

Towards an Existential Approach to the Meaning of Work

By

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Abstract

Towards an Existential Approach to the Meaning of Work

By Scott MacMillan

This thesis explores the meaning of work and its effect on the individual through an 'existential' lens using the 'job-career-calling model' as heuristic. A qualitative study was conducted consisting of in-depth interviews with fourteen professionals, 40-60 years of age, who had made a major change in their line of work. The interviews consisted of a variety of questions designed to elicit feelings about the importance of work using the job-career-calling model and to explore work in relation to their overall experience of life. The interviews were then analyzed using an existential framework (choice, bad faith, authenticity, contingency, death) which was developed from a broad-based review of the literature. The overall results showed that models such as the job-career-calling model are limited as they fail to take into account the existential self and promote a discourse of work as meaning. The results revealed that there are many interrelated factors that affect how the individual views and chooses work, and in order to understand the meaning placed on work, these factors must be taken into account. The central conclusion is that we cannot understand work separate from the existential self; that work must be viewed in terms of its relationship to the formation of the individual self, and not as a separate 'sphere' of life. A preliminary conception of an existential approach to the meaning of work is then outlined. The thesis concludes with theoretical and practical implications, limitations of the research and a future research agenda.

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Chapter 1 - An Overview

Introduction

Imagine yourself on board a train, which is out of control and doomed to end in a fatal crash. Nothing can be done to slow it down or to change the track. Worse still, there is no exit – no one can get out of the train. As a passenger, how would you cope? What would ease your death anxiety? Would denial help? How about illusion? How would you live a vital and meaningful life in spite of the anticipated terror of death? These are the challenging questions confronting all mortals. (Wong, 2008: 65)

In his now classic book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl eloquently argued that “Man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a ‘secondary rationalization’ of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning” (1985: 121). Because of my own existential struggles with meaning, i.e., trying to determine what is meaningful to me and how I should live, I have often asked friends the questions, “what do you believe is the meaning of life?” and “what is a meaningful life for you?” and I received a wide variety of responses. Personal meaning is a complex concept that tends to evoke strong emotions from people. Often the question is perceived as challenging or even threatening, resulting in a defensive response as the person attempts to justify his or her life choices. More often than not, however, people admit that they have never really considered such questions. For some, then, what constitutes a meaningful life is relatively clear and easy to identify and achieve (e.g., family); for some it is an elusive goal, while others do not even want to think about the question. Subsequently, if I ask the question “what is the meaning or impact of your work?” I receive a number of responses ranging from “simply

a way to make money” to “the most important part of my life.” I have personally struggled with these questions for as long as I can remember and this existential confusion is where the questions that make up this thesis begin.

In my own life I have experienced great difficulty with meaning and work. After I graduated from university I accepted a position with the YMCA as a way to pay the bills on a short-term basis. However, I gradually fell in love with the work and the organization, and so my view of work changed significantly from a way to make money to work that I loved. But then something happened to me and I went back the other way. Over a number of years I gradually lost interest in the work and eventually I was back where I started, the work was only about financial gain. One day I woke up and said to myself, “I think it’s time I moved on in my work.” The work had not changed but somehow I had, even though it took me years to realize this. I remember being totally perplexed as I did not understand what had happened to me. What I have discovered, however, is that my twenty-year experience is much more complex and not simply about changes in work categories. Something more profound was occurring. It was about my ongoing search for meaning and how work affected the person I was continually becoming. This realization, and my ongoing interest in how others understand meaning and work, became the basis for this research.

The thesis itself has evolved in a very existentialist way. I started out wanting to explore the meaning of work, specifically to understand Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton’s (1985) job-career-calling model from an “applied” existential perspective. I chose to focus on the job-career-calling model as it is a relatively new model that has emerged in recent years, it is sparking interest among scholars, and it is a

model of work that seems to resonate with the “average” person. However, as my research process “unfolded,” the nature of the research project itself changed to a greater focus on being, work, and the existential self (i.e., the relationship between work, meaning and a broader sense of self). Given the vast nature of such an undertaking, the job-career-calling model provided a useful heuristic (or bouncing off point) for much of the debate on the meaning of work as well as an important contribution to that debate. Thus, the discussion that follows centres on the job-career-calling model as a way of exploring the relationship between the meaning of work and the existential self.

Meaning and Work

Rene Descartes was wrong. It isn't *Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), but rather *Labora, ergo sum* (I work, therefore I am). We need work, and as adults we find identity in and are identified by the work we do. Our work tells us who we are. If this is true, then we must be very careful about what we choose to do for a living, for what we do is what we become. At its worst, work is a burden and a necessity. At its best, work can be an act of personal freedom and self-realization. But either way, work is a necessary and defining ingredient in our lives. (Gini, 2000: 12)

The question of “what makes up a meaningful life” has baffled philosophers and lay people alike for centuries, dating back at least to the days of Socrates and Plato. Like many others, I believe that the most important issue of the 21st century is the individual search for meaning (Bellioiti, 2001; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Ciulla, 2000; Hollis, 2001, 2005). It appears that meaning is of much greater concern now than in previous eras to the average person because of the diminishing influence of religion, people's more questioning natures, and the effects of scientific discovery (Fairholm, 1996; Hanfling, 1989). Additionally, most people historically have been preoccupied with economic

survival precluding them from exploring the deeper questions surrounding meaning. However, notwithstanding the economic downturn in the past year, in recent decades the economic situation has significantly improved for most people in North America and in much of the Western world, and meaning in life (and particularly people's lack of meaning) has become a greater issue (Baumeister, 1991; King & Nicol, 1999; Young, 2003). This was predicted by Frankl almost thirty years ago - "For too long we have been dreaming a dream from which we are now waking up: the dream that if we just improve the socioeconomic situation of people, everything will be okay, people will become happy...the truth is that as the struggle for survival has subsided, the question has emerged: survival for what...ever more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for" (1978: 21). Questions of meaning, therefore, are at the heart of this inquiry and form the backbone of this thesis from beginning to end.

An individual life is a continual work in progress as each of us tries to craft a meaningful and happy existence. For most people, work is a very important part of that search for meaning as well as a major component of self-identity. Our work serves a variety of purposes starting with basic economic need (Taylor, 1911), but it is usually much more than just a pay cheque. Work provides many other things – friendship, challenge, engagement, and, hopefully, it adds to life fulfillment (Ciulla, 2000; Maslow, 1943, 1968; Roethlisberger & Parker, 2002). Though everyone's work will not necessarily provide all of these things, the work community is arguably often the most important community that we belong to, after family (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). Despite the increased importance of leisure and the notion of "balance" in recent years, it seems that work is still the prime driver in many people's lives (Casey,

1995; Gini, 2000; Handy, 1984; Karp & Yoels, 1981; Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002; Moen, 1998; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Mutlu & Asik, 2002; Ransome, 1996; Rinehart, 2006). Gini (2000: ix) notes, “work is the most common experience of adult life...work is the way we come to know the world and are known to the world.”

However, despite the increase in the importance of work in many people’s lives, work can have severe consequences for both individuals and organizations. For many people, work results in anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, other work-related health problems (Blustein, 2006; Ciulla, 2000; Fox, 1994; Grint, 2005; Kanungo, 1992; Maslach, 1982; Mottaz, 1981; Pahl, 1995; Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981; Rinehart, 2006), concerns of inadequate mix of work/non-work life (Bunting, 2004; Ciulla, 2000; Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Pahl, 1995), workaholism (Bunting, 2004; Burke, 2001; Harpaz & Snir, 2003; Snir & Harpaz, 2006), and feelings of alienation (Baxter, 1982; Blustein, 2006; Kanungo, 1992; Mottaz, 1981; Neff, 1985; Rinehart, 2006). At the same time, organizations are dealing with problems of turnover, absenteeism, low productivity, and employee cynicism (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Jex & Crossley, 2005; Warr, 2007). One reason for these problems, as Mills and Simmons (1999: 114-115) remind us is that “people do not leave their selves behind when they come to work. The workplace is charged with emotionality, family concerns, sexuality, worries, hopes and dreams: try as they may, persons cannot divorce their selves from the workplace. Organizations are composed of persons with diverse psychological needs and behaviours which inevitably come to influence, and are shaped by, working relationships.” These problems highlight the need to increase our understanding of the relationship between one’s work and one’s overall life, and how this may change.

Adding emphasis to the meaning of work discussion, and therefore timeliness to this thesis, is the spirituality and work “movement,” which has emerged strongly in the past decade (Dalton, 2001; Elmes & Smith, 2001; Fox, 1994; Gibbons, 2000; Harrington, Preziosi, & Gooden, 2001; Howard, 2002; Lips-Wiersma, 2002, 2004; Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002; Marques, 2005; Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2005, 2006; McCormick, 1994; Mitroff & Denton, 1999a; Ottaway, 2003; Tischler, 1999). Most scholars agree that spirituality in the workplace is an attempt to make a stronger connection between people’s outer work life with their inner life, and many now believe that there is a growing hunger for a more meaningful or spiritual life (King & Nicol, 1999).

As a context for human development, work activities provide a venue for becoming more than one used to be. In and through work, individuals develop themselves by expressing the occupational interests, vocational talents, and work values that move them from a felt negative to the perceived plus. This progressive development constitutes a spiritual quest for meaning and self-completion that, in the process, helps people become someone they want to be, a person they themselves would like (Savickas, 1994: 5)

Despite the fact that many are arguing for the incorporation of spirituality into the workplace, there is great debate about what this means and what a “spiritual workplace” or a “spiritual organization” would look like (Bell & Taylor, 2003; Butts, 1999; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Howard, 2002; Marques et al., 2005; Ottaway, 2003). Regardless of the problems within the literature of this emerging field, the interest in spirituality and work both reflects and further illuminates the problem of a lack of meaning in the workplace, what some have termed a “spiritual crisis,” and has especially focused attention on the desire felt by many individuals for their work to have meaning. This adds to the importance of understanding how work is viewed and how work may affect the individual, i.e., the key questions behind this thesis. “Because empirical explorations of

the extent and the nature of the spirituality, religiousness, and career development relationship have just begun, a great variety of research is needed to develop a thorough understanding of this relationship” (Duffy, 2006: 58).

There are a number of ways to consider the meaning or role of work in a life but there is no agreement to date. “That work has been arbitrarily privileged over other forms of activity and discourse in contemporary Western societies has not led to any consensus about the meaning of work nor about the orientations that workers conventionally have about work” (Grint, 2005: 24) One intriguing method to determine the importance of work which has emerged in recent years, is the Job-Career-Calling model outlined in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Bellah et al., 1985). In this model, work can be viewed in three different ways with very different outcomes and potential influences on a meaningful life. A “Job” is work done just for the money. It is not necessarily something people enjoy and in fact may be something that they actively dislike. What is important is the income from the job that is needed to live. Individuals are not very invested in such work and it is not where they find happiness or meaning. Most of us have had to do this kind of work at sometime in our working lives. A “Career” is about much more than money. It is work where there is much greater investment of time, money, and emotion. People in careers want ongoing growth and development and envision a productive future in that work, whatever it is, whether their career is as a lawyer, teacher, or janitor. They want their work to be something that they enjoy and are much more attached to a career than a job. It is a significant part of self-identity, and research shows it significantly impacts on the ability to find meaning in life (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, & Rozin, 1997). Lastly, there is work that would be

considered a calling. A “Calling” is work that people would do even if they had no need for money or that they would do for free. It is work that they feel incredibly drawn to and that they feel is their life purpose. It is the number one source of their sense of self and meaning in life. Callings do not have to be religious conversions, though that is where the term comes from. A Calling, by definition, means that the work is of such importance to the individual that it no longer feels like “work.”

The Job-Career-Calling model helps us understand the importance of work in an individual’s life but it has been subjected to limited research, and the research has been predominantly quantitative. The model has looked at how people orient themselves to their work according to the three categories. It has illuminated the varying degrees of investment a person has in their work. It suggests a hierarchy of satisfaction, i.e., less for job, more for calling, and also that it may be possible to reframe how one’s work is viewed and therefore increase work satisfaction. Because research on the model is relatively new, other questions remain: Why does one view work as a job, career or calling? What causes people to change their view of work? Does viewing work as “only” a job preclude a meaningful life? Is a career or calling necessary in order for the individual to view his or her work life as meaningful? Could there also be negative aspects to viewing work as a calling? How do “turning” or so-called crisis points relate to how work is viewed? Should everyone be encouraged to find their work “calling” or is having a calling a discourse of today’s Western society and perhaps not always in the best interests of the individual? How does one’s work relate to how he or she defines a meaningful life? These questions have yet to be answered by the model and are the starting point for my research.

Being and Work

Human existence has always been a problem for man, the rational animal, who, in virtue of his faculty of rational reflection, could not help looking searchingly and critically at his own life and at life in general, and comparing his own mode of being with that of other creatures. Existentialism in its modern and particularly its contemporary form concentrates this critical reflection on the individual human self. (Reinhardt, 1960: 14)

One way to analyze how an individual makes choices and understands his or her life in relation to meaning (and therefore to “bridge” meaning and work) is through existential philosophy. Therefore, to investigate the questions noted above about the ‘individual’ and the Job-Career-Calling model, I chose to use key existential themes as a theoretical framework. Existential philosophy provides compelling insights into the nature of the individual self, the circumstances and dilemmas of everyday life, and in particular, it gives us a way to view the creation of individual meaning, i.e., the *authentic life* in existential terms. It has been described as a way to interpret the predicament or dilemma of people in modern Western society and the resulting anxiety and anguish (Collins, 1952; May, 1959b). Golomb (1995: 200) notes, “the existential question today is not whether to be or not to be, but how one can become what one truly is.” Existentialism focuses on creation of the self, argues that human meaning is a subjective experience, and emphasizes that the goal of human existence is the meaningful or authentic life, specific to the individual. The starting point for an existential approach is the recognition that the human self is “the true center of philosophy and... the sole legitimating authority” (Lavine, 1984: 326). The existential self, as opposed to the ‘psychological’ self, is not pre-determined but continually being constituted by how the

individual experiences the world and reflects upon those experiences (Kierkegaard, 1980). The self, therefore, is “one whereby my personal history is very much a product of my current ‘situation,’ and how I construct my self and pursue that self that I am not yet” (Earnshaw, 2006: 124).

Existential philosophy has previously been utilized as a means of understanding the individual in the context of human existence, most notably in the area of psychological counseling (Barnes, 1959; Bugental, 1965; May, 1969; Van Kaam, 1966; Yalom, 1980) and social work (Kominkiewicz, 2006; Krill, 1978; Miehl & Moffatt, 2000; Thompson, 1992). There have been efforts to bring an existential perspective into the study of work and organizations, but only by a limited number of management scholars (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Kelly & Kelly, 1998; MacMillan, 2006; MacMillan & Mills, 2002; Pauchant, 1993, 1995; Robin, 1998; Wallace, 2007; Waugh, 2004; Yue & Mills, 2006). An existential perspective has also begun to be brought into career counseling (Asa-Sophia, Lee, & William, 2005; Malach-Pines, 2002; Malach-Pines & Yafe-Yanai, 2001; Schultze & Miller, 2004) as well as into the discussion of business ethics (Agarwal & Malloy, 2002; Ashman & Winstanley, 2006; Gilbert, 2002; Jackson, 2005; West, 2008). However, despite some recent use of existentialism in management research, the use of existentialism to study the meaning of work is in the early stages and has been limited to a handful of studies.

An existential approach to work uses the individual as the primary unit of analysis and focuses on the nature of the self and how meaning is created. Work is then viewed within the context of the creation of meaning, i.e., does work detract from or contribute to the individual self? However, from an existential perspective, work is only one of

potentially many “places” where the self is realized. Since a life is made up of various parts – family, hobbies, work, friends, community service, and many other potential components – I will argue that they are pieces of a puzzle, which must ultimately fit together for the individual in order for him or her to create a meaningful existence.

Research Objective and Questions

The challenge of this thesis was to investigate the job-career-calling model, but more significantly, to understand how the meaning we place on our work relates to our existential Being, the self that is continually being constituted through our actions and that we are always reflecting on, i.e., the reflexive self (Heidegger, 1967; Kierkegaard, 1980; Sartre, 1956). “There has been a notable lack of attention to the inner motivations, personal constructions, and the way in which people make meaning of working in the literature” (Blustein, 2006: 66). The main research objective was to increase our understanding of the ‘meaning of work’ and its effect on the individual through an ‘existential’ lens using the ‘job-career-calling model’ as heuristic. The major research questions are:

1. What factors determine whether work is viewed as a job, a career, or a calling?
2. Does the Job-Career-Calling model adequately explain why work is viewed in such a way by the individual?
3. What causes people to change their view of work?
4. How does one’s work relate to the existential self?

In the end, my central argument is that we cannot understand work separate from the self, and work must be understood in terms of its relationship to the formation of the individual self.

Methodological Approach

Individuals have been found to vary greatly in the kinds of meaning they derive from their work. Even within the same occupation, the personal meaning that different individuals attach to their work has been found to vary in ways that are systematically related to changes (even minor changes) in how they define the jobs that they do. Importance is thus placed on the narrative of the work, imbued with meaning and representing a personal orientation toward work that helps to make sense of a complex career environment. (Wrzesniewski & Tosti, 2006: 72-73)

To answer these research questions I conducted a qualitative study in which I applied an ‘existentially-informed’ framework to analyze the interviews of fourteen professional people in their “mid-life” years (40 – 60 years of age), who have made a major work change, using the “long interview” style (McCracken, 1988). Comprehensive interviews were used as they provided the depth needed to study the complexity of how people understand their work lives and attribute value to what they do. As Wrzesniewski et al (1997: 32) have stated, “This issue may require moving beyond the questionnaire methods... interviews of considerable depth may be necessary in order to develop hypotheses about how an individual comes to understand her work in terms of Job, Career, or Calling.” The interviews consisted of a variety of questions designed to elicit feelings about work (using the job-career-calling model) in relation to their overall experience of life (Appendix A – Interview Guide). Major question areas included: How is work viewed as either job, career, or calling, and why? What influenced original work

choices? What caused a major change in work? How is a meaningful life viewed and how does work fit within that vision? What else has affected their view of work and their overall life? For the purposes of this thesis work was defined as “paid employment.” A Job was defined for the participants as work primarily viewed as a means of income and material benefits, Career as work primarily viewed as advancement, challenge, and progressive path, and Callings as work primarily viewed as fulfillment, purpose, and work that would be continued even if there was no financial need (Bellah et al., 1985; Wrzesniewski, 1999, 2002; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) (Appendix B – Definitions of Terms).

To analyze the interviews and how people make sense of their work and other factors that make up meaning I used a framework consisting of the major existential themes of Choice, Bad Faith, Authenticity, Contingency, and Death. These themes were derived from a broad-based review of the existential literature (including drawing heavily on the existential-analytic psychotherapy literature) and were chosen due to their alignment with the questions of this thesis. They are also key concepts which informed Bugental’s (1965) existential-analytical approach; Bugental being one of the pioneers of the existential therapy movement. I will outline the framework more fully in chapter three and show how I have used these five major *themes* of existentialism rather than using the philosophy of one particular theorist, e.g., Kierkegaard, Sartre or Heidegger. This approach allowed me to draw upon and incorporate the ideas of many of the existentialists even though they may disagree on particular issues. For example, I have used the importance of death as a theme in my framework as per the majority of the existential philosophers who view it as the main context for human choices, even though

Sartre had a different interpretation of death than did Heidegger or Kierkegaard. This approach also provides for a more comprehensive understanding of the main existential concepts and incorporates the ideas from the existential psychotherapists such as Bugental, May, and Yalom.

Although these themes have each been defined and situated within different contexts by the existential writers (a criticism of existentialism), I am using them in their most 'generic' sense as they relate to this thesis. Additionally, whereas I am separating out the themes for the purposes of the framework, they are intricately related and at times overlap with each other. These five themes provided a framework to analyze: (1) how possibilities enter consciousness and choices are made; (2) how choices may result in a state of bad faith (feelings of living inauthentically); (3) how an authentic existence (meaningful life) is viewed; (4) how unexpected events may change how life is viewed, and; (5) how the prospect of death impacts how life is understood.

Towards an Existential Approach to Work

A critical analysis of the job-career-calling model revealed that while it provides an efficient way to categorize the importance of work and seems to resonate with people, it is also limited. Applying the existential themes then added to our analysis of how the interviewees understood their choices about work and about living a meaningful life. The overall results showed that models such as the job-career-calling model are limited as they fail to take into account the existential self. There are many factors that affect how the individual views and chooses work, and in order to understand the meaning placed on work, these factors must be taken into account. Work has been traditionally regarded and

investigated as a “separate” sphere of life however work is only an “experience” and part of a much greater context within which the individual resides. My central argument in this thesis is that *we cannot understand work separate from the existential self; that work must be viewed in terms of its relationship to the formation of the individual self, and not as a separate ‘sphere’ of life.* Therefore, we are in need of an existential approach to the meaning of work, one that connects work with Being. Based on my analysis of the interviews, I conclude this thesis with some preliminary thoughts on what an existential approach to understanding work and the individual could entail.

The structure for the remaining chapters is as follows: In chapter two I review the literature on the meaningful life, the meaning of work, and the Job-Career-Calling model. In chapter three I provide an overview of existential thought and outline the key existential concepts I will be using – choice, bad faith, authenticity, contingency, and death. In chapter four I explain the research process – the use of the job-career-calling model as a heuristic, the method of interviews, and how the interviews were analyzed using the existential themes as a theoretical framework. In chapter five I present the results of the interviews that focus on work and the Job-Career-Calling model. I describe what the respondents’ work is currently, why they have chosen the work they have, and how they view the importance of their work. In chapter six I use the existential themes to examine how the interviewees have lived their lives and how they made decisions about their work lives: the initial consciousness that led to their first work choices; the subsequent problems with those work choices, i.e., were they bad faith decisions?; the emergence of a new consciousness leading to changing their work; their views on meaning and authenticity; how meaning has changed over time for the interviewees; and

lastly, how their views on death have affected their choices in life. In chapter seven, I examine the issues that are raised in chapters five and six, and provide some preliminary thoughts on what an existential approach to work might look like. Lastly, in this final chapter I outline the theoretical and practical implications of this research, research limitations, suggestions for further research, and give my concluding reflections.

A Note to the Reader

One very important note to the reader is that throughout this thesis, most of the cited sources use the gendered terms of the day “man” or “men” as a stand-in for the generic humankind. For ease of presentation of these views I have left the words in the original but would ask the reader to reflect on the problematic nature of the words especially in today’s more egalitarian ethos.

Chapter 2 – Meaning and Work

Introduction

Work can offer a sense of accomplishment or meaninglessness; it can be a source of pride or shame. And an activity that consumes such a large portion of time cannot help but spill over into nonwork spheres of life. How people work affects the way in which they spend their time away from work, for it places constraints on the enjoyment of “free time” and conditions the overall mode of adjustment to life. (Rinehart, 2006: 1)

At the heart of this thesis are questions of meaning and work; how work adds to or detracts from the individual’s attempts to live a meaningful life and how this may change. In this chapter I review the relevant literature that forms the basis for this inquiry – the meaningful life, meaning of work (including the changing nature of careers, turning points and crises, and spirituality and work), and the job-career-calling model. Since a life is made up of various parts, work is only one of potentially many “places” where meaning is created or found. “Until one knows something of the way in which workers order their wants and expectations relative to their employment – until one knows what meaning work has for them – one is not in a position to understand what overall assessment of their job satisfaction may most appropriately be made in their case”(Goldthorpe, 1968: 36). Work, therefore, should not be viewed in isolation from the individual’s overall life.

The Meaningful Life

Reflecting on the meaning of life may be spurred by psychological crisis but it may also arise from an acute awareness that Henry David Thoreau was correct: most people do lead lives of quiet desperation. (Bellioti, 2001: 10)

What constitutes a meaningful life for a particular individual is complex and multifaceted, and not surprisingly, there are numerous theories on meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Belliotti, 2001; Feldman & Snyder, 2005; Frankl, 1985; Klemke, 2000). The question of what makes up a meaningful life has baffled philosophers and lay people alike for centuries, dating back to the days of Socrates and Plato (Baird, 1985; Baumeister, 1991; Belliotti, 2001; Klemke, 2000). Is meaning discovered? Is meaning created? Is there any meaning at all? It has been easier for scholars to discuss “well-being,” “right action,” and “happiness” than to investigate the meaning of life (Metz, 2002; Ryff, 1989). The question of meaning is of much greater concern now in Western society due to the more critical, questioning nature of people, the general effects of scientific discovery, longer life-spans, a better economic situation for many, and critical world events such as the 9-11 attacks (Baumeister, 1991; Cottingham, 2003; Eagleton, 2007; Gems, 2003; Hanfling, 1989; King & Nicol, 1999; Wrzesniewski, 2002). Especially affecting the question of meaning is the gap which has been left from a diminishing emphasis on religion for many people. “For most of human history no one had to search for the spiritual in their lives...at the core of every culture was a religion, with sacred times and places set aside for public rituals...for many these holy places are less and less familiar today” (Fairholm, 1996: 17). Additionally, the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States had a significant impact on people. Since 9-11 many are re-evaluating their lives and their work, as they search for a deeper meaning in life, more than just achieving career success (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Howard, 2002; Weiss, Skelley, Haughey, & Hall, 2004; Wrzesniewski, 2002).

Albert Camus' legendary Myth of Sisyphus demonstrated what could arguably be the predicament of the human condition, especially in relation to work. Sisyphus is condemned by the Gods to push a stone up a hill only to have it roll back down, and this continues forever (Camus, 1967a). Although some people love their work and their life, this picture of the futile life is undoubtedly the case for many others whether they would choose to admit it or not. For a significant number of people, life and especially their work, is mostly daily drudgery, a treadmill of existence from which they cannot get off, and from which they gradually watch time and their life pass by. Despite the average person in North America now having many more choices about how they live and work, work for many people is still a "daily humiliation" (Ciulla, 2000: xiv), which results in what has been termed the divided self – one self for the public world, one for the private (Mitroff & Denton, 1999a).

There is a paradox currently taking place in Western society – an increasing trend toward superficiality (materialism, celebrity worship, internet obsession), and at the same time, there are indications that people are also hungering for a more meaningful existence. Despite great advances in medical care and technology, and a much higher average standard of living, general well-being and happiness levels have not changed in decades (Easterbrook, 2003; Myers, 2000; Seligman, 2002). Anxiety, depressions, use of medication, and suicide levels have, in fact, all dramatically increased, and meaning has become increasingly attached to security, comfort, consumption and material gain (Cottingham, 2003; Easterbrook, 2003; Fromm, 1955, 1976; Handy, 1994; Myers, 2000; Wattanasuwan, 2005; Whalen, 1999).

The modern era has produced a qualitatively superficial but quantitatively staggering knowledge of the world. In these terms, human beings have sought to

understand themselves through external images provided by the scientific and technological society and have consequently dehumanized and despiritualized their essential being (Bowles, 1989: 409).

The belief that increased wealth and materialism along with the resulting greater security and comfort would be the path to fulfillment and happiness has not materialized. “The great self-confidence of the Western technological nations, and especially of the United States, was in large part because of the belief that materialism – the prolongation of a healthy life, the acquisition of wealth, the ownership of consumer goods – would be the royal road to a happy life” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999: 822). However, the emphasis on materialism, physical comfort, and safety has resulted in what some are calling a “meaning deficit” within both the individual and society (Fox, 1994; Fromm, 1976; Maslow, 1971; Needleman, 1991). “Self-actualization tendencies must compete with many other tendencies as man proceeds to make his own nature...conceivably, man may evolve in such a way as to lose his self-actualization drive and diminish his potential” (Greening, 1971: 9). Fromm (1976: 5) notes, “we are a society of notoriously unhappy people: lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive, dependent – people who are glad when we have killed the time we are trying to save.” We have become accustomed to a rather mundane existence, resulting in a loss of self but we still long for a different existence (Gaarder, 1994: 15). Frankl (1985) emphasizes that the problem is that people do not know how to live in the world and face what he refers to as an “existential vacuum.” “No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do. Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do (conformism) or he does what other people wish him to do

(totalitarianism)” (Frankl, 1985: 128). Therefore, despite unparalleled technological and material progress, finding meaning is difficult especially when it comes to work.

Historically, for most people meaning has been based on a religious belief, living a “good life,” and honoring a greater power, with the hope of a utopian afterlife. Others, such as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, have held a nihilistic perspective, i.e., that there is no meaning to be found and that the question itself is absurd (Bellotti, 2001; Schopenhauer, 2000). “That human life must be some kind of mistake is sufficiently proved by the simple observation that man is a compound of needs which are hard to satisfy; that their satisfaction achieves nothing but a painless condition in which he is only given to boredom; and that boredom is direct proof that existence is in itself valueless, for boredom is nothing other than the sensation of the emptiness of existence” (Schopenhauer, 2000: 69). Still others argue that if meaning is to be found in life, it must be created by the individual (Metz, 2001). Some note that meaning is only temporary, and that people continually fluctuate between boredom and fleeting feelings of fulfillment (Schlick, 1989).

Man sets himself goals, and while he is headed towards them he is buoyed up by hope, indeed, but gnawed at the same time by the pain of unsatisfied desire. Once the goal is reached, however, after the first flush of triumph has passed away, there follows inevitably a mood of desolation. A void remains, which can seemingly find an end only through the painful emergence of new longings, the setting of new goals. So the game begins anew, and existence seems doomed to be a restless swinging to and fro between pain and boredom, which ends at last in the nothingness of death. (Schlick, 1989: 61)

Many philosophers agree that a universal meaning of life does not exist, because meaning is only in the eyes of the beholder and can therefore vary greatly (Bellotti, 2001; Frankl, 1985). “There is no such thing as a universal meaning of life but only the

unique meanings of the individual situations” (Frankl, 1985: 55). They would also agree that in order for a life to be meaningful, it is necessary that the individual feels that his or her life is meaningful (Baird, 1985). It does not matter how the life is judged by others, only how it is perceived by the individual. Frankl (1985) argues that meaning can be found in any activity, even within the concentration camps of Nazi Germany in which he was a prisoner. Some philosophers contend that meaning must be discovered, like finding buried treasure – which implies that it is out there somewhere to be found by each individual. Creating meaning, on the other hand, implies that meaning is made, built, or crafted (Baird, 1985). For Baumeister (1991), a meaningful life is made up of purpose, value, efficacy and self-worth, and that when all four of these factors are met, life is meaningful. Wohlgennant (1989: 35) defines meaning “as a feeling that human beings generally have when they achieve a sufficient number of objectives that they have set themselves, or when they can bring about the realization of values they recognize.”

The search for meaning is clearly dependent on the conditions of a person’s life, as not everyone has the same choices about how he or she is to live. Some people are not in a position to pay much attention to the deeper issues of meaning as they are consumed with basic survival (Baumeister, 1991; Maslow, 1943). This is especially true of those living in the developing world but also applies to many in the developed world as well. “Desperate people do not ponder the meaning of life. When survival is at stake, when the events of each day or each hour carry a sense of urgency, life’s meaning is irrelevant... meaning of life is a problem for people who are not desperate, people who can count on survival, comfort, security, and some measure of pleasure” (Baumeister, 1991: 3). This fits with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory which can be viewed on a continuum with

survival needs at one end and self-actualization or a meaningful life at the other end (Maslow, 1943). This continuum however should not imply that a life devoted to survival cannot still be meaningful. They are not mutually exclusive and in fact a focus on survival can make a life even more meaningful as it provides clear purpose. However, it seems that the question of meaning is a greater concern today because many people have more time to dwell on it.

Conclusion

It is clear there are no absolute answers when it comes to the meaningful life, and that there is more confusion than ever with what is considered a meaningful life (Metz, 2001, 2002). Most scholars agree that a meaningful life is determined by how the individual subjectively experiences his or her “puzzle of life,” and therefore makes sense of his or her life. For many people, work is a major, if not the most important, piece of that puzzle. “Work is the most common experience of adult life... some love it, others hate it, but few of us are able to avoid it... because we spend two-thirds of our waking life on the job, work is the way we come to know the world and are known to the world... work becomes our identity, our signature on the world... to work is to be and not to work is not to be” (Gini, 2000: ix). Ultimately, the pieces that make up a life, especially one’s work life, must fit coherently together in order for one to feel that life is meaningful.

The Meaning of Work

We live in extraordinary times, in which a majority of people in postindustrial societies have an unprecedented array of choices about how they live and work, and what they buy. Machines are our slaves, and the basic necessities of life are, for the majority of people, relatively easy to obtain. This is an era when life

should be filled with all sorts of rewarding activities. Yet many find themselves caught up not only in long hours of work but in debt, and suffering from stress, loneliness, and crumbling families. (Ciulla, 2000:234)

Work can be defined in many ways but for the purposes of this thesis work is defined as “paid employment” (Ciulla, 2000). This is not to discount the validity and importance of work within the home or volunteering, however, for purposes of clarity and relevance to the management literature, I have chosen to concentrate on work done for money outside the home. Historically, work was considered a degrading activity and restricted to the lower classes until the rise of Protestantism and the Protestant work ethic (Dollahyde, 1997; Mutlu & Asik, 2002). This ethic related hard work with worship - “the aim of a work ethic – no longer simply Protestant – has been to give work a point, to charge it with direction, to embed it within a purposeful temporal flow” (S. W. Herman, 2002: 65). Over the centuries work has significantly evolved, and today, globalization, technology, and a shift to a service economy are rapidly changing the nature of work, and the distinction between work lives and non-work lives has become blurred (Fox, 1994; Handy, 1984; Law et al., 2002; Moen, 1998; Ransome, 1996). For many people the work community is the most important community that they belong to, and is even replacing family, church and social groups (Fairholm, 1996), and despite the increased importance of leisure in recent years, it is “still secondary to work” (Mutlu & Asik, 2002: 19).

...definitions of the meaning-of-work concept usually remain unclear and ambiguous. Basically, the concept refers to the set of general beliefs about work held by an individual, who acquires them through interaction with the social environment. It is generally assumed that the beliefs are related to the person’s career orientation and behaviour in the work situation, including job performance, turnover, absenteeism, and job satisfaction. (Sverko & Vizek-Vidovic, 1995: 3)

Although work provides the economic means to live, it can also be an avenue for social needs, shape self-identity, influence status and self-esteem, be an outlet for creative expression, a means of growth, and a major source of fulfillment in life or what Maslow termed “self-actualization” (Ciulla, 2000; Gini, 2000; Handy, 1984; Karp & Yoels, 1981; Law et al., 2002; Maslow, 1971; Moen, 1998; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Mutlu & Asik, 2002; Ransome, 1996; Rinehart, 2006; Seligman, 2002). “People work for money – but they work even more for meaning in their lives” (Pfeffer, 1998: 112). The importance of work has grown significantly to the extent that some people now frame work within a religious context, and the organization that they work for acts as a secular religion (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; Bell & Taylor, 2004; Bowles, 1989; S. W. Herman, 2002). Ransome (1996: 53) argues that, “Work constitutes a crucial manifestation of the basic human need of expression through action.” Scholars are increasingly arguing that a person’s work is strongly connected to his or her life and that work “cannot be understood apart from the whole” (Hughes, 1997: 389). Mutlu and Asik (2002: 18) contend that, “self-actualization is the outcome of an unending process of development and could also be realized through work.” No matter how work is viewed, it is clear that for most people it is a major component of what defines them as human beings (Karp & Yoels, 1981; Law et al., 2002; Moen, 1998), and is an integral part of who we are, i.e., the “whole person” (Fairholm, 1996). “We find our identities and our meanings only within communities, and for most of us that means at work, in a company or an institution” (Solomon, 2004: 1028). Many scholars have noted the increased connection between career and life (Law et al., 2002), and Fox (1994) has gone so far as to argue that work should be redefined within the context of humanity’s place in the

world. Work, then, can either significantly contribute to or detract from the individual's quest for a meaningful existence.

Work occupies a substantial proportion of most people's lives and has often been taken as a symbol of personal value; work provides status, economic reward, a demonstration of religious faith and a means to realize self-potential. But work also embodies the opposite evaluations; labour can be back-breaking and mentally incapacitating; labour camps are punishment centres; work is a punishment for original sin and something which we would all rather avoid. (Grint, 2005: 1)

Unfortunately, however, organizational mergers, downsizing, technology, acquisitions and strategic alliances have resulted in employees spending less time with one organization, many people having periods of unemployment, an increased trend toward contingent and part-time work, and people having multiple careers, all of which creates stress to individual workers (Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002; Ransome, 1996; Rifkin, 1995; Turner, Barling, & Zacharatos, 2005; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). The 'job for life' concept of the past has now become obsolete for many people (Collin & Young, 2000; Hall, 1996). Additionally, many workplaces are being described as "toxic environments" with a variety of problems for employees: high levels of stress, depression, feelings of being treated unfairly, bullying, burnout, low productivity, high absenteeism, turnover, workaholism, and work-related health problems (Browne, 2002; Bunting, 2004; Gini, 2000; Goldthorpe, 1968; Jamal & Baba, 2000; Kelloway & Day, 2005; Kimura, 2003; Korman, 2001; Leiter & Maslach, 2001; Lerner, Levine, Malspeis & Agostino, 1994; Malakh-Pines & Aronson, 1988; Turner et al., 2005). Lastly, there is a growing concern of the inadequate mix between one's work life and non-work life (Bunting, 2004; Ciulla, 2000; Judge et al., 2006; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Work and home have traditionally been

viewed as two separate spheres of life but it is becoming increasingly apparent that what happens in one can significantly affect the other.

These next three sections will deal with the challenges people face finding meaning through their work. The changing nature of careers, turning points and crises, and the spirituality and work literature all indicate ways in which there are more challenges now to align our work lives with our overall lives and, hence indicate the added difficulties of creating a meaningful life.

