The Pennsylvania State University
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EXAMINING THE LESSONS LEARNED
FROM LINKING MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE,
THE INNER-SELF, AND
CAREER DECISION MAKING:
A QUALITATIVE GROUNDED THEORY STUDY
OF MID-CAREER PROFESSIONALS

A Dissertation in
Workforce Education and Development

by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to examine the effect of increasing mid-career professionals’ understanding of how personally meaningful experience informs the inner self to affect career decision making. Specifically, this research sought to examine this effect on the explicit, implicit, and emancipatory learning of the research mid-career professionals. Branson’s Model of the Self and a structured methodology designed to trigger critical reflection were used. Rather than focusing on the politics, ethics and morality of the changing world of work, this research explored the relationship among personally meaningful experience, the inner-self, and career decision making to identify avenues for helping those who are adversely impacted by the changing world of work and ultimately to empower workers to place themselves in the driver’s seat of their careers, by enabling them to plan for and progress to a preferred future.

Historical perspectives on the changing world of work were offered, including the decline in loyalty and trust in the workplace, changes to the social contract, and alterations to the global economy with a focus on Pennsylvania. A view of how the professions of career counseling and training have adapted to those changes was also presented. The literature review emphasized the study’s underlying theories: 1) Branson’s theory of the relationship between meaningful experience and the inner and outer self; 2) Mezirow’s adult learning theory of transformative learning; and 3) the Theory of Career Construction.

The strategies, approaches, methodology and procedures for this qualitative, grounded theory study were described. Mid-career professionals were solicited via
email or personal invitation and selected based on these criteria: 1) not new to their job role; 2) possess a level of comfort in their job role; and 3) hold some certificate or degree beyond a high school diploma. The data were collected via two one-on-one interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed. The interviews occurred before and after distribution of a take home exercise on critical reflection, using Branson’s Model of the Self. A worksheet designed by Branson was completed during the critical reflection exercise and discussed at the second interview. Data were analyzed initially using line-by-line coding and then placed into 12 categories and subsequently into 31 themes, resulting in a grounded theory.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Historical Perspectives

The Changing World of Work

The world of work has significantly changed in the last decades. When is the last time you saw someone use an adding machine or typewriter? Do you know anyone currently employed as a switchboard operator? These are examples of job roles and skill-sets that have been eliminated from the world of work. One could view the new tasks we do and the technological tools we use to perform those tasks as progress, something to be expected. But changes of a more profound and unexpected nature are also occurring. The world of work continues to change. Loyalty and trust in the workplace have declined (Mir, Mir & Mosca, 2002). The perceived “employment”, or “social” contract, between employee and employer, has changed (Brown, 2005). The global economy has caused a migration of manufacturing and white-collar jobs from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Sulon, 2004). The practice of U.S. corporations to outsource work functions overseas is viewed by economists as beneficial to both economies involved and therefore, just another form of trade, producing efficiency gains and lower prices (Beattie, 2004). To compete in the global economy, business must focus more and more on the bottom line. Consequently, forced-career-transitions, such as mandatory job role reassignment and/or relocation, displacement, and plateauing, are occurring and can be very stressful for mid-career professionals, whom Hall (1986) defined as those in a transitional stage, measured by role adjustments, not time. Changes in the world of work have occurred rapidly and repeatedly throughout
work histories, often without warning, and usually without instructions for adapting to the changes. How can professionals be empowered to navigate the forced career-transitions that come their way? The answer will benefit career counselors, workplace learning and performance professionals, business managers and mid-career professionals.

**Decline of Trust and Loyalty in the Workplace**

According to Brown (2005), there are new employment dynamics in place and change happens quickly. Consequently, the very nature of the employer – employee relationship is being reframed. Job security and trust have decreased while danger and risk are increasing. In the 1950s, loyalty between the employee and the employer was the norm. Good job performance was rewarded with advancement and job security. Employees tended to stay with the same organization throughout their careers. But mergers, acquisitions, divestitures and bankruptcies are increasing as organizations focus more and more on cutting costs for profit in a global economy. Loyalty from the employer has been replaced with employee terminations in the short-term interest of the organization. Loyalty from the employee has been replaced with employee movement to other employment.

**The Changing Social Contract**

The relationship or contract between employer and employee has been an on-going theme in management research (Altman & Post, 1996). There has been an unspoken, unwritten agreement between employers and employees in the U.S. culture. Anonymous (2003) called it an “implied” employment contract, where employees would stay with the organization for their entire careers and the employer would
provide continued employment. Hall (1996) called it a “traditional” or “psychological” contract in which employees gave their best efforts, loyalty and commitment and employers gave job security and other rewards. Altman and Post (1996) called it an “unwritten promise” for employment and advancement. This unwritten contract, sometimes referred to as a “psychological contract”, requires continuous learning and identity changes on the part of the employee (Hall, 1996).

According to Brown (2005), it was during the 1980s that this unwritten “social contract” between employer and employee began to change. Good job performance would no longer be rewarded with advancement and job security. Further, Altman and Post (1996) argued that the old social contract was dead, replaced by a rewritten employee social contract. According to Altman and Post, in the new “social contract” employment is understood to be open-ended with the potential for termination by the employer or the employee at any time. From the employer’s perspective, skill sets must match business needs. From the employees’ perspective the burden of responsibility for medical and retirement benefits must now be shared and employability must be the career goal (Altman & Post, 1996). The new social contract fosters poor morale, and employee distrust of the employer. Consequently, management struggles with how to effectively manage the workforce (Altman & Post, 1996), in the face of frequent job changing and an increase in the temporary workforce which act to lower a community’s standard of living.

**The Global Economy with a Focus on Pennsylvania**

An examination of the global economy ultimately must occur within the context of a particular setting, in this case the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This
researcher chose to examine Pennsylvania because that is where she resides, that is where she has lived during a large portion of her career, and that is where she was displaced. The loss of jobs in Pennsylvania includes, for example, the migration of jobs from the commonwealth; i.e. - Murata Electronics North America, Inc. employed some 1,300 people in the 1990s, and continued on until its closure in 2004; and the Corning Asahi plant, employed about 1,000 people, and closed in 2003 (Danahy, 2004); The Hershey Company, announced a three-year restructuring plan to reduce production lines by one third, cut 1,500 jobs (Jackson, 2007), and build a new plant in Monterey, Mexico (USA Today, 2007). In 2008, Bolton Metal Products displaced 200 people, average age 58 (Thomas, 2008). Traditionally, Pennsylvania has relied heavily on manufacturing jobs.

Of course, manufacturing is not the only industry to be leaving Pennsylvania. According to Sulon (2004), more white-collar, specifically information-related positions are going to other countries or are being filled with cheap labor brought into the United States from other countries. When the AFL-CIO’s nationwide “Show us the Jobs” bus tour stopped at the Harrisburg Area Community College, tour organizers were quoted by Sulon as stating that 17,600 information-related jobs have been lost from Pennsylvania due to offshoring. Offshoring is the practice of outsourcing work functions overseas (Beattie, 2004).

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s responses to the problems of displaced workers have been geared toward helping workers recover from the loss of employment by getting them back to some type of work. The solutions offered require displaced workers to make important choices that are limited by the available options
(unemployment, underemployment, stop-gap employment, self-employment, retraining, relocating, accepting a different type of job, retirement, crime) at a time when they typically and strongly feel a loss of control and decreased self-esteem. The myriad of emotions can include panic, unhappiness, stress, frustration, family tension, and feelings of betrayal (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven, & Prosser, 2004) as well as a sense of failure, loss, desperation, and anger (Malen & Stroh, 1998). The financial, mental, and emotional aspects of their futures seem uncertain. They undergo personal, social, and economic changes they neither anticipated nor chose. The big choice about whether or not to be employed has been taken from them.

Danahy (2004) stressed the fact that available jobs do not always require the same skills as the jobs that have been lost. Consequently, workers may need to be retrained to gain new skills and that takes time. He cited examples of workers needing to be retrained for practical nursing, commercial truck driving, and carpentry. When Governor Mark Schweiker issued a call for teaching new job skills to help the ailing economy after September 11, 2001, colleges and business schools throughout the Commonwealth responded with the Tuition Assistance for Displaced Workers (TADW) program (Brubaker, 2004). Unemployed workers, displaced due to the economic climate but previously employed full-time for at least 12 consecutive months, are eligible for tuition assistance, which varies by institution. A college-educated, displaced worker often finds retraining not to be an attractive option (Brubaker, 2004).
The Changing Career Definition

While the world of work has been changing, the scope and definition of the notion of a career have also been changing. What exactly is a career? Is it just a choice among potential occupations or is it more? Several definitions of career have been presented in the literature. Hall (2004) portrayed the career as a series of work-related experiences and attitudes that apply to all sequences of work roles. The career development theorist, Donald Super, viewed the career as a course of events that constitutes a life. Career decisions reflected an individual’s attempts to put self-understanding into career terms, prompting Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2008) to view career as a lifestyle choice rather than as a definition of work. Their concept of career included so much more than just how one spent most of his/her time in the workplace. Surely a housewife can have a career inside the home just as she could have a career in the marketplace. Thus the lifestyle choice to invest one’s energies, abilities and time into the home or into the marketplace is a very personal choice. So, a career is very much related to the person in terms of motivation, self-concept and feelings of self-worth (Gray & Herr, 1998) and is created from interim decisions rather than specifically chosen. In fact, Herr (1997) insisted that one’s career is formed by a process of choices rather than a single event. Hall (2004) agreed, defining career as a series of short learning stages. Therefore, one’s every day decisions are critical to the course and scope of their career.

Hall (1996) identified the 1980s as the time in which careers began moving from the traditional, where the employer bore responsibility for career development (Granrose & Bacilli, 2006), to the protean type, defined by Gray and Herr (1998) as
invented and managed by the individual. The primary goal of the protean career involved accomplishing one’s most important goals in life, sometimes called psychological success (Hall, 1996). In the protean career, the worker is responsible for career development (Hall & Moss, 1998). With the protean career, success is determined by subjective rather than objective measures (Hall, 2004). The protean career involves both proactive and independent management of one’s career and uses self-directed behaviors to achieve subjective career success and self directed values-driven attitudes toward career management (Briscoe, Hall, Frautschy, & DeMuth, 2005). The protean career will be continuously reinvented by the employee, will focus on psychological success, and will be measured by continuous learning and identity changes rather than age (Hall, 1996).

The Changing Profession of Career Counseling

Traditionally, career counselors have focused only on the transition from school to work, yet Krumboltz and Chan (2005), among others, have advocated expanding the counselor’s role to include counseling clients in all types of transitions, both minor and major. In his comparison of career development theories (Super’s self-concept theory, Holland’s hexagon theory, Gottfredson’s theory of occupational aspirations and Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making) Krumboltz (1994) called these “theories of trait-and-factor” and stressed the narrowness of limiting the purpose of career counseling to placing people into specific occupations. He reasoned that all kinds of regular counseling skills are needed in addition to knowledge and skills for career development. Further, Krumboltz posited the
necessity for a new theory. He pointed out that all four theories emphasize the placement of people into occupations (1994).

Super's life-space, life-span model of career development was developed in the 1950s and has been the approach used by career counselors in the United States since that time (Herr, 1997). The five principal career stages Super identified included growth, exploration, establishment, management and disengagement and were previously considered the framework for one’s entire career. Now, however, they can be viewed as a series of mini-cycle transitions (Savickas, 2005).

The changing world of work requires changes in the approach followed by career counselors in helping the adult worker, including mid-career professionals. According to Krumboltz’s Learning Theory of Career Counseling, the goal of career counseling professionals is to promote client learning, with learning as the key concept in all counseling (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Furthermore, Krumboltz and Chan (2005) promoted counselors’ focus on more than skill-sets and interests. They believed that helping clients, with a spiritual or religious worldview, to focus on the quest for meaning and fulfillment would empower clients to not only survive but actually thrive in transitions and the changing world of work (Krumboltz & Chan, 2005).

The Changing Profession of Training

What is the profession known as training? Galagan (2003) contended that the topic itself evokes emotion, passion, debate – all caused by technology, outsourcing, or the various learning and performance-based views on training. In fact, Galagan reported that an attempt to Google the word “training” produced 83.5 million entries. But in an on-line discussion by a major professional organization regarding potential titles for a
In a presentation given to graduate students at The Pennsylvania State University, during the fall of 2005, Dr. William Rothwell, Penn State Professor of Education and international consultant on organization development reviewed the six generations of the field once called training. These generations include the following:

1. Training and development focused on equipping workers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for success on the job. Training has been considered a short-term intervention for learning (Rothwell & Sredl, 2000).

2. Human resource development focused on training, organization development and career development. Cherrmack, Lynham, and Ruona, (2003) viewed the traditional role of trainer as being focused on developing expertise in humans and in organizations as expanding to include providing interventions that demonstrate return on investment.

3. Human performance improvement focused on identifying and finding solutions for performance problems or addressing the causes by intervention.

4. Workplace learning and performance focused on getting the desired results. Workplace learning and performance defined by Rothwell and Sredl as the integrated use of learning plus interventions specifically to improve performance both by the individual and by the organization (Rothwell & Sredl, 2000). Hall (2005) predicted that formal training would be less relevant in the 21st century because of expense, time required and cumbersomeness.

5. Workplace Learner – individual change via learning rather than training.
6. Next generation is as yet unnamed with an undefined focus. Will the next age be the knowledge age, the information age, the participation age, the creativity age, etc? Regardless of what age is coming, we can expect the coming and going of ages to occur more frequently (Chermack, Lynham, & Ruona, 2003).

**Statement of the Problem**

The focus of the problem explored in this study is the necessity for the mid-career professional to adapt to the changing world of work by taking ownership of and accepting responsibility for managing their own career, even when options for similar employment are limited. The problem has been exacerbated by the decline in loyalty and trust in the workplace, the change in the perceived “social contract”, the global economy with a focus on Pennsylvania, the changing career definition, the changing profession of career counseling, and the changing profession of training.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of increasing mid-career professionals’ understanding of how personally meaningful experience informs the inner self to influence career decision making. This research sought to understand the nature of the learning that occurs when mid-career professionals critically reflect on the relationship among a single personally meaningful experience, the inner-self and career decision-making. Specifically, this research explored the effect on the explicit, the implicit, and emancipatory learning of each research participant. Rather than focusing on the politics, ethics and morality of the changing world of work, this research looked at this relationship in order to: 1) identify avenues for helping those who are adversely impacted by the changing world of work; and 2) ultimately to
empower workers to place themselves in the driver’s seat of their careers, to plan for and progress to a preferred future.

**Significance of the Research**

Findings from this research study provide another view of the facets of learning and Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning and the Theory of Career Construction. Findings offer insights into the nature of individual learning, the examination of inner self components, and the relationship among personally meaningful experience, the inner self and career decision making. This research provides another tool for career counselors and workplace learning and performance professionals to use in empowering mid-career professionals to adapt to the changing world of work, and make career decisions that are right for them. Further it provides grounded theory regarding expansion of Branson’s Model of the Self into the area of career decision making. Branson’s findings in the discipline of leadership ethics suggested that self-reflection on the genesis of inner self components can contribute to the professional development of moral leaders (Branson, 2007). The research study described here provides insights for career counselors and workplace learning and performance professionals to use in the professional development of leaders throughout the organization. In today’s world of change, leaders are needed at every level of the organization (Silvers, 1994/1995). According to Brown (1995), companies who wish to win and do in fact win in the marketplace of tomorrow will have many leaders that both customers and investors can count on.

**Research Questions**

This study sought answers to the following questions:
1. What are the perceptions of mid-career professionals regarding the influence of personally meaningful experience on their career decision making?

2. What lessons were learned after critically reflecting on the inner self’s influence on career decision making?

3. What specific learning occurred when mid-career professionals critically reflect on their personally meaningful experiences using Branson’s Model of the Self?

**Limitations of the Research**

The study had several limitations. First and foremost was the limitation of the data as participant-specific-data and therefore unsuitable for generalization to a larger population. To some extent this limitation is true of all qualitative research studies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, the suitability for generalizing to a larger population is there. The second limitation involved the fact that the participants resided in a single geographical area in central Pennsylvania. Although the participants held a variety of job roles within a variety of organizations, they were all from the same geographical area. The third limitation was the necessity to examine the relationship among only a single experience, the inner-self, and career decision making. The fourth limitation was the absence of interests in the inner-self components of the Branson Model of the Self. Interpretation of an interest inventory is a common method of intervention in career counseling (Savickas, 1998). Finally, this research was limited by the experience of the researcher. Research interviewing skills must be honed by practice. This researcher has conducted qualitative interviews for three other research studies.
Assumptions of the Research

Several assumptions were connected to this study. The first was the assumption that each participant would critically reflect on the relationship among a personally meaningful experience, the inner-self, and career decision making. The second was the assumption that each participant would be honest and forthright in the data they presented in the interviews and on the worksheet. Finally, it was assumed that the researcher would be able to effectively probe for and mine rich data.

Theoretical Framework of the Research

The theoretical foundation for this study was Branson’s theory that: 1) beliefs link values to behavior (Branson, 2007); and 2) to really understand how all the components of the inner self influence behavior, such as career decision making, one must examine the genesis of those inner self components (Branson, 2005, 2007). The study also drew from Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, and the Theory of Career Construction.

Branson’s Theory

Branson’s theory is based on the theoretical premise that to understand the influence of the inner-self on behavior one must first understand how the components of the inner self developed (Branson, 2007). Most people know very little about the inner self but know a lot about their behavior, such as that involved in career decision making. In a summary of reviewed literature, Branson (2007) depicted the outer-self as being visible by behavior, while the inner-self, containing a self-concept, values, self-esteem, motives and beliefs, is hidden.
Branson’s Model of the Self

Branson followed the common belief that values and behaviors are somehow linked together as the cornerstone for his Model of the Self (Branson, 2010). The model includes both an inner-self and an outer-self. The inner-self components of the Branson model include self-concept, self esteem, motives, values, and beliefs. The model’s components are inter-related and interactive.

Each component helps create the united self (Branson, 2007). In a personal communication to this researcher (Branson, personal communication, 2010), Branson indicated that the texts he used to create his initial model did not include emotions. Consequently, his initial model did not include emotions. However, he explained, his more recent model does include emotions as a component of the inner self. Branson chose not to make this researcher aware of the change in his model because he did not want to disturb this researcher’s study, which was already underway. Branson’s components of the inner-self are expanded upon in chapter 2 but shown here for clarification.

Self-Concept. An array of pictures one has of self, including ideas, feelings, and attitudes linked to an important life role (Branson, 2010).

Self-Esteem. A feeling one has of self whether positive or negative (Branson, 2010).

Motives. Known and unknown drives for actions that provide personal choice preferences (Branson, 2010).

Values. Enablers with individually selected importance attached to outcomes (Branson, 2010).

Beliefs. Beliefs provide a route to a desired destination (Branson, 2010).
Figure 1.1. Branson’s Model of the Self

Used with the permission of Dr. Christopher Branson
Mid-career Professionals

Rather than an age, Elliott (1994) saw the mid-career as a specific stage in one’s career development, having both specific challenges and specific needs, which must be managed for a smooth transition through the career process. Mid-career is the place at which the worker is competent and successful in performing the tasks attached to the job role. Crisis can occur when these developmental needs are not met or when there is minimal acceptance of change (Elliott, 1994).

Mid-career professionals are hit hard by forced-career-transitions and workplace transitions because: 1) the changes began and escalated during the course of their careers; and 2) the responsibilities attached to their adult personal roles begin to vary. The problems faced by mid-career professionals are more severe in rural areas due to limited employment options.

How can these professionals be empowered to navigate the career-transitions forced on them by the actions and decisions of others and still make personally meaningful career decisions within the changing world of work? In short, how can they be empowered to manage their own careers? This dissertation is part of ongoing research seeking to find appropriate answers to empower workers in today’s changing world of work.

Researcher Identity

My professional life was founded on the lessons I learned very early. I grew up in a small, coal-mining town in central Pennsylvania, where I learned the importance of education. When an uncle was injured in a coal-mining accident, I saw firsthand the difficulties families face when the bread winner cannot work. I became determined to
be something more than a store clerk, factory worker, or coal miner’s wife. I wanted a college degree. Equipped with my bachelor’s degree, I climbed the corporate ladder while serving in the areas of customer service and technical training. I focused on doing my job well and my promotions over the years indicated to me that my employers were satisfied with my work.

But one day everything changed! I now know what it is like to be employed one day and signing up for unemployment benefits the next day. I know the pain, anger and frustration of becoming a displaced worker. For me, it happened suddenly. I suspected nothing nor did I see change coming. But the company executives made a decision to cut costs by displacing all middle management. I learned that neither education credentials nor employee loyalty guarantees continued employment. My assumption of upward mobility and job security in exchange for hard work was a false assumption.

I accepted employment while I searched for a position to restart upward mobility in my career. The job was an income, benefits and something to do. I experienced difficulty figuring out how to regain a position similar to the one taken from me. I wanted a position that would stretch and engage me and require effort. The only solutions Human Resources personnel provided for my problem were skill assessment exercises, interest inventory and resume assistance. I needed information I did not have and assistance I could not find. My assumptions that employers are interested in developing individuals and placing people in positions that fit them were false.

Then one day at a Women’s Conference session, the facilitator asked a question and my answer to that question changed my life! I started to see a different future for
myself and began searching for methods to make that future my reality. I saw an option that I did not see before. I determined to build on the skill-sets I already possessed and expand my knowledge base by pursuing a graduate degree. Why did hearing that single question expand my options and change my life? I wanted to know!

Since the 1980s in my volunteer life, I have been involved in helping adults cope with and ultimately triumph over difficult circumstances and emotional wounds from the past. I have conducted 12-step support-groups, presented seminars, and provided individual self-help counseling in church settings. Throughout those years, I encouraged people to: 1) identify their assumptions and beliefs about self and about God and about the way the world works; 2) compare those assumptions and beliefs to Biblical principles; and 3) question whether the results of their behaviors are as expected. If not, why not? My experience has taught me that there is a relationship between assumptions and beliefs and behavior. I have also come to know that one’s reactions to today’s circumstances may be related to unresolved issues from the past.

**Definition of Terms**

**Adult learning**, a change process that occurs when an individual interacts with his/her her environment and acquires knowledge (Schwandt, 2005, p.178).

**Career adaptability**, readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and work conditions (Savickas, 1997, p.254).

**Career development**, process of learning while deliberately forming action plans based on what is known about the self and one’s preferred choices (Gray, & Herr, 1998, p.136).
Career maturity, a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual’s degree of vocational development along the continuum of life stages and sub stages from growth through Disengagement (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p.124).

Category, a descriptive level of content (Graneheim, & Lundham, 2004, p.107).


Emancipatory research, where researchers hope that process of inquiry, action, reflection and the knowledge they generate transform some aspect of society to free or empower the participants (Rossman, & Rallis, 1998, p.15)

Instrumental Case Study, a case mainly being examined to provide insight into a certain issue (Branson, 2007, p.479).

Job role, are ways individuals carry out their jobs (Rothwell, & Sredl, 2000, p.110).

Job loss, a type of involuntary transition in which the worker has had little or no influence over the outcome, either because it was unforeseen or because he or she chose to stay in a job despite certain warning signs (Ebbenwein, Krieshok, & Ulven, 2004, p.293).


Memo, analytical notes, in a preliminary form, about codes, comparisons, and ideas about the data (Graneheim, & Lundham, 2004).
Mid-career, a specific stage of development in one’s career that carries with it specific developmental needs and challenges that must be addressed to assure smooth transition through the career process (Elliott, 1994, p.76).

New age worker, worker who is attempting to enter the workforce in the next few years (Mir, Mir, & Mosca, 2002, p.188)

Offshoring, U.S. corporations outsourcing work functions overseas (Beattie, 2004, p.3).

Points-of-view, cluster of meaning schemes (Cranton, 2003, p.88).

Psychological success, feeling of pride and personal accomplishment that comes from achieving one’s most important goals in life (Hall, 1996, p.9).

Theme, a thread of an underlying meaning through, condensed meaning units, codes or categories on an interpretive level (Graneheim, & Lundham, 2004, p.107).
Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

This chapter reviews related literature on self-identity, the components of the inner self from Branson’s Model of the Self, critical inquiry, critical reflection, the role of experience in learning, career decision making, the ethics requirement for leadership, and empowerment.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of increasing mid-career professionals’ understanding of how personally meaningful experience informs the inner-self to influence career decision making. Specifically, this research sought to explore the effect on both the explicit and the emancipatory learning of each research participant. Rather than focusing on the politics, ethics and morality of the changing world of work, this research explored the relationship among personally meaningful experience, the inner-self and career decision making to identify avenues for helping those who are adversely impacted by the changing world of work and ultimately to empower workers to place themselves in the driver’s seat of their careers, to plan for and progress to a preferred future.

Research Studies from the Literature

Although not everyone in the past actually experienced a traditional type of career, people aspired to it (Hall & Moss, 1998). Employees’ traditional career expectations included upward mobility and job security (Granrose & Bacilli, 2006). These expectations are increasingly not satisfied. No longer can one prepare only for entry into the work world – now, one must negotiate a myriad of life roles over the course of
a lifetime (Phillips, 1997). Today’s worker must adapt quickly, keep on learning, and be willing and ready to change throughout the course of his/her career (Hall, 1996).

