RADICAL CAREER CHANGES OF MIDDLE-AGED PROFESSIONAL, TECHNICAL, AND MANAGERIAL WORKERS IN THE NEW RIVER VALLEY AREA OF VIRGINIA

by

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Radical Career Changes of Middle-Aged
Professional, Technical, and Managerial Workers
In The New River Valley Area of Virginia
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(ABSTRACT)

The specific problem of this study was to determine common characteristics of midlife professional, technical, and managerial workers who have made voluntary radical career changes, to identify positive and negative experiences faced by these individuals, and to identify coping strategies used by the career changer and families of the career changers.

Data were gathered by the participant observation method of qualitative research. Twenty purposively selected career changers were interviewed using semi-structured interview questions. Questions were categorized as follows: personal background, schooling, career history, the career change, and after the career change. The interview sessions were tape recorded.

Responses to the interview questions were assembled, codified, and examined for similarities. A profile of a middle-aged professional who has made a radical career change was developed. Excerpts from the profile follow. This individual: (a) is about 43 years old, (b) has worked
in the same career for about 13 years prior to the change, (c) experienced no major traumatic event before the change, (d) received no assistance from a "help" agency during the time of change, (e) had few barriers to overcome in making the transition, (f) adjusted to the change with a minimum of effort, and (g) remained financially stable after the change.

A major finding of the study was that 17 of the 20 subjects said they were better off psychologically after making the career change.
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A young person entering the world of work today can expect to be employed an average of 45 years. According to researchers, those 45 years will rarely be spent in one occupation as it has become the norm for individuals to change careers a number of times. The rise in the frequency of career change has sparked interest from researchers in various fields of study. Kanchier and Unruh (1987) surmised that "recent societal issues, such as the quality of work and the quality of life, have drawn attention to the question of voluntary occupational change" (p. 304).

Professional, technical, and managerial workers who make voluntary radical career changes often, as a result of educational accomplishments, encounter opportunities and options not available to their counterparts in the blue-collar work force. (Professional, technical, and managerial workers are in most instances hereafter referred to simply as professional workers.) Because of the opportunities afforded them, these workers frequently make changes to careers that are unrelated to their former fields of work; thus these individuals are said to experience radical career changes. As a result of these career changes many of these individuals experience a
variety of problems that have heretofore been given little attention. This study focused on the personal problems associated with voluntary radical career changes of middle-aged persons in professional occupations.

Purpose of the Study

The central purpose of this study was to identify the personal experiences faced by middle-aged professional workers who have undergone a voluntary radical career change. Specific purposes for the study were:

1. To identify common characteristics of these career changers;
2. To identify positive and negative experiences faced by these career changers; and
3. To identify coping strategies used by the career changers and by the families of these career changers.

Need for the Study

Labor force projections released by the U.S. Department of Labor in April, 1988, revealed that by the year 2000 the civilian labor force will approximate 139 million workers. Three out of four of these workers will be between the prime working ages of 25 and 54. According to a 1986 study, "more than 40 million Americans are in some stage of career transition or job change, in any given year" (Bolles, p. 43). With an approximation of 120
million workers in the 1989 work force, one out of every three is now in some stage of a career move.

According to Weinstein (1985), 58.4 million of the workers in the 1990 work force will be white-collar workers. Projections by the Department of Labor show that the fastest growing occupations in the coming years will be those that require the most educational preparation. Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor, 1988) figures indicate that the number of workers in the U.S. labor force with a college background has increased substantially in recent years. Numbers have risen from 28 to 41% for those with at minimum one year of college education; those with four or more years of college has increased from 14 to 21%. Career changes experienced by these workers in professional occupations often present problems not experienced by those in nonprofessional areas of work.

Individuals often reevaluate their employment situation during their middle years (Hiestand, 1971) in terms of life satisfaction and frequently look in retrospect at what might have been. This time of reevaluation can result in a redirection of lifelong goals and values and a subsequent change of career. Weathers (1976) concluded that mental strain was a significant factor in some midlife career change decisions made by professional workers. Figler (1978) additionally noted that job change
during the middle years is often a result of a multitude of transitions experienced during midlife.

Radical career changes of middle-aged professional workers are reflections of the changing views of society. As the quality of work as well as the quality of life (Kanchier & Unruh, 1987) become of greater importance in the public's eye, more people become willing to make radical changes in their careers in order to enrich the quality of their lives.

The Dictionary of Occupational Titles (U.S. Department of Labor, 1977) divides U.S. workers into 9 distinct occupational categories. The category of professional, technical, and managerial occupations encompasses occupations ranging from careers in education and medicine to careers in architecture and the physical sciences. This study focused on workers in the professional, technical, and managerial category (DOT code 01-19) who have made voluntary radical career moves to other occupations within the professional, technical, managerial category or to occupations outside this category. Individuals included in this study must have experienced distinct changes in their work environments.

Individuals in this unique subset of workers who have made radical career changes have not been studied extensively. It was therefore the purpose of this research to gather and synthesize existing literature on career
changes by middle-aged professional, technical, and managerial workers, identify experiences faced by such individuals, and make recommendations for easing the transition from one career to another. It is hoped the information obtained in this study will enable individuals to better understand and cope with difficulties encountered during such career change. This information should additionally enable educators, counselors, and others to more accurately identify and meet the needs of these career changers.

**Definition of Terms**

**Career**--A profession requiring training and commitment in a specific area (Dillard, 1985). A career gives individuals "emotional satisfaction, a sense of achievement, a sense of purpose for their life, increased self-esteem, and the hope and promise of growth for the future" (Bolles, 1986, p. 4).

**Career change**--A change of work environments in which a new set of job skills, or a transference of existing skills to different situations, is needed.

**Midlife**--For purposes of this study the years between the ages of 35 and 55 have been designated as the midlife years. These specific years have been chosen because they represent a median point in a professional's working life. Professionals typically enter the work world about age 22
and retire about age 68, making the years between 35 and 55 the middle years of work as well as the middle years of life.

**Professional, technical, and managerial workers**—For purposes of this study, the term professional, technical, and managerial workers is used to describe persons in careers that require extensive training and work area expertise.

**Radical career change**—The termination of one entire career and the subsequent acceptance of a new and different career (Driskill & Dauw, 1975; Neapolitan, 1980).

**Voluntary career change**—A change of work environment that is initiated and implemented by the worker.

**Delimitations**

Data for this research were collected by interview from 20 residents of the New River Valley area of southwest Virginia. Subjects volunteered to participate in the study. These individuals had made radical career changes voluntarily.

**Chapter Summary**

Career change has become a part of contemporary life as our society has witnessed more than 40 million adults in some stage of career transition in any year. Moreover, the majority of these career changes have occurred during
the middle years of life. Professionals often experience career changes that place them in occupations that differ dramatically from their previous occupations; thus these individuals are said to experience radical career changes.

Professional, technical, and managerial workers who make radical career changes during middle age often encounter difficulties that are not faced by workers outside these occupational categories nor by those in other stages of the life cycle. This study identified factors that should enable individuals to better understand difficulties encountered during a radical career change. Further, insight gained into coping strategies used by changers and their families should be valuable to educators and career and family counselors when developing training and retraining options for these middle-aged individuals. The findings will additionally contribute new knowledge to the sparseness of existing literature and provide a basis for further research of larger groups of the career mobile individuals.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review includes three sections: an overview of career change, career change of professional workers, and career change at midlife.

Career Change

Career change and its counterparts, job change and occupation change, have become common and almost anticipated occurrences. Consequently, the notion of an individual remaining in the same career for a working lifetime has become a rarity. "Until recently most people assumed that a successful person was one who established himself in a career soon after completing schooling, climbed the ladder as far as he could go, and then stayed put in the same occupation or company until time came for presentation of his gold watch" (Robbins, 1978, p. 1). This assumption is no longer valid as society witnesses individuals making successful career changes several times during their working lives.

Researchers agree that an association with the work world serves important economic, social, and psychological functions in an individual's life (Vollmer & Mills, 1966). Bardwick (1978) found that "relative to work, everything else in life was muted" (p. 135). Katchadourian (1987)
observed that "the rewards of work may be extrinsic or intrinsic, altruistic or self-serving" (p. 133).

Leventman (1981) concurred with these observations when she noted that, "Work is the foundation for the development of self-esteem" (p. 14). People take a great deal of pride in the work they perform and feel a kinship with others in similar fields. Herzberg's study (cited in Landau, 1977) found that work is "not merely a means of making a living for man, but it is essential for self-growth and self-fulfillment" (p. 16).

Maslow (1971) in his theory of hierarchical needs suggested that people's needs influence their behavior and that fulfillment of those needs often influences career decisions. The most basic needs, according to Maslow, are physical and organizational needs. After those needs are met, the social needs of belonging and self-worth must then be fulfilled. Leventman's (1981) suggestion that self-esteem is developed in the work environment fulfills the hierarchical social needs. Intellectual and achievement needs must be met next, according to the hierarchy; then the aesthetic needs of order and balance in life. Finally, when all these lower needs are satisfied, the need for self-actualization or to use one's abilities and skills more fully must be met (Dillard, 1985). Maslow (1971) believed that as each need becomes fulfilled, a person concentrates on fulfilling the next higher need.
Estimates of projected frequencies of career change vary with researchers. Robbins (1978) estimated an average of six changes should be anticipated; Aslanian and Brickell (1980) suggested six or seven; Van Hoose (1985), four; and Sprankle (1985), five to ten. The length of time involved in completing a career change varies with the individual. Research conducted by Robbins in 1978 suggested that the younger middle-agers took more time, made more plans, and investigated more options when contemplating a career change than older middle-agers. Older middle-agers who had voluntarily left their jobs and all those who were involuntarily unemployed were quick to accept whatever job was offered them.

