UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL LOSS AND HOW SELF-ESTEEM IS REBUILT BY

EXECUTIVES WHO HAVE SUFFERED INVOLUNTARY JOB LOSS

by

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ABSTRACT

This narrative research study was inspired by a desire to understand the emotional meaning of involuntary job loss, and how people can successfully rebuild their self-esteem. For this study, the participants are senior business executives, whose identity is embedded in their career. There have been volumes of research on job loss, including the stress impact, loss of self-esteem and coping strategies, to name a few. However, there has been a lack of research that provides an understanding of those personal factors, from inside their world that lifts people from the ruminations and spiral of loss to a renewal of positive self-esteem.

Narrative research methodology was used because of its ability to get to the heart of the research question – through the stories of the participants. It allowed them to give voice to their unique experience, and it provided data that was rich in content and meaning. The use of five individual narratives provided an in-depth multi-focal perspective and the subsequent group-based narrative analysis provided the power of group dynamics an opportunity to further elevate the data by allowing the participants, these strangers bound together by common experience, an opportunity to give individual voice to their stories, while finding deeper harmony together.

This research attempts to track their journey from loss to self-renewal. It seeks to identify the common experiences and emotional themes to provide meaningful insights to help any person facing the challenge of rebuilding self-worth and identity following the trauma of loss.

In essence, this research deduces that the successful process or stages of loss have a purpose – to provide that person with a vehicle for self-acceptance, allowing them to see and find their sense of self and the intrinsic value they possess. This self-knowledge is a prerequisite for positive growth and it provides the foundation from which their reconstructed and true self-esteem is built.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The terms "laid-off", "fired", "sacked", "canned" and "dismissed" all tell a tale of professional and personal rejection, of low self-worth and in many cases, shame. We understand the emotional trauma associated with job loss from the volumes of research and work on the topic (Gysbers, Heppner & Johnston, 1998; Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004; Jones, 1979; Kaufman, 1982) that describe involuntary job loss as an emotionally difficult experience. In the worst case, involuntary job loss has been compared to "a living death" and "bereavement" (Middlebrook & Clarke, 1991; Winegardner, Simonetti, & Nykodym, 1978).

As a life transition, Super (1990) discusses job loss – both planned and unplanned – as one of the most significant times in a person's life, which can cause both physical and emotional upheaval (as cited in Peterson & Gonzalez, 2000). There are many levels of impact: "Economic meaning as well as social and psychological meaning… the loss of steady income, daily social contacts, friendships, and support, and the loss of identity and self-worth" (Gysbers, et al., 1998, p.19). Essentially, "losing one's job is a devastating experience" (Peterson & Gonzalez, 2000, p. 339).

What compounds the trauma associated with job loss is the shame that so often accompanies it. Shame involves a negative self-assessment (Lurie, 2004); the Collins Dictionary (1991) defines shame as "a state of disgrace or ignominy or discredit… a cause for regret and disappointment", with negative effects on self-esteem. Rosenberg created one of the "gold standard" assessments of self-esteem (1965) as a global

construct, which he defined as "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself or herself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval towards oneself" (as cited in Waters & Moore, 2002, p.170). In addition, it is well documented that one of the most difficult psychological consequences of unemployment is a loss of self-esteem (Winefield, Tiggemann, & Winefield, 1992).

This thesis explores the emotional journey of involuntary job loss through the personal stories of senior executives. The research differs from most other studies, which have concentrated on stress effects, external coping mechanisms and job replacement interventions and programs. My approach also differs from earlier studies in that, i) the participant group were business executives who had formed a strong bond to their work, ii) I used the narrative approach which allowed for more heart-felt accounts of the participants' loss, and iii) the narrative analysis revealed themes and highlighted essential elements on the path to rebuilding self-esteem.

In my research, I looked for common themes surrounding the emotional experience of job loss and also for themes that rebuilt self-esteem after such a loss. I learned how the participants transitioned through an initially difficult period to a point of renewed self-esteem. The common experiences of these executives will be valuable to counsellors and to others who support individuals who have undergone such a loss.

The Research Problem

Background

In this thesis, the terms "work," "job" and "career" will be used interchangeably. Some researchers/psychologists distinguish among the terms, with "career" implying a

stronger personal investment that attaches more individual meaning to the work

(Seligman, 2002). But most of the literature appears to use the terms as synonyms – each

signifying the importance of work to the human experience and to the meaning of a

person's life (Frankl, 1962). Further, the term "job loss" refers to an involuntary loss of

work. The participants' common attribute was that they lacked ultimate control over the

severance from their jobs.

A wealth of research on the effects of involuntary job loss was performed from

the late 1970s to the 1990s, when industrial challenges from global competition and

economic recessions resulted in business downsizing and job lay-offs. Much of the

research is up to thirty years old but has stood the test of time. The relevance and validity

of this earlier research is supported by its continued citation in more recent papers.

Although researchers draw from more contemporary work as well, they do not hesitate to

cite earlier papers if these support their research. For example, Waters and Moore's

(2002) research on unemployment and self-esteem cites work on job loss from

Komarovsky (1940), Gurney (1980), and Borgen and Amundson (1987). In addition,

studies on executives coping with downsizing by Armstrong-Stassen (2005) cite work

from Cahoon and Rowney (1984) and Latack and Dozier (1986) work on job stress. The

view is that these earlier examinations continue to be relevant is shared by Gonzalez and

Peterson (2000), who specifically note that early models associated with job loss are still

appropriate today.

Volumes of writings support research casting job loss in a negative emotional

light, including: i) the emotional pain of involuntary job loss (Isaacson, 1981); ii) job loss

as a difficult transition and "a roller-coaster" of emotional ups and downs (Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Aquilanti & Leroux, 1999); iii) the effect of unemployment on a person's self-worth causing depression (Abrams, Orbell & Sheeran, 1995); iv) the effect of unemployment on professionals, (Kaufman 1982); and, v) the impact of unemployment on self-esteem and predicting self-esteem during unemployment, (Waters & Moore, 2002).

It should be noted that despite the many studies on the negative effects of job loss (summarized by Latack & Dozier, 1986, p. 378-379), not everyone experiences job loss as a negative life event. Latack & Dozier (1986) proposed a model of positive career growth for some who may use job loss as a constructive stepping-stone in their career. Sheehy (1981) wrote that, "Stressful life events can lead to growth because they spur people to consider new alternatives, to develop new competencies and to restructure their lives in positive directions" (p376). Still, I contend that research on the positive impact of being fired is miniscule compared to the level of work describing the event as highly stressful and disruptive.

Research by O'Toole (1993) established a measurement scale relating to job satisfaction. On his scale of nine factors, "prestige of the job" was found to be most important to job satisfaction (Gonzalez & Peterson, 2000, p. 64). This connection between prestige, self-esteem and career is further supported by the work of Johnson and Mortimer (2002) who report that a person's work (e.g. doctor, professor, cook, labourer) is a "strong determinant of a person's status within the community, earnings, wealth, and

style of life" (p. 37), and this societal opinion helps determine a person's own identity or self-concept.

Anecdotally, it is reasonable to assume that business executives, as leaders in their organizations, adopt or integrate that aspect of leadership into their personality. Through development and socialization, men are often taught that work is of primary importance in their life, to the point that "the male identity is almost solely defined through work" (Gysbers, et al., 1998, p. 88). Consequently, it is reasonable to claim that these individuals have a healthy self-esteem attachment to their executive positions. Kohn and Schooler (1983) established an empirical relationship between the level of the individual's position and his self-esteem (as cited in Brockner, 1988). Therefore, the emotional impact of involuntary job loss for these executives is significant (Armstrong-Stassen, 2005). This attachment to their position and its aggravating affect is the primary reason that the study focused on male senior executives (e.g. CEOs) who have experienced such job loss and have thus been forced into a personal and career transition.

Statement of the Problem and Research Concept

With the abundance of research material on the importance of work as a determinant of social status and self-worth, we know surprisingly little about the emotional journey of a successful and prestige-oriented group who experienced involuntary job loss. Armstrong-Stassen (2005) cites Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) as some of the few researchers to focus on downsizing of executive level managers. Another study from Peretti, Butcher & Cherry (1985) on the effects of unemployment on self-esteem and as the cause of depression found that professionals, managers and executives reported adverse effects of unemployment.

There is also a lack of research offering insight into the effects of involuntary job loss through the lens of narrative methodology. The one study I found was done by Young (2004) who used a feminist approach and found that story telling was effective means of assisting three women who experienced job loss, to make sense of their loss and to derive some meaning from it. Young also found that their stories followed a pattern that concurred with Bridges (1990), where stories of transition (in this case loss) start with the end, continue with a neutral or challenging time and then conclude with a new beginning. The lack of research using narrative methodology warrants further study to shed light on this personal and emotional journey.

To my knowledge, no narrative approach has focused on the loss of self-esteem resulting from job loss of highly placed executives. The advantage of narrative research is that it allows us to enter the participants' world through their voice from the heart, and to see how they have interpreted the meaning of their experience of personal loss. It also lets us appreciate how, and to what extent, they have re-constructed their sense of meaning and self-esteem.

For this study, the participants wrote their job loss stories in a narrative format. They were supplied with questions to encourage a stream of consciousness focusing on the meaning derived from their job loss, and how they rebuilt their self-esteem. After writing about their experiences, the participants met as a group to share their stories and analyze the significance of the viewpoints discussed in their narratives. As the researcher, I looked for common themes on the rebuilding of self-esteem during the journey from misery to meaning.

Research Question and Purpose

The narrative inquiry focused on two related questions: i) What is the emotional meaning of involuntary job loss, and ii) What are the internal and external elements that help reinstate self-esteem through the transition process?

Through these questions, I hoped to find insights into the emotional challenges of these men. The results may inform counsellors who help people suffering from job loss — regardless of position, status or gender —to better understand and manage their journey through a renewed self-acceptance and a stronger sense of self-esteem.

CHAPTER 2

A Review of the Literature

The goal of this thesis is to better understand the emotional meaning of involuntary job loss and to better appreciate how persons may rebuild their self-esteem after such a loss. Therefore, it is important to first address and explain the construct of self-esteem and its connection to career.

Self-Esteem and Career

Self-esteem has received a great deal of attention since Maslow theorized the concept in 1943. Branden (1994) asserts that "self-esteem has profound consequences for every aspect of our existence – how we operate in the workplace, how we deal with people, how high we are likely to rise, how much we are likely to achieve" (p. 26). The website of the National Association for Self-Esteem (NASE) notes that self-esteem has psychological and sociological dimensions as well as cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions: Cognitive in the sense of how we think about ourselves; affective in terms of the associated emotions; and behavioural in terms of the resiliency and assertiveness involved in protecting the personal boundaries created by a healthy sense of self.

Based on a review of the literature, articulating an exact definition of self-esteem is a challenge. The majority of studies on self-esteem and unemployment have approached self-esteem as a global construct (Waters & Moore, 2002). Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Inventory (1965) is most often used as the assessment instrument, which Rosenberg defined as "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself or herself; it expresses an attitude of approval or

disapproval towards oneself (p. 5)" (Waters & Moore, 2002, p. 171). Brockner (1988) reinforces the self-evaluative aspect of self-esteem by stating that it refers "to an individual's degree of liking or disliking themselves. Thus, the essence of self-esteem is the favorability of an individual's characteristic self-evaluation" (p. 11).

When considered as a phenomenal construct (Tharenou, 1979), a person's self-esteem has been shaped by occurrences or circumstances perceptible primarily to that person. Indeed, given the breadth of self-esteem as a construct, it has been "variously termed self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-respect, self-satisfaction, self-worth, sense of competence, or self-ideal congruence" (Tharenou, 1979, p. 17). All of these terms, when used in this thesis, refer to the overall construct of self-esteem – as will "self-concept," which is a "collection of beliefs and judgement about one's own nature, typical behaviour, strengths and weaknesses" (Weiten 1983, p. 56).

Self-efficacy is closely related to self-esteem, but differs in that self-efficacy refers to the individuals' belief in their ability to successfully execute a particular behaviour (Bandura, 1977, as cited in Brockner, 1988). Branden (1994) also sees this element as a core component of self-esteem, which he notes is "a sense of basic confidence in the face of life's challenges." The second core element of self-esteem according to Branden is self-respect, defined as "a sense of being worthy of happiness" (as cited in NASE's web-site).

As a psychological construct, no external validating criteria exist that specifically define and measure what self-esteem is and what it means to people. Each definition or description attempts to better understand self-esteem as a construct, and to underpin the

validity of its measurement (Tharenou, 1979). Despite this lack of precise definition and exact means for measurement, this thesis' focus on self-esteem is justified because it is essential to the way we see and evaluate ourselves. To understand how a person rebuilds his self after job loss, it is appropriate to concentrate on self-esteem, because as NASE (2003) points out, "Self-esteem is a critical component of any program aimed at self-improvement or rehabilitation."

Moreover, there is a direct link between work and self-esteem: "It is clear from recent research that work plays a crucial and unparalleled psychological role in the formation of self-esteem, identity, and a sense of order" (Work in America, 1973, as cited in Tharenou, 1979, p. 4). The effect that high self-esteem has on individuals is also reflected in the type of work they choose. Tharenou (1984) explains that, "Generally the evidence favours Korman's (1966) postulates regarding occupational choice and self-esteem level... the high-self-esteem person is more likely to want to work in environments whose characteristics are those most closely associated with high-esteem" (p. 623).

The concept of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), or the link between a person's general or global self-esteem and their work, was introduced by Pierce, Gardner, Cummings and Dunham (1989). OBSE reflects the degree to which persons will assess themselves to be of value to an organization. Gardner, Dyne and Pierce (2004) state, "OBSE is one component of a person's global self-esteem that, in turn, is a facet of self-identity that is an even broader construct" (p. 310). They go on to say that "although global self-esteem and self-identity are relatively stable individual differences, OBSE

evolves over time and is based on an employee's overall experiences within a specific work organization" (please note that Gardner, et al., 2004, based much of this assertion on the earlier research on self-esteem from Coppersmith, 1967, and Korman, 1970). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that work position affects a person's view of his/her overall value to and self-esteem in an organization.

Indeed, one's work role is a source of self-perception because work in our society "serves as an anchor for role identity and reward, personal identity and self-esteem" (Brenner & Bartell, 1983, p. 135). Results from research conducted by Murphy and Burck (1976), suggest that middle-aged men experience an increasing level of anxiety over time regarding aging and death, and that this creates a "need for affirmation of themselves by society and through success in their careers" (p. 339). The research by Gardner et al., (2004) summarizes the link best: "Employees with high organization-based self-esteem perceive themselves as important, meaningful, effectual and worthwhile within their employing organization" (p. 310).

In many ways, work or career is more than a way to make money or even to gain self-esteem. Herr, et al., (2004) state that the purposes of work can be grouped under three headings: i) economic, as evidenced by the purchase of goods, ii) social relationships, including the feeling of being valued, and iii) psychological, including self-esteem and identity. Blocher (2000) reinforces the psychological importance of work by stating, "Career is a long-term, psychologically compelling quest for a degree of personal fulfillment, development and social contribution" (p. 185). Describing career as a cornerstone of meaning for people, Blocher (2000) further claims that work "is one of the

major structuring forces in most people's lives, as it affects a person's identity, life-style, friends and standard of living" (p. 181).

As a societal group concerned with their position and prestige, business leaders are a good example of how cultural beliefs and economic, social and political factors can affect a person's identity and self-esteem. "A man's work is one of the things by which he is judged and certainly one of the more significant things by which he judges himself" (Hughes, 1958, as cited in Faunce 2003). The questions we ask others, such as "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and "What do you do?" speak to the importance our culture places on a person's career. This is one of the primary roles that comprise our lives and identity (Herr, et al., (2004). When a person responds with "doctor," "mechanic," "therapist" or "CEO," people assign a value to that work.

The Importance of Success

Since this thesis focuses on senior business leaders, it is worthwhile to consider the importance they attach to career success. Indeed, this group may feel a need to meet the cultural and societal expectations thrust upon them to be successful, as highlighted in a quote from Henry David Thoreau, "Men are born to succeed, not fail."

Herr, et al., (2004) cite Moses (1999) who states that business executives are people "who are ambitious and motivated by advancement, prestige and status" (p. 79). In this respect, Seligman (2002) defines career as something that involves a personal investment, where achievements are marked not only by money but also by career or personal advancement, where "each promotion brings you higher prestige and more power" (p. 168). Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) developed a seven-category value typology

called "Goals and Values: Giving Life Meaning." When asked to rank the seven categories in order of importance, middle-aged men gave the highest value to "achievement and work" – whereas "personal growth" was rated seventh in order of importance.

The humanistic theories, including those of Maslow and Rogers, which were developed as a reaction against psychoanalysis and behaviourism, offer an explanation for a person's motivation to achieve work success. Weiten (1983) writes that Rogers, a strong proponent of humanistic and person-centred psychology, believed that an individual "has self-imposed pressure to behave consistently with one's own self-concept" (p. 58). Therefore, a business leader's self-concept may lead him to choose a status-based position, one in which he can build and maintain a position that improves and protects his identity and self-esteem (Herr, et al., 2004).

As stated in Herr et al., (2004), Jung introduced the term "self-actualization" and defined it "as the goal of individual development, the ultimate end to which humankind strives, the progression of development from a global to a differentiated to an integrated state" (p. 208). Further, Hogan (1991) describes Maslow's (1943) needs hierarchy which theorized five levels of need, starting with "physical needs," then "safety needs," to "social or intimacy needs," to "esteem needs" and finally self-actualization. The esteem needs include "mastery and competence in the face of the world" and "the desire for reputation and esteem from other people" (p. 45). Self-actualization, as articulated by Maslow, is a person's drive to reach "one's fullest potential" (as cited by Weiten, 1983, p. 59).

Maslow's theory has been used as an explanation for the connection between people and their work, and as a motivational theory for advancement and achievement. Shelton (1985) states that, "For most individuals, work is a way of satisfying personal needs, ranging from the basic economic necessities of life to promoting higher order outlets for self-actualization" (p. 18-19). Similarly, Sullivan (1972) writes that, "The need for self-actualization relates to the need for fulfilling relationships, leadership and self-expression, which in turn relates to the adult satisfaction of the needs as career development, advancement and transmission" (p. 94-95)

Gordon Gekko's theatrical claim that "greed, for lack of a better word, is good" (*Wall Street Journal*, 1985) is a mantra that has been embraced by legions of young executives on the fast track. Anecdotally, it reinforces the idea that this segment of society is driven to self-actualization through career and the allure of success represented by wealth, possessions and prestige. Given this belief system and pursuit, it can be argued that business is fertile ground for cultivating corporate egos, where "superstars" like Warren Buffet, Bill Gates and Jack Welch are respected and perhaps even idolized because of their financial success and prestige. If Thoreau was right that "men are born to succeed, not fail," then top business leaders present a societal role model, the archetype of success, which other (aspiring) business leaders see as their inspirational icon.

One only needs to look at the seductive corporate brochures published by business schools to see the appeal of career success as a vehicle for self-actualization, both for its material attractiveness and its high social status. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assert that the motivation of business executives to self-actualize through their work creates a

strong psychological or emotional bond between their status-seeking self and their career

(Brockner, 1988).

From a constructivist perspective, McAdams (1993) advocates, "the social

environment in which we live and mature shapes the development of our basic beliefs

and values" (p. 84). It stands to reason that the societal or "market" value of business

leaders is based not only on their salary, but also on their professional reputation, which

as any public relations firm will emphasize, is sacrosanct.