The world of work is certainly changing. One of the changes is the employee-organization relationship. A literature review from the perspective of those about to enter the world of work and using the theoretical lens of organizational commitment was conducted by Mir, Mir, and Mosca (2002). These authors designated those about to enter the world of work with the term “new age employees” but were careful to point out that new age employees can be of a demographic other than young age.

These authors approached their literature review by questioning whether the dynamic between employees and organizations is shifting from social to economic. They characterized the current atmosphere of employee-organization relationship in the industrial landscape as one of high hopes and declining trust with a huge gap between worker aspirations and expectations (2002).

One conclusion of their literature review was that new age employees feel a diminishing willingness to support organizational goals for the workplace. Literature regarding commitment to the career or profession vs. commitment to the organization was discussed by these authors. Mir, Mir, and Mosca (2002) identified several factors to strengthen the bond between employees and the organization. These factors include communication, challenge, involvement and job satisfaction. These authors concluded the attitude of workers entering the world of work today included decreased commitment to the organization but increased commitment to the career or profession.

These authors presented a framework for managing new age employees focused on recruitment, training and retention. In the area of recruitment, Mir, Mir, and Mosca
recommended using the internet and soliciting employee recommendations while focusing the effort on specific skill sets and customizing pay and benefit packages. In the area of training, Mir, Mir, and Mosca (2002) recommended flexibility with customized training, on-line training, and continuous training with less investment in organization-wide issues. In the area of retention, Mir, Mir, and Mosca recommended job rotation and other inducements for on-going learning (2002).

Research into the attitudes of job-applicants regarding the changing employee-organization relationship was conducted by Brown (2005). In his writing, Brown stressed the decline of loyalty on both the part of the employee and the employer. According to Brown, loyalty was the norm in the 1950s through the 1960s but changed significantly during the 1980s. In his qualitative pilot study of graduating seniors in an Employment and Development class of an AACSB accredited business school, the graduating seniors were asked on several occasions to write self-reflective essays on these themes: “Given the nature of the new employment contract, are careers a vestige of the past? How do you feel about such concepts as career self-reliance and career resiliency? Do you feel “at risk” in the new world of work? If so why, if not why not? If so how do you plan to deal with it?” (Brown, 2005, p.195). These graduating seniors were actively in the job market as well. No grade or course credit was given for participation in the study. Of the graduating seniors, 79.6% (35 of 44) viewed the traditional career as having lost its use while 74% (32 of 43) felt “at risk” in the changing world of work (Brown, 2005). Responses to the question regarding how he/she would deal with it varied from formal education to learning new
technologies to networking to starting their own business (Brown, 2005). However, no statistics were given on these responses.

To determine whether organization loyalty has declined and whether managers following a “free agent model” rather than a “stayed put” model enhanced their careers, Stroh and Reilly (1997) obtained lists from 20 companies of managers who were re-located in 1987 and 1989. Surveys were sent to 50 randomly selected managers from each firm. In addition to the initial selection, as many as 50 managers from each company, fitting a specific profile, were randomly selected. The 1989 sample consisted of 1,029 randomly selected managers from 20 Fortune 500 corporations. A follow-up survey was sent to each of the survey respondents in 1991 with 686 managers responding. Correlation and t-test analysis was performed in order to determine variable correlation and mean differences. OLS regression analysis assessed organizational loyalty predictors (Stroh & Reilly, 1997). Results showed a decline in loyalty from 1989 to 1991 among the managers following the “stay put” model while those managers following the “free agent model” were more loyal to their new organizations. However, in general there occurred a decline in loyalty from 1989 to 1991 (Stroh & Reilly, 1997). These authors maintained that “free agent” model managers fared better than those who followed the “stay put” model due to increased opportunities. These authors recommended fostering less political cultures that place high-priority on meeting the career needs of the employees (Stroh & Reilly, 1997).

To examine the extent to which boundaryless and protean career concepts were integrated into employee perceptions of the psychological contract and to determine whether the types of perceptions regarding the psychological contract and contract
violations have differing affects on employee commitment and intention to leave the organization, Granrose and Baccilli (2006) issued on-line structured surveys to employees of three organizations; including an aerospace firm, a division of a high tech company on the West coast of the USA, and a division of a nationwide high tech company. A sample of 145 returned surveys (78% of those responding) was considered usable. Regression analysis was used.

Results indicated that job security and upward mobility were still important to these participants but training and well-being (components of the boundaryless career) are also important. Time on-the-job that enabled growth and time after work that allowed other aspects of their lives were important to these employees. Violations of the psychological contract to provide training did reduce organizational commitment while violations on providing training led to the intention to leave the organization. In addition, psychological contract violations of the immediate manager did affect the intent to leave the organization (Granrose & Baccilli, 2006)

These authors recommended organizations assist employees in the development of realistic expectations about willingness on the part of the organization to assist in developing and sustaining the employee’s career, given the landscape of the changing world of work (Granrose & Baccilli, 2006). They also recommended providing a positive work atmosphere, skill development, and necessary communication (Granrose & Baccilli, 2006).

Another view of the changing world of work points out the changes in the social contract and calls for a balance between the organization’s social and economic roles (Altman & Post, 1996). To better understand the challenges of this
socioeconomic balance from the perspectives of managers, Altman and Post (1996) interviewed 25 senior executives from 25 Fortune 500 companies. Results found practices including: 1) the perception of the executives to hold a higher level of accountability to the stakeholders than to the employees due to the emphasis on short-term profits; and 2) cost cutting practices include eliminating jobs and employee benefits (Altman & Post, 1996). While Beattie (2004) acknowledged both winners and losers in a global economy, he asserted that economists would argue the losers are a small minority.

Two personality traits necessary for psychological empowerment, according to Spreitzer’s (1995) quantitative study that included questionnaires returned by 393 managers, randomly selected from diverse units in a Fortune 50 organization are: 1) self esteem, the worth one gives to self; and 2) locus of control, seeing one’s self in control rather than external forces. These two factors shape how one sees self. These questionnaires were in a seven-point Likert format. The study began with the hypothesis that self-esteem is positively related to psychological empowerment and the hypothesis that locus of control is positively related to psychological empowerment. The study found a positive relationship between these two factors and psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995).

In a study of change in the locus of control over time, Legerski, Cornwall, and O’Neil (2006) concluded that locus of control is not a stable personality trait and that job displacement does affect one’s sense of control. While the researchers agree these results can not be generalized for a larger population, they do provide one case study. The study was conducted in Utah with the first data collection occurring six months
after the steel plant shutdown and the second data collection occurring one year later. With the help of the local steelworkers union, a 180-page survey was mailed to the displaced union workers. The survey included 10 scale items with three subscales. t-tests were used to analyze results. The number of displaced steelworkers completing both surveys was 293 with 75% of those respondents being older than age 45 and a median length of employment at the plant of 24 years (Legerski, Cornwall, & O’Neil, 2006).

Interested in the belief that the future remains hidden and uncertain, Chermack, Lynham, and Ruona (2003), conducted a literature review of HRD scholarly and practice-oriented publications regarding trends. The premise was that human resource development is influenced by trends in technology, demographics, politics, and other such disciplines; the researchers’ purpose was to identify trends. The purpose of the study was to identify which trends seem most uncertain. Review of 36 articles, explicitly identifying trends, from nine different publications as well as a special report on future trends from a futurist organization, produced a list of 120 general trends. These trends were grouped by topic area and then categorized by themes. The researchers’ analysis of the themes identified six critical uncertainties with the potential to impact HRD. Uncertainties relevant to this research study included globalization and locus of control, organizations or individuals (2003).

Considerations regarding the uncertainty of globalization include time, geography, culture clash, legal restrictions. Considerations for the uncertainty of locus of control were identified to include: competition, training and re-training, and the demand for transferrable skills (Chermack, Lynham, & Ruona, 2003).
What are the ramifications of the changing world of work for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania? Baker, Jeon, and Passmore (2010) conducted a research study to determine the geospatial distribution of susceptible service-producing occupations within the commonwealth and the relationship of education and susceptibility to offshoring. Classified as offshorable by a 2008 United States Bureau of Labor Statistics study are 160 service-producing occupations, within Pennsylvania, falling within 18 major occupational groups of the Standard Classification System (Baker, Jeon, & Passmore, 2010). The Baker, Jeon, and Passmore study used the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics’ scoring system for classifying the degree of susceptibility to offshoring and proprietary software leased from Economic Modeling, Inc for analysis. The study determined that 25% of Pennsylvanians employed in service-producing occupations during 2009 were at risk for having their jobs offshored. In fact their study found Pennsylvanians to be at a higher risk of having their jobs offshored than similar workers anywhere else in the United States. The study also determined the jobs of Pennsylvania workers in service-producing occupations with high wages were less susceptible to offshoring than those jobs associated with fewer wages (Baker, Jeon, & Passmore, 2010).

The finding is difficult news for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which has enjoyed a rich history of industry. Bharadwaj, Falcone, and Osborne (2004) described Pennsylvania as dominated by what they called “old economy” industries with insignificant growth or even decline. After the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed into law in December of 1993, a migration of textile and apparel industry jobs to Mexico followed. Pennsylvania led the nation in compensation for
displaced professionals. Texas ranked second with 112 petitions (Fryer & Mensheha, 1996).

Who is to blame for the changing world of work? Knapp and Harms (2002) conducted a two-year quantitative and qualitative case study research project using survey and interview approaches to examine the impact of job loss for workers when a large television manufacturer in Springfield, Missouri closed during a time of economic expansion. Employees laid-off between the years of 1992 and 1996 were interviewed and surveyed during the years of 1999 and 2000. Initially, questionnaires were sent to names and addresses obtained from a November 1992 union-membership list. Questionnaires from 166 workers (35%) were completed and returned. Three names of workers were provided by a local employment office and then a snowball technique of asking those workers for the names of other workers laid-off was used to obtain additional interviewees. Extended interviews with twenty laid-off workers were conducted and transcribed (Knapp & Harms, 2002).

Results of those studies identified three impacts on attitudes of these displaced workers; 1) increased criticisms of corporate managers and their priorities (Given a choice of five potential groups to blame for the plant closure (Mexican professionals, owners and top managers, professionals’ union, U.S. government, foreign TV-producing companies), 59% of the 166 participants chose to blame the owners and top managers of the company. Only 23% chose to blame the U.S. government); 2) reduced confidence in government; 3) increased support for unions (Knapp & Harms, 2002).

The recommendation of these researchers is for national debate on this subject and for leaders in business, government and labor work together to reduce the negative
impact of job displacement and the social disaffection of a large segment of the workforce (Knapp & Harms, 2002).

To answer the question of how employers and employees can best adapt to the changing dynamics, Hall and Moss (1998) interviewed 49 employees about changes in the “psychological contract” within their organization. Participants were selected from organizations currently in a business crisis and from organizations with elapsed time since a major business crisis. Based on survey results, these researchers identified three stages of adaptation including: 1) experiencing current trauma; 2) living the new contract; and 3) continuous learning. The experiencing-current-trauma stage included instability due to layoffs or economic downturns, and grief at the loss of the old contract. The living-the-new-contract stage requires elapsed time from the layoffs or economic turmoil while the continuous-learning stage was characterized by a basic respect for the employee and the customer. This basic respect provides the bridge between the old and the new “psychological contract”. Hall and Moss (1998) also found an average of seven years required for an organization and the employees to arrive at a level of understanding for the new dynamics.

Recommendations from the Hall and Moss (1998) study for actions the organization can take for rapid adaptation included: 1) recognize the individual owns his/her career and utilize relational activities such as coaching and challenging assignments to foster reflection; 2) provide empowering resources such as information about organizational opportunities, support in obtaining that information, and support for taking developmental action; 3) recognize the organization’s role in the relational process of career development by linking people and assignments for developmental
benefits or creating settings for reflection or dialogue groups for the exchange of ideas; 4) provide career information, coaching, and consulting by encouraging professional conference attendance and having both specialist and generalist career practitioners on staff; 5) communicate information about career services and the new career psychological contract to aid the employee’s autonomy; 6) encourage employees to develop three to five year plans for areas of work and projects they would like to do; 7) acknowledge relationships and challenging work as the key resources for learning by focusing attention on manager/subordinate relationships, utilizing project teams, and support groups; 8) provide career-enhancing work and relational interventions; 9) provide career-enhancing and relational interventions by active participation in how work assignments are made; 9) favor learner identity over job mastery by emphasizing learning and defining success as the ability to move from one job to another; 10) maximize effective performance by developing mentoring relationships and coaching that is skill-building rather than remedial (Hall & Moss, 1998).

**Constructivist vs. Behaviorist Approach to Training**

According to Gray and Herr (1998), needs assessment and documented behavior-objectives have been the model for instructional design in adult education. In fact, Doolittle and Camp (1999) indicated that behaviorism has been the underlying theory for all career and technical education instruction for the last three-quarters of the twentieth century. However, since the mid-1990s some have considered this model to be outdated (Gray & Herr, 1998).
According to Camp and Johnson (2005), behaviorist theory held that every task could be reduced to small subtasks and subsequently taught to anyone. The behaviorist approach to learning and instruction sets behavioral objectives, identifies the competencies required and uses stimuli in the environment to evoke behavior changes (Schwandt, 2005). Consequently, instruction is designed to reinforce desired behavior and prohibit undesired behavior. The behaviorist approach does not consider sense making, learning skills, or an individual’s motivation. According to Swanson and Holton (2001) behavioral psychology does not allow for introspection but rather binds behavior with a specific capacity to respond. Behavior psychology’s concern with what can be observed focuses attention on behavior specifics (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Therefore, the behaviorist approach uses rewards for motivation (Swanson & Holton, 2001). How else can results be assessed?

Because improved job performance produces measurable return on investment, Gray and Herr (1998) argued that the changed-behavior focus of the common linear instructional system design is more compatible with what investment managers and stakeholders want.. Gray and Herr concluded that most management will not be receptive to proposals for change intervention focused on the learning objectives of the participants. Why should they be, when no research has proven a positive bottom line effect of learner-oriented training? In addition, Gray and Herr agreed that instructional design without predetermined objectives provided by management can be meaningless. How can we fathom the point of the instruction without objectives? Gray and Herr declared that the behaviorist approach to learning focuses solely on the individual’s responses to the environment.
Schwandt (2005) posited the notion that learning has been expanded to include choice and freedom. Consequently, Schwandt believed that the traditional educational processes can no longer satisfy the learning needs of adults. Further, Camp and Johnson (2005) related the need for workers to adapt to critical-thinking and problem-solving education.

The constructivist approach focuses on experience as the source of meaning for the individual reflection is needed to change perspectives (Schwandt, 2005). According to Swanson and Holton (2001) cognitive psychology holds that humans organize themselves and their lives around purposes. Consequently, desired behavior can result from an understanding of and a mapping to the learner’s purpose. The constructivist approach, based on cognitive psychology theory, focuses on how humans process information and make sense of their experiences (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Von Glaserfeld (2005) defined constructivism as a theory of knowing. He posited one’s own reality to be a product of the language from one’s developmental years. Gray and Herr (1998) declared the constructivist approach to learning to be the learner actually constructing his/her own meaning from the course content Open-ended questions and case studies requiring troubleshooting activity are examples of constructivist learning strategy (Gray & Herr, 1998).

According to Mayer (2004), constructivism is based on the premise that personally meaningful learning results when the learner makes sense of the material by selecting relevant information. Mayer broke down the constructivist approach to learning and pedagogy into three categories: 1) pure discovery with little direction from the instructor; 2) guided discovery with instructor provided direction, tools,
coaching; and 3) expository methods with the instructor providing both problem and solution. Mayer concluded that the key to a good guided-discovery approach to instruction is to know the right amount and type of guidance to give and how to identify the preferred outcomes.

Jonassen (2006) argued that constructivism is neither a theory of how people learn nor a model for providing instruction. Therefore, one cannot empirically show the value of the constructivist approach. He posited that constructivism is fundamentally a theory of knowing used for over 60 years by the art and sociology fields. Jonassen argued that the intent of constructivism was not to provide a model for instruction because models can vary.

**Reasons for Focusing Research on the Individual**

Organization and government do have roles and responsibilities in the changing world of work. However, the failure of the organization or the government penalizes the individual. In addition, organizational and governmental success rests on the individuals who achieve this success. According to Gray and Herr (1998), the goal of workforce education is to produce independent problem solvers. According to Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996), the goal of career counseling is to promote client learning, with the learning being the key concept in all counseling. Helping clients to focus on the quest for meaning and fulfillment empowers clients to survive and thrive in transitions and the changing world of work (Krumboltz & Chan, 2005).

**Branson’s Methodology**

Because both observation and interpretation, using self-reflection, are needed for a person to truly realize the influences of the inner-self on their own life, Branson
(2007) developed a structured self-reflective process. The process begins when the participant chooses a personally meaningful experience and tells that story. This type of personally meaningful life experience triggers formation of a self-concept image that is then used to provide meaning as similar experiences are encountered (Branson, 2007). By reflecting on personal narratives (Sparrowe, 2005) and life stories (Shamir & Eliam, 2006) one comes to understand his/her own personal image; i.e., self-concept (Branson, 2007). The structured process continues with a series of questions, that have been designed to guide one’s thinking as they reflect on that personally meaningful experience while methodically examining the components of the inner self formed from that experience (Branson, 2007). As the participant reflects on answering the questions, knowledge of a personal image, based on subjective perceptions and interpretations of an important experience, emerges. The degree of knowing about each component increases as one reflects from the center of the Model of the Self toward the outer self (Branson, 2007). Components of the inner-self are inter-related and interactive with each component helping to create a united self (Branson, 2007)

Because the results are unique to each participant, Branson (2007) sought to generalize the process, not the results. In his qualitative, instrumental case study with six principals from Catholic primary schools in Australia participating Branson (2007) found the participants improved self-awareness and got in touch with their inner-self. Participants also gained an understanding of the influence personal values have on behavior, and that some values might cause undesirable behavior (Branson, 2007).
The Branson structured methodology is a time-consuming process but yields self-knowledge most people do not possess (Branson, 2007).

**Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning**

This study used Mezirow’s transformation theory of adult learning, commonly referred to as Transformative Learning, as another lens through which to examine what participant-specific learning - i.e., what beliefs and assumptions are considered invalid and changed by the participant after critical reflection or retained as valid. The Theory of Transformative Learning was developed by Mezirow in 1987 (Cranton, 1996). Transformative Learning can be defined as a process during which one questions his/her own assumptions, perspectives, beliefs, values and expectations and changes them or better validates them (Cranton, 1994, 2001, 2003, Mezirow, 2000). As a learning process, Transformative Learning has the potential to alter a mindset or worldview when assumptions are examined (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006). Cranton (2003) defined Transformative Learning more simply as making meaning of the world based on one’s own experiences. From experience, habits of mind (sometimes called points-of-view or frames of reference) are developed so the next time a similar experience occurs, that habit of mind is used to process the experience. During the process of transformative learning one considers these underlying assumptions and expectations, determines whether they are accurate or no longer valid and changes them if necessary (Cranton, 1994, Mezirow, 1991). The process of Transformative Learning uses critical self-reflection to enable both the examination and revision of assumptions and beliefs (Cranton, 1996).
Transformative Learning enables emancipatory knowledge (Cranton, 1996), which Mezirow (as cited in Cranton, 1996) defined as freedom from forces limiting our options. In much the same way that literacy emancipates those who could not read, emancipatory knowledge brings freedom to the adult learner (Cranton, 1996). As a type of emancipatory education, Transformative Learning helps adult learners become aware of the assumptions that shape their beliefs (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). However, emancipatory education does not prescribe what actions to take (Mezirow & Associates, 1990).

Mezirow (1996) considered Transformative Learning to be an evolving theory with several key propositions, several of which pertain to this study:

1) The process of transformative learning uses interpretation of one’s experience to direct future action.

2) Meaning is made by projecting images from prior learning to interpret new experiences.

3) To truly be a transformative learning experience, one must decide to act on the insights gained from reflecting.

Transformative Learning focuses on meaning perspectives – that is, how we make meaning out of our experiences (Cranton, 1996). Meaning perspectives are a frame of reference with two dimensions (Cranton, 2003). The first dimension of a meaning perspective is a habit of mind. Six habits of mind were identified (Cranton, 2003, Mezirow, 2000): 1) epistemic habits include how one gains and uses knowledge; 2) sociolinguistic habits relate to the use of social norms and language; 3) psychological habits of mind include the inner self components such as self-concept, personal images
and dreams; 4) moral-ethical habits of mind are conscience and morality; 5) philosophical habits of mind are religious doctrine or worldview; and 6) aesthetic habits of mind are standards and tastes. The second dimension of a meaning perspective is the points-of-view resulting from habits of mind (Cranton, 2003).

Meaning schemes and perspectives influence what we perceive, what we comprehend and what we remember (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). They function like filters to shape perceptions formed by experiences (Cranton, 1996). They are used to assimilate new experiences into past experiences during the process of interpretation (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). How one interprets experience influences how one makes value judgments (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). The inner journey toward discernment plus dialogue with the unconscious is the means to Transformative Learning (Cranton, 1996).

Negative Aspects of Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning

Yang (1998) believed that transformative learning does not always produce positive results. Naughton and Schied (2010) cited incidents of soldiers killing civilians in Iraq without remorse, genocide in Rwanda, and birth mothers regretting giving up their babies for adoption. These authors asserted that more academic discussion should occur regarding the potential downside of transformative learning. What about those times when learning processes produce disturbing outcomes and the end results harm the individual?

The Theory of Career Construction

Career construction sees the present vocational situation as having evolved from past experiences and connects those experiences through the present to a preferred
future (Savickas, 2005). The Theory of Career Construction evolved from Super’s Life-Span, Life-Space Theory (Savickas, 2005). Super’s Life-Span, Life-Space Theory holds theoretical propositions important to this study. First, people differ by needs, values, self-concepts and abilities. Second, the process of change includes this sequence - growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and disengagement - with each stage characterized by developmental tasks. Third, success in coping with environmental demands depends upon one’s career maturity or readiness to cope. Fourth, career maturity has a psychosocial component denoting one’s level of development along the life stages (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). The space dimension is about one’s social situation while the span (time) dimension is about how people transition as they prepare for, engage in, and reflect upon life roles (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). To understand someone’s career, one must appreciate the constellation of life roles that affect his/her career (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996).

The basics of the Theory of Career Construction are as follows: 1) representations of reality are constructed socially and personally; 2) career is more about adapting to the environment than maturing inner structures; and 3) career should be viewed by the interpretive processes and social interactions that provide meaning, as individuals make choices (Savickas, 2005). These choices are attempts to express self-concept in the work role. The Theory of Career Construction acknowledges that careers are viewed as both object and subject, both noun and verb. The objective component of a career includes the sequence of job roles and experiences from school until retirement, the traditional definition of career. The subjective component of career includes the meaning the worker gives to those experiences. The subjective
component of career is about weaving a pattern of the meanings of past and present experiences and aspirations for the future to produce a story or life theme (Savickas, 2005).

Traditionally, career counselors considered adults to be in the stage of career maturity. However, Super replaced the concept of maintenance (career maturity) of adult behavior with that of “career adaptability” (Herr, 1997). The changing world of work requires adults to react to transitions. This reaction can be more productive if the workers see themselves as active participants in change rather than victims of change (Goodman, 1994). Career adaptability, defined as the ability to change in order to fit circumstances, involves planful attitudes, self and environment exploration and informed decision-making (Savickas, 1997). Adaptability emphasizes coping processes and career adaptability is about one’s readiness and resources for coping (Savickas, 2005).

According to Savickas (2005), career adaptability can be viewed from four different perspectives: career concern, career construction, career curiosity, and career confidence. Because an occupation is a mechanism or strategy for participating in society, workers construct the story of their work life along the school-to-retirement-career-narrative constructed by society in the 1950s (Savickas, 2005). Accordingly, workers are constantly synchronizing their personal story of meaningful work experiences with the school-to-retirement-career-narrative given by society. The story constructed is not the complete story, but rather, is one version of the career story.

Career Counselors using the Theory of Career Construction should focus on vocational personality type, career adaptability and life theme expressed in clients’
narratives (Savickas, 2005). Vocational personality type focuses on ‘what’ career is constructed while adaptability looks at ‘how’ the career is constructed (Savickas, 2005).

**Career concern** is the most important dimension in career adaptability (Savickas, 2005). This perspective is about concern for one’s future and provides awareness to strategic planning (Rottingham, Buelow, Hees, & Maryja, 2009). When the work life is considered across time, the essence of career is captured because career is an idea and a self-reflection, not a behavior. (Savickas, 2005). Career counseling helps people use daydreams to design the future and one’s life (Savickas, 2005). Lack of career concern can be called indifference (Savickas, 2005).

**Career control** is the second most important dimension in career adaptability. Career control is about career ownership, both feeling and believing that one is responsible for building one’s own career (Savickas, 2005). Career control is about personal assertiveness and decisiveness (Rottingham, Buelow, Hees, & Maryja, 2009). Believing one owns his/her own future causes one to make meaningful choices rather than waiting for chances, fosters responsibility for own life, and enables exploration of the options (Savickas, 2005). Decision-making training builds coping attitudes that trigger curiosity about possibilities (Savickas, 2005).