Kinds of Change

According to Robbins (1978) and Isaacson (1981) career changes are classified as either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary career changes occur for a variety of reasons. McQuaid (1986) suggested that factors precipitating voluntary career change may include a desire to find more meaningful work, a disillusionment with dreams, or a restructuring of family responsibilities. Other factors may include change to secure an advancement, change to lessen boredom, or a self-directed change of geographical location. Interestingly enough, not all career changes that are perceived as being voluntary by
the changer are, in reality, undertaken voluntarily (Thomas, 1977). Sometimes people quit their jobs in anticipation of future occurrences, thus making them "involuntary" volunteers for career change (Robbins, 1978).

Involuntary career changes are those that are forced on the worker. These often occur due to layoffs, terminations of employment, physical limitations, changing technology, or forced retirement mandates.

Hiestand (1971) indicated that there were two distinct types of career changes: 45- and 90-degree changes. Forty-five-degree changes are those changes made when new skills are acquired that allow an individual to "move into a new, related field or a highly specialized part of his present field" (p. 12). Further Hiestand contended that 90-degree changes involve a major disassociation with the former occupation. Neapolitan's study (cited in Brown, 1983) included a third distinct category of change: a radical career change in which a total break from the former occupation is experienced. Possible examples of these career changes would be: 45-degree change--a typing pool secretary to a confidential secretary; 90-degree change--a general accountant to a financial analyst; radical change--a high school principal to a nurse.
Earlier research conducted by Driskill and Dauw (1975) had pointed toward the idea of a radical career move; however, at that time such a move was referred to as a mid-career change. The authors described such a change as "terminating one entire career in the middle years, then entering into a second and completely different career" (p. 562).

Driskill and Dauw (1975) utilized quantitative statistical measures to analyze questionnaire responses of 303 members of an Illinois organization, Forty Plus Chicago. Membership in this group was restricted to professionals over 40 who had experienced a mid-career job change. The sample included men from a variety of family backgrounds, educational levels, income levels, and kind and size of former employers—making the membership a random representation of the total population of executive mid-career job changers. Data were gathered in an attempt to establish a profile of a typical mid-career job changer. A representative sample of the profile follows:

The typical mid-career job changer:

1. was more likely to have an involuntary change than a voluntary one;

2. was likely to be reemployed by a smaller business than the place of previous employment;

3. would probably experience a decrease in gross annual income associated with job change;
4. would probably have a decrease in the number of employees supervised because of job change;
5. would not receive any career counseling from an executive consulting firm in relation to the change.

The profile represented majority percentages of the 303 subjects. Motivational factors of both voluntary and involuntary changers were analyzed for degrees of statistical significance. The factors studied were areas perceived as lacking in the previous position and identifiable reasons for the change. The questionnaire responses of the 303 subjects included 60.7% who had made involuntary changes and the remaining 39.3% who had made voluntary changes. An examination of the data indicated that distinct differences between the two groups existed in reasons for job changes. Specifically, 64.7% of the voluntary changers said that their abilities were not being fully utilized, while only 17.4% of the involuntary changers said that this was a problem. Another distinct difference appeared in the category indicating that change was the result of a desire "to do what I want to do."

Approximately 70% of the voluntary changers indicated this was a motivational factor, while only 6% of the involuntary changers so indicated. Comparable differences were noted in the areas felt lacking in the previous position. Feelings of self-actualization in work were cited by 59.7%
of the voluntary changers as compared to 10.9% of the involuntary changers.

Katchadourian (1987) observed that "most midlife men and women who feel trapped in their work look for sources of satisfaction in other areas of their lives--family, friends, hobbies, travel, sports, intellectual and aesthetic pursuits" (p. 140).

**Change in Work Values**

According to Pine and Innis (1987), recent research reveals that traditional work values of males and females have changed. Women, studies show, have changed values dramatically and have begun to show more concern for objective and practical areas and less concern for social values and altruism than they did in the 1960s. Men, on the other hand, have shown an increase in a desire for order and balance in work life as well as in their home life. Studies further indicate that societal values and economic patterns have a profound influence on individual work values (Palmer & Gould, 1986).

Researchers Robbins (1978) and Thomas (1979) in investigations of the kinds of jobs left behind during a career change, found that those jobs with large, profit-making organizations where the worker experienced a significant amount of stress were most frequently left. Career changers, particularly those at middle age,
generally chose employment with smaller companies or positions with the potential for less stress. Interestingly enough, many male career changers in both studies opted for less traditionally masculine occupations—education, nursing, and social work.

Theories of Change

Theoretical explanations of the individual's desire to pursue career changes actively are offered by several adult development theorists. Super (1972) indicated that a continuing commitment to work and family frequently influences career-change decisions. Holland (1985) believed that personality type was demonstrated in the selection of a career. These personality types or personal orientations, according to Holland, should be classified into six categories using the following descriptors: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Every individual, Holland asserted, has a combination of these personality types with one dominant trait. When work environments do not allow individuals to express personal orientations or to "exercise abilities and skills, [and] express attitudes and values" (Dillard, 1985, p. 23), a career change is in order.

Shaw (1987) and Sprankle (1985) contend that the transferability of skills is a high priority item when
investigating the possibility of a career change. The ability to utilize existing competencies and incorporate them into new work skills was identified as a major component in the career-change decision.

In a study conducted by Mega (1980), 5 male midlife voluntary career changers who had experienced career changes within the last 2 1/2 years underwent intensive interviews. Findings indicated that a significant event had preceded each subject's career change and the change was often associated with a newfound striving for independence. All subjects in the study expressed concerns with the issues of age and mortality. According to Mega, "the search for the new career reflected the subjects' early vocational fantasies that had been suppressed by adult responsibilities" (p. 711).

Nicholson (1988), in a study of 2,300 managers and business professionals found that major life events had been experienced by 80% of the subjects when the survey was repeated about one year later. A sample of major life events as reported by Nicholson included: business reorganization or major organizational change, change of residence, death of a close family member or close friend or colleague, son or daughter leaving home, major injury or illness to family member, major deterioration in financial state, involuntary loss of job, divorce or separation, and arrival of new or additional family
member. Nearly half those in Nicholson's sample experienced a job change in the 12-15 months between the initial and repeated survey. Findings showed that majority percentages of the major stressors were in the work realm, rather than on the home front suggesting that "major discontinuities play a prominent role in managers' work lives" (p. 27).

Robbins (1987) conducted a study of 107 college students who were enrolled in career- and life-planning classes at a large western university. These students were enrolled in a cross section of university departments and were considered a representative sample of the general college student population. Pretest and posttest measures were administered to determine amounts of career indecision levels after career development intervention. Results indicated that precourse career indecision did not significantly correlate with age, self-esteem, or interest pattern structure. However a significant correlation was indicated in the area of goal instability. According to Robbins, the findings indicated a practical implication. "Counselors can examine self-esteem and goal instability levels as possible criteria for readiness to participate in a standard, information-oriented career intervention program" (p. 295).

Weathers (1976) suggested support by spouse or support by significant others through means of patience
and understanding is a key factor in the decision to pursue a career change. Potential career changers, the researcher found, rarely discussed anticipated moves with parents or siblings, but relied mainly on spouses to provide support and encouragement. Transitions between jobs, Weathers surmised, were more easily accomplished when familial support was available.

**Changers Versus Nonchangers**

Numerous studies have been conducted in an attempt to identify differences in career changers and nonchangers. One such study was conducted by Hungerford (1979). The researcher administered a career survey instrument to 245 education and engineering alumni who had completed master's degrees at Northwestern University from 1955 through 1967. The subjects in this study were classified into four groups: (a) those who had experienced no career changes, (b) those who had experienced minor career changes, (c) those who had made one major career move, and (d) those who had made several career changes. A variety of characteristic variables were tested with findings indicating that no significant differences existed among the four groups in their work status, in their personal and social skills, or in their reasons for changing jobs. Significant differences were found to exist, however, when
the variables of education, career values, and action taken in pursuit of another job were tested.

In a similar study of midlife change of occupational field conducted by Carey (1980), a group of 76 subjects were selected from a variety of ethnic, geographic, and occupational sources. The differences between midlife career changers and nonchangers were again researched. Investigation in this study centered on career behavior, career development, and midlife reassessment. The participants included 34 who had changed careers and 42 subjects who had not. In the design of the study "occupational field change" was defined by use of Roe's occupational classification system. Hypotheses supported by the study included an assumption that a significant amount of stress was related in changers' decisions to leave old careers and that occupational satisfaction was greater in new careers. The following two hypotheses for both groups of subjects were not supported: "Career-related aspects of the midlife reassessment were not more time consuming than the non-career aspects," and "self-ascribed personality traits of the change group were not congruent with those in the new fields" (p. 1553).

In a study conducted by Borelli (1980), characteristics of midlife career changers and midlife noncareer changers were again examined. Specific characteristics under investigation were the attitudes held toward work
and upward mobility, personal value systems, demographic factors, and influences on career decisions. Sixty students who were enrolled at Governor's State University in Park Forest South, Illinois, during 1979 were subjects in the study. The subjects were divided into 2 groups of 30 students each. One group (Group A) consisted of those in the process of initiating a career change; the other group (Group B) consisted of noncareer changers.

Statistical measures employed in the research consisted of the Chi-square test for independence or the t test for significance of 152 specific characteristics. The findings indicated that midlife characteristics of career changers were not significantly different from noncareer changers among students in the study.

Section Summary

Many extensive studies have been conducted over the years in the general area of career change. These studies, often quantitative in nature, suggest that career change is a life event that will affect most individuals in our society today either directly, through personal change, or indirectly through the change of a relative or a coworker.
Career Change of Professional, Technical, and Managerial Workers

A hierarchical model of a typical professional oriented career path, according to Caple (1983), includes a college-educated worker starting at the bottom and after demonstrating merit, becoming a manager. This career model, however, overlooks the aspect of career change. There have been many people who have started at the bottom of a chosen field and while working their way up have developed other areas of interest and expertise and have changed fields in midstream.

In contrast to the traditional hierarchical model, the Japanese approach to managing people creates individuals who are likely to stay with one company for a working lifetime (Caple, 1983). Japanese workers are subjected to frequent change within the organizational structure, thus lessening boredom with repetitious assignments. This management style in Japan creates few discontented workers and consequently even fewer midlife career changers.

Some professionals place a high value on stability (Friend, 1985) and the sense of future security it provides. For others there must be constant challenge, constant reevaluation, and constant redefining of future goals. Although some workers are content to pass their working years in the same secure environment in which they
entered the working world, others are discontent and frequently feel the urge to move on.

Changing technologies in today's work force have caused many individuals to undergo retraining as a means of preparation for changing careers. Neugarten (1968) suggested that "retraining is the means by which adult workers can continue to adjust themselves to the exigencies of a rapidly changing society" (p. 341). Belbin and Belbin (1968) further noted that "those in higher occupational grades appear to have a need for retraining at various periods throughout their working life as a safeguard against the obsolescence of their skill or a loss in its market value" (p. 345). Professionals, according to these authors, must continually extend their knowledge base in order to maintain viable employment options.

According to Friend (1985), job change has become socially acceptable—even admirable. Current belief among upper management in the public sector is that it is no longer desirable for executives to keep doing something they do not enjoy until the time comes to collect the proverbial gold watch. Accordingly, a poll of 306 top executives by the management consulting firm of Parks, Sholl & Gordon, Inc., of Waltham, Massachusetts, indicated that nearly half those polled believed executive careers
should be built at a number of organizations, with an average of 4 or 5 years at each.

Thomas (1979) in reviewing research efforts of numerous investigators in the field, offered three explanations for the increase in the number of midlife career changers in high-status careers. In the first explanation, Thomas described the "counterculture hypothesis," in which individuals express a disenchantment with society as we know it and subsequently choose to disassociate themselves from their former surroundings. Thomas based this hypothesis on research conducted by Krantz and Roberts on individuals who had dropped out of the mainstream of society. A second explanation offered by Thomas was the "developmental or Gauguin hypothesis." This hypothesis contended that at middle age all individuals undergo a personal crisis of varying depths and feel a resurgence of ideals and goals of youth that were suppressed when the realities of adulthood forced them into the world of work. Thomas based this hypothesis on research by Levinson's 1977 research on unrest experienced by middle-agers. Thomas' third explanation maintained that society has made career change possible due to changing demographics and changing technologies. Thomas cited 1972 research by Sheppard and Herrick concerning the necessity of upgrading career skills as a basis for this third hypothesis. Thomas' study was based on a sample of
73 middle-aged men from high-status positions who had changed careers. Of the three explanations offered, the developmental approach received the most support. The data showed that (a) finding more meaningful work and (b) finding a better fit between values and work were the reasons most frequently cited by these career changers.

Kanchier and Unruh (1987) conducted a study of 166 managers who had voluntarily left employment with a large Canadian organization. All the subjects were of managerial level who had been employed at the company for a minimum of 3 years and had left their positions within the 4 years before the study. A modification of Roe's occupational classification system allowed for changers who started their own businesses, those who became full-time homemakers, and those who returned to college. The subjects completed a career development questionnaire which consisted of 4 individual questionnaires on the topics of work values, self perception, self description, and job description. Supplementary data were collected by means of semistructured interviews of 65 of the subjects. Findings indicated that 57.8% remained in the same occupational field, approximately 21% made one-step moves, and the remaining 21% made two or more step moves in the Roe system. It was concluded that although all subjects had experienced a career change, most chose fields similar to their previous occupations that allowed freedom for
cultivation of personal and occupational goals. The major reasons given for career changes by subjects in all of Kanchier and Unruh's groups were similar and were generally intrinsic in nature. They included a "lack of sufficient autonomy, authority, challenge, achievement, and use of skills, and lack of congruence between personal and corporate values" (p. 312). Some changers indicated their move was prompted by a variety of "interrelated factors including job dissatisfaction, shift in value priorities, marital breakdown, and having an acceptable occupational alternative" (p. 312). The results of these findings presented implications for career developmentalists. The authors concur that the following two implications are of particular importance: Workers should be encouraged to consider career change as an alternative to being in an unfulfilling working position; and it should be recognized that individuals in different occupations vary in terms of goals, values, and life styles.

Thomas (1977) investigated the relationship between career change and life-style change among professional workers and the issue of voluntary versus involuntary change. Thomas used a qualitative case study approach to gather data. Both Robbins (1978) and Thomas (1977) determined that not all career changers who perceive they have made a voluntary career change have actually done so.
When questioned, one respondent said the main reason he quit his job was because of a "basic values conflict" (Thomas, p. 321), when in reality higher management had found his work to be unsatisfactory and was in the process of transferring him to a different department.

According to Kremple and Colla (1975), "almost half the executives who change positions have failed to make a thorough enough investigation of the [new] job, the new company, their probable growth [in the company] or the impact of the change on their families" (p. 29). One effective way of determining the amount of significance these considerations play on career change pursuits, the authors suggested, was to develop a means of systematic evaluation of the major areas influencing job-change decisions. The authors recommended that charts relating to individual needs and aspirations be developed prior to beginning the career-change process.

Section Summary

Research into career changes of professional workers was found to be minimal. Of the limited studies available it was clear that this particular subgroup has been neglected or simply not singled out as a distinct subset of the population of career changers. The research did,
however, show that career change of professionals has become an acceptable means of career progression.

**Career Change at Middle Age**

Over the years researchers have offered varied definitions of middle age. Van Hoose (1985) deemed the years between 40 and 60 as the midlife years. Sheehy (1976) suggested that middle age occurs between the years of 35 and 45. The time of middle age varies according to the working definitions of the researcher.

With the coming of the midlife years a process of re-evaluation begins to occur in the work place as well as on the home front. During this time decisions with monumental consequences are often made. A fear of failure, according to Falvey (1987), along with a fear of the unknown, is one of the major forces that often keeps people from taking action on decisions. Changes in careers or changes in marital status are often experienced. According to Van Hoose (1985) and Weathers (1976), these changes at any period of life are challenging enough but are especially so during one's middle years. "A new attitude on the part of society toward those in middle age" (Hiestand, 1971, p. 9) has evolved in recent years. Society favors more freedom of choice of occupational as well as educational endeavors.
According to Neugarten and Neugarten (1986), societies as we know them today have defined at least "three periods of life: childhood, adulthood, and old age" (p. 34). The period of middle age, according to the authors, evolved out of a changing pattern of familiar family events. The distinction between childhood and adulthood is evident. Individuals are children until they grow into responsible adults. Likewise, the distinction between adulthood and old age is just as clear. When adults move through their lives to the time of retirement from their work environments, they move toward a time of old age. The interval of middle age has surfaced between the periods of adulthood and old age and has become a distinct era of life on its own. No longer is it considered a mere point of transition, but a unique stage of development. Chronological age has thus become less and less a determining factor in describing identifiable periods of life.

Neugarten (1968) maintained that there are certain life events that, if they occur on time, are subsequently considered to be socially acceptable. These life events include leaving home, getting a job, getting married, having children, and retiring. The timing of these socially accepted norms is often a determining factor in subsequent career decisions. George (1982) and Sheehy
(1976) concur that the occurrence of these life events has varying degrees of impact upon personal well-being.

**Midlife Changes**

Neugarten and others (cited in Robbins, 1978) have determined that at middle age an individual's perception of time experiences a significant change. Individual introspection of prior life events consumes large amounts of time and concentration. According to Robbins, Neugarten and her associates additionally discovered that at this time of life individuals who have been intent pushing to get to the top frequently do an about-face and turn instead to family and community activities.

Numerous changes, with varying degrees of impact, occur at midlife. Included in these changes are physical changes, emotional changes, and personality changes. Researchers Davitz and Davitz (1976) noted that generally beginning around age 30 individuals begin to slow down in their physical activities. This realization could account for the desire of individuals to assert themselves in increased physical activity to prove they are not "over the hill." "The inevitability of mortality becomes quite clear during the first few years of the midlife period" (Van Hoose, 1985, p. 91). Individual rates of decline of health vary depending upon genetic background, environment, occupation, and lifestyle.
In 1933, Carl Jung identified characteristics of midlife that only in recent years have been confirmed through empirical research (Robbins, 1978, p. 22). Jung believed that changes in the human psyche occurred at about age 40 and were distinguishing traits of that age only. He additionally maintained that at middle age physical attributes and values become blended. Women become tough-minded, a traditionally male attribute, and men become tender-hearted, a traditionally female attribute. Jung concluded that change was necessary and should be looked forward to with anticipation rather than a fear of the unknown.

Options at Midlife

In 1971, Hiestand observed that middle-aged people have options that were not formerly available to their age group and that were not available to them as individuals when they were young. He further observed that there has been change in the ages of adults at which important family events typically occur. The years frequently associated with child bearing have also changed, along with the general expectations of those in the midlife stage of development.

Another factor increasing the options of this group is the increasing number of individuals receiving retirement pensions while they are still in the early stages of
middle age. With increased life spans and early retirement, our society sees a great number of people who have retired from work and are still capable of being productive employees.

As people reach middle age, according to Isaacson (1981), they are faced with two alternatives relative to their occupational future.

The first alternative, based on general satisfaction with prior progress and a belief that previously accepted goals are still attainable, is a rededication to continuity of those established plans. The second alternative, often influenced by dissatisfaction with present status or a feeling that the current path and rate of progress will not lead to the desired goals, is a decision to consider other options. (p. 325)

Section Summary

In recent years a change of careers at middle age has become an almost expected life event for many individuals. For some, career change has become as expected as have the young adult life events of leaving home, getting a job, getting married, and having children. Many researchers have studied the phenomenon of career change from varied vantage points and have found little
congruence in the way the changing of careers affects individuals.

Some people move through the transition with little or no adjustment in their current life style, while others encounter obstacles in making career moves. Some change careers with little planning, while others spend considerable time and effort to ensure that the career change is made at the most opportune time.

The reasons individuals cite for changing careers are as varied as the effects of the career change itself. Career moves, whether voluntary or involuntary, occur for many different reasons. These reasons range from more independence on the job to more financial stability.

Career change, as evidenced by the literature reviewed, is an interesting aspect of our culture today. Opportunities for these changes have been brought about by the nature of the current organizational structure of our society. Many new occupations have been created. Along with these new occupations have come opportunities--opportunities for advancement and for change.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research procedures and methods used in this study are presented here. The central problem of the study was to identify common characteristics, experiences, and coping strategies of professional workers who have undergone a radical career change. The procedures are detailed in sections as follows: research design, participant selection process, instrumentation, interview procedures, accuracy of transcripts, and analysis of data.

Research Design

A qualitative case study research design was chosen as an appropriate means of obtaining data about the phenomenon of career change. "Qualitative methodologies," according to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), "refer to research procedures which produce descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior" (p. 4). Guba and Lincoln (1981) state that "The content of a case study is determined chiefly by its purpose, which typically is to reveal the properties of the class to which the instance being studied belongs" (p. 371).

Miles and Huberman (1984) have described qualitative data analysis as consisting of "three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion..."
drawing/verification" (p. 21). Miles and Huberman further offer the following simplified definitions of the three components:

Data reduction--the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data.

Data display--an organized assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action taking.

Conclusion drawing/verification--the process of finding meaning in a set of data and verifying it.

(p. 21)

Helmstadter (1970) noted three distinct features of the case study approach to qualitative research:

1. The case study approach can be used as a means of contributing to knowledge.

2. The case study approach leads to empirically developed hypotheses.

3. Substantial freedom is allowed the researcher in the choice of specific data to collect, the means of collection, and the means of analysis.

(pp. 50-51)

According to Patton (1980) data collection by participant observation combines simultaneous analysis, interviewing, and introspection of the phenomenon under
study. The purpose of such research is to "develop an insider's view" of a particular experience (p. 127).

Data for this study were collected through means of participant observation. Accordingly, Merriam's (1988) suggestion that subjects be selected by purposive sampling "dependent upon what they can contribute to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 76). Subjects were selected that were unrelated to the researcher's career or status in the community. Further the interview was designed to last 45 minutes thus minimizing the amount of time expended by the subjects. The researcher used a contact summary sheet to record observations immediately after the completion of each interview. Material recorded consisted of the researcher's interpretation of outside influences on the interview process.

**Participant Selection Process**

Twenty New River Valley area residents who share the common experience of having experienced a voluntary radical career change during the middle years were selected as subjects in the study. Subjects were selected on the basis of their willingness to participate in the study, provided they met the delimitations of initial job classification, nature of the career change, and classification of the current occupation. The subjects came to
the attention of this researcher through referrals of a local community college's admissions office, through personal contact with various employers in the area, through responses to an advertisement placed in a local newspaper, and through word of mouth. All subjects selected for inclusion had careers that were considered professional, technical, or managerial in nature at the time of the career change. Both males and females were included in the study.

**Instrumentation**

An interview guide was used to collect data for this study. Questions on the guide were organized into 6 categories: personal background, schooling, career history, before the career change, the career change itself, and after the career change. An outline of the classification scheme used in developing the interview guide is found in Appendix A. The interview guide was developed by the researcher after extensive review of the literature and after telephone contact with the subjects. A copy of the interview guide used in collecting data for this study is found in Appendix B.

According to Miller (1970, pp. 86-87), advantages as well as disadvantages exist when research using personal interviews is undertaken. Advantages include the following: Information secured is likely to be more
correct than that secured by other techniques, since the interviewer is there to clear up any ambiguities; the interviewer can collect supplementary information about the informant's personal characteristics and environment, which could be valuable in interpreting the results; and questions about which the informant is likely to be sensitive can be carefully sandwiched in by the interviewer. Disadvantages, according to Miller, include transportation costs, time involved in conducting and transcribing the interviews, and proper training of the interviewer.

Merriam (1988) suggests that defining the amount of structure to responses from the subject is a determinant of the type of interview best suited for qualitative studies. Interviews range from highly structured questionnaire-driven interviews to unstructured interviews. In the first instance, questions are asked according to a specific order, in the latter instance, question guidelines are adhered to but the interviewer adapts according to the responses of the subject. The unstructured interview, Merriam further stated, is often used with participant observation since it allows the researcher to formulate questions as the interview progresses. Semistructured interview questions were used in conducting this study.
Interview Procedures

A pilot study was conducted to enhance the investigator's ability to conduct the interview portion of the study. Two individuals who had undergone career changes at midlife, but were not selected as subjects in the study, were asked to aid the researcher in field testing the interview instrument. After the first interview, the first participant was asked to critique the interview process and the organization and clarity of the interview session. On the basis of this input, minor revisions to the interview instrument were made. The instrument was then field tested a second time with the second participant. After the second critique and later modifications, the interview instrument and tape recordings were reviewed by the investigator and the major advisor of the research to evaluate the quality of the interview process and the information obtained.

After further modification, the interview instrument was prepared in final form. Arrangements were then made to interview the subjects participating in the study.

Identical procedures were used in conducting each interview session. The format for the interview sessions was as follows: (a) explanation of purpose, (b) definition of roles of interviewer and subject, and (c) explanation of interview validation. The investigator conducted the interviews in locations chosen by the individual
subjects. Arrangements were made with each subject to be sure that an agreeable and adequate time frame was allowed for the interview. Interview information was obtained on the basis of anonymity of both career changers' names and names of specific organizations and individuals. A cassette tape recorder was used to record the sessions.

At the conclusion of each interview session, the cassette tape was given a code name to assure the subject of anonymity. The code name was referred to in any further mention of the interview. The code name was subsequently recorded on a contact summary sheet, which was filed with the transcribed notes of the interview (see Appendix C). The contact summary sheet, according to Miles and Huberman (1984), is "a single sheet containing a series of focusing or summarizing statements about a particular field contact" (p. 50). The use of a contact summary sheet allowed the researcher in this study to record pertinent data and reflections concerning surroundings, interruptions, span of time, and other such information while they were still fresh in mind rather than to depend on memory.

Accuracy of Transcripts

After all interview tapes had been transcribed, the accuracy of the transcripts was verified by a panel of 3 individuals not otherwise connected with the study (see
Appendix D). Each observer randomly selected tapes for two of the interview sessions and the corresponding transcribed material. The observer listened to the tapes, reviewed the transcripts, and attested to the accuracy of the written transcripts.

Analysis of Data

According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975):

Data analysis refers to a process which entails an effort to formally identify themes and to construct hypotheses (ideas) as they are suggested by data and an attempt to demonstrate support for those themes and hypotheses. (p. 79)

Merriam (1988) agrees with Bogdan and Taylor's observation that data analysis is an ongoing process and one that should begin early in the data collection phase. This process, Merriam further states produces data that are both "parsimonious and illuminating" (p. 124). Consequently, analysis of the data for this study was begun concurrently with their collection.

Data analysis, according to Merriam (1988), is the "process of making sense out of one's data" (p. 127). As each interview session was transcribed, a duplicate copy of the transcript was made. The original transcript remained intact throughout the data analysis process, allowing the researcher to refer to the original text.
Data were then organized topically through use of typologies, or classification schemes. These typologies served as preliminary outlines for the initial sorting of the data.

A search for regularities in each typology began next. Patterns or "units of information" (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 344) were gleaned from each typology, and categories were developed. These units of information consisted of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs relevant to each category. Each unit of information was then manually cut from the duplicate copy and placed in individual folders according to the classification scheme. Each category was then further examined and classified. The process continued until each typology consisted of numerous segments.

After the manual categorizing process was completed for all subjects, the transcribed material was once again examined utilizing FYI 3000 PLUS, a computer software package designed specifically for information retrieval. This software proved to be minimally useful for the purposes of this research; therefore the researcher relied on the manual process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research methods used in conducting the data-gathering portion of this study.
Twenty subjects were interviewed in sessions lasting approximately 1 hour. These sessions were recorded with audio tapes. Subsequent tapes of the sessions were transcribed and code names assigned to the subjects. Contents of the tapes were examined and typologies codified enabling the researcher to subject the data to thorough examination.

Categories from an initial examination of the data were further divided as different aspects of each topic became evident. Each category was then placed in an individual folder. Categories were examined, divided, and placed in subsequent folders until the researcher was satisfied that no further categorizing of the material was possible. Contents of each folder were then examined for similarities or differences. Findings of these examinations are reported in Chapter 4.

Accuracy of transcripts was attested to by 3 individuals who compared the printed pages with the audio tape of the interview session. Each individual who verified the research material submitted a letter indicating accuracy of the transcripts.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Twenty middle-aged individuals who had made radical career changes were interviewed between January and March of 1989. Subjects for the study were identified through various means. A notice placed in a local newspaper produced 18 possible subjects, 7 of whom were selected to participate in the study. Other subjects came to the attention of the researcher through referrals, social contacts, and inquiries.

Subjects were telephoned to schedule the interview sessions. They were telephoned again the day prior to the session to remind them of the date and time. All subjects were courteous and expressed interest in the research project. Most were at the designated place at the scheduled time for the sessions.

Each subject was allowed to select the location of the interview. Some chose to be interviewed in their home; the majority chose their place of employment as the interview site. The physical setting and situation varied considerably. For example, one subject was interviewed at home while the subject's spouse sat in an adjoining room. Another who was interviewed at work during the noon hour chain-smoked throughout the session. Still another was interviewed at a secondary school in the teachers' lounge. Whether the setting and situation skewed the individual
response is not known; however, these were considered noteworthy and were recorded on the individual contact summary sheet.

The interview sessions were designed to last approximately 45 minutes. However some lasted 35 minutes and others lasted well over an hour. The typical session lasted about one hour.

Transcripts of the individual sessions produced varied amounts of printed pages. Between 12 and 28 pages per session were transcribed. The average of 20 pages per subject produced approximately 400 double spaced pages of typewritten data. Responses to individual questions produced output ranging from 2 lines from one subject to approximately 3 pages from another. The amount of time used to transcribe the audio tapes averaged 2 1/2 hours per tape.

**Presentation of Findings**

Findings are presented according to the purposes of the study:

1. To identify common characteristics of career changers;

2. To identify positive and negative experiences faced by these career changers; and,

3. To identify coping strategies used by the career changers and by the families of the career changers.
Common Characteristics

Common characteristics of career changers were revealed in findings of interview categories on personal background, schooling, and career history.

Personal Background of Subjects. Subjects in this study worked in a variety of careers before making their radical career move. Changes were made to an even wider variety of careers. See Table 1 for a listing of specific careers. Positions left behind included a wide scope of management positions, teaching positions, and positions in individual practice.

No particular patterns were found in the number of siblings nor in the birth patterns of these career changers. Three of the subjects had no children. The others had between 1 and 5 children with the average of the group being 2. Ages of the children at the time of the career change ranged from 5 to 28. The majority of the children were at ages of self-sufficiency when the change was experienced.

Of the 20 subjects, 19 experienced no changes in marital status. The one individual who indicated a change in marital status during the career change commented that her marriage was "on the rocks" for some time prior to the decision to change careers and felt that the career decision had no bearing on her marital status change.
Table 1

Careers of Subjects Before (Career 1) and After (Career 2) the Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Career 1</th>
<th>Career 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cecil</td>
<td>Dir. Non-Profit Org.</td>
<td>H.S. Math Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Mfg. Manager</td>
<td>Invest. Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Mental Hygiene Therapist</td>
<td>Computer Analyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>Credit Union Manager</td>
<td>Caterer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Military Officer</td>
<td>Bus Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Personnel Director</td>
<td>Cobbler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>Stockbroker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Owner Commercial Builders</td>
<td>Stockbroker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Dentist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Bank Loan Officer</td>
<td>Univ. Engl. Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>Office Manager</td>
<td>Owner, Dress Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Funeral Home President</td>
<td>Golf Club Mgr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
<td>Bank Personnel Mgr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Academic Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Cafe Owner/Chef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>College English Teacher</td>
<td>Programmer/Analyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td>College Math Teacher</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Social Studies Teacher</td>
<td>Insurance Agent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seventeen were married at the time of the change. One had divorced approximately 7 years before the career change and, another had divorced about 2 years before the change; neither had remarried by the time of the interview.

Thirteen subjects had a father who had worked in a professional occupation. This was not the case with the mother of the career changers. Only five of the mothers had worked in a professional occupation. The remaining 15 mothers had been homemakers. None of the parents of these career changers were still working full time. They were either semi-retired, retired, or deceased, with the majority being deceased.

Only two of the subjects indicated that immediate family members had experienced radical career moves. Family members of the remaining subjects had generally worked in the same occupations for all their working lives; they had occasionally changed employers or locations but typically remained in the same general line of work.

The educational level of the subjects' parents corresponded to the occupations of the parents. Thirteen of the fathers had received college degrees, certificates, or some training at a university or college-affiliated institute. Seven of the subjects' mothers had received some higher education; two had nursing degrees but did not work after having children.
At age 20, these subjects had goals typical of other 20-year-olds. Their goals were directly related to their fields of study at the particular time. Those in college in the field of education wanted to become teachers, those studying engineering wanted to be engineers, and likewise with other areas of interest. Two individuals indicated they had no occupational goals except "to get through college with the least amount of effort." Other subjects, who were working full time at age 20, said that at that time they wanted to continue doing what they were doing until something better came along.

Schooling of Subjects. Nineteen of the subjects possessed a college degree. The one subject who did not have a college degree was in the field of banking and had taken American Institute of Banking (AIB) courses to meet the demands of his occupation. Three individuals held associate's degrees from a community college, the remaining 16 had bachelor's degrees or higher levels of education (see Table 2). Of the 20 subjects, only 2 indicated a change of majors while in college. The others had career plans mapped out prior to college entrance and continued on that path to completion of a terminal degree. All subjects indicated that frequent and ongoing training in Career 1 was a routine matter.
Table 2

Degrees and Certificates of Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Associate</th>
<th>Bachelors</th>
<th>Masters</th>
<th>Doctor</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cecil</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>xx</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xx</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Two x's mean subject holds two degrees at the same level.
Eleven subjects indicated that some amount of retraining was necessary for employment in their current field (see Table 3). Many of these subjects additionally indicated that a significant amount of work skills used in Career 2 were developed in Career 1. The remaining nine subjects who did not require retraining relied extensively on such a transference of skills. Retraining ranged from the experiences of Lester who gave up his career as an engineer and returned to college for an additional 4 years to become a dentist, to the retraining of Jerry who left a position as head of a personnel department to become an entrepreneur, and eventually a cobbler, and merely took a 3-week intensive course in the art of cobblerly.

Career History, Former Career. Most of the subjects had been in Career 1 for a substantial period of time. The number of years in Career 1 ranged from Jake with 29 years in the military, to Mary who was a school librarian for about 6 years. The average number of years in Career 1 for the 20 subjects was 13 years (see Table 4).

Career 1 was chosen by these professionals for as varied reasons as one would expect when reviewing the job categories themselves. Six of the career changers indicated a desire to help "others" as a key factor in choosing Career 1. The "others" consisted of students in
### Table 3

**Retraining Required for Career Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Required</th>
<th>Not required</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cecil</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>in-house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>A.A.S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>3-week course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>in-house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>in-house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>D.D.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>M.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>M.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>M.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>in-house</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4

**Number of Years Spent in Each Career**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Career 1</th>
<th>Age at Time of Change</th>
<th>Career 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cecil</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
some instances, coworkers in other instances, and subordinates in still other instances. One female, a mother of 5, indicated that choice of a profession was precipitated by the fact that she needed to keep the same working schedule as her children; therefore she felt that her occupational choices were limited to the teaching profession. Several participants indicated the choice of an initial career was an outgrowth of childhood interests.

In Career 1, these professionals indicated the aspect they enjoyed the most was the job satisfaction and being able to see the results of their efforts. The aspect cited most frequently as being enjoyed the least was the lack of support from supervisors in the organization. That lack of support was voiced in some instances as "inadequate leadership" and in other instances as "dealing with higher-ups."

