of boundaryless careers compared to the findings of Arthur and colleagues (1999), described in Chapter Five, who labelled men as their “unlucky” group due to their dependence on illusory company career structures.

This section identifies that at the start of this thesis the contemporary relevance of traditional age-defined development stage theories was questioned and instead the potential relevance of a more individualistic and contextualised framework of career development was proposed. However, by focusing on the experiences of a particular age-group from a phenomenological perspective, it is clear from this research that participants perceived significant differences in themselves at thirty-something compared to their earlier lives and their expectations of how they will be when they are older. Not only were these perceptions of age-related characteristics considered to have motivated their career change but also to have assisted in many ways. These included their identity development, values, use of existing skills and past experience, high perceived control, sense of autonomy and in some cases the motivational force of perceived time pressure.

In conclusion, the findings of this research partially contradict earlier expectations of the limited contemporary relevance of traditional developmental theories. Instead support is offered for some of the tasks proposed and the values considered relevant at
this age. The notion of career rainbow, conceptualized within a contextualist framework was also supported. The significance of a variety of life roles and relational values to men as well as women was highlighted. The findings of this research therefore suggest a vocational development model that does make some age-specific claims. However, it is argued that these should not be inherited wholesale from traditional theories since only partial support for their relevance has been found. The findings also support the constructivist notion of the individual as a self-determining being and capable of learning and overcoming constraints. This suggests that a career development model should be flexible rather than dogmatic, with age-specific characteristics being understood in relation to individual differences and contextual factors.

8.3.2 Implications for Career Structure and Transition Theory

Participant's motivation for expressing their self-concept and independently pursuing subjective values in their new careers reflects the notion of the protean career (Hall & Mirvis, 1996). In relation to career structure, the characteristics of the career paths studied in this research support the contemporary definitions of boundaryless careers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), both are described in section 2.3.3. The findings contribute towards understanding the psychological needs of individuals pursuing such careers and how attempts are made to meet these needs. For instance, many participants identified their need for establishing a coherent career structure. This was perceived as providing focus, direction, stability and progress. It was also valued for feelings of social inclusion, suggesting that currently a defined and unified career path remains the perceived norm, and a goal to aspire to. This may be due to the continued presence of traditional career structures and a remnant of their historic dominance. This research therefore lends support to the recent suggestion that coherence offers an aspect of vocation that may be expanded in boundaryless careers (Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, 2006).

Participants were found to favour implementing existing skills and knowledge in their new careers, and described a learning outcome as perceiving their career change as part of an ongoing cycle of development. Both these findings reflect the notion of cyclical development between transition stages and also between one career and the next (e.g., Hall, 1993, 2002; Nicholson, 1986) introduced in section 2.2.3. The
implications for career structure relate to Hall and Mirvis’s (1995) description of a succession of mini-stages. Cycles of development within the transition process were found, they were particularly evident in the cause maps presented in Chapter Seven. Identifying these feedback loops in cause maps is considered rare (Weick, 2001) and is considered to relate to their novel application in representing the links between factors in boundaryless careers from a phenomenological perspective. This research therefore illustrates that participants were aware of cycles of development in their boundaryless careers and that these were considered to be advantageous in contributing to future change. For instance links between outcomes perceived as successful and increased levels of autonomy, confidence and hope were found. This relates to Hall’s (1976) success cycle described in section 2.2.3.

This research then arguably contributes not only by identifying such a cycle in boundaryless careers but also by illustrating the factors involved and the path they take. These findings suggest that characteristics that appear to contribute to positive career change outcome can be modified if the individual firstly experiences success, reflects on it, and then integrates these positive interpretations into future explorations and adaptations. As with the knowledge perspective described in the previous section, this finding also suggests the need for a dynamic systems perspective on career development.

In this research the significance of a contemplation period in the career transition process was identified. This is not the first time that such a stage has been recognised in transition models in general. For instance, Nicholson (1987) proposed an initial stage prior to actual change in a work setting that he described as one of preparation, involving expectation and anticipation. Isabella’s (1990) model of change using a sensemaking framework identified the first of four stages as one of anticipation. The transtheoretical model of change derived from health psychology (Prochaska et al., 1992) also identifies a contemplation stage considered to be the motivational force for change. The findings of this thesis however, contribute to transition theory by proposing the significance of the contemplation stage in boundaryless careers and identifying the tasks that occur and their significance in providing a necessary foundation for effective self-career management and pursuing a subjectively meaningful career.
While the word contemplation may suggest passivity the various activities involved in achieving psychological and practical readiness for change that occurred over differing lengths of time during this period were considered fundamental to future success. It is therefore proposed that the contemplation stage, even if it appears to be relatively inactive should be regarded in terms of “incubation or regeneration” as recommended by Marshall (1989) in section 5.5.1.

Identifying the significance of the contemplation stage in the transition process for participants was arguably possible because of the phenomenological approach taken in this research. The broader timeframe and situational dimension this provided contrasts to the majority of vocational transition theories, described in section 2.2.3, that are focused within the occupational setting and thus commence at the stage of the encounter of a new role (e.g., Bridges, 1980; Louis, 1980; Schlossberg, 1984). These findings also suggest when the contemplation stage takes place in boundaryless careers. In voluntary career change scenarios the contemplation stage appeared to occur before enactment was initiated and generally occurred over a long period of time while the individual was working. However, in the case of involuntary career change the contemplation period generally began after the job loss due to its unexpected nature. It was found that the constructive tasks associated with this period were often delayed due to the inhibiting impact of negative affect. In some cases a contemplation period was not experienced at all if the individual lost their job unexpectedly and felt financial pressure to return to work as soon as possible. The findings in Chapter Six supported the predictions of Feldman and colleagues (2000) that in such circumstances there is less likelihood of taking a career appropriate to individual needs, abilities and skills.

The temporary influence of negative affect following involuntary career change seen in participant’s experiences in Chapter Six identifies the dynamic nature of emotion as proposed by Briner (1999); also evident (and supporting earlier research) were its deleterious consequences for sensemaking (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2000) and its association with low perceived control and emotional coping strategies (Lazarus et al., 1984). This research contributes to an understanding of the factors that can enhance and minimise negative affect at such a time (see section 6.5.1).
addition, the factors that appeared to enable the job loss to be cognitively reframed as an opportunity with the potential for improvements in the future were identified (see section 6.5.1). This process of refocusing attention from past losses towards potential future gains corresponds to Jaffe and colleagues’ (1994) proposed curve of adjustment to loss that involves a shift from attachment to the past to attention on the future. Once a situation was perceived as wanted then perceived control and positive affect were regained. This supports Thompson’s (1985) finding that personal control mitigates the aversive nature of threatening events, and other research that suggests having a sense of control over personal development, including career, is a critical component of being adaptive and of psychological resilience (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996; Baltes, Stuadinger & Lindenberger, 1999).