When assessing the personal and professional cost of job loss, the axiom, "the

bigger they are, the harder they fall" may be related to the aggravating element of shame.

Or as Brian Burke, the ex-general manager of the Vancouver Canucks eloquently said,

"No matter how prepared you are, no matter how much you expect it, (getting fired) is

still a big-league kick in the ass" (*BC Business Magazine*, January 2005, p. 34).

Involuntary job loss causes self-esteem and self worth to plummet, both

financially and emotionally. Herr, et al., (2004), cite the research of Ritook (1993) who

found the impact on a group of people over 40 experiencing job loss was "not a simple

financial problem but the loss of purpose of their existence... Loss of self-confidence,

feelings of shame and self-blame." (p. 101).

Although somewhat dated, the early work on stressful life events (e.g. death of a

spouse, moving homes, etc.) by Holmes and Rahe (1967) rated involuntary job loss as the

eighth most stressful life event in their "Social Readjustment Rating Scale." This and

other literature also speaks directly to the negative and sometimes crippling impact of

involuntary job loss, including: "Being severed from one's employment is a violent

disruption of a person's implicit need to grow, contribute and socialize" (Blocher, 2000, p 181). "In terms of life stress, job loss is comparable to other traumatic losses; for some individuals it can create almost as much stress as the death of a loved one, and it has been found to be more stressful than divorce or the death of a close friend" (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986, p. 2). "Research findings suggest that job loss results in feelings of low self-esteem, inadequacy, increased stress, changes in health and depression" (Merriam, 1987, p. 107). "When job loss occurs, it is generally associated with feelings of inadequacy, strong questions about one's self-worth and even feelings of guilt" (Winegardner, Simonetti & Nykodym, 1978, p. 151). Finally, Gibson and Brown (1992) in describing the negative psychological impact of involuntary job loss, write, "some stressful life events, if traumatic enough, etch deep and lasting marks into our cognitive systems" (p. 288).

Involuntary Job Loss as a Life Transition

Why does involuntary job loss cause so much emotional pain in people? Why does it negatively affect a person's self-esteem? What are the transition processes and emotional stages that accompany the loss? How is self-esteem rebuilt? This thesis explores these questions through the insights provided by the participants' narratives. To understand involuntary job loss as it applies to self-esteem, we must understand its impact as an emotional force. To gain this understanding, I will deconstruct the emotional journey following job loss into three elements: i) as a life transition, ii) as an involuntary event, and iii) as an emotional loss.

Transition theory is not the focus of this thesis. But as each participant's story is one of change and transition, comments on the transitional process will be well served. Transitions are a fact of life. As Hudson (1991) asserts, "The adult cycle of change moves from relatively stable periods called 'life structures' to unstable periods called 'transitions' and on to 'new structures'" (p. 52). Schlossberg, et al., (1995) defines a transition as "any event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles" (p. 30). Within the context of adult growth, Gibson and Brown (1992) define transition as a shift between major developmental periods.

These transition periods are launched by a life event, defined as "a noteworthy occurrence that involves change in an individual's usual activities" (Merriam, 1987, p. 107). Not every transition is a crisis, but every crisis is a transition. Gibson and Brown (1992) define crises as "events that are sudden, dramatic, and novel; are states of disequilibrium that are accompanied by heightened emotions – fear, anxiety, anger and guilt – where habitual responses seem insufficient" (p. 286-287). Schlossberg (1984) positioned transition within the context of crisis theory and found that the most difficult transitions (such as job loss) are unanticipated events, which "involve crisis, eruptive circumstances, and other unexpected occurrences that are not the consequence of (normative) life-cycle transitions" (Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1992, p. 29). Further, the overall impact of the transition depends on the degree to which it changes a person's daily life structure (Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995).

Whether a transition is positive or negative, and the corresponding degree of psychological stress, is dependent on "the interpretation by a person or a cohort of

individuals that gives the event meaning" (Schlossberg, et al., p. 107). As a life transition, involuntary job loss is subjective and therefore interpretive, "a transition is a transition only if it is so defined by the person experiencing it" (Schlossberg, et al., 1992, p. 27). Consequently, there could be a significant range of experience, from positive to very negative.

Constructivism contends that the make-up or memory of a person is significantly determined by how that person's inner voice, or cognitions explains the experience and works to determine how they view the transition. Therefore, perception is reality: "Constructivist psychology recognizes that people actively create the realities to which they respond" (Range, p 420-420). In other words, because a transition is seldom a binary good or bad, there can be multiple meanings for a single event, and therefore, room for interpretation. If the individuals have a negative explanatory style, they will tend to see the same event more pessimistically than someone with a positive explanatory style. This is one of the key reasons why the narrative methodology in this thesis offers insight into the participants' respective worlds. Each person's story of transition is unique and can have multiple meanings, and as Josselson and Lieblich (1993) point out, "narrative research is a voyage of discovery – a discovery of meanings that both constitute the individual participant and are co-constructed in the research process – researchers cannot know at the outset what they will find" (p. 260).

Schlossberg's (1980) transition theory supports the degree of emotional difficulty by citing job loss as an example of a crisis event which creates some degree of stress (Schlossberg, et al., 1995), and as one would expect, the more negative the event, the

greater the stress impact (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990). All participants in my study had experienced job loss involuntarily. Several reasons may have led to the job loss: being fired, termination as a result of company policy regarding length of tenure, being part of a group lay-off, the inability to perform the job's duties (e.g. due to deteriorating health), or age-based forced retirement. In all these cases, the individuals lacked control over the factors that determined their departure from work.

Based on the literature, a transition is acknowledged to be more challenging if the event is involuntary or unplanned. "Successful life-transition outcomes are more likely to occur when individuals predict the transition, expect it and prepare for it" (Gibson & Brown, 1992, p. 293). We also know that the degree of lack of control will determine the amount of emotional stress incurred. People with an internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966) believe their own actions determine the outcomes or rewards they obtain. People with an external locus of control believe their behaviour and abilities matter little and do not affect the outcome significantly. Thus, when a major transition occurs, the amount of internal control people think they have significantly influences their ability to cope and manage the change (Schlossberg, et al., 1995).

As defined by Schlossberg's transition theory (1985), the "self" is comprised of both personal and demographic characteristics, as well as such psychological resources as ego development, outlook and commitment and values (Schlossberg, et al., 1995). Because in this thesis the narrative process takes a constructivist approach (e.g. Bruner 1990; Creswell 2003; Reissman, 1993), it is engrossing to observe the differences among the participants' explanatory views of the event and their transitions – but at the same

time, there are common themes. Given that research has adopted an ontological

assumption that the participants' reality or "being-ness" is subjectively constructed, the

narrative "self" and its makeup have had a significant impact on the experience of job

loss.

To explain the factors that influence the challenges and stress related to

transitions, Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman (1995) devised their "4-S Model." The four

S's in this model refer to Situation, Self, Support and Strategies. These parameters help

explain the ability of individuals to manage through transitions such as job loss. The

situation variable deals with the circumstances surrounding the start of the transition, or

the trigger event. Paradoxically, the start of any transition begins with an ending

(Bridges, 1980). When this ending is involuntary, the overall impact and level of stress

the individual feels will be greater than if the end is voluntary.

Most of us know that how an event ends influences our overall perception of it.

As we reminisce about experiences such as a job, a marriage, or even a golf game, how

the incident is concluded largely determines how we remember it. The research of

Kahneman, Katz, & Redelmeier (2003) on memory supports this assertion. To prove this

point, they conducted a colonoscopy medical procedure with half the group enduring a

shorter and easier procedure, but with a more uncomfortable ending. This group rated the

experience as more challenging than a second group with a more uncomfortable total

experience, but with an easier end. This speaks to the importance of closure or to the

importance of the final emotional state in determining a person's memory of the entire

event. Therefore, given that the end is the beginning of transition, how a person leaves his job will affect his memory of it.

The Emotional Impact of Job Loss

Job loss "is often described in terms of psychological failure and decreased self-esteem: shame, degradation and inferiority (Fineman, 1983); "disillusionment, betrayal, impotence" (Braginsky & Braginsky, 1975); "a living hell" (Leventman, 1981); "like losing a leg" (Swinburne, 1981), "anxiety and depression" (Estes, 1973; Pearlin, et al., 1981), "lower levels of life satisfaction" (Kaufman, 1982) and "lower self-esteem" (above quotes as cited in Latack & Dozier, 1986). Indeed, lasting changes may be brought about when one experiences job loss, including "One's conception of society, self, friendships, ethics, family and even in one's experience of everyday life" (Braginsky & Braginsky, 1975, p. 72).

Perhaps one explanation for the strong emotional reaction to job loss is that it can break the "psychological success cycle" (Hall, 1977, as cited in Latack & Dozier, 1986). Positive psychological success occurs during career growth when people take positions that are challenging but achievable in terms of competence as well as personal and career growth. Success breeds a healthy amount of self-worth and efficacy, which in turn, feeds into the ability to take on the next challenge. In this sense, success acts a positive reinforcing cycle, but when broken, "job loss removes the very arena within which work-role success may be achieved" (Latack & Dozier, 1986, p. 377). Latack, Kinicki and Prussia (1995) highlight the "harder they fall effect" by stating that "For workers who are economically better off and who may derive a larger portion of their psychological

identity from work, the (negative) discrepancies are more severe than for hourly workers" (p. 327).

Will the previously documented effects of job loss and unemployment be the same for the group of senior executives as for others having lost their job? Kaufman developed a "Model of Adjustment to Unemployment Stress" (1982) that included social support, time out of work, personal characteristics, coping behaviours and "the nature of the professional job market"(p. 288) as the factors that determined the level of stress. Of these factors, "personal characteristics" were considered to be "the most important" in determining the level of stress (p. 290).

Kaufman (1982) concluded that over time, unemployment resulted in an overall negative impact or psychological deterioration which included: "i) loss of self-esteem, ii) loss of personal control and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, iii) work inhibition, occupational rigidity, and feelings of professional obsolescence, iv) social isolation and v) psychosomatic disorders" (including maladies such as headaches and stomach ailments) (1982, p. 293). Similarly, Winegarder et al., (1978) asserted that the stress effects of involuntary job loss included: i) finances, ii) self-image, iii) negative feelings, iv) mental health, v) communication with friends and family, vi) social life, vii) physical health, viii) relationship with children, ix) relationship with spouse/partner, and x) use of alcohol.

We already know that job loss can be devastating and that "grief may well lead to substantial disorientation, lowered self-esteem, less concern for self, and a resulting negating behaviour" (Jones, 1979, p. 198). Even more dramatic is Isaacson's assertion

that "for many involuntary changes, the loss of position is almost as unexpected, devastating and abhorrent as the death of a spouse or child" (Isaacson, 1991, p. 330). Although this reaction may seem disproportionate, for some people, the loss of a job, metaphorically viewed as a piece of one's self dying, can be compared to death. "Unemployment represents the loss of a significant life involvement" (Borgen & Amundson, 1987, p. 180).

Kubler-Ross's (1969) pioneered a theoretical model for the stages of grief experienced when a person faces the trauma of death. This has been used as the basis for other models for stages of job loss (Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Aquilanti & Leroux, 1999; Winegardner, et al., 1978). Kubler-Ross's grieving stages include, i) denial and isolation, ii) anger, iii) bargaining, iv) depression, and v) acceptance. Although Kubler-Ross's (1969) theory focuses on grief in the face of death, Winegardner, et al., (1978) go so far as to label the grief process resulting from job loss as a "living death." Their research demonstrates a strong correlation of emotions of persons experiencing job loss and those facing terminal illness.

A theoretical model for involuntary job loss closely resembling Kubler-Ross's grieving process has been developed by Westberg (1971), who "identifies ten possible stages: shock, emotional release, depression and loneliness, physical distress, panic, guilt about the loss, hostility and resentment, an inability to return to usual activities, a developing sense of hope, and a struggle to affirm reality during which the individual accommodates the loss and redirects life based on the altered situation" (Jones, 1979, p. 197).

Although not a constructivist based theory, this notion of "acceptance", in order to move on and through a challenging transition, is also supported by Erikson's (1959) psychosocial development model, which is based on Freudian psychology. It states that in order to grow and psychologically develop a person must "satisfy" the conflict within that stage. In this theory, the eighth and final stage of development is "ego-integrity versus despair" which states that persons must be accept who they are, as based on their memory of an experience, in order to be happy, fulfilled and satisfied.

However, not everyone will experience every grieving stage with equal duration or intensity. Or as Borgen and Amundson (1987) have asserted, the transition through job loss and unemployment can be an "emotional roller-coaster." But there are strong correlations between the grieving process over death and job loss. For example, the depression stage was experienced by 80 percent of the individuals who lost their jobs while the anger stage showed a 63 percent response (Winegardner, et al., 1978). Interestingly, many individuals who experienced anger first focused their emotions on their employer, and then shifted their feelings of blame and anger inwardly.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Research Design

Introduction to Narrative

Why use narrative as a methodology? Because the journey to make sense and meaning of the experience of job loss is so intense, and the transition process towards self-acceptance and rebuilding self-esteem is so emotionally challenging, I believe narrative inquiry offers the most effective research methodology. As Murray (2003) elucidates: "Narrative psychology provides a dynamic approach to understanding human identity and the process of making sense of our ever-changing world" (p. 110).

Narrative inquiry is the branch of qualitative research that is "concerned with making a knowledge claim based primarily on constructivist perspectives, (i.e. the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern)" (Creswell, 2003, p. 18). Reissman (1993), sees narrative methodology as providing "a systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects" (p. 70). From an interpretative perspective, Bruner (1990) states that narrative is basically "how protagonists interpret things" (p. 51).

From the beginning of this project, I hoped that a narrative approach would allow the research to get under the participants' skin to discover, feel and validate that person's inner truth, experience and journey. Narrative inquiry focuses on the "content and meaning" of the journey and on the search for "truths unique in their peculiarity, grounded in firsthand experience" (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 260).

The Power of the Narrative

There is a power to story-telling and narrative inquiry as "it allows us to understand the subjective experiences of a person's personal truth" (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 262). Elie Wiesel (1966) claimed, "God made man because he loves telling stories." Stories allow us to determine what is meaningful in life, as they serve to bestow knowledge, the inner truths about ourselves, or about world truths. The cultural pervasiveness of stories is obvious in Aesop's Fables, First Nations mythic folklore, and even the teachings of Christianity through the gospel of Jesus, who chose stories to convey the teachings of God. As Jesus said, "I will speak to you in parables and I will explain mysteries hidden since the creation of the world" (*Matthew* 13:34-35).

The appeal of stories is universal as "we are all tellers of tales" (McAdams, 1993, p. 11). These stories may be told through books, myths, history, television, movies, or simply through conversation as we communicate with each other and to make ourselves understood: what I did last night, how I spent my summer holiday, or something as emotionally challenging as what happened when I got fired. In this sense, stories are powerful tools that allow us to connect with ourselves and to share our experiences with others. "It [Narrative] underlines our very being and our way of acting in the world" (Murray, 2000, p. 96).

To express personal experiences, people use mental narratives to organize, predict, and understand the complexities of their lived experiences (Epston, Freeman & Lobovits, 1997; McAdams, 1993), and to make sense of the world and their place in it

(Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993). More succinctly, we use the "story-form" to make sense of ourselves to ourselves and to others (Gergen, 2001).

Narrative Epistemology

As a qualitative methodology, the foundations of narrative inquiry were born from the need to expand beyond the realist-based assumptions from natural science, which proved too restrictive, and to migrate towards a more "inherently interdisciplinary" or "holistic" approach (Reissman, 1993). Accordingly, narrative inquiry is commonly used in qualitative research for such topics as health, trauma, abuse and illness (Crossley, 2000).

Structurally, "stories have a setting, characters, recurring themes and images and are organized through time" (McAdams, 1993, p. 30). Given its subjectivity as a qualitative methodology, narrative analysis is "compelling in atypical ways" because "its causality, reason and explanation, for example, are in the eye of the beholder [reader, researcher, storyteller]" (Dunn, 2003, p. 605).

This thesis focuses on the personal emotional injury associated with job loss. The information gained about the participants' search for meaning would be limited if I had chosen a quantitative approach. Thus, "the qualitative narrative researcher eschews methodolatry in favor of doing what is necessary to capture the lived experience of people in terms of their own meaning-making" (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 260). In further support of narrative inquiry, Bowman and McAdams (2001), explain that narrative emphasizes "qualitative over quantitative research, hermeneutic over logical-

positivistic frames, idiographic over nomothetic points of view and inductive over hypothetico-deductive strategies of inquiry" (p. 5).

McAdams reinforces his point with the help of J. Bruner (1986), who asserts that "we understand the world in two ways… the paradigmatic mode (i.e. logical and rational thought), or the narrative mode, which is concerned with human wants, needs and goals" (as cited in McAdams, 1993. p. 29). Bruner (1986) further argues that, as opposed to the rationally based "paradigmatic" approach, narrative research provides "an alternative approach of knowing… by making sense of the world by connecting events over time through stories (p. 12)."

As an alternative narrative methodology, I considered using a phenomenological approach, which focuses on the "human experience…and the procedure involves a small number of participants through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning" (Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 15). But rather than phenomenology, which focuses of the "essence" of the human experience (Creswell, 2003), when considering this emotional transition from misery to meaning, what better approach is there than to hear the experience through the participants' own deeply subjective stories? The participants' stories can help them construct their individual true meaning. "The search is for truths unique in their particularity, grounded in firsthand experience" (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 259). In other words, people understand their experiences and give them voice based on how they construct them, so rather than a phenomenological mirror reflecting the reality of their lived experiences, a person's own narrative creates a personal truth and allows us to enter the looking glass.

To assess the emotional impact and personal changes from a traumatic event like job loss, with narrative inquiry "we can begin to understand our changing identities and our ways of interpreting the world" (Murray, 2003, p. 110). It is logical that the best method of uncovering the emotional truths of the experience is to allow research participants to tell their story. Further, Josselson and Lieblich (2003) state, "In narrative, as opposed to paradigmatic, modes of thought, the aim is to create interpreted descriptions of the rich and multi-layered meanings of historical and personal events" (p 259). They further explain that the search for truth is unique in their own first-hand experience and that the emphasis is on content and its meaning (p. 260). Therefore as a qualitative methodology, narrative inquiry provides a dynamic approach to understanding human identity and the process of learning from experience and making sense in our world.

Social and Cultural Context

When using narrative inquiry, we must consider the cultural context of the participants' stories, which is "derived through personal interpretations that are inextricably embedded in socio-cultural, political and economic contexts" (Epston, Freeman & Lobovits, 1997, p. 51). Obviously, these business leaders tell stories with a cultural and ideological slant. Bell (2003) emphasizes this point when using narrative inquiry to study the construct of racism. In other words, who we are, and whence we come from a social, political and cultural perspective, is going to influence our interpretation (and the telling) of stories.

Bowman and McAdams (2001) assert that "life stories are psychosocial constructions, co-authored by the person himself or herself and the cultural context within which that person's life is embedded and given meaning" (p. 100). McAdams goes on to explain that, "as psychosocial constructions, life stories reflect the values, norms, and power differentials inherent in the societies wherein they have their constitutive meanings... how people construct their stories and their view of themselves will depend to a degree on cultural heuristics and how we see ourselves to others" (p. 101). In a culture where business leaders such as Bill Gates are revered as icons, it can be argued that people aspire to climb this corporate or business ladder and that consequently, they spin stories about themselves in this context, "people are exposed to a wide range of biographical stories [including] the media, which all provide narrative models for people's understanding of themselves" (Gergen, 1994, p. 20).