Changing Nature of Careers

It is commonplace to observe that people who switch from one career to another do so for a variety of reasons. These may relate to remuneration, job security, the need to develop and challenge oneself, a desire to develop new skills and abilities, a quest for new experiences, to address a set of personal goals, or various combinations of these and other less well-articulated reasons. At its base, in any career change is some level of recognition that the current occupation is not a good fit for the individual. (Richardson, Watt, & Tysvaer, 2007: 219)

Since the 'job for life' concept of work has changed and many people now move from one organization to another or even change their line of work entirely, a new career paradigm has emerged (Collin & Young, 2000; Hall, 2002; Pahl, 1995). "Career patterns depict the life course in event sequences rather than simply destinations. These qualities of the working life span have meaning both in social (public, objective) terms and in personal (private, subjective) terms" (Jepsen & Choudhuri, 2001: 4) . One way to view this new paradigm of work is the "boundaryless career" which can also be viewed as an opportunity within one's work (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Mirvis & Hall, 1994). "The boundaryless career could itself offer up new opportunities, stimuli, relationships, and networks that people can use to remake themselves" (Mirvis & Hall, 1994: 367). Higgins

notes that new career decisions are embedded within a social context and that changes in work are partially dependent on the opportunities provided by one's social network.

Results from the present study show that, beyond individual-level factors such as demographics and work history, individuals' decisions to change careers are socially embedded. In particular, the results show that the greater the diversity of an individual's network of advisors, the greater the likelihood that the individual will change careers. In addition, this study began to explore the mechanisms through which interpersonal relationships affect career change by examining how different subsets of advice relationships - those that are primarily instrumental versus psychosocial - affect the decision to change careers. (Higgins, 2001: 612)

Success in work has typically been viewed externally, as defined by the greater society, usually in terms of advancement, salary, degree of responsibility. But in relationship to living a meaningful life, it is the "subjective" success that is probably far more important, i.e., that the individual feels positive about his or her work (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Heslin, 2005). Hall argues for the "protean career," which he defines as one in which people make decisions about their work by attempting to align their work with their core values, and to achieve "subjective" success (Hall, 2004). This new paradigm of work may result in people evaluating their work within a greater context, one that encompasses a more holistic approach to life.

It could be that the interesting, fast-changing, and emotionally demanding work offered by tomorrow's organizations will not prove to be the end-all and be-all to the self-developer. Aspirations of getting more time with family and pursuing personal goals hint at other dimensions to their identities. To the extent we can set aside simplistic notions that 'self-actualization' is the pinnacle of human motivation, this makes room to consider how family feeling, community membership, and spirituality are transcendent aims of human development. (Mirvis & Hall, 1994: 378)

However, this new view of work has also resulted in confusion for many people as they must now learn to 'navigate' their work life in a different way. "The baby

boomers have yet to achieve consensus as to what the nature of work, careers, retirement, or the work-family interface should be” (Moen, 1998: 44). Changes in career may result in greater personal fulfillment for an individual but changes can also result in new confusion with work (Clarke, 2007). Much greater and more diverse research is needed in order to understand how people make sense of a change in their career.

Evidence from this study suggests that making peace with one’s new changed career...is a more complex and ambiguous business than a review of current career literature might lead us to believe... suggests further avenues for research into individuals' experiences of changing career forms as a corrective to the overly positive and normative literature... In this way our understanding of individual experience of careers would deepen and be made considerably more relevant and sensitive to those coping with change and those assisting them to cope. (Mallon, 1999: 368)

The new paradigm of careers calls for the need for new approaches to career counseling. Traditionally, career counselling has followed the trait-factor approach, and emphasized the need for people to match their individual characteristics, notably personality in order to make appropriate work choices. This approach assumes that human characteristics relating to work do not change (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). However this approach fails to take into account how the individual may change his or her perception of work over time.

Although the process of career choice is one of the oldest in the careers field, it is still one of the most relevant to what is happening today. Even though the original view of the career as being largely determined by one’s initial choice of occupation has been replaced with the more emergent, protean perspective, there is a fresh need to understand how choices are made on an ongoing basis. (Hall, 2002: 87)

To respond to the challenges of this new work environment, scholars are calling for new career-counselling methods. One such concept, is the need to help people learn to

'self-manage' their careers (King, 2001, 2004; Quigley & Tymon, 2006). "These are challenging times for workers. Many commentators have argued that, in an increasingly chaotic organizational environment, workers will experience a great range and frequency of transitions during their working lives, and will need to take responsibility for charting and navigating their careers" (King, 2004: 113). Super (1983) has argued for career-counselling models that takes into account life-span development, and there have been preliminary efforts to bring an existential perspective into career counseling (Asa-Sophia et al., 2005; Maglio, Butterfield, & Borgen, 2005; Van Kaam, 1966).

The new paradigm of multiple careers means that an individual may have many more choices to make regarding work which greatly impacts his or her journey of life. Unfortunately, many people may not be prepared for the challenges of change this new dynamic of life presents and be unduly influenced by outside forces. Grierson (2007: 34) notes, "If we can assign a verb to our passage through life, possibly the best fit is *drift*. We mark time and distance, and we may try roughly to hold a bearing, but we go where we're pushed." Adding to the potential danger of drifting in life are the problems of turning points or crisis times that we may encounter as we age.

Turning Points and Crises

The six-figure income, the prestigious job at Apple, the status of being a teenage Internet whiz kid and the endless good times wore thin and wore out Victoria-born Tom Williams. He was 25 years old and having an early mid-life crisis. Meaning had been sucked from his life, says Mr. Williams, so he dumped his job, salary and lifestyle and started selling philanthropy online to make his world real again. (Meissner, 2007: A8)

Also of relevance to this thesis is change, as one of the key questions to be investigated is why people change their view of work. This highlights the need to review

the concept of life turning points which indicate that people may view their life and especially their work, differently as they age (Grierson, 2007; Hollis, 1993, 2005; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001; Wethington, Kessler, & Pixley, 2004).

Many people experience some "aha" moment in their lives, whether it results from being fired from a job, dissatisfaction with a dead-end career, or reaching midlife, when they need to reexamine where they have been and where they really want to go. However, not all people experiencing organizational change, personal plateaus, or midlife will recycle. Many accept that their careers will no longer offer the personal satisfaction they once expected. Others will take jobs in which they are underemployed; many will forego retraining and will be unprepared for new career opportunities. (Sullivan, Martin, Carden, & Mainiero, 2003: 39)

A person at age forty may view his or her life very differently than when he or she was thirty or twenty years of age, and therefore we need to include in our discussion the topic of adult development, and especially the adult lifecycle. "Most men undergo a mid-life change in style of work and living. Early adulthood produces qualities of strength, quickness, endurance, and output. Middle adulthood is a season when other qualities can ripen: wisdom, judiciousness, magnanimity, unsentimental compassion, breadth of perspective, the tragic sense" (Levinson, 1978: 25-26). We need to understand that as the individual changes, so too may his or her relationship to work.

The concept of the adult lifecycle originally came from the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (Erikson, 1963). Whereas Freud focused his efforts primarily on child development, Jung became more interested in how adults change throughout the course of their lives. Jung categorized adult development into "young adulthood," which he believed to last until approximately age forty when personality was established, and "individuation," from age forty until death (Levinson, 1978). Erikson (1963) built upon the work of Freud and Jung, but identified three stages of adult development: Intimacy

(age 21 to 35), Generativity (age 35 to 55), and, Integrity (55 to death). Levinson (1978: 30) contends that, “the nature of each era is reflected in the evolution of a man’s careers in work, family and other settings, his involvement in solitary and social enterprises, and his broader life plans and goals.”

The research on adult development indicates that there are “turning points” in a life; the “mid-life” crisis and in more recent years, the “quarterlife” crisis (Robbins, 2008; Thorspecken, 2005). Crisis points in life have been described as key times in a person’s life when he or she is struggling with major choices that affect their life, especially as it pertains to meaning. “Emerging adults experiencing the quarterlife crisis might be searching for relief from confusion as to which path in life to follow” (Butler, 2005: 65). Especially of interest to scholars (and of most relevance to this thesis) has been the middle stage of adulthood as this is when many people seriously reflect upon their life. “As a person enters the Mid-life Transition, he or she is likely to review his/her progress and ask: ‘What have I done? Where am I now? Of what value is my life to society, to other persons, and especially to myself?’ ...he must deal with the disparity between what he has dreamed of becoming” (Levinson, 1978: 30). Hollis (1993) calls the mid-life years the “middle passage” which he notes, is “less a chronological event than a psychological experience” (: 9).

What kind of play has our life been, in service to what, or to whom? Do we like what we see, if we look honestly, and whose fault is it then? If we do not like what we see, then we are obliged to construct a fiction more worthy of service. If we are stuck, and know we are stuck, and we always do, then is there not some deep imperative to get unstuck? And is not the assumption of this responsibility for finding the right fiction to serve what we mean by “becoming something when we grow up”? (Hollis, 2001: 53)

The mid-life years are also, frequently a time when people experience a career plateau (Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). It is then when people may change their expectations for their life prompting them to seek out mid-career renewal (Grierson, 2007; Hollis, 2008; Leider, 1976).

If a man at 40 has failed to realize his most cherished dreams, he must begin to come to terms with the failure and arrive at a new set of choices around which to rebuild his life. If he has succeeded brilliantly, he must consider the meaning and value of his success.... often a man who has accomplished his goals comes to feel trapped: his success is meaningless and he is now caught within a stultifying situation. Many men find their lives relatively satisfactory in some respects and disappointing or destructive in others. Whatever his life condition, every man in the early forties needs to sort things out, come to terms with the limitations and consider the next steps in the journey (Levinson, 1978: 30-31).

As people change throughout adulthood they will tend to view their life through a new lens, perhaps with new possibilities, and this will naturally affect how work is viewed. For example, upon graduation from university many students will tend to be seeking a job or career that pays them the highest salary. They may choose work based on financial need if they have large financial debt accumulated throughout their university years, and pass up work that they would prefer in favor of work that pays the highest salary. However, as people age, their life circumstances will undoubtedly change, as well as their personal views on what is important to them. This means that they may look to other possibilities when it comes to work or to expand components of their life or to add new avenues of life. "There is a search for meaning and new life goals: Spirituality is becoming increasingly important, especially for people at mid-life. With the former goals now viewed now viewed in a different perspective, and with time seemingly suddenly shorter, the person may begin to search for new values, goals, and meaning in

life (Hall, 2002: 113). Of greater importance in one's life then, as we age, is the concept of 'spirituality.'

Spirituality and Work

Adding a new voice and therefore greater emphasis to the discussion of the meaning of work is the 'Spirituality and Work' movement. The topic of spirituality and work first appeared in the early-1990s and has grown quickly over the past fifteen years (Dalton, 2001; Elmes & Smith, 2001; Fox, 2003; Fox, 1994; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Gibbons, 2000; Harrington et al., 2001; Howard, 2002; Lips-Wiersma, 2002, 2004; McCormick, 1994; Mitroff & Denton, 1999a; Ottaway, 2003; Tischler, 1999). The interest in spirituality and work has resulted in a plethora of research, space at academic business conferences, and consulting businesses. There are now numerous articles, books, websites and consulting companies dedicated to the promotion of spirituality and work. A search on "spirituality and work" in the databases ABI and EBSCO yields 410 and 1588 results respectively. On the Google search engine "spirituality and work" yields 154,000 results. It has been estimated that there are now over 300 books on spirituality and work. The Academy of Management has created a new interest section called "Management, Spirituality, and Religion" to respond to the great demand for the incorporation of values at work. "Business owners, managers, policymakers, and academic researchers all need to remember, as many surveys indicate, that tens of millions of world citizens are hungering for transmaterial, mind-expanding, soul-enriching, and heart-centred (spiritual) values" (Butts, 1999: 329).

Spirituality and work is viewed from many perspectives and has been defined in a variety of ways. Some scholars regard it from a religious perspective, i.e., bringing God

into work practices, while others view it from a secular perspective. “Spirituality at work is not about religious beliefs...it is about people who perceive themselves as spirited beings, whose spirit needs energizing at work. It is about experiencing real purpose and meaning in their work beyond paychecks and task performance” (Harrington et al., 2001: 155). Dalton (2001: 18) maintains that “it is possible to speak of spirituality as a universal human activity because life is filled with experiences that drive us to question and seek answers on the meaning and purpose of existence.” Mitroff and Denton (1999b: 83) define spirituality “as the basic feeling of being connected with one’s complete self, others, and the entire universe.” No matter how it is defined it is clear that spirituality in the workplace is an attempt to bridge the gap between work and the overall pursuit of a meaningful life.

We each need to find meaning and purpose and develop our potential, to live an integrated life. Spirituality encompasses the way an individual lives out his or her sense of interconnectedness with the world through an ability to tap into deep resources... spirituality is both highly individual and intensely personal, as well as inclusive and universal (Howard, 2002: 231).

The interest in spirituality and work has been linked back to the 1960s, when people were rebelling against many institutions and looking for different life experiences (Tischler, 1999). It has also been connected to the 1980’s where there was a tremendous generation of wealth and people were making increased salaries but were still not happy with their lives (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). The changing of the psychological contract between employee and employer, downsizing and massive company layoffs, and increased use of technology are also considered to be motivators of the spirituality movement (Harrington et al., 2001). Also influencing the spirituality and work movement is a heightened awareness due to scientific discoveries about the dangers to the

environment such as global warming and ozone depletion. Jaccaci and Gault (1999: 22) argue that “this renaissance, this dawning and awakening of humanity, is the emerging era of evolution...it is a time of our conscious creation of human evolution shaping all life on earth.”

Not surprisingly, there are both physical and psychological benefits to having a healthy spiritual life, and work has been shown to play an important role in a person’s well-being. Parker-Hope (2001: 9) claims that “increasingly, the medical profession is promoting the notion that a person’s spiritual well-being may be as important a factor in long-term health as are diet and exercise...it [the value of spiritual health] has become a widely accepted area of medical study.” There has also been a connection proposed between spirituality and emotional intelligence - the more in touch with his or her spirituality, the greater will be his or her emotional intelligence (EQ), and therefore the more productive he or she will be at work (Tischler, Biberman, & McKeage, 2002). Spirituality and work has been shown to have a positive correlation to job satisfaction and helps to prevent burnout (Komala & Ganesh, 2007). Lastly, a spiritual workplace has been shown by some scholars to have a direct correlation to ethical behaviour (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Moberg, 2001; Pava, 1999).

The interest in spirituality and work is contributing a new voice to the meaning of work discussion for academics and lay people. “The study of spirituality and religion has catapulted into mainstream psychology as an area that can shed light on many variables, including those tied to work and working” (Duffy, 2006: 52). Many spirituality and work scholars argue that work should be “meaningful” to the individual, that work should be where we find our “purpose,” and for the need to integrate spirit and work (Fox, 1994;

Harrington et al., 2001; Herman & Gioia, 1998; Mitroff & Denton, 1999a, 1999b; Raelin, 2006). The spirituality and work scholars are also focusing attention on a major question in the workplace: how does one's work add or detract from his or her pursuit of a meaningful life and why can this change?

Conclusion

Work, whether it is a necessary evil due to the financial imperative, or our first love, is one of the most important determinants of whether a person considers his or her life to be meaningful. The new nature of careers is resulting in the non-traditional career path, one where the individual's work life is not static but where instead work may change frequently. This places greater emphasis on the individual to take a more fluid approach to understanding his or her work, the effect of the choices of one's work and how this may need to change throughout one's life. This new view of work highlights the need for new research to increase our understanding of how work is chosen and especially, how this may change. Arthur, Inkson and Pringle (1999: 16) argue, "The emergent links among careers, reciprocities, and life beyond work call for a broadening of career theory." The literature on life turning points and crises indicate that there may be key times in a life where people make significant and sometimes radical changes, especially when it comes to their work lives, and that these changes will be interpreted in different lights at various points. "Life transitions may be experienced as changes for better or for worse – depending on how they are viewed and storied" (McAdams et al., 2001: xvii). Increasing our understanding of the relationship between work and the individual and how this relationship may change over time, can help people assess their work lives and make positive work changes, or perhaps help them 'reframe' how they

view their work. Many spirituality and work scholars argue that work should be where we find meaning, which is also implied in the Job-Career-Calling model (Wrzesniewski, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). These same scholars argue that our work should encompass our spirituality; that we need to bring our “spirituality” with us into the workplace, which of course sounds like a good idea. This implies, however, that it is possible for us to leave our self behind at home when we go to work (like leaving a briefcase) but we cannot separate our work life from other parts of life. The individual self is always present and all experiences of the self must be taken into account as he or she seeks to live a meaningful life. One way to determine an individual’s investment in his or her work and therefore its meaning is the Job-Career-Calling model.

The Job-Career-Calling Model

Career development is, for most people, a lifelong process of getting ready to choose, choosing, and typically, continuing to make choices from among the many occupations available in our society. Each person undertaking this process is influenced by a great number of factors, including family, personal values and aptitudes, and social context. Because of the centrality of work in most people’s lives, it is important that we strive to understand the career development process and how it can be influenced to benefit individuals as well as the greater society. (Brown & Brooks, 1996: xv)

Traditionally, the most common method to study the importance of work in a person’s life was to look at the amount of time spent at work (MOW International Research Team, 1987). However, time spent at work can be misleading, as people may spend long hours at work for a variety of reasons - financial need, to keep from losing their job, fear of failure, to avoid other areas of life or perhaps because of the lack of other areas. Today, the importance of work is studied using the concepts of work

centrality, work salience, and work alienation. Work centrality is defined as “the degree of general importance that working has in the life of an individual at any given point in time” (MOW International Research Team, 1987: 81). Work salience overlaps with work centrality, and is defined as, “the relative importance of work in relation to an individuals other important life roles” (Sverko & Vizek-Vidovic, 1995: 10). Historically, men have been shown to place a greater importance on the role of work in their lives than women who have been focused more on family roles; however this has lessened significantly in recent decades (Matzeder & Krieschok, 1995). Work alienation, popularized by Marx, is a “state of psychological disengagement that generalizes across one's self-image and social relationships both inside and outside of work” (Banai & Reisel, 2007: 466). It is a measure of the “disconnect” people may feel with their work and/or their workplace.

The Job-Career-Calling model provides a practical method to investigate the importance of work in a life with its three distinct categories, but the research is in an early stage and it has been subjected to few follow-up studies (Duffy, 2006). The model was introduced in the classic book, *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al., 1985), which was an in-depth look at how life was being lived in the United States. Bellah et al (1985) argued that people were oriented to their work in three distinct ways, as a Job, as a Career, or as a Calling. They defined a Job as “work as a way of making money and making a living...supports a self defined by economic success, security and all that money can buy,” a Career as work that “traces one’s progress through life by achievement and advancement in an occupation...yields a self defined by a broader sense of success, which takes in social standing and prestige, and by a sense of expanding power and competency that renders work itself a source of self-esteem,” and a Calling as

work that “constitutes a practical ideal of activity and character that makes a person’s work morally inseparable from his or her life...links a person to the larger community...a crucial link between the individual and the public good” (Bellah et al., 1985: 66).

Therefore, a person with a Job orientation views work primarily as a means for economic gain, a Career orientation as a development path, and a Calling orientation as purpose in life and work that the individual would engage in even if he or she had no financial need for work (Bellah et al., 1985). The Job-Career-Calling categorization can be thought of as a continuum of personal investment with a Job orientation placed at one end, a Career orientation in the middle, and a Calling orientation at the far end (Wrzesniewski, 1999).

Job Orientation	Career Orientation	Calling Orientation
Low personal investment		High personal investment

In a Job orientation, work represents the minimal personal investment whereas this is highest at the Calling orientation end of the continuum. People with a Job orientation view work as primarily “financial necessity” and typically they are counting the days until retirement with the belief that at that point they will be free to do what they really want to do in life. A Career orientation lies in the middle of the continuum as it involves a greater investment for the individual than a Job but less than a Calling. “The notion of a ‘career’ implies an organizational ladder to be climbed, but it also stands for an institutionalized life path and a series of choice processes” (Moen, 1998: 41). People with a Calling orientation to work do not separate their work from the rest of their life as people can do with a Job or Career orientation; a Calling *is* their life.

Historically, a career has been considered as work that is desirable, i.e., people are encouraged to seek out a career and not view their work as a only a means of financial gain (Collin & Young, 2000). However in recent years, careers have been replaced in importance by callings and people are now being encouraged to find their calling (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Novak, 1996). Callings were originally related to religious endeavors, i.e., “called by God,” and examples include Mother Theresa and Billy Graham (Delbecq, 2004; Weiss, Skelley, Haughey, & Hall, 2004). Sometimes the term Calling is used interchangeably with vocation while others differentiate between the two with calling being a defined as an “external” call, i.e., outside the self, and vocation being defined as an “internal” call (Dik & Duffy, 2009). “A calling is a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation” (Dik & Duffy, 2009: 427). Callings have also been associated with work that serves the greater good of society (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). From a secular point of view, callings are usually identified by asking people what they would do with their lives if they did not have the financial need to work.

Whereas the Job-Career-Calling model was originally suggested in 1985, research on the model itself began in 1997 and the primary researcher to date has been Amy Wrzesniewski of New York University (Wrzesniewski, 1999, 2002; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski & Tosti, 2006).

Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz (1997) investigated the Job-Career-Calling model by surveying 196 university employees and found considerable empirical support for the distinction between the three orientations. They also found that work orientation was not occupation dependent, i.e., within the same occupation you could find people who viewed the same work as a job, career or calling. The work itself does not necessarily matter, only how it is regarded by the individual. For example, working as a police officer may be a Job for one person, for another it is a Career and for others still, a Calling. "Satisfaction with life and work may be more dependent on how an employee sees his or her work than on income or occupational prestige" (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997: 31). Lastly, they claim that the same work can start as a career or even a calling but over time turn into just a job. The new nurse may at first see his or her work as a calling but this may change significantly over time and later in life consider the same profession as a job.

We believe that we have demonstrated that it is easy for most people to assign themselves to one of the three Job, Career, or Calling dimensions, based on degree of agreement with three paragraphs representing the three work-relations. The differentiation of the three orientations was clearer and easier than we had anticipated. In accord with our predictions, we presented evidence indicating highest life and work satisfaction for respondents who see their work as a Calling – even when income, education, and occupation are at least roughly controlled (the administrative assistants). (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997: 30-31)

In her Ph.D. dissertation on the Job-Career-Calling model and job loss, Wrzesniewski (1999) found that work orientation influences behaviours after suffering a job loss. She also reported a relationship between age and work orientation. Her results indicate that younger job seekers were more oriented towards a career while older job seekers had stronger orientations towards callings.

Preliminary research implies that the most contented and therefore productive people are those who see their work as a calling (De Klerk, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski & Tosti, 2006). “Calling-oriented individuals report higher job and life satisfaction, even after controlling for income, level of education, and occupation, than people who view their work as jobs or careers. These employees also report higher work motivation and are less likely to regret their choice of occupations” (Wrzesniewski & Tosti, 2006: 74).

Freed (2003) investigated the relationship between the three orientations and job satisfaction, and found support that people with a Job orientation were least satisfied with their work, people with a Calling orientation were most satisfied, and that people with a Career orientation were in the middle. Other research has proposed that having a calling is connected with being perceived as a “success” in life (Heslin, 2005). Lastly, it has been suggested that people may be able to “re-craft” i.e., reframe their conception of their work, and change their view in order to find greater meaning in it (Parry, 2006; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). For example, if a hospital cleaner could connect his or her work to the greater purpose of helping others, then the work could be viewed as a calling instead of a job and result in greater meaning for the individual.

Banaga (2000) applied a framework based on spirituality and work to analyze the interviews of sixteen people between the ages of 38 and 78 to investigate why people may view their work as a calling. The results indicated that callings are related to contribution and concern for others, and usually aligned with one’s faith. “The results of my study show that spirituality and religion can have a significant influence in the experience of work” (Banaga, 2000: 218). However, Banaga (2000) also noted that a

Calling may also be connected to increased levels of stress. Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) surveyed 3091 first-year university students using a 20-item scale to investigate the presence of or search for a calling. They concluded that, “students searching for a calling and those who obtain a calling are at very different points in their career development, and that the process to find a career calling may take a considerable amount of time...it may not be until some students feel a calling that they truly understand the importance of work in their lives” (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007: 598). In a review of the literature on Callings, Dik and Duffy (2009) hypothesize that finding a calling may be related to the influence of family and critical events in a person’s life, e.g., disasters such as the 9/11 attacks, Hurricane Katrina, and the Asian tsunami. They call for more research into the origins of callings and how ‘finding your calling’ might be encouraged in people (Dik & Duffy, 2009).

Although a few studies have used interviews to evaluate the Job-Career-Calling model (Banaga, 2000; Wrzesniewski, 1999), the most common method to date has been through a quantitative approach either using self-report items such as: “My work is one of the most important things in my life” and “I am eager to retire,” or asking participants to read a description of each of the three orientations and rate on a 1 to 5 scale how much they felt the description matched their own view of work (sample below) (Wrzesniewski, 1999; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Job – Mr. A works primarily to earn enough money to support his life outside of his job. If he was financially secure, he would no longer continue with his current line of work, but would really rather do something else instead. Mr. A’s job is basically a necessity of life, a lot like breathing or sleeping. He often wishes the time would pass more quickly at work. He greatly anticipates weekends and vacations. If Mr. A lived his life over again, he probably would not go into the same line of work. He would not encourage his friends and children to enter his line of work. Mr. A is eager to retire. (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997: 24)

However, despite the predominance of their use, quantitative methods appear to be limited in their ability to investigate the complexity of how people may view their work, especially how their view of work may change. Wrzesniewski et al (1997) have specifically argued for the need for qualitative studies employing comprehensive interviews to probe the meaning an individual places on the three categories of job, career, and calling.

Conclusion

The Job-Career-Calling model has sparked interest in the management research community but the research is in an early stage, and has been mostly quantitative in nature. Although the model appears to provide an efficient way to categorize the importance of work in a life, human existence is very complex and how people understand the various parts of their lives may defy simple categorizations. As well, the job-career-calling model appears only to describe how people categorize work. It does not attempt to explain or understand why they do. For instance, why is an individual oriented to work in one direction versus another? What causes people to change their view of work? How do “turning” or so-called crisis points relate to how work is viewed? How does one’s work relate to how he or she defines a meaningful life? These important questions do not appear to be answerable via the Job-Career-Calling model alone.

To answer these questions we can conceptualize life as occupying two spheres – the outer life where we interact each day with other people including our work lives, and the inner life, the one we live in our mind, our thoughts and emotions (Fox, 1994). These two components or worlds are closely connected, and in order for the individual self to be

fulfilled they must be adequately bridged. What happens in the outer world arguably affects the inner world and vice versa (Hollis, 2008). The literature on meaning suggests that work is a significant and obvious component of most people's outer life whereas meaning is intrinsic and "realized" in our inner life (Fox, 1994). However, a life is a "perceived reality" by an individual and is set within, and influenced by, a societal context. Thus, "To understand how individuals perceive, evaluate, and carry out their lives, and to grasp the ways in which they cope with the opportunities and constraints imposed by the structural and cultural settings of the larger society, requires the inclusion of the individual as an actor" (Buchmann, 1989: 3-4). The best way I will argue to bring in how the individual makes sense of work is through existentialism.

Bridging Work and Meaning

There is a bridge between the intrapsychic world of existential man and his interpersonal world. The bridge relates the solitary self to a world of other selves. It is not a simple bridge to cross. It, too, has its complex tensions. The stress in man's struggle to relate to his fellow man is in the effort to reconcile the solitude of the private self with an intersubjective communication of that same self. (R. E. Johnson, 1971: 12)

To bridge these very disparate literatures and to help us understand more fully how people view their work and create their lives I will be using the job-career-calling model as a heuristic and be applying a theoretical framework using key existential concepts. Despite the great importance many people place on work it is still only one aspect of a person's life, and therefore, the challenge is to investigate the job-career-calling model within the context of how the individual views his or her overall life, hence the use of existentialism. Existentialism "attempts to understand how events in life fit into

a larger context...involves the process of creating and discovering meaning, which is facilitated by a sense of coherence (order, reason for existence) and a sense of purpose (mission in life, direction)” (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000: 1). The major concepts of existentialism can be used to investigate how people make sense of their life as they attempt to create a meaningful existence. In the next chapter I review existential thought and outline the themes that I will be using to analyze work and the individual.

Chapter 3 – Existentialism

Introduction

The existential self is embodied, Being-within-the-world means that feelings and primordial perception precede rationality and symbol use and, in fact, activate them. The existential self is becoming. The experience of self is constantly unfolding as the individual adapts to new situations and possibilities for self-growth. The existential self is reflexive. The self is the focal point of all aspects of being: values, creativity, and emotions. The self is also the arena for the ongoing tension – if not conflict – between the individual and society. (J. M. Johnson & Kotarba, 2002: 8)

To investigate the individual and work in relation to the creation of a meaningful life I am using a theoretical framework ‘informed’ by existential philosophy because, as I will argue below, existentialism provides the most appropriate concepts to analyze how the individual understands his or her life and make major decisions on an ongoing basis. In this chapter I will review existential thought and outline the five major concepts that I am using to analyze the meaning of work. As mentioned in chapter one, existential philosophy has been utilized primarily as a means of understanding the individual in the context of human existence, most notably in the area of psychological counseling (Barnes, 1959; Bugental, 1965; May, 1953, 1969, 1983; Yalom, 1980) and social work (Kominkiewicz, 2006; Krill, 1978; Miehl & Moffatt, 2000; Thompson, 1992). There have also been efforts to bring an existential perspective into the study of work and organizations (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Kelly & Kelly, 1998; MacMillan, 2006; MacMillan & Mills, 2002; Pauchant, 1993; T. C. Pauchant, 1995; Robin, 1998; Wallace, 2007; Waugh, 2004; Yue & Mills, 2006), career counseling (Asa-Sophia et al., 2005; Cohen, 2003; Malach-Pines & Yafe-Yanai, 2001; Schultze & Miller, 2004), business

ethics (Ashman & Winstanley, 2006; Gilbert, 2002; Jackson, 2005; West, 2008), and leadership (Lawler, 2005). However, despite the use of existentialism in these areas, existentialism has rarely been employed as a method to analyze work choices (as in the job, career, calling model), especially pertaining to changing stages of life.

Existentialism has typically been utilized in five different ways in management research. One approach has been to use a specific philosopher's ideas, e.g., Wallace's (2007) use of Beauvoir's existential feminism as outlined in the classic *The Second Sex* (1983) in her study of female accountants. A second approach has been to apply an existing framework, e.g., Robin's (1998) use of Yalom's existential framework (death, isolation, meaninglessness, freedom) for studying executive men. A third approach has been to apply a particular existential concept to a management problem, e.g., Reedy and Learmonth's (2008) study on death and organizations or Yue and Mills (2006) application of bad faith in sense-making. A fourth approach has been to apply existentialism in its general form to analyze organizational and management issues (MacMillan, 2006; MacMillan & Mills, 2002). Lastly, a fifth approach has been to create a framework based on selective existential concepts, e.g., Ashman and Winstanley's (2006) study on business ethics (nothingness, freedom and choice, dread, Being-in-the-World).

I considered all of these options but after a broad-based review of the existential literature I decided that the most appropriate approach for the purposes of this research was to utilize five major existential themes – Choice, Bad Faith, Authenticity, Contingency, and Death. These themes stood out as the ones most applicable to the inquiry of the research and are key concepts which informed Bugental's (1965)

existential-analytical approach. They provide a theoretical framework to analyze: (1) how possibilities enter consciousness and choices are made, (2) how choices may result in a state of bad faith (feelings of living inauthentically), (3) how an authentic existence (meaningful life) is viewed, (4) how unexpected events may change how life is viewed, and (5) how the prospect of death impacts how life is understood.

Existential Thought

If nothing else survives of all the existentialists have said, it will be impossible to forget the utter seriousness with which they have dealt with human existence. “I want honesty,” Kierkegaard is supposed to have exclaimed shortly before his death. “Truth is courage and error is cowardice,” Nietzsche added to this. And in a sense this passionate willingness to search and find and to witness for this supreme personal experiment with one’s whole personality is the core of existentialism. It forms the basis for authentic existence, is the key to the overcoming of estrangement, and gives the highest promise for the preservation of free and responsible man. (Breisach, 1962: 237)

Existentialism is a multi-faceted view of the nature of individual “Being,” and as such, is made up of many varying perspectives (Baggini, 2005; Breisach, 1962; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Cotkin, 2003; Grene, 1959; Kaufmann, 1989; Reinhardt, 1960; Reynolds, 2006; Schrag, 1977; Tanzer, 2008; Tillich, 1952). Though Sartre (1970: 25-26) himself argued that, “the word is now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all,” there is general agreement that existential philosophy attempts to make sense of and provide answers to the circumstances and dilemma of the human condition. Karl and Hamalian (1974: 13) argue that, “Existentialism, ultimately, is more a frame of reference than a fixed idea...a process of thought rather than a distinct movement,” and it is the framework I wish to develop in this chapter. The existential

philosophers challenged our conception of what it means to be ‘human’ and in doing so gave us the ambitious goal of encouraging humanity to seek out an ‘authentic’ existence. Understanding the challenge of creating that authentic existence and how work fits in the puzzle of a life is the primary objective of my research.

Existential philosophy can arguably be traced back to Socrates when he famously stated that a key problem of humanity was a lack of self-examination - “the unexamined life is not worth living.” However, the initiator of existentialism, as we know it today, is considered to be Soren Kierkegaard, as he was reportedly the first to reject the emphasis on universalism in favor of a focus on the individual - “my listeners, do you at present live in such a way that you are yourself clearly and eternally conscious of being an individual” (Kierkegaard, 1956: 195)? Since Kierkegaard, many others have contributed to our understanding of existential philosophy – Buber (1958, 1967), Husserl (1967, 1970), Nietzsche (1974, 1990, 1999), Camus (1967b, 1972), Jaspers (1957, 1969), Marcel (1949a, 1949b, 1950), Heidegger (1967), Sartre (1956, 1962, 1970, 1975), Beauvoir (1983), Tillich (1952) and Frankl (1978, 1985), each providing his or her own unique perspective (Collins, 1952; Cotkin, 2003; MacDonald, 2001; Reynolds, 2006; Wahl, 1969). Others, such as Hegel, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Kafka could also be included among the Existentialists, but their inclusion would be debated (Reynolds, 2006). Some, such as Heidegger and Camus, rejected the existentialist label (perceiving it to be a negative characterization), but we cannot ignore their influence on the development of existential theory, even though they may address many different issues through their philosophy (Harper, 1972; Kaufmann, 1989; Reinhardt, 1960; Reynolds, 2006; Tanzer, 2008).

They share a common concern for what Husserl called the ‘life-world’ (Lebenswelt), for the world of everyday experience as opposed to the realm of transcendental consciousness. However, apart from this concern with the ‘life-world’ and the way in which men exist within it, it is misleading to view their work in similar terms. Each develops a theoretical perspective which, while adhering to a roughly similar position in terms of the various strands of the subjective-objective dimension of our analytical scheme, addresses itself to quite different issues and problems. (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 243)

Despite existentialism’s ancient history, it is more recently rooted in nineteenth century Europe and only really came into prominence in the twentieth century following the end of World War II (Allen, 1973; Barrett, 1962; Cotkin, 2003; Tanzer, 2008). After the war, Europe went through a long period of recovery and the general population experienced profound feelings of confusion, questioning, and disillusionment with religion, and were therefore, looking for a philosophical direction (Breisach, 1962; Cotkin, 2003; Reynolds, 2006). Heidegger, Sartre, and other philosophers provided answers and direction for individual life through their existential philosophy.

Existentialism has been described as the “irrational” philosophy, and a reaction against the Age of Reason (Barrett, 1962; Breisach, 1962; Roubiczek, 1964). “In opposition to the Platonist claim that things in the world are what they are in accordance with rational, unambiguous principles, that the world is rational, and thus that ambiguities in the world are merely apparent; the existentialist claims that things really are ambiguous, that there are no unambiguous principles constituting that world – the world for the existentialist is irrational” (Tanzer, 2008: 7). Hence, existential philosophy is both “irrational” and inherently difficult for many people. The notion of life being ambiguous may be threatening to people who seek comfort and security in life, as we will see below.

Existence Precedes Essence

Existentialism is based on the premise that “existence precedes essence” – that people are thrown into the world and simply exist, and their essence is created through the lives they choose to live. The emphasis of existentialism is on the individual’s experience with life and not on a preconceived human nature. “What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence...we mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards” (Sartre, 1970: 28). This puts the onus, and hence responsibility, on the individual and how he or she chooses to live life. This notion of the individual creating meaning is quite different from the belief that humanity has a pre-determined essence (see Locke, Hobbes, or Rousseau) or that it is for example the mode of production that creates man’s essence (Marx & Engels, 1963, 1968), although Sartre was willing to strongly consider the latter possibility in *Search for a Method* (1963). In existentialism, essence and therefore meaning is created by the individual on an on-going basis throughout his or her life.

For many existentialists, humans are a “tortured” species because of their incomprehension (of the “absurdity” as some would say) of life. We are thrown into this world but, as Sartre notes below, are given no rulebook for how to live.