In this research perceptions of control in relation to career change experiences were not found to be clear-cut. Participants in all three studies described some elements of their career change as being under their control and other aspects not being under their control. Therefore, the distinction made initially between voluntary and involuntary type career change in this research, that reflected the distinction made in the extant literature, was revised to a subtler difference between career change that was predominantly viewed as voluntary or that which was predominantly viewed as involuntary. In some cases the circumstances of individuals were found to be similar but their perception of whether their career change was primarily voluntary or not varied. The distinct experiences following these different judgements was particularly evident in contrasting the experiences of the participants in Chapters Five and Six, and the advantages derived from perceiving control in career change have been illustrated throughout this research. This finding therefore suggests that it is valid to distinguish career change experiences on the basis of control, but that this division is based on the individual perception of control rather than simply on their circumstances.

The holistic and dynamic perspective of career change achieved in this research provides an understanding of how career paths might be captured over time and the connections and cycles of development that are identified and considered to benefit on-going progress. The influence of emotion on individual’s appraisals of their contextual opportunities and constraints, personal beliefs, and their capabilities is also
It is argued that the findings in this chapter highlight the need for a process-orientated model of career change that is able to capture the dynamic nature of the transition and individual responses, and also encompasses a dynamic perspective on emotion.

8.3.3 Implications for Theories of Career Success and Career Competencies.
The focus of the final empirical study reported in Chapter Seven was in identifying the factors that contributed to participants evaluating their career change as successful and understanding how these evaluations were made. This was contextualised in recent theory relating to career success (e.g., Hall & Chandler, 2005; Heslin, 2002; Nicholson & de Waal-Andrews, 2005) and the literature relating to career competencies. An objective of the research, stated in Chapter Three, was to provide more specific understanding of career competency concepts that has been called for in the literature (Heppner, 1998; Kidd, 1998; Savickas, 1997). These will be discussed later in this section.

A summary of what participants evaluated as successful and the dynamic process of how evaluations were made is summarised earlier in this chapter in section 8.2. The findings relating to what was considered as successful for this age-group when pursuing boundaryless careers included satisfaction from pursuing subjective goals, self-expression, finding meaning, improved relationships with other people, learning, and personal growth. Some of these findings are novel while others reflect those in the literature. For instance, they align with Hall and Moss’s (1998) description of psychological contracts in the ‘new deal’ as learning and development contracts with the self. They also align with Mirvis & Hall’s (1994) notion of psychological success as the ability to “make sense” of constantly changing work circumstances and to integrate work experiences into a coherent, integrated identity (see section 2.3.3).

It appeared that subjective criteria were predominantly used to evaluate success amongst the thirty-something participants and this was beneficial. When social comparisons were made it was found that these were generally used to assess performance, not for objective reasons however but to validate decisions that had been made. Other strategies were also identified that contributed to evaluations of success including addressing perceived failures in terms of potential success by
extending the timeframe for their achievement. This supports recent work by Heslin (2005) that proposes that career success incorporates actual and anticipated career attainments. In addition, this research found that due to the perception of limited time for accomplishing goals by some thirty-something participants self-imposed evaluation points were established to assess progress, thus avoiding wasting time on pursuing what appeared to be inappropriate goals. Identification of the factors that contributed to career change being evaluated as successful also extends an understanding of career competency concepts such as career maturity, career adaptability, and career resilience. The replacement of Super's notion of career maturity with career adaptability by Savickas (1997) in the life-span concept of development (see page 46) was an attempt to reassert the role of the self-determined individual to what had been an age-prescriptive view of development. Based on the findings of this research this emphasis appears valid, however, the argument for addressing factors that appear to be age-related, made earlier in this chapter, suggests the need for both these aspects to be considered in career development theory.

In terms of career change it is proposed that there is a need for two distinct concepts of career maturity and career adaptability. In section 3.2.1 career maturity was defined as the readiness of the individual to deal with the developmental tasks and the career decisions that are required by society at his or her particular life stage (Phillips & Blustein, 1994). In this research the characteristics found to contribute to effective independent career management were age-associated characteristics such as identity development, cognitive complexity, self-awareness, self-confidence, high perceived control, and autonomy. In terms of career expectations at their particular life-stage thirty-somethings perceived they should have reached a certain level of achievement, and have a sense of coherence and thus direction in their career path. Continuity of skills and knowledge in the new career were found to contribute to a sense of progress and maintaining standards of achievement. Identifying and prioritising significant values and consolidating skills were found to contribute towards a sense of unity and direction.

Career adaptability, on the other hand, was defined in section 2.3.3 as being forward looking and behaving proactively (Super & Knasel, 1981). A fine distinction is made here with career maturity in that career adaptability, it is argued, is about on-going
adaptation to a changing context, rather than just the readiness to respond. This encompasses some developmental characteristics such as cognitive complexity that allows learning and the development of wisdom. It also involves values such as favouring personal fulfilment above security, and personal characteristics such as flexibility. Greater specificity in relation to these terms that is provided here offers an understanding of the varying requirements of career competencies during career change. It is also thought that inclusion of the development perspective contributes to an appreciation of the needs and characteristics of individuals at particular ages, and provides an opportunity to assess where there are any discrepancies between the two.

In terms of career resilience, all the factors associated with career maturity and adaptability are considered to contribute towards individuals having the strength to meet the challenges of boundaryless careers. Other contributing factors were found to include building on existing strengths to provide skills, knowledge and competencies that contributed confidence and a level of ability in meeting challenges. In addition, all the factors involved in the success cycle discussed in section 8.3.2 can be considered to contribute towards career resilience. Attitudes of openness, flexibility and hope that were described as outcomes of evaluations of success are believed to provide an effective platform from which to face future change. In addition, career resilience appeared to have an important emotional component. In both voluntary and involuntary career change experiences positive affect appeared to be necessary for enabling the cognitions and behaviour necessary for effective change.

Individuals who had experienced multiple involuntary career changes were found to feel more emotionally vulnerable each successive time. This contrasts to earlier research that views emotional regulation as a component of wisdom, thus proposing that it becomes more regulated as a result of experience (Webster, 2003). In this research, while the individual had some knowledge of what to expect each time, this did not appear to ameliorate the negative affect in any way, suggesting emotion to be an entity distinct from those associated with the processes of learning. Indeed the ambiguity participants associated with being personally affected by involuntary job loss on several occasions appeared to increase the more times it occurred. However, factors that appeared to reduce negative affect and therefore increase career resilience were also identified in this research, such as social support, regaining perceptions of
control and having a positive view of the future. Overall, these findings go some way to understanding what might constitute career resilience in various circumstances and provides some sense of what it feels like, something that in general, has been omitted in the literature (Kidd, 1998).

Overall, the findings support those of Mattes (2004) who identified successful mid-life career changers as having a strong sense of identity, manifested in resourcefulness, a creative spirit, and a belief system that served to pull them toward a deeper, more satisfying life. These findings also identify further adaptive responses that appear to contribute towards thirty-somethings interpreting their career change as successful. These include a high level of self-awareness, autonomy, high perceived control, some degree of time pressure motivating the achievement of their goals, self-efficacy, honesty, and the capacity to adapt and learn.