**Career History, Current Career.** Reasons for choosing the current career were, again, as varied as the careers chosen. Some chose Career 2 because the position represented a special interest of the subject. For example, Joe, the owner of a commercial building business, became a stockbroker because of an avid interest in personal investments. Maggie, an office manager in a manufacturing industry, became the owner of a dress shop because of a keen interest in ladies' fashions. Others chose Career 2 merely because of the availability and location.
The amount of time spent in Career 2 ranged from Jake who had been a bus driver for only 1 1/2 months, to Joe who had been a stockbroker for approximately 10 years prior to the interview. The average time spent in Career 2 by these subjects has been less than 3 years (see Table 4).

Contact with people ranked high in the list of things enjoyed the most, while things enjoyed the least were more difficult to pinpoint. Those that were in new occupations for only a short period of time indicated they had not found anything they disliked yet, while those who had worked longer periods of time, especially those who had gone into business for themselves, suggested that attending to menial jobs connected with their businesses was their least favorite part of the job. They described bookkeeping chores, and periods of peak activity within their businesses as the least enjoyable.

All subjects indicated that although the actuality of Career 2 may not be exactly as was imagined prior to the change, they are content with their choice and none expressed a desire to return to their former career.

Summary of Common Characteristics. A typical middle-aged professional who becomes a radical career changer is one whose father also worked in a professional career. The individual is married, has two children, and comes
from a family in which both the father and the siblings have worked in the same occupational field for most of their working life. At age 20 these individuals had goals typical of their cohorts.

This person was not indecisive about a college major but rather stayed within one specific field of study until the completion of a terminal degree. The individual has a bachelor's degree and is frequently involved in some educational pursuit. It was not concluded whether retraining was required for the radical career change.

A middle-aged professional who makes a radical career move is typically one who has been in the same career for approximately 13 years. This individual has chosen a career according to individual needs at the time of employment. A sense of personal satisfaction was the predominant response when asked what they enjoyed most in Career 1, and lack of support from "higher-ups" was the most frequent response expressing what was enjoyed the least in Career 1.

Contact with people is an important component of a successful working environment for these subjects. In particular, those who worked in positions in Career 1 where very little contact with people was available sought contact with people when searching for Career 2. These subjects made radical career moves an average of 3 years prior to the interview.
Positive and Negative Experiences

Positive and negative experiences of these professionals are revealed in categories of responses regarding the time before the career change.

Before the Career Change, Discussions. All married subjects with the exception of one indicated that their spouse was consulted prior to a decision to leave employment in Career 1. The one subject who did not seek such advice, indicated that it was a mistake to not include the spouse in such a major decision. The subject further indicated that if the change was to be made again, then certainly spousal advice would be sought.

Children of the career changers were occasionally included in discussions pertaining to the change providing they were old enough to understand the nature of the discussion. Younger children were merely told of the change after its occurrence.

Close friends were often consulted concerning the change. Two subjects, Jerry and William, indicated that although they consulted close friends regarding the decision to make a career change, this is not advisable. Jerry, when asked if he discussed the career change with anyone, replied "I discussed it with my wife first and then some close friends, some of which proved to be a mistake because word got out at work that I was leaving
before I wanted it to." William had a similar experience in discussing the anticipated change with a friend. The friend, apparently impressed with William's decision to change careers, applied for the position that William was interested in, much to William's distress. Other changers indicated that in discussing anticipated career moves with friends, they learned that many coworkers were dissatisfied with their careers and felt trapped by commitments, and were thus unable to make career moves themselves.

Some career changers who returned to college in preparation of second careers indicated academic counselors and ministers were consulted. Parents and siblings were rarely consulted regarding the career change.

**Before the Career Change, Help Sought.** Five subjects indicated they sought help from an employment agency, counseling agency, or similar assistance service during the time of the career change. Two of the 5 contacted employment agencies and 3 others merely discussed options with college advisors. The other 15 subjects indicated they sought no help but chose instead to make appropriate discreet investigations and inquiries. Many indicated they used a form of networking or acquaintance contact to assess the availability of employment opportunities.
Before the Career Change, Major Event. Six subjects indicated that there was no major event occurring in their lives just prior to or during the time of career change.

Four others who initially responded "no" later revealed traumatic events they considered to have not been major components in their decision making. One of the subjects had, upon the death of a parent, inherited a home and other holdings, and indicated this occurrence had no bearing on the decision to change careers. Later in the interview the subject mentioned that the parent's death had paved the way for a move back home and the eventual successful establishing of the business. The subject further indicated the move would have been made regardless and the finances would have been found somewhere; the inheritance merely made the move easier. Another subject requested a year's extension of work time in a particular location and the request was denied. Still another subject in a high-level corporate position had experienced the work termination of an immediate supervisor. Another subject had experienced a merger within the organization which had precipitated a minor change of working environments. Since the staff had not yet become adjusted to the new office location, the opportunity to resign presented itself.

Only 2 subjects responded "yes" when asked if a major event had influenced their career change. One subject had
experienced the traumatic death of a child and had come to the realization that life is too short to continue in a career that gives an individual very little pleasure when there are other things in the work world you would like to explore. The other subject who responded "yes" had experienced an altercation with a client that was emotionally damaging to an ongoing occupational future.

Nine of the respondents indicated that ongoing circumstances, rather than a single major traumatic event, contributed to the career change decision. Of these subjects, three indicated that an ongoing lack of cohesiveness in the workplace was paramount in the decision to leave. Another 2 indicated that recurring difficulties with family members were significant in the career change decision. Still another indicated that favoritism, specifically to employee workloads, was displayed toward certain newer members in the workplace which created a sense of antagonism. Another subject indicated that a continual fear for the future stability of the current organization was a contributing factor in the career change decision.

Career Change, Time Elapsed. Changes in careers were often considered by this group of subjects several years before any action to institute a move was taken. One individual indicated that 13 years before a change was
made, it was considered. At that time the subject had young children and felt that the required return to college would not be satisfactory to the family's lifestyle and ultimately dismissed the notion of a change. Other subjects indicated as many as 10 years had passed since the idea of a career change had surfaced. Only 2 individuals indicated that a year or less than a year had passed from the time the thought of changing surfaced until action was taken. Joe, the owner of a commercial building business, considered the change for about a year before taking action; and Hank, who moved from banking to catering, considered his change less than 2 months. The amount of time from the first thoughts of leaving Career 1 to beginning Career 2 was an average of 5 years.

These subjects indicated that later on, when serious consideration was given career change, much shorter periods of time were engaged. Times in this category ranged from about 2 months to about 5 years. The longer spans were attributed to those changers who returned to college. An average time of serious consideration before switching from Career 1 to Career 2 was approximately one year. Subjects indicated that the age at which serious consideration was given to changing was around age 39.

Subjects indicated the time they chose to change careers was an appropriate time to make such a move. Jerry, the personnel director turned cobbler, suggested
that around 40 is a good time to change fields because at that age one is still young enough to seek out other avenues if initial instincts for change fail. A person very much older than 40, according to Jerry, would have a more difficult time being flexible in the choice of a career. Cecil likewise indicated that "people often feel that much after the mid-forties opportunities for relocation become restricted."

Patricia, the English teacher who became a computer programmer/analyst, made the following summation on changing careers at midlife, "I'd say there is one problem that most of us older people face when we change a job and that is we suddenly find ourselves beginning again at the bottom level and all of our coworkers are 20 years younger than we are. People our age are upper management and sometimes this makes us, as well as the people around us, uncomfortable."

**Career Change, Help Programs.** Only 2 of the subjects indicated help programs sponsored by some public service agency would have been used, if available, during the time of the career transition. The overwhelming majority said they would not have taken advantage of any such programs. Further, while reflecting on the change, another 6 people indicated if the decision to make the change was presented again and something of this nature
was available, they would have taken advantage of it. One subject, a former middle school teacher, said simply, "I was ready to change and I knew it; nothing could have convinced me otherwise." Another subject said, "Even though we might want some help, we think we are intelligent enough to deal with the situation and to work it out on our own."

**Career Change, Barriers.** All subjects indicated there were no financial restrictions placed on them or their families as a result of the career change. Two did, however, reveal they put their families on a budget for the first time during the career change to avoid the implementation of extreme measures should a new career not materialize in a timely manner.

For those subjects who returned to college, as well as those who opened their own business, the matter of finances became a primary factor in their career changes (see Table 5). The subjects who returned to college as full-time students acknowledged that financial support, from either a spouse or a savings account, contributed to their success in making the career change. Those changers who opened their own businesses relied primarily on savings accounts and bank loans to help establish their careers. Subjects noted that although barriers did initially exist, they were overcome with minimal effort.
Table 5

**Barriers Identified by Subjects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Geographic</th>
<th>Financial</th>
<th>Educational</th>
<th>Other*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester</td>
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<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
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<td>Martha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
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<td>Patricia</td>
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<td>Pauline</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Entries in this column include special barriers; i.e., not wanting to leave the area.*
Three subjects indicated a desire to remain in the same location as a prerequisite in choosing Career 2. One subject's spouse did not want to move, another's child was in the last year of high school and did not want to move, and another subject did not want to move away from aged parents.

One unique barrier voiced by the military person was the difficulty in translating existing military skills into civilian skills and subsequently becoming a worthwhile member of a civilian society.

**Career Change, Effect.** Two of the subjects reported the career change was "psychologically uplifting" for their outlook on life. Another two indicated that in retrospect the change must have been difficult, but at the actual time they were so involved in the change itself they did not notice the effect. Seven subjects indicated that not only were they now much more relaxed but family unity had also improved. One subject reflected on the experience by saying, "Just the mental aspect of going from the security of being set in life, of having it made, into the not knowing what you are going to do, can be very unsettling." The remaining subjects indicated that the career change had no effect on them or their families.
Summary of Positive and Negative Experiences. Professionals tend not to use existing agencies for help-oriented assistance. These professionals choose to use individual methods of locating available employment.

Individuals tend to discuss anticipated moves with their spouses. Friends are often sought out for advice regarding these moves. Children and ministers are occasionally consulted; however, parents and siblings are rarely consulted.

Only two of the subjects initially responded affirmatively and two negatively when questioned regarding a major event. Upon further questioning it was revealed that four additional subjects had indeed experienced previously unrecognized major events in their lives that had contributed to their career change. Therefore, a total of 6 individuals had knowingly or unknowingly experienced a major event that probably triggered a desire to change careers.

The remaining subjects indicated that a continuous series of minor events and the inability to cope with them, prompted the career change. Subjects in this study had pondered the idea of a career change about 5 years before actually becoming serious about the notion. When it became apparent that a change would definitely happen, they took approximately one year to make the move. These
individuals generally concur that about age 40 is an appropriate time to make such a move.

Professionals typically think and act on their own in both work and personal matters. Therefore, they tend not to take advantage of assistance programs.

The subjects in this study encountered few barriers as a result of the career change. Minor financial restrictions were handled through use of savings and bank loans.

For those subjects who concluded that the career change did have an effect on them and their families, the majority indicated that the effect was for the betterment of the family.

**Coping Strategies**

Coping strategies were identified through the findings of the study in categories of the strain of the career change and the time after the career change.

**Career Change, Strain.** Four subjects indicated they believed the career change did not put a strain on their marital relationship; 5 indicated that it did. The remaining subjects indicated they changed careers in order to take the strain off their marriage citing pressure at work as having created tension at home.
Families coped with minor tensions relative to career change by giving the changer space and time to work difficulties out on their own. One subject remarked, "We coped with the pressure by not dealing with it, we hoped it would go away, which was absolutely the wrong thing to do." Very few other strategies were mentioned since so few of the subjects concluded that a strain existed.

After the Career Change. All subjects with the exception of one indicated they were either better off or about the same psychologically after making the change of careers (see Table 6). The lone subject was the military person who had become a bus driver only until more suitable employment is found. This subject was frustrated that worthwhile employment options had not been forthcoming.

Thirteen subjects indicated they were either not better off or about the same financially after making their career change (see Table 6). One subject indicated it was too soon to tell since he had just established his business. The remaining 6 subjects indicated they were better off financially.

Current occupational goals of these career changers were expressed in terms of personal life goals rather than toward specific occupational goals. Desires to find
Table 6

Psychological and Financial Benefits of Career Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Psychologically Better Off</th>
<th>Financially Better Off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
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<td>Lester</td>
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<td>Pauline</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
self-satisfaction were voiced as "doing something that I really want to be doing," and as simply as just "to be happy."

When asked what kind of work they expect to be doing 10 years from now, 6 of the subjects indicated a desire to move up in their current positions within the next 10 years, and 4 others indicated they would, most likely, be in the same position. Another 4 said they would be retired. When presented with the question "If you knew then what you know now about your current career, would you have changed?" an overwhelming majority indicated they would have changed and most added they would have changed earlier in their life. Two subjects suggested that if they could have changed anything it would have been not to go into their initial career but rather explore several fields before making a work commitment.

Summary of Coping Strategies of Career Changers. The middle-aged professional workers did not change careers to become more financially secure. They changed for intrinsic reasons rather than for monetary reasons. Their occupational goals were more person-oriented rather than work-oriented. They expressed no dissatisfaction with their career choice and were confident they made the right decision to change.
The career change of these professionals did not put a strain on their marital relationship. Rather, the change was made to reduce strain of the work in Career 1.

After the Career Change, Advice to Future Career Changers

Because responses in this category were so varied, important points made by various subjects are simply listed verbatim below:

- Do research and know what you are getting into.
- Try to get the feel of the environment of where you think you want to be.
- Think about your decision realistically.
- Make your decision based upon facts rather than upon hopes and desires.
- If you are to the point of where you are thinking of changing, then there must be enough reason to change.
- You shouldn't change for the things as simple as money.
- Go ahead and do it, do it right away and don't sit and think about it for several months or years.
- Don't be afraid of changing; you always have your old career to fall back on.
- Don't be afraid of taking a risk.
- Start your serious planning at least a year in advance.
- If you are not happy, change jobs, don't wait.
- Make sure you know what you want, if you want it, you can do it.
- Set a realistic deadline for completing the transition.
- Investigate your options, then go for it.
Look toward the future realistically, not with a rosy-eyed view.

Life is too short to be doing something that you don't want to be doing.

Figure out why you want to change, then look for compatible jobs.

Chapter Summary

The findings of interviews conducted with middle-aged professional workers in the New River Valley who have made radical career changes have been presented in this chapter. Findings suggest that the typical career changer is one who is married, has 2 children, and has at least 1 parent who has worked in a professional occupation. This person likely has a bachelor's degree and is often involved in some form of further education.

This individual had been employed in the same career for approximately 13 years prior to the career change. The actual change was made about 3 years before the interview after consultation with the changer's spouse and with little or no guidance from an organized agency.

Career changes were made by these subjects because of ongoing difficulties rather than a single major event. Relatively few barriers to career change were encountered during the transition, and most of these workers indicated the change alleviated strain that they had experienced in the previous career.
A summary of the study is presented in this chapter, including interpretations of the findings and recommendations.

Summary of the Study

The specific problem of this study was to determine common characteristics of midlife professionals who have made radical career changes, to identify positive and negative experiences faced by these individuals, and to identify coping strategies used by the career changer and families of the career changers.

Few research studies on professionals who have made radical career changes during middle-age appeared in the literature. A large amount of research was located that dealt with the general topic of career change. Research on career changes at midlife proved just as fruitful. However, when the researcher turned to studies on career changes of middle-aged professionals, few studies were found. When the topic was further narrowed to radical career changes of middle-aged professionals, the research was even more sparse.

The lack of previous research made the investigator aware of the importance of conducting such a study in view
of the latest societal trend of changing careers a number of times during one's working life (Robbins, 1978; Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Van Hoose, 1985; Sprankle, 1985).

Accordingly, an investigation into the radical career changes of middle-aged professionals was conducted. Data were gathered by the qualitative research approach of participant observation. Twenty purposively selected career changers were interviewed using semistructured interview questions. All subjects voluntarily chose to participate in the study; therefore, this sample should not be construed as being generalizable. Questions were categorized as follows: personal background, schooling, career history, before the career change, the career change itself, and after the career change.

Interview sessions were tape recorded. Three individuals not otherwise connected with the study were each asked to examine 2 randomly selected tapes and subsequent transcripts of the sessions and attest to the validity of the written transcripts. All transcripts were deemed to be accurate (see Appendix D).

Responses to the interview questions were assembled, codified, and examined for similarities. A profile of a middle-aged professional who has made a radical career change was thus developed (see Appendix E).
The population was chosen solely for this study and should not be assumed to be a random selection of career changers. The case study approach was selected "because one wishes to understand the particular in depth, not because one wants to know what is generally true of the many" (Merriam, 1988, p. 173).

Summary of the Findings

This summary examines the findings of the research categorically according to the purposes set forth in Chapter 1.

Common Characteristics

Demographic data indicated the age at the time of career change to be about 43, which is slightly below the median age range (35-55) at career change of all subjects. This finding supports the researcher's decision to define 35-55 as the years of midlife and as the span of years during which a change of careers will usually be encountered. A general feeling of contentment was expressed by the subjects regarding the age at which they changed careers. Those who experienced a change of careers between ages 45 and 55 suggested they had waited a little too long to make the move and, in retrospect, wished they had made the move earlier.
Although more males (14) than females (6) were included in this study, it cannot be concluded that males make radical career changes more often than females. Research subjects were chosen on the basis of occupation and accessibility rather than gender. Findings indicate that professional workers who make radical career moves have been involved in a number of educational endeavors during their working lives. This finding supports Belbin and Belbin's (1968) theory that professionals are aware that continuous training and retraining is necessary in order to keep abreast of current technologies and trends. These subjects not only received early extensive training to attain their professional status but continued to upgrade their knowledge by participating in such activities as conferences and workshops in their own and other fields of learning.

Acquiring additional skills to pursue a change of careers was necessary for only about half of the subjects. Since retraining was not a prerequisite to every career change decision, it appears that the transfer of existing skills was common. This finding is in congruence with Shaw's (1987) and Sprankle's (1985) observation that transference of skills is important when a change of careers is being considered.

The following working hypotheses emerged from an examination of the common characteristics:
1. A middle-aged professional who makes a radical career change is one who is often involved in (a) the updating of current occupational skills, and (b) the pursuit of extended skills and knowledge through conferences, workshops, and other such educational means.

2. The transfer of existing skills from one occupation to another is a common occurrence for middle-aged professionals who make radical career changes.

Positive and Negative Experiences

The aspects of Career 1 enjoyed the most by subjects were being able to see satisfactory results of their efforts. Specific things most enjoyed in Career 2 included contact with people. Enjoyed the least in Career 1 was a lack of support from superiors. There was little agreement among subjects as to the least enjoyable aspects of Career 2. However, attending to menial details of the occupation was frequently mentioned.

Career changers had been employed in occupations for approximately 13 years before making the radical change. The term of employment in Career 1 ranged from 6 to 29 years.

No major or traumatic event was evident in the career change decision of the majority of subjects. It was observed that although an initial response in some
instances had been negative, later queries determined that occurrences of major significance had in fact existed at the time of the change in only a small number of the subjects. This finding is in contrast to research by Mega (1980), and more recent research by Nicholson and West (1988). Mega's research found that all 5 subjects experienced a major event that prompted the career change. Nicholson and West's (1988) research likewise found that stressors such as major events were evident in 80% of his sample of 2,300 subjects when a repeated survey was administered approximately one year after an initial survey. Further, nearly half those in Nicholson's sample experienced a change of occupations in the year between the initial and repeated survey. These findings, as well as other studies with similar findings, had led this researcher to anticipate that a larger number of subjects would have experienced a traumatic event prior to the career change decision. However, instead of a single major event, subjects in this study were found to cite ongoing difficulties as precipitating the change.

People taken into confidence by the subject during the time of the decision to change careers were primarily spouses and close friends. Very few parents and siblings of the changers were consulted. This finding concurs with Weathers' (1976) study that suggested that spousal support and encouragement was a primary factor in the successful
transition between careers. Further, Weathers noted that parents and siblings were rarely consulted.

Robbins (1978) found that younger middle-agers took more time, made more plans, and investigated more options when contemplating a career change than older middle-agers. The older middle-agers, according to Robbins, made career choices much more quickly. No similar conclusion can be drawn from the subjects in this study. Subjects who returned to college, regardless of their age, naturally took longer to complete their career transition. Also those subjects whose responsibilities at the time would not allow a change, took longer to make their career move. It is the observation of this researcher that circumstances, rather than age, is a major determinant of the amount of time needed to make a career move.

Subjects in this study indicated they were better off psychologically after experiencing the change of careers. From this finding it is suggested that work satisfaction has a direct result on the mental outlook and subsequent psychological well-being of individuals. In the words of one changer, "I just simply don't mind going to work in the mornings now. Before I changed careers I hated to get up, now I am up early and excited about what the day will bring." This same sense of contentment and self-satisfaction was expressed by nearly all the changers in this study.
From a financial standpoint these subjects were generally neither better nor worse off as a result of the career change. It seems that money was not a primary reason for making the change; their motivation was intrinsic.

Working hypotheses gleaned from the positive and negative experiences of these subjects are:

1. Career changes of midlife professionals are triggered by ongoing difficulties in the work place rather than by a single major event.

2. Professional workers who change careers during middle-age are psychologically better off after completing the change.

3. Middle-aged professionals change careers for intrinsic rather than monetary reasons.

Coping Strategies

Subjects reported smooth transitions from Career 1 to Career 2; thus minor adjustments in routines rather than extensive coping strategies were employed. Regarding the strain of the career change as discussed previously, most of the changes were prompted by continual pressures such as inadequate organizational support and excessive work loads. For the majority of the changers, the career change itself was not looked upon as having put a strain on the marital relationship but rather it was looked upon
as a solution to a recurring problem. In one sense the change itself was a coping strategy from a previous career.

The following working hypothesis relates to coping strategies: Professional workers who make voluntary radical career changes during middle-age make smooth transitions therefore only minimal adjustment is necessary.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the investigator makes the following recommendations:

1. The study should be repeated with nonprofessionals who make radical career changes to determine differences and similarities of the 2 groups.

2. A follow-up of the subjects in this study should be done in 5 years to assess their long-term psychological and economic well being. Results of such a study would either reaffirm or refute the career changer's initial impression of the change.

3. A similar study should be done on professionals who make involuntary career changes to assess differences in the perception of coping strategies needed during the time of transition.

4. More research is needed to determine why these subjects would not have used a "help" agency if one had been available. Some means of organized support that is
acceptable to professionals who change careers should be developed.

5. The study should be replicated in other locales to determine if professional workers in rural areas perceive voluntary radical career changes differently than professional workers in other areas.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

CAREER CHANGE INTERVIEW CATEGORIES
1 Personal Background
   A. Family
   B. Education
   C. Occupational Goals

2 Schooling
   A. College
   B. Further Education

3 Career History
   A. Former Job
   B. Current Job

4 Before the Career Change
   A. Discussions
   B. Help Sought
   C. Major Event

5 Career Change
   A. Time Elapsed
   B. Barriers
   C. Effect

6 After the Career Change
   A. Benefits
   B. Occupational Goals
   C. Future Work
   D. Advice for Career Changers
APPENDIX B

CAREER CHANGE INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT
Personal Background

1. Tell me about your family.
   Probe: Your spouse, children, siblings, parents
2. Were you married at the time of your career change?
   Probe: Did you have children then, how old were they?
3. What is/was the occupation of your family members?
   Probe: Have any family members experienced any major career moves?
4. How much formal education did your parents receive?
5. Tell me about yourself when you were about 20 years old.
   Probe: What were you doing then, what were your occupational goals?

Schooling

1. What is your highest level of education?
   Probe: What was your college major, did you ever change majors?
   Probe: Any further education since college, workshops, retraining, etc.?

Career History

1. Tell me about your former job.
   Probe: How long were you in it and why did you choose it?
   Probe: What did you enjoy most, least?
2. Tell me about your current job.
   Probe: How long have you been in it and why did you choose it?
   Probe: What do you enjoy most, least?
   Probe: Is it what you had hoped for?

Before the Career Change
1. Tell me about yourself just before the career change.
   Probe: Did you discuss pending change with anyone
   Probe: Did you seek help from any agencies (employment, counseling, etc.)
   Probe: Do you recall anything major or traumatic that happened in your life about that time?

Career Change
1. Tell me about the actual career change.
   Probe: How much time elapsed from when you began considering a change until it was actually completed?
   Probe: How old were you, how do you feel about making such a change at that time of life?
   Probe: How many times have you changed careers?
   Probe: Did you utilize any kind of "help" program?
2. Did you encounter any barriers in making your career change?
   Probe: Anything financial, educational, or geographical; any financial restrictions?
3. How has the career change affected you?
   Probe: Did it put a strain on your marital relationship?
   Probe: How did you cope with the strain?

After the Career Change

1. Tell me about yourself since the career change.
   Probe: Are you better off psychologically, financially?
   Probe: Have your occupational goals for the future changed?
   Probe: What kind of work do you suppose you will be doing 10 years from now?
   Probe: If you knew everything then that you know now about what your career change would be like, would you have changed and changed when you did?

2. What advice can you offer future career changers?
APPENDIX C

CONTACT SUMMARY SHEET
Career 1 __________________  Career 2 __________________
Date ______________  Age ______________  Sex __________
Place of Interview ___________________  Time __
Code Name _________________________  Code Number __
Name _______________________________________________________________________

Additional Information:
APPENDIX D

PANEL FOR VERIFICATION OF ACCURACY OF TRANSCRIPTS
Mr. Eddie C. Crews  
Assistant Superintendent  
for Instruction  
Pulaski County Schools  
Pulaski, Virginia  24301

Mr. Fred A. Parson, Jr.  
2594 Creston Avenue, SW  
Roanoke, Virginia

Mrs. Bonnie M. Skelton  
Marketing Instructor  
Radford University  
Radford, Virginia  24141
June 9, 1989

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This will verify that I, the undersigned, have reviewed by listening to two interview tapes along with the transcript conducted by Mrs. Isom.

After having compared the transcripts with the interview tapes, I conclude that the transcript prepared by the original investigator is an accurate representation of the interview contents. Based upon this conclusion, I feel that the transcripts are accurate.

Sincerely,

Edward C. Crews
Assistant Superintendent for Administration

ECC/lf
May 15, 1989

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter will serve as verification that I, the undersigned, have reviewed two of the interview tapes and examined the transcripts per my instructions.

I conclude that the transcripts supplied by Mrs. Isom are accurate representations of the interviews that were conducted. Based on this conclusion, I feel that the transcripts meet the criteria of reliability.

Respectfully,

Fred A. Parson, Jr.

2594 Creston Avenue, SW
Roanoke, Virginia 24015
March 22, 1989

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to certify that I participated in the verification of the written transcripts which were prepared by the principal investigator. My participation included listening to two randomly selected tapes and reading their respective transcripts to verify transcription accuracy.

The comparison indicated that an accurate transcript of each tape was prepared by the researcher.

Sincerely,

Bonnie M. Skelton
Instructor of Marketing
APPENDIX E

PROFILE OF MIDDLE-AGED PROFESSIONAL WHO HAS MADE A RADICAL CAREER CHANGE
A typical middle-aged professional who makes a radical career change:

1. experiences no change in marital status;
2. has at least one parent who worked in a professional occupation;
3. has worked in an occupation for about 13 years prior to changing careers;
4. is often involved in educational pursuits;
5. has very few barriers to overcome in making the career change;
6. receives no assistance from organized agencies during the change;
7. experiences no major traumatic event before the change;
8. feels psychologically better after the change; and,
9. remains financially stable.
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