From a constructivist psychology perspective, narrative analysis "theorizes about and investigates how human beings create systems for meaningfully understanding their worlds and experiences" (Raskin, 2002, p. 1). The use of narrative will allow for a deeper and broader exploration of the participants' self because through narrative discourse, through the telling and retelling of the story, the self is created and re-created and as such it allows for a true and personal understanding. "Narrative psychology provides not only a framework for understanding but also for challenging the nature of ourselves, and of our worlds" (Murray, 2003, p. 110).

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research and narrative inquiry have both been described as interpretive (Reissman, 1993; Creswell, 2003). This speaks to the closeness of the relationship that forms between the researcher and participants as "the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 184).

Who I am, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, is part of the being of the researcher. I have experienced involuntary job loss. It is important to disclose this for reasons of both ethics and validity because the "reflexivity" that I bring to the qualitative approach and narrative method will affect the study. "The personal-self becomes inseparable from the researcher-self" (Creswell, 2003 p. 182).

That said, I carefully maintained my role as researcher. As with many researchers conducting narrative-based inquiries, I sought "to give voice to what is not well-represented in the science of human experience" (Josselson & Lieblich, 2000, p. 262). Perhaps it was because of the empathy I feel for people undergoing the struggle of job loss. Regardless of the inspiration, I believe my dual role offered advantages, as I was better able to connect to their experience and help them tell and analyze their story, and equally important, they were able to connect with me in the telling of their story. In all, I believe my experiences enriched the research by shedding added light on the deeper meaning of involuntary job loss and the reinstatement of self-esteem rather than clouding the research with subjectivity. Indeed, I have too much regard for narrative research to interfere with the process by biasing the narrative.

It was essential that my experiences not impede the narrative process of inquiry and analysis. The collaborative nature of the narrative process demanded I remain aware of my own values, beliefs and ethics. I took appropriate precautions not to negatively affect the validity of the participants' experiences and stories. My role as researcher was to help the participants focus on the telling of *their* story. This empathic approach is supported by Murray (2003) who suggests that the aim of the researcher is to "help clients expand their repertoire, to construct new and more satisfactory stories" (p. 100) and "to encourage the participant to tell his or her story... [by being] empathetic and supportive" (p. 102).

As a researcher, I had enormous respect for the participant's stories and for their voyage of discovery and I made sure no transference would interfere with giving them their voice.

As the group leader and facilitator, my experiences helped the narrative inquiry and the group analysis of the stories. I worked to exercise good group facilitation skills, including i) reaction skills, such as listening, paraphrasing, clarifying and summarizing, ii) interaction skills, including moderating and linking, and iii) action skills, including questioning and advanced empathy. In particular, I made sure that each participant had an opportunity to tell his story and engage in the narrative. My role also required posing open-ended questions to facilitate the participants' stories and data collection. Amundson, et al., (1993) also emphasized that personal qualities, such as being self-aware, tolerant, positive, empathic, people-oriented, involved and open are key to effective group dynamics. I trust that these were also present.

To analyze the narratives, the group listened to and provided feedback to each other's stories. This took particular sensitivity and skill from a facilitation standpoint because the stories were so deeply personal. As researcher and group leader, I strove to provide the right context so that each participant could feel capable of telling and analyzing his story. I believe that because of my familiarity with business leaders, experience as CEO and as a group-counselling leader, I was able to encourage participants to speak freely of their journey. That view was strongly echoed by the group.

Data Collection and Management

Narrative methodology included data collection in written format. Writing their stories in privacy as opposed to a structured interview, or in a group session, was a good way for these business leaders to disclose the difficulties and shame associated with involuntary job loss. Composing their story allowed them to feel safer and more able to reflect on the personal challenges of their transitions. I believe that this method helped make the process more meaningful and revealing, "Simply writing or performing a story of oneself can prove to be an experience of healing and growth" (McAdams, 1993, p. 32).

The participants based their writing on seven questions that helped them construct their narrative (discussed later in the chapter).

Defining the time and event parameters for the story was important for the data collection since "Where one chooses to begin and end a narrative can profoundly alter its shape and meaning" (Reissman, 1993, p. 18). Therefore, participants were asked to begin the narrative from the date of their involuntary job loss and end it once they had reached a comfortable level of renewed self-esteem.

After the participants had written their story, rather than conducting individual interviews with each participant, we met as a group to share stories and to reflect and analyze their tales as a group in a collective narrative. The results were powerful. The fact that total strangers met and disclosed such intimate aspects of their life made the experience rich and remarkable for everyone (such is the power of group dynamics and universality). We held the group session in a comfortable, convenient and safe location in downtown Vancouver.

I met with each of the participants beforehand to better prepare them for the group session. I believe that the data collected during the group setting enhanced the validity of the research by providing group support and peer encouragement, which ultimately enriched the group narrative. In the company of peers, the participants externalized and divulged more of their story, their emotions and their inner truths. McAdams (1993) claims that the group narrative is a resource by which participants can take on the role of creator in order to recreate what happened to them and make sense of the experience. Moreover, if anyone felt ashamed, the sense of inclusion and feeling of universality helped support the participants, since the group process allowed them to "gain confidence through participating in the exchange of stories with colleagues from the community" (Murray, 2003, p. 102).

Group Process and Logistics

Participant Selection

To find senior business leaders who have experienced involuntary job loss, I sought the assistance of outplacement and recruiting companies with experience and

contacts to identify such candidates, including Korn Ferry International, Ray Bernsten Ltd. and Right Management Inc. I did not know any of the participants beforehand and as mentioned, they did not know each other. This unfamiliarity helped to generate a greater degree of openness, which aided the group process and dynamics. The criteria for being a member of the research group included:

- Male, preferably over 50 years of age

- Experience of involuntary job loss, preferably within the past 12-24 months

- Employed at a senior management level (e.g. CEO, chief financial officer)

- View of job loss as a negative life event

- Emotionally reflective and introspective

- Self-esteem significantly rebuilt

Stereotypically, business leaders may not be reflective and open to disclosing emotions during a transition. But the pre-screening process I conducted helped to create a level of trust and safety conducive to openness. During the pre-screening, I assessed whether the candidate had mostly overcome his negative emotional reaction to the job loss and had rebuilt his self-esteem sufficiently. Borgen and Amundson (1987) state that the average time to feel the emotional drop is six months and outplacement firm Right Management adds that it takes on average three months to start to rebuild a sense of self after job loss. However, to help ensure that the participants were suitably able to reflect back on the overall experience, I wanted a time frame of 12 – 24 months.

This level of renewed self-esteem was assessed during the pre-screening interview by posing a series of questions such as, "how do you feel about yourself," "what is your

level of confidence and self-efficacy," "how did you start to rebuild your self-esteem," and "how did you know you were making progress?" I also asked if others commented on their self-esteem and how they managed the process.

After the initial telephone contact, a prescreening meeting took place to ensure the participants fully understood the purpose of the research, that they fit the participant criteria, and that the ethics and research process were understood. I left them with a copy of the Letter of Consent for their review.

In total, to arrive at a group of five participants, I screened nine executives and of these candidates, all but two fit the criteria (one claimed that he experienced no emotional ill effects and the other unsuitable candidate was clearly still in the throes of grief over his job loss). But what is noteworthy, is that all seven suitable candidates wanted to participate in the study. In fact, each of the two gentlemen who could not attend a group session, due to personal and/or logistical conflicts, still offered to write their story if that would assist the research. I attribute this to their desire to offer personal insights and help with what they considered to be worthwhile research. Or perhaps there is just an innate drive for people to tell stories.

As a footnote, I acknowledge that women's careers are also highly important and that they may have similar strong attachment to their work. For this research, however, I chose to ask only men to participate. As it is difficult to discuss personal emotions with strangers under any conditions, I was encouraged by outplacement professionals that a group of men would probably find it easier to discuss their experiences with their own gender.

Questions for the Written Narrative

At the conclusion of the pre-screening meeting, I presented the participants with a set of questions that assisted them to recall their emotional transition. This approach has been recommended by Reissman (1993), and I designed the questions to help the participants reconstruct their story with a high degree of subjectivity and interpretation.

Seven open-ended questions guided the participants. This format, I believe, facilitated a stream of consciousness and at the same time, provided a degree of consistency for the group narrative to work. They could choose to use these questions or reject them. I encouraged them to use the questions as a base and to expand upon the questions that resonated most with their story. The questions were as follows:

- Describe the attachment that you felt towards your job and how it influenced your self-esteem. In other words, what did it mean to you and how did you identify with the role?

- Briefly describe the circumstances surrounding the job loss. Was it planned and how much control do you believe that you had over the outcome?

- Please describe your personal transition following the loss of your job for the next three to six months. How did the experience affect you psychologically (including your self-esteem and identity, both mentally and emotionally)?

- How and when did you start to overcome the feelings of loss? Can you identify the things that both helped and hindered the rebuilding of your self-esteem and identity?

- Is your self-esteem at the level it was prior to the loss of your job and if not, what do you believe will be necessary to more fully rebuild your sense of identity and esteem?

- As you look at yourself today, both mentally and emotionally, how did the experience change you?

- What would you recommend to others who have just been told that they have lost their job? What advice might you have for them as they work to regain their sense of themselves and their self-esteem?

Group Logistics

For the research to proceed in an orderly fashion, I developed the following logistics:

- The selected participants met at a convenient and comfortable location conducive to a three-hour evening group session (appetizers and refreshments were made available).

- The group sessions for the narrative collection and analysis was audiotaped, the method most acceptable to the group. Recording the data collection facilitated further analysis after the session.

- Due to ethics and confidentiality, the participants signed confidentiality statements and gave written permission be audiotaped.

- The audiotape has been safeguarded in a locked file. The tapes will only be listened to by me and possibly by members of my committee.

Group Session Agenda

The group session was an exciting and emotional event for the participants that elicited honest, forthright answers. We followed this agenda.

Group session begins: (4:30 pm)

- Welcome and a review of logistics (Researcher)

- Purpose of the research (Researcher)

- Introductions: Personal introductions, as well as a discussion on expectations, and group norms, including confidentiality.

Group Narrative Review and Analysis: (5:00 – 8:00 pm)

- Each participant read his written narrative.

- Each participant commented on the story and what resonated within him.

- Each participant was invited to share his own thoughts on the telling of the story and upon hearing the various comments made by the group participants. The group's analysis stimulated each individual's assessment of his journey. Specific topics included the gamut of emotions resulting from job loss; what it took to accept and overcome the professional and personal loss; what factors contributed to the renewal of self-esteem; and what elements helped account for a renewed identity and self-esteem.

Group Narrative Analysis

The group-based data analysis was exciting because the dynamics provided a more complex and therefore richer narrative exchange. This is supported by Labov (1997), who suggested that the reaction to the narrative from others in the group provides

the most information for analysis. The group focused on identifying both the elements and themes related to the emotional loss and also what themes were evident and necessary for the rebuilding of their self-esteem.

Following the group meeting and discussion, I further analyzed the audiotapes for additional content and thematic analysis. I also reread the individual written narratives and listened to the audiotape group session. Both provided insightful information, but it was the group session that, upon listening to it again, provided the richest data.

Rigour

This research is based on narrative inquiry – which at its most basic is story telling. It is a personal interpretation of some aspect of the participant's existence in the world, which is grounded in a social, historical and cultural context. A traditional view of research quality defines rigour as the application of method and assumes an implicit connection with relevance. The question for this narrative based research is: How is this rigour measured or assessed when the data is encoded through the prism of the participant's psyche, and then again decoded by a researcher who is an integral part of the qualitative process?

For this research, the rigour or validity given to the research method and process is based in its relevance or its "trustworthiness" as defined or assessed by its truth value, credibility, consistency and neutrality (Krefting, 1991). With respect to its truth value, the narrative is highly credible since it comes directly from the participants' own experience. The participants each had ample time to write their own story as a stream of consciousness or plot, with a beginning, middle and end. Then the participant read his

story, which was then listened to and peer reviewed for relevance and candor. I submit

that in the company of peers, with stories of similar experience, if they had deviated from

the truth of their experience, it would have been apparent in body language, tone and

choice of words. Further, the group was forthright and direct enough to confront the

narrator and question, if not the story's honesty, how it differed from their own

experience. Accuracy was also ensured as the participants wrote their personal story and

sent electronically – while the group narrative was audio taped and captured verbatim.

There was a remarkable consistency among the stories. Each participant's

experience through the transition of loss to self-renewal contained the same basic

elements, stages and findings. The only difference was the length and duration of the

stories, as well as some variations with respect to their journey toward renewed self-

esteem. This candid consistency from multiple participants provided dependability not

only to the data in itself, but also to the analysis of the group narrative. With respect to

trustworthiness, there was a remarkable congruence among the participants' language and

their affect and body language. Again, it would have been apparent and questioned by

other group members, if any aspect of their stories and group analysis had been

embellished or falsified. In addition, the collection of data from the individuals and the

group has rendered strong and consistent themes that will be directly applicable to other

persons who have suffered involuntary job loss and who are working their way back to a

renewed sense of self.

Lastly, as a measure of how relevant the group experience was to the research and

how powerful it was for the participants, I received two emails that read:

"Hi Peter: … Just wanted to say – thanks for an amazing evening. Thanks for finding me… I am looking forward to reading your final paper when it is available. Thanks for an amazing evening. Regards, "

"Peter, just wanted to wish you well on your thesis. I enjoyed the experience."

CHAPTER 4

Results and Findings

This chapter provides a review of the participant's narrative, followed by a thematic and content review of both the individual and group narrative. The participants stories presented below were written before the group session. Each participant was given a week to write his story, with the necessary time to reflect on his experiences and transition. The questions provided to the participants were designed to help create a stream of consciousness.

The sequence of questions focused on the personal meaning of job loss and on the elements used to rebuild the participant's self-esteem. Much of their thoughts and disclosures were conditional upon their anonymity and therefore, I will provide no greater introduction to the participants here than to present them by their pseudonyms: Bob, Brad, Jerry, Grant and Richard. Nor will I divulge their position or company, because it is not relevant to their transition from loss to self-esteem.

During the group session, each participant read his story and then each group member gave his own interpretation of the reader's narrative, emphasizing what the reader's story meant to the listener. In other words, each person in the group explained what resonated within him when he listened to the tale of the others. The individual stories were meaningful. However, given the collective energy and power of group dynamics, they served primarily as an appetizer for the rich smorgasbord of insights revealed by the group's collective narrative. The result was a powerful interwoven quilt of discovery and meaning.

The Participant's Stories

Participant #1: Brad

Describe the attachment that you felt towards your job and how it influenced your self-esteem? In other words, what did it mean to you and how did you identify with the role?

My job or career is a very important part of my make up. Actually it falls into what I call my "business" component of what makes me me. The other two components that makes me me are Health and Family. I am always pushing for balance and growth between these three and I need all three. So although business (or job) is not all of me it is 1/3 of me and a key part of me. Thus a key part of my self-esteem. Further I have simplified my life such that I really only care about those 3 things and constantly developing those three things so given this focus and if there is a change (i.e. loss of one of the three); one could speculate of imagine what it would do to my self-esteem.

Briefly describe the circumstances surrounding the job loss. Was it planned and how much control do you believe that you had over the outcome?

The job loss was not planned, it was very sudden, I didn't see it coming at all; except for maybe a week before. That said I did sense something wasn't quite right a week earlier, but couldn't put my finger on it. So in short very sudden and with no warning. The firing was fast and direct but how they did it was extremely unprofessional, which made it even harder. I was called to the company's lawyer's office, my chairman was there to deliver the news, I was told I was being fired for cause (which was not true), but could resign and they would pay me a small settlement. In

short I was being coerced to resign due to the allegations of cause. I did not resign, so they fired me.

As for did I have control over the outcome. I had no control during the firing process, there was no way to undo it. It was clear this is what they wanted to do although their true motives were not clear (because cause wasn't the issue). However, I replay my time there over and over again in my head and ask myself what I could have done differently to change the outcome. So I guess what I am saying is that I didn't have control of the outcome in the final few weeks, but I am left wondering if I had done certain things differently, then maybe the outcome would have been different. But interestingly, those things that I would have done differently would have been against my core values, but I digress for this is beyond the scope of the question...

Please describe your personal transition following the loss of your job – for the next three to six months? How did the experience affect you psychologically (including your self-esteem and identity...both mentally and emotionally.

It was very very hard on me for I had never been fired before. Further I didn't see it coming, I thought I was doing all the right things and was even told I was doing the right things, and finally I was never told the real reason why I was fired.

No question my self-esteem was down, I had lost a third of myself. Although I appeared positive and upbeat to outsiders, inside I was left with tons of self-doubt as to my abilities to be a leader/manager. But there were a number of things I did to overcome this that I will address in the next question below. For me the best way to describe what was happening was I felt like I was going through a mid-life crisis. I had read about

them, so now I wondered if this was my mid-life crisis. I spent a lot of time thinking, sole searching; what do I want to be when I grow up. Is what I am trying to achieve in business my true calling or am I on the wrong path. Did everything I ever stand for, was it bullshit. It is too soon to tell if this was my mid-life-crisis, but at the time it sure felt like it was.

How and when did you start to overcome the feelings of loss? Can you identify the things that both helped and hindered the rebuilding of your self-esteem and identity?

In order to overcome the feeling of loss I did a number of things to help me:

a) I needed to get what was rightfully owed to me from the company, so I had to get proper severance paid to me. If I were able to achieve this then this would validate to me and others that I was never fired for cause and it was all just a game to see if I would blink/cave in. I did get every penny that was owed to me and that was a huge step in the right direction of regaining my self-esteem.

b) I told myself that being a CEO is a tough tough job and in this day and age it is totally normal to get fired. CEO's get fired all the time, I shouldn't be immune to this. It is part of the job of a CEO to get fired.

c) I got tremendous support and encouragement from three people; me wife, my father, and a business mentor. They were a focal point of support and an outlet for discussion and they all held up a mirror to help me look at myself.

d) I met with as many of the directors and senior management team of the company that fired me that I could after I was fired and after a settlement had been arrived at to seek out answers and understand why I was fired. I was able to speak to probably 70% of them and their insights were very helpful. Point to note: There was no consistency of reason for my firing from any one of them, they all had different answers.

e) I met with the head hunter who had placed me in the position to seek out answers from them and understand why I was fired.

f) I start to help other companies and work with business people who I first and foremost trusted and strongly felt had the same core values that I had.

g) I focused all my energy into "health" and "family" to help offset what I was missing in "business."

h) I read books about job loss and mid-life crisis to help me find answers. Note: I did not find these very helpful.

i) I looked and sought out any wins I could get, I celebrated every win possible. A great weekend with the family, a great bike ride with a great time, a good meeting, an introduction to someone new. I viewed every win as a stepping stone to bigger and better things.

j) Last but not least I constantly told myself I was good at what I do, this was not about me, but about a situation I got myself into that I should have never got myself into. Basically I got into the wrong crowd and paid the price of being fired.

I didn't really overcome the feeling of loss until I settled my law suit, as well as processed much of the above. It took about six months after the firing to be ready to get back in the saddle and engage again. Prior to that I was very cautious. Even after six months it took a lot more, so said differently the total feeling of loss were not gone yet. They still aren't entirely a 1 ½ later. I think they will always be there, but it slowly diminishes over time and as I achieve new successes.