In conclusion, these findings contribute to the nascent career success literature by identifying the factors that are valued by thirty-somethings pursuing boundaryless careers as well as the stages that these are evaluated as successful. In addition, the strategies used for ensuring positive evaluations are identified and greater specificity regarding career competencies at this age and in relation to this career type are furthered.

Overall these findings specify the influence of maturational factors, self-determination, emotion, individual differences, and context on career development. In response to the general criticism of emerging theories as characteristically vague and unfocused identified in section 2.3.5 this research has provided a holistic impression of career change while also focusing on specific issues in a targeted way. This has provided a meaningful insight into the factors concerning thirty-somethings as they change career and in turn has furthered theory in a number of relevant domains. Based on this analysis of the findings in the context of existing career theory the next step to be taken is to propose a theoretical framework for the study of career development.
8.3.4 A Proposed Theoretical Framework for the Study of Career Development.

The social constructivist framework of this research has provided an understanding of the individual as a self-directed being within their specific context. Interpretation of the phenomenological perspective has been within a sensemaking paradigm. This has captured the dynamic nature of the experiences of the transition process and the attempts to make sense of them. An insight into the emotional experience of career change has also been achieved.

An integrated theoretical approach has been adopted in this thesis to illuminate the research area, as recommended by MacKenzie Davey & Guest (1996) and later by Cohen and Mallon (2002), identified in section 2.4. This has allowed elements from both traditional and contemporary theory to elucidate the findings, and has also enabled the relevance of both theoretical approaches to be assessed. For instance, the findings suggest the significance of specific development factors on career but the role of autonomy was also identified, a factor that has often been omitted by development theorists (see page 41) but one that has been a focus for constructivists.

The social constructivist framework has offered a broad perspective on the career experiences of the participants that has enabled an understanding of the inter-related roles of salient development tasks, individual differences and context. For example, a conceptualisation of the influence of work and non-work roles and values on career development was possible. In relation to gender, this provided a fresh perspective on their contemporary relevance to men, and consequently challenged the prevailing constructions of male career development. The need for an approach to the study of career that acknowledges the reduced boundaries between work and personal roles (Hansen, 1997) and recognises the significance of subjective values and subjective evaluative criteria for men as well as women is suggested by these findings. The social constructivist framework also captured an understanding of relational influences on career development. For example, the benefits of on-going social relationships appeared to provide a valued sense of identity continuity that assisted adjustment to a new career. In the case of involuntary job loss any negative impact on family members was found to have the potential to hamper adjustment by heightening negative affect and threatening identity in domestic roles.
On the basis of this research an integrated theoretical framework for the study of career is proposed comprising of three key elements, the first is process-orientated, the second is action-theoretical and the third is emotion. The reasons for the inclusion of each of these elements will now be clarified.

A theoretical approach that encompasses a process-orientated perspective is proposed for the study of career on the basis of this research for several reasons that have been outlined in section 8.3.1. Firstly, such an approach is considered necessary to capture the effects of individual development on shaping career. The influence of maturational factors such as identity development, perceptions of control and apparent age-related tasks have been evident in this research. Secondly, the on-going process of sensemaking requires a process-orientated approach. This enables an understanding of the transition process from a phenomenological perspective and illuminates the process of experience, interpretation and subsequent influence on cognitions and behaviours and how these change over time. Capturing this process also allows for a knowledge perspective on career development by addressing learning and cycles of development. It also identifies how personal characteristics such as confidence can change over time, and how evaluations were found to shift during the transition process. This dynamic perspective also recognises that not only do opportunities and constraints fluctuate during the lifespan, but so do individual’s perspectives of whether they view these as opportunities or constraints. Thus a process-orientated framework offers a more flexible and positive view of development compared to the structuralist approach based predominantly on school leavers and graduates (e.g., Gottfredson, 1981; Roberts, 1968).

It is also argued that an action-theoretical perspective is a necessary component in a theoretical framework for studying career development on the basis that behaviour appeared to play a significant role in self-definition, in sensemaking and in the evaluation process during career change. Firstly, in relation to identity, the findings appear to support Beronsky’s (1996) view that that a self-constructed identity translates into an active approach to career exploration and decision making based on internalised goals and values that are integrated with the core sense of self (see section 5.4.2.1). Participants also demonstrated the need to continue to use existing skills and known behavioural strategies at least initially in their new careers, this appeared to
contribute towards a sense of identity continuity. In addition, the personal growth that was valued as an outcome of career change seemed to derive primarily from action. For example, interaction with a diverse group of people was perceived to lead to increased empathy and tolerance.

Secondly, it is suggested that an action-theoretical perspective is relevant for understanding the process of sensemaking and thus being able to interpret the career actor’s phenomenological experience. The findings can be construed as support for Weick’s (1979) belief in enactment as the basis of sensemaking. This on-going activity evolves as new situations are encountered, action is taken, interpretations are made and sensemaking is attempted: in short, action appears to be fundamental to the cognitive process of sensemaking. This constantly evolving process implies how decision-making and evaluations change over time. The role of behaviour in sensemaking is also highlighted in attempts to address cognitive dissonance. For instance, some participants described perceiving discrepancies in aspects of their career change such as the apparent inconsistency between what on the one hand they consciously felt they wanted and articulated, and what on the other hand, they actually did (see section 7.4.1.3). In such cases it appeared that actions rather than cognitions were used as the primary source of evidence on which to base retrospective sensemaking. - i.e., the individual referred to what they had done or had not done as evidence of perhaps really wanting something or not wanting something else. Weick’s (1995) action-driven approach to addressing cognitive dissonance and post rationalising behaviour describes this process, and it is contrasted to an alternative belief-driven approach. Weick describes how actions are used as the foundation around which structures of meaning are developed, and how these actions are given significance and justification by modifying this meaning. Identification of the role of behaviour on the processes of sensemaking in this research provides a fresh reminder of its potential significance at a time when cognitive processes have predominated as a consequence of positivist psychological research.

Thirdly, the benefits of an action-theoretical perspective in illuminating evaluation processes are evident from this research. Taking personal responsibility and acting in an independent manner were valued by participants and associated with having the freedom to pursue subjective values in their new career. Indeed actively pursuing
subjective goals was found to be intrinsically motivating. It was also found that that
the accomplishment of goals perceived to be under the active control of the individual
were particularly valued. In addition, participants were found to use behaviour in self
and social validation, as described earlier, achieving performance goals was used to
prove competency in a new field and thus affirm the career change decision.