According to Sartre, man, if he honestly reflects, cannot help realizing that his situation is like that of the player or the artist. Herein consists the absurdity of existence. Life has the same value as a game has – that is, whatever value the players choose to give it. One has to play the game, but one is never given a book of rules. (Barnes, 1959: 49)

Not surprisingly, many of the existential philosophers were atheists and believed that the “absence of God” resulted in “emptiness” for life, hence incomprehension, which must be somehow reconciled and filled (Breisach, 1962; Harper, 1972). Kierkegaard and

Tillich are notable exceptions, as they believe that the only logical answer for how to live life is through devotion to God (Reynolds, 2006; Tillich, 1952). Regardless of their religious outlook, however, the existentialists were all tapping into people's lack of, and search for, meaning in their lives. Above all else, existentialism is about awakening or rebelling from the "ordinary person" syndrome, the routine pattern of existence that society can inadvertently or overtly place on people (Olson, 1962; Reynolds, 2006; Wild, 1966). Breisach (1962: 4-5) contends that, "Existentialists have asked for a life in which man continuously questions his purpose and accepts responsibility for his actions, one which truly reflects man's special position in this world." From birth, different societies ingrain in people an imperative to live the "good" life, one which is usually determined by the approval of other people in that society. For example, in our Western context, a young person may choose to pursue a certain profession because it is one in which the parents have encouraged as opposed to what the person truly would like to do. This is traditionally followed by marriage, children, home ownership, and planning for retirement without perhaps thinking about the real desire for any or all of these things.

The Self

From Kierkegaard through to Sartre, self is not understood as a concrete entity, a thing that pre-exists my thinking or recognition of it, as if it lies around waiting for me to inspect as the mood takes me. For Existentialism, self is a 'relational' term, a way of Being which dynamically constitutes the self at the same time as it reflects upon a self which might appear to be already present. (Earnshaw, 2006: 2)

Although there are many types of existentialism, there is general agreement that existentialism is focused on how the individual self creates meaning in a chaotic world (Barnes, 1959; Breisach, 1962; Reinhardt, 1960; Reynolds, 2006; Sartre, 1956, 1970;

Wahl, 1969). Existential thought highlights the enormous possibilities of human existence and what can “be” for individual life; the focus is on individual Being and the reflexive Self that is always being constituted. “Wherever man has seen his life and his world as infinitely possible, as infinitely variable, as infinitely problematic, there existentialism exists as a region of the mind” (Karl & Hamalian, 1974: 13). For the Existentialists, “philosophy is essentially the study of Being” (Wahl, 1969: 95), i.e., what does it mean to exist. “Existence is reached most immediately and certainly in the existing self, although not even the existentialists can settle among themselves upon the exact nature of this self as revealed in a primary inspection” (Collins, 1952: 196). Heidegger argues that the most important question people can ask themselves is, “What is being?” He argued that this was the only true question of significance and everything else was secondary to the investigation of existence. Heidegger developed his own theory of human being (separating himself from other existential philosophers), which he labeled Dasein, from the German word which means “being there” or simply “existence” (Harman, 2007).

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence- in terms of a possibility of itself; to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. (Heidegger, 1967: 33)

The question of what is “being,” is, of course, up for great debate (May, 1983; Reynolds, 2006), but many philosophers agree that it is related to an awareness or consciousness of oneself, that one “is.” For example, consciousness makes us aware of thoughts and feelings, and of time passing. Bugental (1965: 27) defines “‘be-ing’ as a name for the process of self-aware existing.” Sartre uses the terms “being-in-itself” (en

soi) and “being-for-itself” (pour soi). Being-for-itself refers to the capacity for self-reflection, possessed by humans, while being-in-itself refers to that which does not have this capacity, i.e., objects which have no consciousness (Reynolds, 2006). May (1983: 17) defines Being as “the individual’s ‘pattern of potentialities.’” According to Heidegger, humans are unique in that they have an understanding of “being in the world,” and they must then deal with the possibilities or paths of life from which they must choose, rather than follow through instinct (Heidegger, 1967).

As we make choices, therefore, we produce a new self, but that new self is only a temporary self as the individual is always changing based on new intentions, new choices and new experiences.

Each act of intentionally derived reflection, of necessity produces a new and unique interpretation of ‘I’. In that act of self-reflective construction, we rely on the relationship between the external stimulus and the perceptually selective variables of past experience, present mood and future expectation. In other words, at each point of self-reflection, the *self-construct* that emerges is the result of the prior intentional act. But no one intentional act is entirely identical to any other since both the physical and perceptual variables will have altered at each instance of reflective awareness. As such, ‘the self’ that emerges at any given intentional moment is phenomenologically ‘real’ singular and relatively coherent insofar as it is able to construct, or ‘story’, a temporal narrative incorporating (selective) past experience, current mood and future expectations or goals. But, at the same time, this ‘self’ is also revealed as an impermanent construct that, at best, is a partial expression of an infinity of potential interpretationally constructed selves. (Spinelli, 2005: 83)

Therefore, the focus of this thesis is on the individual, the existential being or self that is continually being constituted through his or her experiences and by reflecting upon those experiences. Additionally, whereas there have been a variety of concepts proposed by the existential philosophers, I am using five major existential themes – Choice, Bad Faith, Authenticity, Contingency, and Death. These themes have been drawn from the

traditional existential writers but also from the existential-analytical therapy literature. The next five sections will describe the central themes that I will be using to analyze how people view work and meaning. Although I am separating out the themes for the purposes of the framework, they are intricately related and therefore overlap with each other.

Choice

Choice translates necessity into freedom. This does not mean, however, that necessity is dissolved. The self still remains a synthesis of necessity and possibility, but it takes on a new qualification. In every act there is a hidden necessity or a factor of facticity. If necessity were dissolved, finitude would vanish, and the self would become an infinite or absolute freedom. But as long as it exists, the self remains a finite and actualized freedom, which means that it has a destiny, or as Heidegger would say, it 'exists factically.' (Schrag, 1977: 191)

The first major theme I am using is the belief that the individual is conscious and free to choose, and therefore bears ultimate responsibility for his or her life (Breisach, 1962; Bugental, 1965; Reinhardt, 1960; Reynolds, 2006; Solomon, 1972). In existentialism the individual views and interprets life through his or her own subjective prism. For the individual "being," then, life is a purely subjective experience and therefore, of primary importance is how choices and actions (and the subsequent results of those choices and actions) are interpreted, and affect the self. Sartre (1970: 24) argues that, "Existentialism, in our sense of the word, is a doctrine that does render human life possible...which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and human subjectivity." Each individual places a value on the various aspects of his or her life; this ultimately creates meaning, and it is constantly changing.

An outsider's questions to an existentialist should be "What do you find when you think about yourself, what is going on inside you, what are your primary

immediate experiences?” And the existentialist as insider would reply, “You may well ask, for every time I look I find something different.” (Harper, 1972: 10)

Sartre notes somewhat pessimistically that we are “condemned to be free,” i.e., freedom brings choice and subsequent responsibility for our actions (Sartre, 1956). Freedom of choice is a concept that many people do not accept, preferring to believe that life is not up to them. Some may believe that it is easier to deal with life if we think that we are really not in control, and therefore cannot be totally responsible for our lives. However, if we are free, as existentialism strongly emphasizes, all actions (and non-actions) in life are choices, and in the end we define ourselves through our choices. Our freedom gives us these choices, choices that result in the path that we follow, and ultimately in the life that we live. “Life is nothing until it is lived; but it is yours to make sense of, and the value of it is nothing else but the sense that you choose” (Sartre, 1970: 54).

The belief that humans have total freedom of choice has been echoed by many scholars including the psychologist Viktor Frankl who argues that even when we cannot control actions, we can still choose how to react to any given situation. Frankl uses the example of his own experiences of being in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany to illustrate that even in terrible circumstances humans can choose how they view and react to life (Frankl, 1985). Sartre agrees with Frankl’s contention that the individual is “free as a conscious being to choose the meaning that s/he will give the facts in his/her situation” (Lavine, 1984: 359). According to this philosophy, a person’s life is made up of the sum of his or her decisions that are made each day. “Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but

the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is” (Sartre, 1970: 41). Even though people for many reasons may pass up opportunities in life, Sartre (1956: 472) also says, “We can even choose not to choose.” And, in not choosing, he is arguing, we have taken an action and made a choice.

I can persist in manifesting myself in a certain kind of employment because I am inferior in it, whereas in some other field I could without difficulty show myself equal to the average. It is this fruitless effort which I have chosen, simply because it is fruitless – either because I prefer to be the last rather than to be lost in the mass or because I have chosen discouragement and shame as the best means of attaining being. (Sartre, 1956: 472)

An emphasis on choice, however, does not mean that people are completely isolated and unaffected by others. Despite Heidegger’s emphasis on “being,” people cannot just spend their time inquiring “what am I?” People are situated within the world and, therefore must deal with daily living which Heidegger calls Dasein’s “average everydayness.” “Dasein and the world are not two distinct entities that can vary independently of each other. They are complementary... Dasein’s approach to the things around it is a practical one of circumspect concern rather than disinterested contemplation” (Inwood, 1997: 37). Humans are not alone in the world and must share this world with others, and are, arguably, dependent on other people to give meaning to their lives as meaning tends to come through our relationship to other people. “By declaring that man is responsible for and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system” (Frankl, 1985: 133). If meaning is discovered as we exist in the world and perhaps greatly based on the values of the majority, then this may account for the importance placed on work and why people

may choose the work that they do. Work is of such importance today because success and status in life tends to be measured in relation to other people – salary and position. For example, medical and law professions are, in Western society, highly sought after occupations as these professions provide both a high status and a significant salary.

In order to have agency or choice, it is necessary for the individual to have awareness of his or her existence and therefore an important question is, “what level of consciousness does the individual have?” Consciousness refers to awareness of one’s individuality, awareness of thoughts and emotions, dreams, desire, and most importantly, the finiteness of life, one’s mortality. As conscious beings, individuals “cannot logically be regarded as causally determined by unconscious forces by antecedent psychological conditions” of his or her life (Lavine, 1984: 358). However, some people may not regard their life, especially their work, as their own choice, but instead as the result of forces outside of their control such as pressure from parents, economic necessity, or the availability of work (Wallace, 2007). This is unfortunately common as many students have informed me that they had no idea why they were pursuing a business education; it was their parents’ idea, not theirs.

Man has not chosen the particular situation in which he finds himself “in the world,” and he feels himself oppressed and hemmed in by a strange and hostile environment. These limitations of his human situation are not only of a physical but also of a psychological nature. In certain moods man feels himself not only as a prisoner in his surrounding world but also, as it were, imprisoned and enslaved by his changing emotional reactions, by his instincts and urges. (Reinhardt, 1960: 237)

Many scholars would of course argue that all people do not have the same degree of freedom in life and choices, i.e., the deterministic view, because all lives are not situated the same. Existentialists would not deny this since they believe that choices are

made from the possibilities that the individual has in front of him or her at a particular point in time, and therefore, choice can be considered a relative concept. Frankl (1985: 143) contends that, “Man constantly makes his choices concerning the mass of present potentialities; for which of these will be condemned to non-being and which will be actualized?” Therefore, all life is situated within a personal context, or world, and is created within that perceived world. “The existentialist meaning of the world is disclosed only when the question is subjectively formulated: “How do I exist in the world”” (Schrag, 1977: 27)? In effect, we then create the world in which we live.

World is the structure of meaningful relationships in which a person exists and in the design of which he participates. Thus world includes the past events which condition my existence and all the vast variety of deterministic influences which operate upon me. But it is these as I relate to them, am aware of them, carry them with me, molding, inevitably forming, building them in every moment of relating. For to be aware of one’s world means at the same time to be designing it. (May, 1959a:59-60)

For example, if you ask people to describe their lives, as I do in this thesis, it is important to recognize that how the person interprets his or her choices is based on the givenness or situation that he or she has lived within. “A life goes on inside, varied and complex, depending on the individual, but also conditioned by certain fundamental limitations of knowledge and experience” (Harper, 1972: 87). The observer rarely knows or understands the context within which people view their lives and make decisions. Harman (2007: 161) notes that, “Even many analytic philosophers seem to be coming around to the view that all perceptions and statements emerge from some sort of dark background, whatever this might be.”

Since the individual is free to choose his or her life, this then leads to the question of “how is one to live?” Existentialism’s answer is, famously, to live the “authentic life;”

however while we choose our being our awareness of that is often buried in bad faith caused by external influences resulting in inauthenticity.

Bad Faith

At the very core of each philosophy has always been the wish to bring fulfillment to the human longing to find the meaning of life. The existentialists have held that such a fulfillment can come not from the creation of thought systems but only in authentic existence. Consequently, unauthentic existence is the direct antipode of fulfillment. It represents deficiency and negativity. (Breisach, 1962: 189)

The second major theme I am using is the concept of bad faith, which can be viewed as synonymous with “feelings of inauthenticity”, i.e., when the individual is living a false life. “Bad faith is the Sartrean equivalent of inauthenticity” (Warnock, 1970: 98), which is a possible state of existence due to one’s freedom to choose and therefore bearing responsibility for one’s life. “Freedom provides the ontological basis for unauthenticity [sic] and authenticity as possible modes of existence...Man can affirm his freedom through resolute choice and thus attain integrity, or he can abdicate his freedom, neglect to choose, lose his existential centeredness, and succumb to unauthenticity” (Schrag, 1977: 180). The problem is that many people do not question their “being” (how should I exist?) and tend to act in “bad faith,” which means that the individual acts in accord with assigned definitions of self, taking neither full credit or blame for his or her actions. It is “an attempt to escape from . . . [individual] freedom by pretending that human affairs are unavoidable or necessary, as is the causal order of things” (Lavine, 1984: 361). This is echoed by Barnes (1959: 48) who comments, “...man cannot bear the realization that all the values he lives by, his purposes, his projects are sustained by his own free choice; he finds it too great a strain to accept sole

responsibility for his life. Therefore he takes refuge in the belief that somehow the external world is so structured that it guarantees the worth of its objects, it provides specific tasks which have to be done, it demands of each person a definite way of living which is the right one.” Free will and free choice are difficult concepts, undoubtedly, and many people do not even think about how they live their lives.

Socrates stated that “the unexamined life is not worth living,” and this has been interpreted as “the unexamined life is a wasted life,” because it means that someone is sleepwalking (unconsciously) through life (Morris, 1999). Socrates argued that we must question who we are and what is important in our life, and that it is only through self-awareness that we then choose our lives and live a meaningful life (McClelland, 1951). Sartre too stresses that people need to be “conscious” of their choices and live an “authentic” life, and that to be conscious is to be free. The opposite is to live in “bad faith” or “inauthentically” where people live unconsciously, not accepting their freedom. For example, a person may stay in a marriage or job in which they are not happy but never even know or acknowledge that it is the source of their unhappiness. Living in “bad faith” is based on self-deception and falsehood. This means that we must be self-aware and recognize our circumstances and freedom to choose. “We say indifferently of a person that he shows signs of bad faith or that he lies to himself... [we] shall willingly grant that bad faith is a lie to oneself, on condition that we distinguish the lie to oneself from lying in general” (Sartre, 1956: 48).

Heidegger describes inauthenticity as people being ‘untrue’ to themselves, blindly following other people, and living a sham life.

Dasein is sometimes authentic and sometimes not. Does Heidegger mean that only authentic Dasein is really Dasein, is really a human being? That inauthentic

Dasein is not properly human? No. He associates *eigentlich* with the adjective *eigen*, 'own', which is used in such contexts as 'having a room of one's own', 'having a mind of one's own', and 'being one's own master'. To be authentic is to be true to one's own self, to be one's own person, to do one's own thing. (Inwood, 1997: 26)

Inauthenticity also relates to death as "inauthentic" people are not consciously aware of their inevitable death. Instead they ignore the constant threat of not knowing when their life will end. The authentic person is constantly aware of the possibility of his or her own death and faces this possibility continually. Inwood (1997: 78) notes, "Authentic Dasein runs ahead to its own death...If Dasein runs ahead of its own death, then it can escape the clutches of the 'they' and make an authentic choice about its own way of being." The knowledge of death provides Dasein with the choice between authenticity and inauthenticity.

One difference between authenticity and inauthenticity is that authentic Dasein is not wholly engrossed by the present and by the immediate past and future. Authentic Dasein looks ahead to its death and back to its birth, and beyond its birth to the historical past...Only the present moment exists now, the past no longer exists, and the future does not yet exist. So there are no temporally extended objects or events, no world enduring over time, only an instantaneous temporal slice of a world and of the objects and events within it. (Inwood, 1997: 67)

Heidegger says that we "fall" (fallenness) into inauthenticity and become what is expected of us in the "public arena" and behave according to the norms and rules of society. We escape from our true selves into a public life that is untrue or false. Heidegger's view of inauthenticity is similar to Sartre's living in 'bad faith.' Yalom (1980: 378) states that, "the human beings 'universal conflict' is that one strives to be an individual, and yet being an individual requires that one endure a frightening isolation." As a result of these feeling of isolation and loneliness, people may take comfort with

other people and become negatively dependent on them, resulting in the loss of their individuation. “The contrast between authenticity and inauthenticity is for some synonymous with the contrast between good faith and bad faith, between being true to yourself and betraying yourself, between being sincere and insincere, between being a “phony,” or a “fake,” or a “poser,” and being “real” or, again, “authentic” (Feldman & Hazlett, : 1). Living in “bad faith” is always a threat to people as it can occur at any point in time and it precludes living the authentic or meaningful life.

Authenticity

Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfillment or self-realization in which it is usually couched. This is the background that gives moral force to the culture of authenticity, including its most degraded, absurd, or trivialized forms. It is what gives sense to the idea of “doing your own thing” or “finding your own fulfillment.” (Taylor, 1992: 29)

The third major theme I am using is the concept of authenticity, or how the individual defines a meaningful existence. “For Sartre, authenticity is creation of meaning” (Breisach, 1962: 197). Accordingly, the overwhelming challenge for the individual is the creation of “authentic” or meaningful life, and this is unique to each individual. “Meaning in life is obtained through an authentic existence. The conditions for achieving this kind of existence are commitment to actualize one’s possibilities to choose and decide about the possibilities and to act on them” (Orbach, 2008: 284). The starting point for authentic action is the recognition that meaning must be determined by the individual self (Lavine, 1984). The individual must accept responsibility for his or her life and make living an authentic life a continual and never-ending goal. “Man moves

physically, morally, and intellectually in view of an end, in order to attain a greater richness of his own being and existence as well as in order to enrich and enhance the being he finds in the surrounding world” (Reinhardt, 1960: 198). Authenticity is subjective to the individual and only manifests itself in the life that is ultimately lived, a life in which he or she is conscious and free. Golomb (1995: 10) notes, “though the term [authenticity] is indeed derived from *auctoritas*, the authority in question is self-directed – it is the mastery of one who freely creates the pathos of authenticity and strives to express and live it in the everyday.” The authentic life is somewhat similar to Maslow’s concept of “self-actualization” (Maslow, 1971). However authenticity is more a way of living than a final destination.

At each point there is a progression choice and a regression choice. There may be a movement toward defense, toward safety, toward being afraid; but on the other side, there is the growth choice. To make the growth choice instead of the fear choice a dozen times a day is to move a dozen times toward self-actualization. Self-actualization is an on-going process; it means making each of the many single choices about whether to lie or to be honest, whether to steal or not to steal at a particular point, and it means to make each of these choices as a growth choice. (Maslow, 1971: 45)

The authentic life is contingent on how the individual views the world and his or her beliefs about meaning, and “each individual has to come to her own conclusions about authenticity” (Golomb, 1995: 200). Therefore, authenticity cannot be judged by another person, but can only be assessed by the individual herself. I may believe that my friend is living the “wrong” life however the authenticity of another person’s life is not for me to decide. It is subjective and so this judgment of life can only be made by the individual. Bugental (1965: 33) states, “authenticity is a term used to characterize a way of being in the world in which one’s being is in harmony with the being of the world

itself...we are inauthentic to the extent that we are in conflict with the givenness of being.” The Authentic person recognizes that human existence is a mystery, and he or she ventures forward creating meaning as he or she journeys through life (Breisach, 1962). In effect, the individual “chooses” who to be and then leads his or her life in accordance with the choice.

The basic step in achieving inward freedom is “choosing one’s self.” This strange-sounding phrase of Kierkegaard’s means to affirm one’s responsibility for one’s self and one’s existence. It is the attitude which is opposite to blind momentum or routine existence: it is an attitude of aliveness and decisiveness; it means that one recognizes that he exists in his particular spot in the universe, and he accepts the responsibility for this existence. This is what Nietzsche meant by the “will to live” – not simply the instinct for self-preservation, but the will to accept the fact that one is one’s self, and to accept responsibility for fulfilling one’s own destiny, which in turn implies accepting the fact that one must make his basic choices himself. (May, 1953: 168-169)

However, according to Existentialists, living the authentic life is difficult as people are alienated, or isolated from the external world in which they are situated, and unduly susceptible to the influence of the herd (other people) (Breisach, 1962; Heidegger, 1967; Pappenheim, 1959; Solomon, 1974). “Many people are like blind men feeling their way along in life only by means of touching a succession of other people” (May, 1953: 32). This alienation results in feelings of anxiety and dread which make it difficult to live the authentic or meaningful life. “What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaninglessness in rational terms” (Frankl, 1985: 141). At one extreme is the idea that since life is without universal meaning, and therefore, ultimately a meaningless endeavor, then suicide is a rational act (Tillich, 1952; Yalom, 1980). On the other hand, even if people agree with Camus and his somewhat pessimistic portrayal

of life in the *Myth Of Sisyphus* (Camus, 1967a), that life is only a “meaningless game,” we do exist and most people try to live their lives to the best of their ability. In the past decades, as we saw in chapters one and two, many people thought that the path to a meaningful life was through economic success, but this has not led to happiness and fulfillment (Frankl, 1978). People are searching for more than economic success in the workplace, and again, this may help to explain both the rise of the spirituality and work movement and the existentialist’s prescient grasp of the nature of human alienation and therefore of our need for authenticity.

In this limitedness of our autonomy, as in our limitedness of awareness and action, resides the existential anxiety that is part of the human experience. We know our limitedness and seek for some surety, some sign “out there” and finding none, are confronted by a sense of the emptiness of the “out there” and the threat of ultimate meaninglessness. (Bugental, 1965: 38)

Humans are arguably the sum of their actions throughout life, and Sartre notes, (1970: 42) “Man is no other than a series of undertakings, that he is the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings.” There are numerous choices to be made, and each choice may result in either bad faith and stagnation of the individual, or authenticity and the growth of the individual. Even though he is not considered an existentialist, this view seems somewhat similar to Fromm’s (1976) concept of a “having” orientation to life versus a “being” orientation to life. Fromm argued that the majority of people in Western society are focused on a *having* orientation where the goal of life is to accumulate and own; a *being* orientation, on the other hand, is about experiencing life. “I refer to two fundamental modes of existence, to two different kinds of orientation toward self and the world, to two different kinds of character structure the respective predominance of which determines the totality of a person’s

thinking, feeling, and acting” (Fromm, 1976: 24). So, according to Fromm, a having orientation, i.e., having a spouse, having a car, home ownership, requires very different values and attitudes toward life, than someone who is oriented towards being, and who experiences joy and fulfillment within daily existence.

Additionally, a person may at times be living an unconscious life and/or be living in bad faith, and not know this. In this thesis I will be focusing on the middle stage of life, as the mid-life period seems to be for some at least, a time of increased awareness and possibly an awakening to the signs of “bad faith.” Many people come to midlife pondering the question “what am I doing with my life”? The mid-life questioning, according to an existential framework, can be viewed as a gap or incongruence between “real” life and “authentic” life. “How many of us, arriving at mid-life or later, having done all the “right” things, having served the expectations of our family and our tribe, feel so little at home in our lives” (Hollis, 2008: 55)? If the individual feels his or her life is no longer or perhaps never was authentic (i.e., living in bad faith), then it is not surprising for him or her to experience anxiety and depression (Grierson, 2007; Hollis, 1993). “Everything one says about the self should be regarded as tentative, born in swirling mists of conflict and self-conflict...hardly anything can be said that one is not to be tempted to revise or even cancel – most of all, whatever we try to say about interior motives and directions of the soul” (Harper, 1972: 87). This highlights the need to always keep in mind that a person’s existence is subjectively interpreted by him or her.

A person’s life consists of a number of components, and like various pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, they must fit together in order to translate into authentic existence. Using this perspective, work and the other areas of a life (for instance family, hobbies, athletics

and spirituality), are not viewed as separate domains but merely as different components of the puzzle that is meaning. Viewing work and home life as totally separate implies that people can view each component separately and compartmentalize their life, which most research today shows is rarely the case (Cinamon, 2006; Eikhof, Warhurst, & Haunschild, 2007; Haar, 2006; Huang, Hammer, Neal, & Perrin, 2004; Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006; Perrone, Webb, & Blalock, 2005). As a person transitions from one phase of life to another, he or she may be moving *towards* authenticity or away from it. For example, people may be brought up to believe that having children is a necessary part of living a meaningful life; however, after having children they realize that they do not feel ‘right’ in this life, and regret their decision. Obviously, some decisions are harder to undo than others but this is what makes existentialism such a difficult and important challenge.

The task and possibility of the human situation is to move from his original situation as an unthinking, and unfree part of the mass, whether this mass is his actual early existence as a fetus or his being symbolically a part of the mass in a conformist, automaton society – to move from the womb, through the experience of the birth of self-awareness, the crises of growth, the struggles, choices and advances from the familiar to the unfamiliar, to ever-widening consciousness of himself and thus ever-widening freedom and responsibility, to higher levels of differentiation in which he progressively integrates himself with others in freely chosen love and creative work. Each step in this journey means that he lives less as a servant of automatic time and more as one who transcends time, that is, one who lives by meaning which he chooses. (May, 1953: 275)

The challenge for the individual, according to existentialism, is to live the authentic life which each person must define for themselves, and most importantly, to try to avoid the inauthentic life or living in bad faith. “A person is authentic in that degree to which his being in the world is unqualifiedly in accord with the givenness of his own nature and of the world...authenticity is the primary good or value of the existential viewpoint” (Bugental, 1965: 31-32). However, authenticity is a dynamic state of

existence and meaning for the individual will change over time as human existence is necessarily contingent.

Contingency

...each man lives in the midst of contingency, that even the knownness of day-to-day living is, in a sense, but a phantasy [sic], a wish more than an actuality, I do not know, I cannot know enough to be safe, to be secure, to predict with complete confidence from one moment to the next. Contingency means that what will become actual is contingent upon many influences, many variables, so many that they may well be infinite in number. The fact of contingency means that I never can predict with complete assurance. The experience of contingency means that I live with anxiety. (Bugental, 1965: 22)

The fourth theme I will be using in this thesis is the idea that the individual exists ‘contingently’; that individual human existence is only temporary, that little can be predicted with certainty, and therefore, the struggle to live authentically, is “contingent” on many factors. “The individual carries out his essential thinking precisely as an empirical, contingent existent who retains his actual bonds with other beings and reflects within and upon these existential conditions” (Collins, 1952: 30). The future self is a mystery to the individual and contingent on unknown factors which, therefore, results in a state of anxiety. “Contingency flows away from us on every side as though our every act were a stone dropped in a pond. Our smallest acts, our most casual choices, have the potential of reaching to any point in their consequences. We can never imagine all the possible permutations and ramifications of our doing and not doing” (Bugental, 1965: 297).

Since existence is contingent, what may be meaningful at one point may have no meaning at a different point in time. Bugental (1965: 40) states, “Man lives in contingency...can and does take action that affects his awareness and experience...takes

such action without ultimate guide posts of universal values or built-in instincts...in constant relation with his fellows while yet being separate from them.” Despite efforts to live authentically, it is difficult for most people as many events may be out of their control. Therefore, slipping into “bad faith” is always a potential danger, and shadows every person’s existence. For example, an occupation may be meaningful for many years for an individual but later in life hold little interest besides the salary; unfortunately, a typical situation for many people (Grierson, 2007; Hollis, 1993). Each day people are faced with a variety of choices and possibilities; many of which they are fearful of, since the results could be positive or negative.

Man finds himself in, “a world he never made,” a world of infinite possibility. In this world man is constantly confronted with choices for which he must always be less than adequately prepared. Thus man is constantly faced with uncertainty, with contingency, with the possibility that his choices may fail to bring him the results he intends. That failure may range from the simplest disappointment to a fatal misstep, from being late to a pleasant evening’s recreation to being killed as he walks across his normally quiet, residential street. (Bugental, 1965: 74)

This dilemma highlights the challenge for the individual as he or she lives, as it is not enough to choose what one’s authentic existence is at a particular point in time. Instead, the search for authentic existence is never-ending as people move along the continuum of their life, continually ‘interpreting’ the world around them, thus creating themselves, while at the same time needing to make sense of unforeseen events, e.g., the recent financial crisis. The challenge is to confront one’s contingency and accept the uncertainty which is one’s life; because, ultimately, we can not anticipate these events and must accept the ‘unknown’ nature of human existence.

To confront contingency means to open one’s awareness to the full meaning of infinite possibility, to recognize that what will happen is always, at least in some measure, unknown. Contingency means that the number and potentialities of all

the influences that go to determine what will happen in this instant, in the next hour, today, in my life are beyond my knowing. (Bugental, 1965: 295)

Finally, since lives are continually being lived and contingent on many factors over a lifetime, the challenge of creating an authentic or meaningful existence is a continual process until we encounter the most significant contingent factor of all, the date of our death which ends our existence as we know it.

Death

Death is the only certainty in life. All living organisms die; there is no exception. However, human beings alone are burdened with the cognitive capacity to be aware of their own inevitable mortality and to fear what may come afterwards. (Wong, 2008: 65)

Lastly, I am using death as a major theme, because from an existential perspective, the individual's awareness of mortality affects the urgency of his or her choices throughout life, and therefore affects how time is viewed. The opposite of "being" is "non-being," or "nothingness," the result of the inevitable death which all people must face (May, 1959a; Sartre, 1956; Tillich, 1952). Death's significance, for the existentialist, is that the recognition of death causes "anguish" as death ends all possibilities for the individual and rarely does a person know when their death will occur (Tillich, 1952). This has become increasingly important in Existential psychotherapy, which "seeks to bring to the person's living awareness consciousness of the non-being aspects of his potential" (Bugental, 1965: 15); that is, accepting the limits of one's death gives meaning and finite boundaries to one's life. "Dasein, Heidegger has told us, is always ahead of itself, always poised before possibilities as yet unrealized.... but there is for Dasein a final possibility, a possibility to end all possibilities, namely death" (Inwood,

1997: 69). For Heidegger, therefore, there are three reasons for people to focus on death to help give meaning to life: (1) the knowledge of death helps to shape life; (2) the awareness of impending death gives freedom of action, and; (3) death forces us to focus on time as it puts an end to possibility (Harman, 2007; Inwood, 1997).

Dasein's awareness that it will die, that it may die at any moment, means that 'dying', its attitude to or 'being towards' its own death, pervades, and shapes its whole life. A life without the prospect of death would be a life of perpetual postponement. Why bother to write a book now, if I have an eternity of life (and of undiminished physical and mental vigour) before me? (Inwood, 1997: 69)

Death is the unavoidable ultimate destination of human existence. Even critics of existentialism recognize the importance that death has on our existence. "People do die, people do struggle all their lives between the demands of real and counterfeit selves, and we do live in an age in which neurotic anxiety has mounted out of all proportion so that even minds inclined to believe that all human problems can be solved by physical techniques begin to label "mental health" as the first of our public problems" (Barrett, 1962: 9). People can choose to ignore their mortality or face it and attempt to use death as motivation toward a meaningful existence. "Man neither can nor should, say the existentialists, shut out the consciousness of death or refuse the anguish and despair which the consciousness of death entails" (Olson, 1962: 194) Much as some may try to ignore death, eventually all humans are faced with it.

There is a tacit understanding that sooner or later, we all have to come to terms with our own mortality. As surely as night follows day, so death awaits for us all. The certainty and inevitability of death makes its presence felt in every arena of human existence. There is no escape from its shadow, no refuge from its power. (Wong, 2008: 65)

Heidegger emphasizes that an important component of freedom of choice is the need for people to recognize their inevitable death as opposed to looking at death as an “abstraction” (Heidegger, 1967). Heidegger states, “it is only in full...awareness of our own mortality that life can take on any purposive meaning” (Stokes, 2002: 151). The importance of death goes far beyond just its inevitability. “There is nothing timeless about man; on the contrary, he is time-riven” (Harper, 1972: 48). The awareness of time passing and inevitable death, reinforces the need for people to make choices and not to “put off” life as many people may be inclined to do, not recognizing that time is ticking away on their mortality each day. Solomon (1974: xiii) notes, “a threat of imminent death – or even a passing thought of our mortality – is sufficient to wrench us out of our current involvements – even if but for a moment – and force us to look at our lives.” Unfortunately, what this means practically is that people may stay with work that they do not like while they plan for the day they retire to really enjoy life. However this assumes that death (or ill health) will not come unexpectedly before retirement. Death is “the one fact of my life which is not relative but absolute, and my awareness of this gives my existence and what I do each hour an absolute quality” (May, 1959a: 49).

Ultimately, the recognition of death and the fact that they will cease to exist should force people to recognize that since they currently exist, they are free to choose their life. “Death is potentially (as awareness and meditation) an incentive to dedicate oneself to what matters, to ignore the trivial and to start living an authentic life” (Tomer & Eliason, 2008a: 11). However, not all of the existential philosophers agree on the importance placed on death, notably Sartre.

Sartre, following the Epicurean view of death, places death outside the individual’s experience of his inner subjectivity and defines it as simply a

termination of this subjectivity. The only being of death is its actual being, and it can become real only when the individual is no longer. Sartre thus eliminates any existential significance that death may have for the individual subject. Insofar as death has any meaning at all in Sartre's view, it is a meaning which is relevant only to the Other. (Schrag, 1977: 107)

Regardless of Sartre's minimalist view of death (which was clearly a minority position in terms of other existentialists), I believe death is a significant factor in most people's lives. One's awareness of death or death salience will be a major influence on the degree of urgency with which one views life and therefore makes their choices.

"Death salience refers to the extent to which individuals contemplate their own mortality and death. The extent of death salience is related, in part, to the degree (intensity and duration) of people's exposure to death" (Tomer & Eliason, 2008b: 164). Some people treat death as an objective experience, i.e., everyone dies and so I can distance myself from that thought, whereas the challenge according to the existentialists is to treat death as subjective, and focus on death as your own innermost experience, i.e., the end of your existence.

Because we fear death, we also seek security with our self, with our Being – we wish to know "who" we are, but in the seeking of "security," we begin to live in Bad Faith, as we give up on possibilities of existence. "In most adults the balance is tipped toward security, largely *by situating the self in the world in such a way as to avoid basic threats to the self*" (Douglas, 1984: 94). Ultimately, from an existential point of view, all security is an illusion, as it is impossible to maintain since we eventually must give up security when we face death, our non-existence. Additionally, the timing of death is a mystery as it can come at any time. It can appear gradually in our old age or it can be thrust upon us suddenly and unexpectedly. "Purely rational thought, though it can explain

the causes of death in scientific terms, can never account for the fact that we can die at any moment and are beings who, in any case, must die sooner or later. The length of our lives seems to be fixed in a purely arbitrary way which, being inexplicable, defeat the powers of reason” (Roubiczek, 1964: 113).

Summary

In summary, the focus of this thesis is on the individual, the existential being or self that is continually being constituted, has a history of experiences, and is reflexive. Additionally, I am using five existential themes to investigate the individual and the meaning of work – choice, bad faith, authenticity, contingency and death. These themes were derived from a broad-based review of the existential literature and provide a framework to analyze: (1) how possibilities enter consciousness and choices are made, (2) how choices may result in a state of bad faith (feelings of living inauthentically), (3) how an authentic existence (meaningful life) is viewed, (4) how unexpected events may change how life is viewed, and (5) how the prospect of death impacts how life is understood. In the next chapter I describe the research process I employed to probe the usefulness of, what I will call, work-bound approaches to meaning *at work*, as exemplified by the job-career-calling model, and to explore the potential for an alternative existentially framed approach that links meaning *and* work through an understanding of the role of Being.

Chapter 4 – The Research Process

Introduction

People choose from a vast array of events, thoughts, wishes, and interactions to form a unique and ever-changing life story. In studying these life stories, or narrations, we come to understand better the ways in which meanings of transitions are constructed. It is these meanings that guide the person through the next phase of their existence, only (usually) to have the meanings change once again as life moves on. (McAdams et al., 2001: xvi)

To investigate the relationship between the individual and the meaning of work, I conducted a qualitative study focusing on but not limited to, the job-career-calling model, using comprehensive interviews as the data collection method, and analyzing the narratives through a framework informed by existential themes. The analysis focuses on the interviewees' feelings about work as a job, career, or calling but more importantly, on how work interacts with the individual self. This chapter explains the research process adopted: (1) The use of the "Job, Career, or Calling" model as a heuristic for exploring the meaning of work, (2) the choice of interviews as a method for exploring being and work, (3) how I am using the five existential themes outlined in chapter three, and (4) the interpretive process to analyze the interviews.

Job, Career, Calling Model as Heuristic

My approach in this thesis is two-fold. Firstly, I am assessing the value of the 'Job, Career, or Calling' model in its own right, i.e., is the model adequate in explaining how work is understood by the individual or are there perhaps limitations within the model? Secondly, I am using the 'Job, Career, or Calling' (J-C-C) model as a heuristic

for exploring and anchoring an otherwise unwieldy debate on being and work. My investigation of the model provides an initial way to examine how work is understood by individuals but my challenge is to delve further into how work interacts with one's being. Whereas on the surface, the J-C-C model appears to provide an efficient way to categorize the importance of work in a life, human existence is complex and may defy simple categorizations. Work is only one aspect of a person's life and must fit with other components. As noted, "How people work affects the way in which they spend their time away from work, for it places constraints on the enjoyment of "free time" and conditions the overall mode of adjustment to life" (Rinehart, 2006: 1).

Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to increase our understanding of work in relation to the individual self, since work is only one of potentially many "places" where the self is realized. In order to understand work choices, we must understand how people constitute and reflect on their self, i.e., work must be understood in terms of its relationship to the creation of the self. Hall and Chandler (2005: 173) state, "To understand the journey of the self, we must track the more complex world of the subjective career... we must know more than simply where and when the person has arrived in his or her career." The major research questions are: (1) What factors determine whether work is viewed as a job, a career, or a calling? (2) Does the Job-Career-Calling model adequately explain why work is viewed in such a way by the individual? (3) What causes people to change their view of work? (4) How does one's work relate to the existential self?

Interviewing and Being

To answer the above research questions I am using interviews utilizing the “long interview approach” (McCracken, 1988). Interviews were chosen over other potential methods such as observation or surveys, as interviews align most appropriately with the objectives of this thesis. As previously noted, Wrzesniewski et al (1997: 32) have argued for the use of comprehensive interviews to investigate how people understand their work as job, career, or calling. The goal of this thesis is to understand issues of the particular individual, specifically to probe how he or she chooses his or her work and how this relates to his or her self and the creation of meaning. “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation” (Kvale, 1996: 1). As such, interviews are the primary method used where the main concern is to understand the individual and the problems of the existential self (Kvale, 1999; May, 1969; Spinelli, 2005; Yalom, 1980). Interviews provide the best method to understand personal experience, give depth of insight, and the flexibility to study the complexity of how people attribute value to what they do, and to interpret the reconstruction of events (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985; Bryman & Bell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McCracken, 1988; Seidman, 1998; Silverman, 2000). Kerlinger (1979: 272) comments, “the existential individual, the core of the individuality, forever escapes the scientist. He is chained to group data, statistical prediction, and probabilistic estimates.” Unlike other methods, interviews allow the individual to explain his or her choices and how he or she may feel about those choices and their subsequent results at this particular point in time versus when the choices were

first made. “The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world...can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience” (McCracken, 1988: 9).

Most importantly, the interviewees are seen as the foundation of their own knowledge and as having the insight to judge their own lives, again relying on fundamental existential themes. Brenner, Brown and Canter (1985: 3) note, “It is this willingness to treat individuals as the heroes of their own dramas, as valuable sources of particular information, which is at the resurgence of interest in various interviewing procedures...only when the researcher and the respondent have the possibility of communicating directly with each other that the subtleties of the mutual understanding between the two parties can be harnessed.” However, it is important to recognize that the existential self is always reflexive and that the individual narratives take place at a particular point in time. The narratives are only how one understands his or her life “looking back.”

Our self making stories accumulate over time, even pattern themselves on conventional genres. They get out-of-date, and not just because we grow older or wiser but also because our self-making stories need to fit new circumstances, new friends, new enterprises. Our memories fall victim to our self-making stories. It is not that I can no longer tell you (or myself) the “original, true story” about my desolation in the bleak summer after my father died. Rather, I would be telling you (or myself) a new story about a twelve-year-old “once upon a time,” and I could tell it several ways, all of them shaped as much by my life since then as by the circumstances of that long-ago summer. (Bruner, 2004)

For the purposes of this study fourteen interviews were conducted to probe how people understand their work as job, career, or calling, and other existential aspects of meaning. It was not methodologically necessary to interview or survey large numbers of

people. When it comes to interviewing and sample size, Bryman and Bell (2003: 101) state, “there is no one definitive answer.” McCracken (1988: 17) emphasizes, “‘less is more.’ It is more important to work longer and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them. For many research projects, eight respondents will be perfectly sufficient.” Lincoln and Guba (1985: 235) state, “it is usual to find that a dozen or so interviews, if properly selected, will exhaust most available information.” The interviews were semi-structured, involving a prepared set of questions; however the questions were not rigidly adhered to and the interviewees were allowed to stray into other areas as per the individual situation (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bryman & Bell, 2003).

The Participants

The fourteen people interviewed came from various professions, including academia, business and education. I identified these people through a targeted opportunistic sampling approach (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Most were people that I personally knew in some capacity while a couple of the participants were referred to me. Additionally I deliberately chose some “deviant cases,” people who do not quite fit the criteria, and my assumptions (Silverman, 2000). The interviews were all conducted in person and lasted sixty to ninety minutes. They were held at a location convenient for the interviewee, with the majority of the interviews being held in a private meeting room at Saint Mary’s University. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. The names have all been changed to ensure anonymity. The participants for the interviews were chosen based on two criteria: (1) age (40-60), and; (2) life experiences (major change in work). I chose the 40 to 60 age category because people in the middle

stage of life are typically at a point of maturity and have sufficient self-awareness to question and discuss their lives, as per the adult lifecycle (Hollis, 1993, 2005; Levinson, 1978, 1986; Levinson, 2000). I also interviewed those who have made a major change in their work life because a major objective of this study is to understand how people come to the conclusion that their life is going in the wrong direction, i.e., recognition of inauthenticity. A significant life change is usually the result of unhappiness caused by a recognition of a “meaning” deficit (Grierson, 2007; Hollis, 1993). Four of the people interviewed are near-completion Ph.D. students. One is a homemaker who does not currently work outside the home, but previously was a social worker and is now looking to re-enter the workforce. One is a schoolteacher, two are professors, and six work in business. Since a key objective of this study is to increase our understanding of why a person may change his or her view of work and life, I deliberately sought out people who had experienced a “difficult” period in their life. All of the people interviewed had at least one university degree and many have post-graduate degrees. And they are all in the middle stage of life as per the three-stage theory of adult development articulated in chapter two (Eriksen, 1963, 1980; Levinson, 1978, 1986).

Interview Questions

The interview questions were designed to elicit from each of the people interviewed an understanding of their work choices and their views on their work life, but also to provide a picture of how the individual sees their life to date from an existential point of view. Therefore, whereas the interviews were primarily focused on work, the interviewees were also asked to reflect on their overall life experiences – their initial goals and dreams, work choices, values, meaning, unexpected events, and death. I did

this because, from an existential perspective, a person's *Being* is not composed of separate and non-interacting components. Since life cannot be compartmentalized, examining people's work life in isolation from their overall life does not make sense.

As outlined in chapter two, the Job-Career-Calling model represents three categories of how work is viewed on a continuum of personal investment; a Job representing the least and a Calling, the most (Bellah et al., 1985; Wrzesniewski, 1999; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Additionally, whether one views work as a Job, Career, or Calling is a subjective experience and may change throughout the person's life (Wrzesniewski, 1999, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Jobs were defined as work predominantly viewed as income and material benefits, careers as advancement, challenge, progressive path, and callings as fulfillment, purpose and work that would be continued even if there was no financial need. Sample interview questions included: (1) Would you describe your work as a job, career or calling (after being given a definition of these terms)? Why? (2) What do you like about your work? What do you dislike about your work? (3) What would you do if you didn't need to work for financial gain? (4) What did you want to be when you were a teenager or young adult? If you're not doing this, what changed your mind? and; (5) Is your life turning out the way you thought it would? If not, why not? (For the full list of questions see the interview guide, Appendix A).

Applying Existential Themes

To analyze the interviews I am using the five major existential themes as outlined in chapter three – Choice, Bad Faith, Authenticity, Contingency, and Death. These

themes provide a way to examine the relationship between work and how the individual views his or her 'lived' life. They can be applied to understand a life as it "unfolds" over time and new directions are chosen, new experiences realized, and a new self constituted. This is especially helpful, as previously discussed, in relation to the problems many people encounter in their life as they age, and particularly as they go through the mid-life years. In my analysis of the interviews the five themes relate to specific interview questions; however the themes are intricately linked and therefore overlap throughout the analysis.

First, I am using the theme of choice to analyze how the interviewees made choices, i.e., how potentialities came into consciousness and actions were chosen. Questions relating to this theme included: What did you want to do when you were a teenager? Who or what influenced your initial work choices? Did you pursue a certain work path due to outside influences or was it your choice? How do you view those initial choices now? If you did not pursue work that you dreamed of when you were young, was it a conscious choice to pursue a different option, or was it influenced by contingent factors beyond your control? The main existential question for people is, "*How* do I exist in the world" (Schrag, 1977: 27)? As part of this existence, people may choose work that they consider to be or becomes a Job, a Career or a Calling. For some, the choice leads to authenticity while for others it may result in bad faith - made unconsciously or as the result of societal pressure. "The situations into which human beings are cast are multiple...however described, they must be experienced inwardly by each individual, each Dasein, each being-in-the-world; and each living subject must effect his own authentic relationships with the situations he encounters throughout the "instants" of his

life” (Greene, 1967: 129). Of the many choices people make throughout their lives, work is for most a major choice which impacts other aspects of life, as people seek to live a meaningful existence. “In the long run work can prove a boon or a burden, creative or crippling, a means to personal happiness or a prescription for despair. But no matter where we might wind up on this spectrum, where we work, what we do at work, and the general climate and culture of the workplace indelibly mark us for life” (Gini, 2000: 2). Choice is dependent on consciousness, is subjective to the individual “being,” gives the individual power over his or her life and the ability to, ultimately, control and hence, mold one’s life.

Second, I am using the theme of bad faith to analyze whether the choices made by the interviewees led to experiences which resulted in them feeling they were in a state of inauthenticity. Questions relating to this theme included: Have you ever felt that you were living the ‘wrong’ life? What major changes have you made in your life and why? Have you ever felt that you were an imposter and playing a role as opposed to doing what you believed you should be doing in life? Major life changes can be regarded as the result of feelings of bad faith or anxiety and leading to new possibilities being revealed. “Anxiety discloses man’s possibilities and confronts him with a future. And in this confrontation with his future, man is called to decide in the moment” (Schrage, 1977: 175). As the Self evolves as we age, more information is uncovered about our real values and beliefs, and better, more authentic choices can potentially be made. The people interviewed all made a major work change later in life. Was this because they felt that the work was not reflective of their true desires, which emerged with time, resulting in a change to a new type of work, or were there other reasons behind the change, such as

family considerations? The challenge for the individual is to recognize that he or she is living in bad faith and make new choices. “The existentialist hero comes face to face with the truth about himself when he recognizes within him the structures of bad faith – in much the same way that the Christian convert is saved from sin at the moment when he acknowledges that his soul must be cleansed of it” (Barnes, 1959: 55). Work may be fulfilling for a number of years but the same work may also eventually become a source of anxiety and angst, and choices that led to authenticity at one point in time may eventually result in a state of inauthenticity for the individual.

Third, I am using the theme of authenticity to analyze what the interviewees consider to be meaningful in their life and therefore how their work fits within their particular “vision” of a meaningful life. Questions relating to this theme included: What do you consider to be a meaningful life? Do you consider your life to be meaningful? Why or why not? Has your view of your life ever changed especially in what you consider meaningful? Have you ever felt your life was not meaningful, and if so, why? For existentialists, the authentic life is the subjective existence that the individual consciously and freely chooses. Orbach (2008: 283) notes, “Authentic being is creating, and constructing one’s life on the basis of what one thinks, feels, and desires and not on conventions, norms, fashions, or expectations of others. In other words, to be oneself is to realize and actualize one’s subjectivity and one’s own possibilities and unique potentials.” One’s work can either contribute to meaning for the individual, or be an activity that detracts from the individual and contributes to a belief that his or her life is ‘meaningless.’ This fits with the research on the job-career-calling model in that the perception of one’s work is unique to the individual and independent of occupation

(Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). The difference in how work is viewed is not dependent on the type of work but based solely on the subjective view of the individual, e.g., one person's calling may be another person's job. Therefore a person may regard his or her work as very meaningful even though others may consider it only a routine or mundane activity. Additionally, how we regard life and our choices as we look back may be very different than when we viewed and experienced them at the time, hence the need for examining how life has evolved over time. One question I asked originated with the movie, *The Matrix* which has been the subject of considerable philosophical study (Grau, 2005). In this futuristic (and very existential) movie, the main character is asked to choose between taking the red pill or the blue pill. If he takes the blue pill, he will live a comfortable life but it is not real. It is only a dream and his physical body is encased in a pod, or cage. If he takes the red pill, he will live his own reality but it will not be a comfortable life; instead he finds out he is living in a post-nuclear war world and will probably die at a young age. The question pertains to individual consciousness and its relationship to authenticity. Is an unconscious yet comfortable life more important than living a "real" but difficult and probably unhappy existence? This question gets at the individual's core belief about meaning and the world - is life or should life be about struggle and pain, or should the goal of life be to simply get to the end with as little pain as possible?

Fourth, I am using the theme of contingency to analyze how events outside of the interviewees' control may have affected their views and choices of work and other aspects of their life. Questions relating to the theme of contingency included: What unexpected events have significantly affected your life? How have your views of

meaning and life changed over time as a result of unexpected factors? How do you view work and your life differently today versus ten years ago or twenty years ago? Has your life turned out the way that you thought it would? Little of life can be predicted with any certainty and numerous unforeseen events will take place in the course of a life. Some of these events will affect the self positively such as marriage and children, while others will affect the self negatively, e.g., death of a loved one or being fired. The effects of these unforeseen “happenings” of life (that all individuals will experience) are dependent on how they are interpreted by the individual. For example, the 9-11 tragedy would have resulted in varying states of existence depending on how the experience was interpreted by the individual. For some people it resulted in a major change in how they viewed their work (Wrzesniewski, 2002).

What is important to understand is that the same or similar ‘conditions’ can generate a shift from authentic to inauthentic ways of being, or vice-versa, or, indeed, provoke no shift at all. The impact of a tragedy like the destruction of the World Trade center in New York City may have been experienced by some as a moment of illuminating authenticity, but it as surely induced an inauthentic stance in others. Equally, for some it may have had no impact whatever upon their currently adopted way of being. (Spinelli, 2005: 111)

Finally, I am using the theme of death to analyze how the interviewees’ views about their own mortality have affected how they regard their life. Questions relating to this theme included: How has the prospect of death affected your choices? If you were told that they had only one month left to live, how would you feel about your life? Death is the most significant contingent factor of all and many existentialists would argue that facing one’s death is a prerequisite for authentic existence, as it focuses us on meaningful existence. The thought that some day we will not exist, that our life is finite spurs us to action, to not put off life with a “someday I’ll do this” attitude. May (1953) argues that

the first step in recognizing one's freedom and being able to choose one's life is to consider suicide; what he refers to as psychological suicide. "It is doubtful whether anyone really begins to live, that is, to affirm and choose his own existence, until he has frankly confronted the terrifying fact that he could wipe out his existence but *chooses* not to. Since one is free to die, he is free also to live" (May, 1953: 170). Additionally, from an existential perspective, attitudes at a point in time towards one's inevitable death may be more positive if one feels that he or she is living authentically and do not perceive life as currently meaningless (Kaufmann, 1959).

The Interviews

The results of the interviews were fourteen powerful, life narratives of dynamic individuals, both of where they are in their life today and of how they view the past. Some of the people interviewed could easily, and openly did, talk about their lives, while others needed significant probing and encouragement to get them to "open" up. This was especially the case for some when discussing values, beliefs and difficult times in their life. For example, some of the interviewees spoke freely about their childhood while others either had difficulty remembering it or perhaps did not want to relive painful memories. Some people commented that they had not really thought much about these questions previously while others had given them a great deal of thought. For some, the interviews were a somewhat uncomfortable experience, and they commented on the difficulty of thinking and talking about their own life. They had rarely been asked about themselves, who they were, their dreams, their values, why they lived as they did, and their beliefs. "Oh, God, wow...that's an essay question" (Daniel)! "Oh...does everybody

laugh when they get that question? Because they're nervous and that's a big question (Joseph)?" Some became quite emotional as they talked about the choices they had made and their effects, especially on people who were close to them such as family members – “you'll make me cry again” (Christine). I was surprised by the difficulty some people had talking about their lives and particularly how difficult it was to specifically articulate their beliefs on meaning and values, though interestingly the values become clear when they discuss how they view work.

The narratives are thought-provoking on many levels, especially when applying an existential lens. How a person views and understands his or her existence or Being is, as Heidegger continually emphasized, the most important question of all (Heidegger, 1967). Additionally, narratives of a life not only serve to explain a life but also, then, shape that life. Schrok (2002: 219) notes, “We all have stories about our lives. These stories shape our emotional experiences and, in turn, how we choose to live. Stories are thus central to our existential lives and to our obdurate realities.” The narrative is the individual looking at his or her life through a window but the window can also be distorted, focused only on a particular direction, or be filtered (Lester, 1984). “At every moment that one spends gazing through a window, that activity forces one not to see as well” (Lester, 1984: 60). Individual life may be regarded as a performance, but since we only see the individual actor on stage, we do not get to see what is backstage, i.e., the inner self (May, 1953). May (1953: 94) notes, “consciousness of oneself is always a unique act – I can never know exactly how you see yourself and you can never know exactly how I relate to myself. This is the inner sanctum where each man must stand alone.” We do not see the workings of the inner mind nor can we necessarily understand

the thought processes of another person. “The inner self is a vastly complex, open-ended, slowly evolving set of intuitive senses that our mind has about our entire being-in-the-world” (Douglas, 1984: 95). Therefore, the interviews are only a snapshot of how the individual remembers and understands his or her life at the moment in time of the interview and that recognition is reflected in my analysis. I did not judge their particular choices; the point was to analyze how *they* felt about them.

After the first three interviews, I was more convinced than ever that anxiety and anguish are not just occasional states, but an on-going condition of day-to-day human existence. An individual’s existence is subject to continual turmoil and questioning, as people try to live what they perceive to be the ‘right’ life, i.e., authentic life. The lives of the people interviewed have all been characterized by a major change, which usually comes about after a period of intense questioning of life. Most were still in this state at the time I interviewed them.

Periodically, all of us lose our understanding of the world, our means of coping, our plan for prevailing. Each of these nodules of negation will be experienced as a crisis; it is a crisis of a belief system. Such a crisis is an existential wounding and a spiritual wounding as well. Not only do we suffer in the outer world, but we suffer in our very personal sense of meaning, and in our sense of relatedness to the mysteries of this world. (Hollis, 2005: 84)

However, another interesting aspect of the interviews is that some people were quite definitive about their lives, the choices they had made and their life in general. This is surprising since, as mentioned above, life to me and other existentialists is an unpredictable journey of Being and characterized by anxiety and confusion. Yet, some of the people interviewed did not talk about their lives as such; few even used the word confusion. But the human condition, from an existential perspective, is one of

unavoidable anxiety and confusion (Collins, 1952; May, 1996; Tanzer, 2008). Some of the people interviewed view their life in absolute terms, so was this because they have no confusion, which is unlikely given the turmoil they were going through, or was it because they were trying to show a social mask to the interviewer or make themselves feel better by showing clear responsibility for their choices (Atkinson, 1998; Riessman, 1993)?

Some of the people interviewed talked mostly about their work, and even when the question was about other areas of life (such as family or hobbies), their answers inevitably returned to the topic of their work. This is not surprising since work is so important in the “everydayness” of people’s lives and can become the most important part of their daily lives. Also, it is the individual experience of life that I am investigating and life is seen and made sense of through the eyes of each individual. Under the concept of “being for others,” the self that each person believes herself to be is a reflection of how he or she is seen by others. Since work is a major place where we are “seen” by others, what happens at work can determine our sense or understanding of Self, which in turn affects our belief in whether or not our life is meaningful or authentic. Sartre (1956) emphasizes that all desire is striving to Be. We analyze our life after the fact, as we experience everydayness and create a lived existence, and thus, become our Being.

I looked at it more as get a degree out of the way so that part's done, and then get an MBA because maybe that will open up possibilities. And it did, in the end. But it took me to my very last course of my MBA to finally discover what I should have been doing...It's kind of funny. I never thought of it that way to tell you the truth but... so many choices. (Vincent)

The type of work a person pursues is a choice, usually among potentially many choices; however choices are revealed only after decisions have been made.

The Benefits of Self-reflection

The chance to talk about who they are, to understand their own narrative, seems to have been beneficial for the interviewees. Almost all commented that they had rarely, if ever, thought about the deeper questions of their lives, which supports previous research. “Deep reflection on one’s life does not represent an easy option and that is why many people avoid it” (Howard, 2002: 238). Some people may not think consciously about their life at all preferring the “smile, be happy” strategy of living. Additionally, perhaps, not thinking about the deeper questions of life may be a protective mechanism, i.e., if I think about it too much I’ll drive myself crazy with confusion. But to understand our self we need time to reflect on who we are and to make sense of our lives. Although not thinking about our life is obviously counter to an existential point of view, the opposite is also problematic. A few of the interviewees had thought a lot about questions of meaning and were very definitive about their lives. However, from an existential perspective, we should not be definitive about our existence because the human condition is such that we do not have definitive answers and should exist in an on-going state of confusion.

All of the people interviewed seemed to find this opportunity for self-reflection to be cathartic, and an extremely worthwhile experience. There is a very positive effect of reflection, because we need to have opportunities to tell our story, and make sense of our lives (Schrok, 2002). The process of conducting the interviews, therefore, provided an opportunity for people to think about past decisions and how they feel in present day about the choices they made – choices that have resulted in the creation of Self. Comments included, “This was something for me that was really good for me because it allowed reflection” (Ryan), and “I had a lot more to say than I thought I did....as I was

going through [the interview] I think I probably had some insights, because you don't think about these things daily” (Vincent). I believe this to be an immediate and significant first benefit of this research: the opportunity for people to reflect on and make sense of their lives.

Interpreting the Interviews

To analyze the interviews I went through a series of steps, each one delving more deeply into the narratives, similar to peeling back the layers of an onion to get to the core. My first step in the process was to create an interview matrix to help summarize and categorize the interviews. The matrix included basic information about each person - demographics, current disposition, life beliefs, views on the importance of work, and critical incidents in their lives. The matrix enabled me to record my first impressions of each of the people interviewed so that I would have an initial understanding of the major similarities and differences between them. I then re-listened to the interviews using the audio tape. This helped me to formulate my general impressions and to get a sense of how people were “feeling” during the interview, and thus, help me to understand how they currently understood their life. For example, when asked about their views on the meaning of life, the interviewees usually reacted emotionally, i.e., laughter, heavy sighs, or even anxiety. These reactions told me something about the difficulty they would or would not have answering those questions and consequently their degree of self-awareness and overall feelings about their lives.

My next step was to code the transcripts using the existential themes developed in chapter three. I initially felt this would be a fairly straight-forward task, but I quickly realized that even attempting to code the interviews was a very positivistic approach and

not in keeping with an existential approach (Bryman & Bell, 2003). An existential approach is a far different process, and in the end a much more difficult one as it recognizes the ambiguities of the human condition. I am trying to “understand” how other people “understand their lives,” which is ultimately, due to the human condition, “un-understandable” (Heidegger, 1967; Sartre, 1956). How do I try to understand, the “un-understandable,” that which is impossible to make sense of from an existential perspective? Trying to place labels on what people themselves are trying to make sense of and provide some order to their lives is, in many ways, an impossible task using an existential approach. I had to repeatedly fight the temptation to simply categorize and critique the narratives, i.e., criticize how someone has chosen to live or their interpretation of a choice. For example, since authenticity is a subjective state of the individual, it cannot be, or at least should not be, judged by another person. We can investigate Being, but we cannot provide answers to Being. This makes my thesis in some ways full of contradictions and questions, but this is, in the end, the human condition, according to existential thought, and therefore the very point of this inquiry.

Our view of the other depends on our willingness to enlist all the powers of every aspect of ourselves in the act of comprehension...to orient ourselves to this person in such a way as to leave open to us the possibility of understanding him. The art of understanding those aspects of an individual's being which, we can observe, as expressive of his mode of being-in-the-world, requires us to relate his actions to his way of experiencing the situation he is in with us. Similarly, it is in terms of his present that we have to understand his past, and not exclusively the other way round. (Laing, 1971: 32)

I also realized that using an existential framework in coding was difficult because people's thoughts, feelings, and actions are more open to interpretation than I had initially realized, and as already stated, I continually fought the urge to judge. For

example, if a person says that she was encouraged by other people toward a certain direction with work, is this an example of societal pressure and therefore bad faith, or is it an awakening of consciousness toward authenticity? This dilemma was a continuing theme throughout the interview analysis as I attempted to apply existential philosophy to the narratives and not “drift” into a positivistic approach. One of the key benefits in coding the transcripts, however, was that it provided an immediate visual of the importance of work in the person’s life.

After my initial coding of the interviews, I then went through a lengthy process of analyzing the transcripts looking for thematic connections to try to understand what had been revealed by the people interviewed. As I struggled to understand what the narratives “mean,” what was originally clear to me, i.e., the purpose of my thesis, became more complex. How do I make sense of how a person makes sense of his or her life? To the people interviewed, this is their world and how they interpret their life determines whether or not life is ultimately meaningful to them. Who was I to try to label, judge, and interpret them? In the end, I had to let them speak for themselves and accept their understanding of themselves as revealed in applying the existential themes.

We can understand another human being only as we see what he is moving toward, what he is becoming; and we can know our selves only as we “project our potential[*I*] in action.” The significant tense for human beings is thus the future – that is to say, the critical question is what I am pointing toward, becoming what I will be in the immediate future. (May, 1959a: 41)

Ultimately, from an existential perspective, an individual’s essence is created as a person lives, and his or her Being is understood only after the fact, i.e., human reality is a “choice of being” (Sartre, 1956: 602). According to Heidegger, similarly, the person is always moving toward death, always moving toward Being, and the totality of being only

emerges with death (Heidegger, 1967). The individual is, therefore, always in a state of becoming, as each minute of each day, the self is being created and individual Being realized. The self is in continual formation and can change slowly or very quickly due to major life events. Whether life events are big or small, however, they always result in a different Being (Heidegger, 1967; Sartre, 1956). As choices are made, people literally create themselves and as they pass through a door metaphorically (or point in time literally) there is usually no going back. Additionally, we must deal with the situation of the individual, i.e., the world as perceived by the person who we are studying. The context of individual existence cannot be separated from the choices that determine Being.

...a complete bracketing away of the outside world is impossible. We can attend to experience in order to discern essential conditions, but any kind of sustained bracketing away – or epochal reduction in Husserl’s terms – is impossible, as we are necessarily what Heidegger calls beings-in-the-world, inextricable from our social situation. (Reynolds, 2006: 13)

A person’s life is in many ways a complex mystery as he or she attempts to make sense of past actions. However, this complexity is inherent in the human condition, and can never be eliminated from conscious thought (Allen, 1973). Therefore, while recognizing the limitations of our understanding, we can still make some preliminary observations of people’s complex relationships to work.

Summary

In this chapter I have explained the central aspects of the research strategy: (1) The use of the Job, Career, or Calling model as a heuristic for exploring the meaning of

work, (2) the choice of interviews as a method for exploring being and work, (3) how I am using the five existential themes outlined in chapter three to analyze the interviews, and (4) the process I went through to interpret the interviews and its constraints. In the next two chapters I will present the results of the fourteen interviews. In chapter five I will discuss how and why (or if) the people interviewed view work as a Job, Career, or Calling, and how this may have changed during their life. In chapter six I will analyze their overall lives using the existential themes as outlined: their beliefs about life, meaning, and death, and how these beliefs impact the choices people make throughout their lives about their work (consciously or not) to live an authentic existence and avoid working in bad faith.

Chapter 5 - Jobs, Careers and Callings

Introduction

No human being can live for long, except in a state of total dependency, without a reasonably stable but slowly evolving sense of inner self. The sense of inner self... is the highest-order centrally integrating sense that our mind has of our overall being-in-the-world. It is this sense of inner self that partially orders the vastly complex subsystems of our mind and orients us continually toward acting in the vastly complex and changing situations we face in everyday life. (Douglas, 1984: 69)

In this chapter I will present the results of the interviews that focus on work and the Job-Career-Calling model. I will describe what the respondents' work is currently using the three categories of job, career, and calling to determine if the Job-Career-Calling model is sufficient to explain the choices people make about their work lives. My objective is not to critique the choices the interviewees have made but to understand how they, as individuals, make sense of their current work lives using the three categories. "Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men [sic] and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 19). In the process of seeking to understand the work life of individuals, the goal of this chapter is to show how the categorization is not sufficient for understanding how people view work. The main questions to be addressed in this chapter include: How do the interviewees view their current work and why? Can the interviewees easily categorize their work as one of a job, a career, or a calling? Do the categories of job, career, and calling clearly resonate with how people actually view their work? In the end, I will argue that there are four

problems with the model in terms of its overall usefulness from an existentialist point of view.

The Job-Career-Calling model, as stated, provides a method to understand how people orient themselves to their work, i.e., the *importance* of work in their life. Jobs are seen primarily based on financial gain, a career as challenge and development and a calling as life purpose, and therefore the categories can be viewed on a continuum of personal investment. Research on the model implies that the three categories are distinct, and that the most satisfied workers are those who view their work as a career or calling over a job (Freed, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). However, for the interviewees the categories of job, career, or calling were not necessarily clear, especially career and calling, even though they were defined for the participants beforehand. The categories were interpreted in very different ways and the categories overlapped, i.e., as both career and calling or almost a calling. The interviews also revealed that a calling may be much more problematic than previously understood. These contradictions will be developed further in the sections below.

Work as Job

What myth are we living? Are we living out our parents' unlived lives, compensating for their fears? Are we in thrall to the values of the herd, which may offend the soul but keeps one compliant company? Are we subject to those splinter mythologies, the complexes, which will direct the rest of our life on automatic pilot for so long as they remain unconscious and unchallenged? (Hollis, 2001: 45)

In Job-Career-Calling terms, a job is defined as work that is primarily viewed as a means to meet economic needs and is seen as being a “lesser” view of work than a career

or calling and perhaps detrimental to overall satisfaction with life. Of the fourteen people interviewed, three viewed work as a job. One wants to be in a career but feels stuck in a job. One person is happily choosing just a job and one is in the middle of making a transition from a twenty year long career to new work, which he wants to be a job.

Stuck in a Job

Elizabeth describes her current work as a job but she is working towards having a career – “I’m in a job...I would leave that behind in a second.” She has a business background, including a Masters in Business Administration (MBA), and currently works in an administrative position with the provincial government. She is under no illusions about her current work, recognizing that it is not the work she wants to be doing but rather it is a strategic decision. She is “putting in time” in her current job so that she can make a move to the career she desires.

Currently it's a job, working towards a career. I don't know, the calling part is difficult because it's difficult to pin point what a good position or role gives me could be considered something that I would do no matter what because I make work that I really enjoy. I continue to search for new positions that give me what I really want from work, but I wouldn't call it a calling, I guess is what I'm saying. It's just a way of living.

She notes that having a Job at the moment has advantages, with the main one being that it allows her the means to do what she “really wants to do,” i.e., concentrate her time into other areas of life such as travel, exercise, and spending time with her husband. “My particular position right now is a job...I get up and go do my work and get it done because that will provide me the ability to do the things that I really want to do.” However, she also continually emphasizes how important her work is to her. Since work has always been an integral part of her life, she is somewhat frustrated with this aspect of

her existence. She implies that work is not an authentic part of her everyday life at the moment.

I have a job now, which does not necessarily represent what I feel my work to be...although there are parts of it that are very satisfying... the day to day, going back and forth to work at this particular job is not what I would consider my work. My work is in basically working with teams of people in the past positions that I've had to get end goals for organizations... And I would say leading a team of skilled people is what I would say is my work that I do best, and that's what I like to do. I like to see, kind of help teams and specifically managers and leaders, young leaders, put processes together and become successful, and where they become successful, the more interesting projects I can take on, and you know, continue taking, I guess, keeping my challenges going. I think that's...what do I like or dislike about it? I like teamwork.

Previously, she had a Career she enjoyed, but she made a strategic decision and a conscious choice to leave her Career in order to relocate with her husband. In some ways, she feels that she has lost her way in her work life as it has become mainly a means of achieving her economic aims.

I made a decision a few years ago to move out of my work, which would be when I lived out west, and come to Nova Scotia, and basically, for different reasons, primarily decisions I made, but I was not able to get to land a position with a company that could take advantage of the work that I do. I've only been able to get positions that give me a job to basically pay the bills and things like that.

She does not deny that her work has been her choice. "A job could be anything that gets me to pay the mortgage, or whatever...that's what I have to do now, in order to get back to the position I that I have had in the past to get to be doing work, the work that I do, I guess." She considers most of her previous work as a series of Careers, which she equates with work that she not only likes but is also proficient at.

I'd say the majority of it. I've worked a little less... about 20 years...I would say probably 15 of those years have been...doing the work that I like and I think that I'm good at. I think there's a link there, because if you're good at what you're doing, you also have a tendency to like it. And success to me is not, primarily, is

very much not financially based. It's helping and working with good teams of people. That's what success is to me...I will leave jobs, I am quite known for leaving good paying jobs, financial jobs, when I get tired of, that I've done the work that I can do.

She describes herself as being on a journey with her work, a journey that is currently going through a difficult phase since she is stuck in a job. "So I will move and do what has to be done to keep my, to keep challenged I guess...To keep searching for this work." She keeps searching for the right career but also recognizes that she will probably never find the one and only "right" career for herself. "I find it and then I leave...did I do 15 solid years of...work that I like? I've done two or three, and then I've left." She has enjoyed a variety of work in the past and does not think that there actually is one work position out there that would keep her happy for the rest of her life, similar to the belief that each person has one true soul mate - "No, I doubt there's one position." She also recognizes that she is in a different stage of her existence, as she comments on her age, and how it affects her view of her work. She is more selective with the work that she is willing to do than she was in the past, and this means she will take more time in making decisions regarding work.

I'm not, as a 40 year old woman going to jump ship quite as easily. It was not easy to find work that was meaningful to me, as you get older, because the work that I look to do is difficult to basically get... I mean, that's why it's taken me four years in Halifax to get it. Like I shouldn't have to have waited four years and gone back to school to get my accounting to get the work that I want because I am good at what I do, and my résumé not that spotty actually, and I do have some higher education. But I have to recognize that at the age and stage that I'm at that it is more difficult. So it will limit me because of my wants. And they are materials wants and travel wants, and things like that. So I will not be as quick to make decisions searching for the right work because I need to balance my needs and wants with decisions.

Although Elizabeth considers the work she does only a Job - not what she would like to be doing, and not “exciting” to her - she enjoys the flexibility and the work environment.

When I head to my job...whenever I head to my job...I wouldn't say excited, no, but...I certainly don't dread it, and I never really have....even though the actual work itself is more of a job to me, the job has a positive work environment that allows for me to be happy there...it has a lot of flexibility built into it, there's good people in the office, I have a nice physical environment... that adds to, or takes away from some of the unhappiness I have, I guess, because it truly is just a job.

Elizabeth has moved from one work position to another throughout her life, and is still searching for that perfect work. She tends to enjoy the people she works with and sometimes the day-to-day aspects of the work she has had but she has not found work that fulfills her need to fully action her beliefs. She feels a lack in this area although she did note that sometimes she feels her work is meaningful when she is helping clients who have little financial means. She is conscious of the choices she has made with her work life. She knows her life is more than just her work and her work can be simply a means of allowing her to focus on other aspects of life. Her desire for a career, however, indicates a frustration and anxiety on her part that she is not fulfilling her potential with a job even though she enjoys the everydayness of the work. This aspect supports the Job-Career-Calling model, which predicts the frustration of having “just” a job without perhaps acknowledging the challenges of attaining and keeping careers or the benefits of having a job when other aspects of life are valued more than work.

Job as Choice

Michelle is a homemaker who currently does not work outside the home. She is focused on raising her children but intends to go back into the workforce in the future. She previously had a Career which she notes became a Job over time, and which she eventually chose to give up when her first child was born. She considers her children as her work. "Right now I don't work because I'm staying at home with the kids... that's my work, right now." Michelle made a choice early in her life that family would be her priority. To her, this meant that she would be a stay-at-home parent once she had children until they went to school. Despite having a career for the eight years prior to having children, she was conscious that work was always going to play a secondary role in her life. Not surprising, children add a significant component to life and can change how work is viewed. She is planning to return to work on a part-time basis and clearly wants a Job, as her primary focus is, and will always be, her family. "I see myself wanting to be back, I guess, in the work force at some point...but not until the kids are both in school." She is currently researching her options for future work after her children start school.

Something part time, where I can go and I know that I can leave it there at work, I'm not going to bring it home with me, in terms of work at home, or in my mind. Just the stress of it, every job I've had before. So, even though I know I want to work again, I know first that I definitely want to be home more with the kids.

She is not sure what type of work that she would like to do but is definite that she wants a job only, and no more, certainly not a career. She defines her future work more in terms of what she does not want, than in terms of what she does want. She is definitive that she does not want a career.

The perfect would be working mornings, knowing that, like it's very important to me that I'll be home when they get off the school bus. So, the ideal job is one

that's pretty flexible hours, one that I could be home when they're home, and I guess, mostly something that is doing admin work, like in a doctor's or a dentist's office or Service [department], where you go and get your vehicle registration, or Blue Cross, or something like that. I would see myself enjoying that a lot. And also, I don't know because I haven't done the job, but I don't think it would be a lot of stress and coming back home with me. So, something like that.

She wants work kept in its place to ensure that it does not come home with her and be a source of stress in her life. She also reinforces the idea that she only wants a job as she cannot imagine continuing to work if she did not feel that she had to for financial reasons – “I can't imagine that I would.”

Daniel is an entrepreneur who is in the midst of a major work change. He operated his own business for sixteen years and he feels that it was a very good Career. However, he gradually became exhausted by the work, and has left his work to search for a new occupation, which he would like to be a job or a “small” career. So he is going in the opposite direction with his work aspirations, but consciously and deliberately.

I just sold my restaurant/catering business, after 16 years... I'd been in the restaurant management business for 28 years... at the moment, I'm asking that age old question, “What the hell do I want to do with the rest of my life?”

He initially became an entrepreneur because he believed that it would provide what he wanted from his work: a good income and especially, “freedom.”

I had this fantasy that I always wanted to have my own business because then I could do whatever I wanted. I'd have all kinds of free time and I could work hard and then play hard. Make above average income and not have to be at work at a certain time, and I could do my own thing.

He is now considering his options for future work, as he wants to move on to a new stage of life. While he is not clear about what he should do, he is fortunate in that he does not have an urgent financial need to make a choice immediately. He notes that he

wants his new work to be “minimal effort,” which is not surprising since he has worked very hard over the past 20 years and now wants a break.

I've always had a passion for real estate, ever since I've come to Halifax. I remember walking down the street looking at these properties and imagined fixing them up and painting them, renovating them and being able to get, acquire some kind of passive income from them. You know, with minimal effort.

He is planning to take a course in Real Estate to see if he enjoys the work and determine if he is suitable for this type of work or not. “I want to take the course and immerse myself in it so I can say, ‘Yup, this is where I want to be,’ or, ‘Nope.’” He has identified work activities that he enjoys and would now like to focus on in his work. He enjoys being creative and seeing the results of what he has created, similar to an artist.

When everything works together, you know, so it's kind of like building a little orchestra, all these little components, many, many components. And, when it just, when it works, you know? The restaurant is busy and staff are doing their thing and everybody feels good about what they're doing and their contribution. And you go, “Holy shit, I put this together!” And...being able to see what I created.

He has also changed his view of work, as it is not as important to him as it was over the past twenty years. “I've since realized there is so much more to life than work.”

When asked if he would describe his work as a Calling in any way, he is unsure but believes that it is something more than just a typical career.

I certainly have this, what we call today, “entrepreneurial spirit”...I can imagine...when I get up in the morning...being in the restaurant business, I know there are certain things I've got to do. Like being the farmer and getting up and looking over his fields and saying, “Today we're going to do this and this and this. We're going to make this thing happen,” you know? “We're gonna make these crops grow.” For me it was, “I've got things to do to look after myself. I have this creation called a business, and I'm going to go and tend it. I'm going to do this for it and that for it,” it's like a living thing. Is it a calling? No, I don't think it's a calling.

He seems to be conflicted about how to describe his past work as an entrepreneur; he will not say it was a Calling yet also feels that it was more than a Career. At one point in the interview he definitely says that it was not a Calling, but then also refers to the work as a passion. And having a passion is a key characteristic of a calling.

I don't know...it was a passion, yeah I guess it was a passion. A passion to be on my own, a passion to do my own thing. Was it a calling? No. Was it just going to work? No...it's like I'm a farmer...I gotta get up in the morning, I gotta make my living, I gotta tend my fields, I gotta create.

Now he is looking for a different type of work, one with much less responsibility and the accompanying stress. "I want to get away from the responsibility to so many people and so many things... I want a simpler type of way to make a living...I'm so, like done with it...I feel it matured me a lot and allowed me to do other things where I can get to the part and go, "Ah, ha. I don't want to do that any more. I want to do this type of work." He recognizes that he is at a major transition point in his life, and that work still is and always will be, a significant part of his life. But he feels strongly that he wants to move on and that there is a better way of living for him now to be grasped.

Up to this point I created this world, of heavy responsibility...Having a tough career, having employees and having so many variables I had to be responsible for...having kids early in life and having to be responsible. I see the rest of it as being more playful, letting myself off the hook in terms of having to be so responsible...Working smart as opposed to hard. I don't mind hard work, it's kind of a tool I have in my back pocket, but... so I see a lot more ease in the rest of my life. More ease, more joy... more rest and relaxation.

For both Daniel and Michelle then the decision to work at a "mere job" was consciously taken and works for them in a way that is not predicted by the Job-Career-Calling model because it assumes that callings (not jobs) are the way to a better life. They have both chosen jobs either because of their external circumstances changing (having

children) or because their view of work itself has changed and the model fails to account for changing circumstances or for the fact that someone would consciously choose to have only a job.

Job Summary

Michelle, Daniel, and Elizabeth view their current work as a job. Michelle and Daniel made a choice that they only want their work to be a job and Elizabeth is in a job because she has been unable, so far, to create the career that she would like to have. Elizabeth left her work because location and family were more important than the career she had but is now paying a price for that choice. Daniel left a Career after twenty years and is now searching for a Job, but not just any Job. He is not willing to do work that does not fit with the other parts of his everydayness, and financially, he does not have to. Elizabeth emphasizes that even though she is searching for a career she enjoys the flexibility and work environment in her current job. Michelle made a choice for children; Elizabeth made a choice based partially on her spouse and other family concerns. Daniel made the decision because of a desire for a different life style. Counter to what is implied in the Job-Career-Calling model, these three interviews tell us that there are good reasons why people might want only jobs and that it is not always true that a career is preferable to a job. The interviews indicate many other factors that are being taken into consideration when making decisions about work and the model does not necessarily explain why some people view their work in one way or another.

Work as Career

According to the Job-Career-Calling model, a career is work that is viewed as more important to the individual than a job. The individual has a greater investment in his or her work and seeks challenge and personal growth (Bellah et al., 1985). The model predicts that the career distinction is clear and implies that people have greater work satisfaction if they view their work as a career instead of a job. Seven of the people interviewed view their current work as a Career, or are in a transition toward a Career. Career was the hardest term to define and describe for the interviewees. Some saw their work as between a job and career; some saw a career as “balance” while others stated that a career had ironically “called” to them, though it wasn’t a calling per se. The interviews with people with careers illustrated three challenges for the model: the categories themselves are not distinct and they overlap; definitions depended on the individual; and all of the careers had “calling moments” that are not taken into account by the Job-Career-Calling model.

Between Job and Career

Justin has recently embarked on a second career as an academic after working in the public sector for the past twenty years. He describes his new work as being *between* a job and a career. “I would say in the middle. I definitely see work as more than a way to make money, but I don’t see it as being at the career level either. So I’d put it somewhere in between.” He made a strategic decision to change his work as a result of boredom in his old work and when a good opportunity for change arose. “An opportunity presented itself to basically take advantage of the skills that I’ve been developing and acquiring over the years, and I was rather bored with what I was doing before, I had been there long

enough. So it was a good fit.” He views his work differently now than he did when he was younger. “I would say early on in my career, when it was closer to the vocation side of things because of the responsibility I would take. Once I got out of my 20’s, that passed. But other times where it has been a means to pursue other things as an income. But I would say more in the last ten years it’s been more of a balance.” Justin’s interview shows us the ambiguity within the categories of the Job-Career-Calling model because he cannot label his work definitively a job or career, preferring to elaborate more carefully the difficulties with both.

Career as “Balance”

One interviewee saw career as an opportunity for balance, defined as more than just a job but leaving time for other aspects of life – not associated with a calling which is all encompassing. Christine is a professor with children who previously had what she considered a good career in the corporate world but is now in completely different work which she also considers a career. She admits that her view of work has changed as she became disillusioned with the corporate work environment after many years. “I had been working for a good 20 plus years, and it was like, you know, “Is this it?”...“Is there more than this?” And... a lot of the fun's gone out of it in terms of the work.” This, along with family considerations, resulted in a decision to change to a new line of work, one that would also be more stable. The work change was something that she had been thinking about but also was the result of a friend’s encouragement.

“You seem to enjoy this, you seem to be good at it, have you ever thought about doing...this full time?” And I had actually been thinking about it... I had that in the back of my mind, which is why I pursued that when I got down here. So it just seemed to be a good opportunity...And it seemed to work better with family. That was, in terms of our rationale for coming home...have a better environment for

our family and also maybe to have a little more balance in life. And the [work], in terms of a career, seemed to afford that opportunity and flexibility.

She feels good about the career change even though it took a number of years as she had to go back to school. “I’m very optimistic about the future in the sense that I think I’ve been through a very demanding phase of my life.” She talks about work in terms of being rewarding, fulfilling and about having greater balance.

I’ve kind of found my groove... a balance between doing something work wise that is rewarding and fulfilling to me where I feel I’m making some kind of positive difference. And, that I’m also...enjoying...in as big a way, or even a bigger way, my children and my husband and my friends and the rest of my family....That there’s more of a balance, that the scale isn’t tipped so much in the favor of the work stuff. I’m tired. And I do feel my family has been short changed, and I don’t want to be in that position, I want to feel like, “Okay, there’s a better balance” and...if anything, my family’s getting more of my time and my energy.

Her career change process has made her rethink how she views work. She wants, as she always has, for her work to be significant and challenging, but she now views her work in relation to family concerns. She desires flexibility of work hours and time so that her family can be her first priority.

The way I think of myself in terms of my worth, my value, and it’s been interesting...thinking about the importance of your work outside the home relative to everything else that you do. And I know that historically I’ve probably put my work outside the home before most of it. That was paramount, and the family, everything else could work around it. My husband, my children, you know, my extended family, my friends... but now it’s about, it’s about putting bread on the table, it’s about keeping a house, you know, a roof over the family.

She speaks of desiring a good life, a well-rounded life, and a balanced life, and despite work still being very important to her, it does not have the same level of importance that it did in the past. “Maybe some of it is my attitude, maybe I’ve changed as well and I don’t see those deadlines as being as firm as I perceived them to be in

corporate life.” The decrease in the importance of work is a change similar to Daniel’s but Christine seems to consider work more important than he does. Her new work involved going back to university for many years, something Daniel is not interested in doing.

Life is not all about work... there is so much more, and it's important. Yes, you have to have an income, and be able to feed yourself and clothe yourself and put a roof over your head. But...we take that to an extreme sometimes as well, in the sense that, in terms of society and how materialistic we are and how consumer oriented we are. We can live, a lot of us, much more simply than we are. So if you have a job that maybe doesn't pay six figures, you can still live a good life, and have a very full, rounded life.

Christine seems to be living a balanced life in accordance with her value system. She describes her work as a career but not in terms of career development as per the model, only in terms of balance. Because the model has not developed an in-depth analysis of the three categories and has not incorporated the notion of the existential self, it is not able to encompass elements outside its current definition of career as primarily challenge and development.

Career as Passion and People

One interviewee saw a career as something we should feel passionate about which is also how the model describes callings but she explicitly rejected the idea that her career was a calling. Shannon works for a major corporation as a senior manager in their IT division and views her work as a career. “It’s not a job, it’s definitely a career because I’m on a career path and I feel that I’m consciously choosing to learn as much as I can... if it were just a job, I wouldn’t be...for me, a career is something that I’m passionate about, and it gives me meaning because if you’re passionate about something then you’re

going to be interested without taking a big effort.” She originally worked in physical education and then computer science before returning to school for an MBA degree followed by a Masters in Adult Education. She values people and her current work involves managing a department and teaching. “I really love relationships, I love human relations, you know, I’m interested in the study of communication and how people interact.” Shannon’s description of a career sounds less like a career as per the model’s definitions and more like a calling, but she overtly rejects the calling designation, illustrating again how the categories are unclear or overlap.

Career but it “Called” to Me

Three of the interviewees (Joseph, Courtney and Barbara) spoke about having careers that “called” to them, but that they did not consider callings. Joseph worked in the hospitality industry for many years before going back to school and becoming an elementary schoolteacher, thirteen years ago. He describes his current work as a career but feels that he had a Calling to become a teacher.

I look at it though as a career, because it was a calling that brought me into it, and now it's a career that I enjoy and I look at where it's going to take me. So I see it as a career...yes, the pay is nice, I think that teachers, that we're fairly well paid, and the paycheck is nice of course, to maintain my lifestyle. But it's the career that I see as a vehicle now, of taking me different places. And hopefully it will take me to some new challenges as well.

He now loves being a teacher and in comparison to his former work he feels much better off because he feels worthwhile and challenged.

I like the flexibility in the job. My job is never the same, day to day...you're almost like a counsellor to kids, you're, you're a surrogate parent...no day is the same, I like that. I like the flexibility in my schedule as well...I do have summers off, which is a nice perk...my evenings and weekends are off... I enjoy the research that's involved in delivering content, staying up on current trends with

education...there's lots of professional development that goes along with my profession, which I enjoy taking, and bringing back and improving my own personal practice...also the fact that I could pursue other avenues in education as well. Like right now I'm doing my masters right now, and hopefully that will open some doors down the road for me...there's lots that I like about education.

He plans to further his education, and expects to have new and greater opportunities with work in the future. "In the next 10 years I, well in the short term I'm going to receive my masters...I'm hoping that that door will start to open, and down the road maybe move to teaching in the university setting." He does not think about retirement and always expects to be working, at least part-time. He enjoys working and even takes on additional work in the summer when he does not need to, financially.

I don't think I'll retire completely, I'll probably work part time job doing something. But even during the summers now, I'm thinking, "Well, what can I do as a part time job?" And I have worked, this is actually, this summer and last summer is the first two summers I haven't worked during the summer in another job somewhere. I like to stay busy in that sense.

When asked if he would continue to work if he did not have to for financial reasons he notes, "Initially, no. But...I could see being bored a little bit, and maybe getting back into work, because it is such a, it's a big part of your life, really." Joseph rejects the idea that his work is a calling but he also feels, interestingly, that the work itself "called" to him, an option that is not mentioned in the model.

Like Joseph, Courtney also describes her work as a part-time university professor as a career but that it "called" to her. She has been teaching for the past three years and explains that she got into this type of work only by "accident." She previously was in work that she viewed as a calling, working for a religious organization as it combined her

work with her strong faith, but was let go by the organization. This resulted in a major disillusionment with life, and searching for a new direction with her work.

I didn't know what I wanted to do...I only found this out by accident...And she said, "Do you want to teach it?" Okay...and I had a really funny feeling, I had a very weird feeling that I was walking through a door that was definitely going somewhere. I had a feeling that something big was happening around that...I guess now I see this as a vocation, not a calling...Now, it's me calling me to it, I see that.

She loves the teaching aspect and enjoys the research, and values making a "positive difference" with her work. At the same time, though, she uses the phrase "paid employment career" which implies that she separates in her mind, paid work from unpaid (volunteer) work.

I would say that I probably found, my [place] for the rest of my paid employment career...I love the teaching, and it's very rewarding and fulfilling for me. I like the research too...I enjoy that too, as long as I'm connecting with people and actually seeing a difference from my work. I need to do research that somehow makes a positive difference, that isn't just analyzing tests for the sake of analyzing tests and writing a paper.

She expects to continue with this line of work but believes that it may also evolve into a more artistic endeavor, which she values. In addition to creativity and ideas, she values social justice, which she brings into her teaching. "I'm there because I care about their lives; it's not just an academic exercise for me...it's a social justice thing for me, very much so." She recognizes that since she is not in a full-time, permanent position, it is not stable work, and she could eventually lose it.

I would like to be doing this, probably until I retire, but I would, you know, I can see that probably my work will take on more and more of an artistic, creative piece. It's already going that way. Yeah, you know, you just never know what curve ball life is going to throw at you... if we have a bad recession, part-timers will be the first ones cut I think...I'm preparing for that if it happens. I'm doing the same things, I mean, I've just been accepted into a PhD program, but I don't

have the money for that. I'd like to think that I'd have it by then, but it's not a big goal.

Barbara is the third example of someone who uses the calling descriptor to talk about her career. She describes a Calling for herself as the process she is going through to change her work. "For me, it's the process which was calling like, filled with moments, filled with motivation, that speak to a more existential thought process. But the work itself is either a job or a career. The calling is the process to make these changes, for me." She views her current work as a "choice in progress" and even if she did not need to work, would still see the transition through. She is currently a Ph.D. student who previously experienced a series of Jobs and Careers. She describes her new work much like Christine does, as one that is more stable and a better "fit" with other aspects of her life, such as family, but it is also about more than that for her. "[Work], extremely important for lots of reasons, for challenges and sort of psycho social growth. It's been important for economics...I do want to earn a living, I do want to earn a good living to meet the material goals and needs of our family."

Although Barbara feels, for the most part, positive about her career, she realizes that she does not enjoy all aspects of it, notably the teaching component. "It's always also been an add-on, something I do to earn some money...I enjoy it when I'm in the classroom and I have interaction. I have wonderful moments. But, on a long continuum, no, not as much." She believes that everyone has a calling; it is just not always their work.

I think everybody has a calling. I think that tapping into the depth of yourself and a motivation to go beyond the physical execution of a task, it exists within everyone. It's not necessarily manifests in the way they earn their living... I think that's okay. I think that if your employment is just a job, or is a career, means that

your calling lays elsewhere. So your calling is perhaps, parenthood. Or your calling is perhaps a creative... not everybody will necessarily... have their work as their calling.

Barbara wants to think that her new work may become a Calling but admits that so far, it is not. “My early career was a career, but is [my current work] life a calling? I want to say it is, but I don't think I can. And that in itself I think is kind of interesting. That I have the desire to say that it's a calling because there's something in my psyche that says a calling is a good thing.” Like the others in this category, she describes herself as having a career but having been “called” to it. This appears to contradict the model as in the model this is “the” definition of a calling but it does show the importance people place on having callings and the ambiguity between callings and careers. Perhaps another way to understand this is to recognize the importance people put on their careers by saying they were called to it.

Career with “Calling Moments”

Nicole is divorced with two grown children, and owns and operates a small business from which she takes great pleasure. “I really enjoy what I do. I really enjoy it.” In spite of this, her work life has not turned out the way that she had envisioned that it would. She has changed work for different reasons, mainly family considerations, and has not had the stable career or calling that she had envisioned. She views her current work as a Career. “As far as career, I don't know if I expected to be where I am, but I'm quite okay with where I am... I think I've done a pretty good job out of building something out of my life.” She would like to have work that is a calling and describes teaching, which she does as part of her current work, as her passion and calling.

“Teaching, I think, helping people is my calling.” When she is teaching, her work feels like a Calling. Unfortunately, teaching is only a part of what she does at work.

One of the things I like the most about it is, with the adult education background and teaching, that was a passion for me. Empowering others to take action is a thrill. And for me, if I can sit down with someone and bring some piece of information to a level that they’re comfortable with, and they really fully understand it, at least at that time, it’s like an “Uh-huh!” for me...I’m doing that now on an individual basis, right, when I’m working with clients, or if I’m doing corporate training for businesses. That’s what I love.

Whereas her work is very important to her and she personally wants a calling, like Elizabeth she believes it is not necessary for everyone to have a calling - “I don’t think everyone has to have a calling, no.” However, it is clear that she believes that work is an important part of life, and significantly affects people. “A lot of what we do is connected to our work... if we’re not fulfilled in our work it really takes a toll on our personality. And that’s what happened to me in the corporate world.”

As noted above, Christine regards her work as a “balanced” Career, however she is not sure if it may also become a Calling. She comments, “I don’t know, it’s hard to say. In the early days in [previous work] I definitely think that my work was a career.” She wonders if her new work is perhaps growing into a Calling. One aspect of her work – teaching – is certainly becoming a Calling component. “I was teaching in the work environment with those new employees, and now teaching in the classroom I see it’s an extension of that, or it’s a bigger manifestation of that. So maybe that is growing into more of a calling.” The majority of the interviewees, then, spoke about their careers as having “calling moments” which is an important distinction not captured by the Job-Career-Calling model currently.

Career Summary

Christine, Justin, Joseph, Barbara, Courtney, Nicole, and Shannon all consider their work to be a career of some sort. However, “how” they describe a career varies greatly; almost a career, a career as balance, a career as passion and people; a career that called to me, and a career with calling moments. In terms of the model, the interviews clearly indicate the problem within the categories and the overlap between them. They also show the complexities of people’s needs for balance and life outside work which is not captured by the model. Some noted that there are different “moments” within work, some that make it worthwhile and other aspects that do not. But the good “moments” may not be a positive aspect of the work as they may blind people to their true feelings about their work, and therefore stay in work that perhaps they would be better off if they left. Some also noted that they want to say their work is a calling but it is not. Perhaps viewing work as a calling is an unconscious desire or that we are conditioned by society to believe that we must have a career or calling. Neither of these factors is depicted by the model.

Work as Calling

According to the Job-Career-Calling model, a calling is work that people feel “called” to do, and could also be described as the person’s passion in life (Bellah et al., 1985). Preliminary research on the model predicts that the happiest and most fulfilled people will have callings because this gives them a passion and inherent purpose in life (Freed, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Not one of the people interviewed unequivocally describe their work as a Calling, but four of them view their

work as much more than a career: as something in between career and calling; as almost a calling and; as trying to make it a calling. Most importantly for our analysis, one of the interviewees (Ryan) illustrates that there may also be real problems for the individual when we want our work to be a calling because our unfulfilled desires create turmoil and anxiety – which again is not predicted by the model.

It's both Career and Calling

Vincent and Andrew are both part-time professors who are in the process of completing their Ph.D. who view their work as both career and calling. Vincent seems to really love the work he does, continually using very positive language and describing all the wonderful things about it. Even when I asked questions about other aspects of his life, such as hobbies, he invariably came back to talking about his work. He personally equates a calling with activism, which is what he values most in life.

It's more than a career...it could be just a career, and I think many people would look at it that way. But I think calling implies activism, or political viewpoints or interests. And I mean interests way beyond you know, self interest, but you know, challenging interest and so, I have to say, in my own case I feel it's a calling.

He believes that in the past five years he has found a home, and that he is on the right path since for the majority of his work life he has been trying to find the right road. "I think I'm on that road that I really want to travel... I think it will get better and better from now on...I really appreciate being part of this [work] community." He sees that his new profession is not a Calling for everyone, and that it can be a Career for some and a Calling for others which supports preliminary research on the model (Wrzesniewski, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

But you look around and see all these others...and you think, "Is it a calling, or are they just in career mode?" You know, "Am I skeptical or..." I can't think of the word, but maybe they started out as idealists and it was a calling for them originally...but, I wonder with some anyway, but with many I just think it's, you know, just a career. Not that that's necessarily a bad thing, but I think this is a place where there are strong interests at work here, and so my interests might as well be part of the mix too.

Vincent made a change in his work years ago for a number of reasons, and he views the change as a major life step, and not only about work. His career change from businessman to professor is, interestingly, a continuation of the teaching he did when he was young, relating to his athletics background.

Part of it was it was an opportunity that was there, but I also...I don't think that I can say it was a calling as such, but I always enjoyed being a coach or instructor of sorts. You know, a sports coach, canoeing in particular, and swimming. So that was always part of my character, I suppose. Taking the step from being student to instructor was probably the same sort of step I would have taken in sports, or in other places. Even being a tutor in high school and stuff like that, or university. It was just another step. So it wasn't a vocational choice, it was just another step, sort of thing.

Work for Vincent has always been about "finding my own road and it wasn't so much about being successful in business...that was just a vehicle to being able to, being independent and able to do the things that really matter to me." So whereas he previously viewed work as a means to an end, now he views work as an end in itself. He is clear about what his current work gives him – "It's a place where I can have an influence, and a place where, that I really enjoy being anyway, aside from the...I mean, I like the life, the flexibility, the challenges, the rewards." And he also notes that "There are very few places where you can actually be part of something [original ideas] like that." Vincent describes his work as both career and calling, and seems to equate calling with "activism." It could be that people may consider their work a calling when they can

identify the work as being the main place in our life where they put their beliefs into action.

Like Vincent, Andrew describes his current move into academia as both career and calling. He has had a series of jobs and careers in his life but chose to make a major life change several years ago after a serious accident. In the past three years, he has clearly found a new career but he is not sure if he can call it a calling because he is still trying to figure out what his work now means to him.

Now, is it a calling...I don't believe that there is some sort of master plan where I was supposed to be an academic or something, and I found it. I think quite the contrary...I found it interesting...I chose to become an academic and then I did things that would make me become an academic. So, it wasn't that I woke up one day and knew, there was an angel there saying, "You're going to be an academic." And therefore that's my role, it was quite the contrary in that I decided this would be something I was interested in, that would use my talents, that would be challenging to me where I could contribute to my society as well as to myself and my family... it was just a better fit.

He has always worked and it has been an important part of his life. "Work has been a major component of my life for as long as I can remember. I can not truly remember a time before I worked for pay." However, he also states that he has changed his view of work in the past five years. It is now less about financial gain and more about the work itself and the work environment, and how the characteristics of the work position make him feel.

Work is very important to me, only its important now for very different reasons. Instead of being about a little bit of power and a whole lot of money, now it was about being around people. When you lose the social aspect of work, even when you're like me and you're fairly introverted, it's a profound loss. I don't know if people can really appreciate the true loss that it is, and not for a week or two, but for years. We socialize at work. We interact with people at work. We see new ideas and find different ways to understand our community at work.

He credits this change with a change in himself. “My change in how I viewed work came with the change in how I viewed myself...and out of that, how I viewed myself came a change in how I viewed life. It was a very different chain of events of how I'd done things differently.” He is now working toward a profession that is a surprise to him, because his self-concept had not allowed him to think of himself as an academic. “I had never considered being a professional in any way, shape or form myself, although I had been, I just hadn't recognized it.” His new work has enabled him to reinvent himself and as a result changed his entire life. In his mind he was living the wrong (bad faith) life, but now is living the right (authentic) life.

What it evolved into for me was, it's another portion of my life...it's not just something you do for money. I think it's something you have to challenge yourself socially, emotionally or if you want to call it spiritually, whatever that means...and vocationally, which is a loaded word, but I use it because vocation means calling, and I think when you find work you are good at, you can offer more and eventually it will transcend later from money into something else, although I don't know what it is. It's definitely something else.

Andrew is another example of the problem the interviewees had in describing their work as a job, career, or calling. He also illustrates that people may be hesitant to describe their work as a calling which is counter to the job-career-calling model. Perhaps the perceived investment and commitment needed to have a calling runs counter to the idea that we need balance outside of work and that for these interviewees, at least, they did not want to be perceived as only being interested in work.

Calling as “Internal” Work

Jessica has also transitioned to a new career over the past five years and, like Vincent refers to it as a calling. She made the decision to leave a career that she enjoyed

to one that she believes is a more stable one, and that can also meet her “Calling” needs. She is now a professor with grown children, and describes work in terms of joy and passion.

[I want] the joy that comes out of it. It's funny. I simply want the kind of work that we technically don't call work. I want the flow. I want to feel like I'm making a difference. And it's kinda, I almost feel guilty taking a pay cheque. It's like, they pay me for this stuff!

She regards a calling as an internal phenomenon, one that she has had to become a professor. “A calling comes from inside, I think. A career is externally placed...I think a calling comes from inside, and I was called inside to leave my career, and go follow my destiny, which is teaching.” Despite noting that she loves the work that she now does, she does not feel that she has found the right organizational fit for herself. As a result, she is not completely happy in her transition. “I haven't found the 'fit' with the organization. It's not the right person/organization fit yet... (but) I love the work.” Jessica’s dilemma illustrates that even when work is viewed as a calling a person can still be unhappy with the workplace environment.

Additionally, even though she views her work as a calling, she emphasizes that her work must fit with other aspects of her life, notably that it provides balance, like Christine. She also does not plan to be working full-time beyond retirement age, at least not full-time - “not full time working... I want to be writing about my memoirs and stuff.” While her work seems to be very important to her at this time and she describes it as a calling, she is also looking forward to the day when she will no longer be working. There appear to be some contradictions between Jessica’s view of work as a calling and the model. While she continually describes her work as a calling, she also talks about

balance, and need for work to fit with other components in her life. She also states clearly that she would not continue in the work if she did not need it for financial gain.

Therefore, the calling category is not any clearer than the career category and there can be significant overlaps and inconsistencies between them.

Trying to make it a Calling

Ryan left his previous work to become a professor but he is not sure how to describe his new work. His work was very significant to him and he wants his new work to be a Calling but admits that much of the time it feels like a career. “Work is really important to me... Is it a calling? I don't know if I would refer to work, per se, as a calling.” In the past his work was a clear religious Calling, but he gradually became disillusioned with the work environment, like Christine and Barbara. He made a change toward what he believed would better for him in the long run and his new work has some characteristics of a Calling. But he mainly described it to me as a Career, and this is a problem for him as he wants a passion, as he has had in the past.

I thought I would be an academic, I kind of see myself as an academic. I would default to wanting to know why about things, rather than just how to do something. That whole life appealed to me. I anticipated that this would lead to an academic position of some kind. And certainly, I had good models in my master's program of people who were doing interdisciplinary work, from a Christian perspective. And so I thought eventually I could end up in that kind of context as well. I thought, “Yeah, that's kind of more of who I am.” The university, the semesters, you know, being involved in learning really interesting things, writing about them and doing research.

Unfortunately, Ryan thought academia would become a new calling, but it has not worked out that way as he refers to his new work as, “Not what I signed up for.” But despite his struggles in adapting to his new work, he has “moments” when the work is

extremely fulfilling. “And it's at that moment as you press on that you know it's around the corner, but you can't see what's around the corner until you turn the corner. So you need to keep working, but when it's there, it's there. It's exciting, and its fun.” When asked how he feels about his work now, he comments, “Slightly disillusioned...feels like, “Why am I here?”...you just think, “Good gracious, this is not what I signed up for.” However, he also recognizes that there are components within his work that are very fulfilling to him.

...it's just a real joy to see those things happen and to interact with those people, and so on. And you feel that there is some value in what you're doing... and then where I also find a sense of fulfillment is in doing research. ...when it's there, it's there. It's exciting, and its fun...I especially like to work with other people. I find it motivating...because I'm a very social person. So it keeps me focused, and it keeps me going, and those things are good... so that's why, in part, I like [my work].

Ryan admits that he has a high need to contribute to society and, therefore, wants his work to be a calling. It is clear that he is conflicted with his current work life as he comments, “If I had a month to live, I'd go, ‘Aww man!’ I think I would largely abandon you know, the whole academic side, I wouldn't have time to crank out a paper or two, and I don't think that would be the point. I would focus entirely back on the faith side of things.” He wonders if this newly chosen work is actually getting in the way of what he desires from his life, which he describes as some form of self-sacrifice.

And so I'm wondering if part of my discontent that shows up with some of the teaching side isn't also because maybe teaching gets in the way of this striving, which is perhaps more motivated than anything else. And when you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, it's a calling quite beyond selfish ambition, and it's a calling to self-sacrifice in many ways.

Ryan wants to feel that he is making a difference to people in the world, which he is trying to do, but with some difficulty at the moment, pointing to the complexities that follow any major life decisions especially when they haven't gone completely as planned. Since Being is always in a state of becoming, consciousness is also always changing, and choices re-interpreted. Ryan illustrates that the desire (or need) for work to be a calling may be problematic as this may place very high expectations on the work that someone chooses. How can a high degree of contribution to society be maintained? And what happens if this need is no longer being met by the work? What happens when the individual fails to realize Being potentialities that he or she desires? "The condition of the individual when confronted with the issue of fulfilling his potentialities is anxiety...when the person denies these potentialities, fails to fulfill them, his condition is guilt. That is to say, guilt is also an ontological characteristic of human existence" (May, 1983: 112). The model, as currently understood, does not indicate any inherent problems with having a calling and does not take into account the sometimes problematic aspects of having high expectations for our work.

Calling Summary

Vincent, Andrew, Jessica, and Ryan all describe their work in terms of some aspects of a calling. However, each of them has a personal definition of what a calling means - as process, passion, activism, destiny, and psychological need. Jessica describes a calling as personal destiny; a person is "given" a talent to be fulfilled through work. "If there's something that you've been given, that you're good at, I think you owe it to yourself and to the world, to use it." Vincent describes a Calling as a process. They all have a strong need to feel they are contributing to the welfare of other people. "I get the

feedback that I'm a good teacher. From parents, from administrators, which is good, I want to know, I want to be a good educator.” However, despite describing their work as a calling they also appear to contradict the typical calling description, e.g., Jessica describes her calling in terms of balance and notes that she would not continue with the work if she did have a financial need. She also illustrates the difference between being happy with work as a calling and being in the right workplace. The desire for a calling also seems to potentially be problematic as this places very high expectations on the work that someone chooses. Most previous literature has suggested that viewing work as a calling directly correlates to increased health (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), but Ryan’s case shows that an inverse relationship may also be possible. High expectations for work and wanting work to be a calling can create a high level of anxiety and, therefore, could negatively affect the individual’s being.

Critique of the Model

The Job-Career-Calling model provides an effective method to categorize the importance an individual assigns to his or her work and it resonated with the people interviewed. However the interview analysis calls attention to four limitations of the model. First, the categories are understood in different ways and can overlap with each other. Most of the interviewees could not clearly identify their work as a job, career or calling. A career was described in different ways, as balance to passion and learning. They mostly noted that their work had elements of at least two different categories, e.g., they had “calling moments’ within their career, or being “called” to their career, or almost a calling. There are “moments” within work that seem to make it worthwhile and

meaningful to the individual, even though there are other aspects of the work that are not. This can, of course, become a double-edged sword. Because these “moments” can also sometimes blind people to their true feelings about their work, individuals need to remain conscious about their choices and not stay in work that they should be leaving. Three “experiences” of work that were mentioned frequently were work as a means to action beliefs, the interaction with other people, and the everyday activities involved in work.

Second, the model appears to imply (and some of the interviewees confirmed this) that it is preferable to view work as a career or calling, and not as a job. A Job seems to imply the non-authentic life and although having a Calling is not absolutely necessary, according to researchers, having a Career is considered by many people to be almost a key requisite in order to live a meaningful life (Karp & Yoels, 1981; Pfeffer, 1998; Ransome, 1996). I suggest that, contrary to some of the research which emphasizes the positive nature of callings (Wrzesniewski, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), there may be negative effects when people view their work based on one criterion such as the need for security, helping others, contributing, or following in the footsteps of a family member. For example, for those who believe their work should be a calling, work will be the main source of authentic existence. But an authentic state is not permanent and therefore cannot be maintained, and if a person views his or her work as a calling, inevitably there will be problems with the work which will undoubtedly cause anxiety and anguish. At that point it may be necessary for them to then change their work but it is difficult to move from one calling to another as the interviews have shown. Also, despite describing himself as content with his current work as an academic, which is a calling, Vincent appears to be still searching for a state of authenticity. So it appears that viewing your

work as a calling does not necessarily mean you are living authentically and illustrates how meaning can change over time. The craving for this type of “return” from our work can perhaps never be satisfied leaving the individual in a “no-win” scenario of life.

Some people feel quite satisfied with lives that are reasonably comfortable and orderly but in which they have minimal engagement or sense of purpose. Their lives have much viability in the world but little suitability for the self. When the self is so little invested in the life, the life in turn can offer little to the self – though many adults settle for this condition. Likewise, people who are passionately engaged in living, and who invest the self freely in the life structure, may experience much turmoil and suffering. They ask more of life than it can readily provide. The intense engagement in life yields more abundant fruits but exacts a different and in some ways greater toll (Levinson, 1986: 11).

Third, the model does not explain how a particular view of work affects or interacts with other parts of a person’s life. Despite the importance of work in Western society, it is only one aspect of a person’s existence among many. Does the person who views work as *only* a job have a greater challenge in living an authentic life than people who view work as a career or calling? Or, is it the opposite, that in fact other (non-work) avenues of life present a greater opportunity for fulfilling needs that lead to authenticity? Those who claimed their work was just a job appear to have very sound reasons for wanting work to be “in its place” in regards to other, more important, aspects of their lives. What the interviews showed me was that a job can be fulfilling and create an authentic life because other priorities are more important to that individual and conversely that a need for a calling can be detrimental.

Finally, and most importantly, whereas the model categorizes work, it does not explain where the view of work comes from and why that may change. Why does one person view work as a job while another view it as a career or calling? Choices in life, including those made about work, must first become part of an individual’s

consciousness; options are then recognized and choices made. So what contributed to this consciousness for the people interviewed? “Existentialism presents an image of the self-to-society relationship that is quite apropos to today’s world: the image of the self confronting society” (Kotarba, 1984: 225). Each of the people interviewed determined a major work change was in order. For most, this change took years, and came with an emotional cost to themselves and their family. “Freedom provides the ontological basis for unauthenticity and authenticity as possible modes of existence. Man can affirm his freedom through resolute choice and thus attain integrity, or he can abdicate his freedom, neglect to choose, lose his existential centeredness, and succumb to unauthenticity” (Schrag, 1977: 180). The people interviewed ultimately chose to go in a new direction in their work and since desire is related to a state of anxiety, we can surmise that their previous work resulted in this state. From an existentialist perspective, anxiety emerges as a result of a state of inauthenticity, and the person may then make a new choice and move toward authenticity.

In chapter six I will examine these concerns by expanding our analysis of the narratives to include the nature of being, using the existential framework. I will explore how the interviewees made choices and have changed their work in response to changes in their circumstances or viewpoints. To do this, I will utilize the existential themes outlined in chapter three in order to understand how the interviewees’ work is related to their Being. Those five themes are choice, bad faith, authenticity, contingency, and death, and they will be used to answer the questions that the Job-Career-Calling model has not been able to address. I will argue that the main weakness of the model is that it fails to take into account the existential self, that is, we cannot understand work without

understanding how the individual “understands” his or her self, especially as the self is continually changing. What is lacking, then, is an explanation for how work fits with one’s Being as he or she makes choices throughout life and attempts to live authentically.

Chapter 6 – Understanding a Life

Introduction

The existentialist writers hope to shatter our dogmatic beliefs and lure us into giving up blindly accepted ethical norms and ideologies. Only when we successfully shed these values that we have been conditioned to uphold by various institutions – our families, schools and universities – will we be able to reach beyond them to the genuine roots of our selves and ultimately attain authenticity. The unnecessary information we have collected during our lifetimes, the ‘facts’ postulated as an integral part of the ethos of objectivity fostered by society and its institutions, are inapplicable to the sphere of human existence in which one struggles for one’s self. (Golomb, 1995: 8)

In the preceding chapter I explained how the interviewees view the importance of their work and where their current work fits in the Job-Career-Calling model. The importance of work varies greatly among the people I interviewed. Most have always considered work as at least a career however they have all also gone through changes in their work in the mid-life stage. Some feel that they *should* have a Calling, yet one has either not materialized or other parts of life have precluded it. “I continue to search for new positions that give me what I really want from work” (Elizabeth). For some of the people interviewed, the choice of work is based on what it does *not* do to life, rather than what it adds to life. Some of the people interviewed talked about the need for “balance” in their life and for “security.” But is pursuing a life of balance or security only following societal dogma, and hence, accepting of bad faith for the individual, or is it a case of knowing oneself? Some of the people interviewed commented that they have “arrived” at a good place in life, as if life is about finding something or a destination. They also talked about wanting work to be a place they feel they belong, to feel a sense of community around them.

Although the model provides an efficient way to understand the importance an individual places on his or her work, I argued in chapter five that there are four problems with the model in terms of its overall usefulness from an existentialist point of view. In this chapter I further explore the limitations of the model by examining the lives of the interviewees using the existential themes developed in chapter three (choice, bad faith, authenticity, contingency and death). Whereas we know *where* the interviewees have arrived in their work today, we do not know *how* they arrived. As noted, the existential self is always changing as a result of our experiences and our reflection on those experiences. In order to understand the meaning of work for the interviewees we need to know *the journey* that they have taken to get there. Why did they choose their original work and why did they change that work? Were the original choices the result of family pressure or other influences, or their true desires? Do they now (looking back) consider the original work choice a mistake or did the work itself somehow change? How do their choices of work relate to what they consider to be a meaningful life? What unexpected events may have influenced their choices? How does the thought of death affect how they view their life or do they even think about their mortality? In analyzing the interviews using the theoretical framework, then, the major questions to be answered in this chapter which cannot be addressed by the Job-Career-Calling model are: (1) How were work choices originally made? (2) How did bad faith (feelings of inauthenticity) influence their decision to change their work? (3) How do they define the authentic (meaningful) life? (4) How have their views of work and meaning changed over time as a result of contingent factors? (5) How do they view death and how does this affect their attitudes toward work and life?

Original Work Choices

Freedom that is total, yet rooted in a determinate, historical situation; dread in the face of such freedom; and the concealment of dread in the comforting frauds of everyday existence – such is the nexus of ideas that make up the core of the existentialist’s conception of human life. (Greene, 1959: 56)

Choices are made from the multitude of potentialities that are within the consciousness of each individual, and then translated into action. “Man constantly makes his choice concerning the mass of present potentialities; which of these will be condemned to nonbeing and which will be actualized” (Frankl, 1985: 143)? But where do the possibilities that become part of individual consciousness come from? “The self is concerned about that which it has been (necessity) and that which it is yet to become (possibility). Consciousness of being a self involves arriving from a past and moving into a future” (Schrag, 1977: 122). For the interviewees, early experiences exposed them to various possibilities for work and these potential choices became conscious to them as they became old enough to work. I asked them questions such as: what influenced their original work choices, were they committed to their original choice, and, how do they feel about those choices? As follow up questions, I then asked them (if they did not pursue work that they dreamed of when they were young) was it a conscious choice to change direction, or was it determined by other factors beyond their control? And what led to the change in desire for a particular kind of work? A few people had difficulty articulating what they initially wanted from their work which can be interpreted as a symptom of a lack of consciousness. “It appears that participants’ unwillingness or inability to answer questions concerned with where they wanted to work, what roles they

wanted to play and what positions they wanted to occupy all played a part in this indecisiveness” (Wallace, 2007: 212).

For the interviewees, original work choices were made twenty to forty years ago. Like all choices that an individual makes in life, they are judged based on the results at any given point in time and so are continually re-interpreted as time goes on, and as Being changes. The choices made by the people interviewed are thus viewed at the time of the interview, and not necessarily the same way they would have been at the time that they were made or at any other point in time, i.e., one year ago, five years ago or three years in the future. Therefore, it is understandable that the people interviewed may now “look back” on many of their choices with surprise, bewilderment, amazement or regret. And since an individual’s Being is always in a state of becoming, the process of the interview itself, has affected the person’s Being.

The reasons stated by the people interviewed as to why they choose the work they did was fourfold: the influence of family, the desire to make a difference, being called by God and admitting that they chose something by not choosing.

Influence of Family

Five of the people interviewed clearly identified their parents or another family member as a source of influence in deciding what work to pursue. Elizabeth, who is currently in a job but searching for a career, was influenced both positively and negatively by her parents. She was influenced positively by their strong work ethic; however, her parents were not “professional” people and their expectations for their daughter were such that they could not seriously envision her pursuing something as elitist as medicine which she originally considered. She also grew up in a small

community that limited her work options. “There was no opportunity there for anything other, like if you were leaving town, you were going to university and you were going to not live back in a small town...So because I was from a small town, you had to go out into the world, which gave me the next taste of more world, and I just kept going.”

Christine, currently in a new career as a professor, was significantly influenced by her parents’ values of hard work and education. “I grew up in a family where my dad, and my mom as well to a certain degree, placed a lot of importance on work and working hard, long hours, and my family did well as a result of that... So it was never an option that I wasn't going to go to university.” During her undergraduate degree Christine was encouraged by one of her professors to consider graduate school but at the time she had no interest in further education or in being an academic. “He talked to me at that point about going on and doing graduate studies, and I just looked at him, you know, I couldn't even fathom doing that... I want to go out and get a job! And get paid!” Twenty years later in her mid-life years, Christine has changed her work to become a professor.

Daniel’s parents gave him basic structure but since his upbringing was also quite negative, he developed a view of work as a means to “escape” from his family. “I saw work as a way to escape from my parents and their fears about the world.” Work meant freedom and power, and he was mainly driven by the desire to be living on his own and away from his parent’s influence. Adding to his view of work as freedom, were the positive feelings he received when he first earned his own money from doing various jobs. “When I worked I got paid, when I got paid I had power because I could buy things for myself, I didn't have to rely on other people, I could look after myself... That's kinda what I discovered as a kid... Not have to rely on anybody.”

Like Daniel, Nicole did not feel “secure” when she was growing up, describing her childhood as not “functional.” As a result, she learned to value security, especially financial security, and it is a value that she holds to this day. “I came from a very...a very insecure childhood financially, so, we grew up without a lot of money, so money became very important to me. Knowing what it's like not having a lot of it. And marrying very early in life, a lot of percentage of reason why I married for money was pretty high.” She believes that because she was raised in an environment that lacked security it has been more difficult for her to take risks throughout her life. She was also influenced by a teacher when she was very young who instilled in her a strong desire to be “successful.” “I was a five year old student, first year of school, and her reaction to my work burned in my brain... made me feel like I had worked really hard... really had a lot of influence on my need to succeed... the driving force that I have to succeed.” The desire to be a “success” has stayed with Nicole all her life but this value also causes her stress because whatever she does, it is never enough.

The influence of family on young people is understandable but from an existential perspective living for others will result in the inauthentic life. To live authentically it can be argued that we must be careful not to make our decisions based entirely on what other people want us to do, i.e., in bad faith. In the end, in order to be made in good faith, we must “own” our choices, and therefore accept the self that we become by those choices. “Authentic being is creating and constructing one’s life on the basis of what one thinks, feels, and desires and not on conventions, norms, fashions, or expectations of others” (Orbach, 2008: 283).

Making a Difference

The second most common reason for someone picking a particular occupation originally was the desire to make a difference: this was the case with four of the people interviewed. Michelle grew up believing that her work should involve “helping people.” She remembers wanting to be a pediatrician but in the end chose not to pursue it. “I always wanted to be a pediatrician, that's what I always said when I was little. I would like to have been a pediatrician. But I think when you get older and you get in school, and you think how much more school that takes and I didn't think to pursue that any more.” She changed her mind when she got older and she realized that she was not willing to choose to do the education needed to be a doctor. But she still wanted to “help people,” so she chose a career as a social worker. As she puts it, it was simply “a job where I was helping people.”

Michelle seems to have been influenced to make this choice by a societal concept that we must do important work. Society today encourages “contribution,” “balance” (Nippert-Eng, 1996) and “security” (Baggini, 2005) as desirable traits. And existentialism does acknowledge the complex societal pressure brought to bear on the individual. “All human beings recognized by their fellows as socially competent (“sane” and “adult”) realize, with widely varying degrees of implicitness, that they are both distinctive, separate, individuated beings and socially defined beings (Douglas, 1984: 70). There is of course, nothing wrong with people wanting their work to be ‘important’ as long as they understand where their desires come from and that their work is consciously chosen.

Called by God

Both Courtney and Ryan had religious callings. Courtney had a very difficult childhood characterized by feeling “different” and confused about the meaning of life. “I felt as if I was somehow an observer of my family. I seem to remember I was watching them do their thing, and as a little kid, like, I was on the outside looking in... So I just kept running into the fact that I felt different, and never connecting on the level that I wanted to connect with people. And I never knew why.” Her faith and her work came together when she became the church secretary of the fundamentalist church that she belonged to. She found her calling with the church but, unfortunately, the relationship between her and the church ended badly, when she was excommunicated because of her sexual orientation. This was a very traumatic experience at the time and dramatically changed the direction of her life – not just with work but all aspects of her life.

Ryan originally planned to become an engineer like his uncle and also because he enjoyed “creating.” “Initially I wanted to be an engineer. I love math, and I loved the idea that you could create things and shape things and mold things into certain, in certain ways, and create cool things.” He also had an altruistic desire to help people which came from his strong religious faith and eventually decided against engineering in favor of something that he believed would make a difference in people’s lives. “So in the end I thought, “Well, I need to focus on something that begins to work at people's core and values at the things that will reshape them in ways that enhances their lives. That will in fact, impact the lives of the people around them as they change themselves.” The combination of his faith, his uncle’s influence, and his friends, resulted in Ryan’s choice

to go into the ministry. Both of these interviewees illustrate that our choices are based on our strongest beliefs and these come from many sources including the spiritual.

Choosing by 'Not Choosing'

Vincent and Joseph are examples of people who made decisions by not consciously choosing. Vincent worked as a volunteer firefighter when he was a teenager and the medical training he received resulted in an interest in medicine. "I didn't consider anything other than doctor, although I should have. And when that didn't, when that wasn't going to bear out, I fell into something." The main criteria for choosing what to pursue at university was about what he did not want to do, rather than any plan for his life and he ended up choosing science. "I didn't know where I was going, that's probably one of the reasons I didn't continue because I didn't have a good picture of where, what I could do with it, other than going to medical school, and that just wasn't in the cards." He took a Business degree by default because it was available and he believed it would be a relatively easy degree to achieve. "So I actually chose that not because it was challenging and it was something I really, really wanted to do, but because it was easy and available and something to do. So in terms of, I can't say what I was going to do before that because that's one of the reasons that I stopped, because I didn't know where I was going."

Joseph originally considered becoming a hockey player, a teacher, a pilot, or joining the military. "I think I got to that point in high school that I really didn't have a career plan, and there wasn't really anything in place in high school back then to kind of say, you know, 'Look at these options, or look at these options.'" He believes that he did not consider properly all the options that were available at the time. "Looking back now I

think even to have been a police officer or something like that would have interested me, but at the time it never did. But, hindsight's 20/20.” He studied Business at university with a specialization in the hospitality industry which he considered to be a “practical” choice. He also considered teaching as an option but chose not pursue it. “I always enjoyed school... and I think in the back of my mind I always wanted to be a teacher, but as I said, I didn't act on it.” Eventually Joseph would change his work and become a teacher which illustrates that possibilities at one point may be rejected but embraced at another point in time. Both of these interviewees illustrate Sartre’s concept that choosing not to choose is still a very important choice.

Choice Summary

The potentialities for the interviewees’ original work choices came into consciousness from a variety of sources. Family was the major influence for most of the people interviewed but was negative as well as positive. Most of the initial work choices were based on only one major criterion, such as helping others, or from a default position – they didn’t know what else to do. But choices about work must meet many needs, not just one, and it is not surprising that young people are sometimes not capable of making informed choices. Most young people have very limited life experiences and are still determining their values. Therefore, they would have only a partial understanding of what they would want from their work or their life, for that matter. Most people are heavily influenced by either family members or societal norms, i.e., to get married and have a family. Some of the people interviewed admit to not knowing where they were going with their life. “As a kid I didn't know where in the heck it [my life] would end up” (Nicole). Since the self is realized only after reflection, however, does the choice even

matter? It is only the interpretation of the results by the individual that determine the authentic life. If this is the case, then we could argue the choice is mostly irrelevant as long as it has been made in good faith. This fits with Frankl's "will to meaning," i.e., that it is only the interpretation of our life that matters, and meaning can be found in any situation (Frankl, 1985). The notion of contribution undoubtedly comes from family and society, as well as being an intrinsic desire. Society tends to value contribution and we view those who contribute to the welfare of others very positively, e.g., Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and Nelson Mandela. But is the desire to make a contribution through work a choice made in good faith and toward authenticity, or is it a sign of bad faith, and only a consequence of societal pressure - similar to what marriage and children may be for an individual? I will come back to these questions in chapter seven.

Eventually all of the interviewees would make a major change with their work. As discussed in chapter three, desire comes from a state of angst, resulting in new consciousness and potentialities, which then leads to choice, subsequent actions and a new Being (Sartre, 1956). What, if anything, created angst in the interviewees? What caused new potentialities to emerge and consequently what created their dramatically new choices? Did they experience a new consciousness resulting in new choices toward authenticity or was the new choice made in bad faith?

Awakening from Bad Faith

Despair as the final result of thought and experience means that fear and trembling, *Angst*, become the most basic quality of man's existence. This kind of dread is seen as a necessary achievement, for only by it is man able to appreciate fully the nature of existence. All those who do not live in this state of mind are supposed to be cut off from reality. (Roubiczek, 1964: 112)

All choices are either made in good faith or bad faith, according to existentialists: good faith if they are conscious choices, the individual takes responsibility for them, and they lead to authenticity; and bad faith if people do not freely make or take responsibility for their choices and they result in inauthenticity (Reynolds, 2006). A state of “bad faith” is always a possibility as it can and does occur at any point in time and because authenticity is only a temporary mode of Being, not a permanent one. Work for the interviewees eventually became a source of angst and anguish which in turn led to dramatically new work choices. “For most people, particularly adults trying to overcome the earlier experiences which have blocked them in becoming persons in their own right, achieving consciousness of self involves struggle and conflict” (May, 1953: 119). People may find that the work they aspired to in early years does not fulfill them and they change their work or occupation frequently (Grierson, 2007; Hollis, 1993), as indeed, the majority of the people interviewed have. I asked them what caused the feelings of bad faith with their original work choices and that resulted in the desire for change. The majority made the choice to change jobs in the middle stage of life which is typically described as an awakening from a routine existence (Hollis, 1993, 2005). How did a new consciousness emerge leading to new choices? What led to these changes? For the people interviewed, changes came about because there was a conflict between their day-to-day work and what they originally thought the work would be, an incongruence between the work and their beliefs, a critical incident or simply boredom, stress or a question of timing.

Abstract versus Day-to-day Work

Michelle discovered within a few years that, despite enjoying her *studies* in social work, a *career* in social work was not what she had envisioned. “At the time when I chose it, I really enjoyed doing the course work... I really enjoyed it.” A social work program at university, she found out, is very different from the reality of being a social worker. The everyday activities of the work turned out to be far different than what she had thought they would be when she made the choice to become a social worker in university. “...but when I was out working in it, I just realized, I just felt you really had to have a certain personality for it, and mine really wasn't a good fit. Because, although I really do think I'm quite empathetic and compassionate for people, I take it so personally it was a job I just couldn't leave at work.” For Michelle, social work “was not really a good fit” and she did not feel that it was the right thing to be doing. It certainly did not result in a state of authenticity as it affected her emotional health to the point that she would become sick prior to going to work. She notes that she was, “quite unhappy and it ended up affecting all the parts of my life because I was very upset...actually physically sick about it, and on my mind all the time.” It was not that she hated being a social worker, or that she did not like all aspects of the work, but she was not able to separate herself from the clients. Consequently, she brought their issues home with her, which resulted in huge stress, something quite common with people who work in the helping professions (Maslach, 1982; Pines et al., 1981). She did not anticipate that the day-to-day work activities of social work would have such a negative effect on her and she now regrets the decision she made to pursue social work as a career. “I regret how I made the decision to go into social work without really, whether I would have known how I was

really not the right personality for it, I don't know if there was any way that I could have figured that out before I went and took those different years...Probably should have gone into something else earlier on." She seems to have been conscious of the choice she made but at the same time, unconscious about the effect the work would have on her Self.

After a number of jobs and "semi-careers" Elizabeth eventually chose to work as a real estate agent, but, like Michelle with social work, she did not realize what the job actually entailed day to day and that it would not fit with her personality. But she also feels that she could not 'not choose' the work either, that she was not "free" as existentialism would argue. "I came to a juncture where...I made the decision to do it, nobody forced me to do it. I didn't feel I had any other choice." Like Michelle, she was surprised by the negative effect the day-to-day activities of being a real estate agent had on her. "I didn't do enough research, I'll be honest, I'll take responsibility. I talked to the wrong people, or I heard the wrong things, and, didn't quite realize that you would have to put yourself out there... I didn't really realize what I would feel like until I got there, into that position."

After working in the hospitality industry for a number of years Joseph realized that this was not the work he wanted long-term. "But actually when you got outside and into the real world, to work in hotel and food, I didn't have the greatest jobs. It just didn't click with me." He eventually decided that he wanted to return to university and study to become a schoolteacher. "I sat down and just said, you know, 'I'm not enjoying what I'm doing'... I thought, 'I can't do this the rest of my life.' And, I knew, I always knew I wanted to be a teacher, back in high school, and I never acted on it. I never...so I thought, 'This is the time to do it.'" Three of the people interviewed therefore felt that the reason

they got into jobs that they subsequently left was because of not knowing enough about themselves or about what the job actually entailed.

Incongruent with Beliefs and Values

Five of the people interviewed changed their work because the work did not fit with their value system. Daniel worked in the food industry until he was presented with the opportunity to purchase his own restaurant. Despite feeling conflicted between his values of freedom and power (which he developed in his youth) versus the hard work he expected it would be, in the end he freely made the choice to pursue his dream. “I wanted to do something for myself, and what can I do, I can't imagine working for somebody else, I want to do my own thing, I don't really want to go into the restaurant business, but shit, it's what I know.” In the end, becoming an entrepreneur was something he says he did for himself, which implies that he feels some of his past decisions were based on the influence of other people and not his true desires, hence, in bad faith.

Jessica eventually became disillusioned working in the corporate sector and decided that she wanted to become a teacher. She emphasizes that she felt like an “imposter” in her work, which implies that she was not living “true to herself,” i.e., in accordance with her beliefs and value system, and therefore not living authentically. She then made a good faith choice to change direction in her life, towards living authentically. “Now I've come back to teaching and I don't feel like an imposter at all. I feel like I've earned my way, in my mind, it's not an outside thing, it's not an external thing. I've earned my right now, to feel confident and to teach. It's just a journey I had to take.” The feeling of being an “imposter” in life is a good descriptor for people who are living inauthentically (Sartre, 1956). “The performer inevitably performs not only for others,

but also for himself; he is therefore *acting* rather than *being* what he is” (Marcel, 1949: 42).

Nicole ended up working for a financial company but did not enjoy the day-to-day work and eventually she came to the conclusion that she needed to make a change. It seems that the work was incongruent with her value system, because, as she puts it, she was “setting people up to fail.” “I knew it wasn't the right fit for me, and I knew I had to do something about that.” Her comments indicate that she knew that she was in the wrong type of work however the problem when people realize that they are living inauthentically then becomes, “what now?”

Barbara chose to change her work partially as a result of disillusionment with the work she did in the private and public sectors. She wanted her work to be more than it was, as she values “making a difference,” and therefore chose to make a major work change. Eventually she made the decision to pursue a Ph.D. degree and become an academic, a career transition that has not been smooth. “I've had terrible moments where I've thought, ‘This is terrible and I just want to chuck it.’” But the difficult times she has experienced were not just about her work but more about problems with life; struggling with bad faith and authenticity. “It's probably much more [than about work], it's probably when the stars don't align, when there's discourse in many, many, many different facets of my life and it becomes overwhelming. If I can compartmentalize then I can manage.” Barbara's dilemma is an example of life's difficulties being multi-faceted and more than just work-related. She notes that she manages when she compartmentalizes but how does one keep the components of life from interacting and affecting one another, and should we even be attempting to do so?

Ryan changed his work due to a toxic work environment but unfortunately now describes his life as struggling to bring his faith and his work together, as they were in the past. The “incongruent” life describes an inauthentic life. “I would say that there's incongruence at times, and it's those times when I feel I'm losing sight of what it is to be a disciple, or a follower of Jesus Christ...I think frankly, at the moment, I'm at one of those places where the faith side hasn't been front and centre like it needs to be, as I see it needs to be.” He is currently thinking about where he is going with his life as he admits to being at a crossroads. “You've caught me at a point where I'm going, ‘Holy cookie, what's this all about and what's going on?’” His goal now is to bring his work and his faith together. “And part of my life is trying to figure out how does that fits together in a way that the integration is more seamless than right now.” Like most of the interviewees, Ryan wants his new work to be meaningful to him and that is one of the most challenging tasks a person faces in choosing an authentic life. Most scholars agree that work becomes more meaningful when we are absorbed in it and it is easier to become absorbed in challenging work (McCormick, 1994). Herman (2002: 68) comments that “while meaning can be found in many different ways in work, perhaps the most promising and intense occasion arises when some recalcitrant problem, some brute reality, is encountered and must be resolved – somehow.” But whereas Ryan finds his new work to be challenging, he has not been able to reconcile the work with his faith. So work must also fit with other aspects of life in order to lead to authenticity, particularly congruent with our value system.

Christine seems to have some regrets about the importance she has placed on work in the past as it does not seem to fit with the values that she holds, or perhaps her

values have changed. She notes the guilt that she felt in her former work as a result of placing what she now considers too much importance on her work, over her family. “Conscience gives us something to understand; it discloses” (Heidegger, 1967: 314). The recognition of conscience in regards to other people sparks choice and action. “One must keep in mind that when we designate the conscience as a “call,” this call is an appeal to the they-self in its self; as such an appeal, it summons the Self to its potentiality-for-Being-its-Self, and thus calls Dasein forth to its possibilities” (Heidegger, 1967: 275/319).

Critical Incidents

Other important factors that lead to change are critical incidents such as losing your work, ending a marriage, accidents or serious health problems. These are also examples of contingent factors but I have included them in this section since they were the catalyst for work change. All of these unexpected and usually unwelcome events change people’s lives forever and lead to positive and negative change. A recognition of bad faith can lead to new consciousness resulting in new choices towards authenticity. “In the course of this project – the fundamental project – other more immediate choices will present themselves, some of an everyday nature, some which come at what may be called ‘crises’ in my life trajectory. It is in this second case that the possibility of changing my ‘fundamental project’ presents itself” (Craib, 1976: 23).

Christine lost her career in the corporate sector when she was unexpectedly fired; an event she terms a “shocking experience.” “Made me question the importance that I placed on work... I was working just as hard as I could, putting in as many hours as I could and then to lose my job without any sort of, not a lot of notice, and for no apparent

reason. That really shook me.” However, she calls losing her work an awakening from an unquestioning life which implies that she was previously living inauthentically. “It’s interesting how you can go through life, to some degree, not questioning those fundamental assumptions that somehow you make along the way. So, I talked about my father and the work ethic and he was in management, and in senior roles, and I bought into all of that and didn’t question things very much.” She admits to not questioning or challenging her fundamental assumptions, which is one of the main criticisms the existentialists have of people blindly following the herd (Heidegger, 1967; Reynolds, 2006).

Courtney’s work with her church came to an abrupt end when at mid-life she was forced to resign. The fundamentalist church she belonged to excommunicated her when they did not accept her sexual orientation. The parting of ways between Courtney and the church was devastating to her sense of self as she lost not only her work but her faith in the church. “But the hardest culture shock was that I no longer had a vocation...It was a complete, [change] of my identity over night... One day I was a church secretary and believed in Jesus Christ and God in all, and the next day I was saying, ‘I don’t know if I even believe in that.’” She had to not only find new work but a new world and new meaning. “My whole life changed overnight. So, then, I began a whole new search for meaning.” So the loss of a calling can be a devastating experience as the person’s self is so invested in the work.

Barbara was the victim of corporate downsizing and her opinion of work seems to have gone from idealism, to some disillusionment and cynicism. “My position in the government came to an end. That was particularly nasty, as these things can be...it was

quite horrible.” This negative experience, however, turned out to be good for her as it gave her time to reflect on who she was and what she really wants out of her work. As a result of losing her work, she pursued a career that means much more to her than her previous one did but, of course, she would not have known of this positive outcome at the time. “I really had to stop and think and reflect not only on what I wanted to do, but on who I was...there were some things that emerged from that process that I'm only now recognizing as valid and worth my time and energy.” Three of the people interviewed therefore were profoundly affected by being fired and losing their former work identities. In all three cases, however, these changes led to more authentic work.

Divorce was a factor for at least two of the people interviewed and had similar effects as losing a job. After a number of years as a stay-at-home mother, Nicole's life changed dramatically when her marriage ended. “I knew if I had stayed in that relationship, by the time I was 65 or 70 years old, I would have been sitting in a rocking chair saying, ‘What the hell is that all about?’ I wouldn't have felt like I had lived passionately, or had taken any chances in my life. That I had chosen the ‘safe’ life.” Nicole knew that staying in her marriage would have been to take the “safe” route, which would have meant a state of inauthenticity. As existentialists often state, life cannot be safe and secure as human existence is characterized by unpredictability. “Each man lives in the midst of contingency, that even the knownness of day-to-day living is, in a sense but a fantasy, a wish more than an actuality. I do not know, I cannot know enough to be safe, to be secure, to predict with complete confidence from one moment to the next” (Bugental, 1965: 22). Nicole was willing to give up her safety and security in order to pursue an authentic existence by going back to work full-time and going to school for a

Masters degree. “Life was incredibly different for the first, you know, four years. Because that's when I went back and finished my degree and started a master's and then went into the corporate world, and had to go through all the industry accreditations.”

Like Nicole, life drastically changed for Daniel when his marriage ended and the world he had created was turned upside down, leaving him confused and lost. “All my illusions kind of crashed down... The picket fence, the house, the car. And I went bankrupt just the same time. So everything I thought I was kind of melted away, and I was left, just kind of defenseless and depressed, and thinking, ‘What the fuck?’ It just didn't make sense to me. How could this be my life? This wasn't my vision of my life.” But as a result of this state he chose to join a support group and over a period of time experienced a new awakening – “through my own searching... really got to know myself.”

Finally, Andrew's view of work and life changed overnight when he had a serious car accident, which resulted in the loss of his work, and for five years, his health. He was not physically able to work for almost five years but this time allowed him the opportunity to reflect and re-evaluate the role of work in his life. “I came to the conclusion of what work had been for me and what it would be if I could and was able to work again. And I was thinking I would return back to school and take on an academic life.” His view of work and what was meaningful in his life changed with the accident. Up until then he viewed his work as outcome based, solely about making money. “I could [previously] focus on work only as an outcome. And as a detriment, of course, if you're spending 16 to 18 hours a day working at something you're not passionate about, there's no way you're a real quality person.” He notes that with this attitude toward work he was

not a “quality person” which implies inauthenticity. No one would argue that Andrew chose for the accident to happen to him but it did have a positive effect on his life, and this is just one example of critical incidents, like divorce, and job loss, that can further one’s reflection and self-evaluation.

Negative and Positive Effects of Other People

Another major cause of anxiety from work was the negative effect of co-workers. Ryan worked in the ministry for a number of years but gradually found the work environment to be “increasingly toxic” and affecting his mental health. This was predominantly due to the negative effect some of the people he worked with had on him. “I was beginning actually to face a level of depression, self diagnosed in some respect...it was tough to focus, tough to be motivated, tough to do anything. I just didn't want to carry on with things.” However, replacing a calling is difficult, especially when you are trying to combine work and a strong faith. After considering a number of options he decided to return to school and become an academic since he loved learning and he believed that he could combine his faith and a profession in academia into a new calling. “Is there a way, I thought, to somehow have my faith be vital, and yet, do something different?” The problems he was facing impacted his consciousness, as he comments, it “opened up a place where I could begin to ask, ‘Well, what should we do now?’ ” As we have seen with other interviewees, new consciousness caused by new experiences seem to be necessary in order to identify a state of inauthenticity, and thus, to make new choices towards authenticity. Nicole also has a history of leaving her work due to the negative effect of the people she worked with. “It [negative feelings toward work] was the result of not so much the work itself, although that can be mundane, but it's usually

more the relationship aspect of being in a corporate structure and being in middle management, and having to deal with the personalities and the styles.”

Like Ryan and Nicole, Andrew also noted the effect people in the workplace had on him but in a positive way. After he unexpectedly lost his work, what he missed most of all was the social component of work, an aspect of his work that he had not previously realized was so important to him. “When you lose the social aspect of work, even when you're like me and you're fairly introverted, it's a profound loss... I lost almost all my entire social contacts because I lost work.” The “people” aspect of work seems to be an important factor in how work is viewed. For many people it may not be so much the end result of work, i.e., money, or purpose but interacting with others that gives work its value. The “being-with-others” aspect of work is a major part of most work and from an existential perspective how we are viewed by others has a significant effect on our sense of self.

Boredom and Stress

Change can also result from feelings of stress or boredom, which leads to the desire for new experiences. Nicole and Elizabeth both emphasized that they tend to leave their work as a result of boredom. “I'm kind of like the Peter Pan...I keep shifting and changing... that's just who I am. I can become bored. In fact that's what's happened in my careers. Once I get a career to a place, or a job to a place where I'm comfortable with it, well then I start to get bored” (Nicole). “I got bored because the work had been done that needed to be done in that organization. So, I left there without a job and moved to the mountains, to start again” (Elizabeth). Boredom is an emotional state or mood and from an existential perspective, moods reflect the human situation. “Mood is an intentional

disclosure through which the human situation becomes transparent...reveals the way I exist in the world...but also a situational determinant” (Schrag, 1977: 68). For Nicole and Elizabeth boredom seems to have resulted in a new consciousness and allow new potentialities and subsequent actions to emerge. “Heidegger argues that it is moods that make it possible to direct oneself towards things and engage in meaningful projects in the world” (Reynolds, 2006: 33).

Many of the people interviewed frequently commented on the stress that they experienced as a result of their work. Feelings of stress, like boredom, can be a sign of bad faith, and a sign that “I am living the wrong life.” Stress can also create awareness and subsequently result in a major life change toward authenticity. “Important decisions affecting the entire course of one’s life are rarely made without some form of mental distress; and it is a commonplace of contemporary social criticism that modern-day men try very hard to escape this form of distress by having others (the state, public opinion, or the corporation) make decisions for them” (Olson, 1962: 53).

A Question of Timing

Lastly, for three of the people interviewed the “right” work was also a matter of the right timing. Vincent’s work history was “scattered and fragmented” for a twenty-year period in which he moved from one job or career to another as opportunities would arise. “I think, in my early adulthood it’s more true that things fell into my lap because I didn’t have a good map of what I wanted to do. It was more about opportunism. But the last few years it has been much more about deliberate decisions, the last ten or 15 years it has been more like that.” Many of his choices were “default” choices; opportunities that presented themselves (which he then passively went along with) as opposed to conscious,

thought-out choices towards authenticity. However, he still made these choices freely, albeit without much conscious thought, since even choosing “not to choose” is a choice (Sartre, 1956). His feelings about work dramatically changed when he decided to return to university to study for a Ph.D. degree and to become an academic. He appears to have gone from bad faith to authenticity. He is fortunate in finding a calling as an academic as there are few other opportunities that would meet his need to combine his beliefs as an activist with work that he enjoys.

Both Christine and Joseph were exposed at a young age to the professions that they would embrace later in life. Christine was encouraged to consider graduate school when she first attended university but at that time in her life it would have been a choice made in bad faith. “In university when one prof asked me about graduate work, and no, that wasn't even on my radar. And if you had told me at that point that I would be teaching in that program, I would have laughed, I would have thought that was crazy.” However, twenty years later when her life is very different she makes that choice in good faith. It appears that the same choice can be made in bad faith or in good faith depending on how or when it is made, and therefore the point in time of work choices becomes very relevant to the challenge of authenticity. This helps to explain why many people may choose to ignore work opportunities, e.g., turn down the promotion, but embrace them at a different point in time.

Bad Faith Summary

The interviewees eventually changed their work as a result of feelings of angst with the work that was originally chosen for many reasons: (1) the day-to-day work did not match the original abstract view; (2) the work was incongruent with beliefs and

values; (3) critical incidents – being fired, loss of a marriage, and a serious accident; (4) effect of co-workers; (5) boredom and stress, and; (6) a matter of timing. They demonstrate the freedom we have to change the direction of our lives when we feel that the current path is not the “right” path. “People can alter their projects and thereby ‘refuse’ the interpretations and values which projects carry” (Cooper, 1990:157). In particular, critical times of despair in a life may create anxiety that leads to change. Allen (1973: 91) notes, “human life as we know it from within is neither inauthentic nor authentic wholly... It has its shames and its splendours, its baseness and nobility, at every moment.”

Some people may not notice the signs of anxiety for a long time. Courtney noted, “I was happy for quite a long time doing what I did, and then slowly but surely the signs were all there, I just didn’t move on them.” Others may make the conscious calculation that to change is “not worth it” and choose the routine-ness they know as opposed to the “devil” they do not know. This is, of course, a bad faith choice and results in inauthenticity. “A man may, for instance, through stubbornness or fear of the unknown persevere in a chosen career and attempt to persuade himself that his original choice was for the best despite evidence which only a madman could totally ignore” (Olson, 1962: 16). Also, a person may not know what to do and be paralyzed by indecision until he or she perceives a new possibility. “But I didn’t know how to bring it to an end because I didn’t know anything else. Life was a big question – “Well then what?” I just, and I didn’t want to let go of my job” (Courtney). As a real estate agent, Elizabeth had nightmares and anxiety, and she knew that it was the wrong career for her. “I found it very demeaning. I hated it.” The “wrong” work can make the person feel trapped and not

free; a feeling which has been described as a “psychic prison” (Morgan, 1997). “Human beings have a knack for getting trapped in webs of their own creation” (Morgan, 1997: 215). This feeling of being trapped by their work was articulated by many of the interviewees. “I’m confined by that work, the trappings of that work” (Jessica). This trapped feeling may imprison the individual and make her feel like an imposter, or drive him or her to consider new potentialities and make new choices leading to authenticity.

Authenticity

The true self, for Nietzsche, is not an inner self somehow occluded by a false, superficial one, but a self you should strive to become. The self-estranged person is not distanced from a self he actually possesses, but from a goal he should be pursuing. (Cooper, 1990: 96)

Authenticity is a state of Being where the individual is consciously choosing his or her life, and is fully engaged in it (Sartre, 1956); what Tillich (1952) refers to as “the courage to be.” “In this state [authenticity], one becomes fully self-aware – aware of oneself as a transcendental (constituting) ego as well as an empirical (constituted) ego; one embraces one’s possibilities and limits; one faces absolute freedom and nothingness – and is anxious in the face of them” (Yalom, 1980: 31). As noted previously, authenticity cannot be judged by another person, so it is not for me to decide how another individual should or should not live. Authenticity is a state of consciousness of the individual and authenticity (or inauthenticity) can only be determined by the individual Being under analysis. Therefore, like all of the analysis in this study it is based on the narrative itself and not my judgment of the narrative (however difficult this may be).

...nothing about the idea of the meaningful life as integrated presupposes that every human has to lead the same kind of existence, or that there is not room for many varieties of human flourishing – artistic, athletic, intellectual, and so on. What is presupposed is that to count towards the meaningfulness of a life these varied activities have to be more than just performed by the agent with an eye to personal satisfaction; they have to be capable of being *informed* by a vision of their value in the whole, by a sense of the worthwhile part they play in the growth and flowering of each unique human individual, and of the other human lives with which that story is necessarily interwoven. (Cottingham, 2003: 31)

The importance of meaning to existentialists cannot be over-stated because it is the most important criteria there is to determine an authentic life. “The meaning (point, purpose, goal) of my life, if it has one, is my fundamental project – whether that to be to gain ‘eternal bliss,’ to be virtuous, to become a famous rock star or simply to watch over my children’s growth and development” (Young, 2003: 5). I asked people about meaning directly but I also asked people to identify their values and whether they were living their values in order to assess congruence between choices and actions, and principles held. Lastly, a question I used to determine the interviewees’ thoughts on authenticity, as outlined in chapter three, was based on a scenario from the existential film, *The Matrix*, and the choice between the red pill and blue pill. I used this scenario because the question establishes people’s views of the comfortable life and because, according to Frankl (1985: 88), “Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.”

The Difficulty with Discussing Meaning

For most of the interviewees, discussing the “meaning of life” and their personal “purpose in life” was difficult. “Oh, God. I think that's a tough one to grapple with” (Christine). “Oh wow...how do I define meaningful” (Barbara)? “Woo-hoo-hoo! What is

the meaning of life” (Andrew)? Only one of the fourteen people interviewed could readily answer questions on meaning and who also seemed to enjoy the topic of meaning. To me, it was interesting that these successful, professional and well-educated people were not used to discussing the meaning of life and articulating what gave them purpose. “I haven't spent a lot of time stopping and, you know, dwelling on just on it. It ebbs and flows, it has always been there” (Barbara). Although this may be the typical human condition, i.e., to not think about meaning and live in bad faith, it is difficult to choose our lives and live authentically if we do not have any basis from which to choose (Wilkes, 1999).