Is your self-esteem to the level it was prior to the loss of your job and if not, what do you believe will be necessary to more fully rebuild your sense, identity and esteem?

It is getting closer but it is not quite there yet. The only way I will be able to fully rebuild it is to have a significant leadership win with the current company I am leading.

As you look at yourself today, both mentally and emotionally, how did the experience change you?

The experience for me, no question, has left a scar and I am not sure it will ever heal completely. I still have self doubt from time-to-time, fear of it happening again. I am not sure how I would handle things if it happened to me again, so I think about that sometimes. But these are the negative aspects. There are a lot of positives, but it is very hard to put into words, some easier than others. I know when I wasn't fired it wasn't me or my character that were at question, I was just in the wrong place, and

there were circumstances beyond my control. I am a lot more self aware and try to continue to be self aware. Also I think I am now a more sensitive leader – but this is hard to describe. I am also a leader that makes sure I don't surprise my employees (they always know where they stand).

What would you recommend to others who have just been told that they have lost their job... i.e. what advice might you have for them as they work to regain their sense of themselves and their self-esteem?

- do all the things, or as many as possible that are relevant, that I listed when I answered question 4.

- also talk to people who have been through this, many people I talked to hadn't been fired, they tried to be sympathetic, but empathy is what is really required and needed – I think empathetic discussions in this case are much more useful.

- get back on the "horse"; you are a good person, you have a contribution still to make, go make it happen.

- don't wait for the phone to ring, you need to get out there and make it ring.

Participant #2: Bob

In the spring of 2002, at the tender age of 46, after three very successful years as President of Company Y and 13 years with the company, I left under a mutual separation agreement. In the months leading up to the decision I had been subject to a constructive process which would ultimately result in my position being eliminated. My attachment was first to the Canadian subsidiary and second to the company. I was disappointed and hurt by the change in the company's respect for the Canadian operation. However, I felt

quite relieved and was looking forward to a period of mid life reflection that my years of work at Company Y had afforded me. My plan was to take a year off, a sabbatical of sorts, and then return to a position of prominence in the technology industry in Canada. What I was not prepared for was the loss of status which seemed to immediately follow my departure.

I did manage to avoid thinking about what I was going to do next for about eight months and then panic set in and I started looking for my next position. During that process I discovered that my value was quite high with positions that resembled the one I had left, but was significantly lower in others. Eventually I settled on an assignment with Company Z, that gave me a fair salary, reconnection with the industry, significant status and the opportunity to branch out to a role that required a more relaxed set of skills. That experiment did not bode well and shortly thereafter I resumed my search for the perfect next step.

This led me on a path of self enlightenment, at times painful, always humbling but rewarding beyond expectation. I had not lost my self esteem, it wasn't mine to lose. I discovered that the self esteem I had was defined by my success in the corporate structures I had been part of. I began a journey to find my self and build self respect and self esteem that were mine and mine alone. I focused on reading, meditation and the help of friends and mentors. It was not easy and it took the good part of a year to get to the point where I had not only recovered from the loss of position but had greatly improved my spirituality and outlook on life.

I would not trade that experience for anything else. I feel significantly more comfortable in my own skin and apparently this transformation has been obvious to others as well as welcomed.

My advice to others in similar circumstance would be to forget about rebuilding what you thought you had and build from scratch what you really are. For those that have not had to face the loss of job, or those who will ultimately retire from the confines of their business career, be aware of what is in store for you and begin to build your own self image now rather than when you'll have to. *"Worthy of the gifts that have been bestowed on me and prepared for the adventures yet to come."*

Participant #3: Grant

My name is Grant, I am the former CEO & General Manager of a medium size consumer packaged goods company. I would like to provide you with a brief background of my working career. I believe that this will bring an understanding to how my self-esteem was established and how it was affected by my experience with job loss.

I began working as a teenager while attending school. I worked at numerous jobs and positions of responsibility until after high school graduation where I began to work full time. My first permanent position was with a medium size food manufacturer in City X. I started at the bottom of the corporate food chain and began to work my way through different jobs and responsibilities within the company; all the while gaining more overall knowledge of the operation. I supplemented my knowledge with further related education, in process engineering, performance improvement, quality control, and management techniques. As a result, I was making a contribution to the organization, I

was performing at an above average level and I was being recognized for my work. It is at this point that my overall self-esteem began to grow.

PROGRESSING UP THE CORPORATE LADDER

As I worked in a multitude of functional capacities within operations I gained important overall knowledge and began to have a comfort level with that knowledge and my ability. It was also during this time that I began to see the failure of management to engage and empower the employees within the company. This dilemma now represented the next challenge for me to overcome. I moved into an entry level management as a Supervisor with the company and began to influence the performance of the people and ultimately the company.

I began gaining significance in my role as a manager and began thinking about my future career growth.

As the management team above me was of a young age my options for growth were restricted. It was necessary for me to look outside the my current organization. I then found a position as Manager of Operations that provided a larger scope of responsibility in a larger organization. With increasing responsibilities my self-esteem also grew as I overcame challenges and capitalized on bigger opportunities. After a few successful years in this position my reputation was known and recognized within the industry and with that came further opportunities.

My next transition was with a company that manufactured a wide portfolio of products which represented an opportunity for a further increase my operational scope; and I joined this company as the Director of Operations. In this position I gained a

reputation for getting things done successfully and was given increasing responsibilities. After many years in this position and with the current CEO & General Manager retiring, the opportunity arose to compete for the position. This competition began during a time when I was working towards completing my MBA degree at a local university. After a lengthy selection process involving a number of candidates, I was selected as the new CEO & General Manager.

As I mentioned at the beginning, I am sharing this career history with you because I feel in my case, my self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth, was and continues to be, directly related to my job responsibility, my level of control, and my circle of influence.

THE TERMINATION

Before accepting the job as CEO & General Manager, I thought long and hard about the future of the company and what direction it would need to go to be sustainable in a very competitive and continually consolidating industry. Following much work and due diligence I accepted the challenge of CEO & General Manager and began to set the strategy for the success of the company.

Within the first six months in my new position, the board of directors was approached by a large national competitor with an offer to purchase. And so began the process of pre-purchase due diligence, negotiation, and purchase agreement creation. All of which, deflected my focus and the organization's focus off of the already and ongoing strategic renewal process. Now the focus was on the process of selling the company. This

process took approximately three months and was followed by a successful vote of the shareholders to accept the purchase offer and sell the company.

With the sale of the company my position was terminated. The new owner and I attempted to negotiate a different position within the new corporate structure, but unfortunately the scope and responsibility of this new position did not equal that of the previous CEO & General Manager's position, and the negotiation failed. This resulted in the new owner exercising the termination clause of my employment contract.

From a control perspective, I had no control over the sale of the company, as I was not in an ownership position. In my opinion, it was a good short-term return on investment for the aging owners most of which wanted the liquidity that sale would provide them as they entered retirement, however my main objective as the new CEO & General Manager was one of long-term growth and sustainability, and as a result I was biased and against the sale.

MY TRANSITION

On the day that I was given notice of the termination of my employment contract in mid January 2005 and even though I expected it on some levels; my initial reaction was one of shock, followed by an overwhelming sense of relief. It had been a roller coaster ride from the beginning of the succession process to the completion of the sale of the company. And on a number of levels I was glad it was over.

After leaving the company in mid February 2005, I then entered what I like to call the "honeymoon phase" of my transition. I say that because throughout my entire career I always had a sense that I was in control, and apart of having no control over the

termination of my job, I felt I would maintain control of my destiny and quickly bounce back. I took the next few months to complete my MBA Thesis, go on a long vacation and basically enjoy what I perceived to be a well deserved break. Following graduating from my MBA program in June 2005, I was approached by some fellow MBA graduates to join them in starting a local management consulting company. I agreed, as I felt this would keep my skills sharp, broaden my network, and potentially lead to my next career position.

During the first six months, I began to notice that my circle of influence was slowly diminishing. Consulting, although challenging, just wasn't the same as working in a community of people within a corporate setting. A setting where I had the ability to serve a broad range of people, and be accountable in both the short-term and the long-term.

My cell phone was ringing less often, the people that I felt close to while I was employed were now distant and in most cases we were no longer connected. It was during this time that I began to miss the many working relationships that I had formed when I was in my previous positions. I especially began to notice that even the people that I had taken risks for and/or extended myself to help them become and remain successful, failed to maintain contact. Some of these people, were people that I had also relied on for support. I felt abandoned and I felt that I was becoming less and less significant. Towards the end of this six month period I realized the honeymoon was over.

THE EFFECTS

During the period following the honeymoon of my transition, I began to question my self-worth. I began to wonder about what benefit I could bring to others. No one seemed to be knocking down doors to connect with me or ask for my help. I continued to question myself as to why this was happening and I concluded that it was because I was of no value.

I became depressed and the negative aspects of my personality began to surface and remain dominant. My family and friends were supportive, but they didn't know how to handle me in my negative and depressed state, a state that they had not experienced before. Most people just had faith, faith based on my past successes and my past self-confidence, and felt that this low period would eventually pass. For the most part, I did not share this same faith.

I began to realize that although I had been a leader of people during my career, I was failing to lead myself through this difficult transition. I became critical of myself and others, I was continually judging and I ultimately condemned my self-worth.

In some ways this downward spiral forced me to question and to create the desire to understand why I was feeling this way. I wanted to understand why these negative aspects of my personality had taken over the positive aspects of my personality and were causing havoc with my self-esteem. I had always felt that I understood who I was and I had confidence in the past to face any challenge. What I learned about myself was that what I thought would be an easy transition was anything but easy. In fact began doubting my ability to recover and I realized I needed help.

THE PROCESS OF REBUILDING

I decided to get focused on two objectives; first, I needed to understand why I was having a hard time with my job loss and why my negative aspects were dominating my personality; for this I found a personality coach who would help me understand the root cause of my emotional state. The second objective was to focus on finding a job, I stopped consulting except for a select few close associates, and I began working with a career coach who was familiar with my career history. This became my purpose, I even felt at times I was being selfish, but I realized I needed to take care of myself.

The personality coach facilitated my self-reflection process. Specifically, performing a self-reflection that was deep enough to understand my personality aspects, when they developed and why, and also to recognize, accept, and acknowledge them. It was through this process that I began to understand all of the aspects of my personality, and to recognize which aspects were serving me and which aspects were draining my energy and hindering my transition.

With the help of the career coach, I began to review my career and the significant accomplishments and the accomplishments that provided me with the most personal satisfaction. We identified my values and the things in my career history that emotionally engaging and empowering.

This work was a benefit, as it helped my define what was important to me, what I was comfortable doing, and gave me the ability to clearly articulate the value I could bring to an organization. Now I was armed with the necessary knowledge to begin

interviewing for my next career opportunity, and more importantly, finding that opportunity where I would truly fit.

It was during this time as I was becoming aware of who I was, that I began to become aware of the different people that were entering my new circle of influence. Wonderful people, people who were showing up without judgment, people who wanted to help. In some cases these were people that I new from my previous position as CEO & General Manager, but mostly these were new acquaintances. I began to realize they were people who shared similar experiences, similar values, and a similar desire to help others. Some of the people were people that needed my help on a professional level, but oddly enough, also on a personal level. The opportunity to help and provide value, helped to re-build my self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

I continue to look for permanent work, work that will align with my values and career objectives. But, now I am feeling better about this challenge and I have gained a renewed sense of self-confidence.

I feel that I am better equipped now to face this challenge and future challenges. What I have gained in my learning about myself and my knowledge about how personality aspects play a role in how we see the world, will not only help me but also people that I work with. I have a broader sense of the human dynamic and increased my abilities around emotional intelligence. This will make me a better manager and leader in the future.

I reflecting on my experience, I am reminded of the basis for the creation of the Outward Bound Survival Schools. My understanding essentially is that during the second world war when the convoy supply ships were sailing between north America and Europe, it was discovered that the survival rate of sailors of destroyed supply ships thrown into the deadly waters of the Atlantic was higher among the older sailors. With sailors forced into the ocean for long periods of time, facing unknown futures, and in some cases death; it was observed that the younger more physically fit sailors were more likely to succumb to the harsh conditions, then the older less fit sailors. It was determined that the older sailors had accumulated a longer life experience, a life experience that included hardships and challenges that they had overcome, experience that they could draw strength from.

This was the my first job loss and although I had faced challenges before, those challenges were defined and controlled to some degree by me. Now that I have overcome this transition, I know that I am stronger and more resilient as I move forward. My self-esteem is beginning to be defined by me and not by my environment. I have the ability to create my significance, control my significance and to risk my significance.

If I was asked to coach or mentor someone facing a similar job loss transition I would suggest that they look at job loss as a gift. It is an opportunity to step back and re-establish and/or re-define who you are. Allow yourself to go through the five stages of denial, while being gentle with yourself. Suspend judgment of yourself and others. Focus on the future and your values and your intention. Don't think that your situation is unique, ask for help to move you through the transition. Don't get stuck in the

"Honeymoon Phase" following your job loss. Realize early that you ultimately control your destiny. And remember the words of Winston Churchill, "When your going through hell, keep going"!

Participant #4: Jerry

I'm not sure whether we're intended to disclose our former positions, but I think I have to if some of this narrative is going to make any sense. I was the first person from outside, hired by the Company Y, and after less than one year on the job, I was terminated in a storm of controversy over the Company Y's inability, for about the 10th year in a row, to keep to budget.

I loved my job. I felt flattered to be in the position I was in, and I really enjoyed the excitement, the variety of work and the solid camaraderie of the executive team. The job was an important one, and I felt proud that I was the first civilian selected to hold the position. I felt that what I was doing could make a real difference and that I was working in an almost noble environment.

However, the political pressure that surrounded the organization and my own position had become intense. It was clear that something had to give, but I really didn't think I'd be a casualty. I'd been with the Company Y for less than a year, the budget wasn't "mine," and the Company Y's budget problems were chronic. I felt, and I had been assured, that I had been hired to resolve an under-funding issue, not to correct and over-spending problem. So, while I was surprised when my contract was terminated, I wasn't entirely shocked. Although the public spin on the situation was that I had

voluntarily retired because my position was being re-defined, in reality I was given no choice.

Former co-workers, the press and my friends and family initially seemed far more indignant over the situation than I was. Early on, I had realized I'd taken on a tough assignment, and I wasn't sure whether I could be successful. I was, however, very disappointed that I didn't get a real shot at it. I was very disillusioned over the blatant politics of my termination, and I had trouble coming to terms with my being the designated political sacrifice. In my mind, I had been treated in a way that I would never have considered acceptable myself, and I was bothered that a number of people I really liked and respected seemed to have gone along with it.

I took a couple of months off before I started to look for another position. In the meantime, I received numerous phone calls and messages of support, sometimes from totally unexpected sources, and these went a long way to re-building my self-esteem. My former co-workers kept in constant touch. I remained involved in a number of corporate and volunteer board positions, took a couple of courses, and when I did start looking for a job, I went really hard at the networking side of things. This intense networking was critical – not only was I chuffed by how many people were interested in meeting with me, but it helped me overcome the sense of loss, as the more I told my story, the more I came to believe that I had been an unwitting victim who never really belonged in a political environment in the first place. Also, as a result of networking, I interviewed for a number of positions and received a couple of job offers, all good for self-esteem and

sense of worth, and helped me in being careful and selective in pursuing any future activity.

After 18 months, I believe my self-esteem is in pretty good shape. I believe I'm naturally a positive thinker, but how much of the repair job is due to rationalization and other self-defense mechanisms... I'm not sure. On reflection, it probably doesn't matter. What does matter is I think I've made a fairly full recovery.

The loss of my job at the Company Y was the first real set-back of my professional career. I'm probably a bit more cynical and cautious than before, but I'm certain that many more positives than negatives came out of the experience. I've learned to be more comfortable with myself, and many of my personal priorities have changed. I think the downtime following my termination gave me an opportunity for reflection that I never really had before. That said, if I could, would I go back and assume my previous position with a clean slate? ......I probably would!

For others who have just lost their job, don't spend a lot of time on personal recriminations. You have the opportunity to re-focus and re-invent yourself that not many get. Consider this an opportunity. Take a good break, examine your priorities and lean heavily on your family and your personal network to help rebuild your self-esteem. Be selective in your next career choice. Don't be afraid to think out of the box!

Participant #5: Richard

1) *Describe the attachment that you felt towards your job and how it influenced your self-esteem? In other words, what did it mean to you and how did you identify with the role?* In the case of Company "Y", the attachment had a family as well

as a personal history. Between myself, my father and his father we had over 100 years of employment with the Company. So, I had grown up with the industry, the technology, the people, etc. Personally I had started with the Company as an installer after a couple of failed attempts at university and risen to the executive floor by the time my career was to end. I had done very well by the Company and the Company, at least in my opinion, had done well by me. For myself, not having achieved any kind of university degree, Company Y was important for my own achievement in the business world as well as my opportunity to provide for my family. I always felt a tremendous sense of obligation to the Company for what it had provided in the way of opportunity.

2) *Briefly describe the circumstances surrounding the job loss. Was it planned and how much control do you believe that you had over the outcome?*

   a. The merger between the industry companies of Company X and Company Y was considered a "merger of equals". For the Boards of Directors and the executive teams this meant an even representation would be required from each of the companies in the new company. Also, if the Chair of the Board came from one company the CEO would come from the other. Given the role of Company Z in the deal it was pretty much a foregone conclusion that J. Smith would be the Chair which meant that J. Jones would be the CEO. Jones then went about interviewing the respective executive teams to determine his ultimate team. Jones was rather long in the tooth at the time and not really current in terms of the technology of

the day let alone the future. In my interview he showed me his desired

structure and I noted the absence of Information Technology as a direct

report. He said he didn't have the time to deal with it. I asked him what his

two most important products were. He reckoned cellular and long

distance. I than asked him what he thought those products were based on.

He said he didn't understand the question so I said that, in my view, they

were really more about the billing systems that served them and the

flexibility of those systems in the configuration and delivery of packages

i.e. information technology. He got rather angry with me for even

suggesting he might want to re-think his structure. This was only a

snapshot of what I was to both learn and experience about J. Jones but I

knew right then that I wouldn't be part of his executive team and that,

even after all these years, I didn't want to be part of a company he was

going to lead. After he had made his mind up each member of the two

executive teams had a follow-up meeting to receive their determination. I

was the last to see him. He sat me down and showed me his team. I had

called it exactly and, to no surprise I wasn't there. He than started to tell

me about a very important role he had for me. Having already thought this

through and knowing that I had "change of control" and a well defined

package as well as a secure pension I stopped him and said that I was not

one to waste people's time. I than asked him to confirm I had "change of

control" as an option. When he confirmed that I said that is what I would

take. He looked me in the eye and said "I hope we can expect the same level of effort out of you over the next few months as you gave in your first 28 years". Not knowing whether to hit him, say something in retort or just ignore him I, very out of character, paused. I then stood up, offered him my hand and wished him good luck. I than returned to my office and heard nothing from either the CEO of Company Y or the Chair of Company Y until I happened to run into the Chair some 10 days later on the executive floor. I have never regretted my decision but it was that day in 1998 that I realized that companies don't have souls, people do, or don't as the case may be. So, in terms of control, I had no control over whether I would be on the new executive team or what role I would have. I did however, have a great deal of control over whether I stayed or I left especially given the way things unfolded i.e. while I wasn't to be part of the executive team they still wanted me to stay so leaving was my decision. Truth be known, probably a small consolation in the face of the realization that I wasn't selected for one of the executive roles.