**Career curiosity** is the third most important dimension in career adaptability, and includes asking questions that explore one’s fit in the world of work (Savickas, 2005). Career curiosity is about the exploration of potential; future scenarios and future selves (Rottingham, Buelow, Hees, & Maryja, 2009). Being open to new
experiences results in experimentation about possible selves and roles and trying new things (Savickas, 2005).

*Career confidence* is the fourth and final dimension of career adaptability. Career confidence stems from solving problems (Savickas, 2005). Confidence brings feelings of self-efficacy (Savickas, 2005). Career counselors use activities to help individuals foster a sense that they are good enough to deal with the problems of life, and to focus more on what they are doing than on how they are doing (Savickas, 2005).

To answer the question what does adaptability look like in the face of involuntary career transition, Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven, and Prosser (2004) conducted a qualitative grounded theory research study. Participants included 9 men and 9 women, aged 30 - 61, who were clients of a career counseling agency. Using career adaptability literature, these authors developed a gender specific vignette describing adaptability. This written explanation was first given to each participant, along with a single item self-rating survey. Semi-structured 60 to 90 minute interviews were then recorded and transcribed. Two important findings were made: 1) approaching job loss with a sense of urgency, which includes high reality orientation and planfulness, results in some promising leads; and 2) developing both a sense of goal clarity, based on self-knowledge, and the process needed to visualize the place, offers a satisfying end, while the necessary steps in between provides the advantage.

**Self Identity**

Learning is an experience of identity. It changes who we are. It changes our aspirations (van Woerkom, 2004). Because work provides self-definition, it can be
considered egocentric, enabling people to identify themselves as what they do (Savickas, 1991). One’s satisfaction with work is proportional to the degree to which the self-concept has been implemented (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). Although people differ in the degree of importance they attach to work, people do tend to link work with self-worth (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). Work is both a psychological experience and an activity (Savickas, 1991).

Because people are not born knowing the meaning of work, it must be taught (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). As humans grow and develop, they learn about the meaning their society or culture assigns to work (Savickas, 1991). Therefore, society’s definition of work can be learned mistakenly or not at all (Savickas, 1991). In fact, some people do not learn well and adopt dysfunctional beliefs about themselves and the role of work. Because the majority of folks have not reflected on their beliefs, they may be unable to articulate their personal definition of work and how it relates to who they are (Savickas, 1991). In fact, the concept one has of self includes both objective and subjective elements and is developed over time (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). Objective elements stem from the understanding of self in comparison with others. Subjective elements spring from the understanding of self by focusing on one’s own uniqueness as reflected in the life stories one constructs.

Consequently, inaccurate beliefs about either self or the world of work will cause the professional to act in a manner that makes sense to him/her but may not produce his/her desired outcome. (Niles, & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009).

The components of the inner self identified by Branson are discussed next.
**Self-Concept.** Branson (2010) defined self-concept as an array of pictures one has of him/herself, including ideas, feelings, and attitudes linked to an important life role. Branson (2007) saw self-concept as a personal image created from a personally meaningful experience and founded on subjective perceptions and interpretations, not necessarily on real facts. The literature provides a variety of meanings for the term self-concept. Rosenberg and Owens (2001) and Guindon (2010) saw self-concept as the sum total of everything one feels and thinks about one’s self. Developing the self-concept is a process of interaction between the environment and one’s inherited aptitudes (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). According to Super’s self-concept theory, people make occupational choices based on their self-concept at the time the decision is made (Krumboltz, 1994). Self-concept includes both objective elements (results of comparing self to others); and subjective elements (results from understanding one’s own uniqueness) and develops over time (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). Super saw the on-going process of putting one’s self-concept into action as career development (Betz, 1994).

**Self-esteem.** Branson (2010) defined self-esteem as a feeling of self whether positive or negative. The literature provides other definitions as well. Self esteem is a feeling related to one’s sense of self-worth (Brockner, 1988, Spreitzer, 1995). Worth depends on the values provided by society and can be shaped and changed through feedback from significant others (Guindon, 2010). Self esteem is the worth one gives to self (Spreitzer, 1995). It is an attitude based on one’s evaluation of the self-concept (Guindon, 2010). It is subjectively specific in that self-esteem includes only the global and selective attributes and qualities of self that matter to the individual. These
qualities and attributes are subconsciously prioritized by the individual and vary by role and experience. Guindon went on to explain that self-esteem can be high in certain situations and low in other situations based on the individual. This is very true for situations that occur beyond the control of the individual such as job displacement, reassignment, and plateauing. Guindon believed that the cultural view of work in America puts the individual in control and deemphasizes external variables. Consequently careers viewed as successful attach positive attributes to the individual while careers viewed as not so successful attach inferior attributes to the individual.

**Motives.** Branson (2010) defined motives as known and unknown drives for actions that provide personal choice preferences. Motives are rules for life developed from one’s personal image and self-esteem, based on a personally meaningful experience (Branson, 2007).

**Values.** Branson (2010) defined values as enablers with individually selected importance attached to outcomes. The literature provides these meanings for the term values. Values are personal assessments of the worth of certain behaviours or outcomes and can be changed by learning events (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Values provide standards to use in evaluating actions and facilitating whether certain interactions are socially acceptable (Brown, 1996). Those who seek to understand why people do things must study needs. Those who want to understand people's needs and the ways in which they address them should study values (Super, 1986). He asserted that values can be measured and are related to important psychological and sociological variables. Values develop from experience – those in which one’s
inherited characteristics interact with the environment (Brown, 1996). He asserted that values influence how one processes data and serve as guides to behavior.

**Beliefs.** Branson (2010) asserted that beliefs provide a route to a desired destination. The literature offers several meanings for beliefs. Beliefs about self and the world of work are - 1) developed as an attempt to make sense of what is seen; 2) acquired through direct and indirect learning experiences; and 3) interpreted subjectively (Krumboltz, 1994). Krumboltz developed a Career Beliefs Inventory (CBI) with 25 scales in these categories: 1) My current career situation; 2) What seems necessary for my happiness; 3) Factors that influence my decisions; 4) Changes I am willing to make; and 5) Efforts I am willing to initiate. The CBI was developed based on the expectation that people make career decisions based on what they believe about themselves and the world of work (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). Inaccurate beliefs about the world of work or the self could cause the worker to act in a way that makes good sense to her/him but produces undesired and unexpected outcomes (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). Likewise, irrational beliefs about career choices can prevent making choices that satisfy, according to Krumboltz's theory (Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, & Niles, 2009). Many people have at least one false belief that can skew their career development and prevent effective problem solving (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Krumboltz’s Learning Theory of Career Choice and Counseling holds that new learning can change false and inaccurate beliefs (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Beliefs are habits that guide behavior (Mezirow, 1996).
Critical Inquiry

Both Branson’s methodology and Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning use critical inquiry to trigger or initiate critical reflection. Critical inquiry focuses on learning and discovering (Van Vuuren & Crous, 2005). According to Goldberg (2001), inquiry is about four important concepts. First, inquiry is about asking questions with curiosity. Inquiry is engaged in actions focused on finding an answer. Neither the workplace learning and performance professional nor the career counselor, nor the researcher knows the answer. Second, inquiry involves moving beyond surface conclusions to probe the methods used to reach those conclusions. The career counselor and the researcher must probe for more substance. Third, inquiry examines out loud the assumptions of one’s self. Fourth, inquiry is about an openness and willingness to revise one’s own thinking based on new information. Goldberg (2001) believed that inquiry is a valuable part of the process of dialogue, where individuals explore with one another ways of thinking, assumptions and mindsets. The goal of this exploration is to arrive at levels of deep understanding.

Fry (2000) asserted that change begins with the first question. Philips (2004) agreed that asking questions influences what people give attention to by drawing attention to the subject of the question. Questions focus our attention and along with our conversations, influence our perceptions of the world (Philips, 2004). Good questioning creates a sense of disequilibrium, which Mezirow described as a trigger event for Transformative Learning (Cranton, 1996). Critical inquiry leading to critical reflection can be triggered by uncertainty and disorienting dilemmas (Cranton, 1996; King & Kitchener; 1994, Schwandt, 2005). Newman and Fitzgerald (2001) argued that
meaning is created in language rather than reflected in statistics or forms that require external interpretation.

Cranton (1996) differentiated the necessary reflections in the transformative learning process to be: content reflection (What do I believe?), process reflection (How did I come to believe that?), and premise reflections (Why is that belief or assumption important to me?).

**Critical Reflection**

Critical reflection is really a rational process to determine whether or not previously held views still fit (Cranton, 2003). Critical reflection is, also, a logical and an analytical method for adults to use in order to better understand themselves (Cranton, 1996). Critical reflection involves assessing the experience or assumption being reflected upon and therefore is much more than simply thinking about the experience or assumption (Mezirow, 1998). Reflection includes many things, from simple awareness, to consideration, to imagining alternatives (Mezirow, 1998) to identifying what is happening - what does it mean and what should be done about it (Seibert, 1996). Self-reflection involves looking at both one’s own assumptions and one’s own behavior (Schwandt, 2005). Critical reflection involves self-probing (Marsick, 1988). The outcomes of self-reflection can include self-knowledge, increased awareness of which situations include uncertainty and disorienting dilemmas, and change in one’s perspectives (Schwandt, 2005). Therefore, critical reflection can help adults to better understand themselves. This self-understanding enables one to make decisions that are personally meaningful and accomplish the outcomes he/she desires (Mezirow, 1998). Critical self-reflection enables a revision of
what one assumes and believes (Cranton, 1996), and therefore can help mid-career professionals in the areas of expanding options and validating expectations. Cranton (1996) believed critical reflection to be central to learning from past experiences. Marsick (1988) agreed stating that some level of reflection is needed for learning to take place. Transformative Learning emphasizes reflection on prior learning to determine whether what was learned is still valid in today’s world (Mezirow & Associates, 1990) and to differentiate between beliefs, with tested evidence, and those with untested evidence (Cranton, 1996). Critical reflection does not always lead to Transformative Learning but is always a component of Transformative Learning (Cranton, 1996). When reflection produces transformation, one’s frame of reference becomes more open and justified (Cranton, 2003).

Why don’t mid-career professionals routinely use the tool of critical reflection? The majority of people neither have then time nor make the time for self-reflection (Branson, 2007). In addition, negative perceptions of reflection abound and include the ideas that: 1) it’s all about contemplation, removed from the real world not performance in the business world; 2) it’s old world not cutting edge; and 3) it’s a luxury, not related to real life (Seibert, 1996); and it’s soft and irrelevant (van Woerkom, 2004). For adults choosing to learn comes from a desire to grow (Cranton, 1994). Getting to know how one learns takes time and practice with self reflection (Schwandt, 2005). Lord and Hall (2005), suggested the need for leaders to engage in deeply structured self-reflection for professional development.
The Role of Experience in Learning

Yang’s Holistic Theory of Knowledge and Adult Learning defines learning via three facets. Yang (1998) defined facet as a channel between one’s inner self and the outer realities. He believed knowledge to be: 1) one’s understanding; 2) learned from personal and social life; and 3) cumulative (1998). Yang posited that knowledge has three facets or channels, that link the inner-self to outer realities. He differentiated these channels as explicit, implicit or tacit and emancipatory. Explicit knowledge can be communicated via language and therefore taught in a classroom setting. The source of explicit knowledge is logic and reasoning while the goal is efficiency and truth. Typically, research studies focused on explicit knowledge include a structured nature of the problem and the research tool of empirical analysis. Implicit or tacit knowledge is highly personal, the behavioral component of knowledge and cannot sufficiently be put into words. It cannot be reduced to words and is difficult to communicate. The source of implicit knowledge is practice and experience and the goal is effectiveness and reality. Typically, research studies focused on implicit knowledge include a less-structured approach and the research tool of interpretive-experiential. Emancipatory knowledge is about feelings, emotions and personal viewpoints. It results in efforts to be free from restraints. The source of emancipatory knowledge is freedom and justice while the goal is significance and empowerment. Typically, research studies focused on emancipatory knowledge include a non-structured approach and use the research tool of critical reflection (Yang, 1998).

Due to the differences in the three facets of knowledge, Yang (1998) concluded that researchers and literature authors divide their work and writings into paradigms
based on the type of knowledge examined or discussed. Knowledge consists of interrelationships among the three facets so that a holistic view should be considered. None of the three facets of knowledge can be dismissed or isolated from the others because they provide support for the other facets. Explicit knowledge will appear as meaningless facts and implicit knowledge will appear as idiosyncrasies without the other facets. Emancipatory knowledge will be only emotion without them. Change to any one of the facets will affect the other facets (Yang, 1998). Yang identified nine modes of learning.

Learning from experience is the foundation for much of adult education (Yorks, & Kase, 2002). Two basic assumptions of Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making are 1) one’s personality and behavior can be explained by their unique experiences; and 2) humans will strive to both understand and control their environment to suit themselves (Niles, Jacob, & Nichols, 2010, Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) divided learning experiences into two types. The first type of learning experience, called instrumental learning, occurs via reinforcement, either positive or negative. The second type of learning experience, called associative learning, occurs via personal association of emotions, either positive or negative, to the event. These personal associations may be valid or invalid. People may not always remember the specifics about an experience but will remember their conclusions about it (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). In addition, the accuracy of these personal associations with experience will depend on the number of times this similar experience has occurred (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996).
Although experience provides both information and data, Seibert (1996) argued that experience does not specifically provide learning. Mezirow & Associates (1990) defined learning as the process of reflecting on past and current experience to make meaning. Yang (1998) defined learning as the conversion of knowledge and agreed that experience does not always produce knowledge. Mezirow (1998) thought the learning process used previous interpretations of the meaning of experience to construct new interpretations to direct future actions. In fact, Yang (1998) posited that only when the learning from experience can actually be validated is it in fact knowledge. If we do not always learn from experience, what must happen to generate the learning? The meaning one gives to an activity shapes the experience (Savickas, 1991). One learns from the meaning given to an experience and the meaning is given by reflection (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991; Seibert, 1996). According to Cranton (2003) from experience, habits of mind (points-of-view or frames of reference) are developed so the next time a similar experience occurs, that habit of mind is used to process the experience. Each one has unique meaning perspectives, sometimes called “filter paradigms” which shape perceptions formed by experiences. Together, experiences and meaning perspectives derived from those experiences influence how we assimilate new experiences (Cranton, 1996). Dialogue with others creates that meaning (Hall, 1996). It allows the testing of the validity of beliefs and interpretations (Mezirow, 1996). Literature provides discussion of the need for discourse with others (Brooks, 2004).

Reporting on his preliminary findings from an exploratory study of managers at a major manufacturing firm, Seibert (1996) posited that reflecting only after the fact or
at the end of the project is not sufficient in the age of the new career contract. Extended conscious thought is essential to today’s career learning and development (Seibert, 1996). When learning empowers one to understand, control his/her behavior, and anticipate the realities, the learning is very significant (Mezirow, 1996).

Career Decision Making

Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making was developed to explain why individuals select certain occupations and why they select to change those occupations (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). According to this theory, individuals choose occupations based on self-observation of values, interests, abilities arising from learning experiences and take action based on preferences developed by those learning experiences (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). This theory includes four categories of factors influencing career decision making. The first factor is genetic including gender, physical appearance, abilities and disabilities. The second factor includes the environment and events generally outside of the individual’s control. The third factor is learning experiences. Krumboltz expected that people make career decisions, based on what they believe about themselves and the world of work (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). Brown (1996) posited that values as being the dominant factor in decision making. It would certainly seem that making informed decisions throughout the course of a career requires an individual to identify a personal definition of success. Otherwise, how can one make personally meaningful career decisions? How can one measure and reward success? How can one evaluate outcomes and make adjustments? Arthur, Khapova, and Wildrom (2005) defined career success as the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes over time.
These authors stated that career success can be subjectively or objectively evaluated. Subjective success has internal indicators of the situation and is evaluated by one’s own sense of what he/she is doing and where he/she is going, while objective success has external indicators of the situation and is evaluated by management determining pay raises, promotions, assignments, etc. (Arthur, Khapova, & Wildrom, 2005). One wonders how many workers have ever really stopped to consider who will be the judge of his/her success?

Career decisions reflect one’s attempts to put self-understanding into career terms (Super as cited in Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). Career decision making consists of weighing alternatives using available information and relevant criteria, and choosing the best alternative (Gati, Fassa, & Houminer, 1995). What criteria are relevant? According to Krumboltz’s career development theory, holding irrational beliefs about career choices can significantly prevent effective goal setting (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). One can conclude that identifying irrational beliefs produces relevant criteria. Decision-making training builds coping attitudes which trigger curiosity about possibilities (Saviskas, 2005). Decisions, such as ones about careers, can be either proactive or reactive (Chermack, 2003). Proactive decisions anticipate change. Reactive decisions respond to change.

Decisions in life differ from other types of decisions in four important ways (Chermack, 2003). First life decisions, such as career decisions, are not a single decision but rather a series of decisions. Second, current decisions contain future decisions. Decisions made today will dictate the future. Third, decisions change the environment. Finally, correct decisions must be made at a precise moment in real time.
Decision-making effectiveness is judged by outcomes (Chermack, 2003). Good decision making includes choices that increase performance. Challenges to effective decision-making include mental models, which are repositories of one’s values, beliefs, and biases. Biases stem from personal preferences and how one chooses to frame the dilemma (Chermack, 2003).

After reviewing several models for rational career decision making, Phillips (1997) concluded that a sequential, interactive method is the typical path for career decision making. She argued that a new model of career decision making is needed because choice points are not always predictable, the array of options is not stable, information about the options is not always readily available and the decider herself/himself may not be clear and consistent at making decisions. Even though adaptability was advanced as the skill most needed in the changing world of work, Phillips concluded that it is unclear what adaptive career decision making would look like.

**The Ethics Requirement for Leadership**

Leadership is a social influence process (May, Hodges, Chain, & Avolis, 2003). Stating that the loss of corporate ethics has conservatively cost the U.S. economy billions and that even good people may choose not to act ethically, these authors argued that leaders need to see their role as including ethical responsibilities to all stakeholders and the ability to recognize and evaluate ethical issues. Yang (1998) believed that transformative learning does not always produce positive results. Naughton and Schied (2010) cited incidents of soldiers killing civilians in Iraq without remorse, genocide in Rwanda, and birth mothers regretting giving up their babies for
adoption. These authors challenged the readers to engage in more academic
discussion, regarding the potential downside of transformative learning. What about
those times when learning processes produce disturbing outcomes and the end results
in harm to the individual?

In a qualitative phenomenological study exploring how CEOs learn, Henderson
(2001) interviewed 10 CEOs who confessed to having a transformative learning
experience and found: 1) the circumstances surrounding the experience affect the
transformative learning; 2) circumstances can be offset by engaging in discourse with
self or a higher being; and 3) ideal conditions for discourse with others are rare.
Minkes, Small, and Chatterjee (1999) considered ethics to both prescribe and
describe standards and behaviors of morality - behavior can be acceptable or
unacceptable. This researcher agrees with Branson that the learning processes should
be accompanied by a standard or code of ethics. From Branson’s (2007) perspective,
the modernity worldview focuses on developing individual and personal rights and the
the presumption that the individual possesses the power of reason and moral will
without social rules and obligations. Therefore, ethics must be taught.

Organizations can no longer rely on management personnel alone for leadership.
This is especially true for organizations with multiple geographical locations.
According to Russell (2001), leaders shape culture by modeling values. Given that
definition, one would discern that a leader is not defined by formal position but rather
can and should exist at all levels of the organization to keep it dynamically growing
and producing. A leader can be, but is not necessarily, a manager. Decisions must be
made daily and at every level that affect the entire organization such as how to stay
competitive, run the business, improve processes and satisfy customers. Decisions are sometimes personal as well. Will I be honest? Will I fully contribute today? Will I cooperate or sabotage? Does this job fully engage and energize me? Will I look out for myself only or for others as well? There will be ramifications for every decision. Individuals have differing paradigms based on education, experience, and personality. In this context, how can there be a single right answer?

Today’s decision may not seem exactly right in tomorrow’s complex world. But an understanding of self, values, beliefs, and motives, and an elimination of irrational beliefs and assumptions will enable informed decision-making. Sure, leaders continue to grow in their job roles. In the long run, the leader will accept a past decision, viewed differently in the light of tomorrow, as that was then and this is now. That is who I was then. This is who I am now. Leaders require decisions they can live with for the long run.

**Empowerment**

Cranton (1994) posited that transformative learning produces empowerment. What exactly is empowerment? Spreitzer (1995) defined it as taking an active rather than passive approach to one’s role, while Bandura (as cited in Spreitzer, 1995) saw empowerment as the ongoing changing and adjusting of perceptions about self and the world of work. Since the 1980s empowerment has been a focus of both academia and business due to the perception that the empowerment of employees can help both the employees themselves and the organization (Gkorezis & Petridou, 2008). These authors believed excellent service and customer satisfaction must be strategic goals for any organization in today’s fast-paced business climate. Empowerment is a state of
enabling (Conger & Kanungo, 1990, Gkorezis & Petridou, 2008). It is very subjective (Gkorezis & Petridou, 2008) and should be viewed as a continuous variable rather than from an absent or present state (Spreitzer, 1995). How do empowered workers perform? Goodman (1994) viewed them as individuals who can anticipate and develop plans to overcome barriers. Spreitzer (1995) believed that effectiveness and innovative behavior are outcomes of empowerment. Actions to empower include exploring the options and making the choices personally meaningful (Savickas, 2005). Spreitzer’s model broke empowerment into four cognitions. The first cognition is meaning, defined as the valuation of the goal according to one’s own standards. The second cognition is self-efficacy, defined as one’s confidence in one’s own ability. The third cognition is self-determination, defined as one’s sense of possessing choice regarding what actions to take. The fourth cognition is impact, defined as one’s degree of influence over outcomes (1995).

Two personality traits necessary for psychological empowerment, according to findings from Spreitzer’s (1995) quantitative study involving questionnaires from 393 managers, in a Fortune 50 organization are: 1) self esteem, the worth one gives to self; and 2) locus of control, seeing one’s self in control rather than external forces. These two factors shape how one sees one’s self. The study found a positive relationship between these factors and psychological empowerment. In another study of 306 steelworkers in Utah, survey results taken before and after the plant closed indicated evidence that job displacement did affect sense of control; the researchers concluded that locus of control is not a stable personality trait (Legerski, Cornwall, & O’Neil, 2006). These studies are discussed more fully in chapter 2.
Chapter Summary

The world of work, the career definition, the professions of career counseling and training continue to change. This chapter looked at what the literature offers to mid-career professionals as they seek to own and manage their own careers. Learning was presented as an experience of identity (van Woerkom, 2004); there is potential for learning to be mistaken learning, resulting in dysfunctional beliefs about self and the role of work (Savicaks, 1991) due to people’s tendency to attach work to self-worth (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). The components of the inner self identified by Branson were discussed from the perspectives of other literature. Goldberg’s (2001) four concepts of inquiry and the purpose of inquiry according to Fry (2000), Philips (2004), Cranton (1996), Schwandt (2005), and King and Kitchner (1994) were presented. Critical reflection was defined. The reasons for critical reflection, according to Seibert (1996) and von Woerkom (2004), were presented as well as the reasons people do not typically take or make the time for critical reflection, according to Branson (2007). Potential results from critical reflection, according to Cranton (1996), Marsick (1998), and Mezirow and Associates (1990), were given.

The concept of knowledge was defined. The role of experience in learning was discussed from the standpoint of Yang’s three facets of knowledge; 1) explicit; 2) implicit; and 3) emancipatory. Yang (1998) believed that these facets are channels linking the inner self to outer realities. The research approach for each of these facets was given.

The role of experience in learning was presented from the viewpoints of Yorks and Kase (2002), Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996), Seibert (1996), Yang (1998), Kolb
(1984), Mezirow (1991), and Cranton (2003). Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making and the four categories of factors influencing career decision making were presented as well as contributions to the relevance of career decision making from Brown (1995), Gati, Fassa, and Houminer (1995), Chermack (2003), Arthur, Khapova and Wilson (2005). Finally, this chapter discussed the subjectivity of empowerment from the literature and the requirements of self-esteem and locus of control for psychological empowerment were identified from Spreitzer’s (1995) research.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter details the methodology used in this research. Information regarding the research design, grounded theory approach and features, types and sources of data, data collection strategies and procedures, mode of analysis, and trustworthiness is provided.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of the problem explored in this study is the necessity for the mid-career professional to adapt to the changing world of work by taking ownership of and accepting responsibility for managing their own career, even when options for similar employment are limited. The problem has been exacerbated by the decline in loyalty and trust in the workplace, the change in the perceived “social contract”, the global economy with a focus on Pennsylvania, the changing career definition, the changing profession of career counseling, and the changing profession of training.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of increasing mid-career professionals’ understanding of how personally meaningful experience informs the inner-self to affect career decision-making. This research sought to understand the nature of the learning that occurs when mid-career professionals critically reflect on the relationship among a single personally meaningful experience, the inner-self and career decision making. Specifically, this research explored the effect on the explicit, the implicit, and the emancipatory learning of each research participant. Rather than focusing on the politics, ethics and morality of the changing world of work, this research looked at this relationship in order to:
1) identify avenues for helping those who are adversely impacted, or potentially can be adversely impacted, by the changing world of work; and 2) to ultimately empower workers to place themselves in the driver’s seat of their careers, to plan for and progress to a preferred future.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the perceptions of mid-career professionals regarding the influence of personally meaningful experience on their career decision making?
2. What lessons were learned after critically reflecting on the inner self’s influence on career decision making?
3. What specific learning occurs when mid-career professionals critically reflect on their personally meaningful experiences using Branson’s Model of the Self?