The necessary inclusion of emotion in the proposed framework is evident from the
understanding gained of its influence in career change in this research. As described
previously, a process-orientated approach allows a dynamic perspective on emotion
during career transition. The triggering of negative affect in response to the
experience of involuntary job loss was clear in participant's narratives in Chapter Six.
The subsequent impact was also identified, for instance, the influence of emotion
(e.g., depression) was found to influence cognition (e.g., self-doubt) that in turn
influenced decision-making (e.g., choose a job that is known) and consequently
behaviour (e.g., enacting a job considered to be a compromise). This cascading
influence of emotion reflects Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) affective events theory
described in section 2.3.3. The significance of factors, particularly time and
emotional support that were found in this research to ameliorate the intensity and
duration of negative affect, validates their argument that it is necessary to understand
these events as social and coherent entities. This research extends current research by
identifying the factors that appeared to contribute to regaining emotional stability
following involuntary job loss among these thirty-somethings, and highlighting the
need in such circumstances for a period of time to regain emotional stability before
career exploration can effectively begin.

A change of employment type from being an organisational employee to self-
employed was found to be particularly emotionally challenging for participants who
perceived their career change had primarily been voluntary. This was due to changes
in their social setting and new feelings of isolation and loneliness that had the
potential to slow their pace of adjustment. Again, this finding highlights the relational
component in the study of emotion and identifies this as having particular relevance in
relation to boundaryless careers where social relationships at work may be minimal or
change on a frequent basis.
The debate regarding the affective response to change is discussed in section 2.3.3. These findings appear to support Brown’s (1996) view that anxiety is a natural response to change, but resistance to change is not, unless a threat is perceived. It was found that if participants viewed their career change as something they wanted then this was associated with perceived control and consequently with positive affect, even if they had been made redundant. The contributory factors identified in wanting the career change were found to include having subjective goals, de-valuing the past and having confidence (based on appraisals of previous success). It is argued that this process identifies the internal imperative associated with progress and development, but rather than simply being a deterministic cause-effect relationship it suggests that individuals are motivated towards change when certain internal and external variables are present.

In conclusion, investigation of the apparent current phenomenon of career change at thirty-something has provided an effective means for challenging the contemporary relevance of career theory and has extended an understanding of theory in a number of relevant areas. The social constructivist framework of the research has provided a holistic impression of the career change experience that captures the complex inter-relationships between the relevant variables. This is considered valuable because it attempts to provide an authentic representation of the career actor’s perspective. This broad scope, a consequence of the exploratory nature of this pioneering research, is also considered valuable in establishing the relevant factors to career change at thirty-something thus providing a basis for future research in this area. While acknowledging the benefits of the holistic approach, efforts have been made to establish clear research parameters in order to provide a meaningful theoretical context and focus to the findings. For instance, the sensemaking interpretative framework has offered an insight into the transition process from the phenomenological perspective and the findings have furthered an understanding of how sensemaking interacts with emotion and action in a dynamic manner during this process. In considering the aims of the research it is felt that an appropriate balance has been struck between achieving a holistic understanding of career change while also establishing specific theoretical and applied contributions.
In the following section the findings of this thesis are addressed in terms of their contribution to the field of psychology.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS FOR PSYCHOLOGY

While this thesis has focused on the career change experiences of a specific age-group, in this section, the scope is further widened to a discussion of the implications of these findings in the context of current thinking in psychology.

The findings suggest that career change is not only a consequence of the turbulent nature of the contemporary working environment but is also a response to the need to express personal values. The significance of subjective values in influencing career change is of particular interest to current thinking in terms of its relevance to men as well as women. In the context of the extant literature, the influence of subjective values on the careers of women was unsurprising since the role of relational and personal development goals as well as professional goals in their career development is well established (Still et al., 1998; Sullivan, 1999; Tolbert et al., 1998). However, the finding that men also based their career change on subjective values challenges the traditional view that the predominant values shaping men’s careers are autonomy and occupational achievements (Gilligan, 1980; 1982; Miller, 1976), and the more contemporary view that conceptualisations of career encompassing non-work lives, such as protean careers, are more relevant to women (Reitman & Schneer, 2003). As identified in section 8.3.1 this research suggests a more positive picture of men’s position in the contemporary working environment than that portrayed by Arthur and colleagues (1999). It appears that in the U.K., some men at least, are adapting effectively by using subjective values to provide a self-defined value system to direct, structure, and evaluate their progress, and that the content of these values seem to offer them fulfilment.

These findings not only contribute to the nascent literature on the subjective meaning of success in boundaryless careers, they also suggest the need for revised models of men’s development that include greater recognition of the significance of their subjective values. In more general terms the findings identify the need for a contextualist position (see page 48) that addresses the influence of both context and individual development when assessing adjustment in a variety of situations. This
The values selected as the basis of their career change by the majority of participants in this research supports the conclusion drawn by King and Nappa (1998) that people do appear to recognise the value of happiness and meaning in life and do not over-estimate the importance of money in their evaluations of the goodness of a life. In line with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs it may be argued that having the opportunity to pursue such values is however, an indulgence, only available to those living in a society where basic needs are met, thus limiting the relevance of this thesis to residents of wealthy and economically stable countries. Examples, in this research, of individuals with minimal resources that achieved successful career change however, challenge this argument, and suggest that lack of money, for instance, is not necessarily a barrier to self-fulfilment as an adult. To further emphasise this point, the converse situation of people with plentiful resources who talk of wanting to find a more fulfilling life but do nothing to realize their dreams are likely to be familiar to us all. This study of adult career development therefore contributes to the wider discussion, central to positive psychology, of what constitutes a 'good life' and how this can be realised. It suggests that as an adult the constraints that may affect earlier life choices have the potential to be loosened, and that the influence on development of current opportunity structures depend much on perceptual orientation.

Characteristics including self-awareness, authenticity, self-determination, perceived control and analytic reasoning appear to contribute to living life according to personal values.

In general, the values found to be significant in this research correspond to those found in earlier studies on subjective careers (see section 2.2.5). However, some values of significance to participants have been less recognised in previous studies, these appeared to be either values associated with their age (e.g., affiliation) or with their context (e.g., cohesion, structure). The holistic perspective achieved in this research offers not only a comprehensive insight into the origin of values but also an understanding of their broader impact. For instance, while a cultural trend of individualism (Watts, 1996) has been identified, it appears from these findings that values associated with success in such a climate, such as autonomy and personal
responsibility, are balanced by values such as affiliation and achieving a unified structure. The apparent psychological need for this combination of values in the pursuit of personal fulfilment and perceived success suggests the benefits of a society shaped not only by individualism but also by defined structures comprising of networks of individuals working with, and for one another, while concurrently pursuing self-fulfilment. The findings of this research suggest that it not only possible, it also necessary to coalesce these various values.