3) *Please describe your personal transition following the loss of your job – for the next three to six months? How did the experience affect you psychologically (including your self-esteem and identity... both mentally and emotionally. –*

   a. I left Company Y on January 31st, 1999 and started with a new company on February 1st, 1999. In hindsight not a very wise decision but I wanted to show everyone that I wasn't going to "miss a beat". In taking on the

President's role in this new company I didn't have a lot of time for grieving or dwelling on my decision. However, I probably received an average of 7-10 calls a week over that time (in fact over the next 12-15 months) reporting the demise of a once wonderful company to work for. I felt like a counselor through most of this. I suppose it both validated what I believed would happen as well as my decision to leave but it also made me angry and disappointed with the people that had the power to have done things right. I was a strong supporter of the merger. It was the right thing for the two companies but it was handled very poorly. I found myself , from time to time, fantasizing on returning to the Company to set things right. Little did I know that I would have that opportunity. I would reiterate that while I felt a sense of loss I always felt I had made the right decision and my feelings were more on the empathy side for those who didn't have the same opportunity as I in leaving. Interestingly enough I was approached twice to return to the Company prior to when I actually did. First was being headhunted to fill an executive role that became open. This was after Mr. XXXX had left and prior to (his replacement) arriving. The second was by (the replacement) just after he arrived in the summer of 2000. This would have actually occurred had re-location not become an issue. Both of these events served to provide some level of validation for me.

4) *How and when did you start to overcome the feelings of loss?* I don't think I will ever get over the feelings of loss. For me, Company Y was part of my extended family. So, it is kind of like the loss of my parents. I have dealt with it. I focus on the positive memories and, in the case of the job loss, try and not dwell on the negatives. Can you identify the things that both helped and hindered the rebuilding of your self-esteem and identity? I consider myself incredibly lucky. I never took much solace in the fact that everything I predicted would happen, did, as a result of the selections made for the executive team. Why, because the Company I loved was suffering and more importantly the people within it, many of whom I'd gone to war with over the years. I have already talked about the approaches I received to consider returning. While neither of these panned out, in November of 2001 Mr. Z, the new CEO asked me to come back and achieve the synergies that should have been exacted at the time of the merger. I returned to lead a small team of people in driving 36 different initiatives that resulted in a $X million reduction in expense as well as elimination or deferral of another $X million of capital expenditures. This, coupled with the performance of the wireless company, served to put the Company in a cash flow positive position and take the share price from south of $10 to north of $50. This was to be a one year contract assignment. However, at the end of the first year I was asked to come back as an employee in an executive role and ended up staying two more years.

5) *Is your self-esteem to the level it was prior to the loss of your job and if not, what do you believe will be necessary to more fully rebuild your sense, identity and*

esteem? – This is a very interesting question. My role with Company Y had allowed me to perform a role in the community that I would not otherwise have been able to do. While I continue to engage in activities it is not the same. So, in some ways it is probably not something that will ever be restored. Having said that I am incredibly lucky to have a very strong family which has always been what's most important to me and continues to be. I also have worked at having other things in my life that provides diversity and balance. This, as I have come to realize, is incredibly important in helping one deal with tragedies in aspects of one's life. Job loss and otherwise. So, while I have had a sense of loss the actual void has been minimized. Also, I have continued to engage in meaningful work, both charitable and compensatory. In fact, I have had the opportunity for adventures and learning that I would not have enjoyed had I stayed with Company Y in 1999. The decision to leave was a difficult one but one that I thought through and engaged other's whom I respect in as well. Having made that decision, making other decisions, with respect to career fulfillment, have been much easier, less painful and, I would say, always been right for me and my family.

6) *As you look at yourself today, both mentally and emotionally, how did the experience change you?* – I think the biggest change for me I have already mentioned. I had always viewed Company Y as much more than a job. There was a sense of family there. Two things really occurred for me – first, as I said, I realized that companies do not have souls, people do. With that realization I think my "blind loyalty" changed forever. Not in a bad way but definitely in a practical

way. As well, I have always had this strong sense that I would not leave my fate to others but always take control, to the extent I can, of my own destiny. This was re-enforced through this experience.

7) *What would you recommend to others who have just been told that they have lost their job... i.e. what advice might you have for them as they work to regain their sense of themselves and their self-esteem?* – The first thing I would say is that if you are providing the advice after the fact it is, in many cases, too late. I think that is why I was so keen to participate in this research. In today's world people need to prepare for the eventuality of job loss no matter what level they are in a company. The second thing I would emphasize are the two realities that I have already mentioned i.e. companies do not have souls, people do and, to the extent you can, take control of your own destiny. Finally is the need for balance in one's life. If you let yourself be defined as a person by only one ting than losing it can be disastrous. So, constantly evaluate your life and ensure you have balance whether that is in the form of a relationship, marriage and family, hobbies, sport, faith, fitness, whatever. Ensure that there is some balance and work at creating and maintaining it. And, as the pressure of job mounts do not compromise that balance. It is even more important during those times of stress. The more balanced and varied the definition of self the less likely that any one event can bring you down.

Content and Thematic Review

The written narrative accounts of the five participants and the group discussion

highlight the common themes and the experiential pearls of wisdom that crystallized as a

result of the participants' voyage from misery to meaning.

For clarity, I define a "theme" as something that is common to the experience of

all participants. In addition, I have highlighted the individuals' "nuggets" of experiential

wisdom within these themes I judged to be the most meaningful from a research

perspective. The themes are divided into the two main domains of emotional loss and the

rebuilding of self-esteem.

The Emotional Meaning of Loss

Theme 1: The importance of work and self-esteem

Two characteristics struck me about the men who participated in this narrative

exploration: Their strength of character and how important their work was to them.

Within their own narratives and throughout the group session, they displayed honesty,

forthrightness, intelligence and respect. There was a willingness to share, listen, learn and

grow that may seem surprising given the personality stereotypes that society often

bestows upon CEOs and senior executives (contemporary examples include Kenneth Lay

and Bernie Ebbers).

The drive for a meaningful career is a strong aspect of the participants' self-

described personalities. They describe themselves as "competitive," "type A"

personalities, whose business and organizational achievement is key to their happiness.

As outlined by Brad, "there are three things in my life that are important, my family, my

health and business." So strong is work as a determinant of self-actualization, that even when Brad, Jerry and Grant knew their job promotion could be problematic, even though their "gut" or "intuition" warned them against it, they still took the promotion. As Jerry explained, "There was a sense of adventure and challenge, that despite knowing that the job was perhaps going to be a problem, I wanted it… and in fact, even with everything [i.e. the termination] that has happened to me, if I could wipe the slate clean, I'd take it again." This drive was echoed by Grant, "There were all the warning signs… but I still wanted to take it."

All participants strongly endorsed the concept that career success fueled their self-esteem. This was well articulated by Grant, "As I overcame the challenges and responsibilities of various positions [in my career], I began to grow and there was a direct correlation between my career growth and my self-worth and self-esteem." In fact, they noted that a negative side to the self-esteem issue could emerge from unsubstantiated false self-esteem fed by, as Bob said "… the trappings of corporate culture, including the 7,000 square foot waterfront home." They added that perhaps these trappings led a "false" ego. As Bob pointed out, "My position had a significant amount to do with my inflated ego. And I firmly believe that my self-esteem was designed and fabricated by the company that I worked for … and that it wasn't mine in the first place."

Not only was their work a vehicle for their self-actualization, it took on human qualities, and was often described as "a part of me" and "like family." Given the importance of the participants' work, there was often a perceived "obligation, "loyalty" or even a "blind loyalty" to their company/career. As explained by Richard, "I had no

university degree, so the company was important for my own achievement in the business world, as well as my opportunity to provide for my family. I always felt a tremendous sense of obligation to the company for what it had provided in the way of opportunity."

In addition, it was clear that work provided additional meaning and purpose for these participants, including friendship, structure and providing for their family. As Jerry said, "I loved my job, the camaraderie, I thought that I could make a difference and it was a noble cause."
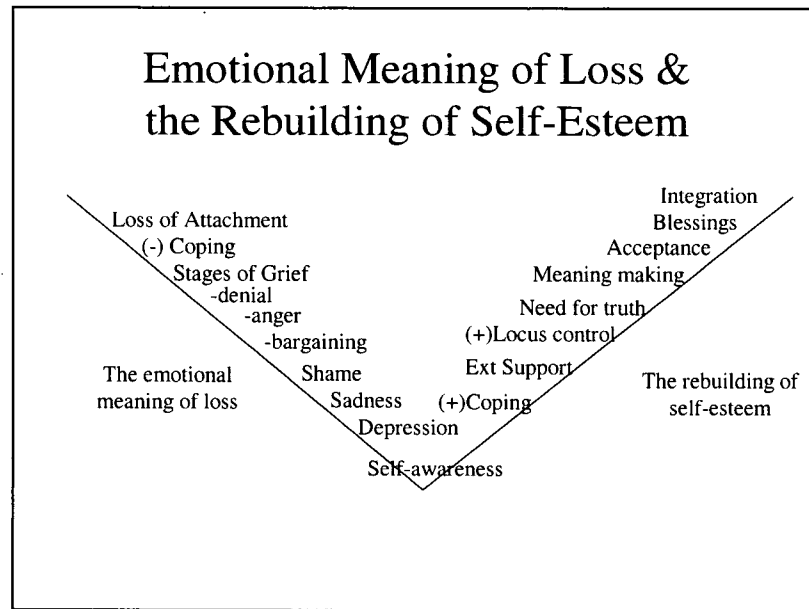
Theme 2: The emotional meaning of job loss and the impact to self-esteem

To participate in this study, the candidates simply needed to have experienced involuntary job loss. I did not expressly search for people who had experienced the free fall of negative emotions. However, of the nine candidates I qualified for participation in the research, all but one executive reported significant emotional challenges from the job loss, including a significant drop in self-esteem.

The depth of the participants' emotional challenges after job loss was clearly evident. Brad explained, "I had never been fired before so I took it really hard. I was left with tons of self doubt about my abilities as a leader and manager, and that was really important to me." Richard referred to his employment of 25 years in terms of "blind loyalty," and to its loss as the "tragedy in his life."

Although each person's circumstances surrounding his "termination" (the term most often used by the participants) were different, they experienced a surprising degree of similarity in their reactions and emotions through the transition. They largely followed Kubler-Ross' (1969) classic stages of grief over the loss of their job, including denial,

anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. However, as a variation of this transition and based on the results of the participant's narratives, I have charted their journey through the various stages, or positions, that they experienced through job loss:

Emotional Meaning of Loss & the Rebuilding of Self-Esteem

Integration
Blessings
Acceptance
Loss of Attachment
Meaning making
(-) Coping
Stages of Grief
Need for truth
-denial
-anger
(+)Locus control
-bargaining

The emotional
Shame
Ext Support
The rebuilding of
meaning of loss
Sadness
(+)Coping
self-esteem
Depression

Self-awareness

The grief pattern on the left of the chart during the emotional meaning of loss occurred regardless of whether the involuntary job loss was expected or unexpected. As Grant said, "Even though I knew it was coming, when I finally received the news, I felt a shock, followed by some degree of relief that it was over." He described his feelings of anger and depression, "negative aspects, both thoughts and behaviours began to surface and it was so unlike me and so unlike anything that anybody around me had seen before." Brad was also surprised and somewhat confused by his reactions to the job loss, which are clear signs of depression. "So with the firing, I began to think that I was having a mid-life crisis... and I began to question everything."

It was evident that the stages of loss within the group were not even in duration, or equal in terms of emotional intensity. Richard, for example, felt an enormous loss, "it was like I had lost family, or my parents." Nor was there a smooth and linear progress through the stages. Instead, the participants went back and forth among the stages of loss, as indicated by Bob: "It took me some time to get over it [the termination], and not completely understanding and in trying to justify what happened… or having a resentment to what happened… and I found that those two things are really meaningless and have no value, and yet I don't know how many times I would go back in a conversation and when the question would come 'so why did you leave,' it might start out nice, but by the end I'd lay out a bunch of justifications and resentments about what happened."

The emotional sense of loss appears to have been exacerbated by a number of things, particularly if the departure had taken place under negative circumstances. As Jerry pointed out, "It hit me particularly hard because there was a secrecy and a betrayal by a number of people whom I had trusted." Grant echoed the hurt felt by a perception of betrayal: "What was especially bothersome was that people whom I had helped in their career, at risk to myself, the contact stopped and that was disheartening… that my network was diminishing… which made me feel abandoned and less and less significant."

In addition, the high degree of personal attachment to the job also played a role in the emotional separation from the company and initial transition through the loss process. As Richard said, "It was that day in 1998 that I realized that companies don't have souls,

people do, or don't, as the case may be." To which he added: "Perhaps I will never totally get over the loss."

Another factor that surfaced was the degree of control that each participant felt they had over the termination and its circumstances. As Grant said in a voice seemingly harbouring some unresolved resentment, "How much control did I have over this thing... I had no control over the sale of the company." Richard also speaks to the issue of control in his narrative: "I've always had a strong sense that I would not leave my fate to others, but take control. This experience has reinforced this [belief]."

Theme 3: The loss of self-esteem and shame

The loss of self-esteem and the sense of shame that accompanied job loss, and the accompanying negative emotions, were so prevalent that although they are closely associated with the stages of grief, I want to highlight them as a distinct theme. Every participant in every narrative discussed the issue. Bob captured the concept: "After two years and after a couple of jobs that didn't really work out, I hit a psychological bottom of depression and from that bottom, I started to rebuild. My journey is all about the rebuilding of my own self-respect or self-esteem." He also commented on the relationship between self-esteem and depression, "Dwelling on the whole self-esteem issue can drive you into a depressive state... but then there is this tremendous upside when you climb out."

Grant spoke to the close relationship between his work and self-esteem: "Because my self-esteem was directly tied to that position, when I lost the position, it was like I had no significance." He went on to explain how his perception of personal value or self-

worth was linked to his self-esteem, "I started to question my value and my worth, because if there was worth, then why isn't my phone ringing?" Brad chimed in to reinforce the connection: "My self-esteem is made up of three things: Business, family, and health. So you can imagine that if I lose one of those things, a third of my self-esteem is gone."

The impact of public shame on a person's self-esteem is evident in the comments made in both individual and group narratives. As Grant explained, "Inevitably when you meet someone, the conversation turns to 'What do you do?' to which you reply, 'Well I'm the former'... and immediately your brain's going... well 'What do they think,' and you start to backpedal and try to explain, and what it did for me is to reinforce that I don't like this situation and it seems to fuel the resentment." Brad agreed and explained further: "I used to dread the question, 'So what do you do,' because you're at a function and you just know it's coming. And I used to hate it... because there was such a void and I wasn't complete... I couldn't say that I was running a company, and it affected my self-worth. I didn't have a part of me that was engaged." Richard also felt a sense of shame that was masked by starting with another company the day after he was terminated with his ex-employer, "I wanted to show everyone that I wasn't going to miss a beat."

One fact that emerged from both the individual written narratives and the group discussion, although all participants reported their self-esteem had been rebuilt, the two participants who displayed the most positive affect and outward self-confidence (two indicators of positive self-esteem) were the two executives who were again employed at a similar position.

The Rebuilding of Self-Esteem

Theme 4: The effect of coping skills and support on renewed self-esteem

Following the involuntary job loss, the participants relied strongly on both internal coping strategies and external supports. The coping strategies can be subdivided into two categories: positive effects and negative effects. The negative coping strategies predominated at the beginning of the transition process.

The primary negative coping strategy was denial. Many participants reported that immediately after the notice of termination, they downplayed its significance and tried to rationalize that it was mostly their decision to leave. But when pressed on the issue, at best, the involuntary job loss was considered a "constructive dismissal" because had they been given another equal position, they would have stayed in the job. Denial also took the form of time off, perhaps as a means of avoidance coping. As Bob said, "After the termination, I took eight months off... and then when I came back, the panic set in when I tried to find another job... which at the start I thought would be mine for the taking."

Some participants reported that they used positive coping skills at the beginning of the transition. However, as they progressed through the phases of the transition, all participants reported that they used positive coping skills. From a behavioural standpoint, keeping active was a coping strategy that all participants claimed was critical for a positive transition, and to keep from "dwelling" on the termination. As Jerry and Brad said, "You need to stay busy... and you need to work the phones." Other behavioural coping activities included focusing on health (Brad) and sports (Grant). Some participants mentioned activities that focused on charities and community activities (Richard) and

time spent on prayer/meditation (Bob), which also had mental and emotional benefits. Grant articulated the sense of meaning gained when a person focuses on something external: "Gaining a sense of purpose by helping people who 'showed up' in my life also started to help my self-esteem."

Without exception, all participants in the narrative inquiry reported that increased activities with family played a significant role in managing the challenges of job loss. An additional noteworthy point is that the only candidate who did not receive support from his family was a person who was not accepted as a participant into this study because he was still in the midst of grieving over the loss of his job. In fact, at the age of 45, he could not bring himself to tell his parents he had lost his job.

Positive coping strategies also included normalizing, in realizing for example, that the "life-span" of a CEO is short these days. As Bob said, "Being a CEO is a tough job and in this market, getting fired is a reality." This reality was repeated by Brad who said, "CEO's get fired all the time. I shouldn't be immune to this."

The most powerful positive coping strategy was probably the participants' own thoughts, which almost forced them to believe in their abilities. As Bob said, "I constantly told myself I was good at what I do, this was not about me, but about a situation I got myself into that I should have never got myself into… and paid the price of being fired." Bob agreed and said, as the others nodded their heads in approval, "I told myself that they can take away my job, but they can't take away the skills that got me there."

External support was another crucial means by which the participants built their self-esteem. All spoke with gratitude of the support they'd received from their friends, colleagues, associates, and especially from family. Brad speaks to the positive impact on his self-esteem when he received the support of people he trusted: "I got tremendous support and encouragement from three people; my wife, father, and a business mentor. They were a focal point of support and an outlet for discussion and they all held up a mirror to help me look at myself." Jerry agreed that, "the numerous calls by my ex-colleagues helped my self-esteem immeasurably." Grant spoke of the help and support he received when he finally sought outside, yet trusted, coaching: "I got to a place where I needed some help because I was questioning my value, so I got a career coach to help me re-establish my career worth and personal values."

The quality of the personal relationships that surfaced following the job loss provided additional emotional support, even if the participants' networks, both social and business, had shrunk significantly. The participants received solace because there was a trade-off for quality rather than quantity. As Grant explained: "Although my community got smaller, I noticed that people started to show-up in a meaningful way… and that was another thing that helped to build my self-esteem." He added that my showing up in his life, and the opportunity to meet others in our group, were evidence of this trade-off.

Theme 5: The impact of self-awareness and positive closure on self-esteem

In the individual narratives, and especially in the group narrative (perhaps facilitated by the group dynamics), the unmistakable link between self-awareness and the rebuilding of self-esteem emerged. The participants reported that after a period of sadness

and depression, they entered a mental and emotional place of self-reflection and true introspection. It was almost as if, for the first time, they looked in the mirror and turned their thoughts and emotions inwards, unencumbered by the self-constructed distortions of the outside world. As Bob said, "I first had to get to this really humble place before I could start to build my self-esteem." Grant agreed, "Understanding myself, my negative thoughts and whether they had any value and if not... let's move them out of the way... it was about understanding who I was, because a strong self-awareness helped me manage the situation." He continued by saying, "One of the awakenings for me was that the executive position and what it brought to my esteem wasn't important... in particular, all the people who wanted to be on the bandwagon and then all of a sudden, wanted to get off." Perhaps Jerry was questioning if he had truly reached that place of clarity and introspection when he asked, "How did you know when you hit bottom?" to which Bob replied, "I just woke up one morning and knew that I was through the worst of it and that they couldn't take anything else any from me and that I could climb out of it [the depression] now."