**A Qualitative Research Design**

Mid-career professionals need to adapt to the changing world of work by taking ownership of, and accepting responsibility for, managing their own careers, even when options for similar employment are limited. Consequently, emancipatory research was selected for this study - this type of research was defined by Rossman and Rallis (1998) as transforming some aspect of society and freeing or empowering the participants. Specifically this research sought insight into the types of learning that occur when the participants critically reflect using a structured methodology and Branson’s Model of the Self, and whether or not that learning empowers and transforms the participant. The nature of a qualitative study allows the researcher and participant to work together in order to gain an understanding of the participant’s perceptions (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven, & Prosser, 2004). This research explored
the manner and types of learning that occur when mid-career professionals critically reflect on the relationship between a single personally meaningful experience, the inner self and career decision making. Consequently, a qualitative research design was chosen.

This design included both the collection and analysis of what Polkinghorne (2005) called ‘languaged data’. Newman and Fitzgerald (2001) argued that meaning is external interpretation. The study used the Branson Model of the Self and a structured methodology for critical self-reflection, which seeks to enable participants to articulate what lessons are learned from examining the relationship among a personally meaningful experience, the inner self’s genesis and career decision making. The study also used Mezirow’s Adult Learning Theory of Transformative Learning and the Theory of Career Construction. Mezirow’s theory and the Branson structured methodology both use critical inquiry to initiate the critical self-reflection process.

**Features of Qualitative Research**

Quantitative and qualitative research studies have different beliefs and assumptions (Gregson, 1998). In fact, Gregson (1998) acknowledged that qualitative research design differs from quantitative research design in assumptions about the world, and philosophical principles, and research approaches. Acknowledging the difficulty in identifying the differences between quantitative and qualitative research, Gregson cited these differing specifics provided below:

First, while quantitative research is based on a positivist philosophy, which assumes the presence of governing facts, qualitative research is based on an interpretive philosophy which assumes that reality is socially constructed via the
definition an individual or group gives to a situation. In fact, there can be multiple realities from a variety of viewpoints and perspectives. Therefore, qualitative researchers seek to understand the viewpoints and perspectives of the participants. Second, quantitative researchers use a deductive approach with specific questions, while qualitative researchers use an emergent design approach with broad research questions that may change as the study progresses (1998).

**A Grounded Theory Approach**

A research approach is a general, but holistic and methodical roadmap associated with research purposes (Baptiste, 2008). Qualitative research approaches differ from quantitative research approaches in the epistemic interest not the strategies of the research (Baptiste, 2008). According to Baptiste (2009), epistemic interests refer to the type of knowledge the study seeks and to the nature of understanding. Baptiste (2008) cited three classes of epistemic interests, identified by methodologists, including: 1) descriptions; 2) predictions; and 3) explanations. The epistemic interest of this study was in describing the type(s) of learning that occur when mid-career professionals critically reflect on the relationship among a single personally meaningful experience, the inner self and career decision making, using a structured methodology for critical reflections and Branson’s Model of the Self. The substantive interests concern the data given by the participant in the two interviews and the worksheet completed by each participant. The phenomenon of interest is the learning, which occurred during critical reflection.

The strategy of this qualitative study was engagement with grounded theory, which according to Rossman and Rallis (1998) describes social phenomena and
contributes to understanding about them. The study ultimately sought to understand the perspectives of participants, within the research focus, regarding themselves, their careers, and their career decision making. Grounded theory research moves beyond descriptive studies into an exploratory theoretical framework to provide an understanding of the studied phenomena (Charmaz, 1996), although the understanding is presented in abstract form. The conceptual framework of grounded theory research is generated by collected data, rather than by previous studies (Anderson, 2003). According to Anderson a tension exists between the requirements in grounded theory research to be both sensitive and objective (Anderson, 2003). Objectivity concerns the researcher’s openness to the data as it emerges, while sensitivity concerns assigning meaning to the data based on the researcher’s insight (Anderson, 2003). Grounded theory researchers must evaluate how data emerging from the study fits with the initial research interests but also avoid forcing own ideas on the data (Charmaz, 2006).

**Types and Sources of Data**

Before beginning data collection, approval to use Branson’s Model of the Self was obtained (Appendix A) and approval from the Penn State Institutional Review Board to engage in this research study was obtained (Appendix B). Grounded theory begins with data (Charmaz, 1996). The data in this research study were obtained from one-on-one interviews and a worksheet completed by each participant after critical reflection.

Participants were mid-career professional workers – that is, not new to the world of work or to their current employment positions, and possessing some education/certification beyond a high school diploma. Patton (1987), Adler & Adler
and Graneheim & Lundman (2004) argued for the inclusion of participants with a variety of experiences in the research in order to answer the research questions from diverse points-of-view. Consequently, participants chosen for this research had different job roles and years of experience and types of experiences. They were invited personally or by listserv email (see Appendix C) and selected based on their application answers, within the research parameters. The research acceptance form given to participants included examples of promotion, job re-assignment, vacation, relationship, ceremony or other event (Appendix D), to help participants consider experiences that were personally meaningful to them. Two of the mid-career professionals chose a job re-assignment experience. One of the mid-career professionals chose a vacation experience. The other seven mid-career professionals chose experiences that were not on the list of examples.

The literature definitions of career vary from a lifestyle concept which includes all the roles played during the course of a life (Niles & Harris-Bowelsbey, 2008); to an idea, a self-reflection, not a behavior (Savickas, 2005); to a lifestyle choice (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008); to something created from interim decisions, not chosen (Gray & Herr, 1998); to a series of short learning stages (Hall, 2004). Because the literature presents multiple definitions of career, the participants were not given a definition but were encouraged to answer the interview questions about career from their own perspectives.

The interview strategy was chosen because the feelings and thoughts of participants can better be articulated during interaction than may occur through a
structured survey. The interviews were dialogic and semi-structured with an initial list of predetermined questions.

**Interviews**

Qualitative research studies focus on knowledge production but honor multiple realities - the interview is the best avenue to us in identifying and assessing multiple realities (Stake, 1995). Interviews enable an in-depth exploration of the subject matter and solicit the participant’s interpretation of their experience (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, one-on-one interviews were conducted. People like to be listened to and of course the interviewer must listen during the interview, but must also remain in control of the data gathering. Therefore, Stake (1995) offered recommendations on the degree and extent of note-taking during each interview. The purpose of the first interview (Appendix E) was to set a benchmark for understanding the participant’s work history and perspectives on career decision making. These questions focused on answering Research Question #1: What are the perceptions of mid-career professionals regarding the influence of personally meaningful experience on their career decision making?

In addition, this initial interview included questions designed as critical inquiry with the potential to trigger critical reflection regarding career ownership. Cranton (1996) differentiated the necessary reflections in the transformative learning process to be: content (What do I believe?), process (How did I come to believe that?) and premise (Why is that belief important to me?). Consequently, the same three questions regarding career ownership were asked in both interviews to identify any learning after critical reflection.
Because research provides the potential for ideas to emerge that were not considered before the study started, Charmaz (2006) advised assigning new questions accordingly for subsequent participants. As the researcher began conducting the initial interviews, it became obvious that the age of the participant seemed to influence perspectives on careers and career issues and could therefore affect the research results. Age was initially not considered to be of importance due to the definition of mid-career as a stage rather than an age (Hall, 1986, Elliott, 1994). One of the mid-career professionals, Otis, said:

*Otis: I have looked at people earlier in my life and thought how could someone stay at a career in one job for 40 years and retire from there. As I have gotten older I kinda retracted from that a bit. I can see how people do that.* (Interview, 11/27/10).

Otis’s words indicated a potential for workers to view career differently and place importance on differing factors when making career decisions based on their age. Consequently, a question about age group was added to the initial interview questions. Of the ten mid-career professionals, two were aged 30-34, six were aged 35-55 and two were aged 56-60.

At the end of the first interview each mid-career professional received a handout (Appendix F) describing the components of Branson’s Model of the Self, guided questions to facilitate the critical reflection process (Appendix G), a worksheet to document their results of critical reflection (Appendix H) and a completed worksheet example of the researcher’s responses after critical reflection (Appendix I).

Pertinent questions for the second interview came from the researcher notes and first interview transcripts. A review of this information revealed that only seeking the
factors mid-career professionals used to make career decisions would be insufficient.

So in the second interviews the researcher asked specifically ‘why’ those factors were important. In addition, questions were developed for the second interview regarding areas deemed to have been insufficiently probed in the first interview. For example, Jessica’s (another mid-career professional) second interview included this follow-up question:

*Researcher: When I asked you about how work relates to who you see yourself to be, you said it played a huge role. Would you talk more about that?*

*Jessica: I feel like actually in the last couple of weeks that work is consuming my life. Although I don’t want it to. My son is more important. I do think that my career and my choices that I made define me. I have gotten so much education. I have a doctorate. It’s hard not to let your path in that respect define who you are. But it is interesting to me that now that I have (my son), it’s much less so. Now I see myself as more of a working Mom. The mom is the part that comes first. The work is secondary but it is still a big part. (Interview, 11/01/10)*

The purpose of this second interview was to understand the type(s) of learning that occurred (explicit, implicit or emancipatory) and lessons learned during the critical self-reflection using Branson’s Model of the Self (Appendix J). The questions focused on answering the second and third research questions: What lessons were learned after critically reflecting on the inner self’s influence on career decision making; and what specific learning occurred when mid-career professionals critically reflect on their personally meaningful experiences using Branson’s Model of the Self.
Participant Worksheet

At the end of the initial interview, each mid-career professional was given a blank worksheet to document their thoughts after critical reflection. The worksheet covers the inner self components and served as a repository of thoughts as the mid-career professional reflected on answering the guided questions. Each participant also was given, at the end of the initial interview, a worksheet the researcher completed as an example. Each mid-career professional was instructed to use Branson’s method and Model of the Self to critically reflect on that personally meaningful experience and their inner self and career decision making to complete a worksheet. The completed worksheet was to be brought to the second interview to facilitate discussion and to be retained by the researcher for analysis. Only five of the mid-career professionals wrote their thoughts on the worksheets. Two typed the guided questions and their answers. Two wrote out their answers on lined paper. The problem with using the worksheet was expressed by mid-career professional Sean as “not having enough space” (2Q2); by mid-career professional Wyatt as saying he only “looked at the worksheet to decide how I wanted to answer the questions” (2Q2); by mid-career professional Beth as “easier to sit and write while being reflective” (2Q3); and by mid-career professional Chester as ”going off the chart” (2Q2). Data on the worksheets and other documents were analyzed line-by-line along with the interview transcripts.

Field Notes

Document review requires that the researcher be organized and open to unexpected clues; consequently, the researcher should have a plan but expect revelations and setbacks (Stake, 1995). The researcher documented observations,
thoughts, unanswered questions, and feelings immediately after each interview. Per Stake’s (1995) recommendation, ample time was allotted after each interview for the researcher to prepare interpretive commentary. The researcher maintained a journal during the research to develop memos. The researcher’s emotions and observations and unanswered questions were analyzed. See Appendix K for examples.

**Data Collection Strategies**

In grounded theory research, data are collected to develop theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2006). This grounded theory research used the data-gathering skills of listening, looking, and asking questions (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Data were collected via two transcribed audio-recorded interviews and a completed worksheet per mid-career professional and researcher field notes taken throughout the study. The interviews were dialogic in nature, allowing conversation between the researcher and the participant in order to develop an understanding. An example of the dialogic interview may be found in this exchange with mid-career professional Chester:

*Chester: How about that? As a result of this experience and the effect on my inner self I had adapted the following behavior: I know that others look to me as I do to others for indicators on how certain safe situations are developing. If I lose control, others tend to lose control. If I remain calm, others tend to remain calm. If I trust in myself to appreciate the moment in all that I have, I tend to relax and relish the day. I realize I’m very lucky to have such an enjoyable vacation experience and career experience because I can relate it to that as well. And I hope that others will follow. So I think that’s kind of an overall synopsis of, of what I thought about when I was filling out the form. (Inaudible). So in that respect it was kind of a, a nice, nice thing to do to reflect back on this because you don’t always do that. Really. I like to do that.*

*Researcher: And you see yourself just from what I hear you, you see yourself interacting with your colleagues in a,*
in a lot of the same ways as you interact with your family members.

Chester: Right. I, I really like to think of it as a 50/50 even you know with my boss. We don’t really communicate. Our boss/employee relationship I understand but it’s, it’s definitely more of a co-worker than boss/employee. I think that works out well. I can see that he’s satisfied with that style but then I, I see that a little bit with everybody. And I, I feel more comfortable within that work environment as well. So but yeah it’s good. (Interview, 11/11/10.

Data Analysis

The word ‘qualitative’ describes the analysis of the data rather than the data itself (Baptiste, 2009). Further, Baptiste asserted that there is no functional difference between quantitative and qualitative date analysis. Both types of analysis draw central tendencies from the data in order to make inferences. While quantitative analysis draws from the central tendencies of descriptive statistics for inferences such as standard deviations and means, qualitative analysis uses the central tendencies of categories and themes to draw inferences such as insights, stories, and substantive theories and theoretical frameworks. Analysis is the intuitive process of searching for and assigning meaning to the data (Stake, 1995). Charmaz (2006) recommended starting with the participants’ words to preserve fluidity of their experiences and to begin analysis from the participants’ perspectives. From the participants’ connections between data, the researcher selected meaning units, which were translated into interpretive meaning units and then into codes.

Baptiste (2001, 2009) identified four distinct phases of qualitative analysis: 1) refining the goals of the analysis, which may or may not include rewording the
purpose of the research; 2) classifying data; 3) making connections between data; and 4) conveying the message. However, these are not linear phases but can overlap.

**Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis is the learning of the participants individually, whether explicit, implicit or emancipatory. The phenomena this research examined was the individual perspectives on career decision making in the changing world of work and the learning gained from critically reflecting on the relationship of their chosen meaningful experience, the genesis of the inner self and career decision making.

**Mode of Analysis**

The researcher used a line-by-line coding approach for the interview transcripts and the worksheets resulting in 414 codes. A code is just a label placed on a meaning unit (Graneheim & Lundham, 2004). Following the recommendation of Charmaz (2006), care was taken to ensure the code fit the data rather than forcing the researcher’s notions on the code. This care started with identifying a meaning unit. Graneheim and Lundham (2004) defined a meaning unit as words related to each other via content and context. Meaning units should be neither too broad nor too narrow according to Graneheim and Lundham. Meaning units described by multiple paragraphs (too broad) are more likely to include multiple meaning units. Meaning units defined by one word (too narrow) may result in fragmentation. Here is an example of a meaning unit:

*No I guess not cause I think, I think it’s evolved over the years you know more from, from the oh I just need to make more money and be known as good at what I do to the side where I’m more people oriented. (Alex interview, 11/11/10)*
Analysis of the meaning unit, involving the interpretation of the meaning of the text, referred to by Graneheim & Lundham (2004) as an interpretive meaning unit, was developed. Here is the corresponding interpretive meaning unit:

*Career decision making evolved from need for money, to being good at what I do, to people oriented*

The interpretive meaning unit was then given a code. Here is the corresponding code:

*Career decision making evolved*

A compiled chart of all codes was developed to use in identifying categories and themes. Assembling codes into categories is an interpretive process, involving analysis rather than description (Anderson, 2003). Therefore, the researcher must acknowledge those personal beliefs and values that will influence the generating of categories (Anderson, 2003). The researcher identity section of chapter 1 identified the values and personal beliefs of the researcher. For assurance purposes, care was taken to ensure that each category included data from multiple mid-career professionals to maintain consistency between multiple sources of the data. Both the identification of the researcher’s beliefs and values and the inclusion of multiple sources of data served as measures of assurance. A category manifests the expression of the text and focuses on the similarities and differences of the codes while a theme represents the relationship aspect of the data (Graneheim & Lundham, 2004).
**Figure 3.1. Data Collections and Data Analysis**

1. **Data Collection**
   - Invite Participants via email or face-to-face
   - Select participants
     - Unique Job role
       - 3+ years in job role
       - Degree/certificate beyond HS diploma
   - Set up 1st interview
     - Ask participant to choose 1 meaningful experience for study
   - Conduct & audio record 1st interview
   - Conduct & audio record 2nd interview
   - Participant reflects to complete take home exercise
   - Transcribe 1st interview
   - Transcribe 2nd interview
   - Conduct raffle for all participants completing study
   - Present winners with prizes

2. **Data Analysis**
   - Organize data
   - Familiarize self with data
   - Code transcripts and worksheet line-by-line
   - Develop chart of codes and merge into categories
   - Using field notes, memos, categories, document all ideas
   - Use ideas from data to form theory
   - Develop grounded theory
   - Search for alternative explanations
   - Write report
Assuring the Trustworthiness of Analysis

According to Hill (2001) validity and reliability are essential elements in the instruments used in research. Reliability focuses on whether or not consistent measurements are produced over time while validity focuses on indicators that the instrument is accurately measuring. In quantitative research, validity and reliability are concepts denoting the trustworthiness of the study (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, Gregson, 1998). However, in qualitative research trustworthiness is comprised of credibility, dependability and transferability (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, Gregson, 1998, Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility is gained by choosing the most suitable meaning unit and executing good judgment in the similarities and differences in categories (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Good comparison and contrast of categories can be produced by using quotations from transcribed texts and by agreement among the researchers but Graneheim and Lundman also noted the differences in the literature regarding the appropriateness of researcher agreement due to multiple realities. Care was taken by the researcher to ensure similarities and differences were contained within the categories. Quotations from the participants are given in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Dependability is usually about the stability of the research process (Anderson, 2003). Open dialogue among the researchers is one avenue to ensure dependability, because interviewing and observing evolve during the research process as researchers gain new insights, there is potential for inconsistent data gathering (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The research findings should be traceable through the process so the reader can understand how particular conclusions were reached from the data.
Transcribed audio-recorded interview transcripts, participant worksheets and other documents and researcher field notes were maintained and are available for inspection. Also, quotations from the participants are included in this dissertation.

Transferability of the research findings to another specific context is really the responsibility of the reader (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). However these authors recommended that the researcher ensure transferability by clearly describing the research context, participant selection process, and data analysis process, and by presenting the findings with quotations (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Anderson (2003) advised researchers to provide sufficient information about the participants to allow the readers to decide on the transferability. Specific details of these research participants are discussed now and provided in chart form in Appendix L.

Mid-career Professional Participants

Specifically, the study sought to engage participants meeting these criteria: 1) mid-career; 2) possessing a certificate or degree beyond a high school diploma; and 3) serving in an unique job role differing from that of the other research participants. Mid-career can be defined as the place in which the worker is competent and successful in performing the tasks attached to the job role (Elliott, 1994). Consequently, participants with 3+ years on the job were sought. This criterion was selected to ensure that the participant was no longer in an on-the-job-training situation.

The study also sought to engage professional participants rather than those who achieved no certificate or degree beyond a high school diploma. The researcher’s
expectation was that those achieving something beyond a high school diploma would be more apt to possess a career mindset.

Job role indicated the part an individual played in a particular context, guided by values. It included how one approached the tasks and duties associated with the job description (Rothwell & Sredl, 2000). The unique job role requirement ensured data richness due to the inclusion of varying viewpoints. Patton (1987), Adler and Adler (1988), and Graneheim & Lundman (2004) argued for the inclusion of participants with a variety of experiences in the research in order to answer research questions from diverse points-of-view. Ten participants were selected to participate in this research study - seven men and three women. Nine were married and one was divorced. Nine had dependents and one did not. One possessed a Ph.D degree, two possessed a master’s degree, five possessed a bachelor’s degree and two possessed an associate’s degree. For a breakdown of the mid-career professionals see the following synopses and reference in Appendix L.

Mia, aged between 35 and 55, with an M.S. degree had been in the job role of information technology manager for 3 and ½ years. Her meaningful experience was coming to the USA, from the Chinese cultural revolution, alone as a single girl.

Jessica, aged 34, with a Ph.D. degree, had been in the job role of director of assessment and instructional support for three years. Her meaningful experience, chosen for this research, was unexpectedly becoming a mom and realizing her career was now secondary to being a working mom.

Sean, aged 30, with a B.S. degree, had been in the job role of lead developer for four years. The meaningful experience he chose for this research was having a period of time with a supervisor who enabled growth, trusted him, gave him opportunities for more responsibilities and designated him as lead developer.
Beth, aged between 35 and 55, with an A.A. degree, expecting to finish the credits for her B.S. degree in 2012, had been in her job role of team leader/supervisor for five years. The meaningful experience she chose for this research was accepting the boss’ request to move from a technical role to a team lead role with undefined responsibilities at the same time she was returning to school as an adult learner.

Otis, aged 60, with an M.B.A. degree, had been in his job role of accountant for six years. The meaningful experience he chose for this research was losing his job in his mid 30s on the 7th anniversary of his employment with the company.

Nelson, aged 58, with an AA degree, had been in his job role of database administrator for eight years. The meaningful experience he chose for this research was participating in a group where everyone voiced their “blunt” opinions but once the decision was made everyone served as a team.

Wyatt, aged between 35 and 55, with a B.S.E. degree, had been in his job role of senior director for ten years. The meaningful experience he chose for this research was deciding to give up engineering, his dream job, to move into IT for family, being at home reasons.

Peter, aged between 35 and 55, with a B.S. degree, had been in his job role of lead systems analyst for fourteen years. The meaningful experience he chose for this research was expecting first child and choosing to come home, changing from double income family to single income family, earning ½ of what he earned before, changing from many employment opportunities to few opportunities. The choice was made because his family resided at home location.

Alex, aged between 35 and 55, with a B.S. degree, had been in his job role of systems administrator for fourteen years. The meaningful experience he chose for this research was working weekends while a coworker in a higher position, who didn’t have to be at work, would send him electronic messages of encouragement, asking how he was.
Chester, aged between 35 and 55, with a B.S. degree, had been in his job role of programmer/analyst for twenty eight years. The meaningful experience he chose for this research taking a family vacation with college-aged kids and wondering whether this would be the last family vacation.

One mid-career professional, Nelson, completed the initial interview but failed to complete the second interview. When the researcher went to Nelson’s office for the scheduled second interview, Nelson was too busy and asked to reschedule. This happened five times. From the field notes of the first interview with Nelson:

10/13/10 (1st) interview Nelson, Database Administrator. Meaningful experience was participating as part of a team, where what was said in the room stayed in the room and did not have to be censored. The Manager made it that way. Nelson tried to continue that concept in new organizations but was never able to have that experience again. This experience was connected to his career decisions when he was “going thru the ranks” but not now. Looking forward to retirement because of time – doing what he wants to do. His current organization has problems with reporting structure, goals and things that meaningful experience did not have. I sensed frustration with that inability to have that experience again and his current job role. I thought there was some bitterness there and perhaps some unresolved feelings. His worst career decision was made for money. After two months he knew the decision was wrong. His definition of work is pushing the organization’s goals. Always learning. Nelson owns his career. He knew he owned his career the 1st time he left one position to go to another. Owning his career is a realization. “I felt good with sufficient probing and correct probing. I realized that adaptability is my values judgment”. Nelson chose to remain in a difficult situation but still continues to learn and self-improve. But he also talked about not going the extra mile.
Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the qualitative research design, which focused on ‘languaged data’ (Polkingham (2005), and the grounded theory approach to research, which describes social phenomena and contributes to understanding about them (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). An explanation of the types of data and data collection strategies were presented, as well as the process of analysis followed in this study. Line-by-line coding of the interview transcripts and worksheets was performed followed by assembling codes to categories and finally to themes for a grounded theory. Details of how the research would satisfy the trustworthiness of analysis were included in regards to credibility, dependability and transferability. Research credibility was provided by the inclusion of participant quotes in the findings. Research dependability was provided by ensuring traceable findings through the process and the availability of interview transcriptions, worksheet and researcher notes for review. Transferability was made possible by clearly describing the research context, the participants and their selection, and the process of collecting and analyzing data, and by presenting the data alongside participant quotations.

Finally, the participants provided informative data are shown and illustrated in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Results

The epistemic interest of this study was in describing the learning that occurs when mid-career professionals critically reflect on the relationship among a single personally meaningful experience, the inner self, and career decision making, using Branson’s Model of the Self and a structured methodology for critical reflection. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research findings. The codes, categories, and themes, are discussed. Data analysis from the perspectives of Branson’s theory, model and a structured methodology for critical reflection, as well as Mezirow’s Transformative Theory of Adult Learning and The Career Construction Theory are presented.