Two perspectives in this research suggest a shift in focus is necessary from emphasising career outcomes to emphasising processes of development in career theory. The first perspective that contributed to this view is the social constructivist perspective that has provided an insight into the dynamic processes of sensemaking, evaluation, learning and self-development. The second perspective is that of career change as part of lifelong development. However, the significance of career outcomes in cycles of development is also noted, suggesting their role should not be forgotten. The findings of this research suggest that a shift from a predominant focus on outcomes to a dynamic perspective that focuses instead on processes of development has a broad relevance to other aspects of personal development. Roger’s referred to a ‘good life’ as “a process, not a state of being” and “a direction not a destination” (1967, p. 186). This aligns strongly with the findings of this research that illustrate the role of anticipation in contributing to evaluations of success, the value placed on attempting goals, the value on learning, and the shifts in expectations over time that were recognised and valued by participants. This perspective shifts the psychological definition of success or what constitutes a ‘good life’ to one which emphasises factors such as the intrinsic motivation in pursing subjective goals, self-expression, finding meaning, connection with others, learning, hope, and an open attitude towards the unanticipated aspects of change.

A comprehensive range of motivations have been identified in this research in relation to the question of why thirty-somethings give up their established lives to face the challenges of career change. The apparent human need for development has been recognised (see page 412) but at the same time the need for parameters that provide structure to this development have also been noted in the value placed on coherence.
This combination is summed up in the Gestalt notion of the individual continually striving to structure, to improve or to be stretched (Harvey, 1997).

The findings illustrate a number of ways in which participants sought to impose structure in their lives during a period of change, and in their new career. Examples include the consolidation and continuity of skills and interests in the new career, and continuity of identity from on-going relationships. The need to do this in an occupational climate characterised by a lack of structure appeared to be associated with a number of factors including continuity of identity, providing a sense of meaning, a gauge for progress, and social inclusion. The need for structure was particularly evident amongst individuals who had previously had the most changes in their lives. Amongst the reasons identified previously, the consequence of reducing one’s options by imposing structure on their careers was considered beneficial in that it reduced the demands of taking personal responsibility for making choices. This relates to Schwartz’s (2004) work on career exploration in which he proposes that unconstrained freedom leads to paralysis, and that self-determination within rules of some kind leads to optimal functioning and psychological well-being. This, in more general terms, suggests that in a society that offers a proliferation of choice and emphasises individualism there may be negative consequences for psychological health. However, the coping strategies employed by participants in this research go some way to illustrating how individuals may adapt to this context.

8.5 PATHS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
During the course of this research a number of areas have been highlighted that are considered worthy of further study but are beyond the confines of this thesis. In this section, six potential areas for future research are outlined.

The first area proposed for future study is a longitudinal approach to career change experiences. The current research does not claim to offer any more than a retrospective ‘point-in-time’ view of each participant’s career, and the limitations of this are acknowledged (see section 5.7). The decision was taken to interview individuals at different lengths of time after their career change in an attempt to provide some insight into their responses to the various stages encountered and offer a sense of the dynamic process of sensemaking. However, in order to reduce the impact
of some of the limitations cited, such as memory loss and the influence of mood, and to provide an on-going perspective on individual's changing constructions of career over time, longitudinal research that revisits the same individuals over a period of time to assess their career change experiences would build constructively on the current findings.

Secondly, this research has provided a perspective on how career change events are linked to affective states and how these in turn influence certain cognitions and behaviours. However, these findings are based on retrospective interpretations of emotional response that have a number of limitations (see section 3.2.4). Attempts to access more immediate emotional reactions to events, allowing minimal time for interventions of sensemaking or a change in mood would be an interesting avenue for future research. The benefits of this would be to further an understanding of concurrent emotional experiences to facilitate the development of more effective counselling. Of particular interest would be the emotional experiences immediately following involuntary job loss, and during the first weeks of adjusting to self-employment following an organisational career. However, a note of caution in attempting such research is suggested by participant comments in Chapter Six. Some individuals only felt able to participate in the research once they felt they had resolved the issues they faced, implying a difficulty in finding individuals in challenging circumstances who are willing to disclose their emotional responses or who are indeed, able to articulate how they are feeling.

A methodological development arising from this research would be a study that uses participant-generated cause maps to illustrate notions of success in boundaryless careers. The reasons for the decision to use researcher-generated maps rather than participant-generated maps are discussed in section 4.6.5.1. However, Weick's (2001) suggestion that maps interpreted by a researcher may be different in a number of ways from those produced by the individual themselves (see section 4.6.5.2) prompts an interest in comparing the two types of maps and identifying any fresh findings. If the concerns relating to participants understanding of maps can be overcome and if sufficient time is available then future research using the self-Q technique (e.g., Bougon, 1983) to generate concepts and the use of participant-generated maps to provide a representation of their meaning systems would provide
an innovative application of this methodology in the study of boundaryless careers. Since the self-Q technique involves three interviews over a period of time, this would also contribute to the recommendation for longitudinal research in this area. Finally, the potential use of participant-generated cause maps in career counseling is outlined in section 4.6.5.1. The role of reflection in promoting sensemaking, self-awareness and learning found in this research suggests that the identified use of cause maps as a basis for self-reflection (Nicolini, 1999) may have potential benefit for career changers.

This research has focused on identifying factors that contribute to achieving career change that is perceived as successful. These have been found to include characteristics of the context in which the career change is being enacted, personal characteristics of the career actor, and certain interpretative strategies of the career change experience. It is considered that these findings have potential implications for career management interventions, however, these are not fully explored within the confines of this thesis. This is due to a focus on the career psychology literature rather than the counselling literature that thus precludes a thorough analysis of the findings in an applied context.

In Chapter One the call for greater convergence between theory and practice (Savickas & Walsh, 1996) was highlighted. While this research has clearly raised issues that have relevance to career management it has not been possible to make specific recommendations for interventions for the reasons given. However, pursuing this research area in the context of the counselling arena is considered to have potential benefits for individuals self-managing their careers, career counsellors and employers. Among the many factors identified in this research as contributing towards successful experiences of career change, and considered to have potential in benefiting career counselling, two particular examples are worth mentioning here. Firstly, the findings suggest that individuals are able to self-regulate the type and timings of the social comparisons they make during career change. This raises the question of whether these skills can be taught and consciously managed, therefore contributing towards positive career change experiences. The second example relates to the finding of cognitive reframing strategies used in interpretations of potentially negative events. Further study of the strategies used in such a situation is considered
to have the potential to compliment counselling approaches that employ cognitive behavioural techniques.

In section 2.2.5 the value of researching the career development of under-represented populations was outlined. Within the homogenised sample of thirty-something complex career changers in this research there were further sub-groups, based for instance on employment type, such as the self-employed, or gender, or sexual orientation. The findings suggest factors of specific relevance to these sub-groups; however, due to the very limited sample sizes it was not possible to build any generalisations from the individual cases. As such, it is argued that further research on such groups would be of interest, for example, in addressing adjustment issues for the self-employed, or the factors that contribute to meaning in the careers of gay men.

The final area suggested for further study relates to the notion of opportunity structures. The findings of this research highlight the changes in actual and perceived opportunity structures that occur over time as a consequence of both shifts in the individual's context and in their own development that affects their perceptions of constraints and opportunities. In Chapter Three the potential influence of communication channels such as television and the Internet on opportunity structures was raised (see page 95). However, this influence was not discussed by participants and remains an interesting area for future research. The information and opportunities provided particularly by the Internet are thought to have the potential to influence career expectations and career exploration behaviour, with the consequence of liberating individuals from their immediate physical surroundings. The question of whether this is wholly beneficial or may encourage unrealistic expectations and have harmful consequences remains unanswered.