With respect to this "humble place," they all referred to an "authenticity" that was necessary for their renewed self-esteem to germinate. As described by Brad, "I was also trying to find my authentic self at that naked level." Again, with the agreement of the others, Bob continued, "If you get to a true place of self... or a sense of self, then the esteem issue becomes irrelevant, because it becomes about humility and humanity and you realize that you can learn as much from a guy squeegying windows as you can from

the CEO of a company. I could pretend to know that before, but there is a different authenticity to it now."

At this point of clarity and self-awareness, they reported the constructive effects that resulted from a positive locus of control. Grant, "There is an awareness that you control your destiny, so you need to take responsibility for it." As Bob said, "I believe that at the lowest point of self-esteem, you still have the ability, and choice, to change your attitude." For Jim, it was a conscious choice to shed his own negative self-image: "You need to go through the process of recrimination and discard the self-doubt, in order to build the self-esteem."

This taking-back of a positive internal locus of control also led to an understanding that they were, in some way, at least partially responsible for the job loss. Bob explained that, "I found that any time I spent on that [being resentful and trying to justify it] was unproductive in going forward and actually demoralizing and hurtful and depressing and all the stuff that goes along with it and it actually prevents you from moving to the next step, which is, whatever the justification was, that you were actually equally responsible for the outcome."

In keeping with the positive theme of personal clarity, the participants also referred to the need for an true understanding of the job loss event, which was necessary to achieve positive closure. Almost all the participants spoke of the need to go back to the employer to achieve an understanding of the circumstances that led to their termination, this was especially important to those who had experienced an unexpected involuntary termination. As Brad explained, "I met with as many of the directors and senior

management team of the company that fired me as I could, and after a settlement had been arrived at, to seek out answers and understand why I was fired." Over time, there is a realistic understanding around the reality of the termination as captured by Grant: "Don't think that your situation is unique." This comment also speaks to the comfort gained from the knowledge that they were not alone.

In keeping with the concepts of self-awareness and truthfulness, there was strong agreement among the participants about the importance of personal integrity. As Brad passionately explained, "I remained true to my core values... I knew that I did nothing wrong, so I wouldn't play the 'resign for personal reasons game' and I felt good about that. I just grew to understand that it was a misfit of roles... Standing my ground and seeking litigation, because I hadn't done anything wrong, was really important to me and to my self-esteem."

Theme 6: The blessings of involuntary job loss

Without exception and through all of the emotional hurt associated with the transition, every participant was able to see positive aspects to the job loss. Jerry, "Consider this an opportunity and don't spend a lot of time in recriminations... and be positive. After all it's an opportunity to reinvent yourself, and I'm certain that many more positives than negatives came out of this." They all agreed that the experience had made them better business people. As Bob said, "If the people who suffer job loss were a (publicly listed) stock, I would always invest in that stock over a stock of people who hadn't lost their job... because of the self-awareness that they now have and that will make them better at their job." Brad emphatically echoed his opinion, "that is so true...

and I use the word 'sensitive' leader." He continued on, "I'm a lot more self aware as leader... and I have a mantra of 'no surprises' (speaking indirectly about his unplanned termination). Brad, "I feel as though I'm a better person and I can share that with people. It sounds corny, but I've reached a new level of self-actualization... it wasn't just the firing... but it was a crisis that caused me to be a better person." Grant shared his thoughts, "It's a blessing to actually see that your self-esteem can be defined by yourself." As the group wrapped up, Bob chuckled and said, "You didn't get fired... it was a gift."

Theme 7: Group dynamics and the role of the researcher

The individual narratives were rich in data. The stories followed the questions I posed and each participant was diligent in their attempt to provide insights into the personal meaning of the job loss and how their self-esteem was rebuilt. However, it is the narrative data collected in the group session that provided an added level of insight or dimension to the research, undoubtedly due to the group dynamics.

As the facilitator, I found it interesting and rewarding to see how the group evolved over the session. At the beginning, they were strangers, by the end, they were kindred spirits brought together by a similar experience. Grant: "The gift of being connected to each of you... I have a perpetual grin that has helped to validate my experience and helps me continue to move forward... with people who are of similar spirit." In this case it is not that misery loves company, but that people who are miserable can find such emotional support by sharing with those in similar circumstances.

There was also a benefit to the notion of universality within the group that came from reading and listening and the linking to similar emotional elements within the transition. As Brad noted, "Greg, it is so great that you said that, because when you did, I wrote down something very similar."

At the beginning of the pre-screening interview, most candidates were hesitant to tell their story and skeptical as to its merit. But once they understood the process and purpose of the research, all but one of the candidates was keen to tell his story and participate. They saw it as an opportunity to learn, grow, heal (to a certain degree), and to provide insight to the research with the intent of helping others who suffered the same loss. It also speaks to the magnitude of the challenge they faced as they moved through the transition.

All the same, it is doubtful the participants would have bonded in the group without our having taken the time to ensure proper group process. The participants created their own norms and rules regarding confidentiality. In addition, it was essential to ensure that each participant had come through the most difficult stages of the transition — their periods of sadness, anger and depression — and was able to reflect back on the process.

During the group meeting, as each participant read his story, his tone and body language revealed he was reliving the experience of his transition. When asked about this, Grant commented, "Telling the story was like a reliving of the process." It seemed that as each finished his story, how he felt at the end of his tale reflected where he stood in his own emotional transition. For example, Brad, who is now gainfully employed as a

CEO, remarked, "After reading the narrative… I feel energetic, I feel good, I feel as if I'm almost over it." In contrast, despite Jerry's brave face, his affect and tone demonstrated a real sadness… saying that "even though it has been two years, this has opened some old wounds… and when it's all said and done, if I had the chance to go back with a clean slate, I would."

As facilitator, it was important for me to step back and ensure that the participants could tell their story. There is no question that my own experience with job loss affected both my collection of the data and its analysis – to the benefit of the research, I believe. However, although I was part of the group and they included me as a participant from the standpoint of group dynamics, my role was to facilitate and not as someone to share his own story. At the same time, the participants recognized that because I have held senior business roles and had experienced job loss, it was easier for them to relate to me as researcher and facilitator. Brad said, "What has made this so authentic, was the fact that you have gone through it… it has made it real… and not so academic."

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This chapter discusses the results and findings of the research study. Its purpose is to identify and highlight shared themes that emerged from the participants and illuminated the personal and emotional meaning gained from involuntary job loss, and the elements that helped participants rekindle their self-esteem.

The power of narrative inquiry

The narrative methodology provided a unique opportunity to unearth data rich in emotional insights and personal meaning. The individual narratives and especially the group narrative provided valuable insights into the participants' experience through the transition. These insights were revealed by the stories they told. After hearing and reading the narratives, it became clear that telling their story allowed the participants to communicate, understand and validate their experiences since narrative, "underlines our very being and our way of acting in the world" (Murray, p. 97).

As narrative is based on constructivism, it "theorizes about and investigates how human beings create systems for meaningfully understanding their worlds and experiences" (Raskin, 2002, p. 1). The participant's stories took on the meaning they ascribed to their experiences. Even though their stories were unique to themselves, the meaning and common themes were based on a contextual web of cultural and social beliefs (Polkinghorne, 2000).

The narrative inquiry gave individuals who experienced involuntary job loss an opportunity to go back and rewrite history. As Epston, Freeman and Lobovits explained,

"These conversations can shape new realities and therefore shape their lives" (1997, p. 47). Further evidence of narrative inquiry's ability to reshape and reconcile the past comes from Denzin (1995) who states that the self is an ongoing process of being created and re-created in discourse: "In speaking, I hear myself being created. I hear myself, not as the other hears me (or sees me), but as I want them to hear me" (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 73).

Group dynamics and the role of the facilitator

The power of group dynamics and the generative interaction that result from sharing stories led to the participants' gaining new insights. Talking about their experiences was helpful. Through narrative inquiry "individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives" (Reissman, 1993, p. 2). Therefore, as a means of understanding the personal trauma of loss and the subsequent rebuilding of self-esteem, their stories allowed them to explore their own human condition and reconciliation through meaning making. As Jerry explained: "Telling my story seemed to help me, as the more I told it, the more I became able to see that I was an unwitting victim in a set of circumstances."

As the researcher/facilitator's role is critical to narrative process, it is important to review how I performed this function. We know that as a form of qualitative research, narrative analysis is interpretative by nature (Reissman, 1993). My role as researcher and facilitator was to help the participants focus on telling their story. This role is supported by Murray (2003), who asserts that the aim of narrative inquiry is to "help clients expand their repertoire, to construct new and more satisfactory stories" (p. 100), and "to

encourage the participant to tell his or her story … by being 'empathetic' and 'supportive' (p. 102).

It is always possible that the experiences of the researcher/facilitator may affect or even taint the data. I was, however, intensely aware of this risk and allowed the group to interact and bond amongst themselves. I took precautions to ask open and exploratory questions, as opposed to leading questions; indeed, my role as facilitator was to help them tell *their* stories by give them the time and place, i.e. a "sacred space". Therefore, I submit that the danger of transference was minimal. On the contrary, given my executive business background and experience with loss, I am convinced the richness of the group data was significantly enhanced as demonstrated by the level of trust the participants showed towards me. Creswell illuminates the closeness between the researcher and the participants: "The inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants" (2003, p. 184).

The emotional meaning of job loss and the rebuilding of self-esteem

To analyze the results of this research question, I will subdivide this section into two areas: i) The decline of the self largely categorized by negative emotions, thoughts and behaviours, and ii) the ascent of the self largely comprised of positive emotions, thoughts and behaviours. At the midpoint is the turning point from loss to the rebuilding of self-esteem. At this point, there is an awareness of their "authentic self" (as they called it), and a positive reaction to the job loss, which marks the genesis of a renewed sense of self-awareness. The chart presented in the results section tracks this journey and supports

previous research (e.g. Adams, Hayes & Hopson, 1977; Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Aquilanti, et al., 1999; Kubler-Ross, 1969).

With the exception of one candidate out of the nine interviewed, all participants reported their job loss led them through the stages of grief first identified by Kubler-Ross (1969). As mentioned in the literature review, Kubler-Ross's theory has been expanded to include losses other than death. Of particular relevance is the work by Adams, Hayes and Hopson (1977), which developed a transition model that tracked the level of self-esteem through seven stages of transition including: Immobilization (representing shock and denial), minimization (representing bargaining and avoidance coping), depression (including sadness and anger), acceptance of reality (letting go), testing (developing trust), search for meaning (what are the learnings), and internalization (as cited in Latack and Dozier, 1986). The individual and group narratives support a similar set of stages through the transition. In particular, resentment displayed as disguised anger was obvious. Most participants had also exhibited negative or avoidance coping by taking time off, vacation activities or travel, only to return to reality when the "honeymoon period" ended.

From a constructivist's perspective, learning involves constructing one's self-knowledge from one's own experiences. Therefore, the stages of emotional transition that construct a person's knowledge includes a learning component derived from his/her emotional and cognitive experiences and beliefs. Constructivism is highly personal because of the way people assimilate and construct understanding from their experiences. In addition, as knowledge is formed within a social and cultural context, they gain

knowledge from the experience at each successive stage. Once they have clarified these thoughts and emotions, they can give voice to it and thus gain a deeper understanding. As explained below, the stages are not linear as the participants move along, or move back to the various stages, because they have not yet fully understood or constructed the meaning of each stage.

I use the term "stage(s)" to denote the different experiences felt through the transition phase. However, this term denotes a linear advancement through sequence of experiences, which is contrary to the findings of this research and others (e.g. Borgen & Amundson, 1987). Therefore, it may be more accurate and fitting to refer to these stages as statuses or positions.

Within the transition period of grief and loss, it appeared that the duration and intensity of each stage differed for each participant. The movement between stages was not a linear progression but repetitive and cyclical in nature. The participants themselves reiterated they moved back and forth many times between anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance. They explained that just when they thought they are out of the woods, a trigger comment would plunge them back into a different, sometimes negative, stage. Yet Grant recommended the voyage: "It's an opportunity to redefine yourself, and I'd tell someone to allow themselves to go through the stages of denial (i.e. loss). And be kind to yourself and suspend judgment on yourself or others."

For many executives, the termination has led to a lasting emotional loss as described by Richard, "I don't think I will ever get over the feelings of loss. For me, Company Y was part of my extended family. So, it is kind of like the loss of my parents.

I have dealt with it. I focus on the positive memories and try not to dwell on the negatives."

Coping strategies were not just employed at the beginning of the job loss transition, but throughout the process and continued even when positive self-esteem was regained. Again, this speaks to the cyclical or non-linear emotional stages of the transition. The fact that coping skills continued to be used also speaks to the fragility of the renewed self-esteem. Perhaps this indicates that to rebuilt self-esteem after the trauma of job loss requires a degree of testing for an adequate level of resilience to develop. The scar is thin and the wound could easily be reopened. Some participants feared a reoccurrence of job termination, exhibiting symptoms that mimic post-traumatic stress disorder. Brad commented, "Will the scars ever heal? Probably not. I still have self-doubt from time to time and I still have some fear around it because it was so sudden." Yet for these men to move through the transition and to be effective as executives, they realized they had to be self-aware enough to recognize this anxiety. As Bob said, "You have to let go of the fear that it could happen again if you're going to move on... because that fear can be like an Achilles Heel."

Breaking the psychological attachment to success

It was clear in both the individual and group narratives that participants were highly attached to their positions and to their company – referring to the company as "family" and often using such words as "loyalty." They also commented on how they were drawn to running a company and leading people. The participants defined themselves as "type A" personalities and added that taking on new and more challenging

organizational and executive roles was important to their personal and professional self-actualization. It is also important to note that at no time did participants state they missed the money, material perks, or the authority derived from their executive role. Their loss was something deeper, something that was a part of themselves.

Given their intrinsic motivation to positions of leadership, it further explains how difficult it was for them to lose this role and grapple with the mismatch between what they did before and after their job loss. Therefore, given the importance of work in these people's world, and given the psychological and social connection between them and their career, they all agreed that involuntary job loss was a highly stressful life event: "It is virtually always a personal crisis for the person experiencing it" (Herr et al., 2004, p. 100). Kaufman (1982) supported this view when he argued that the psychological stress from job loss for professionals was greater than for other occupational groups because a larger portion of their ego-identity was associated with their work (as cited in Latack & Dozier, 1986).

The feeling that they had not yet completed their tasks at the company also played a role in the emotional challenges of the transition. Virtually all participants felt that the promise of professional growth had been broken and that they had not yet achieved what they had set out to do. Therefore, the emotional meaning of job loss with aggravated by this break and the loss of an incomplete future, or by the loss of a "non-event" (Schlossberg, et al., 1995). Not only did they lose their jobs, but their future expectations and goals were also taken away. Jerry explained it this way, "I was deeply disappointed not to have been given a fair shake in the job."

Another way of viewing the effect of this career breakdown is to take a reverse or opposite view of the Psychological Success Cycle (Hall, 1977, as cited in Latack & Dozier, 1986). The executives' track record of reaching for and achieving their next level, or the next professional plateau, strongly reinforced their self-efficacy and self-esteem. Now, this single act had ruptured their long track record of success. It seemed as though they were cycling on the road full of career success only to come crashing down because a stick, called involuntary job loss, had been thrust in their wheel's spokes.

Coping with job loss, both positive and negative

The way participants coped with their job loss varied greatly depending on their circumstances and resources. "Essentially, coping with stress can be seen as a problem-solving strategy. These can be divided into task-focused and cognitive-emotive focused strategies which include developing better skills and competency to deal with the specific problem, seeking social support, information seeking, denial, rationalizing, de-awfulyzing a problem, delaying action by using relaxation and/or distraction and symptom management" (Cox, 1993, as cited in Milner and Palmer, 1998, p. 4). Borgen and Amundson (1987) claim that effective coping skills and strategies are not only important for managing the initial reaction of grief as described above, but are important in managing "the erratic mood swings and a progressive loss of optimism about finding employment" (p. 98).

The participants' ability to cope and their vulnerability to the grief process were influenced by three major factors i) The person's understanding of why the job or career loss occurred (i.e. meaning making), ii) the effectiveness of the support systems available

to the person, and iii) the individual's ability to cope effectively with stress (Mallinckrodt & Fretz, 1988; Isaacson, 1991).

In her 2005 research, Armstrong-Stassen lists six coping strategies used in business organizations by executives having lost their jobs: positive-thinking coping, direct-action coping, instrumental-support seeking, avoidance, disengagement and job seeking. She cites Latack, Aldag and Joseph (1992) who state that, "*positive-thinking coping* reflects recasting the situation in positive terms such as thinking of the challenges of the situation." (p. 120).

According to Latack (1986), positive-thinking coping, direct-action coping, and support seeking represent control-oriented coping strategies, whereas avoidance and disengagement are forms of negative coping" (p. 120). Positive coping is a good example of the locus of control, which is "a belief about whether the outcomes of our actions are contingent on what we do (internal control orientation) or on events outside our personal control (external control orientation)" (Zimbardo, 1985, p. 275). Grant demonstrated this positive locus of control: "I took a hold of myself, and really, it was about developing a path or an intention around what the future should look like."

The importance of external support

All participants mentioned external support as key to coping with job loss and with rebuilding self-esteem. The primary sources of support were family, colleagues, friends and associates, in that order. In their analysis of social support as a means of coping with job loss for older people, Mallinckrodt and Fretz (1988) found a correlation between various types of social support and their affect on stressors: "The perceived

availability of social support was significantly correlated with positive self-esteem, internal locus of control and lower levels of psychological symptoms" (p. 283). In contrast, one candidate was still in the depths of grief (shown by his tears during the interview) over his job loss and had not yet been able to speak with his family about his termination. In this case, family or social support as a coping strategy can be a double-edged sword, because "if no social support or family support is offered, then the individual may be even more susceptible to higher levels of stress" (Palmer, 1996, p. 533).

How self-esteem is rebuilt

In 1967, Coppersmith was one of the first to suggest that self-esteem reflected the extent to which individuals believe themselves to be capable, significant and worthy. As an extension of this theory, organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) developed by Pierce, Gardner, Cummings and Dunham (1989) reflected the degree to which persons will assess themselves to be of value to an organization. Gardner, Dyne and Pierce (2004) suggest that OBSE is a component of a person's global self-esteem and that the constructs are closely related. The distinction is that global self-esteem (based on Coppersmith's 1967 definition) is largely based on experiences through socialization, whereas OBSE is 'situation specific' and evolves over time based on an employee's experiences within a specific work organization" (p. 310). The link between a person's global self-esteem and their work-related position has been established by Gardner, Pierce, Cummings and Dunham (1989).

Rebuilding resilient self-esteem resembles the psychological success model (Hall, 1976) referred to earlier, as it speaks to a person's growing sense of competence and self-esteem that increases by taking on newer and more demanding challenges. So perhaps the psychological rebuilding process can equally apply to a person's core or internal self-esteem. As Bart said, "(After I was terminated) I put everything into my health and family and at the same time, I looked for wins and successes… no matter how small because they were stepping stones to feeling better." He continued, "Is my self-esteem back to the level that it was before? No, but it's getting close. The only thing that, I think, that will truly bring it back, is to experience a success that is greater than what I experienced when I was fired. That's when I will feel that I'm completely whole again. Even now, even after a year and a half, I still have the feeling of losses, but they diminish with each new success that I have. It's an emotional process, not a rational one."