The Confusion of Meaning

The interviewees' beliefs on the meaning of life range from having a strong religious perspective, i.e., to serve God, to an atheist existential perspective, i.e., no meaning except what I personally create. Most admitted to confusion about what “the meaning of life” actually means in general and particularly for themselves. “We really don't know what it's all about, we really don't know what the meaning is. How the hell do we know” (Daniel)? Ryan has a very strong religious faith and the purpose of his life is to honor that faith, and therefore his faith is the determining factor in all the choices that he makes. “I think in the end I would have to say a meaningful life is a life, for me, is a life lived in faith to Jesus Christ... am I faithful to that relationship? Am I faithful to that calling...that is a meaningful life...the physics of that I'm less concerned about, but it's the heart of it that has to be there for a meaningful life to live.” However, most of the interviewees' beliefs have changed as they became older and their faith is now not as significant in their life as it once was.

A few of the people interviewed believe that there is no purpose to human existence and that they create their own meaning in their lives, i.e., the atheist existential perspective. “Well, what I've come to believe...I think it changes, I think it changes over time and with age. And that's a good thing, I think it's supposed to change... I think we make the meaning in our lives. I don't think the meaning of our lives is given. I don't think it's sitting out there for us to find so much as it is we make it” (Andrew). “There's always shifting and changing with it for me” (Nicole). “It is an individual thing, that's all, it's about the living and not...life sounds like an end result. To me it's about living, it's such a cliché, but it's the journey, not the destination. And it is specific to the individual. The meaning of life is what you take from it every single day that you live” (Elizabeth). “You set the purpose. I set my own purpose for me...I have to be responsible for my own life” (Courtney).

Most of the interviewees describe their individual meaning in life as “contribution,” i.e., making a positive difference in the world. Contribution for them ranges from doing “important” work to raising children or having a positive influence on friends. “It, you know, in terms of my purpose, and frankly I'm still working on this one and thinking about it, but I think, you know, I'm here and I'm trying to make a positive difference, and it's on a very small level” (Christine). “I think that I have positive contributions to many people's lives in a simplistic way. I don't solve diseases, I don't cure diseases, I don't solve monetary problems and things like that. But on a one on one, genuine relationship, I think I add meaning to life and therefore that gives me meaning... I guess that I made a positive contribution to individuals, individual's lives” (Elizabeth).

“I think our purpose now is to, to make the world a better place...maybe to me it's to make the world a better place for everybody” (Joseph).

Some defined meaning in terms of finding peace, personal growth, self-actualization and commitment to a cause. “The meaning of life is, we're on a path to try to achieve what, self-actualization or enlightenment, or whatever word you want to label it, it's a place of peace... That's my journey. And the day to day is the journey, right? That's the stuff” (Nicole). Joseph talks about being “happy” and content as the meaning of life. “The meaning of life, you know, its enjoyment, fulfillment, I want to be happy in my life.” Barbara relates meaning to community. “We consciously create community around us, and I believe the purpose of life is to achieve successful coexistence in community. But I also believe that this is but one phase of a larger, more meaningful existence that spans the physical...that goes beyond physical.” Andrew views commitment to something as the meaningful life. “I just want to look back and say, “You know, it's been rough, but hey, didn't hurt too many people along the way, tried to minimize impact on others that was negative, did some stuff that was fun, lived a life that was committed to something, I don't care what it is you're committed to, as long as it's something and that's good enough.” Vincent describes his past life as a search for meaning, trying different paths, and trying to find the “right road.” It is clear then that there are many different definitions of meaning according to each person but the common denominator appears to be contribution of some sort and being at peace with oneself.

Work is not a Primary Value

To probe deeper into what the interviewees consider the authentic life I asked what their values are or the principles that they live by. Sverko and Vizek-Vidovic (1995:

5) note, “values can be conceived of as specific priority criteria that direct human behaviour.” Values provide guidelines that help the individual choose between potentialities as they “constitute a code according to which a system of action may be formulated...allow us to place possible ways of behaving into some approval-disapproval hierarchy” (Yalom, 1980: 464). Discussing values was difficult for some people as they had either not thought about their values, or they could not articulate them easily. “What else? I don't know, that's kind of the only thing I can think of off the top of my head” (Joseph). However, values also emerged indirectly in the answers to many other questions, e.g., “Anything in life that's worth having takes work” (Elizabeth). “It’s about the fact that life isn’t just about getting a job and making money. I can’t stand that, I never could stand that” (Courtney).

The interviewees cited family, especially spouse, friends, success, health, and their faith as what they primarily value. No one specifically said that their work was a value although many commented on a “work ethic” and “success” as being important values, “Work ethic is something I really value in life” (Joseph). Most emphasized that their main value was their family. “The top things would be my family and my faith in God” (Michelle). “Family is very important to me, and being able to be with my children, and play a meaningful role in their lives...I value community quite a bit...I value my friendships” (Christine). “Health for my friends and family, and I will also say that having positive relationships with friends and family” (Elizabeth). Some of the interviewees said they value “peace,” noting that they have not been at peace for much of their life. Like recognizing the symptoms of boredom and stress, does not being “at peace” mean a person is living in bad faith or is not being “at peace” indicate that the

person is in fact, living existentially, and is a conscious Being dealing with the human predicament? As stated in the bad faith section, although values are difficult to articulate for many, we must still choose in congruence with our values in order to be in a state of authenticity.

Meaning as Hardship

In order to make good faith choices and live authentically, existentialists argue that we must be conscious of the possibilities of life and not live a life based on following the herd, i.e., we must live the “Examined Life” (Schrag, 1977). The question based on the hypothetical scenario from the film, *The Matrix*, elicited a variety of responses with most saying they would choose the pill where they would live the “real” but difficult life, as opposed to choosing the pill which would result in the comfortable, but “not real” existence, i.e., life would be a dream. One person stated that he would choose the pill that kept him in his current life since he was so content. “I’d probably take the pill that brought me the good life, and, or kept the same life. Why? Because I’m enjoying it. And maybe that’s not real, but it’s what I’ve come to know and what I’ve come to accept. So, I guess that’s the pill I’d take” (Joseph).

Most view the difficulties of life as the nature of human existence which is, of course, the existentialist’s view. “I want the real life. You know, because, I’m saying that not because I want the pain and the hardship, but, I don’t want to be asleep...I want to work through the pain and the hardship, and I think we all need to get to the meaning of our life. Otherwise, what’s the meaning” (Daniel)? “Wake up, wake up and live the reality.... Because I believe that you can find the beauty and the truth in whatever you’re faced with. And I also believe you can cope” (Barbara). “If you can get through it and

bear it, and you have the capacity to find meaning, so, you know, meaning in kind of a, I guess I've just always said, "Okay, how can I use this? I've been through it, how can I use it?" (Courtney). Andrew and Christine both comment that experiencing hardships ultimately lead to becoming a "better person" and "personal growth." Becoming a "better person" implies that the human being can evolve which is in line with Maslow's (1971) argument that the pinnacle of human existence is self-actualization. Although in line with the interviewees, a belief in self-actualization would not be supported by most existentialists as they do not regard human existence as a "progression" toward a peak point, but a way of being in the world. However, most of the interviewees align with the existential view that consciousness and anxiety are necessary requisites of living authentically.

Living for Others

Lastly, one of the challenges of living authentically according to existentialists is the undue influence of other people. For example, after Barbara completed her Masters degree she got married and notes that decisions from that point on became joint decisions made with her spouse. "So a number of the changes were a result of career angst on somebody's part. Not necessarily mine. So we kind of took turns." She was no longer completely free to choose her life which raises the question, "Does marriage preclude existential freedom?" Beauvoir (1983: 479), notes, "The couple should not be regarded as a unit, a closed cell; rather each individual should be integrated as such in society at large, where each (whether male or female) could flourish without aid; then attachments could be formed in pure generosity with another individually adapted to the group, attachments that would be founded upon the acknowledgement that both are free."

Existentialism, many feminists argue, is much more difficult for women who seem always more constrained by society and other people, than men (Tong, 1998). Barbara and her spouse took turns experiencing “career angst” and in changing work positions. Existentialism argues that choices must be made by the individual; that they must be ‘owned,’ and they must not be choices made to mainly please others. Decades ago, Beauvoir (1983) argued that marriage can result in women losing the freedom to then choose their life, as their choices become secondary to their husbands, and because women internalize their otherness. While this may be true, most existentialists acknowledge that choices must enter consciousness from some avenue. We are all influenced by others and probably rarely make choices in isolation from other people. The notion of the situated self will be discussed more fully in chapter seven.

Authenticity Summary

In summary, most of the interviewees had difficulty answering questions about meaning. They had either thought little about the questions, could not articulate their views or were uncomfortable with the questions themselves. This difficulty is problematic because an understanding of what is important to an individual provides the basis for good faith choices and allows him or her to align work with other aspects of the self and achieve authenticity (Hollis, 1993, 2001, 2005). Beliefs on meaning and values varied widely with most citing “contribution” as being important, but interestingly, none of the interviewees said that work was a major value. Most believe that life is about hardship, that difficulties are a part of life and that even when they experience difficult times, they note that how they respond is still a choice. “I either make or break, there are contextual things that have an impact on that, but I can always choose my response. So I

can either sit with dust on my head, and cry, or, get up and decide what I'm going to do with what I've been given" (Courtney). This resonates with Frankl (1978, 1985) when he argued that in any situation, even the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, we can choose our response, hence the "will to meaning." "The concept of the "will to meaning" represents the striving to construct meaningful wholes from the discrete elements of experience, and the translation of that striving into a unified philosophy of life" (McCarthy, 1980: 137). They also noted the influence of other people, especially family members, on their choices. But choices that are unduly influenced by others may not be a result of true desires but bad faith in action. To choose our lives and live authentically, we must be conscious of our self, our possibilities for life, our choices, and the subsequent new self that we will, in effect, create by those choices.

Contingency

This discovery of the limitedness of our awareness provides the corollary recognition that we live in contingency. This means that because we do not know all, we do not know enough to ensure the outcomes we desire. Standing on our rocky promontory we cannot know at what moment we may discover the river is running dry, is coming to flood stage, is filling with debris, or threatens to overflow its banks and sweep us away with it. (Bugental, 1965: 36)

One's existence as it unfolds throughout life can never be predicted as we are contingent beings and therefore the self must always deal with anxiety. "Although much of our day-to-day life is predictable and secure, existentialism reminds us of the risk, uncertainty, and lack of predictability that are also present" (Thompson, 1995: 504). The challenge for the individual is to accept the 'uncertainty' of life and yet, at the same time, still choose his or her life. "The person who seeks to actualize his potential is, among

other things, the person who seeks to open his awareness more to the reality of contingency. It should be apparent that the fuller appreciation of contingency would result in a sort of person very different from those most of us are or know” (Bugental, 1965: 298).

My Life is Not What I Expected

The interviewees had all expected to live a “typical life” consisting of marriage, children, successful career, and good friendships. “I would have expected that I had two point five kids, identified profession, and living in a typical community” (Elizabeth). “I think I had a fantasy that I would get a job, I think back then, when I started university in business, I thought I would be an accountant, I would get married, I would have kids, you know, go to parties on the weekends, I would retire and live happily ever after. That would be my life” (Daniel). However, life did not turn out the way that they expected and they are all “surprised” by the life they have lived. This fits with existential philosophy in that life is an unpredictable, chaotic experience and our Being is continually being formed. The “unexpected life” seems to be par for the human condition. “I had no idea that I would be fifty and be selling a restaurant, have three teenagers and I would have two marriages, and be embarking on a new career...no, it's totally not what I thought” (Daniel).

Michelle never expected that faith would become an important part of her life. She did not foresee in any way having a “religious awakening” in her 30’s which now, outside of her family, is the most important aspect of her life. “I guess surprise would be the importance, the importance of my faith. That has completely surprised me over the last two years. I never would have thought that would be one of the main important,

central things in my life.” While her work life has not been successful, in her opinion, her faith has been an unexpected and welcome surprise in her life. Elizabeth is surprised that it has been such a struggle to find and keep an enjoyable, stable career. “My career is not defined, my careers, whatever, are not defined. I thought I would of had one career for most of my life and it would have been a fairly positive, I guess sort of prestigious, but that's a bit too big, identified profession.” Nicole is surprised by how her career has developed and also by her lack of a settled relationship. “The biggest surprise for me is just in the last little while, and that's in the area of relationships... As far as career, I don't know if I expected to be where I am, but I'm quite okay with where I am.”

As discussed in the ‘critical incidents’ section, Andrew’s life was significantly altered due to the almost tragic accident he suffered, which resulted in an “awakening” to greater consciousness and possibilities for his life. The accident especially changed his view of work. “I think that the accident... put me in a place that many people arrive at maybe in their late seventies, if they're fortunate to live that long, where loss has happened, infirmity, pain, you know, all these types of things that we associate with a life that's been lived.” If he had not had the accident Andrew believes that his life would have been far different than it is now, and not for the better. “I think I would have looked like a whole lot of middle age executives that had driven themselves to the point of failure, lost some family along the way, focused on things like money over substance, and ended up probably in a mid life crisis wondering, ‘What the hell have I done?’” Critical incidents, even if they seem very negative at the time, can also change a life for the better.

Despite living the “unexpected life,” the majority of interviewees are content with the life they have lived. Reflecting Maslow (1943), Daniel believes that the years he spent in business for himself were very positive and resulted in growth and learning.

My self esteem is up about a million percent...I went from having no work, and the fear of, “Can I make this business work?” to jumping into it, making it work...seeing what I've created...Just so much growing...I've been able to raise my kids with the money that I've earned. Been able to build homes and do other things. And so it's been, just such a growing process. Learned so much, you know, learned about working with people and running businesses. Got a lot of positive feedback from employees and customers. It's been a great, great learning experience.

Christine and Joseph both note how fortunate they are compared to other people and grateful for the opportunities they have had which emphasizes that human existence is “situated.” “I do feel really blessed, it's just a fluke, you know. I think in some ways that's what's so hard to accept about life, in a way, is that, I happen to be born in Canada and have all the opportunities that are afforded to us, you know, a person who is born here. And you know, it just seems unfair, in some respects, to the rest of the world” (Christine). Joseph also feels content with his life and fortunate for the opportunities he has had. “I do feel good about my life, and I look at other people and I think, you know, I'm fortunate...I don't really have a lot to complain of, and when I do complain I feel, you know, ‘What are you complaining for?’ Because, I have a good life, there's no question about it.” I will discuss the socially situated aspect of life and how it affects work choices and the existential self in chapter seven.

Looking Back on Life

I also asked the interviewees how they eventually hoped to look back on their lives. Most, again, emphasized contribution, to feel that their life contributed to other

people. “Try to be a positive influence and you know, when I think about my life and what I'm doing here and what I hope to leave, in terms of my children I guess, I hope to leave a legacy” (Christine). They also referred to “living their values” and making “the most” out of their life as important. Many want to feel that they lived their life to the fullest, and that they made the most of the opportunities they were given. “I want to look back and feel that, excuse me, that I was successful in what I set out to do, and that I was a good, because I'm in education, that I was a good teacher” (Joseph).

That I've done the best I can. In other words, even if things don't work out, if somebody doesn't like me or if a situation doesn't play out the way that I would like, you know, I can look at myself in the mirror and say, “I've done what I could, and I've done the best I can to be okay in that relationship.” And in other words, I'm not saying something I shouldn't have said and I'm not doing something that I know in my heart and against my value system. (Nicole)

However, not all of the interviewees believe in looking back, preferring to focus on the present and future. Barbara, especially, does not want to think about whether or not she has made the right choices but instead chooses to focus on the future. She also notes that decisions are made with the “information available” at the time.

I don't! I don't want to look back! I want to know that this is moving forward, and then it ends, and then I go on to something else...I don't like to look back. I don't believe in regrets. I think the time for action is now. You do it, you make the best decision you can based on the information available, and you carry on and live with it. You don't look back and say, “I coulda, woulda, shoulda,” and regret, that's so negative! ...I don't like to look back. I mean, I reflect and I think about the past, I do, but I don't want to stand at the end of my life and look back on a series of whatever. I'm not building me, I guess, something else builds me. I'm just living that life. It's not an endeavor to create the shrine of Barbara.

Most but not all of the interviewees have a vision of the life they hope to have in the future. “There are things I would like to do, I haven't mapped them out or anything, but there are things I can imagine I want to do as sort of a spiritual quest” (Vincent). “In

20 years I'm going to be part time on the ocean somewhere, I'm going to be seeing my family, but also doing something in communities and helping other people somehow. And then I will die a happy, happy woman” (Nicole). Some seem to adhere to an existential viewpoint as they recognize that they are confused and that their existence is an unpredictable journey; feeling their way in the darkness. “At the moment, I'm asking that age old question, “What the hell do I want to do with the rest of my life”” (Daniel)? “My thing in the world is, I don't know what the hell I'm going to be when I grow up, if I ever grow up” (Nicole). “My life kind of takes over and it goes in a direction, I am just floating in a stream, a lot of times I make decision points as to which little tributary I want to go down, but I, whatever comes up and makes me happy and works for me and my husband, we just kind of do” (Elizabeth).

Contingency Summary

The people interviewed expected to live the “typical” Western life but they have all been surprised in one way or another by the life they have actually lived. Despite being surprised by how their life has turned out and what they are today, at this point in time, most look back on their life with positive feelings, i.e., look at how far I have come. “I've taken a very difficult upbringing and somehow was able to reach inside and pull out the learning from that, and make it work for me” (Nicole). They also illustrate how meaning can change over time, and how some values take priority over others. Despite Nicole's view that her life has been a bit of a surprise to her, she has strong feelings against living the “safe life.” The concept of the “safe life” is much maligned by existentialists. “For however far the march of scientific rationalism may take us (and obviously it has gained us considerable advances in comfort and security), it cannot

remove that most fundamental aspect of our human condition – our dependency, our finitude, our mortality” (Cottingham, 2003: 76). Because the recognition of death and our own mortality is such an important concept to existentialists, my last theme deals with how the people interviewed view death, and how their attitudes towards death affect their choices in life? Death is the most significant contingent factor of all, as death ends existence and we do not know when death will happen.

Death

Death and life are interdependent: though the physicality of death destroys us, the *idea* of death saves us. Recognition of death contributes a sense of poignancy to life, provides a radical shift of life perspective, and can transport one from a mode of living characterized by diversions, tranquilization, and petty anxieties to a more authentic mode. (Yalom, 1980: 40)

Death is non-being, the opposite of Being, and as long as there is Being, death is always a potentiality. “Death is the condition that makes it possible for us to live life in an authentic fashion” (Yalom, 1980: 31). Existentialists argue that all of us must come to accept that we will ultimately cease to exist as this will allow us to be free to experience authentic existence.

Only if we are aware of our own finitude are we impelled to act now and with urgency. It makes it more likely that we will achieve the authentic mood that Heidegger calls “resoluteness.” Without this recognition, Heidegger suggests that a life of inauthenticity and frivolity, and of uncritically believing what others believe, threaten to dominate. (Reynolds, 2006: 43)

Without this recognition, therefore, we may not make choices in good faith towards authenticity but instead will be condemned to living inauthentically.

Unfortunately, this was one of the most difficult questions for the interviewees and many did not want to talk about it.

I Don't Want to Think About It

Not everyone who was interviewed wanted to discuss the topic of death; a few were very uncomfortable with the subject. Two people stated that they never think about death except abstractly, choosing to ignore thinking about it as much as possible, which is contrary to an existential point of view. “Unless someone close to me passes away, or something happens when you have an illness and brings you closer to it. But my preference is to not think about it” (Justin). Only one of the people interviewed seems to think a lot about death and their own mortality and that was probably because he had a brush with death. “I think it's important to know the boundaries between life and death” (Andrew). Most of the interviewees say that they do not think much about death or of fearing death. For example, Elizabeth refers to getting older as only a “state of mind.” Her parents are fairly young and she does not think much about death. “Superficially, sometimes, yes...But deep down, no, I don't really think about it. I do think it is a state of mind.”

The people interviewed have a variety of beliefs about death. Some such as Ryan and Michelle have a strong religious faith and therefore believe in an afterlife. Most admit to being confused when it comes to their views on dying and what comes after death. “I have questions about that...more than answers” (Andrew). “I *should* say I believe that I'm going to die and I'm going to go to heaven, that there's an afterlife, but I'm not sure that I believe that... I don't know at this point” (Christine). Some follow an existential view of death and believe that there is nothing beyond human existence. “I

think that when we die, it's the same as when we were prior to creation, we're in that void, there's nothing there, and that's what it will be like after" (Joseph). "I think when I'm dead, I'm dead" (Andrew). However, most of the interviewees believe or want to believe that their Being continues in some form after death, and that contrary to the thinking of most existentialists and atheists, Being does not end with death. "I believe that the meaning of life continues before and after the physical life" (Barbara). "You know I don't want to believe that we just die and rot in the earth, the party's over...I don't really know what happens...I believe there is something more to this life that we just don't know about right now" (Daniel). Courtney, who has had a very strong religious faith for most of her life, believes that her Being does not end with death but will continue in some form. "I don't think that it just ends when the body gives up because we've got this energy... I've concluded that there's something. Yeah, but what it is, I don't know" (Courtney). So the people interviewed think little about death and most believe that their being does not end with death.

But what if you were facing death?

To explore death attitudes further, I asked the interviewees how they would feel if they had to face their own imminent death. Some commented that even if they were told that they had only six months to live, they would feel good about the life they have lived. "I'm okay with everything I've done. Like, if you tell me I have six hours to live, I'm okay with that" (Andrew). "I would, I really would. I feel that I, as I said to you, to me being able to say I've done what I can, I've grabbed life as much as I felt I could. I don't regret so much" (Nicole).

Really, at this point I could hang up my skates and feel like I've accomplished a lot...It's like having been on a long journey, so, for each of the things that I've been through; they're like journeys, big ones that you were going on for years...I definitely feel as though I went on long journeys and then came back. And then I just, wow, that was one journey and then another journey! Oh! And then another... so I guess I have a few stories. (Courtney)

Vincent feels better about his life now than he ever has and the possibility of death does not bother him the way it used to. "I think I would feel better today than I would have just a few years ago." This seems to be directly due to his change in work and the fact that he has now found his calling. However, there is another dimension to his feelings; because he is on the "right path" he is excited about the prospects for the next twenty years of his life which adds a new dimension to thoughts of death. "But, I'd still feel incomplete, like there was still a lot to do... Each year should bring more personal progress I think, or each month hopefully will bring more personal progress and more satisfaction with my life... from here on out, I hope."

Courtney is acutely aware of the passing of time but views her life as chapters in a book that she is abstractly reading. "I see my life as a book and I'm reading through the chapters. I've felt like that for a long time and I have the sense of when I've moved into a new chapter. And I know that there's an end, and I'm conscious of that end, and I'm conscious of the passage of time." She uses the term "reading" as opposed to "writing" which is a more passive state, akin to drifting down a river instead of driving the boat. Joseph says that he is content with his life and appears to be currently in a state of authenticity. "If I was going to die in six to eight weeks, I wouldn't really have any regrets. No, I wouldn't. There wouldn't be anything that I'd feel...I don't feel...right now I don't feel like there has been any rock, any stone that hasn't been unturned" (Joseph).

Ryan feels quite differently and admits that if his life ended in a month, he would feel that it had ended too soon, before he had completed his life. “If I had a month to live, I would feel that I hadn't yet lived to my potential. I hadn't yet accomplished kinds of things I'd hoped to perhaps accomplish, or would have envisioned what I thought I would have accomplished.” Attitudes towards their personal death seem to be related to their current feelings about life, which supports previous research showing a connection between fear of death and a lack of purpose in life (McCarthy, 1980). This reinforces the existential importance of being fully conscious of one's inevitable death as we make choices about work.

Death Summary

The majority of the interviewees have a low death salience, choosing to think little about death, which fits with previous research on the general population (Becker, 1973; McCarthy, 1980; Reedy & Learmonth, 2008). “Many people think of death as unreal, as just beyond the horizon, as something they should postpone thinking about – in fact, as an event that is not to be mentioned” (Koestenbaum, 1976: 32). Andrew is the exception but this could be because he also experienced a serious accident and research indicates that coming face to face with our mortality has a significant effect on death attitudes (Tomer & Eliason, 2008a). For example, Andrew and Nicole are ready for death while Elizabeth and Ryan are not “ready” to die, as they feel that they have not yet experienced life the way they had envisioned. Perhaps death is easier to accept if we feel that we have experienced life, even briefly, the way we had pictured it for ourselves when we were young, and if we are not existing in a state of continuous desire for something more or different. “As Holderlin says: ‘The soul that, living, did not attain its divine

Right cannot repose in the nether world.’ But he that has made something of his life can face death without anxiety: ‘Once I Lived like the Gods, and more is not needed’” (Kaufmann, 1959: 62).

Chapter Summary

To every human desire there is the “why” of justification. “Why should you want that?” and “What will that get you?” and so on. And to every answer there is the further “why” and then another, *ad infinitum, ad absurdum*. “The ultimate ‘why’ has no answer,” Nietzsche warns us. Of course not, for there is no ultimate “why.” The justification is never completed, never attached, and so all of our desires and our values remain unsupported, unjustified, mere vanities, and –absurd. (Solomon, 1993: 42)

In this chapter I used the existential themes to examine the interviewees’ lives to expand our analysis and understand the connection between their work and their existential self. The analysis shows that there are many interrelated factors that affect how work is viewed. Choices about work do not only affect work; work for most people significantly affects the person’s sense of self and as such, can result in authentic or inauthentic existence. As seen with some of the interviewees, a choice of work may be made in good faith towards a sought-after state of authenticity but still lead to anxiety and anguish. The interviewees’ first work choices were made based on the influence of family, teachers, and a notion of contribution. Most of the interviewees view their work in terms of “contribution,” “balance” and “security” but are these good faith choices or the result of societal pressure and simply a desire to fit in with the herd? Elizabeth wanted to be a medical professional when she was a teenager because she viewed medicine as “prestigious” work, and because it was one of the few options available in her

community. For a few, the work choice was more of a default choice and something they were not strongly committed to. The interviewees eventually changed their work as a result of feelings of anxiety.

The interviewees defined a meaningful life in terms of contribution, finding peace, personal growth, self-actualization and commitment to a cause, and cited family, especially spouse, friends, success, health, and faith as their main values. Most had a difficult time discussing their beliefs about meaning, values and especially death. Either they had not deeply thought about these questions, could not articulate themselves, or they were uncomfortable with the questions themselves. From an existential perspective, awareness of one's inevitable death is an important aspect of making choices leading to authenticity. Life is viewed with greater urgency when we become more conscious of our mortality. We may ignore the anxiety we feel about our work for decades, but as we get older and are more aware of our mortality, the increase in our death salience may then be the catalyst for new work choices. The danger is that when we ignore our feelings about the self we may wake up one day realizing, much too late, that we lived inauthentically.

The question now is how can we examine work and the creation of authentic existence together? To do this we can use the existential concepts used in this chapter (choice, bad faith, authenticity, contingency, and death), as a way to view work and its effect on the individual. In chapter seven, I will outline some aspects that could potentially be included in an existential approach to understanding work. In this thesis I have argued that in order to understand work more fully, we must investigate work in terms of its relationship to the existential *Self*. In the end, we cannot understand work separate from the self, and work must be understood in terms of its relationship to the

formation of the individual self. The main problem with the Job-Career-Calling model, then, is that it assumes we are looking for strategies to deal with our work lives when we should be looking for strategies that allow for the creation of the authentic self.

Chapter 7 – Towards an Existential Approach to Work

Introduction

An existential position holds that the world is contingent – that is, everything that is could as well have been otherwise; that human beings constitute themselves, their world, and their situation within that world; that there exists no “meaning,” no grand design in the universe, no guidelines for living other than those the individual creates. The problem, then, in most rudimentary form is, How does a being who needs meaning find meaning in a universe that has no meaning? (Yalom, 1980: 423)

In this concluding chapter I will summarize and discuss further the results of the interviews, and outline some potential aspects that an existential approach to understanding work could include. The main weakness of models such as the job-career-calling model, are that they fail to take into account the existential self; that is, we cannot understand work without understanding how the individual “understands” his or her self, especially as that self is continually changing. What is lacking, then, is an explanation for how work fits with one’s Being as he or she makes choices throughout life and attempts to live authentically. The relationship between self and work is multifaceted, and I would argue, consists of a complex feedback loop. The components that make up a life interact, and as one element changes, the changes will inevitably affect other components of life. My central argument is that work must be understood in terms of its relationship to the creation of the self. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with the theoretical and practical implications of this research, research limitations, suggestions for further research, and give my concluding thoughts.

Summary of Results

In chapter five I analyzed how the interviewees view their work as job, career, or calling. The job-career-calling model provides an efficient way to understand the importance of work, i.e., an acid-test that also seems to resonate with people (as it did with those interviewed). However, whereas the model adds to our understanding of work, it is also limited. The model does not address the questions of how choices about work are made and why they may change. The categories are not clear and seem to overlap. There appears to be a bias towards careers and callings over jobs. Finally, the model does not explain how work relates to other aspects of a person's life.

In chapter six I expanded the analysis by applying five existential themes to the interviewees' narratives, which helps to understand the choices they have made throughout their lives. Original work choices were made based on the influence of family and notions of contributing to society. Some did not make a "committed" choice but chose their work through default, but of course, this is still a choice. The chosen work then resulted in anxiety and bad faith due to varying factors: the day-to-day work did not match the original abstract view; the realization that they were living for others; the negative effect people had on them in the workplace; the work was incongruent with beliefs and values; critical incidents including losing their work, end of a marriage, and a serious accident; boredom and stress, and the timing of opportunities.

One of the most significant causes of work anxiety was the difference between the abstract view of the "profession" that they chose, versus the day-to-day of the work itself. For example, Michelle was influenced in her youth to become a social worker as she felt that her work should be about "helping people." However, she did not enjoy the day to

day work of a social worker, notably the client interaction and eventually resigned. The expectations she had for the work of a social worker were very different from the work itself, which negatively affected her mental well-being, and home life. For many people work is probably more about the day to day activities that form their work and the people they interact with than where they find their meaning.

Another major cause of anxiety for the interviewees was incongruence between the chosen work and their beliefs on meaning and values. Vincent comments, “I worked in, I mentioned earlier, two utilities and IBM and anybody, almost anybody would think, ‘Those are pretty good places, why didn't you work there?’ I hated it. Not that I hated those places, but I hated the idea, what I would have to become to be a part of it.” His work was not congruent with his situated self; his value of social change, and therefore negatively impacted his self.

Also playing a part in change for the interviewees were unexpected critical incidents that dramatically altered their view of work, e.g., being fired from work, divorce, and serious health issues. Prior to his accident, Andrew evaluated work solely in terms of financial gain however the accident dramatically changed his view of life and his work. He talks about having now “awakened” and made new choices, which have led to a much better life. He emphasizes how good he feels these days, especially since he transitioned into a new line of work – “I feel alive most of the time. I mean, I'm not on auto pilot anymore in my life.” This fits with the existentialist belief that authenticity is only possible if the individual is fully conscious and responsible for his or her choices, and not “sleepwalking” anymore.

As the interviews have demonstrated, in the first stage of life the individual may not be fully aware or conscious of what authenticity means to him or her. Michelle was surprised when she found that aspects of social work affected her negatively. Elizabeth reacted badly to being a real estate agent noting that she had not done her “homework.” Vincent regards his life as having come full circle since he started out as an idealistic young man, then became a business person, but has now returned to his idealism, as an activist academic working to make change. “It’s just taken a long road to get here, longer than I had imagined...if I go back to my teens and that kind of idealism and world view I had, I took a big detour, but I came back to the same place. I just didn’t know how to get there early enough, didn’t know what I was looking for early enough.” However, change at mid-life may also be more difficult as we may choose to rationalize our lives and be hesitant to consider new possibilities voluntarily. “The young more easily separate themselves from values they discern and then reject, for they can more easily move out into the awaiting world, experimenting with vitality and hope. The older adults have already finished their ‘hope trip,’ and they are at a significantly different point as they gaze into the abyss of alienation” (Krill, 1978: 1).

The interviewees all learned more about themselves in the process of working, and were then able to make more informed choices. May (1983: 167) emphasizes that “knowledge and insight follow decision rather than vice versa.” However, they also had difficulty articulating their beliefs which is a requisite to choosing the authentic life, and their views on meaning and their life have changed over time. They have all been surprised by their life in various ways, especially their work life. As discussed in chapter two, mid-life is frequently a period where people may question their lives and in some

cases make drastic changes (Grierson, 2007; Hollis, 1993, 2005; Levinson, 1978; Levinson, 2000). Traditionally, a person was supposed to choose a line of work, study for it, secure a position with an organization, and happily stay with both the work and the organization until retirement at the age of sixty-five. This was considered to be the “good life” (May, 1953). The interviewees came to the conclusion that to continue in the life they had created was wrong; it was an inauthentic existence. For most of them, this change took years, and came with an emotional cost to themselves and their family. At mid-life most people have probably come to know and understand themselves much better, e.g., beliefs and values, and therefore what they consider to be the authentic life is much clearer.

Between the ages of 40 and 50, people who may be successful in their professions frequently begin to question the value of their lives. This is a period of reassessment of one’s self, one’s life, and one’s career. It often happens to people who started their careers with great enthusiasm and conviction, believing they would make major contributions to society. By mid-career, they have begun to realize that their contribution may be far smaller than they had dreamed. (Pines et al., 1981: 173)

The job-career-calling model implies that viewing work as a calling is preferable to viewing work as a career and especially a job (Freed, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). As discussed in chapter two, many spirituality and work scholars argue that work should be “meaningful” to the individual (Fox, 1994; Harrington et al., 2001; Herman & Gioia, 1998; Mitroff & Denton, 1999a, 1999b; Raelin, 2006), which is also implied in the Job-Career-Calling model (Wrzesniewski, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). They also argue for the need for the individual to bring his or her spirit into the workplace, but as the narratives reveal, we cannot separate work and spirit. “Spirit is the self” as Kierkegaard famously stated (Kierkegaard, 1980: xi). The

individual self is “all that we are” and it is a work in progress at all points in time and during all aspects of life. No matter where we are, we “are” our self, and are “only” our self. But, as the interviews have shown, confronting the self (or spirituality) is not easy and so people may simply avoid it. “Even if we accept spirituality as central to our world philosophy, we are insufficient in our ability to understand this and to live with it... spirituality provokes uncomfortable questions in us and may mean confronting pain” (Howard, 2002: 238).

From an existential perspective, it does not matter how we view work; all that matters is that we choose our self by choosing our work freely. And this does not necessarily mean getting everything we desire, e.g., becoming leader of my country or a famous actor. “It is necessary to point out to ‘common sense’ that the formula ‘to be free’ does not mean ‘to obtain what one has wishes’ but rather ‘by oneself to determine oneself to wish’ (in the broad sense of choosing). In other words success is not important to freedom” (Sartre, 1956: 483). Success is not the existential goal; the goal is only to choose our life. “Whether we want to become good parents, teachers, artists, firefighters or just decent people, life can have meaning if we strive to be who we want to be by doing what is necessary to become that person” (Baggini, 2005: 116). However, we do not exist in isolation but are influenced by many factors: family, beliefs about meaning, values, friends, and social norms, e.g., contribution. “A self worth wanting – a ‘complete’, ‘emotional’, ‘moral’ sort of thing, to which adjective such as ‘true’, or ‘authentic’ tend to be attached – is something with a character; where emotions, decisions, actions and reactions spring from a reasonably coherent cluster of beliefs and values” (Wilkes, 1999: 29). We choose our self through the choices we make in all areas

of our life based on our own internal evaluative process of perceived possibilities. “Man must make himself man through the mundane labor of decision-making... He will choose the alternative which best fits with the referent criterion if he has an explicit awareness of all the significant factors involved in the decision. Thus explicit awareness is necessary for effective decision-making” (Johnson, 1971: 11). We cannot choose our life in good faith without questioning our own being which highlights the need for self-reflection if we are to make appropriate choices about our lives, including our work lives.

I would argue that despite the apparent importance that we place on work in Western society, it may not be as important as many believe it to be, or perhaps in the “way” we believe it to be. It does not matter whether or not *work* is meaningful to the individual but it is important that a person feels that his or her *life* is meaningful. “I would want to say that I've made some kind of a meaningful, positive, contribution. I'm not sure that that's gonna be relative to any of the actual “work” work that I do” (Christine). A meaningful life, then, is the real challenge and this takes an awareness of the existential self in order to make decisions that result in the authentic life. Work itself may be more interchangeable than thought as it is really only a means to authenticity or “fulfillment of the self.” Ryan noted that even though someone may enjoy his or her work, it is only one component that makes up a life. “We can make our lives a little easier in terms of work intensity, but in the end, does that keep you from divorce, does it keep you from issues like anger?”

The authentic life may indeed be the “balanced” life, the “secure” life, or however else a person chooses to live but authenticity is judged by the individual, not society. According to Sartre, we must never allow our humanity to be defined by others, only by

ourselves (Sartre, 1956). No matter how well society may view a type of work, e.g., medical doctor or teacher, it may be the wrong choice for that particular individual. “I may be connected to value, contribute to a wide network of relationships, and be deeply appreciated by my society, but if I lack the feelings, attitudes, intentions, and beliefs appropriate to my situation, my sense of meaninglessness will be acute” (Bellotti, 2001: 80). And so it is up to the individual to ascertain whether the need for balance or security is authentic or externally imposed. “Ultimately, if he is to achieve authentic existence, the individual must make his decision alone, but this decision, made in solitude, at the same time reaches out into the social context which determines the self’s concreteness” (Schrag, 1977: 201). A life lived for others is contrary to the main tenet of existentialism; that is, for the individual to “choose one’s life” (Sartre, 1956). However, if the individual takes responsibility for the choice, then it could be argued that it is chosen in good faith and potentially leads to authenticity. The danger is not in *what* we choose, but in *how* we choose; if we give up our freedom to choose by not questioning our being.

Lastly, the interviewees view death abstractly with most choosing to ignore thoughts about their mortality altogether. When asked about how they would feel if they had a fatal illness, there was a clear division between those who are content with their current life versus those who are not. Even if we don’t face a tragic car accident or terminal disease, all of us will age and our health will decline as we move gradually closer to death. As the saying goes, “no one gets out alive.” Most of us fear death, fear the nothingness, and we cannot comprehend what death means, because we do not know what death is or how it “feels.” Those times, usually in the middle of the night, when we comprehend what it may mean to not exist, we are scared. We are afraid of the

nothingness that Sartre refers to. According to existentialism, it is important that death is always a part of one's consciousness, as facing death provides the freedom to choose, and therefore the chance to live authentically. McCarthy (1980: 135) argues, "The affirmation of a personal meaning of existence lies rooted in the certain knowledge of death."

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this thesis show that models such as the Job-Career-Calling one are inadequate as they fail to take into account the existential self. The existential self is complex and as the analysis has shown, there are many interrelated factors that must be taken into account in order to understand the effect one's work has on that self. Work should not be viewed as a "place," separate from one's Being. It should be viewed instead as one aspect of how the individual experiences his or her existential self. Therefore, to truly understand work we are in need of an existential approach. In the following section I provide some preliminary thoughts on aspects of an existential approach to understanding work and meaning.

Some Thoughts on an Existential Approach

The existential challenge that each of us must face for ourselves is to determine how to structure our individual human existence, while at the same time knowing that our existence is finite. Work has been traditionally regarded and investigated as a "separate" sphere, but work is only a part of a much greater context within which the individual resides. As such, inquiries around the meaning of work need to focus on the individual self and how existence is viewed and life therefore chosen by that individual.

The Self

Our sense of self seems to be essentially rooted in our thoughts, personalities and memories. Time erodes the chains of connection that tie these to their predecessors; the person I was twenty years ago is very different from the person I am now. Because these changes are gradual and life is relatively short, we can nevertheless see our adult lives at least as forming a single narrative. (Baggini, 2005: 53)

Our individual existence is the self and therefore the self must be the central focus of enquiry in order to understand any aspect of human existence, including the experience of work. The existential self is also the subjective self, and exists in a form known only to the individual being. No one can get inside another person's head and we cannot understand the Self and the world as that Being understands it. According to existentialists, therefore, we should exist in a perpetual state of questioning our own being: Who am I? What is this world that I exist in? What does it mean to exist? The self chooses its self from possibilities that are perceived in our consciousness about work and non-work. Existentially, at least in Western society, work is the main place where we are being-in-the-world, and therefore where the self is constituted. Work is a relationship between self and the experiences of work; a relationship with the work itself, the daily activities, and the people we interact with in the workplace. As such, work is a place where we put our beliefs into action, interact with other people, and experience the day-to-day activities.

The self is continually being formed as we exist each day and attempt to live life as we see fit, usually a struggle between how we see ourselves and who we want to be. Maslow (1968: 10) notes, existentialism "deals radically with that human predicament presented by the gap between human aspirations and human limitations (between what

the human being *is*, and what he would *like* to be, and what he *could* be).” Every thought, and every action that a person makes, in the course of his or her existence, affects and is affected by the self. “The existent is oriented towards possibility; he is choice, freedom, projects, uniqueness, subjective truth, paradox” (Wahl, 1969: 89). The struggle for selfhood is dependent on the belief that we are free; if we believe that we are free and therefore that our life is a choice, we will continually ask ourselves, “How should I live my life?” Freedom gives us possibilities to choose from, possibilities that when realized become experiences that change our self.

The goal of the existential self is to live authentically, focused on our being, free to choose, aware of potentialities, and choosing in good faith towards authenticity. “A person is both actuality *and* potentiality” (Maslow, 1968: 10). The challenge for the self is to choose “one’s self” from the possibilities one perceives. Ultimately, however, the choice is not necessarily right or wrong; all that matters is that the choices throughout life are made in good faith and results in authenticity for that particular individual.

If a life has enough projects, interests, connections to energize its bearer’s will to live and love of life is meaningful, then almost any set of concerns will do. These concerns must be the bearer’s. They cannot be imposed externally or result from delusions or hallucinations. They must be real, not simulated. Such a person’s life would be meaningful enough to block suicide, enjoyable enough that the bearer wants to go on. (Bellioiti, 2001: 85)

The existential self must not only understand his or her situation, he or she must also “accept” the human predicament which means accepting the “illusion” of his or her own existence. “What I do know is that life is full of potential, of possibilities, of promises that we’re loathe to give up, and that so long as we’re alive we can tell ourselves we’re the agents of that life, believe in the illusion that we’re in control”

(Rubin, 2007: 150). The illusion is the absurdity of the human situation, the existential human predicament. In order to “function” successfully in this world, as a Being which we do not understand, we must accept the fundamental human condition. If we do not accept the human condition, then life will probably always be one of continuous turmoil as we seek to make sense of that which we cannot make sense of. “To exist or not to exist, that is always the question. And there is always the second question: what does it mean to exist” (Wahl, 1969: 108)? Nietzsche argued that “illusion” was a necessary component of human existence, a stand that I am in agreement with as we are all “medicated” to some degree (Nietzsche, 1999). All that differs is how far we are on the medication continuum. We can opt out of life (suicide), physically medicate ourselves with drugs, or “mentally” medicate ourselves with an illusion that our existence matters, and follow the dogma of society which is the result of our social construction. Interestingly, two of the interviewees commented that they believed that their existence was only a dream. “Our lives are just a dream. It's just our view. It's our mind's interpretation that creates our existence” (Nicole). One person commented that he sometimes feels that he is literally dreaming. “I remember when I was a kid wondering if life was just a dream, and maybe I'm going to wake up one of these days and think, I don't know, that I'll be a baby in the crib because I've been dreaming this whole life” (Joseph).

Therefore, an existential approach to work is focused on the self and the goal of the self is to live authentically. Unlike the job-career-calling model, work is not viewed as to its importance in itself but instead on the experiences of work and how those experiences then affect and change the self. However, whereas the self is always alone

and in many ways alienated from other selves, we still live in a “situation” of existence, and we cannot understand the self without understanding that situation. Each individual, then, exists within his or her unique, particular situation in the world.

The Situation

When man is born, the stage is set for him. He has to eat and drink, and therefore he has to work; and this means he has to work under the particular conditions and in the ways that are determined for him by the kind of society into which he is born. Both factors, his need to live and the social system, in principle are unalterable by him as an individual and they are the factors which determine the development of those other traits that show greater plasticity. (Fromm, 1945: 14)

Choices to live authentically are influenced by the situation of our existence (the environment that surrounds us) and thus contributes to each person’s unique version of the authentic life. If choices are to be made in good faith and towards authenticity, they must align with the individual’s belief system, which includes beliefs about meaning and the world, a conscious awareness of his or her mortality, along with what the individual values. “The understanding of human motivation must proceed from the understanding of the human situation” (Fromm, 1947: 50) Despite what some existentialists may argue (that we are not constrained in any way), the self is influenced by many factors; we are both free and constrained at the same time. “Freedom is always freedom in some given situation; it is limited, conditioned. Thus each of our acts can be interpreted in two ways: in terms of our situation and in terms of our freedom” (Wahl, 1969: 65). The situation is always affecting the self and is affected by the self, and is always changing.

The situation each of us “finds” ourselves thrown into consists of both internal (individual) characteristics and external (environment) characteristics. Individual characteristics include our beliefs about meaning, awareness of death, and values, and

secondary characteristics such as age, health, and economic situation. The environmental characteristics include the society that we live in and other people. The relative situation that the self is in adds another dimension to how people see their lives. For example, Christine and Joseph commented that they are content with their lives and grateful for the opportunities they have had because they both note how fortunate they are compared to other people, i.e., that their situation is better than others.

Internal

Beginning with the internal characteristics of individuals, the interviewees subscribed to a variety of views on the meaning of life, how they regard death, and their values. Some people have clear beliefs while others do not, especially when it comes to death. We may argue about whose view is the better one but it does not matter in the existential goal of living authentically. What does matter is that we understand our views in order to choose our life and that we face our inevitable and arbitrary death. Existentially, death is of paramount importance to our situation, as choosing life over death is a necessary requisite of authentic existence. "Facing death and the potential of nothingness constitutes the "existential challenge" of honest, authentic human experience" (McCarthy, 1980: 154). If the individual does not face death (and not in an abstract way as in "some day I will die"), the individual does not choose his or her life and therefore is doomed to inauthentic existence. Since, existentially, life is an 'absurd' experience, wondering whether to commit suicide is a rational possibility and potential action. The individual then contemplates suicide as a possibility, and if choosing against this possibility, demonstrates his or her freedom to choose his or her life. "Philosophical suicide is a way of dealing with the existential absurdity by attributing false meaning to

life by means of escape from the absurd, belief in the afterlife (religion), searching for order in life (science), or any other form that denies the absurdities of life” (Orbach, 2008: 290).

If we do not face death we may put off new choices believing that it is not the “right time” for change. We may live an inauthentic life and console ourselves with the belief that “someday” I will live a different life and thus, live authentically. For example, despite engaging in a type of work that we know is not what we want to be doing and knowing we are in a state of inauthenticity, we may stay in this circumstance for many years. This is especially true of those who want to deny their freedom, those who live as if they have forever, not realizing there is a time limit on their existence. “The possibility of death, then, belongs essentially to us, and is understood by each of us as a limit upon all our striving, a limit that importantly defines what we are, by placing in context all those other ends that we grasp ourselves through” (Richardson, 1986: 145).

I would argue that we should view consciousness along two axes: awareness of being and death, with the unpredictability of life along one axis; and the ability to accept and live out our existence “successfully” along the other axis. Some people may have a high awareness of the existential problem of meaning and death but be unable to accept the illusion. Hence, day-to-day life would be extremely difficult. On the other hand, ignoring the existential dilemma of death completely and accepting the illusion of life is the inauthentic life. In order to function we must be able to have both – an awareness of death and an ability to accept. “Does it really make sense to reflect continuously on one’s own existence on the one hand, and on Being on the other, in order to find out in the end what we knew from the beginning, that both are elusive” (Heinemann, 1953: 187)?

Ultimately, we must accept the illusion to some degree, i.e., the nature of the human condition and the absurdity of life, in order to function. We must go along with the illusion (that we are an actor in our own play), even if we believe our existence to ultimately be meaningless.

As we have seen with the interviewees, people may be unaware of their major beliefs and values, or simply choose to suppress them, perhaps unknowingly, in favor of societal norms. When the interviewees were young, they had limited life experiences and were still formulating their beliefs and values. Therefore, it is understandable that they would have only a partial understanding of their self and their desires for work.

Sometimes we may exhibit bad faith by claiming that the reason we do not pursue an activity, e.g., volunteer work, is that we lack the time or give some other excuse, when in fact we don't really possess the value of volunteer work. But we may rationalize our behaviour since we are all "supposed" to value volunteer work. Who ever says that they do not care about helping others? The problem is that people may not know themselves, their value systems, their beliefs about the world in which they are situated and their relationship to that world. They may experience life without questioning their being, living in a semi-conscious state and only superficially aware of their own existence.

Additionally, there are secondary individual characteristics such as age, gender, race, health, education, and economic situation that will also affect the self and the potentialities that are available to him or her. The options for work will usually be far greater for the university-educated, thirty year-old, than they would be for the uneducated, fifty year-old. Many of the interviewees returned to school for graduate education but others may not have this possibility due to personal financial

circumstances. A person may not want to retire but be forced to due to health problems, or a person may wish to retire but cannot because of insufficient financial means. “There are times when I look at my life now, and I see what I'm doing, and I worry sometimes about retirement for myself and my financial situation, even though it's okay, there's still that insecurity around it” (Nicole). As noted previously, freedom does not mean getting everything we want in life.

External

The self is also affected by the external environment, other people and the social system (society) that we live in including the economic system. Elizabeth commented, “All of my friends influence me because I don't really make any decisions without asking at least 20 people. No, I still make my own decisions, there's just a lot of interaction shall we say.” Like all situation factors the influence of other people will vary depending on the individual. For some people, family may be a strong influence on self whereas for others, it is negligible. Most of the interviewees were influenced initially by their parents in both positive and negative ways, and this influence lessened over time.

The pressure of societal norms can result in a life solely devoted to “fitting in” to the society in which we are situated. “Men’s original desires are many, and they are invariably desires of particular things and specific states of affairs. Moreover, most human desires are shaped primarily by the social and economic conditions under which they thrive” (Olson, 1962: 188). Barbara stated, “I'm a product of the times. The influence, I grew up in Canada in the 50's and 60's in Quebec as an Anglophone. So that had a tremendous influence on the way I view society, on the way I view language, on the way I view education, yeah, and minorities, social activism.” For Daniel, the small

community he grew up in strongly influenced his choices, noting, “I don't think that was the culture back then, either...you live where you lived, get a job, stay there for 40 years and live happily ever after.” Societies, of course, change over time, e.g., issues of morality may change but we are all pressured by these societal norms to act and thus exist in a certain way, usually in a very routine pattern. And, as noted by the female interviewees, women feel especially pressured to submit their lives to family concerns (Beauvoir, 1983).

Elizabeth noted that despite being unhappy overall with her work as a real estate agent, there were positive aspects to the experience. “I still felt it was meaningful then because I was helping some very difficult clients who had no money and had no wherewithal get a house, which is a huge, big deal.” So the work did provide a means of her actioning her belief of helping people. However, in using this example of contribution, we must stress again that any choice must be our own. We must always ask if the desire to make a contribution through work is a choice made in good faith and toward authenticity, or is it a sign of bad faith, and only a consequence of societal pressure and therefore, the situated self.

An existential approach is focused on the self, where each self resides in a unique, particular situation, and where the goal of the self is to live authentically. We now add the *experience* of work, i.e., how does the experience of work affect the situated self?

Work as “Experiences” of Self

Consciousness is a relationship to Being and a pursuit of value, but this is still an abstract description. It must pursue Being in a particular and specific way (or ways) and it is this particular pursuit of value which is the project. No project is determined; as we have seen consciousness is a freedom, a nothingness in the

midst of Being. It must therefore choose its project, the fundamental way it will seek value, from amongst the choices offered to it by the world. (Craib, 1976: 23)

Unlike the Job-Career-Calling model that categorizes work as a specific and separate *thing*, i.e., job, a career, or a calling, with an existential approach, work would be viewed as *process* or related *experiences*. Three “experiences” that stand out from the interviews in this regard are work as actioning beliefs, being-with-others, and everydayness. These three aspects seem to be involved to some degree in all work but their importance and effect on the self varies with the individual, and therefore, determines the type of work and workplace that is positive for the particular individual. The importance of these experiences translates into how work is viewed and is needed to explain work in a way that models such as the Job-career-calling do not. “Meaningful work isn’t just about the meaning of the paid work we perform; it’s about the way we live our lives... it’s the alignment of purpose, values, relationships, and activities that we pursue in life” (Chalofsky, 2003: 58).

Work as Actioning Beliefs

First, work can be an opportunity to experience “beliefs in action,” where a person may “choose” to action his or her beliefs, and by these experiences, attempt to fulfill inner desires and live authentically. The self (and meaning) is an outcome of action (Yalom, 1980), and work for many of us is the primary place where we actualize our beliefs. For example, if we feel that making a contribution is important, work is a place where we fulfill this belief, where we can “actualize” the belief and thus ourselves. A person may choose to be a teacher as they believe strongly in educating young people or an artist if they value creativity.

People who view work as a forum for action will likely be inclined to view work as a career or a calling but this is not necessary. Most people probably would not consider a “job” as the main place to action their beliefs yet the work may still provide opportunities that meet this need. The interviewees who view work as a career or calling described their work in terms of action, usually contribution. The academics all seem to have a need to be worthwhile; the only difference being whether they fulfill their need through teaching or research. In choosing his work first as a minister and then as an academic, Ryan noted, “I wanted to be involved in things that really would make a difference in people’s lives. So that people's lives were improved, people's lives were enhanced in some way.” However, he also has a strong faith, and since he desires work that brings the two together, his choices for work are limited. As discussed in chapter two, his situation aligns with the spirituality in the workplace literature because he is attempting to make a stronger connection between his outer work life and his inner life (Fox, 1994; King & Nicol, 1999). Ryan asked himself, “Is there something I can do, where I can, in essence, bring my faith back in?” Becoming a university professor, where he would teach and conduct research, seemed like the right move in order to regain a state of authenticity. “I could end up in a more secular institution with a faith background, presumably bring some values into that context, and yeah, I thought, ‘This is the way to go.’ I thought, ‘Yeah, that's kind of more of who I am.’”

For Christine, the most rewarding part of becoming an academic is the opportunity to be creative. Nicole emphasized, “Helping people is the bottom line of what really makes me happy.” Courtney’s work allows her to fulfill her desire to fight for social justice. Vincent’s work as an academic fulfills his need to be an activist and argue

for political and social change. Jessica notes that she wants, “the joy... the flow. I want to feel like I’m making a difference.” As a schoolteacher Joseph wants to feel that he is making a difference in the lives of his students.

And 20 years down the road, 30 years down the road, I'd love to have a student come up and say, “Hey, do you remember me?”...give me some feedback and be like, “I remember when you did this,” and it probably will be something I didn't even teach, you know, it will be one of those things that happened at recess or something, that made a big impact on a particular child...that's what I would like...at the end looking back, would be worth more than anything, for a student to come up and say that.

Work as Being-with-others

Second, work can be about experiencing other people, i.e., “being-with-others.” Since the self is influenced by how others see us, the social aspect of work can be very significant. The importance of the social component depends on the individual, i.e., the degree to which other people affect our sense of self and how much we enjoy being with others. Some prefer little interaction with others at work while some only enjoy work when they are around other people. Unfortunately, some people who value being-with-others may be in work that is solitary in nature, while others may be in the opposite situation. If this is the case, then the work is incongruent with what they value, and will likely have a negative effect on the self.

For many people the social aspect of work is perhaps the most important one as it seems to provide a “connection” and “belonging” that most of us tend to seek out. Nicole stated, “When I'm around people, I really try to be with them. Like, you know, no matter how busy I am, or crazy I am, I really want to feel that I'm connected with them, at that particular moment for whatever time we're together.” Shannon stated, “My passion is...being connected with people.” Ryan noted that he really enjoys working with other

people, “I find it motivating...because I’m a very social person.” Andrew emphasized, “We socialize at work. We interact with people at work.” And it is what he missed the most after his accident and could not work. The interviewees noted frequently that whereas they did not necessarily enjoy their work, e.g., Elizabeth, they enjoyed the people they interacted with in their workplace. In some cases, this was almost reason enough to stay in a profession of work that was not meaningful to them. If this is their authentic choice then it is made in good faith but if this is a default choice because they do not question their being then it is made in bad faith.

Work as Everydayness

Third, work is about ‘everydayness,’ an experience of engaging in various activities, and exhibiting our self. “Our being is immediately ‘in situation:’ that is, it arises in enterprises and knows itself first in so far as it is reflected in those enterprises. We discover ourselves then in a world peopled with demands, in the heart of projects ‘in the course of realization’” (Sartre, 1956: 39). The majority of work is composed of a variety of daily activities, some of which may be enjoyable to us and others that we will not enjoy. For example, Michelle enjoyed the administrative work of a social worker but she did not enjoy the client-based work and it resulted in anxiety and stress.

...the parts of the social work that I really liked was more the administrative part of it. I really liked the financial part, the computer work, or organizing the files and things. That's what I enjoyed about it, not the clients... And all the other social workers I knew would always say, “Oh, that's the part I can't stand. I wish I didn't have to keep up with my files.” I wanted to be out there, I would have been happy to have been in the office getting it all organized, getting all my files organized.

Despite wanting to change her current work, Elizabeth still enjoys the everydayness aspect of her work and looks forward to going to work in the mornings because of it. This can be a problem however. With both the being-with-others and everydayness aspects of work we may lose ourselves in the “routine-ness” of life; living a “busy” life but not an authentic life as the “busy-ness” may preclude reflection on the self. We may get lost in the everydayness and being-with-others aspects and lose sight of the existential goal of authenticity and the necessity of questioning our being.

Normally, says Sartre, my life is one of ‘engagement.’ I am fully and busily engaged with the world that is shaped, coloured and created by the fundamental set of values, the fundamental ‘project,’ that I am. In normal life I operate *within* this project. The result is that life is – or at least seems – meaningful. Alarm clocks, traffic lights, even tax forms show up as meaningful things demanding ‘urgent’ attention because they show up within my fundamental project. (Young, 2003: 137)

The everydayness of the work itself that is chosen also affects other aspects of a person’s life. For example, Christine and Barbara noted that being an academic provides them with a flexible work schedule so that they can devote more time to their family. Elizabeth’s current work, which she views as a job, allows her to concentrate her energies into other areas of her life. Michelle emphasized that she does not want a career or a calling and is looking for a part-time job because raising her children is her main priority. Joseph noted that each day as a teacher is different and he loves that aspect of his work. Others noted that whereas they loved the “notion” of the work they chose, they did not always enjoy the work activities themselves.

Since the self is continually being constituted, based on the experiences and subsequent feelings generated through our everyday activities, the self is always changing, always reflecting on its Being, i.e., the “reflexive work self.”

The Reflexive Work Self

Frustration, insecurity, and painful striving are the inescapable lot of humankind, and the only life worth living is one in which this fact is squarely faced; for, if the existentialists are right, a life of frustration, insecurity, and painful striving itself generates values, and the values so generated are the only ones actually realizable and genuinely worthy of human pursuit. (Olson, 1962: 14)

Most importantly to an existential understanding of work and meaning is the idea that the self is always reflexive and how we experience our work and the workplace transforms our self. The “right” choice of work is work that fits authentically with the self, i.e., is “chosen” which may be a job, a career, a calling, or other. The experiences of work will each affect the individual self and determine the self that we are creating on a daily basis. We could view the three experiences of work in terms of degrees of importance, e.g., actioning beliefs as having a more positive impact on the self than being-with-others and everydayness. But the emphasis that is placed on the three aspects is up to each individual to determine. Whether he or she chooses work primarily based on actioning beliefs, everydayness, or being-with-others does not matter, only that he or she has freely chosen it. We can choose to seek out meaningful work, work that fills us with great purpose (Ryan) or we can look for work that provides a comfortable everydayness, or being-with-others or, what is most likely, a mixture. Work for many people is probably more about the “everydayness” and being-with-others aspects than about actioning beliefs; what is important is how they interact with other people and the various activities that take place as part of their workday. The “right” choice of work is dependent on the individual determining what he or she needs from work in terms of the importance of beliefs, other people, and the day-to-day activities. Daniel argued that he is most content in the times when his work has been like an orchestra and all the components come

together. The “mix” of the three, therefore, must affect the self positively for the person to feel good about his or her work, and the options may be vast or limited, depending on the individual.

However, since the self is reflexive and ever-changing, the effect of our work experiences may change. On an abstract level we know that we are a “different” person in our fifties than we were in our forties or our thirties. But it is important to recognize that this difference is not an abstraction; it is the condition of the human self as we exist over time. If we realize that our self is always changing, then it is easier to understand when our lives no longer fulfill our desires and when it is time to make new choices. As I sit here thinking and writing, my self is being changed. And of course, my reflection of this state causes more change and so-on, in a never-ending feedback loop. In some ways it could be said that I am locked into the “prison” of my self; that is, if I am conscious and not “choosing” to ignore the feelings, which would amount to ignoring my existence as being. A life is a dynamic existence and as we have seen in the previous chapters, choices at one point in time may be the wrong ones, whereas at another point in time, they are made in good faith towards authenticity. Since Being is always in question and the Self continually constituted, life is rarely what people expect, especially when it comes to work. In my own previous work with the YMCA, for many years the work I did each day felt “right,” but eventually, despite no change in the work itself, the same work resulted in daily anxiety. The work that had affected my self positively for twenty years, now had a negative effect on my self.

Inevitably there will be ebbs and flows in a life and other aspects of life will emerge which will affect work. How different would life be if instead of viewing change

as something to be afraid of, we considered change as Being, and as natural as breathing? A philosophy of “change” would be a new condition for most people as the goal of life, especially as we age, has historically been to achieve a “stable” life (Levinson, 1978). Under this approach we can also understand the decisions about retirement that people must make. If the work is affecting the self positively then the individual contemplating retirement, should either continue working if possible, or he or she must replace the positive effect of work with something else, e.g., volunteer work.

Summary

Unlike the job-career-calling model of work an existential approach can provide a lens on work incorporating various views: the abstract versus the day to day, the practical versus the meaningful. It takes into account the individual “situation of existence” including factors such as non-work activities, critical events, the societal situation, and the various perspectives on meaning (religious, atheistic, etc.). It also explains why work is viewed in a particular way, as a job, career, calling, or other, and this view may change as the self changes. “Life is like a telescope that we can increase or decrease the magnification, adjust the focus, and view our lives from various vantage points” (Bellioti, 2001: 82). In this way we move from the particular to the universal and back again. Through the personal lens we focus on the everydayness and the being-with-others aspects of work, and through the universal lens we may view the actioning beliefs aspect of work. In combining the particular and the universal, we constitute and re-constitute the existential self.

Contributions of this Study

In this thesis I applied an existential framework to probe the meaning of work with fourteen people who had made a major change in their work lives. I used the major themes and concerns from across a variety of existentialists in order to provide the lens through which to understand how the interviewees view their lives. I began with an exploration of the job-career-calling model, and progressed to how each of the people interviewed understands and makes sense of his or her life. This work offers a substantive methodological contribution through the application of a broadly defined existentialist perspective. Beyond this, I reaffirmed the need to focus upon the individual in matters of meaningful work and the complexity of the domain.

Theoretical Contributions

First, we now have a greater understanding of the Job-Career-Calling model and the limitations of models such as these. Whereas the model provides a method for the categorization of work, it does not explain the dynamic effect of the work ‘experience’ on the individual. Our work lives are more complex than the model takes into account, and categorizing work into a career versus a calling versus a job, limits our understanding of work. This is the key problem with job-career-calling model of work; it assumes we are looking for strategies to deal with our work lives when we should be looking for strategies that allow for the creation of the authentic self. The Job-Career-Calling model also implies that it is preferable to view work as a career or calling, and not as a job. One’s work may not fit easily into any of the three categories, or the same work may be viewed as a job on some days, while on others days it may be viewed as a career or a calling. Also, people who view or desire their work to be a calling have a greater

challenge to find and maintain work that is a calling. The interviewees who claimed their work was just a job appear to have very good reasons for wanting work to be “in its place” in regards to other, more important, aspects of their lives. And they appear to be living authentically.

Second, this research demonstrates the need for an existential approach to truly understand the meaning of work. We cannot understand work separate from the existential self; work must be viewed in terms of its relationship to the formation of the individual self, and not as a separate ‘sphere’ of life. An existential approach helps us to understand why work may be viewed in a certain way and why that view may change over time. Under an existential approach, the categories of job, career, and calling do not matter, and in fact, are problematic; what is important is the relationship between one’s work and the individual self. This will be dependent on how the work is affecting the self at the point in time, i.e., the reflexive work self. An existential approach can also be a bridge to the spirituality and work field. This field suffers from many opposing views - one end dominated by those who wish to convert the workplace into a place of “God,” and at the other end, by those who just want “humane” treatment in the workplace. An approach of work and the self can help us understand this dichotomy and unite it. The self and what is termed “spirituality” are not separate. Therefore arguing that people need to be able to bring their spirituality to work is misleading. A perceived problem with the individual’s spirituality is really a problem with how work is affecting the self. We can understand spirituality by increasing our understanding of the individual self.

Third, I have developed and applied a new existential framework consisting of Choice, Bad Faith, Authenticity, Contingency and Death. I believe that this existential

framework worked very well for the purposes of this thesis and would be appropriate for other similar endeavors of research.

Fourth, I have reinforced the need to focus on the individual in research on the nature of work and the workplace. If the individual is not always included in our analysis of work and organizations, we are ignoring the human condition and will only perpetuate the systems that are in need of change. Management research must always keep the individual in mind.

Practical Contributions

The main practical contribution of this research is that it reinforces the need for a more comprehensive view of work in relation to the individual be taken in career counselling and helping people make appropriate work choices throughout their lives. The main weakness of most work counseling programs is that they encourage work choices without taking into account the self or, if they do, only superficially. Under an existential approach, work would be chosen based on its effect on the individual self as it pertains to meaningful existence. Additionally, the effect of one's work on the self may change and the originally chosen work may no longer have a positive affect on the self, especially as time passes and the situation of the self changes. Traditionally we have often viewed work anxiety as mainly being a problem of the individual, in effect, blaming the individual, especially if the work is supposedly "good" work. People can be even discouraged from changing their work. But under an existential approach, we can help people realize that how their work affects them will probably change throughout their life, and that when their current work no longer "fits" with their self, new work could be considered.

An existential approach can also be used to provide organizations with a new lens leading to a greater understanding of employee behaviour. Managers need to realize that they only see the actor on stage, i.e., at work and they do not see what is backstage, i.e., the effect the work is having on the self. If we understand the negative effects of work on the individual, then we will have more empathy for the individual, thereby putting us in a better position to consider solutions to problems.

Lastly, a secondary practical benefit of this research is that it provided the opportunity for the people interviewed to tell their story. People need to be able to tell their story in order to make sense of their lives. We need to find ways for all of us to “tell our story,” and understand our self and our choices as we attempt to live authentically.

Research Limitations

While this thesis adds to our understanding of work and self, there are a number of limitations starting with the possible “inauthenticness” of the use of a “pregiven” approach. A pre-given approach would appear contrary to the basic tenet of existential philosophy because applying any one theory to the individual meaning of life is problematic and fails to take into account the human predicament. Meaning and the existential ambiguous nature of the human condition, some might say, is far too complex for any one type of analysis. This was also evident with the contradictions and limitations that emerged during the analysis of the narratives and the challenges to avoid a positivistic management approach. However, though complex we can still try to analyze the connections between people and their beliefs and existentialism acknowledges those limitations. “There will never be a last word on the meaning of life, partly because each

individual has to satisfy herself that she has asked the right questions and found satisfactory answers. The search for meaning is essentially personal” (Baggini, 2005: 5). Another problem might be that, as previously noted, existentialism is not a coherent philosophy but made up of many varying perspectives. “The mandate that what counts most is ‘good faith,’ whole-hearted dedication to a freely chosen course or cause, and not to any truth anchored in a collectivity or a world beyond the individual, produces wide variations, not only in the views of its members but in the views they hold at different times” (Novack, 1966: 11). Perhaps the most famous critique of existentialism was Theodor Adorno’s *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1973). Adorno, a member of the Frankfurt school of critical theory, criticized the inherent ideology behind existentialism and the “jargon” of existential terms. Many consider existentialism an “irrational” philosophy, one that can ultimately offer little in the way of answers. I hope I have shown otherwise.

Additionally, existentialism is based on the premise that the individual is free to choose but many people really do not feel that they have choice when it comes to decisions about their work lives. To what extent can the self be purely free of influences and what does this say about existentialism?

A key assumption in each of the theoretical models is that people have choices regarding the careers that they pursue. This assumption may be valid in the case of most college students but in no way can be extended to the general population. Many workers may believe that they had little if any choice in selecting their current occupations because they did not have the opportunity to explore their options or receive training for more desirable careers. (Duffy, 2006: 59)

Many would also argue that existentialism’s focus on the individual may result in ignoring the universal and sociological concerns. But a society is made up of individuals, and, “It is necessary to keep in mind the distinction between individuality and

individualism” (Schrag, 1977: 201). There is also the claim that existentialism is ultimately, a philosophy of “man against himself” (Heinemann, 1953: 184), and that “as man is bound to the world, in putting himself into question, he puts into question the world which he develops about himself in some way” (Wahl, 1969: 92). I tend to agree but this is the nature of the human condition as we are trying to understand ourselves (to make sense of what does not make sense), and so, we must accept the riddle that is human existence and the world we live in. All of these concerns about and critiques of existentialism can be the basis of future research.

Future Research

From this research we now have a greater understanding of work as it relates to the existential self, but like existentialism, the research raises more questions than it answers. Of particular importance is the question of how the psychology of the individual may fit into an existential approach and thus affect how work is experienced. How does one experience actioning beliefs, being-with-others and their everydayness at work? What are the factors involved with the three experiences that separate “good” work from “bad?” We also need to investigate the effects of gender and cultural differences on an existential approach, why people vary in their level of consciousness and how this can be enhanced, and more work needs to be done on how beliefs and values are formed. Do women have a fundamentally different approach to freedom and choice than men? Are the very categories of existentialism embedded in maleness? Can an existential approach based on the freedom to choose our lives be applied to people who may have very limited

choices? Lastly, we need to understand how the *process* of the narrative may change the narrative.

Concluding Reflections

The search for meaning, emboldened by values that point to but never reach the eternal is too often obscured by our lives of habit and diversion. We must learn to appreciate life as an endlessly dynamic process of change, not a fixed state. We must understand that a robustly meaningful life, married to a joyous or peaceful psychological condition that is earned, defines high aspirations. And then we must live. (Bellotti, 2001: 91)

This thesis has been a work of personal reflexivity, and as I have reflected on the work I have also reflected on, and changed, the self that I perceive myself to be. I am now better able to understand my twenty-year experience with the YMCA, mentioned in chapter one. My work started out as a job and progressed to a career and finally to a calling, but then it went back the other way. The work had not changed and the organization I worked for had not changed but I had. My existential self had changed over the twenty years and unfortunately, in the end, the work no longer fit with the self I had become. This is the main lesson of this thesis. *Work is an experience that must fit with the individual's existential self.*

I am more convinced than ever that the human situation is one of confusion and ignorance but despite this, we must still “live” our lives and choose between authenticity and inauthenticity, the “serious” life versus the “superficial” life. “‘It is better,’ John Stuart Mill wrote, ‘to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.’ And although it might be best of all to be Socrates satisfied, having both happiness and depth, we would give up some happiness in order to gain the depth” (Nozick, 1989: 102). But I must also

accept the illusion that is my own life. I have come to the conclusion that my life will always be characterized by confusion. It is a maze that I will navigate each day, continually choosing between directions that appear at the time. I will live this life the “best” way that I can, in the way that makes the most sense to me, but I also know that on my deathbed, my existence and the world I have inhabited, will still be (almost) a complete mystery to me.

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Appendix A - Interview Guide

The interviews were semi-structured and the questions were used as a guide to elicit the overall work and life narrative of the interviewees. Follow-up questions were asked as per the individual situation.

1. Tell me about your work. What do you do? What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?
2. A Job is work that is viewed as primarily about income and material benefits; Career as advancement, challenge, progressive path; and Calling as fulfillment and purpose, work that would be continued even if there was no financial need. Would you describe your work as a job, career or calling? Why?
3. Do you think having a calling is better than “just” a job? Why or why not? Do you think you should have a calling?
4. What did you want to be when you were a teenager or young adult? Why? If you’re not doing this, what happened? How do you view those initial choices now?
5. Best work experience? Worst work experience? Why?
6. What would you do if you didn’t need to work for financial gain?
7. When do you want to retire? Why? How do you envision your retirement?
8. What do you believe is the meaning of life?
9. Is your life turning out the way you thought it would? If not, why not? For the better, or for the worse? What significant unexpected events have happened to you and how have they affected your life?
10. What do you consider to be a meaningful life? Do you consider your life to be meaningful? Why or why not?
11. Has your view of your life ever changed especially in what you consider meaningful? If so, why?
12. Have you ever felt your life was not meaningful? If so, why? What major changes have you made in your life and why?
13. Do you feel that you are living the “right” life? The life you were meant to live?
14. Who do you admire? What do you value?

15. In the film the Matrix, the main character is asked to choose between taking the red pill or the blue pill. If he takes the blue pill, he will live a comfortable life but it is not real. It is only a dream and his physical body is encased in a pod, or cage. If he takes the red pill, he will live his own reality but it will not be a comfortable life; instead he finds out he is living in a post-nuclear war world and will probably die at a young age. Would you take the blue pill or the red pill? Why?
16. Do you think about death? How does this affect you? How would you feel about your life if you were told that you were going to die in the next six months?
17. When do you feel most yourself? Why?

Appendix B – Definitions of Terms

Term	Definition
Job	Work primarily viewed as a means of income and material benefits.
Career	Work primarily viewed as advancement, challenge, and a progressive path.
Calling	Work viewed primarily as fulfillment, purpose, and work that would be continued even if there was no financial need.
Self	Who am I? Who we are continually becoming through experiences Self is reflexive, and changes through reflexivity
Choice	People choose from possibilities that emerge in consciousness, they are responsible for their choices, choices result in experiences
Bad Faith	Choices may result in a state of bad faith (inauthenticity) where the individual is an actor playing a role, not conducive to a 'positive' sense of self
Authenticity	Goal of life is to exist authentically – a meaningful life to choose one's life and be true to one's self, to live a subjectively meaningful life
Contingency	Existence is contingent, cannot be predicted, dependent on many factors, authenticity is not a permanent state
Death	Death is the most significant contingent factor of all since it results in end of existence and date of death is unknown, creates an urgency to life



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