8.6 CONCLUSION

The current generation are the first to confront the implications of accelerated environmental change and to pursue boundaryless careers in any great number. The focus of this research has provided an understanding of the subjective experience of career change in this context, particularly for the thirty-something age-group. The challenges faced in achieving career change evaluated as successful have been
highlighted. However, overall, it is suggested that this context provides opportunities for self-fulfilment and that this age-group are able to capitalize on them.

Both the values and characteristics of thirty-somethings have been found to compliment the features of the contemporary occupational climate, despite the threat to perceptions of control resulting from enforced job loss. The configuration of characteristics that have been associated with the thirties in this research, as well as some more general personal characteristics, suggest that this age is an ideal time to change career. For instance, less explored identities (Marcia, 1993) may thwart the pursuit of subjectively meaningful careers at a younger age, while a foreshortened time perspective and reduced perception of control (Heckhausen & Schultz, 1995) may similarly impede development in older individuals. Identification of the characteristics that contribute towards successfully evaluated career change in a boundaryless career climate has contributed to a broader theoretical understanding of career concepts, such as career resilience.

By investigating the factors that contribute to the career actor achieving career change they perceive as successful, this research has been broad ranging. It has confirmed some of the fundamental cornerstones of career theory, such as the value of expressing the self-concept in vocational terms. It has also revealed some new aspects of significance in contemporary career development such as the value placed on continuity and coherence, and of subjective values and evaluative criteria in shaping the careers of men. By focusing on thirty-somethings, their development concerns have been identified. This has also provided an updated theoretical perspective on career development that specifies the influence of individual development, self-determination, individual differences and context. It supports some aspects of traditional age-defined development models but otherwise offers a more refined and contemporary framework for development than that offered by much of the extant theory.

Finally, it is hoped that this research has provided the reader with an informative depiction of the contemporary career change experience that has both enhanced their theoretical understanding of the relevant issues and informed them of the potential practical applications for assisting successful career change. In accordance with
qualitative principles, it is advocated that this understanding was derived not only from the theorising provided in the last part of the thesis but importantly also from an immersion in the detail of individual experiences.
REFERENCES


Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1979). Sociological paradigms and
organizational analysis: Elements of the sociology of corporate life. Portsmouth, NH:
Heinemann.


Dobrow, S. (2003). Following their hearts? Subjective career orientations and career-related outcomes in young classical musicians. In P. A. Heslin (Chair), *What is there to career success?* Symposium conducted at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Seattle, WA.


experience: theoretical, psychosocial and learning implications. Tel Aviv & London: Freund.


426


Ryff, C. D. (1990). *Psychological well-being in later life*. Invited address at Conference on working with aging persons and major life changes, October, Division of University Outreach, Madison, WI.


452


Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organising.* (2nd ed), Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.


APPENDICES

Appendix I: Press quotes on the subject of career change.

This is the life...or is it?
...Today middle youth really is the downshift generation, with figures for those of us quitting the daily grind rocketing: 2.6 million in the U.K. last year, a number that’s expected to soar to 3.7 million by 2007, according to a recent report in The Observer. No doubt spurred on by the deluge of TV programmes on the theme, 40 per cent of under 35s plan to downshift, a Prudential survey suggests.

Why the corporate high flyers are opting for a career in the classroom.
As the new school year begins, classrooms are filling with executives, journalists and lawyers who have become teachers out of a desire for fulfilment.
...Linder, 33 is not alone. Thousands of professionals in their mid-thirties are abandoning high-flying careers to, literally, go back to school.

High paid wives let husbands do their own thing.
High-earning women are supporting their husbands as they quit their jobs in search of more fulfilling careers, a report disclosed yesterday...The study which questioned a 1,000 males graduates aged over 30, found that a fifth of office-based men were considering a career change, with more than half saying they will do so in the future.... Turning 30 made almost a third of graduates re-evaluate their working lives, whilst almost a fifth said becoming a parent was behind their desire to change jobs.

New directions.
Most of us long to do something worthwhile and yet it is something few of us achieve. We spoke to three women who switched careers and found happiness in being able to
touch someone’s life. ‘...I reached a turning point when I had a hysterectomy at the age of 30. I took six months off and looked at my life. My mother had died four years earlier at the age of 56 and it suddenly hit me - I could have lived half my life already and what had I achieved?’” and
Becky Saunders, 32, gave up her career as a marine biologist and retrained to become an assistant teacher.
Women and Home, 2005.

The Great Leap of Faith as young quit rat race.
A growing number of professionals are leaving high-pressure careers for easier lives but, reports Amelia Hill, boredom and poverty can cause regrets.
“In the city I was working 11-hour days, often over entire weekends” says Robertson, 32, from Hampshire. “But I could afford a fabulous house, wonderful restaurants and amazing clothes. I thought this is how things are meant to be. But then I hit 30 and suddenly realised this wasn’t a life I had chosen; I had simply gone along with the enthusiasms of my teachers and family who genuinely thought they knew what was best for me. I realised I was working too hard to have a real life of my own...”

Out of the rat race and into the human race.
Getting out of the rat race is a recurrent dream for many working people. And, increasingly, they are acting on their urge, according to a new report... “Too many demands on time, too much information and too many choices leave many feeling burned out at the end of the day” said Datamonitor’s Dominik Nosalik. “This is leading some to reassess what really matters – is it to earn and spend more, or is it to focus on family, relationships, and other human values?”
Metro, 16th April, 2003.

Jumping off the treadmill? Don’t fall into debt.
Leonie Gordon was a high flying media lawyer who worked in television and film production, but in September she began an MA in anthropology of development and social transformation at Sussex University. It has meant she had to take a drop in income and sell her flat to pay for her studies, but she has never been happier. “I
was looking for a different kind of fulfilment, and I don't really miss the money or the London lifestyle... To some it might seem like it is a bit late to change career direction at 37, but I am by no means the oldest person there" she says.

Appendix II: Interview schedule for study one.

Biographical:

Age:
Current career:
Past career (s):
Length of tenure in each:

Identity:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What does your “career” mean to you personally?
3. What factors influenced your initial choice of career?
4. What factors influenced your previous choice of
5. What factors influenced your current choice of career?
6. How do you feel about your career?
7. How do you think other people perceive your career?
8. What factors may influence your choice of career in the future?

Life Stage:

9. What are your priorities in your 30s?
10. What is expected of you at this stage in your life by
    family/partner/friends/colleagues? And what effect does this have on you?
11. What is expected of you at this stage in your life by society? And what effect
does this have on you?
12. Have your feelings about work & work/life balance changed over time and
what brought about these changes?

Contemplating Change:

13. Why did you do your previous job?
14. What did you like & dislike about your previous occupation?
15. Why did you change your career?
16. What were you looking for in your new career?
17. How did this need develop?
18. Were you trying to avoid anything in your new career?
19. Had you always wanted to avoid that?
20. Did you consider other options?
21. Did you have a clear idea of what you would/could be in the future?
22. What were your initial perceptions about your chosen career and how were these shaped?
23. When contemplating your chosen career what did you think other people’s perceptions of it were?
24. How did you go about making your decision?
25. How did you go about entering your chosen area?
26. To what degree do you consider that the change was a choice?

Transition stage:
27. How did you feel leaving your previous work & people?
28. Did you prepare for the transition period and if so, how?
29. How did you find the transition period?
30. Was anything different about your most recent change compared to earlier change?
31. What did you feel about the pace of the change?
32. Can you remember how you felt about yourself in your new career in the first few months?

Completed Change
33. Has changing your career made you feel differently about yourself?
34. What are your feelings about the way other people responded to your career change?
35. How does it make you feel when you compare yourself with your others e.g. your contemporaries, your friends, parents?
36. What do you think other people’s perceptions of your chosen career are?
37. We talked earlier about what your hoping to avoid and to get out of your new career, do you feel that that your expectations have been met? How do you feel now about where you are and what you are doing?
38. Earlier we discussed your feelings about work-life balance, what do you feel about the balance at the moment?
39. Has the change been as you expected/planned or have there been surprises?
40. What gains and losses do you feel you’ve made as a result of the change?
41. What have you learnt about yourself by changing your career?

**Future**

42. What defines career success & failure for you?
43. How do you feel about the future?
44. Do you think you would change again and if so why?
Appendix III: Email to participants in study one, sent a week before their interview.

Dear X,

Following our telephone conversation I am sending some information about my studies and what I'd like to ask you about when we meet. I am currently in the first year of my PhD in Psychology at the University of Surrey. I am looking at experiences of career change amongst thirty-somethings. In the current study I am particularly focusing on the experiences of voluntary career change. The questions I would like to ask you are open-ended, I'm interested in whatever has been, and is currently of significance to you, career can be considered in whatever way you chose to define it. I am sending over a few sample questions, this is purely so you have some idea of the kind of things we will discuss, you don't prepare anything beforehand. As I mentioned on the phone the interview will last approximately an hour and a half, and the content of the interview is entirely confidential. With your consent, I will audio-tape it for transcription purposes, the tape will be kept securely and destroyed on completion of the research. You will be referred to with a pseudonym and any specific names or other identifying references will be removed. I hope that you will gain from the interview and I look forward to seeing you on X.

Kind regards,
Amelia Wise.

Sample Interview Questions.

1. What does your career mean to you personally?
2. What factors influenced the choice of your current career?
3. What are your priorities in your 30s?
4. What is expected of you at this stage in your life by family/partner/friends/colleagues?
5. And what effect does this have on you?
6. What were you looking for in your new career?
7. What were your initial perceptions of your chosen career and how were these shaped?
8. How did you make your decision to actually make the change?
9. How did you go about entering your chosen area?
10. How did you find the transition period from your old job to the new one?
11. Can you remember how you felt about yourself in your new career in the first few months?
12. Has changing your career made you feel differently about yourself?
13. Have your original expectations been met? How do you feel now about where you are & what you are doing?
14. What have you learnt about yourself by changing your career?
15. What defines career success & failure for you?
Appendix IV: Email sent to participants in study two a week before their interview.

Dear X,

Firstly, many thanks for taking the time to be interviewed for my studies into career change.

Some background information:
I am currently carrying out the second study of my PhD in Psychology at the University of Surrey. I am looking at the experiences of individuals who have undergone change in general during their working life and specifically, an involuntary career change.

What is involved:
The interview will take approximately two hours and I will use an interview technique called Kelly’s Repertory Grid. This provides a structure for the discussion but allows you, the interviewee complete control over the content. A grid of the content you provide is compiled during the interview, this will then be analysed to draw out themes and important issues. At a later date these findings will be fed back to you to ensure that you are in agreement with them.

The aim of this technique is to let you determine what is talked about, and this should be done in as honest and thorough way as possible. I hope it will also be an interesting and enjoyable experience! If you are in agreement, the interview will also be tape recorded for later transcription. It is understood that the conversation may be sensitive, therefore the interview will be treated confidentially and contributions will be anonymous. The audio tapes will be kept securely and destroyed once the research is completed.
Beforehand:

Before we meet I would like you to think of the following experiences from your working life:

1) Two experiences of change in your working life that were significant to you and over which you had no control.
2) Two experiences of change in your working life that were significant to you and over which you did have control.
3) Two experiences of change in your working life that were not particularly significant to you.

We will discuss and compare these experiences. I will then ask you to rate these experiences in terms of how positive or negative you felt these experiences to be, how much you felt in control, how you adjusted to the changes and how they made you feel about yourself.

Please don't prepare answers or think too much about this before the interview but it would be useful if you could think of the six change events from your working life.

I look forward to seeing you on X.

Kind regards,

Amelia Wise.
Appendix V: Rep Grid Procedure.

1. Tell me about your career history.

2. List 2 events in your working life in which you experienced involuntary change in relation to something that was important to you, list 2 events in your working life in which you experienced voluntary change in relation to something that was important to you, & list 2 events in your working life in which you experienced change that was not of particular importance to you. Each event is an element.

3. Write each element on a card, shuffle & number.

4. Fill in the rep grid along the top with each of the elements.

5. Schedule: 1,2,3; 1,2,4; 1,2,6; 1,3,4; 3,4,5; 3,4,6; 1,3,5; 1,3,6; 1,4,5; 1,4,6; 2,3,5; 2,3,6; 2,4,5; 2,4,6; 3,4,2; 1,5,6; 2,5,6; 3,5,6; 4,5,6.

6. Present the above 3 elements and ask: “In what way are 2 of these similar and how does one differ?”

7. Interviewee notes down why the pair is similar in the pair column and the single one is different in the single column on the grid. The single doesn’t have to be the opposite of the pair. Write down a single word which sums up the similarity or difference and elaborate. These are the constructs.

8. If more than one construct comes out use a new line of the grid.

9. Put the number 5 above the pair column and the number 1 above the single column.

10. Ask the interviewee to rate each of the constructs against each element using a Likert scale, with high being 6 relating to the element, and 1 being the lowest. Encourage use of the extremes of the scale.
11. Top View: fill in constructs along the top row as in the previous grid. Write 5 above the pair column and 1 above the single column. In the Pair column write “Positive experience of career change” and in the single column write “Negative experience of career change”.

12. Ask the Interviewee to rate each of the elements against the top view construct (i.e. Positive or Negative experience of career change).

13. Try laddering – present the interviewee with one of his/her constructs and asked which pole they would prefer to be assigned to and why.

13. Calculate the difference between the score on the top view and those on the original grid, write the difference in the top left hand corner of each box on the original grid. Therefore, if the score is 4 on the top view and its 2 on the original grid then write 2 in the top corner. If it says 2 on the top view and 5 on the original grid then write 3 in the top corner. Add up these scores and put on the left hand side of the grid at the end of the relevant row.

14. In the second row on the top view reverse the scores from row 1 so that 5 becomes 1, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2 & 5=1.

15. Calculate the difference between this number and the score on the original grid, write this in the bottom right hand corner. Add up these scores and write on the right hand side of the grid at the end of the relevant row.

16. Look at the elements where there is the greatest difference between the two values on either end of the rows. This shows the largest discrepancy relating to the particular element and reveals which is the most important elements relating to the satisfaction of the career change.

17. Content analyse the 6 elements with the highest differences.
Appendix VI: Table of change events in working life discussed by participants in study two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Voluntary change event</th>
<th>Involuntary change event</th>
<th>Insignificant change event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Leaving BE.</td>
<td>Leaving CE.</td>
<td>Moving to RP in Central London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working in film.</td>
<td>Leaving RP.</td>
<td>Moving between departments at BE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
<td>Choice of first job in the city.</td>
<td>Having cancer.</td>
<td>Change from being a t-shirt designer to a handbag designer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marrying a divorcee with four children.</td>
<td>Redundancy.</td>
<td>Appointment to deputy of head of research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Working in the city.</td>
<td>Redundancy from PW.</td>
<td>Internal move from sales to risk trading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Going to work in Hong Kong.</td>
<td>Collapse of bank.</td>
<td>Moving from first job to PW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>Change from factory worker to office staff.</td>
<td>Made redundant after one year in managerial role.</td>
<td>Made redundant but offered a new role in same company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changing from employed to self-employed within same company.</td>
<td>Made redundant after 5 years service.</td>
<td>Change of location with new training role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Decision to start a totally different business office cleaning.</td>
<td>Being made redundant from a long-term job.</td>
<td>Joining forces with two others to start a secretarial business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision to give up own secretarial business.</td>
<td>Splitting up with husband.</td>
<td>Expectations not realise starting work in London after secretarial business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jemma</td>
<td>Left physiotherapy private clinic to do masters.</td>
<td>Signed off from practising physiotherapy due to ME.</td>
<td>Becoming a new manager at HR company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left outsourcing company to explore new alternatives.</td>
<td>Redundancy from HR company.</td>
<td>Going back to work as physiotherapist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Arrival of children, domestic change.</td>
<td>Redundancy caused by a poor CEO.</td>
<td>Job change due to acquisition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left golf for a new job knowing the risk.</td>
<td>Career change due to lack of capabilities playing golf.</td>
<td>New job has potential personal risk with travel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Attending Landmark Forum course and quitting ‘secure’ job.</td>
<td>SR business failed.</td>
<td>IT company moved location within central London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Embarking on a property renovation project rather than getting a ‘proper’ job.</td>
<td>Redundancy from IT start-up.</td>
<td>Made a director of the business at IT company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlin</td>
<td>Starting work at RT.</td>
<td>Change of manager.</td>
<td>Re-organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking time-out.</td>
<td>Redundancy.</td>
<td>Changing job from R to VP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>Decision to clearly delineate work, social and home life.</td>
<td>Significant change to the industry I worked in.</td>
<td>Change in management style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision not to be as hungry for career furtherance i.e. promotion.</td>
<td>Salary decrease.</td>
<td>Acceptance of the circumstances in terms of new career path.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAIR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  Process + opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Potential + the unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Excitement for future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Frustration with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Motivation in competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Enthusiasm, potential +</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7  Negativity + starting again           |   |   |   |   |   |   | 4 Questioning banking as an industry for me + 
| 8  Lack of choices                      |   |   |   |   |   |   | 5 Discussed with me              |
| 9  Lack of confidence                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |            |
| 10 Pressure from family                  |   |   |   |   |   |   | 2 Moving forward +              |
| 11 Hated the work                         |   |   |   |   |   |   | 1 Making time + feeling of       |
| 12 Fear of making                          |   |   |   |   |   |   | confusion of what I had          |

Appendix VII: Example of completed repertory grid

471
Appendix VIII: Interview schedule for study three.

Expectations of outcomes of career change versus reality:
1. Did you want to change career, and if so, why?
2. Describe your experiences of change.
3. In relation to the reasons you wanted to change career, how is your life now?
4. Is your current life what you expected it would be?
5. What is important to you now?
6. Is this the same or different to what was important to you before?
7. Do you feel you’ve succeeded or failed in anyway?
8. Specifically what makes you feel this way?
9. How long will you continue doing what you’re doing now?

Processes of change:
10. How did you cope with the challenges of transition?
11. What did you find hard to cope with?
12. What did you learn from your experiences?
13. What feels the same now and how does this make you feel?
14. What feels different now and how does this make you feel?
15. How do you feel about yourself following your change?

Post-career change:
16. What impact has your career change had on your life?
17. Can you give me examples of things you’ve done since your career change that you don’t think you’d have done before?
18. What factors (positive or negative) have come out of your change that help in your career or general life?
19. Does your job fit your personal requirements?
20. How do you feel about the future?
Appendix IX: Email to participants in study three, sent a week before their interview.

Dear X,

Following our telephone conversation here is a bit more information about my studies and what I'd like to ask you about when we meet. I am in my third year of my PhD in Psychology at the University of Surrey. I am researching the factors critical to satisfactory career change and outcome in thirty-somethings. In this study I am particularly interested in the outcomes of career transition and the role these outcomes have in determining later career development. I would like to ask you about your experiences of career change, your expectations, the reality of the outcome, coping strategies for the challenges you faced during the change process, what you learnt, how you felt about yourself at the time and afterwards, and the impact of the career change on your life now. The questions will be open-ended and I'm interested in whatever is of significance to you, career can be considered in whatever way you chose to define it. The interview is completely confidential. With your permission, I will audio-tape it for transcription purposes. The tape will be kept securely and destroyed once the research is complete.

I hope it will be an interesting experience for you, and I look forward to seeing you on X.

Kind regards,
Amelia Wise.
Appendix X: Example of individual cause map
Appendix XI: Variables from Individual Cause Maps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Career Structure</th>
<th>Fear of failure</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>Increased understanding of opportunity</td>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>Connection with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Stimulation</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>No peace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna</td>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Quality of Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>Space/freedom</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>Fears</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bena</td>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>Connected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candice</td>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>Work-life balance/stress</td>
<td>Connection with others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvey</td>
<td>Consolidation</td>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Experimentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Low self-esteem</td>
<td>Connection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The variables are colour coded to indicate which node they correspond to in the cross-case cause map. The three antecedent variable nodes are self-awareness, responsibility, and realistic goal setting. The three intervening variable nodes are cohesive career structure, improved work-life balance, and connection with others. The two evaluation outcome variable nodes are progress and success.