To climb out of the funk of loss and depression, participants had to take responsibility for their situation and for themselves. Moving the locus of control from an external negative source, where one feels like a victim, to an internal positive locus of control was in itself a process that reinforced the building of their self-esteem. As Bob explained, "There was a realization, based partly on the writings of a guy who was in a concentration camp (Victor Frankl), that even though you can't change a particular situation, you can change yourself." This internal or positive locus of control was also witnessed in a spiritual sense. Bob continued, "I built my self-esteem through reading and meditation and with the help of friends and mentors. For me a big component was my

spirituality and prayer, one such prayer is for God to make me worthy of the gifts that have been bestowed upon me because I have such tremendous gratitude."

As we know and as Bob pointed out earlier, much of our self-esteem comes from the reflection of ourselves in the eyes and reactions of others. The participants strongly agreed that much (if not all) of their previous self-esteem came from the company and the cultural and social perks of being known as a business leader in the community. For a strong and real sense of self-esteem, a balance is needed between external sources and internal sources. When weighted towards the external source, like a company's adulation, the participants reported their self-esteem was distorted. It is easy to see that the trauma of involuntary job loss cracked or smashed that mirror. As Bob stated so eloquently, "I discovered that the self-esteem that I had wasn't mine to lose and that my self-esteem was defined by the corporate structure that I had become a part of. When you're gone and not contributing to the goals of the company, similar to a star athlete, there is an immediate void." For the participants to move forward, they learned they needed to wash away and to atone for the "false sense" of self-esteem offered by external factors.

For former executives to be included in the study, their self-esteem had to have been largely rebuilt. As expected, not all study participants had gained the same level of self-esteem following their job loss. Interestingly, among the five participants involved in the study, the two displaying the highest level of confidence had secured another executive position. This observation leads me to speculate that for a group of individuals whose work-related responsibilities mean so much, perhaps the only thing that fills the void of self-esteem was finding comparable employment.

The importance of witnessing shame for self-esteem

Secrecy casts a long shadow of shame and untold tales can profoundly shape a person's life (Eron & Lund, 1996). It is pervasive and can pierce every aspect of a person's world – essentially immobilizing them (Epston, Freeman & Lobovits, 1997). Maya Angelou's quote, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story in you," describes the secret shame an event like job loss can have on a person. Perhaps the shame is emotionally more difficult than the event's trauma. So if "stories live to be told to others" (Bowman & McAdams, 2001. p. 26), why is the shame of professional rejection so painful to share and to accept?

What releases the shame? Usually, publicly revealing or externalizing the shame through telling and witnessing helps dissolve the person's shame. This externalizing, or telling of the story, is "a centrally important assumption underpinning narrative therapy: that persons are responding to problematic situations, not embodying problems" (Payne, 2000, p. 53). The narratives support externalizing as a means of allowing an individual to understand that "the person isn't the problem: the problem is the problem" (White and Epston, 1990, p. 26). As Brad said, when he looked back, he saw that it wasn't him, but that he was an unwitting victim of circumstance. Perhaps this is why narrative is so effective as a means of healing trauma and building self-esteem. Externalizing, sharing and ultimately witnessing shame offers release from this private torment as it moves from the self into the public domain. Said another way, externalizing the problem frees a person from believing the shame is an integral part of their self (Epston, Freeman & Lobovits, 1997), a condition of healing trauma and finding self-acceptance. Even though

externalizing shame was not the group's purpose, it could not help but become an integral part and outcome. Jerry spoke to the weight that has been lifted off his shoulders... "I don't know if this [experience] is therapy, but I know it's really good stuff."

The relationship between shame and self-esteem is set within a context or framework of public, cultural and social norms, expectations and perceptions. In other words, if the participants had not expected a negative public reaction to their termination, they might have been much less likely to suffer shame. To illustrate the point, Bob argues... "But if you knew that everyone in your social group had been canned over the last five years... you'd have no problem saying you were fired because you'd want to be one of the club. The problem is that we have a perception, and we live in the reflection of ourselves so we assume that those people will judge you based on what you say." In addition, the participants who appeared to be more self-confident (as judged by what they said, their tone and affect) more readily admitted they were "fired," or "terminated." I believe this is evidence that their sense of shame had been largely resolved.

The importance of positive closure

To move on through the transition, the participants needed to have positive closure. In narrative, there can be multiple meanings for a single event. Story-telling is well suited to finding positive closure because it allows the person to tell their tale, to see it from different angles, to re-write it in their minds and understand that the job loss was something that happened to them, as opposed from it being them (Epston, et al., 1997; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Those who repeat their story of job loss and ruminate in a quagmire of emotional transition may lack an understanding of their own experience. In

other words, learning occurs within one's personal reality, which allows them to make sense and give meaning to the experience.

Part of positive closure is the drive to determine what really happened and what was the truth of their own role in the termination. They all agreed on this need and empathized with Brad who spoke with his managers and recruiters because he said, "no one told me why I was terminated." In addition, the participants who appeared further along in the rebuilding of self-esteem were better able to assess their responsibility. As Bob said, "at some point, I had to see that I was equally responsible."

When they lost their jobs, some of the participants also finished their career. This seemed to make the loss extra difficult as the end of their job tainted and coloured all their memories, even the good times. The research of Redelmeier, et al., (2003) was cited earlier, and it supports the negative effect of involuntary job loss on a person's overall view of their career, especially if their career has now ended. In the research, two groups were given a colonoscopy, with the second groups' final five minutes being more uncomfortable than the first group. In this case, the second group had a more negative memory of the experience, even though their colonoscopy was less uncomfortable for the first part of the procedure. Intuitively we can apply this result to any relationship-based experience that ends on a sour note. It demonstrates that the emotions felt when an experience has ended can have a general and negative affect on the experience.

With respect to a person's memory or recollection of an event, a constructivist would claim that the person had not yet made sense of the event or found meaning in its occurrence, which would allow them to properly understand and integrate the memory of

the experience, "People organize their experience by actively constructing templates of meaning that help them interpret their past, negotiate their present and anticipate their future. (Range, p. 420-421)

An alternative approach, which supports the claim that emotion and the ability to understand (i.e. "satisfy) and integrate the experience, is Erikson's (1959) eight stage psychosocial model of development. A follower of Freud, Erikson asserted that for healthy personality development to occur, each personality stage must be satisfactorily resolved. Erikson's eighth and final stage of ego-integrity versus despair, theorized that the need for positive closure (i.e. "satisfaction" in Erikson's vernacular) over an emotional loss (or "conflict") was necessary to regain a sense of identity and self-esteem. This theory supports the participants' need to understand and accept what affected them emotionally. Sheldon and Kasser (2001) state that ego-integrity, which takes place in the last phase of life, frequently takes the form of a search for ego transcendence or for an understanding of one's place in the ultimate scheme of things (p. 492). In other words, the transition to acceptance of the self and of the situation became a wrestling match to find real meaning and a positive outcome, so that the event would not taint future memories.

Self-acceptance and the acceptance of job loss

Anderson's (1837) children's fable, "The Emperor's New Clothes" resonated with the group. Metaphorically, the participants' former executive position gave them a life-style and perks that falsely inflated their self-esteem. When they lost their jobs, they felt naked with the realization that after job loss, the emperor had no clothes.

Virtually all commented that they had found themselves in a difficult and "humbling" place. They added that what helped build their self-esteem was the realization of who they were and what their self-worth was at a "naked" level. The two people who appeared to have regained the highest level of self-esteem were those who spoke most frankly and directly to the process of being almost reborn after the challenges from their grief and depression. As Bob said, "I got to the point where I realized that they [the company] couldn't take anything else away from me and that I was OK and that I still had all those things and skills that made me, me." From this point, he was able to re-construct his self-esteem but, as the group concurred, it was an "authentic" sense of self-esteem, based on what he had learned and who he was as a result of the experience.

With this sense of self-awareness, it appeared the participants saw the termination in a new light and were to more able to understand the termination and what ensued afterward. This ability to make meaning of life's transitions is significant (Schlossberg, et al., 1995). Thus, the capacity of finding meaning in involuntary job loss is critical to moving through transition and to accept, integrate and grow from the experience. If they reach that point, they appear to have found a real sense of self-esteem. Taylor (1983), studied cancer patients in transition and concluded that the positive adaptation to life-threatening events involved three interrelated themes, 1) The search for meaning (why it happened), 2) gaining a sense of mastery, and 3) self-enhancement.

The litmus test for this renewed sense of self is whether the participants truly see the job loss as a blessing. As Brad said, "I would not trade that experience [of loss] for anything because it has been the most significant event in my life in terms of personal

growth." Bob agreed: "The recommendation that I would have for others is to forget about what they have and to start rebuilding from scratch. You should not rebuild with the same materials, but rebuild from nothing and that way you'll put more thought into it and have a better building in the end."

Implications for Research

I believe this exploratory study opens the door for future related research. It is true that many studies on job loss and self-esteem were completed from 1970 to 1990, which continue to provide a solid foundation for current research. But little research has been conducted using narrative inquiry, which, based on constructivist principles, I believe addresses the core psychological meaning of the loss and rebuilding process. Therefore, narrative inquiry could be used on other groups and participants who have suffered a loss, based on their own specific characteristics and criteria.

Further work could provide a clearer understanding of the length of the stages of emotional loss, as well as a better understanding of their relative intensity for different people. This could include differences in age, occupation, gender, culture, etc. Further, we can ask if character traits like resiliency and hardiness play a role in regulating the transition's emotional intensity and duration. This additional research could unveil more about the process, which in turn could help more people through the emotional loss.

We know that the group experience provided a rich collection of data. Moreover, the participants indicated that the group experience was effective in resolving issues surrounding shame and other psychological inhibitors to emotional resolution. Perhaps

another study using a self-esteem assessment tool could determine the impact of the group experience to the overall transition process and self-esteem.

This research focuses on job loss within the context and possibility of regaining employment. What about those persons facing the loss of the career through retirement? We know that the demographics are quickly shifting baby-boomers into retirement and although there are volumes preparing this group for the financial aspects of retirement, there is a notable lack of research to understand the emotional transition. Are they staring down the barrel of a loaded gun? What are the interventions and programs that could assist their emotional transition?

The lasting negative psychological impact of involuntary job loss for some is indisputable: "some stressful life events, if traumatic enough, etch deep and lasting marks into our cognitive systems" (Gibson & Brown, 1992, p. 288). But it is difficult to assess how strong and how durable their renewed self-esteem is. Perhaps a longitudinal study to determine what could weaken their renewed sense of self-esteem and to enhance its resiliency and effectiveness may be worthwhile.

We know the relationship between self-esteem (and self-efficacy) is a necessary precursor for re-employment (Greenberg & Joseph, 2001). But research could investigate the relationship between self-awareness as a determinant of self-esteem, which in turn is a pre-condition to the reinstatement of self-esteem. In other words, what comes first? Was it the participants' self-awareness of their self-worth that freed them from the shackles of shame, depression and negative self-esteem that allowed them to re-emerge? Could more research be conducted around the personal and external elements and their

relative efficacy to pull someone through the tunnel of loss to renewed self-esteem, meaning and happiness?

Finally, we know that it is possible to rebuild self-esteem and the research highlights much of the ingredients for a successful transition. But there are two critically important questions that require more research: Is it necessary to be re-employed at the same level (i.e. challenge, responsibilities, etc.) to fully re-instate self-esteem? In other words, to fill the "void" Brad described? Does the terminated person need to feel the same degree of professional success? A second, but related question that deserves further research is: Can the person who suffers job loss, find equal meaning, purpose and identity based self-esteem if they seek a different life role? For example, how can the conditions and measurement of self-esteem be ascertained to determine if the lawyer who becomes an author or the teacher who becomes a community volunteer continues to find an equal degree of meaning and purpose in their lives that directly affects their outlook on themselves and on their societal worth?

Implications for Counselling

This research was able to shed light on a deeply emotional and difficult transition process of a group of participants who have been woefully under-represented in previous research. In fact, due to the attachment and bond between their identity and their position, the emotional challenges they experienced may be even greater than other groups. I expect this research will give counsellors a greater understanding and empathy for any individuals who through losing their jobs have lost part of themselves.

By association, I believe the themes and elements necessary for successful transition can equally be transferred to groups that feel a bond between who they are and what they do, be they professor, athlete, musician or business person. In this sense, because it is about emotional loss around identity, I would submit that this research might shed light on any meaningful life role where the individual deeply connects their selves to the relationship, e.g. a mother who might lose her husband, the child who loses his/her family, or the musician who loses his/her hearing. Regardless of the event, I would further submit that the process is the same. I hope this research has shed another prospective light on the transition.

In addition, because the constructivist or narrative approach was so successful in bringing forth the meaning the participants felt around the loss and what it meant to their self-concept, I advocate that narrative therapy may serve as an effective counselling approach. It can help the person better construct and understand the truth of what happened, to move past the pain and to re-construct their self-esteem and lives. Telling their stories may help them to truly find renewal of self.

Lastly, given that all the participants experienced psychological growth and a rebuilding of self-esteem from all positive approaches and interventions through the transition, I advocate that the counselling approach include elements of positive psychology. Greenberg and Joseph (2001), lend support to this approach with their research on the positive effects of self-generated (positive) imagery as a coping strategy. It produced positive results for people seeking re-employment. My observation of the participant group concurs in that everything linked or grounded in a positive intervention

or psychological approach helped the participant through the trauma of loss and on to the rebuilding of self-esteem. There are cognitive, behavioural and emotional examples of this approach, such as (i) positive coping skills, (ii) external support, (iii) a real or truthful understanding of what led to the termination, (iv) the positive and generative energy that results from group dynamics and universality, (v) positive internal locus of control, (vi) self-efficacy (vii) an true appreciation of self, (viii) positive visualizations, (ix) a giving of yourself to your immediate family or to the community and engaging in positive spiritual pursuits and (x), ultimately viewing the experiences of life, even the difficult lessons, with gratitude and as a blessing.

Conclusion

This research was about loss and renewal. Based its results, I submit it was a highly emotional and personal process. For the participants, the conditions that had to be met to reconstruct their self-esteem include, (i) An understanding that the sense of loss and the stages of grief are a normal and necessary part of the rebuilding process (or as Grant said in quoting Winston Churchill, "If you are going through hell, keep going"); (ii) An externalization and witnessing of the shame; (iii) An understanding of the truth around the circumstances of job loss; (iv) An understanding of their self-worth; (v) A sense of purpose or meaning in their lives — equal in terms of self-worth and identity — to truly compensate for the personal and psychological loss; (vi) and finally, a true acceptance of the trauma and its effect in order to move past the sense of loss and rebuild self-esteem to prosper emotionally. "In a normative sense, growth has occurred if one can look back on the job loss transition, identify not only the losses but also the gains from

that experience, and conclude that relative to one's career, the gains outweigh the losses" (Latack & Dozier, 1986, p 380).

What is the pay-off for having endured such a longstanding and painful process? Reportedly, the participants benefited from the blessings they claimed to have received from finally accepting and integrating the experience of pain associated with job loss. By their admission, it vastly enhanced their emotional capacity as measured by the sensitivity and empathetic regard for other people and for themselves. In support of this new found self, McAdams (1993) claims, "With respect to personal ideology, the most mature perspectives are often the hard-won results of ideological struggle and a prolonged journey in which values and beliefs are repeatedly challenged, tested, and transformed" (p. 90). With this deeper meaning of the event and of themselves, they claim the job loss ultimately enhanced a truer sense of their core values and their capacity as humans. As Brad said, "I feel so blessed to have been a part of this experience."

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APPENDICES

11. Has this research proposal received any independent methodological peer review?   (See Guidance Note #11)   ☐ Yes   ☒ No

If Yes, indicate the name of the committees or funding agency involved in the review. Also, state whether the peer review process is ongoing or completed.

12. External approvals for research involving other institutions and other jurisdictions:
Provide written proof of agency approval for projects carried out at other institutions and when applicable, other jurisdictions.
(See Guidance Note #12)

☐ Other Institutions? Name of institution: _____ Approval received? - date: (y/m/d)

☐ Other Jurisdiction or country? Name of jurisdiction or country: _____ Approval received? - date: (y/m/d)

☐ Request for Approval **has been** submitted to the institution or responsible authority in the other jurisdiction or country. **(Send a copy to the Behavioural Research Ethics Office when approval is obtained.)**

☐ Request for Approval has **not been** submitted. (Please explain in #20).

13. Describe the purpose and objectives of the project and state the hypothesis. (See Guidance Note #13)
Note: If you cut and paste, the box size is limited and text will disappear at the bottom of the page. Please proof read your work. There is additional space in item 45. Do not refer to attachments in lieu of completing item 13.

This research will explore the personal transition of senior business executives who have experienced involuntary job loss. The proposed approach is different from earlier studies in that, i) the subject group will be senior business executives, ii) a narrative methodology will allow for a personal account of the subjects' loss, and most important, iii) it is anticipated that the narrative stories and group discussion (i.e. analysis) will reveal common themes with regards to the internal rebuilding of self-esteem - as opposed to the more traditional approach of job replacement programs.

The intent of the research is to find common themes through the process of rebuilding self-esteem after job loss. Although previous research does assert that job loss is emotionally challenging, it is important to note that the participants in this study will not be in the difficult early stages of loss. Rather, a criteria for their participation is that they can more objectively reflect back. Accordingly, the participants will have transitioned through an initially difficult period to a point of renewed self-esteem. Therefore, the objective of the proposed research is to provide a greater understanding of the personal loss following job loss, and the rehabilitation of self-esteem.

Research purpose: To provide further insights into the journey from job loss to renewed meaning, so that anyone who has suffered this loss, will be better able to understand and manage their own journey back to an even deeper sense of themselves – through a renewed self-acceptance and a stronger sense of self-esteem.

Research Question: The research will track the emotional stories of loss, and the rehabilitation of self-esteem, and will attempt to answer two related questions: i) For senior career executives, what is the emotional meaning of involuntary job loss, and ii) What are the internal elements or themes that help to reinstate self-esteem through the transition process?

Human Subjects

14. How many subjects, including controls, will be enrolled in the entire study? **5 participants**
How many control subjects will be enrolled in the study? **N/A**

15. Describe who is being selected, and the criteria for their inclusion. (See Guidance Note #15)

The participants will come from a clearly defined group, i.e. senior business leaders who have experienced involuntary job loss. The participants will be fully competent adult men. The criteria established for the group research participants will be: Male, over fifty years of age, has experienced involuntary job loss from a senior executive position within the past 6-24 months. This time frame is important to help ensure that they have successfully rebuilt their self-esteem.

16. Describe who will be excluded from participation. (See Guidance Note #16)

Senior males executives over 50 years of age will be the participants who have experienced job loss. The study will not include participants under the age of fifty, or female participants. For the purpose of the study and to identify common themes in the participants narrative of renewed self-esteem, it is helpful that it group consist only of men. No male participants will be excluded on the basis of such attributes as culture, language, religion, race, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.