Meaningful Experience and Career Decision Making

This research required mid-career professionals to choose a personally meaningful experience for study. Considerable thought was given to Branson’s decision to guide participants away from choosing a “sad” experience, indicated in his research findings (Branson, 2007). Clarification for these criteria was provided in a personal communication to this researcher (Branson, personal communication, 2010), explaining this decision was out of concern for both the researcher and the participant. Branson’s concerns were that the researcher not be overwhelmed with the needs of the participant and that the participant not become emotionally consumed by sadness. After consulting with professors on my Ph.D. committee, this researcher chose not to limit the choice of meaningful experience. This turned out to be a good decision as limiting the choice away from a “sad” experience would have affected the choices of
Otis, and potentially both Wyatt and Peter. Four mid-career professionals chose experiences outside of the workplace while six selected experiences within the workplace. The mid-career participants saw a relationship between their meaningful experience and their career decision making, even before critically reflecting. Unexpectedly, several of the mid-career professionals chose a meaningful experience of process rather than a single event. This selection leads the researcher to offer a caution to career counselors and workplace learning and performance professionals to not limit references to meaningful experience to a single event or occurrence. A mid-career professional, Sean, provided this information regarding an experience of process:

Sean: It’s about 2 years since S has been my supervisor. I was certainly happy with where I was before then. But since she has taken over she has really helped me to grow in leadership terms. She really seems to have a lot of trust in both my technical expertise and my leadership ability. Before she took over my role was lead developer and I did lead people in terms of here is this project you take that part and do it. Since she has taken over I am actually identified as team leader where I’m just not managing this particular task but really all the work of people on my team. That is just a great experience because it gives me more responsibility in terms of one thing I really grown to admire about her: she has really good technical knowledge but she can recognize – this person has more technical knowledge than I do. She may not agree with them but she will accept what they say. That has been very important. That is what really helped me to grow in a lot of ways as a leader. The opportunity to have success. (Interview, 10/25/10).

An overview of the meaningful experience chosen by each mid-career professional for this research is provided next.
Table 4.1.

Mid-career Professionals’ Meaningful Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mid-career Professional</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Having a period of time with a supervisor who enables growth, trusts employees, identified Sean as Lead Developer and gave opportunity for more responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Becoming a Mom was unexpected, life changing but realized she did not want to be a stay-at-home-Mom, wanted a career – career is now 2nd to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otis</td>
<td>Losing his job when laid off in his mid 30s on the 7th anniversary of his employment with that company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt</td>
<td>Deciding to give up his engineering career (his dream job) to move into IT for family, being at home reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Every time he worked weekends in ‘not high status’ (computer operator), a coworker in a higher position (programmer) who didn’t have to be at work would send him an electronic message of encouragement, asking how he was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Accepting boss’ request to move from technical role to team lead, with undefined responsibilities, at same time as she was returning to school as an adult learner was a leap. It was scary and exciting and the continuation of seeing a dual career; i.e. parent and people developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>Colorado vacation with family and college-bound kids, Could be last family vacation together. Vacation had purpose and exploring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Expecting 1st child chose to move home to PA; from double income family to single income family making ½ of what he made; from many job opportunities to few job opportunities. But family were here. Didn’t really want to move back home, felt like hadn’t accomplished enough yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>Participating as part of a team, where “blunt” opinions could be given but once the final decision was made, everyone worked as a team. Hasn’t been able to duplicate that experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Coming to USA, from Chinese cultural revolution, alone as a single girl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis Process

The researcher’s assumptions and beliefs that: 1) employers will not reward hard work with upward mobility and job security; 2) employers are not interested in developing employees and placing them in positions that best fit them; and 3) one’s reactions to today’s circumstances may be related to unresolved issues from the past were documented in chapter 1 and drawn upon to shape the research study, to develop the research questions and to develop the initial questions for the interviews. Rather than focusing on the politics, ethics and morality of the changing world of work, this research looked at the relationship among meaningful experience, the inner-self
components and career decision-making in order to: 1) identify avenues for helping those who are adversely impacted by the changing world of work; and 2) ultimately to empower workers to place themselves in the driver’s seat of their careers, to plan for and progress to a preferred future.

The interview questions were used to initiate dialogue and identify areas to be probed for underlying meanings. The researcher allowed fluidity within the interview conversations but ensured that all pre-determined questions were addressed by the mid-career professional. After the interviews and worksheets were completed, the transcripts of both interviews and the worksheets were read to gain an overall sense of the data per mid-career professional and the combined perspectives. Line-by-line coding of the interview transcripts and the worksheets was used to place the data into meaning units and then into codes. Caution was taken to ensure codes were neither too broad, i.e. paragraphs with many meaning units; or too narrow, i.e. single words. Grounded theory researchers must evaluate how data emerging from the study fits with the initial research interests but also avoid forcing own ideas on the data (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher constantly asked herself whether the meaning of the code was clear or fragmented. According to Anderson a tension exists between the requirements in grounded theory research to be both sensitive and objective (Anderson, 2003). Sensitivity concerns assigning meaning to the data based on the researcher’s insight while objectivity concerns the researcher’s openness to the data as it emerges (Anderson, 2003). Comparing and contrasting the codes placed them into categories. Categories were examined from the perspective of the three research questions to ensure research coherence. The codes within the category were then
analyzed for underlying meanings and sorted into themes. Examples of codes, categories and their assorted themes can be found in Appendix M - Career Definition Category, Themes, and Codes; Appendix N - Career Decision Factors Category, Themes, and Codes; and Appendix O - Critical Reflection Effect Category, Themes, and Codes.

Categories for Research Question #1

The first research question for this study was: What are the perceptions of mid-career professionals regarding the influence of personally meaningful experience on their career decision making? The categories of codes grouped to answer this question included: 1) Relationship of Meaningful Experience and Career Decisions; 2) Meaningful Experience Impact; 3) Career Decision Factors; 4) Career Decision Factor Personal Importance; 5) Work Definition; 6) Career Definition; and 7) Relationship of Work and Career to Self Identity.

Relationship of Meaningful Experience and Career Decisions

The initial interview sought to identify the mid-career professional’s perspective on the impact of that meaningful experience on her/his subsequent career decisions. A question was asked about the relationship of the meaningful experience to their career decisions. Nine of the mid-career professionals saw a relationship between their meaningful experience and career decisions they had made. A mid-career professional, Nelson, qualified his answer:

_Nelson: Pretty much not now. Certainly as I was going through the ranks. I remember little bits and pieces and thought processes, I would think where did that guy come up with that? Where did that come from? I could sit down and talk to the manager and extrapolate those minutes into dollars. (Interview, 10/13/10)._
In relating their meaningful experience to career decisions, these mid-career professionals gave evidence of learning from it and applying that learning to their career-related decisions. Although Gati, Fassa, and Houminer (1995) theorized career decision making consists of weighing alternatives and choosing the best alternative, these mid-career professionals talked about the importance of priorities and approaches to career decision making. This category included the themes of: 1) Necessity for career decision priorities; and 2) Necessity to approach career decisions with purpose. These themes are much more than simply choosing amongst alternatives.

One theme that emerged was the emphasis on the necessity for priorities in career decisions, as gained from a meaningful experience. The mid-career professionals not only talked about the necessity to prioritize the available known alternatives but focused on which type of alternative mattered most to them. Several examples may be found below:

* Alex: Yeah I think the connection is that again when you make a career decision it really shouldn’t be just for financial reasons. You know there’s a, there’s a culture in the place that you work. And I think that’s got to be part of, that’s part of why I’m here. (Interview, 10/26/10). 

* Jessica: Absolutely. I would not apply for a tenure track position even if a perfect one came along. My career is second without a doubt. I have to think about what is best for us. That is not at all where I thought I would be. I saw myself as career-driven and I was going to reach for the top. It’s not as important as I thought. (Interview, 10/15/10).

Another theme in the mid-career professionals’ understanding of the relationship between meaningful experience and career decision making was the necessity to
approach career decisions with purpose. For example, Alex used his meaningful experience of “I’m valued by somebody at work” (2Q7) to make daily decisions that resulted in employee retention.

*Alex: Keep meaningful experience in mind for retaining people (Interview, 10/26/10).*

Peter realized that his meaningful experience of moving home to Pennsylvania and family when expecting his first child changed the purpose for his career decisions.

*Peter: Do I see any connection between the decision to move back here and my career decisions? Well, I think so. It was the first one based on family and it’s been that way ever since. (Interview, 10/24/10).*

**Meaningful Experience Impact**

This research sought to understand how the mid-career professionals perceived the impact of a meaningful experience on their career decisions. Themes from this meaningful experience impact category included: 1) meaningful experience involved and invoked feelings; and 2) meaningful experience generated learning about self and priorities; and 3) Meaningful experience generated learning about the world outside self.

The theme, of meaningful-experience-involved-and-invoked-feelings, was mentioned frequently by several mid-career professionals. According to Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) associative learning occurs when either positive or negative emotions are personally associated with an event, either validly or invalidly. Several examples of meaningful experiences involving feelings and/or invoking feelings follow. Jessica continued to experience feelings, stemming from her meaningful experience of unexpectedly becoming a mom.
Jessica: I said that I am a working mom who has to juggle work and family life. I feel guilty because I am not at home with my son, sad because I miss him, feel that my work is compromised because I don’t always give 100% to the job, juggling what I have to do, jealous when I hear about people that have family here and they can have them babysit. (Interview, 11/01/10)

Otis, Chester and Peter expressed feelings relating to their experiences.

Otis: I realized after that, maybe for the first time, there are things out of my control. But it wasn’t anything that I did that cost me this job. I feel it was this company’s loss. I was a good employee. I did the job. I was faithful to them. There is no such thing as far as I am concerned as corporate loyalty. You don’t see that anymore. Companies don’t think anything of laying people off, experienced people. (Interview, 11/27/10)

Chester: Just I, I, it was rewarding to see how we all got together last . . . how we acted together and gave me hope that we’ll be able . . . just because the kids are in college, that they still enjoy going with us, which it was a free trip for them so why wouldn’t they? But I think it kind of gave me good hope for the future I think that we can do things together like that still and it’s just . . . it was just kind of a rewarding trip. (Interview, 10/19/10).

Peter: I felt coming back home was a step backwards. It took a while to sort of get back to where I was before. You just get comfortable where you are. So once I had a job, had something to do, once my kids came along none of that matters so much. (Interview, 11/24/10)

After careful consideration of the presence and frequency of “feelings” in the data, this researcher sought input from Branson regarding his reasons for not including emotions in the inner self components of his Model of the Self. In a personal email, dated 11/01/10, Branson indicated that the texts he used to create his initial model did not include emotions. Consequently, his initial model did not include emotions. However, he explained that his more recent model did include emotions as a
component of the inner self. Branson chose not to make this researcher aware of the change in his model because he did not want to disturb this researcher’s study, which was already underway.

When learning empowers one to understand, control his/her behavior, and anticipate the realities, the learning is very significant (Mezirow, 1996). What learning occurred from the meaningful experience and how significant was the learning? Data indicated the theme of meaningful experience having generated learning about the self and priorities. Peter gained understanding, Jessica made changes to her behavior, and Wyatt anticipated reality.

Peter: Well, my experience was deciding to move back home. There was good and bad with that. I didn’t really want to come back home. So that is where I realized there are some things more important than others. Also, because I had to take that step backwards with job, job security and where I am in my job is important to me. (Interview, 11/24/10).

Jessica: Having my son, it changed the image of who I am. It has changed the way I work because I see that now when I am at work I have to do the best job that I can. I can’t slack off because the hours that I am here are hours that I am away from my son. So I feel that I must do the best I can do or otherwise it is waste of time. It’s changed my perspective on work. I also value my free time. I think I used to be more apt to do things on the weekend and now I do not. That is the other reason, Now when I am at work I feel like I use my time more wisely then I probably use to. I am very careful about what I schedule on my days. I can’t waste a lot of time or otherwise I will waste a lot of time and that is hours that I could be with my son. It has changed a lot. I push myself harder. The few people that report to me I push them hard. It seems like now when I work I have to do the best job that I can because the hours that I am here doing my job are hours that I spend away from my son. I feel that I must do the best that I can. I also value my free time. I’m very careful about my time. I try not
to schedule meetings so I can get out at 4. (Interview, 10/15/10).

Wyatt: That is the experience of deciding to move into data processing. It was a timely decision.

Researcher: Were there other people involved in this experience?

Wyatt: Just me. The job I had made me a very generous offer to stay. But everyone was expecting me to not have a personal life. I had a lot of children. I realized I could not give everything that career required and the quality of life for my family. (Interview, 10/19/10).

Examples of the theme of a meaningful experience generating learning about the world outside the self may be found below. That learning was significant for mid-career professionals, Beth and Otis.

Beth: But when I reflect back on accepting that offer for new responsibility and see just what it, what it has grown into, what it has offered me over the years it’s, it’s really profound. So let me explain a bit more. In accepting that new area of responsibility it required me to travel and, and this is, this all took place here at (company name), it required me to travel to Pittsburgh. I had never visited Pittsburgh before. This would be my first time taking a company car just that whole experience, process, driving, navigating myself to Pittsburgh. My two daughters were very young at the time. Mommy had never gone away for a week at a time you know that type of thing. And so I was dealing with a lot of my own anxiety about this new venture I was going on. Having done that, however, having survived my trip to Pittsburgh, being in the situation of meeting new people from other universities, training with other people and then the what followed from that in the 6-8 years that I was in that area of responsibility it turned into annual, global conferences that I attended which meant my very first time in an airplane and going off to a big global sized conference, thousands of people, I knew nobody. It started teaching me the important of . . . well it, it really taught me that there’s a much bigger world out there than what you have in your own secure little home life or in your own secure little life in your current
workplace. And so looking back those two experiences whether it be navigating my own car to strange places or flying and you know experiencing new places and new people just really changed me as a person. I had a whole different attitude toward, toward travel in general, to exploring new, new cultures and just whatever it might be. And, and just a real appreciation for what the, the world has to offer. But it’s those two experiences too as the trencible fact of, of just how I grew personally and professionally that has really propelled me to, to continue to be open to new challenges and to more, and to keep growing my career path. (Interview, 10/17/10).

Otis: It was nothing in my control nor was it my fault. I can’t fault myself for this for any of these job loses. I want to do the best job that I could. There were decisions out of my control. But I have to be aware that I am a strong person, I am a good employee. I have this faith in God and I have to count on Him to carry me through and to teach me things. I have to say at this point in my life, I am 60 now. God has never failed me. God has never failed me and He does things for His own purposes. So I have to realize that and not mope about these things. Sure there is a level of sadness, if you will. There is a level of uncertainty, of doubt. But you just have to work through those things. You can’t fold under those circumstances. (Interview, 11/27/10).

Career Decision Factors

Career decisions reflect an individual’s attempts to put self-understanding into career terms (Super, as cited in Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). The career decision factors category included talk about factors these mid-career professionals considered in career decision making. Themes in the career decision factors category included: 1) Someone more important than self; and 2) Quality of life both outside and inside the workplace.
Several people considered someone more important than themselves when making career decisions. For some mid-career professionals, that someone is God.

Alex and Otis provided examples.

**Alex:** Well I think just, just based on a study that I’ve done over the years, and just growing spiritually over the years. Just come to realize that ultimately He’s in control of everything. He has a plan for my life. He’s sensitive to me and my life. I feel like He has me here for a purpose too. Well, probably if I was, if I was in total control of my own life I’d have it messed up pretty bad. Like obviously I’ve made plenty of wrong decisions in my life but I’m coming to realize that I’m careful about what decisions I make. I base them on something and that’s what I base them on at least I hope I do (Interview, 10/26/10).

**Otis:** Well, that is a good question. A lot of people struggle with knowing the will of God in their life I really don’t struggle with that. When a decision comes up I want to make, I do it prayerfully. I take it to God and I step through the doors then. For example, this is very relevant, this opportunity to back away from working full time next year and do some other things, some professional things and some travelling and do some other things but not have to come to work every day. That is part of that. And I’ve met with financial people to make sure things are taken care of there. But in all these things I consider if God wants me to stop with this...and that is my prayer, God if you want me to stop with this let me know clearly. People struggle with saying I am not sure that is God’s will. But if He brought it to your mind and to your heart and if you take these steps and it goes to fruition, for me that is God’s will. God makes it clear by letting things happen. I am convinced of that (Interview11/27/10).

For other mid-career professionals, that someone more important than themselves is family. Jessica, and Peter gave examples.

**Jessica:** I think the path that I’ve come. I have worked hard. I feel like I came this far I can seek out opportunities that are right from my experience and interest. But that has
definitely changed. I am more focused on what would be right for everybody rather than just me (Interview, 11/01/10).

Peter: I have come to realize that family is more important than self. It is more important than career (ws).

Quality of life both inside and outside the workplace was the theme of career decision factors for mid-career professionals, Sean, Wyatt, and Chester.

Sean: In general I would say one of the biggest focuses is growth and moving forward in my career. I am not a particularly patient person, career development wise. I am always thinking what can I be doing to move to the next step, to get to the next level, to get the promotion. To do things like that, I am always thinking what can this get me. It can be stressful. Sometimes it would probably be a little easier just to sit down and do my job for a while and not worry about the next step (Interview, 10/25/10).

Wyatt: Quality of life first. But when I make career decisions part of it was where do you want to spend your day? Knowing the great majority of my time away from my family is work. I must enjoy it. Where are my personal decisions? What motivated me? All these include challenges/ I will take on challenges. I must enjoy the area I am working in. I am pretty consistent. (Interview, 10/19/10).

Chester: Stability. I didn't really want anything that necessarily involved high pressure. Traveling. That kind of thing. And I guess whenever . . . when I got this job there’s not, there’s not . . . it, it was not, there wasn’t a whole lot of opportunities for advancement but I just wanted something that was rewarding and yet would allow me to enjoy my evenings and that wasn’t too stressful (Interview. 10/19/10).

Career Decision Factor Personal Importance
This research sought to understand the importance of the career decision factors per mid-career professional. The category included these themes: 1) Career decision factors part of my life; and 2) Career decision factors stem from feelings. Otis and Sean give examples for the career decision factors part of my life theme in the career decisions factor importance category.

**Otis:** It’s always been a part of my life, I think. I have looked at people earlier in my life and thought how could someone stay at a career in one job for 40 years and retire from there. As I have gotten older I kinda retracted from that a bit. I can see how people do that. There is a certain comfort level knowing when you get up every day that you are going to the same place to do the same things with the same people. But now I have gotten a little bored with that. I have been doing the same things for six years now. I say “retire” only because it is a word that people understand. It is certainly not in my personal vocabulary. I say in words that people will understand. I’m looking toward that because of the opportunities and adventure and doing new things, stretching myself and such. I always like doing stuff. I want to learn something new every day. I want to learn things every day about this world, about people. (Interview, 11/27/10).

**Sean:** Oh, I think they always kind of have. Even if you go back to when I was in school. I was always thinking about what do I have to do to get the first chair saxophone, you know. What can I do to even things like becoming president of the choir and things like that. Now I am thinking about college and how can I get this internship. I don’t know I think it is just always how I have been wired. (Interview, 11/23/10).

Career decision factors stem from feelings was the theme in the importance of career decision factors category for mid-career professionals, Wyatt and Chester.

**Wyatt:** Ultimately, I want to enjoy the hours I have to work. I enjoy solitude, watching the birds and nature. But I can’t do that. (inaudible) the birds. I learned I enjoy the challenge (Interview, 12/06/10).
Chester: Because to me they, they all add up to a, to a good day I guess. If I don’t find a job or, or career rewarding then it will be boring for me, feel unsatisfied, things like that. I find the day goes by so much faster if I feel I’ve made a contribution and was challenged a little bit. So again I don’t have the urge to work 24/7. Personally I don’t, I think after a certain amount of time I think it’s counterproductive. So I think it’s important to get away. I do that during the day when I, I take a lunch hour and go out and, and exercise and that . . .(Interview, 11/11/10).

**Work Definition**

The research sought to understand the perspectives of mid-career professionals regarding the definition of work. A question was asked in the first interview regarding the personal definition of work. Humans are not born understanding the meaning of work. Rather, as they grow and develop they learn about the meaning their society or culture assigns to work (Savickas, 1991). Therefore, society’s definition of work can be learned mistakenly or not at all (Savickas, 1991). The definition of work category included any comments regarding the definition of work and the themes were: 1) work is necessary; 2) work is meaningful; and 3) work has purpose. According to Savickas (1991), work is both an activity and a psychological experience.

Six of the mid-career professionals talked about work as being necessary – something to be done: Jessica (work is employment, 1Q7), Otis (bills force work on you,1Q6), Beth (anything performed,1Q7), and Peter (something you have to do,1Q6), Wyatt (something I have to do in order to support my family and lifestyle,1Q6), and Mia (something you need to get done, 1Q6).

Five of the mid-career professionals talked about work as more of a psychological experience, ascribing meaning to work: Peter (should be something you
enjoy, 1Q6); Chester (accomplishing the task, 1Q7); Jessica (designing own time, 1Q7); Alex (involves people, 1Q7); and Beth (motivation has to be part of work, 1Q7).

Six of the mid-career professionals talked about work having purpose. Purpose implies something quite different than just ascribing meaning to work. The mid-career professionals who saw work as having purpose included: Otis (work is what you make of it, worksheet; Peter (allows preferred after work activities, 1Q6); Wyatt (enables family standard of living, 1Q6); Alex (accomplishment for compensation, 1Q7); Beth (done for a reason or cause with returned rewards, 1Q7); and Mia (something you want to do, 1Q6).

Career Definition

Even in soliciting mid-career professionals for this research, the ambiguity of career was shown. Several examples of the ambiguity of defining career as found in the researcher’s field notes are provided below:

10/06/10 – IRB approval received – 4 volunteers responded to my email invitations. One lady—who did not volunteer—said she doesn’t have a career only a job. I explained the definition of career is changing and could be lifestyle choice, a constellation of life roles, etc.

10/07/10 another lady said she isn’t going to volunteer for my research because a career is something from her past. I explained the definition of career is changing. She listened but my words made no difference. I wonder about people in a job but not in a career. What does that mean? I need to be more aware of others and ready to probe for more info. I need to give a listening ear.

12/05/10 – a man I invited to participate in this research said he could not because he never made a career decision. He just “fell into” his job and has been there for 30+ years. I talked about the changing definition of “career” and gave some everyday examples of career decisions we make. I wish I had asked about his childhood career dream
and maybe probed for more about his work life. I think I am too eager to explain. I need to listen more and probe for information when unexpected opportunities come up.

Because the literature does not present just a single definition of career, the mid-career professionals were not given a textbook definition but were encouraged to answer the interview questions about career from their own perspectives. The career definition category included any comments having to do with defining the concept and/or experience of career. The themes for the career definition category included: 1) career is a chosen “path” on the journey toward a goal; and 2) career includes personal actions and “goals” over time. Clearly these mid-career professionals perceived career as less tangible and more abstract than the concept of work. The theme of career as a chosen path on the journey toward a goal indicates movement from one point to another point. Mid-career professionals, Beth and Chester give examples.

Beth: So I guess I do not have a book definition for it or I would have, it would be here. But I would define career as the path we choose to take as part of our work and that work is not necessarily have to be . . . well let me back up and say work would be anything done, anything performed for another individual or individuals.(Interview, 12/15/10)

Chester: I think a, a job path. A journey from the day you graduate from college or whatever it is you did I just (inaudible) journey.
It’s, it’s a very important part of the journey certainly because I wouldn’t be able to feel that I contributed to society or even (the organization) if I didn’t, if I didn’t have a career that would make me proud. In a program you know has made me proud. It doesn’t overwhelm me with pride like I invited a cure for cancer or I won the national championship in football or anything like that. But I, I, I feel I’ve made a solid effort and I, I like being part of the team that can do that. I don’t really feel comfortable leading. So it’s probably one of my negative things but I, I get nervous at times maybe. So that, and that maybe you know that maybe certainly a negative in my mind that I


haven’t led too much or had the chance to (inaudible). But that’s, that’s I guess that’s what I think about as a career. (Interview, 11/11/10).

The theme of career includes personal actions and “goals” over time is exampled by mid-career professionals Wyatt and Peter.

Wyatt: So career is a set of jobs, positions with a goal in mind, and you have to become very good at. Spending 20 years progressing is a career. Becoming a better manager, director, senior director is a series of jobs, becoming better at, leading to a career. (Interview, 12/06/10).

Peter: She chose what she wants to do. She worked toward a goal, reached the goal and is now she is doing what she wants to do. (Interview, 11/24/10).

Relationship of Work and Career to Self-Identity

Learning is an experience of identity that changes who we are and our aspirations (van Woerkom, 2004). Although people attach differing degrees of importance to their work, they tend to link work with self-worth (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). Because the majority of folks have not reflected on their beliefs, they may be unable to articulate their personal definition of work and how it relates to who they are (Savickas, 1991). The mid-career professionals saw a relationship between their personal image and their career decision making even before reflection. However, mid-career professional, Otis qualified his answer:

Otis: Aaah, Not so much now as I did when I was younger in life. I think when you are younger you are much more independent. I have gotten much more dependent on God. Having gone though circumstances that are out of my control, I have lost that feeling that everything will work out. I think you have to be more careful with that. I am much more dependent on God. I am not what I was before I knew the Lord and came inot this relationship with Him. Time and moving on in life breaks down a lot of those independencies. You become a lot less independent more
dependent on others around you and your spouse and that sort of thing. (Interview, 11/27/10).

The relationship of work and career to the self-identity category included any reference to how work and career relate to who the mid-career professional sees her/him self to be. These were the themes: 1) see self as defined by something other than work or career; and 2) see self as somewhat defined by work or career.

Five mid-career professionals saw self as defined by something other than work or career. Peter – paying the bills defines me (2Q10); Wyatt – see self as professional, father, husband, provider (2Q15); Otis – career doesn’t define me (2Q14); Alex – Christianity is a big part of who I am (1Q8); and Mia – Career affects my life. It’s 1/3 of life (2Q15).

Four mid-career professionals saw themselves as somewhat defined by career or work.

Chester – I think some people are defined by careers of what you do. I think it’s important you know whenever you meet somebody they often . . . one of the first question is always what do you do and that kind of thing. But I don’t feel that it makes me . . . it defines me 100% or anything like that. (Interview, 11/11/10).

Beth: Back to some of my sociology classes now, I think work has a direct relationship to who you might see yourself to be. (Interview, 10/27/10).

Sean: Um, it plays a large part in how I see myself. I think I tend to be one of those people that if someone said “describe yourself to me”, one of the first 2 or 3 things I would say is a software developer (Interview, 10/25/10).

Jessica: I can’t see myself not working. For financial reasons I wanted to keep my job but the 2nd reason. I think if I had my son I mean for financial reasons. I don’t see my self as a stay at home mom. When I in this position, I like it
so much. I like the people I work with. So I do think that plays a role that is what I am. (Interview, 10/15/10).

**Critical Reflection**

Critical reflection is both a rational process for determining whether or not previously held views still fit (Cranton, 2003) and an analytical method for adults to use as they seek to better understand themselves (Cranton, 1996). Self reflection involves looking at both assumptions and behavior (Schwandt, 2005). This research study included an assignment for critical reflection between the first and second interviews. Although each mid-career professional was given a minimum of two weeks between the two interviews to allow ample time for critical reflection, results varied in the actual amount of time invested in this activity. Also, the reported reflection time constitutes only the mid-career professional’s remembrance or approximation of time spent on this task. The depth of the reflection is unknown and may or may not relate to the amount of time spent critically reflecting. Perhaps a specific class or scheduled workshop with a script for guiding critical reflection would yield different results. However, the time periods reported by the mid-career professionals are described below.

*Alex during 15 days: Cause I looked over it you know after you left the first time I read, I read over all of this just so I can kind of get the wheels grinding a little bit. And I probably spent you know an hour or so just thinking about what I was going to say here.* (Interview, 11/11/10)

*Jessica during 16 days: It’s always during the last two weeks. So I have been thinking about it off and on these last couple of weeks. Now today was when I actually sat down to put it on paper. But I have been thinking about it. It’s been busy the last two weeks, all day meetings. I had no
time to put my thoughts together and then at home after putting (my son) to bed. I thought who am I? This working mom – juggling, that’s been in my head. As soon as I picked up this paper this morning it was all ready there this last couple of weeks. (Interview, 11/01/10)

Chester during 22 days: Well I looked at it I, I don’t know I’d say, I’d say about four times because I read over them and, and then tried to figure out the best way to answer. You know is it by answering the questions, is it by filling out the chart . . . and then I, I left it and then I came back to it. And that’s kind of how I, I work on projects. (Interview, 11/11/10)

Sean during 28 days: Um, I mean sat down and really thought about it worked on it – it certainly popped up in my head frequently. (Interview, 11/23/10)

Peter during 30 days: O, I’d say I spent one hour or one hour and a half. (Interview, 11/24/10).

Mia during 31 days: Two hours. Today I rewrote the worksheet for one hour. (Interview, 12/09/10).

Otis during 45 days: Quite a bit actually, thought about them quite a bit before I actually wrote them down. Couple hours at least., just to try to think through this (Interview, 11/27/10).

Beth during 48 days: It was sort of in the back of my mind but again really being focused, no other distractions, just really thinking hard about this, it pretty much occurred in that one sitting when I sat down to write my response to the questions. (Interview, 12/15/10).

Wyatt during 46 days: The first day I read through it. I tucked it away and forgot about it. I apologize for it. I was travelling last week and I read through it, thought about it. I sat down yesterday and wrote. But I sat down actually in two sessions. When I have to do something like this that requires time. My quiet time is usually afternoons. Most I finished Sunday morning- in fact I had one paragraph left. (Interview, 12/06/10).
Although 46 days passed between the first and second interviews for Wyatt, the time interval for reflection was really 35 days. This is because Wyatt showed up to the second interview without having done any of his reflection exercise so we had to reschedule. From the researcher’s field notes:

11/10/10 – 2nd interview with Wyatt. He said “Was I supposed to do something”? He didn’t do any homework. So we went over again the homework assignment and rescheduled the interview.

Gaining an appreciation of the methods used by individuals to learn takes time and practice with self reflection (Schwandt, 2005). Why don’t mid-career professionals routinely use the tool of critical reflection to improve their learning? The majority of people neither have nor make the time for self reflection (Branson, 2007). Mid-career professional, Wyatt agreed.

Wyatt: (pause) It required me to put in writing this dialogue, topics I never have time to think about. (Interview, 12/06/10).

Also, the nature and purpose of reflecting, and even how to reflect, may be unfamiliar. Mid-career professional, Otis, talked about his difficulty in his second interview:

Otis: Some of the descriptions were a little...some of these things were difficult because I really never thought about things. I know you have some examples here. I am not a psychology person. I am more of a knee-jerk reaction. I don’t think of things this way. I don’t look at things this way. So it was a little difficult to work through some of these things. (Interview, 11/27/10)

**Categories for Research Question #2**

The second research question was: what lessons were learned after critically reflecting on the inner self’s influence on career decision making? The categories of
codes grouped to answer this question included: 1) components of the inner self and career decision-making; 2) career construction; and 3) transformative learning and career ownership.

**Components of the inner self and career decisions making**

Using Branson’s guided questions, the mid-career professionals critically reflected on the inner-self components, subsequent to that meaningful experience and the resulting behavior; i.e. career decisions. According to Branson’s (2007) theory, beliefs link values to behavior. The link among values, beliefs, motives and career decisions could be seen in the results of the critical reflection exercise. Some examples follow:

**Table 4.2. Values, Beliefs, Motives, Career Decisions Link**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Motives</th>
<th>Career Decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Otis</td>
<td>Honesty, Truthfulness</td>
<td>Have to be honest with others to be true to self</td>
<td>Honesty, faithfulness have been strengthened and are my strongest motives in work and professional</td>
<td>It taught me that my career is in God’s control as is my entire life. Every step of the way He has been faithful…I have a stronger faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Working hard</td>
<td>Work hardest whenever have opportunity can best fulfill potential with supportive manager</td>
<td>Realize importance of supportive manager</td>
<td>I perform my best because I know that success will provide me with other opportunities When considering career moves, I keep in mind the impact a new manager could have on my career</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Branson (2010) saw self-concept as an array of pictures one has of self, linked to an important life role. The mid-career professionals were asked to reflect on what self-concept developed from that meaningful experience. Six mid-career professionals
expressed on their worksheet their self-concept with feelings: Otis (vulnerable); Peter (feel haven’t accomplished enough); Jessica (working Mom, juggling work and family brings feelings of guilt, sadness, jealousy); Alex (feel valued by someone at work); Beth (complimented – superiors believe in me); and Mia (excited, nervous, proud after got through it). Two mid-career professionals expressed their self-concept as capable: Wyatt (can make serious life decisions); and Sean (capable of succeeding and growing professionally). Chester expressed his self-concept as limited to a role (good father).

Branson (2010) saw self-esteem as a positive or negative feeling one has of one’s self. Guindon (2010) explained that self-esteem includes attributes and qualities of self that matter to the individual and therefore, can vary from high to low depending on the situation. Four of the mid-career professionals saw their self-esteem related to that meaningful experience as high. Peter saw his self-esteem as low. Mia saw her self-esteem as “sure self-esteem”. Jessica was not sure self-esteem was impacted by the meaningful experience. Wyatt related his self-esteem as “possess confidence to make future decisions”. Chester saw his self-esteem as “relaxed”.

The career decision behavior resulting from the inner-self components related to the meaningful experience, as documented on the worksheets, included: Otis (I went back for my MBA – the job I have now I have because of my MBA); Peter (I have come to realize that family is more important than self. It’s more important than my career); Chester (Since the experience was a positive one, I would say it reinforces my desire to be relaxed, supportive and enjoying the moment); and Sean (Even when a particular task/project does not interest me, I perform my best, because I know that success will provide me with further opportunities. Instead of just focusing on the
completion of a task/project, I try to provide opportunities for growth to developers on my team. When considering career moves, I keep in mind the impact a new manager could have on my career.; Beth (Whether in career decisions or other, I stand up for what is right. I try to practice taking a genuine interest in others. I remind myself that my career success is all up to me and nobody else.); Alex (I often drop what I am doing if someone needs to discuss a concern or personal problem. I try to be a good listener. It’s hard for me since I am extremely task-oriented. Ask people how things are going.); and Jessica (If son gets sick, I stay home with him. I have a different work schedule now – come in later and leave earlier – juggle around my son’s wakeup time. I’ve given up some personal hobbies and spend less time with friends. Because of guilt of being working mom, we very rarely get babysitters. Don’t get break much.); Mia (Choose the work environment and people who support my values and talents. Be open to the right opportunities. Listen to your inner voice. Work hard and support others who are motivated to do better.); and Wyatt (I challenge myself everyday. I work intensely and with focus on results.).

Asked about whether they desired to change anything about the way they make career decisions after critically reflecting, five of the mid-career professionals responded with satisfaction in their career decisions. Two mid-career professionals saw value in a specific change to career decisions.

Sean: Well, I don’t know if you remember this but one thing we did discuss is that I would stay in that kind of drive. I tend to get a little stressed out and feeling trapped when I am not moving forward. I have been in this position for 4 years and while there has certainly been a lot of growth within that I truly think I should be a manager by now. I have to calm down that drive to move forward. I have to think well maybe I should just work in this position and
continue to take opportunities but not necessarily think about am I moving forward? Am I getting stretched out here? Part of that is where you spend 4 years in college and it is really hard work. Four years on the job is really not that long. So I think it is adjusting your time scale a little bit. (Interview, 11/23/10).

Peter: Um, it probably would be better if I had more – was able to take more risks – was willing to take more risks. There may have been other secure positions within the university I may have. (Interview, 11/24/10).

One mid-career professional was uncertain about her desire to change career decisions.

Jessica: At this point in time..I mean... you know... these are things any working mom goes through. Am I doing the right thing? Should I stay at home? I don’t think that being a stay-at-home mom would be right for us. I mean probably the ideal situation would be part time with benefits. That is pretty unlikely. I do miss having time with him. But I think I will probably keep things as they are for the foreseeable future. I do like having a job that is flexible. I can take care of him. I have the summers to spend with him. I can take a day here and there if I need to. It’s the absolute best. I don’t think either one of us would be happy with a stay at home. He is the type of kids that needs others. He is learning a lot at school. He comes home and I think where did you learn that? And the school he is in they do fun things, it’s very amazing. They do a lot of neat activities. SO I mean in that respect he is getting a lot of good. It’s just that I miss him. But you can’t have everything. So.. (Interview, 11/01/10).

Another mid-career professional was suspicious of the question and ambiguous in his response.

Wyatt: this looking back and saying if only. The older I get I realize some decisions are good and some are bad. So your question kind of forces me to that O gee I made a wrong decision. I changed jobs a couple of times. There were a couple of time I helped others. Rather than staying in a job and trying to change your job it is far easier for me
In the changing world of work, organizations can no longer rely on management personnel alone for leadership. Why not? Leaders shape culture by modeling values (Russell, 2001) and leaders, as role models for values, should exist throughout the organization (Silvers, 1994/1995). From Branson’s (2007) perspective, the modernity worldview focuses on developing individual and personal rights under the assumption that the individual possesses the power of reason and moral will without social rules and obligations. Therefore, ethics must be taught. According to Brown (1995), companies who want to win and do in fact win in the marketplace of tomorrow will have many leaders that both customers and investors can count on. Of the mid-career professionals in this research study, only Wyatt and Jessica belonged to a professional organization with a code of ethics. Yet, in examining the components of the inner self formed by that meaningful experience, the others cited values of honesty, truthfulness, trusting others, responsibility, caring, availability for others, reliability, responsibility for self, supporting others, trustworthiness, and dependability.

**Career Construction**

This study used the Theory of Career Construction, as another lens through which to examine mid-career-professional-specific learning. The basics of the Theory of Career Construction are: 1) representations of reality are constructed socially and personally; 2) career is more about adapting to the environment than maturing inner
structures; and 3) career should be viewed by the interpretive processes and social interactions that provide meaning, as individuals make choices (Savickas, 2005).

According to Savickas (2005), career construction sees the present vocational situation as having evolved from past experience and links those experiences to a preferred future and adaptability looks at ‘how’ the career is constructed. Adaptability emphasizes coping processes and career adaptability is about one’s readiness and resources for coping (Savickas, 2005). So how are the mid-career professionals coping with managing their careers? The words “opportunity” and circumstances” came up frequently. Mid-career professional, Otis talked about missed opportunity:

Otis: Well, I can’t divorce career with…. career is part of a person’s life. I am approaching the other side of my professional life. I might answer this a little differently if it was even 10 years ago and I had more time in the workplace. Career for me has been looking for something. Having something in my mind that I really wanted to do, in my 20s and really thought I would have an opportunity to do it. But not having that opportunity. And having to take the opportunities that are offered to me. Certainly not what I would have chosen for me. I look back and know that was God working, I have to go back to my God being faithful, and through all these things He has been there with me. It certainly was not the career I would have chosen. Boy, I had a real bent towards law enforcement and had an opportunity but the job just didn’t come through after I got my undergraduate degree. But who knows what would have happened. I have no idea what would have happened. And after that is when I came to know the Lord. And He was faithful. Career is something that was abruptly changed at several points in my life but in the end turned out to be what God wanted it to be. (Interview, 11/27/10).

Mid-career professional, Chester talked about using opportunity:

Chester: I, I don’t know. I’ve, I’ve kind of enjoyed everything I’ve done. I started fixed term and I was . . . an opportunity came up to be full time and within about six months and I had to choose between two different jobs downstairs. And I chose the, the payroll portion with B.
and, and that was fun cause I, I always enjoyed working with numbers and, and things like that. And, and that was, that was nice. I did that for about 20 years and then I decided it was time for something a little bit different so I came up to, up here. And, and that’s been fun too kind of towards the end of my career I’m learning something new. And so I, I didn’t want to have to be kind of stagnant and just kind of hanging on for the rest of my career. So it’s been fun learning something new. So I, I think that was a good decision as well. (Interview, 10/19/10).

Mid-career professional, Jessica talked about circumstances:

Jessica: Luck. Some things I can’t control. I do think a lot of where people end up in their careers has a lot to do with just the circumstances surrounding them. Things that you can’t quite control. I couldn’t control my first job – that horrible work environment. I would never have expected that after the first interview and I did not know enough people at the university to clue me in as to whether that would be a bad decision. Then something opened up here and I think that was just meant to be. (Interview, 10/15/10).

The themes in this category included the adaptability concepts identified by Savickas (2005): 1) career concern; 2) career control; 3) career curiosity; and 4) career confidence.

The career concern theme included comments about concern for one’s future and awareness of strategic planning. Here are examples:

Chester I always enjoyed working with numbers and, and things like that. And, and that was, that was nice. I did that for about 20 years and then I decided it was time for something a little bit different so I came up to, up here. And, and that’s been fun too kind of towards the end of my career I’m learning something new. And so I, I didn’t want to have to be kind of stagnant and just kind of hanging on for the rest of my career. So it’s been fun learning something new. So I, I think that was a good decision as well. (Interview, 10/19/10).
Wyatt: My vision of what I wanted to do since I was 5 years old is not practical. I always wanted to be a forest ranger. I thought the world was interesting. I used to leave my house when I was 10 or 12 and leave mom a note. In those days there were always forest rangers at the top of the mountains in cabins. They would show me their towers and how they looked out for forest fires. I thought if I could retire financially and do this if I did not have to work for money. They don’t make much. I never could fulfill that dream. But I would spend every waking hour wondering the woods starting tomorrow, if I could. (Interview, 10/19/10).

The career control theme included comments made about career ownership and responsibility for building one’s career. Otis: (realize don’t control everything. Experience taught me that my career and entire life are in God’s control, ws); Jessica (out-of-control circumstances affect career, 1Q6); and Sean (nothing will happen if I am not in control. Critical reflection made me realize everything not in my control, 2Q13); Wyatt (from meaningful experience learned I control my life, I can control my outcomes, 2Q6); Alex (Career is based on God’s role for me - having total control I would have messed up, 1Q13); Chester (can’t control career variables,2Q1).

The career curiosity theme included comments made about exploring one’s fit in the world of work and openness to new experiences. Here are examples:

Otis: I like to have options. So I have always in my career and in my life I have been scanning the horizon, if you will. I had a coworker one time say “I was looking for a job when I found this one”. I like controlled change, if you will. I think that is self explanatory. I like different opportunities. I like different experiences. I am kind of I wouldn’t say “thrill seeker” but I have an adventurous side. I like different things. I like to learn things. I like to meet new people and explore new things. I love to travel because of that. And even internationally, I like to travel. I had an opportunity to go to India this past year. It was just a tremendous experience. So opportunity is a part of my life
and my career. I am always looking for something different. (Interview, 11/27/10).

Chester: It’s fun exploring so I still, I still enjoy doing that. So I’m just more of a, I’m like a (inaudible) and that, that even certainly goes into my career decision as well. I know some people go from job to job and I would feel uncomfortable doing that. I’d probably feel more uncomfortable if I’d stay (inaudible) you know long term (inaudible). But if you go from job to job to job in my mind that kind of makes you I don’t know how to say (inaudible) but it’s not somebody would be loyal (inaudible). (Interview, 11/11/10).

The career confidence theme included comments made about whether he or she feels good enough to deal with the problems of life. Here are examples:

Jessica: Kinda similar to what I have been saying. You’ve come so far, so many classes and jumping though hoops. You want t feel that it has been worth it. That all education you have done something with it. So I think it is important to know that you can make decisions that make you feel fulfilled. (Interview, 11/01/10).

Beth: When I look back and just started looking back and reflecting, it is like my, my work directed my life. And I’d say that’s the case for most Americans. I don’t think it should be that way though. I think we should direct the, we should be more in control of the, the work and going to work and if you choose to work out, outside of the home. So during that, that 25 year period I never really thought because I never took the time because I felt like I didn’t have the time to think about who owns my career. But just through personal, professional development, through maturation in, in general I’m now to that point where I realize I can do my career and it’s all up to me—nobody else—what decisions I want to make in regard to my career. (Interview 10/27/10)

Transformative Learning and Career Ownership

The necessary reflections in the transformative learning process were differentiated by Cranton (1996) to be: content (What do I believe?); process (How
and premise (Why is that belief important to me?).

Themes in this category included: 1) content reflection; 2) process reflection; and 3) premise reflection. Three questions regarding career ownership were asked in both interviews to identify any learning after reflection. For content reflection, mid-career professionals were asked about who owns their career. For process reflection, mid-career professionals were asked how they came to believe such a person owns their career. For premise reflection, mid-career professionals were asked about the importance of believing such a person owns their career.

**Content Reflection**

In response to the content reflection question regarding who owns your career, there was no difference between the mid-career professionals’ responses before and after critical reflection. Five mid-career professionals saw themselves as owning their careers, while four saw someone greater than self owning their careers. For Alex and Otis that someone was God. For Peter that someone was family. For mid-career professional, Chester, that someone was the organization.

> Chester: I just, it just . . . why, why I work for them; they don’t work for me. If that’s what owns, owns mean I mean I understand who the boss is and I have to adhere to the rules. (Interview, 10/19/10).

During the first interview and before reflection, mid-career professional, Jessica, talked about a change in perspective while considering career ownership and realizing that career ownership is also growing in the current position.

> Jessica: That was two questions back about being in control of my career. When I originally answered that question I was thinking about moving out of here. But when I think about growing in the position I own my career. I have that drive.. family pressure growing up that I have to
do the best job that I can. Like right now where I am I am trying to get funds or a grant and trying to write articles. Those are career choices within the position. I have goals. I don’t think I am doing a very good job answering that question. I have goals. (Interview, 10/15/10).

Process Reflection

In response to the process reflection question of how you came to believe that (blank) owns your career there was no significant difference in the first and second interview answers given by six mid-career professionals. However, there was evidence of: 1) some deeper insight in mid-career professional, Otis’s, second interview as compared to his response given in the first interview; 2) language change in Wyatt’s second interview; and 3) complete reversal in Beth’s second interview.

Otis: Things happen that are out of my control. (Interview, 10/10/10).

Otis: Through His faithfulness. Through what He has carried us through, good times and bad times. He is even when I don’t think what is happening is right I can’t say that. He is sovereign and He is faithful. So I think, I am convinced I am going to Heaven through my faith and relationship in Jesus Christ. And I have to think that He will show me why He did certain things that happen are unexplainable except for the Sovereignty of God. I have to be satisfied with that. If I didn’t believe in God when some of these things happen to you, I might just go out into a field and put a gun in my mouth and just swallow that because nothing makes any sense. Certainly nothing that happens in this world. (Interview, 11/27/10).

Mid-career professional, Wyatt, used language from the research in his second interview to expand on his answers in the first interview.

Wyatt: I have confidence in my ability to do any job I choose to do. (Interview, 10/19/10).
Wyatt: I have the self-concept and self-esteem to handle my career. (Interview, 12/06/10).

Mid-career professional, Beth completely changed her answers from a process in the first interview to “always known” in the second interview.

Beth: I think this really just happened in the last two years or so. How did I come to believe that I own my own career. this might be a roundabout way of, of answering that question but my last 25 years has been a whirlwind. It’s been like riding a carousel. You get on the carousel but you never get off because it’s going round and round. And I say that when I put my career and my personal life together. Any personal situations on, on top of a, a fulltime career, one that is I have a long commute too, at least the days that I’m still commuting every day. When I look back and just started looking back and reflecting, it is like my work directed my life. And I’d say that’s the case for most Americans. I don’t think it should be that way though. I think we should direct the, we should be more in control of the, the work and going to work and if you choose to work out, outside of the home. So during that, that 25 year period I never really thought because I never took the time because I felt like I didn’t have the time to think about who owns my career. But just through personal, professional development, through maturation in, in general I’m now to that point where I realize I can do my career and it’s all up to me—nobody else—what decisions I want to make in regard to my career. (Interview, 10/27/10).

Beth: I believe I have always known that I own my career. It was my, my choice and my choice solely you know upon graduating from high school do I want to further my education? It wasn’t somebody else telling me what, what I need to do. And then you take the next step you know enter the workforce. And again whether or not I really knew who I was at the time or whether I really know now, whether I really know which is the perfect role for me in the workforce it’s still my decision whether I made the right decision or not. So again I absolutely own my career. (Interview, 12/15/10).
Premise Reflection

In response to the premise reflection question of why it is important to believe that (blank) owns your career, there was evidence of some deeper insight in the second interview as compared to the response given in the first interview. Mid-career professionals, Otis, Chester and Jessica, provided examples.

*Otis: I want to make decisions that glorify Him (Interview, 10/10/10)*

*Otis: If He does not own my career, nothing makes sense. If this is all just chance or a crap shoot or whatever. You talk to people sometime and I see this perspective, People who don’t have a relationship with God don’t understand this stuff. Everything works out for His perfection. His benefit. If I talked about somebody else or a person or something that would be pride This is God we are talking about, He can do these things because He is God and He deserves honor and glory. You just have to have that faith. (Interview, 11/27/10).*

*Chester: Basically cause I do what they tell me to do every day. If I still want to do something and I can’t think of any instances, and they say Chester let’s, let’s do it this way but I (inaudible). This is a very veteran crew and I’m by far the newest one up here. So I don’t feel that I have the authority of saying oh I don’t think that’s right. So basically I’ve done everything, what they, what they said and I’ve kind of learned why they said it that way. You know why, why is that the best way to do things? So but I guess that’s why I feel that they own my, my career. I don’t have a problem with that. That’s good they’re, they’re very helpful and cooperative. (Interview, 10/19/10).*

*Chester: Well I guess maybe cause I’m not a good leader. So I feel the need to be led and whatnot. Not spoon fed, not babysat, but I don’t have a problem with, with being led. And I feel like I’m definitely the lowest man on the totem pole around here. And that, that doesn’t apply . . . that might apply if I’ve been here 20 years but I, I guess I’m . . . I put myself in the hierarchy and I’m satisfied with that. I’m okay with that because I don’t feel like I’ve been downgraded or put down at all. I mean I think they pretty
much treat me as an equal but I find myself asking more questions than what I did when I was downstairs and I had a lot of experience that wasn’t the case. You know I was the one that people came to me and asked questions. So that was one of the reasons I guess maybe after so many years I, I wanted to change jobs just for a new challenge. That’s been kind of nice I didn’t want to . . . even though I’m not very aggressive or a risk, much of a risk taker well I still have, I still have almost 15 years to go. Do I want to begin this for 15 more years if I don’t have a fresh challenge (inaudible). So I chose to do that. (Interview, 11/11/10).

Jessica: I think in the end that I have had goals in my life to have a good career. So if an opportunity came along. Let’s say something good came along next week I would certainly go for it. I own my career but all decisions have to be the right circumstances. But I do own my career. I feel like I have goals and will pursue those if the right thing came along. I am happy where I am. I can set goals in this job and feel like I can grow right where I am. So my career within the position I have and moving a head. I do the best job where I am. I take my annual review very seriously and I say here is what I am going to try to do. And I do try. I know some people don’t take it seriously. In order to make that process I try to set goals for myself – big goals. That was two questions back about being in control of my career. When I originally answered that question I was thinking about moving out of here. But when I think about growing in the position I own my career. I have that drive.. family pressure growing up that I have to do the best job that I can. Like right now where I am I am trying to get funds or a grant and trying to write articles. Those are career choices within the position. I have goals. I don’t think I am doing a very good job answering that question. I have goals. (interview, 10/15/10).

Jessica: Kinda similar to what I have been saying. You’ve come so far, so many classes and jumping though hoops. You want t feel that it has been worth it. That all education you have done something with it. So I think it is important to know that you can make decisions that make you feel fulfilled. (Interview, 11/01/10)
Perhaps this deeper insight came from the mid-career professional feeling more comfortable about the subject or about the researcher during the second interview. Perhaps this deeper insight came from the question being considered for the second time. Perhaps the deeper insight came from the critical reflection exercise.

**Categories for Research Question #3**

What specific learning occurred when mid-career professionals critically reflect on their personally meaningful experiences using Branson’s Model of the Self?

Categories of codes grouped to answer this question included: 1) Facets of Learning; and 2) Critical Reflection Effect.

**Facets of Learning Category**

Yang’s (1998) channels linking the inner-self to outer realities included explicit, implicit or tacit and emancipatory. This research study found all three facets of learning expressed by the following themes: 1) explicit knowledge gained; 2) implicit knowledge gained; and 3) emancipatory knowledge gained. Explicit knowledge can be communicated via language, can be taught in a classroom setting and stems from logic and reasoning (Yang, 1998).

Explicit knowledge gained was expressed, for example, in the second interview by mid-career professional, Sean:

*Sean: Oh yes, I am always looking forward to...and wanting self control over my career path. To know that if I work hard enough I can succeed. But thinking about this made me realize that even as important as being self driven is, it isn’t entirely within my control. The previous positions I had where I didn’t necessarily have the same kind of supportive environment, not necessarily being given the same kind of opportunities for growth as a contractor. I just worked as hard then. You know I have more skills now but I worked just as hard then.*
It kind of made me realize that I kind of do whatever and the world is mine. I just go in there and do my thing. It’s not really that simple. There has to be an environment. I don’t expect to be just given everything but I think I have to realize that I can’t really do it all. So one of the things I need to keep in mind when looking at opportunities, I need to consider who will I be working for? What opportunities for advancement are there? If they aren’t there it doesn’t matter how hard I work. I’m just not going to be given the opportunities. So I think that is something I really didn’t think about. I can’t just do my thing. (Interview, 11/23/10).

Implicit knowledge is highly personal, the behavioral component of knowledge, cannot sufficiently be put into words, is difficult to communicate, and stems from practice and experience (Yang, 1998). Implicit knowledge gained, was implied, for example, in mid-career professional, Otis’s, second interview:

    Otis: What meaning...a, I can... I will certainly keep what I have written out here and just review it and make sure I realize where I have come from and the point I am in my professional life and my spiritual life. It will allow me to be circumspect about some of these things. I think in some respects we can shape what we do in our values, in our inner core, in how we make decisions and how we react to things. We can certainly have an impact on some of that. This has allowed me to look back on some of these things, How faithful my God has been to me and to use some of these things to help out other people (Interview, 11/27/10)

Emancipatory knowledge is about feelings, emotions, and personal viewpoints with the goal of significance and empowerment (Yang, 1998). Emancipatory knowledge gained was expressed, for example, in the second interview by mid-career professional Peter and observed in Peter’s body language per the researcher’s field notes. The effect of Peter’s critical reflection experience was “Realize family more important than self or career” (worksheet), he saw himself as “paying the bills defines
me” (2Q10), he indicated “career decisions not based on self image” (2Q7), and he expressed himself as “wife has a career, I have a job” (2Q12).

Peter: Well, I mean it was a good exercise. It’s not that I didn’t know this stuff. But to put it down on paper brought it down to a point. I realize why I am and I am OK with that. No, I think it was stuff I knew about myself. It was just reflecting on it. Often when I reflect on it I reflect on the fact that I would like to be doing something else. Looking at it this way, I realize well there is a reason why I am the way I am. That’s OK. (Interview, 11/24/10)

Peter: I have come to realize that family is more important than self. It’s more important than my career. (worksheet)

11/24/10 – 2nd interview with Peter. He wrote on the guided question sheet and the worksheet. He thinks he has a job (I just fell into it) while his wife has a career (worked toward a goal). Giving up a good paying job to come back home for family gave him low self esteem. At times he seemed embarrassed in front of me. We talked about people being multi faceted. Important to see self as good provider but also lacking in some self fulfillment. I felt empathy for his disappointment. He is settling for one important thing at the expense of the other important thing. We talked about career being a lifestyle choice. (Researcher field notes)

To really know whether Peter’s apparent emancipatory knowledge evidenced transformative learning, one would need to observe follow-up actions. According to Mezirow (1996) to truly be a transformative learning experience, one must decide to act on the insights gained from reflection. Within the scope of the interview it was impossible to discern follow up actions.

**Critical Reflection Effect**

This category included comments about the results of the critical reflection exercise. Themes in the critical reflection effect category were: 1) critical reflection generated learning about self; 2) critical reflection generated learning about personal
choices; 3) critical reflection reinforced self knowledge; and 4) critical reflection “allowed looking back”.

Critical reflection generated learning about self. Several examples follow:

Alex: (reflection) helped me learn a little bit more about what drives me, helps you reflect on what you really do value and what you should be valuing and what your beliefs are, etc. Kind of good to give yourself a kind of as self-test there, self-examination (Interview, 11/11/10).

Beth: It had great meaning because there again it caused me to, to really think about what’s important to me. So specifically in regard to career decisions that I don’t make career decisions haphazardly. You know I think I should add to that, that it has also been meaningful for me because as it causes me to reflect more on myself and understand myself better here again being in a supervisory role I can take that one step further and use some of this to help me maybe better understand those who you know who report to me (Interview, 12/15/10).

Critical reflection generated learning about personal choices.

Jessica: I think it is all stuff that I know but I haven’t really said it before. I know how important my son is and I know how much it changes my work style ... he has changed my whole life. It changes everything. So it is interesting to put the whole thing on paper. Then you realize what the priorities are. The number one thing is family. (Interview, 11/01/10).

Sean: I don’t think my self confidence is necessarily a revelation. I am aware of that. But it did get me to think a little more clearly on – again I have been appreciative of the opportunities I have been given. I need to keep in mind – this isn’t luck. I need to keep in mind if another job position opens up that is maybe a little more responsibility than I have right now that might not make the most sense to just jump into it. That might not be a supportive environment. I might get stuck there. So it is really something I need to keep in mind with other career decisions. And I think I never really thought about – until I started thinking about this - how much I could really help people with career growth. Again, I have always liked to
help, people and coach people but I don’t think I would really – but I guess there are two kind of leadership roles but until I really thought about being a leader I thought hey, maybe I should be making more a specific effort to help people develop their careers. More than just the current tasks. (Interview, 11/23/10).

Critical reflection “reinforced” self knowledge. Here are examples:

Chester: I also kind of thought about it in terms of career decisions and things like that. And again similar to the, to the way I planned my life, plan the vacations, kind of came out of the same . . . but it, it kind of just reinforces my beliefs in, in things. I kind of think after you get to be my age you don’t really change beliefs. They’re pretty much instilled in you by the time you’re 20 or 25 and I don’t think people change a whole lot after that. They may want to surprise you or something like that but whenever push comes to shove you are who you are. So, so when I, when I look at the beliefs and things like that and the, and the values and things like that I don’t think they’re any different now than, then, than they were many, many years ago. So it, it was, it’s kind of interesting thinking about you know I don’t often think about my, my own self-esteem or my own values. I don’t list them. So having the chance to do that kind of unless you reflected on maybe what they are and the values really, you really want to . . .(Interview, 11/11/10).

Otis: It made me think about these things, Certain things maybe I haven’t thought about in some time. It’s been good in that respect. It’s reinforced my thrust toward relationships with people, and reaching out to people and being transparent with people and opening myself to people. I am a fairly gregarious person. I like relationships with those people but I am still a private person. I have a tendency to hold things, I like to say “what is going on in your life”. I am getting better at that though. That is a big change in my life. It reinforced a lot of things within me. It’s been a good opportunity to rethink some of these things and to be reinforced in what I am doing. That what I am doing is right. I think that it is. (Interview, 11/27/10).
Critical reflection “allowed looking back”.

Otis: This has allowed me to look back on some of these things. How faithful my God has been to me and to use some of these things to help out other people. (Interview, 11/27/10).

Chester: Of course you can’t turn back the clock but I always wonder what it would be like if I was, if I had been more aggressive if I had gone out into the public world, you know, the, the real world, that kind of stuff. I think there’s, there’s probably always a trade-off between a more high stress real world experience and, and a higher salary maybe more promotions, travel those kind of things. Some of those are negative. Some of them are not. But I guess I kind of chose the safe, middle of the highway direction. So I mean who, who knows what it was . . . what it would have been like. I never actually even explored working for IBM or the federal government or anything like that. So it’s hard to say what would have happened. But I’ve been very satisfied with how things have gone. So I like the area that, that we live in. I like the, the retirement coming up. It should be stable; it’s not related to the stock market. So, so I think it’s a, a it was a stable, dependable map and so who knows what it would have been like had I chose a bit more like investing in stocks or investing in CD. A high risk or a low risk tack. And (inaudible) so I didn’t have any regrets. It’s just an unknown what might have happened. But the more I think about it the more satisfied I am. (Interview, 11/11/10).

Chapter Summary

This chapter used the words of the mid-career professionals to describe the lessons learned from linking meaningful experience, the inner self and career decision making. This chapter contained a discussion of the data analysis process conducted to answer the study’s questions and offer according to the study’s 407 codes, 12 categories, and 31 themes. Figure 4.1 offers an overview of the relationship among the research questions, the categories and the themes. Regarding the trustworthiness of the research: 1) credibility was ensured in showing good comparison and contrast of categories through
the use of quotations from transcribed texts (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004); 2) dependability was ensured in presenting the research findings as traceable through the process so the reader can understand how particular conclusions were reached from the data (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004); and 3) sufficient information about the participants was provided to allow the readers to decide the transferability for themselves (Anderson, 2003). Transferability of the research findings to another specific context is really the responsibility of the reader (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

This chapter presented the data analysis from the epistemic interest perspective, which leads to the exploration of the substantive interest in the next chapter.
Q1. What are the perceptions of mid-career professionals regarding the influence of personally meaningful experience on their career decision making?

Q2. What lessons were learned after critically reflecting on the inner self’s influence on career decision making?

Q3. What specific learning occurred when mid-career professionals critically reflect on their personally meaningful experiences using Christopher Branson’s Model of the Self?

Figure 4.1. Research Questions, Categories, Themes, Grounded Theory
Underlined words are categories; Non-underlined words are themes
Chapter 5

Summary, Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations for Further Research

Summary of the Research

The epistemic interest of this study was in describing the nature and manner of learning that occurs when mid-career professionals critically reflect on the relationship among a single personally meaningful experience, the inner self and career decision making, using a structured methodology and Branson’s Model of the Self. The substantive interest was in understanding that learning.

Stories of the struggles the mid-career professionals endure to balance the demands of their job role with the constellation of their life roles were presented using quotes. The study showed the mid-career professionals could describe the link between the meaningful experience, their self identity, and their career decisions. The study also showed a link between the mid-career professional’s view of career ownership and how they make career decisions.

The world of work continues to change sometimes drastically and often rapidly. Changes in both technology and the global economy affect the organization, the employee and society.

As businesses in America continue adapting to these changes, managers face: 1) the challenges of balancing both social and economic responsibilities; and 2) allocating the time required to consider how best to balance those social and economic responsibilities (Altman & Post, 1996). In the initial phases of downsizing, generous severance was provided but as time passed and downsizing continued employers recognized these packages did not alleviate bad morale of the
employees surviving the downsizing or the myriad of problems facing the displaced workers (Altman & Post). Furthermore, a reduced standard of living within the community due to the increase of a temporary workforce and an increase in the number of people changing jobs continues to be a concern (Altman & Post, 1996). Loyalty on the part of the employer and employee continues to decline. Loyalty on the part of employees benefits the organization by decreased turnover, organizational stability, and willingness on the part of designated leaders to take responsibility (Stroh & Reilly, 1997). These authors advised fostering work cultures that place high priority on satisfying career needs of the employees (Stroh & Reilly, 1997).

The career that is reinvented over time by the individual was predicted by Hall (1996) to be the wave of the future. He identified the advantages for the employee assuming career responsibility. These advantages over the traditional career, where employee loyalty was given in exchange for the promise of upward mobility and job security, included: 1) an increase in the avenues for psychological success since success would no longer be determined merely by upward mobility; 2) the measurement of career by continuous learning and identity rather than age or life stage. Parameters for this new employer-employee contract include for the employee continuous self-directed learning, which is not necessarily formal.

When asked about their current job role and their childhood career dreams, only Chester said he is in a job role corresponding to his childhood career dream. Both Peter and Alex talked about “falling into” their jobs but choosing to stay. Why would mid-career professionals stay in a job role that is not their childhood career dream and
how do they make meaning out of that decision? Peter acknowledged his “belief that family and security are my responsibility” (2Q6) and satisfaction with on-the-job “freedom to do different things” (1Q4). Jessica and Wyatt focused on family life and providing for the family. Alex focused on practical reasons and “I like the people here” (1Q4). Otis focused on his upcoming move to retirement.

Some of the mid-career professionals voluntarily mentioned changing their answers over time. Jessica talked about changing answers after her meaningful experience and during times of stress:

Jessica: One thing that I put, I didn’t know where this went but I felt that it was important. I first put it in motives and then I put it in self esteem. The stress level. Two weeks ago if I was doing this part it probably wouldn’t come up. But the last two weeks we have been so busy. In our personal life it was Halloween and we had some guests. I felt that I had that stress to deal with. I am not sure how it fits. (Interview, 11/01/10)

Jessica: When I think about my self concept, If you asked me these questions three years ago (before her meaningful experience) I don’t know what kind of answers you would get. So it is kind of interesting things to think about. How one thing can change your whole life. (Interview, 11/01/10).

Chester, Wyatt and Otis felt their answers would not change over time:

Wyatt: Some of us are fortunate and don’t have to work. Most of us do. So if you asked me that question years ago I would have answered the same way. (Interview, 10/19/10).

Chester: But it, it kind of just reinforces my beliefs in, in things. I kind of think after you get to be my age you don’t really change beliefs. They’re pretty much instilled in you by the time you’re 20 or 25 and I don’t think people change a whole lot after that. They may want to surprise you or something like that but whenever push comes to shove you are who you are. So, so when I, when I look at the beliefs and things like that and the, and the values and things like
that I don’t think they’re any different now than, then, than they were many, many years ago. (Interview, 11/11/10).

For society in general, Knapp & Harms (2002) recommended national debate on the global economy, job displacement, and the impact on our communities. In addition, they recommended leaders in business, government, and labor work together to reduce the negative impact of job displacement and the social disaffection of a large segment of the workforce.

The changing world of work places new, previously unforeseen responsibilities for career management on the mid-career professional. The challenge for the career counselor and the workplace learning and performance professional is adapting their counseling and training skills to meet the new needs of the mid-career professional.

Keeping in mind the goal of workforce education (to produce independent problem solvers (Gray & Herr, 1998) and the goal of career counseling (to promote client learning (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996), Branson’s Model of the Self and a structured methodology for critical reflection offer another tool for the arsenals of workplace learning and performance professionals and career counselors to assist in increasing one’s self-knowledge and understanding of the influence of the inner-self components on career decision-making. The study results show an increase in self-awareness of the mid-career professionals. Helping clients to focus on the quest for meaning and fulfillment empowers clients to survive and thrive in transitions and the changing world of work (Krumboltz & Chan, 2005).

So what are the results of this grounded theory research study? This research found that critical reflection on the relationship between a single, personally meaningful experience, the inner self, and career decision making
generates all facets of learning, generates learning about self, generates learning about personal choices, reinforces self knowledge and allows looking back.

**Discussion of Study Significance**

This research study is significant in three important ways: First the research was experienced based; second it focused on career decision factors from the decider’s perspective; and third it focused on career decisions not directly related to occupational choice.

**Experience-based Research**

First, this study was experience-based research. Learning from experience is fundamental to adult education (Yorks, & Kase, 2002). Chapter 4 described the learning that occurred during each mid-career professional’s experiences and how that learning affected their individual career decision making. Nine of the ten mid-career professionals saw a relationship between that meaningful experience and their career decision making. You will remember chapter 4 documented Nelson’s clarification of his negative answer to the relationship question as time-specific. The study examined the relationship among meaningful experience, and development of the inner-self, and career decisions. The research found occurrences of explicit, implicit and emancipatory learning when Branson’s Model of the Self and a structured methodology were described and applied in critical reflection exercises. In addition, the data revealed a clear thread between preferences and the meaningful experience chosen for this research. Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making holds that learning experiences are a factor in career decision making because they produce preferences (Mitchell, & Krumboltz, 1996). Themes found in the data
included: 1) meaningful experience involved and invoked feelings; and 2) meaningful experience generated learning about self and priorities.

**Career Decision Making from the Decider’s Perspective**

Second, is the need for research on career decision making from the decider’s perspective. Philips (1997) identified the need for research on career decision making from the decider’s perspective. She argued this new model of career decision making is needed because choice points are not always predictable, the array of options is not stable, information about the options is not always readily available and the decider herself/himself may not be clear and consistent at making decisions. Even though adaptability was advanced as the skill most needed in the changing world of work, Phillips concluded that it is unclear what adaptive career decision making would look like. This research study attempted the understanding of career decision making from the decider’s perspective. Themes found in the data included: 1) necessity to prioritize career decisions; and 2) necessity to approach career decisions with purpose; 3) career decision factors include someone more important than self; and 4) career decision factors include quality of life inside/outside workplace.

**Career Counseling Theory not Based on Occupational Placement**

Third, is the need for career counseling theory not based on occupational placement, identified by Krumboltz (1994). None of the mid-career professionals indicated occupational placement played any role in their career decision making. Themes found in the data included: 1) See self as not defined by work or career; 2) See self as somewhat defined by work or career; 3) Work is meaningful; 4) Work is
necessary; 5) Work has purpose; 6) Career includes personal actions and goals over time; and 7) Career is chosen “path” on the journey to a goal.

**Research Implications**

Findings from this research study revealed several uses for Branson’s model and a structured methodology for critical reflection. These provide a viable tool for assisting clients in: 1) gaining a better understanding of the inner-self and the inner-self’s influence on career decision-making; 2) empowering one to make consistent career decisions that are right for herself/himself; and 3) empowering one to be authentic, which Shamir and Eilam (2005) indicated stems from knowledge and understanding of the self-concept resulting in an appropriate meaning-system. As Beth said:

*People need to have their individualism. They need to be able to be their authentic selves. (Interview, 10/27/10).*

Shamir and Eilam (2005) indicated authentic leaders differ from inauthentic leaders by the degree to which their self-concept is consistent with their behavior. While Branson’s Model of the Self is limited to a single experience, Shamir and Eilam (2005) advocated the development of life-stories, which include experiences over time. These authors saw life-stories as an expression of identity and the result of interaction between experiences and the meaning attached to those experiences through the stories (2005). Therefore this researcher would expand the Branson Model of the Self to span experiences over time.

Branson’s findings in the discipline of leadership ethics suggested that self-reflection on the genesis of inner self components can contribute to the professional development of moral leaders (Branson, 2007). The research study described here provided insights for career counselors and workplace learning and performance
professionals to use in the professional development of leaders throughout the organization. In today’s world of change, leaders are needed at every level of the organization (Silvers, 1994/1995). According to Brown (1995), companies who wish to win and do in fact win in the marketplace of tomorrow will have many leaders that both customers and investors can count on.

Interests and the Importance of Feelings

In chapter 1 the absence of interests from Branson’s Model of the Self was noted as a limitation of the research study because career counselors frequently use tools to identify the client’s interests. However, interests were mentioned only once in this research, with Peter during a discussion of the relationship of his personal image and the career decisions he makes.

Peter: yes but I think that I haven’t made the decisions based on my personal self image. This is not my career choice based on my personal self image. This is what I do and I do OK at it but it doesn’t excite me.

Researcher: Do you think you have abilities you aren’t using? Or is it more your interests?

Peter: I think it’s more interests. I don’t know the abilities. I didn’t really do a whole lot of exploring in school.
(Interview, 11/24/10)

However, feelings were a frequent concern of the mid-career participants and were included in the themes of: 1) Meaningful experience involved and invoked feelings; and 2) Career decisions factors stem from feelings. Moving beyond the need for career counseling occupational placement services, focus on feelings and the role they play in career decision making would seem appropriate.
Limitations for Using Branson’s Model of the Self

From this research study emerged three limitations in using the Branson’s Model of the Self to empower mid-career professionals to place themselves in the driver’s seat of their careers. The first limitation involved those who do not wish to review history. Career counselors and workplace learning and performance professionals should be aware that not everyone is willing to consider history. Although several of the participants expressed the opinion that the critical reflection exercise reinforced their beliefs and behavior. Wyatt said, for example:

*Wyatt:* I have tried to learn from my experiences. I have really forced myself never to go through this looking back and saying if only. It (reflection) required me to put in writing this dialogue, topics I never have time to think about. It was an interesting exercise. I didn’t learn anything from it, no revelations about self. But that goes back to our discussion – I make decisions by myself. I didn’t come across something new but it was nice – I enjoyed the exercise. (Interview, 12/06/10)

Consequently, the value of this tool will be limited by the expertise of the career counselor/workplace learning and performance professional unless the career counselor/workplace learning and performance professional finds a way to present the critical reflection exercise as something other than a review of history.

The second limitation was the internal battle or struggle, cited by several mid-career professionals, even after getting to know their inner self and its influence on career decision making. Some clients will need counseling or guidance regarding how best to apply the learning gained from the critical reflection. The career counselor/workplace learning and performance professional needs to be able to guide the worker toward understanding the importance of those factors in different types of
situations and prioritizing those factors causing the internal battle in each type of
situation.

*Researcher:* Then what kinds of rules for living have you developed as a result of that?

*Alex:* I try to be more personable and I’m, I guess I was . . . being more personable I think is what I was talking about. I was, I was a much more shy person long ago. But I, I think as I’ve matured I have just learned not to be as shy then. And then so I have to remember to be more personable with people too. In fact I just mentioned that to somebody the other day. Oh it was C came in and said oh I wonder how D is doing. She’s at the doctor. Yeah I forgot to go and ask them. I make it a point to go see D to find out how he made out. And I said to C, I, sometimes I just need to be more personable. But I, I hope I am much more than I used to be anyhow. And the other one I wrote down, the second one is life is about more than just me you know we have to consider others too. I mean I fail at that too at times. And the workplace is more than just work. I think I might have mentioned that in our first interview because the workplace is comprised of people who have needs and burdens and problems and all the rest like me. I need to be sensitive to that. Sometimes I’m too . . . I’m, I’m very task oriented and not so much, so much people oriented. So it can be a struggle for me at times to be more people oriented and personable.

*Researcher:* Does that create conflict for you or . . . is it just . . . how does that affect you?

*Alex:* Yeah I guess, I guess it’s kind of an internal struggle, you know. I want to get things done but so at times I wouldn’t mind just shutting the door and pulling myself up in here for, for a nine hour workday you know but I got to remember I can’t do that. (Interview, 11/11/10)

*Chester:* Final category behavior, how do you live out (inaudible) in your daily life? Even after all these years I would say I actively work on them each day. (Inaudible). I think I’m successful about 90% of the time with my (inaudible) blow ups and things like that. That’s easy to say. I am what I am but I can say there’s always that internal battle that I’m always kind of fighting. Be calm
and smart and that kind of stuff. What actions/behaviors do you regularly engage in (inaudible). I said the experience was a very positive one. I’d say it reinforces my desire to relax and kind of enjoy the moment. But there really wasn’t anything as a result of that experience that I would change. There wasn’t really anything negative that I would change. By reinforcing them I hope that that would increase the chance of that happening again. All right so that’s, that’s the way I answered the guided questions. (Interview, 11/11/10).

The third limitation was critical reflection itself. Several participants expressed their difficulty in attempting critical reflection in order to complete the reflection assignment.

Otis: Some of these things were difficult because I really never thought about things. I am not a psychology person. I am more of a knee-jerk reaction. I don’t think of things this way. I don’t look at things this way. (Interview, 10/27/10).

Wyatt: It (reflection) required me to put in writing this dialogue, topics I never have time to think about (Interview, 12-/06/10).

Cultural View toward Work in America

Guindon (2010) stressed the cultural view toward work in America puts the individual in control and deemphasizes external variables. Consequently careers viewed as successful attach positive attributes to the individual while careers that are not viewed as so successful attach inferior attributes to the individual. Humans are not born understanding the meaning of work; rather as they grow and develop, they learn about the meaning their society or culture assigns to work (Savickas, 1991). Beth and Chester talked about the difficulty stemming from stereotyping by our society.

Beth: I think in our society in general however I, I think there’s a bit of a problem with how we relate work to people and who they are. And I think that problem is the stereotypes or the biases that we apply to people in regard
to their socioeconomic status. Humans by nature are judgmental and so when a person is introduced to you as a member of janitorial services and another member is introduced to you as CEO of corporation X, there’s going to be stereotypes and biases tied to those titles. And I think that’s unfortunate (Interview 10/27/10).

Chester: I think whenever, whenever you’re in a, in a social or professional, professional atmosphere people ask what do you do? That kind of thing. So I think it reflects a lot of, work reflects a lot of who you are. It’s only part of it. But I think there would be a lot of emptiness if I didn’t, if I couldn’t say that I did something that I was proud to do. I’m not sure there would be something I wouldn’t be proud to say . . . (Interview 10/19/10).

The obvious question for career counselors and workplace learning and performance professions is “How to assist workers in the changing world of work?” Beth and Alex provide some insight.

Beth: People need to have their individualism. They need to be able to be their authentic selves. (Interview, 10/27/10.

Beth: What I hope to do and really spawning from having done this research with you, from being a participant in the research is I hope to continue to be very thoughtful and reflective and really remember who I am in my core as I move forward with career decisions. It is very easy to pick up the classifieds or to just visit an on-line job listing and say oh that sounds interesting and oh that might be a nice step up for me. But I really see how it’s important to really get into your inner self and question is this really me because you know if we’re not happy in our positions we’re not really doing ourselves a favor or the organization that we’re working for. (Interview, 12/15/10).

Alex: I think it created a higher one of course. And I wrote here as a result of this experience I have a higher self-esteem in a situation which I feel job pressure. There can be a lot of those from time to time. Or if I need confidence. And you know we still have those kinds of conversations these days where I might, somebody might sense that I
don’t feel confidence in being able to do what I need to do. Or somebody might encourage me there. So again I should turn that around with others too and try to encourage them. (Interview, 11/11/10)

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Several avenues for additional research, focused on the perspective of the individual career decision decider, were identified as a result of this research study. The reader is urged to consider building on this research study in one or more of these areas.

First, this research study used the mid-career definitions per Hall (a stage of role adjustment, 1986) and Elliott (a stage in one’s career development, 1994) rather than a chronological age. Allowing there are other age-specific definitions of mid-career, there is potential for research comparing the results of using Branson’s Model of the Self and a structured methodology for critical reflection with age-specific participants. The influence of age was mentioned by Otis and Wyatt: Otis (relationship of self image and career decision making diminishes with age; grown more dependent with age/time life breaks down independencies, 2Q8); and Wyatt (aspirations change with life stage, 2Q1).

Second, when learning empowers one to understand, to control his/her behavior, and to anticipate the realities, the learning is very significant (Mezirow, 1996). A follow up research study with these specific mid-career professionals to describe actions resulting from the critical reflection learning and to understand any reasons why those identified actions did not occur would define the level of significance of the learning.
Third, Alex and Otis spoke of missed opportunities while Beth and Sean spoke about “great opportunities” they had experienced. Future research on how career decision deciders move beyond a missed opportunity would assist answering Philips’ question of what does adaptive behavior looks like in the changing world of work (1997). Future research on what makes an opportunity “great” from the decider’s perspective would expand the modeling for a new decision making model in the changing world of work.

Fourth, from Branson’s perspective, the modernity worldview focuses on the developing individual and personal rights with the presumption that the individual possesses the power of reason and moral will without social rules and obligations. Therefore ethics must be taught (2007). Research comparing the decisions of those who have taken an ethic class with decisions of those who have not would have merit.

Fifth, of the mid-career professionals in this research study, only Wyatt and Jessica belong to a professional organization with a code of ethics. Research into what personal changes occurred after joining a professional organization with a code of ethics would be useful.

Sixth, each of the mid-career professionals in this research study saw a relationship between their meaningful experience and their career decisions before critically reflecting. Is Branson’s theory that to understand the influence the inner-self components have on decision making one must examine the genesis of those components valid? Research comparing the correlation between meaningful experience and career decisions before reflecting on the inner self components and after the reflection would be valuable in providing more data.
Seventh, the feeling of anger often accompanies job displacement (Malen & Stroh, 1998). Research probing the focus of the anger, the duration of the anger, and the degree of the anger from the perspective of the displaced worker would be valuable.

Eighth, Peter indicated he had a job but not a career. In addition, several mid-career professionals refused to participate in this research because they saw themselves as having no career or no longer having a career. Research to qualify what learning occurs from trigger events and/or critical inquiry to assist a worker in understanding the changing definition of career would be useful.

Ninth, research into the impact of left-over emotions years after the job displacement and how the displaced worker is handling those left-over emotions would provide insights into the types of immediate and long-term assistance displaced workers need. Otis identified his job displacement as his meaningful experience even though it happened some 30 years ago.

Tenth, Branson defined self-concept as an array of mental pictures one has of the self (2007). Research into the correlation of the various self-concepts per life role of mid-career professionals would be helpful in qualifying the interrelationship and cohesiveness of those various mental pictures.

Eleventh, what are the parameters of a meaningful experience? What factors constitute a trigger event and are those factors always unique to the individual?

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the study’s substantive interest; i.e. the understanding of what learning occurred when mid-career professionals critically reflect on the
relationship of a single personally meaningful experience, the inner self and career
decision making.

Assertions about the lessons learned from linking meaningful experience, the
inner-self and career decisions were generated by this study. These assertions included
that this critical-reflection tool has value for assisting individuals in: 1) gaining a
better understanding of the inner-self and the inner-self’s influence on career decision-
making; 2) empowering an individual to be one’s authentic self; and 3) empowering
an individual to make consistent career decisions that are right for herself/himself.
Using those assertions, this research study looked beyond the results to identify
additional areas for research concentration
References


of Business Ethics, 58, 195-201.


with sensemaking. *Academy of management learning & education, 4*(2), 176-192.


APPENDIX A

Permission Letter from Dr. Christopher Branson

From: Chris Branson
To: "pqg2@psu.edu" <pqg2@psu.edu>
Date: Tue, 20 Oct 2009 08:38:57 +1100
Subject: Self Research

Dear Patti

I was absolutely delighted to read your email and to note your keen interest in further developing my initial ‘self’ research through your own PhD research within the area of career development intervention. Be assured, I am most willing to provide you with whatever assistance I can. Thus, I have no hesitation in providing you with permission to use my model and my diagram of The Self, but just make sure you appropriately reference the journal article from where you have seen the diagram, too. Naturally, this also implies that you have my permission to show the diagram to research participants and reference it in any conference presentation or journal publication that you provide as an outcome of your own research.

Are you studying at the State College campus of Penn State? I was there only just over 2 weeks ago providing a keynote presentation at the annual Values and Leadership conference and had a fabulous time. While I was there the weather was quite mild but I am led to believe that the first snow has since fallen. I find it hard to believe that the weather could change so quickly.
Best wishes with your research.

Kind regards,

Chris Branson
Dr Christopher Branson, Senior Lecturer
School of Educational Leadership
Australian Catholic University, Locked Bag 4115
Title of Project: Meaningful Experience and Career Decision Making Research

Principal Investigator: Patricia Gouse, Ph.D. Candidate
21 Shields Building, University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-1117; PQG2@PSU.EDU

Advisor: Dr. Fred Schied
314 Keller Building, University Park, PA 16802
814-863-3499 Office
Email: fms3@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to examine the effect of increasing mid-career professionals’ understanding of how personally meaningful experience informs the inner self to affect career decision making.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked a series of questions during this personal interview. The questions and your answers will be audio recorded. You will receive a take home exercise for reflection after the first interview to be completed before the second interview.

3. Access to recordings: Only the researcher (Patricia Gouse) and a transcriber will have access to the audio recordings. The transcribed material may be viewed by the researcher (Patricia Gouse) and Penn State faculty members serving on Patricia’s Ph.D. Committee.

4. Duration: The 2 personal interviews will each last approximately one hour. The take home exercise includes 7 questions regarding the relationship of that meaningful experience we talk about in the 1st interview and how you make career decisions. Most likely you will be able to answer those 7 questions in 30 minutes but may find yourself reflecting on the questions and answers over the two week window before our 2nd interview.

5. Benefits and discomforts. The possible benefits of participating in this research include; 1) opportunity to contribute to career decision-making research; 2) opportunity to gain insight into your own decision making process; 3) exposure to a theory that links meaningful experience to career decision making. No discomforts to you are anticipated. You can choose whether or not to answer each question and whether or not to hand in the worksheet.

6. Compensation for successful completion of this research: You will enter you in a raffle where:
   1st prize = $75 gift card to Olive garden or Red Lobster
   2nd prize = $50 gift card to Amazon.com
   3rd prize = $25 gift card to Penn State Creamery

7. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at room #21 in the Shields Building on Penn State’s main campus.
in a locked facility. The audio recording will be transcribed and will not contain any personally identifiable information such as name, employer name, address or email. The audio recordings will be destroyed three years after the official closure of this research study; i.e. approximately 2013. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections and Institutional review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this project.

8. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Patricia Gouse (814) 863-1117 or Dr. Fred Schied (814) 863-3185 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call these numbers if you feel this study has harmed you. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775. The ORP cannot answer questions about research procedures. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.

9. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Completion of the interview implies your consent to participate in this research.

10. You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please so answer the question the researcher asks at the start of the audio-recorded interview. Completion of this interview implies your consent to participate in this research.

11. Record Keeping: Please retain a copy of this form for your records.

Thank you!
APPENDIX C

Participant Invitation

This invitation will be issued by electronic mail or by face-to-face encounter.

You are invited to participate in research concerning personally meaningful experience and career decision making!

Successful completion of the research will enter you in a raffle where:

- 1st prize = $75 gift card to Olive garden or Red Lobster
- 2nd prize = $50 gift card to Amazon.com
- 3rd prize = $25 gift card to Penn State Creamery

The research will include two interviews to be audio recorded, separated by a take home exercise with questions for reflection about how you make career decisions.

To participate, please complete the section below with the appropriate information and return to PQG2@PSU.EDU or

Patti Gouse, Ph.D. Candidate
21 Shields Building
University park, PA

Name: _________________________________________________________________

Email: __________________________ Home/work/cellphone: __________

Current job role: __________________________

Length of time in current job role: __________

What professional certificates, degrees do you hold beyond a high school diploma?

_____________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much for your assistance!
APPENDIX D

Participant Acceptance for Research

Congratulations! You have qualified to participate in the research on Meaningful Experience and Career Decision Making!

I would like to meet with you on (date) at (time) at this (location) for our first interview.

In preparation for our 1st interview, please think about events, experiences, situations that really mattered to you.

For example: promotion, job re-assignment, vacation, relationship, ceremony or other event

• Think about those special events, experiences, situations that mattered to you.
• Do those special events, experiences, situations have anything in common?
• Choose one event, experience, situation for the study to tell me that story.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study! I look forward to our first interview.

Patti Gouse, Ph.D. Candidate
The Pennsylvania State University
21 Shields Building
University Park, PA

PQG2@PSU.EDU 814-863-1117
APPENDIX E

Interview #1 Dialogic Questions

The purpose of this interview is to set a benchmark for understanding the participant’s work history and perspectives on career decision making. These questions focus on answering Research Question #1. What are the perceptions of mid-career professionals regarding the influence of personally meaningful experience on their career decision making?

1) You listed your job role as__________. Was that always what you wanted to do?

2) What are some of the most important career decisions you have made?

3) How do you make career decisions? What factors are important to you?

4) Which career decision(s) gave you the most satisfaction? Why?

5) Is there a career decision that did not turn out as you expected? Why do you think that happened?

6) How would you define work? How does work relate to who you see yourself to be?

7) When you considered your most meaningful experiences to contrast and compare them, what did you learn?

8) Tell me the story of your most personally meaningful experience? Who was there? What happened? What did you do? How did you feel? Paint the picture for me.

9) Do you see any connection between this personally meaningful experience and career decisions you have made?

10) Who would you say owns your career?

11) How did you come to believe that ___ owns your career?

12) Why is important to you to believe that ____ owns your career?

Demographics: Marital status__________________
Number of dependents__________________
Professional organization memberships____________________________________________
Age ___ under 35 ___ 35 to 55 ___ over 55
This graph is a picture of the self with two parts. The inner self is not visible. The outer self is very visible and is seen in behavior, like decision making.

Many people know very little about their inner self but they know very much about their behavior. That is they know what they do but they may not know why they do it. Why do I behave this way?

Examining the components of the inner self helps to identify the influence the inner self has over the outer self (behavior). Understanding the influence one’s inner self has on behavior gives one the choice of overruling that influence.

Reflection helps one better understand the inner self and what is going on behind the scenes.

**Inner self:**

Self-concept = personal image  
Self-esteem = sense of self-worth  
Motives = rules for life  
Values = standards for action  
Beliefs = an attempt to make sense of self and the world

**Outer self:**

Behavior = career decision making

---


Used by permission from Dr. Christopher Branson
APPENDIX G

Guided Questions for Examining how Meaningful Experience, the Inner-self, and Career Decision Making Relate Together

**Self-Concept** –
What image of yourself do you gain from this moment/experience?
What strengths? What weaknesses?
What do you learn about yourself?
How did you act in this situation and what does this tell you about yourself?

**Self-Esteem** –
Did you act with confidence or meekness?
Were you dominant or passive?
Did you learn to act more assertively?
Did this incident change your level of determination or clarity in the way you would act in the future? Why?

**Motive** –
As a result of this moment/experience/incident, what have become important things to do in your life?
What actions do you feel you need to do, or are right for you, as a result of this experience?
What rules for your life might have come from this experience?

**Values** –
From these motives, or rules for life, which values now have added importance for you?
Which of your values are always helpful and which could sometimes be unhelpful?

**Beliefs** –
Think about each value to see how it has been converted into some form of belief about yourself and how you will always act.
Complete the following sentence with each of your values – I value [insert the value] because ..... .

**Behaviours** –
How do you live out these beliefs in your daily life?
What actions/behaviours do you regularly engage in which can now be seen to be a consequence of this moment/experience/incident?

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### APPENDIX H

**Model of the Self Worksheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Experience</th>
<th>Impact on Self esteem</th>
<th>Resultant Motives</th>
<th>Preferred Values</th>
<th>Beliefs Formed</th>
<th>Behavior Enacted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Briefly describe a meaningful experience</td>
<td>As a result of this experience I have ___ self esteem in situations in which:</td>
<td>The experience mainly affected my core needs as follows:</td>
<td>From these motives I have a preference for the following values:</td>
<td>As a result of these motives and values, I have created these beliefs:</td>
<td>As a result of this experience and the effect on my inner self, I have adapted the following career decision behavior:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The image I have recorded in my inner self as a result of this experience can be described:

As a consequence I created the following motives (rules for life) to guide my life whenever I come across a similar situation.

---


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APPENDIX I
Model of the Self Worksheet - Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Experience</th>
<th>Impact on Self esteem</th>
<th>Resultant Motives</th>
<th>Preferred Values</th>
<th>Beliefs Formed</th>
<th>Behavior Enacted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Briefly describe a meaningful experience</td>
<td>As a result of this experience I have uncertain self esteem in situations in which: My superiors have the ultimate decision regarding something that affects me.</td>
<td>The experience mainly affected my core needs as follows: Feeling all alone and on my own Self reliance</td>
<td>From these motives I have a preference for the following values: Self-reliance Dependability Honesty Caring Trustworthiness</td>
<td>As a result of these motives and values, I have created these beliefs: No matter what others choose or do, I must be trustworthy</td>
<td>As a result of this experience and the effect on my inner self, I have adapted the following career decision behavior: I make decisions based on my long-range career plan: to be employed and to contribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I lost my job, without warning when 20% of middle management were let go</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image I have recorded in my inner self as a result of this experience can be described: I am alone. I can not rely on superiors in the chain of command for my career.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX J

Interview #2 Dialogic Questions

The purpose of this interview is to understand what learning has occurred during the critical self reflection using Christopher Branson’s Model of the Self. The questions are focused on answering the second and third Research Questions. 2) What lessons were learned after critically reflecting on the inner self’s influence on career decision making? 3) What specific learning occurs when participants critically reflect on their personally meaningful experiences using the Branson Model of the Self?

1) Looking at the worksheet you have completed, talk to me about how you see that personally meaningful experience influencing you now.

2) How do you see your self concept influencing your career decision making?

3) How do you see your self esteem influencing your career decision making?

4) How do you see your motives influencing your career decision making?

5) How do you see your values influencing your career decision making?

6) How do you see your beliefs influencing your career decision making?

7) Do you see a relationship between your personal image and the career decisions you make?

8) Do you see anything you want to change in how you make career decisions?

9) What meaning does this self reflecting exercise give to you?

10) Who would you say owns your career?

11) How did you come to believe that ___ owns your career?

12) Why is it important to you to believe that ____ owns your career?
APPENDIX K

Field Notes Examples

10/10/10 interview (1st) with Otis, accountant assistant – I learned again that I am too ready to talk. I must not fear the silence. Several times I was ready to talk and Otis spoke again. His meaningful experience occurred when he was in his mid 30s and laid off on the 7th anniversary of his employment with that company. His reaction was to choose to do something familiar (restaurant management) but he didn’t like it and wasn’t satisfied. His resultant career decisions are now “gun shy” due to that job loss. He has determined that things happen out of our control. “There is no more company loyalty. I do my job but it is nice to turn the lights out and go home”. He stopped counting the number of times he was displaced. He talked about a married friend with children who lost his job 10 days ago. The LORD owns his career and Otis wants to make decisions that please Him. Otis wants to help but the pain of job displacement comes back. Otis did not look at me throughout the interview. When I asked him why, he said “I can’t”.

10-19-10: People associate career with job choice or employer choice. All participants have mentioned “opportunity”.

11-08-10 – 1st interview with Mia. I was impressed with her office. Bottles of water and a basket of candy on the table by the visitor chair. It seems like she wants visitors to be welcomed and comfortable. She explained she was very busy but wanted to help me. She was impressed that someone my age (she doesn’t know my age) would still be trying to get such a high degree. At a crossroads 4 years ago she decided to move from technical to manager so her voice would be heard. Chose management because: “in my heart I care for people; my kids, coworkers”. First job after college was with a consulting firm. Laid off after 3 months. Thought that is capitalism so different from China, where a college degree means set for life. Makes career decisions with a backup plan. Grew up during Chinese cultural revolution. In grade school during education reform studied hard because she was determined to go to college. Decided to come to USA on her own as a single girl. Her parents and family supported her and are proud of her. She did not seek advice from family or friends about coming to USA. After the recorder was turned off, she thought of another meaningful experience: in Chinese writing class, worked really hard to write this paper, reviewed it many times and thought it was great. But the teacher graded it low. So Mia determined to focus on sciences and subjects with exact answers.

### APPENDIX L

**Mid-Career Professional Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>JOB ROLE</th>
<th>YEARS in JOB</th>
<th>CERTIF/DEGREES</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Lead Developer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Having a period of time with a supervisor who enables growth, trusts employees, identified Sean as Lead Developer and gave opportunity for more responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Director of Assessment &amp; Instructional Support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Becoming a Mom was unexpected, life changing but realized she did not want to be a stay-at-home-Mom, wanted a career – career is now 2nd to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>Database Administrator</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>AA – IBM System Science Institute grad, Honeywell Systems Certificate</td>
<td>Participating as part of a team, where “blunt” opinions could be given but once the final decision was made, everyone worked as a team. Hasn’t been able to duplicate that experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otis</td>
<td>Accounting Assistant</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>MBA - Finance</td>
<td>Losing his job when laid off in his mid 30s on the 7th anniversary of his employment with that company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt</td>
<td>Senior Director</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>BSE Certificate in Business Law &amp; Contracts</td>
<td>Deciding to give up his engineering career (his dream job) to move into IT for family, being at home reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Systems Administrator</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>BS telecommunications</td>
<td>Every time he worked weekends in ‘not high status’ (computer operator), a coworker in a higher position (programmer) who didn’t have to be at work would send him an electronic message of encouragement, asking how he was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Team Leader/Supervisor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Near BS completion (2012) Associate Degree</td>
<td>Accepting boss’ request to move from technical role to team lead, with undefined responsibilities, at same time as she was returning to school as an adult learner was a leap. It was scary and exciting and the continuation of seeing a dual career; i.e. parent and people developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>Programmer/Analyst</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Colorado trip with family and college-bound kids, could be last family trip together. Trip had purpose and exploring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Information Technology Manager</td>
<td>3 and 1/2</td>
<td>MS Computer Science</td>
<td>Coming to USA, from Chinese cultural revolution, alone as a single girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Lead Systems Analyst</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>BS Marketing</td>
<td>Expecting 1st child chose to move home to PA from double income family to single income family making ½ of what he made; from many job opportunities to few opportunities. But family were here. Also, felt strange coming home to hometown so it took a while to get comfortable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix M – Career Definition Category, Themes, and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Otis</td>
<td>- what I did while I was walking thru life looking for something I really wanted to do and thought opportunities would come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>- choosing what you want to do, working toward a goal, reaching the goal and doing what you want to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt</td>
<td>- a vision of experiences in jobs with positions to better value to yourself and employer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>- important part of the journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>- something you train for, like, hope to advance continuously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>- chosen path based on circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>- family provision, proficiency, enjoyment advancing as a result not as a goal includes caring about others based on God’s role for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>- series of tasks, projects, jobs taking you from start in chosen fields to your goal almost person specific and it can change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>- path chosen as part of work, consumes large part of our lives all about personal development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Career includes personal actions and “goals” over time Career is a chosen “path” on the “journey” to a “goal”
### Appendix N Career Decision Factors Category, Themes, and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Otis</th>
<th>Peter</th>
<th>Wyatt</th>
<th>Chester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>options, opportunities, controlled change, adventure, doing, learning, stretching self</td>
<td>belief that family and security are my responsibility influences career decision making</td>
<td>quality of life, enjoyment, challenges</td>
<td>stability, rewards, not stressful, allows evening enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pray for God’s will in career decisions</td>
<td>Family over self</td>
<td>Career decisions based on enjoyment of work and challenge</td>
<td>Consider consequences and desires in career decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want God’s total control in any decision</td>
<td>Staying in the area</td>
<td>Quality of life priority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Beth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family pressure to do best</td>
<td>stability and benefits</td>
<td>growth and moving forward are big focus</td>
<td>autonomy is important factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality of life</td>
<td>responsibility to get good job, support family big part of career decision making</td>
<td>desire upward mobility</td>
<td>Challenge and learning important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s having a plan and purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Notes:**
- Someone more important than self
- Quality of life both outside and inside the workplace
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Appendix O - Critical Reflection Effect Category, Themes, and Codes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Otis** - reinforcement of internal things  
realization my actions right  
reinforced thrust toward relationships, reaching out to people, being transparent and open  
allowed looking back on God’s faithfulness to me and helping others |
| **Peter** – Realize why I am and OK with that  
Realize why I am the way I am  
better if able, to take more risks  
may have missed opportunities |
| **Wyatt** - required writing topics never have time to think about, learned nothing because don’t look back  
--------  
Mia – caused reflection, reassure self have done right |
| **Chester** - reinforces my beliefs |
| **Jessica** - realize priorities  
interesting to put on paper what I know but haven’t said before |
| **Alex** - reinforced people are as much a part of the job as making money  
helped learning more about what drives me  
helped reflection on values and beliefs |
| **Sean** – realization everything not in my control  
Realization need more than doing my thing, need an environment |
| **Beth** - caused thoughts about the importance of not making career decisions haphazardly  
causes self reflection to understand self better |
| **Discover** - have to calm down that drive to move forward  
gave discovery of how I function in leadership roles, how antsy I get looking forward, the consequences of being driven  
discovered can be reflective, find own answer |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>gave sense of career responsibility, not just taking it, and being supportive of others and their situations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Critical reflection generated learning about self
Critical reflection generated learning about personal choices
Critical reflection reinforced self-knowledge
Curriculum Vitae of Patricia A. Gouse

PQG2@PSU.EDU

EDUCATION
Doctor of Philosophy in Workforce Education and Development with emphasis on Training and Human Resources, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park Campus, State College, Pennsylvania.

PRESENTATIONS


AWARDS
2008 – Invited to join Golden Key International Honor Society for top 15% class rank


PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE
1993 – current The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA
Information Technology Consultant responsible for developing and maintaining professional standards of operation, training plans, and disaster recovery plans; responsible for developing and delivering training programs in personal effectiveness, personal growth, leadership and management, and career development categories; process consultation.