17. Describe how, and by whom, the potential subjects will be approached. Attach copies of initial letters of contact and any other recruitment documents. Note that UBC BREB policy does not allow initial contact by telephone. However, surveys, which use random digit dialling, may be allowed. If your study involves initial contact by random digit dialling, please complete the 'Telephone Contact' form, Appendix #4. (See Guidance Note #17)

The research participants will be approached with the assistance of the Human Resources Consulting Firms, Right Management Consultants (RMC) and Ray & Berndtson / Tanton Mitchell (R&B). Both firms offer career consulting and transition services for person's who have experienced job loss. Each firm has offered to introduce the research project to people who fit the participant criteria. If people are interested, they will then contact either the principal investigator or co-investigator. There will be no coercion or direct solicitation of candidates. Given the requirement for only 5 participants, both firms are confident that they would know of 5 people who would be pleased to participate.
A letter of initial contact is attached,

18. Describe the selection and/or recruitment procedures for control subjects, if these differ from the above. Attach copies of initial letters of contact and any other recruitment documents.

Not applicable

Description of Procedures (Must be written in the space provided)

19. Are any of the following procedures or methods involved in this study? **Check all that apply. (See Guidance Note #19).**

☐ Action Research   ☐ Expert Interviews   ☐ Subject pools
☐ Autobiography   ☒ Focus Groups   ☐ Use of medical records
☐ Data Linkage   ☐ Naturalistic Observation   ☐ Videotaping
☐ Deception   ☐ Random digit dialing
☐ Ethnographic Fieldwork   ☐ Secondary Use of Data   ☐ None of these methods

20. **Procedures:** Describe any specific tests, interviews, questionnaires, or experimental procedures. If the study involves an experimental approach to curriculum or treatment, specify how the procedures differ from normal practice. If Deception is involved, please complete the 'Deception Form', Appendix #5. (See Guidance Note #20) There is additional space in item 45. Do not refer to attachments in lieu of completing item 20.

The proposed research will be qualitative. It will consist of a one time group of 5 men who will write their narrative story concerning their personal experience with the challenges of job loss - and how their self-esteem was re-established. There will be questions posed by the researcher, in order to facilitate the writing of their narrative (the questions are below), 2) The group will then share their stories, as a means of capturing the various themes that increased and rebuilt their self-esteem. The stories will not include the participant's names, nor the names of other persons. There will be a signed agreement by all participants of the focus group to ensure confidentiality. The group session will be audiotaped and not videotaped. There will be no secondary use of the data.

Questions to facilitate the participant's written narrative:

1. Describe the attachment that you felt towards your job and how it influenced your self-esteem?

2. How did the experience of job loss affect you emotionally - immediately after and for the next three to six months?

3. How did the experience affect your identity and your self-esteem?

4. How did you overcome the feeling of personal loss and identity? What helped you? This could be internal psychological coping skills, traits, characteristics, or external (i.e. people, activities, clubs, etc.)?

5. How did your identity change from the event to this point in time?

6. What is the meaning and purpose in your life has replaced your job and therefore, your identity and self-esteem?

21. Where will the project be conducted (i.e. what premises, School, Hospital, Community Centre, etc)?
The focus group session will take place in a comfortable setting in downtown Vancouver.

22a. How much time (i.e., how many minutes/hours over how many weeks/months) will a subject be asked to dedicate to the project?

The participants will participate in a 30 minute pre-group interview. Following that, the focus group will be 3-4 hours in length.

22b. How much time (i.e., how many minutes/hours over how many weeks/months) will a control volunteer (if any) be asked to dedicate to the project?

N/A

23. What level of risk to research subjects would you assign to this research project? Minimal risk is defined as those risks encountered in normal, everyday life.

Physical risk	☒ minimal risk	☐ more than minimal risk
Psychological/ Emotional risk	☒ minimal risk	☐ more than minimal risk
Social risk	☒ minimal risk	☐ more than minimal risk
Employment risk	☒ minimal risk	☐ more than minimal risk
Other	☒ minimal risk	☐ more than minimal risk

Describe the potential risks or inconveniences (discomfort or incapacity) to the subject associated with each procedure, test, interview, or other aspect of the study. Describe strategies, which are in place to minimize or manage the risks for subjects and other affected individuals. (See Guidance Note 23)

A part of the written narrative from each participant describes the emotional challenges they experienced following the loss of the job. No significant emotional or psychological risks are anticipated because 1) sufficient time will have lapsed from the job loss, 2) a prerequisite of participation is that their self-esteem has been re-established, 3) there will be a high degree of comfort and inclusion with participants who have experienced a similar event and 4) this is not a therapy group but a focus group for the purpose of research. As the investigator, I will take every precaution to ensure no social harm will be done in areas such as breach of confidentiality, social stigmatization, threats to reputation, and psychological harm. If however, any emotional problem does arise as a result of the research, an appropriate referal to a counsellor will be made.

24. Describe any potential benefits to the subject that could arise from his or her participation in the proposed research. (see Guidance Note #24)

Research has shown that involuntary job loss has initial adverse emotional effects. As a result of the proposed research that explores the emotional transition to renewed self-esteem, an understanding of the elements or themes that reinstate a person's self-esteem may prove beneficial. At the least, it is hoped that the participants will find it gratifying to participate in the research and share their experience in the hope that it may assist others through the transition of job loss to renewed self-esteem.

25. Describe any reimbursement for expenses or payments/gifts-in-kind (e.g. honoraria, gifts, prizes, credits) to be offered to the subjects. Provide full details of the amounts, payment schedules, and value of gifts-in-kind. (see Guidance Note #25)

There will be no expenses incurred and no payments or in-kind donations required.

Data Analysis and Confidentiality

26. Confidentiality: How will confidentiality of the data be maintained? (For example, study documents must be kept in a locked filing cabinet and computer files, password protected).

Information identifying participants will be kept confidential. Because the collection of the data is in a focus group format, confidentiality cannot be assured – but participants will be given instructions, with a verbal agreement to the group, that all information will be kept confidential. Participants will not be identified by the use of names or initials. All research documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office at UBC.

27. Who will have access to the data? (For example, co-investigators, students). How will all of those who have access to data be made aware of their responsibilities concerning privacy and confidentiality issues?

As the co-investigator, I will have access to the data. In addition, the principal investigator (Dr. Norman Amundson) and members of my committee (Dr. Marla Buchannan & Dr. Spencer Niles) will have access to the data. No other persons will have access to the data.

28. Will any data that identifies individuals be available to persons or agencies outside of the University? ☐ Yes ☒ No
If Yes, describe in detail what identifiable information is released, to whom and what safeguards will be used to protect the identity of subjects and the privacy of their data. (see Guidance Note #28)

29. Give details of where and for how long the data or audio/video tapes will be stored. UBC policy requires that data be kept for at least 5 years. If you intend to destroy the data at the end of the storage period describe how this will be done to ensure confidentiality (i.e. tapes should be demagnetized, paper copies shredded). (See Guidance Note #29)

The data (written narratives and audiotape of the focus group discussion) will be held for the recommended time of five years. Following this time, the date will be destroyed by shredding the documents and de-magnitizing and then destroying the audio-tape.

30. Are there any plans for future use of either data or audio/video tapes? Give details. (See Guidance Note #30).

No

31. Are there any plans for feedback on the findings or results of the research to the subject? Please describe below.

No

Informed Consent

32. Describe the consent process. Who will ask for consent? Where, and under what circumstances?
The co-investigator, Peter Ciceri, will present and review the consent form during the pre-group session interview with the individual participants for their review and consideration.

33. How long will the subject have to decide whether or not to participate? If this will be less than twenty-four hours, provide an explanation.
They will have one week to decide. Given the nature of the focus and the minimal risk, one week is expected to be sufficient time.

34. Will every subject be competent to give fully informed consent on his/her own behalf? (see Guidance Note #34)   ☒ Yes   ☐ No
If Yes, skip to box 37. If No, provide details of the nature of the incompetence (for instance, young age, mental incapacity). Note: the age of majority in British Columbia is 19 years. See guidance notes 2 and 34.1 if subjects under 19 years of age are to be included in the study.

35. If a subject is not competent to give fully informed consent, who will consent on his/her behalf?

36. If a subject is not competent to give fully informed consent, will he/she be able to give assent to participate?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No
Explain how assent will be sought. (See Guidance Note #36).

37. Describe any situation in this research in which the renewal of consent might be appropriate, and how this would take place. (See Guidance Note #37)
Renewal of consent will not be necessary.

38. What provisions are planned for subjects, or those consenting on a subject's behalf, to have special assistance, if needed, during the consent process (e.g., consent forms in Braille, or in languages other than English)?
Not applicable. All participants are fully functioning adult males, with fluency in English.

39a. Advertisements and posters

.The following checklist includes the minimum amount of information that should be included in recruitment advertisements or posters.

☐ Institutional letterhead (UBC department or hospital) or a facsimile.

☐ The title of the project.

☐ The Identity of the Principal Investigator and the co-investigators and the name and telephone number of a contact person.

☐ If the project is research for a graduate thesis, a statement indicating this.

☐ A brief description of the recruitment criteria and the research procedures.

☐ A statement of the total amount of time for participating in the research required of a subject.

☐ Details of payment for expenses and/or any other remuneration to be offered to the subjects (if any).

☐ A version date in a footnote at the bottom of each page.

39b. Consent for Questionnaires (Completed by Subjects)

Questionnaires must include a covering letter, which includes the following information. Please check off items in the following list to show that these items have been incorporated into the letter.

☐ Institutional letterhead (UBC department or hospital) or a facsimile.

☐ The title of the project.

☐ The Identity of the Principal Investigator and the co-investigators, and the name and telephone number of a contact person.

☐ An explanation of who is funding or sponsoring the study (if applicable).

☐ If the project is research for a graduate thesis, a statement indicating this.

☐ Second-person pronouns (you/your child), when referring to subjects. Be consistent throughout all consent forms.

☐ A clear explanation of why the subject has been invited to participate in the study.

☐ An offer to answer any inquiries concerning the procedures, to ensure that they are fully understood by the subject.

☐ A brief but complete description in lay language of the purpose of the study and of all research procedures.

☐ A statement of the total amount of time for participating in the research required of a subject.

☐ A statement of all known risks, (for example: psychological, cultural, privacy, confidentiality), and a description of the procedures in place to minimize risks or to provide counseling or referral for those in distress.

☐ Assurance that the identity of the subject will be protected and a description of how this will be accomplished.

☐ Assurance that the information collected (identifiable data) will be kept confidential, an explanation of how this will be done, and a statement of who will have access to the data.

☐ Details of payment for expenses and/or any other remuneration to be offered to the subjects (if any).

☐ An unambiguous statement that the subject may decline to enter, or withdraw from, the study at any time without any consequences to treatment, medical care, or class standing. For research done in the schools, indicate what happens to children whose parents do not consent. The procedure may be part of classroom work but the collection of data may be purely for research.

☐ A statement that if the subject has any concerns about his/her treatment or rights as a research subject, he/she may telephone the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at 604-822-8598.

☐ A statement that if the questionnaire is completed it will be assumed that consent has been given.

☐ Page numbers ("page 1 of 3," "page 2 of 3," etc.).

☐ A version number in a footnote at the bottom of each page.

39c Consent Forms

UBC BREB policy requires written consent in all cases, with the exception of surveys involving random digit dialling, questionnaires that are completed by the subject, or where oral consent can be justified (See guidance note 19.4). All of the following information must be included in the consent form and not fragmented into information sheets. Please check off items in the following list to show that these items have been incorporated into all consent forms

☒ Institutional letterhead (UBC department or hospital) or a facsimile.

☒ The title of the project.

☒ The Identity of the Principal Investigator and the co-investigators, and the name and telephone number of a contact person.

☒ An explanation of who is funding or sponsoring the study (if applicable).

☒ If the project is research for a graduate thesis, a statement to this effect must be included and must also clearly indicate whether it is part of a thesis (public document) or graduating essay (semi-public document).

☒ Second-person pronouns (you/your child), when referring to subjects. Be consistent throughout all consent forms.

☒ A clear explanation of why the subject has been invited to participate in the study.

☒ An offer to answer any inquiries concerning the procedures, to ensure that they are fully understood by the subject.

☒ A brief but complete description in lay language of the purpose of the study and of all research procedures.

☒ A statement of the total amount of time for participating in the research required of a subject.

☒ A statement of all known risks, (for example: psychological, cultural, privacy, confidentiality), and a description of the procedures in place to minimize risks or to provide counseling or referral for those in distress.

☐ If the study involves behavioural therapy, include a statement describing what alternatives to participating in the research project are available to the subject (i.e., what other treatment options are available outside of the study).

☒ Assurance that the identity of the subject will be protected and a description of how this will be accomplished.

☒ Assurance that the information collected (identifiable data) will be kept confidential, an explanation of how this will be done, and a statement of who will have access to the data. Do not say that the information will be kept confidential, since it will be published.

☒ Details of payment for expenses and/or any other remuneration to be offered to the subjects (if any).

☒ A statement of any actual or potential conflict of interest on the part of the researchers or sponsor.

☒ An unambiguous statement that the subject may decline to enter, or withdraw from, the study at any time without any consequences to treatment, medical care, or class standing. (See Guidance Note #39) For research done in the schools, indicate what happens to children whose parents do not consent. The procedure may be part of classroom work but the collection of data may be purely for research.

☒ A statement that if the subject has any concerns about his/her treatment or rights as a research subject, he/she may telephone the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at 604-822-8598.

☒ A statement acknowledging receipt of a copy of the consent form, including all attachments.

☒ A statement that the subject is consenting to participate (by signing).

☒ The signature and printed name of the subject consenting to participate in the research project, investigation, or study, the date of the signature.

☒ Parental consent forms sent home from school must contain a statement of choice providing an option for refusal to participate, e.g. 'I consent/ I do not consent to my child's participation in this study.' (See Guidance Note #39)

☒ Page numbers ("page 1 of 3," "page 2 of 3," etc.).

☒ A version date in a footnote at the bottom of each page.

Potential Conflict of Interest

40. Describe any restrictions regarding the disclosure of information to research subjects (during or at the end of the study) that the sponsor has placed on investigators, including those related to the publication of results. (See Guidance Note #40)

Not applicable

41. Describe any personal benefits that the investigators and/or their partners/immediate family members will receive, connected to this research study. Include details of all fees and/or honoraria directly related to this study, such as those for subject recruitment, advice on study design, presentation of results, or conference expenses.

The principal investigator and co-investigator will receive no benefit from this study.

The only benefit is to complete the research that will potentially help others through the transition of job loss so that the experience of renewed self-esteem and its indentification in this research, will help other persons through the transition.

42. Describe any current or recent (within the last two years) consultancy or other contractual agreements with the sponsor held by the investigators. (Include amounts.)

NA

43. Give details, if any of the investigators and/or their partners/immediate family members has direct financial involvement with the sponsor via ownership of stock, stock options, or membership on a Board.

NA

44. Give details, if any of the investigators and/or their partners/immediate family members holds patent rights or intellectual property rights linked in any way to this study or its sponsor.

NA

45. Use this space to provide information, which you feel, will be helpful to the review committee, or to continue any item for which sufficient space was not available.

Narrative Methodology will be used for this research study. The narrative methodology is well suited for the proposed research because the "constructivist approaches focus on subjective meanings of work and careers" (Cochran, 1997; cited in Kidd, 2003). The advantage of narrative research is that it allows us to enter the world of the participants, through their voices, to see how they have constructed the meaning around the loss of their job and the narrative approach also allows us to see how, and to what extent, they have re-constructed their sense of meaning and self-esteem. These narratives, and the group discussion will provide a rich analysis of the data by the participants themselves. As the researcher, I will look for themes related to the internal rebuilding of self-esteem on the journey from loss to renewed meaning and self-esteem. To my knowledge, this narrative approach has not been done before with this subject group.

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Letter of Initial Contact

From: Peter Ciceri, MA (Candidate)

                  Dr. Norman Amundson

To: Research Participant

Date: July 16, 2006

Participant: Participation in the research study, "Understanding Emotional Loss and How Self-Esteem is Rebuilt by Stories of Business Leaders Who Have Suffered Involuntary Job Loss"

You are being asked to consider your participation in a UBC sponsored research study, "Understanding Emotional Loss and How Self-Esteem is Rebuilt by Stories of Business Leaders Who Have Suffered Involuntary Job Loss".

This research is being conducted as part of the completion of the Masters program in Counselling Psychology for Peter Ciceri and the results of the study will be included in his Masters thesis. Although the names of the participants will be confidential and not included in the study, the study itself will become a public document once completed.

For those who have experienced involuntary job loss, previous research supports the assertion that it is an emotionally challenging transition. The objective of this research study is to better understand this transition and in particular, uncover common themes through the process of rebuilding identity and self-esteem.

The purpose of the research is to provide further insights into the personal journey from job loss to renewed meaning, so that persons who have suffered this loss will be better able to understand and manage their own journey back to an even deeper sense of

CONFIDENTIALITY AND PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

This Agreement (this "**Agreement**") is made and entered between Peter Ciceri, (the "**Researcher**") and _____ (the "**Participant**").

WHEREAS:

Participant agrees to participate the research titled "**Understanding Emotional Loss and How Self-Esteem is Rebuilt by Stories of Business Leaders Who Have Experienced Involuntary Job Loss** (the "**Research**")

Participant wishes and agrees to disclose to Peter Ciceri and other participants in the Discussions certain personal and confidential information for the purpose of the Discussions on the terms and subject to the conditions described in this Agreement.

The parties agree as follows:

1.   In this Agreement, "**Confidential Information**" means all confidential and private personal information disclosed by Participant, including material notes created. Confidential Information does not include information that, without restriction on its use, was, is or becomes generally available to and known by the public, e.g. the published thesis; and/or is not reasonably directly attributable to the Participant or specifically identifiable with the Participant – i.e. the confidentiality and anonymity of the participant is protected.

        In this Agreement, "**Representatives**" means the thesis committee members and/or UBC affiliates and advisors of Peter Ciceri.

2.   Peter Ciceri agrees that it will hold all Confidential Information of the Participant in confidence, and will not disclose same to any third party, except as permitted in this Agreement, and will limit disclosure of Confidential Information only to those of its Representatives who will be, and who need to be, directly involved with the Research and Discussions and who have agreed to be bound by the confidentiality terms of this Agreement.

3.   Participant agrees to hold all the confidential and private personal information disclosed by other participants in the Discussions in confidence and not to disclose such information any third party.

4.   Participant agrees that Peter Ciceri shall not be liable in any manner for disclosure of Participant's Confidential Information by other participants.

5.   In the event that Peter Ciceri is requested pursuant to, or required by, applicable law, regulation or legal process to disclose any of the Confidential Information, Peter Ciceri will notify Participant so that the Participant may seek a protective order or other appropriate remedy or, in its sole discretion, waive compliance with the terms of this Agreement. In the event that no such protective order or other remedy is obtained, or that the Participant waives compliance with the terms of this Agreement, Peter Ciceri will furnish only that portion of the Confidential Information which it is legally required to disclose and will exercise all reasonable efforts to obtain reliable assurance that confidential treatment will be accorded the Confidential Information.

6.   Neither party may transfer or otherwise assign its rights, duties or obligations under this Agreement to any other person or entity, in whole or in part, without the prior written consent of the other party. Any such prohibited assignment shall be void.

7.   The validity, terms, performance and enforcement of this Agreement shall be governed and construed in accordance with the laws of the Province of British Columbia.

8.   The signatories hereto warrant and represent that they are duly authorized to bind _____ and Peter Ciceri, respectively, and to execute this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have entered into this Agreement as of the date of Participant's signature below.

Peter Ciceri

_____
Participant's Printed Name

By: _____   By: _____
     Authorized Signatory   Signature

_____
Address:

_____
Address:

_____
Date: