A CRITICAL INCIDENT STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS' OUTPLACEMENT COUNSELLING EXPERIENCES

by

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ABSTRACT

Outplacement consulting (OPC) is a multi-million dollar business about which little is known with respect to its effectiveness and whether it is meeting the needs of either its corporate or individual clients. This study attempted to shed light on whether the services currently being offered by OPC firms are meeting the needs of individual clients by using Flanagan's (1954) critical incident analysis methodology. Fifteen individuals who had received OPC services within the last five years were asked open-ended questions during in-person interviews to find out what services were helpful and not helpful, and whether there were services they would like to have received but did not (wish list items). The interviews produced 712 critical incidents and wish list items that were then placed into 16 categories: (1) OPC representative activities/actions; (2) job search skills training; (3) assessments; (4) OPC program elements and design; (5) reference materials; (6) OPC representative traits and characteristics; (7) access to offices, supplies and equipment; (8) secretarial/administrative services; (9) relationship with OPC representative; (10) OPC office environment and location; (11) tailored/flexible services; (12) more structured/hands-on services; (13) counselling skills/services; (14) group work; (15) closure/follow-up at the end of OPC; and (16) technical skills assessment and upgrading. A variety of methods were utilized to validate the categories, including participants' cross-checking, independent rater, exhaustiveness, expert opinions, participation rate, and theoretical agreement. Two major results of this study are its support of Wooten's (1996) research and the apparent gap that emerged between current
OPC services that are being delivered and the services individual clients would find helpful. This latter result was evidenced by the six new categories that emerged from the wish list items: (a) a desire for more tailored, flexible services; (b) a greater focus on providing counselling services; (c) a need for more structured, hands-on services; (d) more group work; (e) some formal closure or follow-up at the end of the OPC program; and (f) technical skills assessment and upgrading. Implications for OPC clients (both corporate and individual), practitioners, and future research are discussed against the backdrop of OPC’s historical and operating contexts.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The increased use of outplacement counselling (OPC) in the last decade has been driven largely by corporate downsizing and restructuring, resulting in massive layoffs of people from all organizational levels. As defined by Mirabile (1985), outplacement is "a process that enables management to deal with the sensitive and often traumatic problem of the employee who must be released or the staff that must be reduced" (p. 40). OPC is a multi-faceted service, providing assistance to the employer in planning and carrying out the termination, and to the terminated employee in sorting out current circumstances and future options. Outplacement is designed to minimize costly disruptions within the organization by facilitating a smooth transition process, reducing lawsuits and grievances, increasing the morale of remaining employees, and maintaining the organization's public image as a caring employer. It is also intended to aid the displaced individual in rebuilding a sense of self-worth, re-establishing a relevant career path, and locating challenging employment that fits both the individual and the company (Burdett, 1988; Mirabile, 1985; Wooten, 1996).

OPC services for displaced individuals vary widely, but typically include career planning, resume writing, interview training, assessment, transferable skills identification, values exploration, marketing training, networking, and image development (Kirk, 1994; Wooten, 1996; Zunker, 1994). In addition to these task-related consulting services, some OPC firms also offer counselling services. This is an important distinction, although one not often found in the literature.
Counselling affords a displaced worker the opportunity to express and explore feelings and put them into perspective, helping the individual get in touch with and understand the strong emotions he or she is experiencing as a result of involuntary job loss. In contrast, consulting focuses on collaborating with the displaced worker to develop both a career management strategy and the tactics necessary to carry out this strategy. Ideally, the outplacement specialist generally moves into the consulting role once the displaced worker has come to terms with the new reality and dealt with the emotions arising from unexpected unemployment (Burdett, 1988).

Estimates on the use of OPC services vary, but one study suggests it has grown into a $750 million industry that counsels approximately 1.5 million individuals per year in the United States (Pickman, 1994). More recent U.S. information could not be found, nor could comparable statistics for Canada.

As a human resources manager in a Vancouver-based mid-sized energy company, my interest in OPC began in 1995 when faced with the need to terminate an employee. After securing the services of an outplacement firm, an OPC consultant assisted me in planning and preparing for the termination. Moments after the termination meeting, the OPC consultant turned her attention to the ex-employee, presumably helping her work through the trauma of job loss and teaching her how to conduct an effective job search. The emotional impact of having to terminate an employee was significant, but I found great comfort in knowing that the individual was going to receive help. Relieved it was over, and
appreciative of the OPC consultant’s assistance, I did not delve any further into the OPC firm’s effectiveness.

In 1996, the same energy company announced a 25 percent reduction in its workforce as a result of restructuring. My job was one of those declared redundant, and I found myself as a newly displaced worker being introduced to an OPC consultant. It was a difficult experience emotionally, but an interesting one professionally and academically. It gave me first-hand experience receiving OPC services, and afforded me the opportunity to discuss the experience with others who were terminated at the same time. My own experiences, and anecdotal information from others, suggested that OPC might not be as effective as organizations would like to believe. This raised specific questions about the OPC services offered, accountability, checks and balances, definitions of success, and value for fees paid that did not appear to have adequate answers.

Bridges (1994) makes a compelling argument that constant change and ongoing upheavals in the workplace define the current and future reality of work. He believes that all jobs are temporary because permanent jobs are luxuries businesses can no longer afford and still remain competitive. Moreover, he believes employment security is a thing of the past due to the fast pace of change. Workers may therefore face redundancy when the work they do is no longer required or they are unable to adapt to the changes sweeping through organizations. If Bridges’ view of the future of work is correct, we can reasonably expect an ongoing need for OPC services as organizations continue to layoff, downsize, restructure, reengineer, and “de-job.”
Bridges' (1994) view is supported by Axmith (1997) who suggests that "the passwords for corporate survival will be change, flexibility, mobility, and speed" (p. 232). This translates into a continual paring down of corporations to a core group of key people, increasing the use of contingency workers, and rapid turnover. These predictions appear to be confirmed by recent Canadian hiring, retention, and dismissal practices surveys that indicate OPC use rose between 1998 and 2000 from 85 percent to virtually all companies routinely using OPC firms when terminating employees for performance problems or because of downsizing (Lee Hecht Harrison, 1998; Murray Axmith, 2000). In addition, these surveys have found the trend is towards offering OPC services to defined-term employees and contractors as well as non-exempt staff. Hay Management Consultants in their 2000 Survey of Employee Benefits state that OPC use in Great Britain nearly doubled in the past 10 years from 36% of companies utilising these services in 1990 to 77% in 2000 (Anonymous, 2001). Business-related publications are anticipating an upcoming boom of OPC use in the United States due to the recent economic downturn (Gordon, 2001).

Similar statistics about OPC use in Canada could not be found, but local newspaper articles are appearing that suggest a rise in business for OPC firms (Lareau, 2001). Statistics Canada reported 14,000 jobs were eliminated in Canada during July, 2001, bringing the total number of jobs lost in Canada to 50,000 for the last quarter (Baxter, 2001). Dozens of local, national and international layoffs, downsizings and company closures have been reported in Vancouver area newspapers over the past several months. A few recent
examples affecting British Columbia workers include a Vancouver-based crown corporation cutting 800 employees (Sandler, 2001), a staff reduction of 195 employees in Victoria (Bellett, 2001), 1,000 forestry jobs being cut in the Interior of British Columbia, (Nuttall-Smith, 2001), and 4,000 jobs being slashed in the airline industry (Curren & McGovern, 2001). A number of Vancouver area outplacement consultants have stated in personal conversations with me that they are busier than ever and are not experiencing the seasonal lulls in business that occurred in past years.

In addition, management and human resource professionals quietly continue to deal with increasing numbers of individual terminations at all levels as people no longer fit with changing corporate cultures and expectations. As corporations restructure and downsize in order to remain competitive, more pressure is put on those people who remain within an organization to do more with less – less time and stability; fewer resources and people. Those who are not able to adjust to these new realities are usually replaced, but this activity is rarely made public except in cases involving high profile executives.

Statement of the Problem

The literature review revealed a paucity of research currently available on the subject of OPC services. A number of research questions therefore remain unanswered, particularly pertaining to whether present programs meet the needs of displaced workers, the effectiveness of services provided, accountability for services provided, client satisfaction, etc. This research study was designed to further our knowledge of whether present OPC programs meet the needs of their
individual clients (displaced workers) by asking these clients what OPC services they found helpful, what services hindered or were not helpful, and whether there were services they would like to have received but were not offered. Although Davenport (1984), Pickman (1994), and Wooten (1996), among others, suggest further research is needed on all aspects of OPC services from both the corporate and individual client's perspectives, no research other than Wooten's (1996) was found in the literature. From the individual client's perspective, since OPC services are often being provided at a time of high vulnerability and emotional shock or trauma, it is important to know whether the services being offered are helping or hindering those receiving them. From the hiring company's perspective, in light of the high fees they are paying and their usual interest in ensuring they receive value for fees paid, it is surprising that little or no research evaluates whether the hiring company's needs are being met by the OPC service providers. It is this researcher's hope that future investigators will ask some of these outstanding questions from both the individual clients' and the hiring companies' perspectives.

Definitions of Terms

As mentioned above, the term "client" for the purpose of this study is defined as the individual whose employment is terminated and receives OPC services to help her or him deal with the emotional impact of unexpected unemployment and learn the mechanics of an effective job search. Other required definitions include outplacement counselling and outplacement consulting. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2000) offers this definition
of a consultant: one who gives professional advice or services; expert. The same dictionary defines a counsellor as “a person who gives advice or counselling.” This definition is insufficient to make a meaningful distinction between consulting and counselling, which may explain why these terms are so often confused. For the purposes of this study, the definition of counselling found in Hackney and Cormier (1996) will be used that suggests, “Professional counseling involves an interpersonal relationship with someone who is actively seeking help with personal issues that interfere with or detract from a satisfactory life” (p. 2). The Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (2000) definition of a consultant will be used.
Overview of Outplacement Counselling Literature

In light of the tremendous growth and anticipated ongoing need for outplacement counselling (OPC) services, it is surprising that relatively little is known about it (Wooten, 1996). According to Wooten, Timmerman and Folger (1999), “virtually no published research is available relative to assessment processes and outplacement outcomes” (p. 85). In a review of social science literature from 1966 to the present, numerous OPC articles were found that break down into five major categories.

First, a number of articles discussed the criteria organizations should use for choosing an OPC firm (e.g., Branham, 1983; Friedman, 1995; Henriksen, 1982; McNerney, 1995; Newman, 1988; Simon, 1988; Stevens, 1996). Common criteria include OPC staff professional qualifications, how individualized the service is, the way in which the individual client is helped to develop job-search campaign skills, how much time is devoted to developing a high-quality resume, facilities and support materials available to the client, and client references from other organizations who have used the OPC firm’s services.

Second, many articles defined and described OPC services (e.g., Henriksen, 1982; McNerney, 1995; Miller, 1987; Mirabile, 1985; Pickman, 1994; Pope, 2000; Scherba, 1978; Simon, 1988). For example, Pickman describes a comprehensive outplacement program as one that offers counselling to help the individual deal with the emotional issues related to termination, provides career assessment, gives assistance in developing written job search materials (e.g.,
resume, cover letters, and other marketing materials), provides interview skills training, networking training, coaching on the use of executive search firms, and help developing a marketing strategy. Comprehensive programs also provide office and administrative support services for use by the individual client.

Third, there are articles that outline new OPC models and services (e.g., Aquilanti & Leroux, 1999; Duffy, O'Brien, Brittain & Cuthrell, 1988; Freeman & Haring-Midore, 1988; Kirk, 1994; McKnight, 1991; Meyer & Shadle, 1994; Neinas, 1987). Kirk's Holistic Outplacement Model (HOM) consists of three functional elements: (1) regaining equilibrium (dealing with the emotional trauma of unexpected job loss, learning how to live with little or no money coming in, dealing with self-esteem issues, and handling stress); (2) career development (self-assessment, career exploration, decision making, taking action); and (3) job hunting (networking, influencing, negotiating). Aquilanti and Leroux's model consists of four phases: (1) loss, grieving, and transition (dealing with the initial transition and emotional trauma of job loss); (2) personal development (which includes assessment, identifying work values, dealing with personal stress, and financial planning); (3) job search (informational interviews, resume preparation, networking, and interview skills); and the most critical phase, (4) ongoing counselling and support (providing unwavering support and encouragement to the individual client throughout the many high and low points inherent in a job search).

The fourth category consists of case studies about organizations that have used OPC services when downsizing (e.g., Feldman & Leana, 1994; Havlovic,
Bouthillette, & van der Wal, 1998; Wagel, 1988). Havlovic et al. contrasted the Shaughnessy Hospital closure, which used OPC services, with the UBC Health Sciences Hospital, a control site that did not use OPC services. The use of OPC services was cited as helping in the advance planning and coordination. It was also considered helpful in reducing the trauma of closure and ensuring a smooth job transition or relocation. Feldman and Leana provided eight case studies of corporations who used OPC services, suggesting that these cases represent best practices in managing layoffs. The policies and practices cited in this study include early notification of layoffs, provisions for severance pay and extended benefits, education and retraining for displaced workers, outplacement assistance, clear and direct communication of layoff information, and support services for employees who remain with the organization. Outplacement is positioned as one of many components in a well-handled downsizing initiative. In a similar vein, Wagel describes General Electric Company's comprehensive efforts to retrain and assist displaced employees. OPC services formed one component of a much larger program aimed at minimizing the impact of major downsizing at several GE plants.

The fifth major category includes articles that list the benefits organizations reap by utilizing OPC services (e.g., Abrell, 1985; Dawson & Dawson, 1994; Driessnack, 1980; Logan, 1991; Meyers & Abrahamson, 1975; Mirabile, 1985; Morton, 1983; Newman, 1988). Dawson and Dawson cite the following benefits organizations gain by using an OPC firm: minimizing hostile reactions and negative emotions; demonstrating the professionalism of all
involved in arranging the termination; providing immediate support for the
terminated employee, which decreases the likelihood of wrongful dismissal
lawsuits; coaching and support for the manager who delivers the termination
message; and minimizing legal complications. Mirabile states that outplacement
is designed to minimize costly disruptions within the organization by “facilitating a
smooth transition process” (p. 40). Abrell credits outplacement services with
improving the morale of those employees who remain behind, saving litigation
expenses, and reducing stress levels for everyone.

In virtually all these articles, the authors make the assumption that OPC
services are effective and actually deliver the benefits marketed to both their
corporate and individual clients. As evidenced by the articles just cited, using
OPC services is considered a best practice among most organizations today and
is often considered part of responsible workforce reduction planning. However,
little evidence is offered in support of OPC's effectiveness. Only four articles
were found that attempted to address the issue of evaluating OPC effectiveness.
Of these four, two deal with the question in a unidimensional manner. Davenport
(1984) states that the criterion used to evaluate the effectiveness of
outplacement activities “is the percentage of terminees who find new
employment within a specified time” (p. 186). Foxman and Polsky (1990)
suggest the definition of success for any career consultant is “seeing a client
move through an effective job search, find the job or opportunity he or she wants
and take the skills learned in the job search process to the new job to better
manage his or her career” (p. 30).
These criteria appear to be problematic for a number of reasons. First, there is an inherent conflict of interest between the goals of the organization that hired the OPC firm and the needs of the individual receiving the OPC services. As Burdett (1988) points out, on a prima facie basis, the hiring organization is best served when the individual gets a new job quickly because it lowers the OPC fees they are required to pay. On the other hand, the individual is often best served by taking a long-term view and waiting for the right new job, not just any job. Second, the OPC firm actually has two clients: the organization that hires them, and the displaced worker. The definitions of success in these two articles deal only with the displaced worker and do not address the criteria for evaluating success as it pertains to the hiring organization. Third, the literature has not established a relationship between the speed of acquiring a new job and individual client satisfaction with the OPC services received. Indeed, Davenport (1984) states:

- time pressures dictate that outplacement services produce results, that is, new employment, quickly. This attitude, coupled with the terminee’s wish to put the termination in the past, encourages abbreviated attention to grief issues, exploration, and preventive behavioral changes and focuses instead on task-oriented matters -- resume writing, interviewing skills, contacts with employers, and so forth. Research is needed to determine whether present programs meet the needs of outplaced workers. (p. 189)
It appears an assumption is being made that fast reemployment leads to client satisfaction. And finally, these definitions do not address the satisfaction of the displaced worker in the new job, long-range performance in that job, or worker adjustment (Davenport, 1984).

**Luciano's Study**

A third study that initially appeared to deal with OPC client satisfaction (Luciano, 1997) in fact had a different purpose. This dissertation attempted to relate individual scores on the Big-Five Personality Traits with OPC satisfaction, however no relationship was found. In fact, the focus was more on predictors of reemployment than on OPC satisfaction itself, finding that both age and gender are significant predictors. As a matter of interest, OPC satisfaction was defined in this study as how valuable (using a scale ranging from least to most) the participant found each of eleven OPC services. These services were: meeting with a consultant, word processing support, support or focus groups, research books and materials, computerized databases, job posting, job lead bank/databases, personal computers, office equipment (e.g., fax, copier), job search manual, and career centre. By using these categories for determining satisfaction with OPC services, the study shares many of the problems discussed below in relation to Wooten's (1996) study.

**Wooten's Study**

The fourth article (Wooten, 1996) was the only one found that attempts to predict client satisfaction in executive outplacement and examine the implications for service delivery. Wooten picks up on questions raised by Pickman (1994)
and explores the relationship between service components of OPC and client satisfaction. He defines the client in his study as “an employee whose job was terminated and who was looking for a job” (p. 108). The service components he examined in an 11-item pencil and paper inventory include the following: consultant relationship, clarity of expectations, job search training, job search preparation, positive focus, offices, library materials, office equipment, computer software, administrative support, and client satisfaction. The sample of 68 clients was 91 percent male and 9 percent female, all of them executives, receiving services from the same national OPC firm in 23 cities in the US. His results indicate that outplacement content components (job search training, preparation) and process components (consultant relationship, clarity of expectation, assistance in maintaining focus) were better predictors of client satisfaction when compared with contextual components (library, software, administrative support).

A number of important factors appear to be missing from this study. First, Wooten (1996) does not define key concepts such as “client satisfaction” and “the relationship” between the displaced worker and the consultant. Nor does he list the specific elements that make up the higher-level categories. For instance, one item on the inventory was “training on primary job search techniques,” but this was not broken down into its constituent parts (presumably resume preparation, responding to advertisements, tapping into the hidden job market, networking, interview skills, etc.). Second, he focused solely on the displaced workers’ experience and did not explore the extent to which the OPC firms satisfied the hiring organization’s expectations. Third, the sample was comprised
mostly of male executives so the OPC experience of women and non-executives was not fully examined. Fourth, the variables measured by Wooten were based on the services OPC firms provide; these do not necessarily reflect the expectations or needs of their individual clients. Fifth, Wooten does not make clear whether the services rendered by the OPC firms included counselling, consulting, or a combination of both. Much of the literature on the dynamics of unemployment focuses on the “emotional rollercoaster” (Borgen & Amundson, 1987) experienced by displaced workers. It also offers various career counselling models (Borgen, 1997; Davies, 1996; Kirk, 1994; McKnight, 1991), all of which stress the importance of counselling services to assist the displaced worker in dealing with the psychological trauma of unexpected job loss. This distinction could be characterized in terms of the balance between task (the “hard” job search skills taught by OPC consultants) and process (the “soft” relationship and support aspects offered by counselling) written about by Borgen (1999) and Amundson and Borgen (1988). Since this is an important aspect of OPC services, the balance of counselling vs. consulting services that clients received might have influenced their levels of satisfaction.

Finally, in recent years a number of counselling models have been proposed that recognize the importance of understanding the problem from the client’s point of view (Amundson, 1994; Amundson, 1996; Egan, 1998), helping clients learn and utilize decision-making strategies (Amundson, 1996; Bezanson, DeCoff, & Stewart, 1996), and the effectiveness of group counselling (Borgen, Pollard, Amundson, & Westwood, 1989; Davies, 1996; McKnight, 1991). Yet
Wooten (1996) does not address these important aspects of career counselling so the extent to which they are offered by OPC firms, and the level of client satisfaction with these services if they are offered, remains unclear.

Overview of Career Counselling Literature

Since OPC is a specialized form of career counselling, a review of the career counselling literature was undertaken in order to understand the current research and best practices being generated in this area. This provides context and a backdrop for the OPC service components to be discussed in upcoming chapters. Because the literature on career counselling is extensive, only an overview will be provided here of the themes that emerged in the contemporary research.

Much of the career counselling literature focuses on the new turbulence in organizational environments and the resulting insecurity being faced by many workers. Given the organizational instability experienced by these individuals and the resultant impact it has on their careers, Krumboltz (1998) suggests it is time for counsellors to review their actions and modify them according to the needs of an increasingly diverse and complex workforce. According to Krumboltz, and supported by Axmith (1997), a new career is emerging that is characterized as being fragmented, seeing more self-employment, demanding lifelong learning, moving laterally from one occupation to another, increasing the frequency of occupational shifts, and having to deal with more uncertainty than ever when planning for the future. Krumboltz offers six recommendations for career counsellors to be successful in dealing with clients struggling with this new
career environment: (1) the goal of career counselling should be to help people create satisfying lives for themselves; (2) counsellors should advocate the wisdom of open-mindedness, not decisiveness; (3) career counsellors should assume a broad role in dealing with client concerns; (4) unplanned events should be seen as an inevitable and desirable aspect in everyone's career; (5) career counsellors should teach clients to create potentially beneficial chance events; and (6) increased learning and life satisfaction should become the outcome measures of career counselling success. Others offer different counselling strategies (e.g., Gelatt, 1995; Holm & Hovland, 1999), but all are aimed at assisting unemployed or displaced workers to deal with ambiguity and the unstable, constantly changing environment they are now facing.

Arising from the increased organizational turbulence is the emergence of new career development and managerial career patterns (Grzeda, 1999; Lucas, 1999). Grzeda emphasizes that the new employer-employee relationship, one of employability instead of employment, also arises from these changes and contributes to the ongoing sense of instability experienced by many contemporary workers. He discusses the advent of career change as a feature of management careers and explores a series of propositions that he offers as the start of a new research agenda.

Another theme emerging from the career counselling literature is the increased overlap between career/vocational counselling and counselling for non-career personal concerns (Anderson & Niles, 1995; Chamberlain, 1997; Zunker, 1994). These writers stress the importance of taking into account the
whole person and that given the opportunity, people seeking career counselling often have issues of a personal nature. Often these personal issues affect clients to such an extent that they require attention before they are able to move on to deal successfully with career issues. This is further supported by Niles (1996) who found that supportive career counselling occurs within a framework that encompasses three types of support, one of which is emotional support.

Given the new employability relationship between employer and employee, the concepts of career resilience (Brown, 1996; Griffith, 1998; Waterman, Waterman, & Collard, 1994), career self-reliance (Brown), and career self-management (King, 2001) are being discussed in the literature. Career resilience is variously defined as a group of employees “who are not only dedicated to the idea of continuous learning but also stand ready to reinvent themselves to keep pace with change; who take responsibility for their own career management; and . . . who are committed to the company’s success” (Waterman et al., p. 88); as individual career development (Brown); and as a relationship in which the employer and the employee share responsibility for maintaining the individual’s employability inside and outside the company (Griffith). Brown defines career self-reliance as individual career self-management, and King describes career self-management as “deployment by an individual of behavioral strategies intended to exert a controlling influence over his or her career outcomes” (p. 3). What these concepts have in common are assumptions of ongoing organizational change, an active change in behaviour, and a shift of responsibility from the employer to the employee for planning out a
person's career and taking the necessary steps to ensure the plan is carried out. Grzeda (1999) has taken these ideas and expanded them to suggest a new construct called career motivation, which he describes as "an individual-level construct consisting of three dimensions: (a) career resilience, the ability to overcome career setbacks; (b) career insight, the extent to which the individual has realistic career perceptions; and (c) career identity, factors reflecting career decisions and behaviours" (p. 235).

The ambiguity, uncertainty, and chaos acknowledged by career researchers and practitioners appear to have fuelled the need for structure in the career counselling process. Borgen (1997) writes about how providing a structure in career counselling allows people to assess their needs. Stevens (1999) suggests career counsellors need a structured process to help their clients navigate through the circuitous career-planning and job search journey. Brown (1996), Hiebert (1993), McWhirter (1994), and Rudd and Strong (1997) discuss the importance of career counsellors providing hands-on services through a more active and engaged partnership between counsellor and client.

There seems to be a call to action in the literature to take a more holistic approach with respect to career counselling. Chamberlain (1996) wrote about the importance of counselling the whole person through exploration and discovery of each individual's context of concerns and the "personal meaning of work in their lives" (p. 36). Drevets (1989) emphasized the importance of addressing the needs of the client's whole self: spiritual, cultural, intellectual, moral, physical, social and economic. Wojcicki and Kaufman (1990) suggest that
vocational schools take a holistic counselling approach when retraining adult workers.

The importance of the counsellor/client relationship also emerged as a theme in the literature. Borgen (1997) discussed setting the tone and building the relationship between client and counsellor when dealing with clients who are faced with changing career opportunities. Egan (1998) stressed the importance of establishing the relationship in all counselling situations and looking at the situation from the client's perspective. Waterman et al. (1994) stressed the importance of adding a human dimension to counselling and the critical role career counsellors play by helping clients effectively use the information they obtain and thus stay engaged in the job search process. This sentiment is echoed by Zunker (1994).

Another area that emerged from the career counselling literature is the role of assessment or appraisal (Niles, 1996). Lucas (1999) described the displaced adults receiving career guidance at a counselling centre who requested clarity regarding interest and talents. This was accomplished through use of assessment tools. Mastie (1996) described the role competency testing plays in career counselling, moving the use of assessments out of the traditional interests and aptitudes arena to measuring level of ability. Niles and Anderson (1993) discussed the use of the Occupational Stress Inventory and the Adult Career Concerns Inventory in the career counselling of adults. They found the use of these assessment tools provided tentative insight into the relationship between occupational stress, strain, and coping and career counselling.
A number of writers looked at career counselling from a postmodern perspective (e.g., Anderson & Levin, 1998; Richardson, 1994; Savickas, 1994; Tinsley, 1994). These researchers share an approach to vocational psychology that defines work as a social activity of everyday life, uses multiple realities constructed by perspective, and legitimizes knowledge by its usefulness in practice. They also suggest vocational psychology incorporate two mandates from postmodernism: “decenter from self to context, and emphasize practical intelligence for the everyday activities of ordinary life” (Savickas, p. 105).

Cottone (1991) asks counsellors to take a systemic, nonlinear view of career counselling that focuses on the postmodern ideas that therapeutic change occurs through social relationship and “reality” is a social construction.

Another theme in the career counselling literature is the enhanced need for information to be provided as part of career counselling. For example, Niles (1996) suggests that career counsellors should offer their clients informational support. Miles (1980) discusses the importance of providing information about education and jobs; Aquilanti and Leroux (1999) and Lucas (1999) stress the importance of the counsellor’s role in helping the client gather information, make plans and decisions, and explore their options. Wojcicki and Kaufman (1990), Friedman (1995), and Brown (1996) highlight the importance of counsellors keeping current on cutting-edge industry information, acting to pull personal and vocational information together to help the client make informed, relevant decisions about their career options based on that information.
New ideas about the role of job training were noted in the career counselling literature. These include moving vocational training in-house within companies and redefining training from a cost to an investment, turning interest into capital (Pont, 1995). Some have articulated a new model of job training for economic rebirth (Rudd & Strong, 1997). Others offered ideas about empowering youth with critical social, emotional and cognitive skills (Thompson, 1998) and the need for new job-search competencies (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999) as the economic landscape continues to change. In addition, the literature suggests programs aimed at helping displaced workers and unemployed individuals with job search skills that are consistent with employers' interests are being designed and implemented (Barham & Hoffbrand, 1998; Wojcicki & Kaufman, 1990).

There are two final areas on which current career counselling literature appears to be focusing. First, there seems to be renewed interest on issues around adult career changers due to the increased number of people experiencing mid-career job disruptions arising from layoffs, downsizing, and redundancy resulting from mergers and acquisitions (Lucas, 1999; Mastie, 1996; Wojcicki & Kaufman, 1990). Finally, many of the articles assess the effectiveness of specific career counselling programs (Borgen, 1999; Davies, 1996; Food and Beverage Workers Union, 1992; LaFleur, 1990; Smith, 1998). It is from these articles that career counselling best practices appear to be emerging.
Summary of the Literature

In a summary review of job loss and unemployment research from 1994 to 1998 (Hanisch, 1999), research on OPC (and its effectiveness) was conspicuous by its absence. One might have expected to see it mentioned in research on job loss interventions, but although the study reviewed research on stress management, disclosive writing, job clubs, and JOBS interventions, OPC was not included as an intervention.

In summary, the literature review highlighted that while current career counselling research is rich with new theories, emerging best practices, and evaluations of the effectiveness of specific career counselling programs, little is known about the effectiveness of OPC services with virtually no research having been conducted on this aspect of OPC before or since Wooten’s (1996) study. As mentioned earlier, this research study was designed to address this gap. It asks whether present OPC programs are meeting the needs of their individual clients by asking these clients what OPC services they found helpful, what services hindered or were not helpful, and whether there were services they would like to have received but were not offered. It was hoped the results of this study would build on and perhaps expand Wooten’s findings.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In contrast to Wooten's (1996) method, the current study took a qualitative open-ended interview and critical incident technique approach. This was therefore an exploratory, inductive, descriptive, and applied study since it attempted to address an existing practical situation (which does not arise from a well-formulated theory) and shed light on it so that potential options and improvements to outplacement consulting (OPC) services might be discussed. This research method has several advantages. First, open-ended interviews provide an excellent vehicle for participants to tell their OPC stories, in their own words, making their voices heard for the first time on this topic (Cozby, 1997; Palys, 1997). From anecdotal information and informal discussions with individuals who had received OPC services, there appeared to be a pent-up desire to share their experiences and be heard in the hope that things might change in the future. It was therefore important to design this study so their voices could be heard. Second, given the purpose of this study, the critical incident technique appeared to be a good fit because it has been shown to be an effective method of educing helping and hindering factors (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986).

Critical Incident Technique

The critical incident technique "is designed to generate descriptive and qualitative data of an experience that is still mostly uncharted in the literature"
Alfonso (1997, p. 49). Flanagan (1954) suggested that the critical incident technique “assists in collecting representative samples of data that are directly relevant to important problems such as establishing standards, determining requirements, or evaluating results” (p. 355). Given that few, if any, standards for providing OPC services exist and little research has been conducted on whether present OPC programs meet the needs of terminated workers, the critical incident technique was thought to be effective in shedding light on both aspects of this service.

Although Flanagan developed the critical incident technique from studies in the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Army Air Forces in World War II, a number of researchers have since demonstrated that it is an effective approach for a multitude of studies in a variety of fields. Andersson and Nilsson (1964) employed the critical incident technique in analysing the job of store managers in a Swedish grocery company, suggesting that “it would appear justifiable to conclude that information collected by this method is both reliable and valid” (p. 402). As cited in Alfonso (1997), other studies using this technique have covered such topics as work motivation, group process, the experience of unemployment, the decision-making process after divorce, and the facilitation of healing for the First Nations People of British Columbia.

Given that little is known about whether current OPC interventions are meeting the needs of individual clients, this combination of free-expression that invited individuals to share their OPC experiences and give voice to services they would like to have received but did not (through the open-ended interview),
combined with a more structured consideration of the OPC components that were seen as helpful or not helpful (through the critical incident format), offered the best method for furthering our understanding about the OPC services currently being offered from the individual client's perspective.

This study followed the five steps of a critical incident study (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986): (1) determine the aim of the activity to be studied; (2) set plans, specifications, and criteria for the information to be obtained; (3) collect data; (4) analyze the thematic content of the data; and (5) report the findings.

Sampling Procedure

A total of 15 (n=15) adult men and women from the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island who had received OPC services between 1997 and 2001 participated in this study. The primary inclusion criterion was that individuals must have received OPC services within the past five years. Since involuntary job loss is considered to be one of the most stressful life events that elicits strong emotions (Holmes & Rahe, 1967), it was reasonable to expect these individuals would still have clear recall of the event, and the support mechanisms available to them (such as OPC services). This expectation was supported by Woolsey's (1986) finding that many respondents have "clear and detailed recall of incidents" (p. 246), especially important ones, for several years after they occur.

The sampling procedure was non-probabilistic and purposive since the individuals in this study were included because of having received OPC services. Because the nature of this study was descriptive and exploratory (by virtue of
using the open-ended interview and critical incident methodologies), “sampling requirements are much less stringent than for traditional methods of research . . .

The major purpose of a critical incident study is to provide complete coverage of the content domain" (Woolsey, 1986, p. 245). Therefore the sampling procedure seemed appropriate to the purpose.

The participants were solicited through three avenues. First, I contacted 17 professional colleagues and academic contacts throughout Greater Vancouver by phone or in person and asked if they would be willing to send an introductory letter (Appendix A) to individuals they knew who had received OPC services within the last five years. Ten participants were found through this approach. Second, human resource executives in 11 medium to large Greater Vancouver organizations were approached and asked if they would be willing to send out introductory letters (Appendix B) to former employees who had been offered and received OPC services within the last five years. Five agreed to do so, however only two actually sent letters which elicited a total of four participants. Lastly, the Executive Director of the Human Resources Management Association of British Columbia (HRMA) agreed to give an introductory letter (Appendix C) to members of the association's Professional Employment Group that resulted in one participant. I was not provided with the names of individuals to whom introductory letters were sent and was therefore unaware of who might call to express interest until a prospective participant initiated contact.
A total of 18 prospective participants who wanted more information or were willing to be interviewed contacted me either by telephone or e-mail. These individuals were asked four pre-screening questions:

(1) How long ago did you receive OPC services? This was the primary criterion for inclusion in this study – services must have been received within the past five years;

(2) Did you receive OPC services as a result of corporate downsizing? The initial plan for this study was to concentrate only on individuals who were terminated because of poor organizational fit rather than downsizing. However, given the increase in corporate downsizing and company closures, and the difficulty of determining the real cause of an individual’s termination, it was decided to broaden the criteria to accept a balance of participants who faced involuntary job loss for these and other reasons;

(3) How did you hear about this study? This question provided an opportunity to advise individuals who were terminated by my current employer of my affiliation and employment status with that company. It gave them an opportunity to withdraw at that point if they felt uncomfortable or had concerns about confidentiality. None of the individuals refused to participate in the study because of this affiliation; and

(4) What OPC firm provided the services you received? This last question was included to ensure as many different OPC firms were represented in this study as possible.
All but three of the 18 people who expressed interest were accepted as they met the primary criterion and had received services from a total of six different OPC firms. Three individuals were deemed not suitable as participants and therefore screened out. One had received OPC services in 1990, which was more than five years ago and therefore did not meet the primary criterion. The second person took advantage only of the assessment component of the OPC services and therefore did not experience the full range of services so could not comment on what helped and what hindered. The third individual did not actually receive OPC services upon her termination but wanted to share her opinion that it should be provided to all terminated employees, therefore not meeting the primary criterion.

Formal, written Informed Consent (Appendix D) was secured from all individuals who agreed to participate at the start of the first interview. Confidentiality of the individuals' identity, the organizations they previously worked for, and the OPC firms they received services from was promised in the research findings and any future materials.

Data Collection Procedures

In-person interviews were conducted to obtain the critical incidents and wish list items because they facilitate obtaining a greater depth of response from the interviewees, allowing for more open-ended questions and unstructured descriptions of respondents' OPC experiences. Interviews offer a number of advantages over surveys since "there is a greater chance that the interviewer..."
and respondent can establish a rapport, that the respondent will find it interesting to talk to the interviewer, and that all questions are understood" (Cozby, 1997, p. 96). Open-ended questions are “clearly superior if the researcher is interested in hearing respondents' opinions in their own words – particularly in exploratory research” (Palys, 1997, p. 164). Cozby (1997) suggests that “open-ended questions are most useful when the researcher needs to know what people are thinking and how they view their world” (p. 97). This approach also has the advantage of allowing the interviewer to probe for information as required in order to capture the richness of the individual's experience.

Participants were first asked five open-ended interview questions:

1. Tell me about your experience with the outplacement services you received.
2. What services did you receive that you found helpful? In order to think of services or interventions, it might be helpful to think of the MOST helpful service or intervention that was provided. What was the NEXT MOST helpful? And so on.
3. What services did you receive that you did not find helpful? In order to think of services or interventions, it might be helpful to think of the LEAST helpful service or intervention that was provided. What was the NEXT LEAST helpful? And so on.
4. Were there any services you would like to have received that the outplacement firm did not offer?
5. Were your expectations realized? Why or why not?
These open-ended questions were chosen because they were not framed by a theoretical perspective or by the definitions of success often used by OPC firms that would potentially influence the participants' responses. They were worded to ensure there was no ambiguity and they were specific enough, yet flexible enough, to encourage open disclosure by participants. Following Woolsey's (1986) suggestion that it is important to gather relevant biographical data about respondents, 12 demographic questions were asked at the end of each interview:

1. How long ago did you receive outplacement counselling?
2. What company provided the outplacement counselling services you received?
3. What was the reason for your involuntary job loss (downsizing, office relocation, performance, work redundancy, organizational fit, etc.)?
4. What was your occupation at the time you became unemployed?
5. What is your current employment status (employed full-time, employed part-time, unemployed, retired, other)?
6. If you are currently employed, how long were you unemployed?
7. If you are currently employed, what is your level of satisfaction with your present job (assuming this is the job the person accepted immediately following receipt of OPC services)? If you are not currently employed, what was the level of satisfaction with the job you accepted immediately following OPC services (1 = very dissatisfied; 2 = dissatisfied; 3 = neutral; 4 = satisfied; 5 = very satisfied)?
8. What is your educational level (high school, college/technical school, university undergraduate degree, some graduate school, master's degree, doctorate, other)?

9. What is your age?

10. What is your ethnic background?

11. What is your marital status (married, single, divorced, widow/er, common-law, other)?

12. Gender (female, male)

Some of the questions were related to personal information to help describe the research participants and provide different lenses through which to analyze the data, while others were related to areas where the literature suggests further OPC research or clarity is required. Data from these latter questions were not fully analysed for the purposes of this study but do provide interesting background information and a base for further research.

Eight women and seven men ranging in age from 29 to 63 years (average age = 47.33 years) participated. Two people (13%) held administrative jobs at the time of their job loss; eight (53%) were middle managers; two (13%) were first level managers; and three (20%) were senior managers. The educational levels of the participants included five (33%) with high school and some university or college/technical school training but no diploma, six participants (40%) with college or technical school diplomas, three individuals (20%) with undergraduate degrees, and one (7%) with a master's degree. One of the participants with a university undergraduate degree also held a technical school
diploma. One of the participants who had completed high school also obtained her professional CGA designation. One participant (7%) was African Canadian; the other fourteen (93%) were Caucasian. Table 1 contains a summary of the participants’ basic demographic information.

Six participants (40% of sample) were terminated due to downsizing or plant closures; nine participants (60% of sample) were terminated for a variety of reasons that can be grouped under the heading of poor organizational fit. These reasons include wanting someone else for the job (1), corporate restructuring (5), position eliminated (2), and organization fit/performance (1). It was interesting to note during the course of the screening and data gathering discussions that organizations often used corporate restructuring as a euphemism for dealing with organization fit or performance issues rather than addressing the root cause of the termination with the individual. This blurring of termination reasons was the primary reason for including people in this study who experienced involuntary job loss for a variety of different reasons.
Table 1: Summary of basic demographic data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Current Marital Status</th>
<th>Current Employment Status</th>
<th>Age when OPC Rec’d.</th>
<th>Year OPC Rec’d.</th>
<th>Occupation When Terminated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>F/T Permanent</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>F/T Temporary</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Common-law</td>
<td>P/T Permanent</td>
<td>62/63</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>P/T Permanent</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>F/T Contractor</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>F/T Permanent</td>
<td>40/41</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>F/T Permanent</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>F/T Permanent</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1st Level Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>F/T Permanent</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>F/T Permanent</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1st Level Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>47/48</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the time of the initial interviews, the length of time the participants were unemployed following their job loss ranged from 17 days to 12 months. Table 2 summarizes the length of unemployment following the participants' job loss.

Insert Table 2 about here
Table 2: Participants' length of unemployment at time of 1st interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>% of Sample</th>
<th>Length of Unemployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Procedures

Piloting the Interview Questions

In order to minimize researcher bias or influence, the interview questions were piloted with the first three individuals who agreed to participate in this study. Piloting the interview accomplished a number of things. First, it allowed me to get a feel for the questions and see whether they facilitated in-depth responses. This also helped find the right balance between probing from an empathic stance while letting the participant tell his/her story, and leading the interview into areas of special interest because they appeared to support my expectations. This step also provided an opportunity to practice and fine-tune the interview technique, identify issues that might require follow-up probes, and determine the length of time required for the interviews. In addition, it helped standardize the interviews, minimize interviewer effects, and facilitate the receipt of meaningful data from every interview conducted.

These objectives were accomplished during the interviews with the first three participants. As these initial interviews elicited a large amount of rich data, it was decided to include them in the results of this study. A change was made to two of the open-ended interview questions when it was discovered that the question about “What expectations did you have about OPC services?” consistently elicited responses reflecting services the participants would like to have received but did not. The question was therefore reworded and presented in the fourth through fifteenth interviews as “Were there any services you would like to have received that the outplacement firm did not offer?” The question on
expectations was reworded to, "Were your expectations realized? Why or why not?" and used for the fourth through fifteenth interviews.

The First Interview

As suggested by Jones (1991) and Palys (1997), it was important to ensure each participant had sufficient time for the first interview, a private place was available, and good rapport was established early in the meeting. Interviews were therefore conducted either at the participants' or researcher's homes (since many of the participants were not working), or at the participants' offices. Interview lengths ranged from 30 minutes to two hours, averaging about one and one quarter hours. They ended when the participant could not recall any new incidents. The first part of each interview was spent establishing rapport, putting the participant at ease by using Spradley's (1979) approach of turning the interview into a "friendly conversation" (p. 58), reiterating the purpose of the study, reviewing the Informed Consent forms, ensuring the participant realized he or she had the option to withdraw from the study at any time, and confirming confidentiality of people and companies. Upon reading the Informed Consent form, the researcher offered to clarify anything it contained or answer any questions the participant might have had before starting. The Informed Consent forms were signed by both parties once all questions or concerns had been settled to the participant's satisfaction. An overview of the types of questions to be asked was also provided. The five open-ended questions constituted the majority of the interview. Gathering the demographic data at the end took approximately five minutes. The participants left with an open invitation to e-mail
or call me with any additional incidents they recalled that were helpful, not helpful, or constituted additional wish list items.

To ensure the interview data was fully and accurately captured, all the interviews were audiotaped. The audiotape was supplemented by making notes of important comments during the discussion. This safeguard was an unobtrusive way to ensure points were not missed or skipped over. It did not interfere with the flow of the interview, yet it acted as a trigger for the interviewer to revisit items at other times during the interview. It also provided backup material in the case of equipment failure (Jones, 1991). This backup material was required in the case of one interview where the tape was found to be faulty and therefore could not be transcribed. The notes taken during the interview were typed up and sent to the participant for his confirmation that they accurately captured the main points of the interview. The participant returned them with minor explanatory notes or context information that did not change the original critical incidents or wish list items. All tapes except the damaged one were then transcribed.

Participant candour and comfort were facilitated during the interviews by employing the interpersonal skills detailed by Spradley (1979), which include “asking questions, listening instead of talking, taking a passive rather than an assertive role, expressing verbal interest in the other person, and showing interest by eye contact and other non-verbal means” (p. 46). Although taping can inhibit candour, it did not appear to affect the participants' willingness to share deeply emotional and personal experiences.
In the event that the interviews elicited strong emotional reactions in the participants by re-opening what for many was a painful and unpleasant experience, a counselling resource with a background in business and outplacement was made available to the participants. None of the participants felt the need to avail themselves of this counselling service.

The Second Interview

The second interview constitutes an innovation to the critical incident technique (Alfonso, 1997). It formed an important part of this study's methodology for several reasons. First, it introduced a phenomenological component by providing participants with an opportunity to ascribe meaning to the categories. Second, it gave participants a chance to change or adjust the categories to more accurately reflect their words, experience, and intentions. Third, it provided a means of validating the newly created categories with the participants. The second interview occurred four to six months after the first interview. Two participants could not be reached for this second interview as they had either changed jobs or moved residences. Forwarding addresses or phone numbers could not be located. Contacting the people who had sent the introductory letters to them would have broken the participants' confidentiality so no further steps were taken to locate them. In four cases the interviews were conducted by telephone for the convenience of the participants. Nine interviews were conducted by e-mail at the participants' request.

The protocol for this second interview consisted of a telephone call from me to orient the participant to this next stage of the research. Rapport was re-
established by inviting the participant to share any new events in his or her life
during the intervening months, then updating the participant on the progress
made on this research project since the last contact. I then explained the current
status of the research project to participants and oriented them to the next steps.
Participants were told:
(a) a total of 757 critical incidents and wish list items had been extracted from the
15 interviews;
(b) the incidents had been taken directly from the transcripts of their taped
interviews and therefore reflected their own words with some light editing
done by me to clarify the incident (if required);
(c) I had created categories and moved the incidents into them;
(d) the next step was for each participant to review the categories into which his
or her own incidents had been moved to see if they made sense, they
reflected the participant's meaning when the incident was shared during the
first interview, and whether the category titles were appropriate;
(e) three documents would be sent to the participant containing the helpful critical
incidents, not helpful critical incidents, and wish list items; and
(f) once having reviewed the categories and reflected on what changes (if any)
were needed, the participant was asked to call me to discuss his or her
comments.

Participants were also invited to contact me if they had any questions or
concerns about the data and categories once they received them. This
information was repeated in an e-mail sent to 13 participants along with
electronic Word documents included as attachments. At one participant's request, a letter with hard-copy attachments was mailed since she was unable to use e-mail for health reasons.

Analysis of the Data

Flanagan (1954) suggests the “purpose of the data analysis stage is to summarise and describe the data in an efficient manner so that it can be effectively used for many practical purposes” (p. 344). Flanagan and Woolsey (1986) also suggest there are three steps in the process: (a) selecting the frame of reference, (b) forming the categories, and (c) establishing the appropriate level of specificity-generality to use in reporting the data and findings. This framework was used for analyzing the data collected during the course of this study in concert with methods used by a number of qualitative researchers and writers (e.g., Allan, 1991; Amundson & Borgen, 1988; Cozby, 1997; Jones, 1991; Palys, 1997; Spradley, 1979; Woolsey, 1986). These methods include using data coding schemes, counting the number of occurrences of particular responses, and describing any patterns, themes, and clusters that emerged. The analysis of the data for this study involved three parts: (1) extracting events from the transcribed audiotapes and creating an electronic record of each incident; (2) grouping the incidents according to similarities to form categories; and (3) examining the validity of the categories. Each of these steps is discussed in more detail below.
Extracting the Critical Incidents and Wish List Items

All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and number-coded using participant numbers. Incidents were first highlighted in the transcripts using a colour-coding scheme. This had the advantage of preserving the participants' own words and making the incidents easy to retrieve from the transcripts. Before the event was extracted, the transcript was carefully studied in order to understand the full meaning of the statements. Initially I highlighted everything that resembled a critical incident or wish list item. Following Alfonso's (1997) methodology, these incidents were later subjected to an examination based on the following criteria and corresponding questions: (a) Was the participant's account stated in a complete way? (i.e., What was the context surrounding the specific incident or wish list item?); (b) Was the incident clearly identified? (i.e., What was the OPC service and why did the participant find it either helpful or not helpful?); and (c) Was the incident related to the purpose of the study? (i.e., Did the incident represent a service offered by the OPC firm that the participant found helpful or not helpful, or a service the participant wished had been offered but was not?). Incidents that did not meet the above criteria were excluded from the final results after re-checking them during the validation procedures.

Critical incidents were informally divided into three parts: the context of the incident, which provided background information about who was involved and the circumstances surrounding the event (e.g., "I was in a group with several employees from (name of company) that were all laid off at the same time and so there would be ten of us in this room"); the OPC service that was provided (e.g.,
"There was a small seminar about what to do with your severance package"); and why the incident was either helpful or not helpful (e.g., "Six of the people in the room were from (name of company) so everything was focused around them and what they did and the packages that they received. The rest of us were just sort of left on our own and I was on a salary continuance and they were all getting a lump sum payment so it dealt with lump sum ...."). Dividing the incidents into these components facilitated identifying the actual critical incidents and therefore sorting them into categories. The process of forming the categories was straightforward after completing this exercise.

Forming the Categories

The purpose of this study was to further our understanding of whether the current services being offered by OPC firms are meeting the needs of their individual clients. The frame of reference for sorting incidents into similar groups in order to produce categories was therefore centred on the OPC service or quality of service that was provided by the OPC firm. In the case of wish list items the frame of reference was placed on the service or quality of service the individual would like to have received but did not. This focus then became the basis of the evolving category systems, which emerged naturally from the data. Separate category systems were formed for the helpful incidents, not helpful incidents, and the wish list items, although considerable overlap occurred across the three data sets.

As noted by Woolsey (1986), forming the categories "consists of an analysis of thematic content, arrived at by inductive reasoning" (p. 248).
Flanagan (1954) states that this process is “more subjective than objective,” and that it requires “insight, experience and judgement” on the researcher’s part (p. 344). I was able to utilize my professional human resource background and personal experience as an OPC service recipient to create the initial categories arising from the data. As was expected, some incidents were clearer than others, although any ambiguity arose more around whether they were helpful or not helpful incidents rather than around whether or not an event or service constituted a critical incident. If it was unclear whether an event was helpful, not helpful, or a wish list item, the incident was not included in the final results of the study.

As in any inductive process, corrections to the categories were expected. It was anticipated that categories might be renamed, merged, or eliminated in order to represent their contents better. It was also expected that incidents might be moved from one category to another to ensure the best fit between category heading and content. This was handled through a second interview with participants, discussed in more detail in the validation section in the following chapter.

Examining the Validity of the Categories

Discussed in more detail in the following chapter, an independent rater took 25 percent of the critical incidents in each of the three groups and was asked to place them into the category headings provided under each of the three groups. The rater’s categorization of the items was then compared to the researcher’s and the match rate calculated.
Validation Procedures

As previously mentioned, Andersson and Nilsson (1964) concluded that the critical incident method was both valid and reliable, using several methods to test the validity of the category systems and the reliability of the method. These methods included using independent raters to sort incidents into the emerging category system, and testing the exhaustiveness of the categories. Another method for testing the validity was suggested by Flanagan (1954) whereby the results are compared against relevant literature to check the critical incidents' construct validity. This method has another benefit in that it also affords the researcher an opportunity to study and highlight any discrepancies.

Maxwell (1992) suggests qualitative researchers “rely on a variety of understanding and corresponding types of validity in the process of describing, interpreting, and explaining phenomena of interest” (p. 279). He describes three types of validity commonly used in qualitative research: descriptive validity, interpretive validity, and theoretical validity. Descriptive validity is concerned with the accuracy of the account. In this study interviews were tape-recorded and transcripts were used to accurately reproduce the participants' words. Unclear information was not included in the results of the study. Also, the second interview was useful in ensuring validity as participants checked emerging categories against their contents, confirmed the soundness of the category titles and the extent to which they reflected their individual experiences, and ensured the researcher had not distorted the participants' accounts.
Interpretive validity refers to what the events and behaviours mean to the participants, giving them their "voice" and taking their perspectives into account. Giving individuals a "voice" was one of the purposes of this study. Maxwell (1992) states that interpretive accounts need to be "grounded in the language of the people studied" (p. 289). Towards this end, questions were asked during both the first and second interviews that were directed towards obtaining clarity and understanding of each critical incident and wish list item, the context in which it occurred, and why it was helpful or not helpful.

Maxwell's (1992) third type of validity is well characterized by Alfonso (1997) as referring "to the explanation of the phenomenon and is related to the validity of the assumptions of the study" (p. 71). The assumptions underlying this study (that individuals experiencing unexpected job loss need to have their emotional needs met before they can move into learning hard job search skills, that career counselling involves more than just career exploration and assessment but crosses over into dealing with personal issues, that group counselling would be useful to people receiving OPC services, that people receiving OPC services have specific and unique needs, that the OPC literature has not adequately supported assumptions that OPC services are effective, and that the link between speed of reemployment and individual satisfaction with OPC services has not been made in the literature) are based on career counselling theory and existing OPC research and articles. The findings of the current study tie together helpful/not helpful OPC critical incidents and wish list items with research on effective counselling interventions. They also expand on
the OPC categories previously used to assess client satisfaction and further our understanding of whether current OPC services are serving the needs of individual clients by providing insight about additional, individualized services clients would like to receive.

Given the nature of this study and its stated aim of understanding what OPC services are helping or hindering individual clients as they adjust to job loss and attempt to find new employment, it was important to ensure the critical incidents, categories and interpretations being proposed accurately captured the participants' individual experiences. Three additional steps were therefore taken to validate the data. First, an independent rater read all 15 transcripts and highlighted the helpful, not helpful, and wish list incidents using a colour-coding scheme established by me. Second, a short second interview with each participant was arranged to elicit their reactions to and solicit their input on the initial categorization scheme evolving from the data, and to ensure the data had been accurately represented. This is consistent with the methodology used by Alfonso (1997) and others in their qualitative research studies. Third, the literature was checked and opinions from OPC experts were solicited to see if the emerging categories were consistent with previous research and experts in the field.

In summary, there are five major ways to test for validity in a qualitative, critical incident study: (1) expert opinion; (2) participation rate; (3) independent rater; (4) theoretical agreement; and (5) exhaustiveness. All five of these tests were used in this study and are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

In the critical incident method, sample size "is determined on the basis of number of critical incidents and not number of people" (Woolsey, 1986, p. 246). The 15 participants in this study identified a total of 759 critical incidents and "wish list" items (services they would like to have received but did not). Themes began to emerge during the first three interviews and by the end of the sixth interview redundancy in the data had been achieved. Following a detailed examination of the transcribed interview audiotapes, 757 critical incidents were extracted. However, 47 incidents were eliminated from the final results because it was unclear whether they were helpful or not helpful incidents, wish list items, expectations, or general observations made by the participants. The remaining 710 incidents were divided into three distinct groups for purposes of analyzing and reporting the data: helpful incidents, not helpful incidents, and wish list items. One new wish list item and one new helpful critical incident were added as a result of the participants cross-checking the categories. There were therefore a total of 339 helpful incidents, 179 not helpful incidents, and 194 wish list items. Table 3 presents the critical incidents and wish list totals by group.
Table 3: Critical incident totals by group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Not Helpful</th>
<th>Wish List</th>
<th>Totals by Participant #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 339 179 194 712
These incidents were then classified and sorted into ten helpful categories, eight not helpful categories, and 12 wish list categories. This chapter describes the categories within each group and presents examples of participant statements that fell within each of them. It then describes the expectations the 15 participants had about outplacement consulting (OPC) prior to starting their programs and reports the results of the demographic question around level of satisfaction with the job the participants accepted during or immediately following their OPC experiences. Finally, it discusses the validation procedures used in this study.

Part I: Category Descriptions

The description of categories in this section is broken down into three separate groups: helpful critical incidents or services, not helpful/hindering critical incidents or services, and wish list items (OPC services participants would like to have received but were not offered). Each group is presented in descending order of participation rate. In situations where two categories have the same participation rate, they are presented in descending order of frequency (the total number of incidents cited for each category). Examples of critical incidents are provided for the categories within each group and themes that emerged within each category are highlighted. Participant numbers, assigned in the order in which people were accepted as participants for this study, were used for presenting the examples but they do not correspond to the order in which the interviews took place. Tables summarizing the critical incidents or wish list items
categories, their participation rates and frequencies are presented at the beginning of each group.

Helpful Critical Incidents

Table 4 presents a summary of the ten helpful critical incident categories, their participation rates and respective frequencies.

Insert Table 4 about here

Category 1: OPC representative activities/actions (87% participation rate; 83 incidents).

Participants indicated that the actions and activities undertaken by the OPC representative they worked with were often helpful. These included the actual work tasks and services performed, or information shared by the OPC representative. The outcome for these participants was a sense of having someone in their camp, taking care of their interests, and going above and beyond the call of duty to help them find new employment. It gave them a jump-start on the often daunting task of looking for work, especially for those who had not looked for work for some time, and often provided them with a sense of confidence and direction. Critical incident themes that emerged in this category are: (a) providing emotional support (e.g., encouraging, offering hope and reinforcement, following-up after OPC services ended); (b) proactive tasks or
Table 4: List of helpful critical incident categories, participation rates and respective frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Percentage of participants providing incidents under these categories) N=15</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Total number of incidents cited for each category and percentages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. OPC Rep Activities/Actions</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>83 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Job Search Skills Training</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>42 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. OPC Program Elements/Design</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>42 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Assessments</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>34 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reference Materials</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>23 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. OPC Rep Traits/Characteristics</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>41 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Access to Offices, Supplies &amp; Equipment</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>11 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Secretarial/Administrative Services</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>16 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Relationship with OPC Rep</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>20 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. OPC Office Environment &amp; Location</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of critical incidents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>339 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
services (e.g., providing a list of contact names, setting up interviews, negotiating reference guidelines with the client's former employer, writing the client's resume, putting up job boards, providing information on trends and statistics); (c) spending time with the client one-on-one (e.g., answering specific questions, asking probing questions, showing the client around the OPC offices, reminding the client of the basics); and (d) counselling services (e.g., normalizing the client's experience, assisting with non-career related issues, asking in-depth questions about the client's well-being).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #2 (51 years old)

I also liked the fact that the counsellor actually teed up an appointment for me with a firm that he knew in the local area that did allied work to what I did, and so basically got me an interview with that firm. Now that didn't work out but I know at the time I was pleased that they at least went that far for me in assistance.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #8 (43 years old)

We probably spent two or three sessions just reviewing and revising my resume, and then focusing on some companies... I mean once I decided which industry I wanted to stay in and the type of work I wanted to do then (the OPC representative) helped
me to devise a plan of which companies to target and how to go about researching . . .

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #10 (39 years old)

The one that I found really helpful as well, and I can't say this enough, is the reference guidelines. My counsellor worked with my HR person to ensure they had a mutual understanding and agreement on the reference guidelines because it's such a critical thing, you have people giving you references other than your HR person. . .

EXAMPLE 4

Participant #11 (54 years old)

Preparing to go for the interview . . . I would actually be asking him the questions, "Is there anything, given that this is the organization that I'm applying for, is there anything that you know about this organization that would help me?" and "Is there any particular thing that I should do or talk about in the interview that would help me get this job?" So I ask the questions and if he has any information he imparts it, but my experience so far has been that he calls me back promptly and then just reminds me of the basics . . .
EXAMPLE 5

Participant #14 (48 years old)

I was sent to (name of psychologist), an industrial psychologist and I went through a day's testing with him and I found that extremely interesting. (Name of OPC representative) also came into (name of psychologist) office the second day to kind of share in the results and so that was good to have that tie back to (name of OPC representative).

Category 2: Job search skills training (87% participation rate; 42 incidents).

This category includes training provided by the OPC firm directly related to the client's job search. Examples include training on how to network, write resumes and cover letters, conduct informational interviews, prepare for and participate in interviews, market, negotiate, tap into the hidden job market, respond to advertisements, etc. The impact on participants was a sense of gaining control and of learning the ropes. It helped them understand the whole process of how to go about a job search in today's competitive market, and in some cases upgraded their computer/Internet skills. It gave them a sense of being less panicked, more empowered, self-confident and prepared with the tools they would require to conduct another job search in the future. Critical incident themes that emerged in this category include: (a) technology training (e.g., computer use, how to access the Internet); (b) "hard" job search skills (e.g.,
resume preparation, marketing, negotiating); (c) skills practice and feedback (e.g., mock interviews, videotaped interviews, role-plays with peers, feedback from OPC representative on the client's skill level); and (d) "soft" job search skills (e.g., how to approach people, how aggressive you need to be, how to frame the reason for your job loss).

**EXAMPLE 1**

Participant #5 (54 years old)

And the third thing that I really thought was excellent was that they did mock interviews . . . they did some dry runs and then they did one in front of a video camera and they videotaped it and then they critiqued it afterwards.

**EXAMPLE 2**

Participant #6 (52 years old)

Well, there's certainly interview skills and they did go through the mock interview and the video, then negotiating skills, getting past no when you're trying to sell yourself, marketing skills, this kind of thing.

**EXAMPLE 3**

Participant #7 (41 years old)

They taught you how to sell yourself and how to bring the best parts in what you were trying to sell and taught you that you had a product to sell and the product was you. So definitely the practising
helped because you got asked some pointed questions that you had to answer. You don’t want to stumble or fall in the middle of an interview so practice is good.

EXAMPLE 4

Participant #15 (43 years old)

I did ... have a taped interview with my consultant ... who asked me a lot of questions that I expected, she threw in a few like, “Are you married?” You’re never sure where are we going with this one, perhaps just to see what my reaction would be. And it was interesting to see myself on tape and the little things that I do that might not look favourable to a potential employer ... all of the critiquing and feedback that we had at the end of the interview ...

Category 3: OPC program elements/design (73% participation rate; 42 incidents).

Participants suggested that specific characteristics of the OPC program design or specific components it contained were helpful. Outcomes for participants were a sense of inclusion, structure, peer support, networking opportunities, and often a sense of control if there was some flexibility around the services in which they could choose to engage. Category themes that emerged are: (a) group work (e.g., workshops, interactive events); (b) flexibility (services being added that weren’t originally covered, being able to take time off from the
OPC program); (c) orientation to OPC services (being told what to expect, what was covered, OPC objectives); and (d) specific program components (e.g., seminars on specific topics, one-on-ones with OPC representatives, the OPC representative being present during the termination interview).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #2 (52 years old)

I felt quite vulnerable and I was glad of my wife’s company, and they looked after me and certainly discussed things with my wife as well and I liked that part of it too, that they were kind of working with the family, in the family’s interest. So that was very good, a definite positive for them.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #8 (43 years old)

The other thing that they offered that was very helpful was a series of seminars where you could meet with a counsellor and with five or six other people that were going through the same thing and they discuss four or five different topics like researching companies, preparing your resume, preparing for interviews, those sorts of things.
EXAMPLE 3

Participant #10 (39 years old)

I had a good introduction, they sort of outlined the objectives, the services they offered, and told me where they were going with all of this. All in all, it was a really good introduction.

EXAMPLE 4

Participant #9 (29 years old)

The other nice benefit is, they don't have an extensive menu but you could approach them, they were very open to say listen I'd like to talk about this and you'd work out a cost and go from there . . .

Category 4: Assessments (73% participation rate; 34 incidents)

The majority of participants found the assessment services or exercises provided by the OPC firm that relate to assessing the client's skills, knowledge, aptitudes, interests, etc. to be helpful. The benefit of these incidents to participants was an opportunity to look at different facets of their personalities, their strengths and weaknesses, and address those aspects of themselves requiring change. They saw this as an opportunity to avoid failing or repeating the same mistakes in the future. They also presented an opportunity for self-reflection and self-knowledge that many of them had not experienced before. Themes that arose in this category are: (a) psychological assessments (e.g., personality tests, skills inventories, profile report from psychologist, one-on-one discussion with a psychologist, family of origin effect on work and work
decisions); and (b) self-analysis (e.g., focus on strengths and weaknesses, binder/workbook worksheets, diagnostic tools, career values exploration).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #5 (54 years old)

They gave in this book several worksheets on different aspects and I found that these were really good; they talked about the values and the qualities. This whole section here I found it extremely helpful. They'd talk about skills identification, work values, personal qualities, ... preferences and target decisions. I found that that was extremely helpful in learning about yourself and being able to take these things and expand on them.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #6 (52 years old)

I definitely found the psychological testing very useful, very very useful ... understanding yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, it gives you some real concrete information about yourself ...

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #8 (43 years old)

...and then focusing on some of my strengths and we went through a battery of tests so they did testing and they went over the results of that, and then from that information we discussed what I enjoyed doing and wanted to do and they started work on a resume ...he
helped me through this testing to decide what I should concentrate on and direction for focusing my energy …

EXAMPLE 4

Participant #10 (39 years old)

Probably the paramount benefit of the service was the resume and interview skills. Also you never think about a self-assessment but they took it one step further where they had a computerized model, I think it was called a Strong assessment, and that was quite interesting because they look at different facets of your personality and they match that to the skill sets.

Category 5: Reference materials (67% participation rate; 23 incidents).

This category refers to both reference materials handed out to the clients to keep for their own personal use and materials available for use on site at the OPC firm’s offices. The benefit of these reference materials to participants was the feeling of being given a set of tools that they could refer to again in the future. Like the job search skills training, the reference materials afforded clients a sense of being prepared for whatever came their way during their job search and contributed to a belief in their ability to compete for jobs. It also helped them think through the myriad of issues they needed to address, such as finances, severance packages, tax issues, and legal matters, all of which arose as a result of their terminations. The themes emerging from this category are: (a)
manual/binder of materials (e.g., information sections, worksheets/exercises); (b) on-site library (e.g., books, newspapers, periodicals, borrowing privileges); and (c) reference books the client could keep (e.g., “What Color is Your Parachute?”, resume styles).

EXAMPLE 1
Participant #11 (54 years old)
... the manual that they have is comprehensive, I think it's a good manual, I think it's well organised. Again, never having gone through the process before I don't know if there’s anything that's really salient that’s missing ....

EXAMPLE 2
Participant #13 (50 years old)
The workbook ... it's kind of in chapters and basically we would read the book before we came each week for that section. It included sections on personal assessments, interview skills, the second interview, the questions you can ask, resume writing, networking, so everything we went through in the course was in the book and it's about an inch thick and it was very helpful.

EXAMPLE 3
Participant #2 (52 years old)
... they made written material available, they had a bit of a library in the offices and you were encouraged to take books out of the library ...
Category 6: OPC representative traits/characteristics (47% participation rate; 41 incidents).

This category includes items that relate directly to the personal qualities, habits, traits or characteristics exhibited by the OPC representative. For these participants, these incidents contributed to a sense of being respected and treated professionally by the OPC representative. They also engendered a sense of having a friend or mentor during a stressful time when work-related support systems have disappeared, of having someone to talk to who would listen and have the client's best interests at heart. The themes that emerged for this category are: (a) personal grooming and habits (e.g., punctuality, professional attire and manner); (b) interpersonal skills (e.g., sympathetic, helpful, calm, understood the emotional impacts, empathetic, good listener); and (c) knowledgeable (e.g., well-seasoned in HR, industry veteran, hands-on experience, has personally experienced job loss).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #1 (47 years old)

She (the OPC representative) was well dressed, well groomed, on time, greeted me, paid attention, undivided attention . . .

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #5 (54 years old)

The outplacement counsellor was extremely sympathetic . . . He's calm and very soft spoken and sort of gentle. He kind of handled
me with kid gloves; basically he made the suggestion, all I had to do was nod . . .

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #14 (48 years old)

Well I have found it quite positive and I think a lot of it has to do with the personality of the person I’m seeing. I feel extremely comfortable with her (OPC representative), she behaves like a friend. She’s also very flexible in her approach as well. It’s not necessary in her view for things to proceed in a certain set manner, it can be changed according to the individual.

Category 7: Access to offices, supplies and equipment (47% participation rate; 11 incidents).

This category includes office space, equipment and supplies housed at the OPC firm’s offices that were available for clients to use. This category is different from category #10 (OPC Office Environment) in that it refers to specific services available to clients for their use rather than the physical setting or environment created by the OPC offices. Outcomes of these incidents include a place for clients to work for a few hours, the sense of normalcy discussed in Category #10 below, and a safe haven to go to in between job interviews where they could continue their job search activities while waiting to attend their next appointment. Three themes arose from this category: (a) equipment use (e.g.,
computers, Internet access, photocopiers); (b) office supplies (e.g., paper, business cards); and (c) office space (e.g., desk, telephone, meeting rooms, offices or study carrels).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #6 (52 years old)

Well, I think the office, just being able to go into the office was useful. At that time there were just, they had one computer with the Internet …

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #2 (52 years old)

I liked the office area that they used, that they had for themselves and that they made available to you, it was very professional, it had a computer in the room. Now I don’t remember if it had access to any job search capacities, I don’t know whether it did, but you could use it for typing formats and that kind of thing …

Category 8: Secretarial/administrative services (40% participation rate; 16 incidents).

This category includes the clerical, secretarial or administrative support provided to clients by OPC firm administration staff. It also includes descriptions of other administrative staff support. The primary benefits of these incidents were being relieved of clerical or administrative details and being able to rely on
someone else to handle the small things. In effect, it provided a sense of being mothered. This freed up the clients to master new skills and conduct their job search. Two themes emerged in this category: (a) secretarial/clerical services (e.g., typing, formatting resumes, putting documents on disk, mass mailings, taking telephone messages); and (b) general support (e.g., follow-up, tracking down OPC consultants, handling smaller details the client might have overlooked, finding resources, showing clients how to use office equipment).

EXAMPLE 1
Participant #3 (51 years old)
... and a secretary who helped after I constructed the letter. She typed up different letters for me to send out to prospective employers ...

EXAMPLE 2
Participant #6 (52 years old)
... the actual typing up of the resume and doing a mass mailing was useful ... somebody doing all the templates for me or doing the mass mailing was really good.

EXAMPLE 3
Participant #9 (29 years old)
... the admin support was tremendous ... she's an older lady and just kind of like a motherly figure. She was always moving, never sitting, and she just picks up on all the little details, like if there's
something to follow up, if you're trying to get a hold of one of the
consulting people and it's kind of an emergency she will track them
down. An able competent person that looks after all the smaller
details ... 

Category 9: Relationship with OPC representative (33% participation rate;
20 incidents).

This category refers to the participants' subjective experiences of their
relationship with the OPC representative. It includes items related to working
with an OPC representative that are not action oriented (such as specific tasks or
work that the representative performs), or personal traits or characteristics of the
OPC representative (such as timeliness, grooming, professionalism, etc.).
Outcomes resulting from this sense of relationship with their OPC
representatives included a sense of being heard, of being connected to another
person during a time when many connections have been broken, of having a
confidante, feeling less isolated and alone due to a sense of common ground
with someone who has had similar experiences, and having a role model to
emulate. The category themes are: (a) sharing (e.g., someone to bounce ideas
off, debate ideas with, self-disclosure); and (b) rapport (e.g., feeling cared about,
being with someone who has your best interests at heart, common ground
between friends, trust, being able to talk about non-career related life issues,
having a mentor, feeling connected and understood).
EXAMPLE 1

Participant #1 (47 years old)

...the relationship was one of the things that was most important ... somebody to touch base with, somebody to bounce ideas off of, a bit of reinforcement ... I was able to trust her, she understood me so she had my best interests at heart ... it felt like a really good friend because you know she admitted to having experienced almost the same issues I had.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #8 (43 years old)

Well, I don't know what it would be like for someone that just came in off the street and didn't know the person, because I had this long time relationship with the fellow (OPC representative). He knew what my background was, he'd known me and we'd worked together a few years before so he was fairly familiar with what I was capable of doing, and I think right from day one he was supportive and assured me that I would have no trouble getting back into the workforce. He was there and provided the direction, support that I needed ... I mean my relationship with (name of OPC representative) and what he gave to me was very unique and I think it was very helpful.
Category 10: OPC office environment and location (20% participation rate; 27 incidents).

This category addresses the physical space in which the OPC offices are located and the environment created by the location, amenities, staff, décor, etc. The outcome of a helpful or pleasing OPC environment was a sense of comfort and being welcomed – a refuge of sorts when between job interviews. It provided both a professional office setting for clients to spend time in as well as a sense of structure in their day. They could get up, put on appropriate business attire, pick up their briefcase, get in the car, and go to “the office.” It afforded a sense of normalcy in a decidedly abnormal situation. Several themes arose within this category: (a) physical geographic location and amenities (e.g., downtown, suburb, ample parking, elevator for easy access, coffee/tea/water and other refreshments); (b) office appearance (e.g., businesslike, professional); and (c) the atmosphere or environment (e.g., friendly, relaxed, welcoming, helpful, hospitable, able to approach any of the OPC staff for assistance).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #2 (52 years old)

Well it was a very convenient place to go ...I mean even from the parking lot you felt professional, you were treated like you were entering a business building. The access was good and the instructions that they gave were good, and it was a bright environment.
EXAMPLE 2

Participant #10 (39 years old)

It was a nice environment, friendly. Basically they got to know you by your first name. It wasn't a cold environment, they had the coffee and the tea and everything and it felt good. You could go in there and spend a few hours and be very comfortable.

Not Helpful Categories

Many of the category definitions for the not helpful critical incidents are identical to those described for the helpful critical incidents in the previous section, so are not repeated in this section. Any differences in category definitions between this and the previous section are highlighted, the outcomes and emerging themes have been adjusted, and the examples changed to reflect the data. Table 5 presents a summary of the eight not helpful or hindering critical incident categories, their participation rates and respective frequencies.

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Insert Table 5 about here

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Table 5: List of not helpful categories, participation rates and respective frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Percentage of participants providing incidents under these categories) N=15</td>
<td>(Total number of incidents cited for each category and percentages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. OPC Program Elements/Design</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>62 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. OPC Rep Activities/Actions</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>36 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reference Materials</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>22 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Access to Offices, Supplies &amp; Equipment</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>20 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Job Search Skills Training</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>18 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. OPC Rep Traits/Characteristics</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>9 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Assessments</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>6 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. OPC Office Environment &amp; Location</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>6 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of critical incidents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>179 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Category 1: OPC program elements and design (80% participation rate; 62 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above. Outcomes of receiving these not helpful services included feelings of being herded through a cookie cutter program rather than being treated as an individual with specific needs. It also raised concern and confusion about whether their best interests were being served. They found many of the program elements rigid and intrusive, which led to anger, opting out of some components, and frustration. Themes that arose in this category include: (a) menu of services (e.g., focused only on hard job search skills and did not include support for the emotional side of job loss, not enough variety, too high level and generalized); (b) lack of flexibility (e.g., start to finish progression through the program, everybody gets the same, staid formula); and (c) specific components that did not work for individuals (e.g., the entrepreneurial option, resume format, having the OPC representative present during the termination interview, long distance telephone conversations with the OPC representative that consisted mostly of progress reports on workbook material, etc.).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #2 (52 years old)

I'm not so sure if actually referring you to a lawyer who in this particular case was actually one floor above or one floor below works very well. I think that it's an independent opinion but this
lawyer is getting referrals from this company and at the end of it I just wasn't sure if the lawyer was really truly independent just because of the way that it was set up.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #7 (41 years old)

The videos were kind of old, they were probably '80's vintage videos I would think ... just the look and feel of them because jobs have changed in the last twenty years or so ... it got the job done but it wasn't the best vehicle.

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #9 (29 years old)

I felt a lot of what was in the core seminars was like a teaser and if you wanted more on it then you were going to have to pay more. I had the benefit because I knew a lot of what he was talking about, but at the end of it I think you're more confused than you learned anything and you feel obliged to meet with the expert and spend an extra. Throughout the core there's enough there to get you through but if there's a certain area that you have a question about then if you were to follow up it might cost.
EXAMPLE 4

Participant #15 (43 years old)

…and I said no to the classes on the entrepreneurial option to become self-employed, they really push to become self-employed or go into some consultancy. For me that’s nothing, it doesn’t matter and I don’t know if I care about it. If you’re not into the entrepreneur I don’t know how you can use everything up.

EXAMPLE 5

Participant #14 (48 years old)

…and for me it’s not so much the mechanics of starting again or finding a job, it’s mostly the emotional thing, like feeling confident and strong again is really the big key, not the mechanics of how to do it. And I guess particularly in a profession like mine, which is a very niche profession that (name of OPC representative) doesn’t purport to understand really that much about, that unless I make a real career change I don’t need those kind of services from her …

Category 2: OPC representative activities and actions (73% participation rate; 36 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above. Participants experienced a sense of poor fit, feeling unimportant or not heard as a result of these unhelpful incidents. They also felt frustrated,
overwhelmed, controlled, intimidated and pressured to find a new job. Four themes arose from this category: (a) ineffective services (e.g., help picking out a new career when the client had already decided on a career direction); (b) acting unilaterally (e.g., setting up a whole schedule of meetings without consulting the client); (c) inappropriate actions (e.g., dropping the names of important clients the OPC firm or representative was serving); and (d) one-on-ones (e.g., OPC representative's questions lacked depth and didn't go beneath the surface, showing a complete disregard for the client's emotional state).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #1 (47 years old)
I think I had already picked out my new career, I know I had picked it out by myself, so the counsellor really was not any assistance there. So at our first meeting she came with information from the Internet and stuff that I didn't personally find all that helpful to tell you the truth.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #2 (52 years old)
... the outplacement counsellor did ask some questions around my state of well being, but they were fairly superficial. I think they were the classic screening questions for depression, how are you feeling, are you sleeping well, do you have trouble with concentration, but he didn't really get down into any of the real issues that I was going through.
EXAMPLE 3

Participant #4 (63 years old)

The OPC representative had a whole schedule of meetings set up and showed a complete disregard for my state of emotions. He pushed me around emotionally so I felt abused. The OPC representative put pressure on me to produce, which in this context means get another job.

EXAMPLE 4

Participant #12 (48 years old)

I didn’t get that I was with a bunch of people who were highly regarded professionals in their field. I would rather have somebody talk to me about their own experiences and other peoples’ experiences rather than watch somebody in a video role play something. The OPC representatives didn’t talk about their own experiences and other people’s experiences.

Category 3: Reference materials (67% participation rate; 22 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful incidents section above. Participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the reference or binder materials they were given. That feeling translated into not reading the material or engaging in the exercises. They felt the OPC firm expected too much too soon from them, and they felt unimportant because no attempt was made to customize the material to meet their specific needs. Two
themes arose in this category: (a) binder contents (e.g., sections did not apply to the individual, it was a repetition of the workshops therefore of no help or interest); and (b) the nature of the materials (e.g., voluminous, looks onerous, too detailed).

EXAMPLE 1
Participant #3 (51 years old)
There was a lot of reading material. Some of it I felt didn’t apply to me, contacts, develop personal contacts...negotiations. I didn’t want to negotiate, boy that was another part that didn’t apply to me but it was for executives or whatever.

EXAMPLE 2
Participant #5 (54 years old)
You got the binder here with material in it. Well it was depressing to find out you have to send out a hundred resumes to get one interview. You know that’s really depressing. They do a whole section on financial planning, like budgeting and all that kind of stuff...that was not really useful

EXAMPLE 3
Participant #11 (54 years old)
...I mean they have a good library over there but I’m pretty good at building up my own library so that part of it ... personally I don’t need it, other people might find it very helpful.
Category 4: Access to offices, supplies and equipment (53% participation rate; 20 incidents).

The definition for this category has been expanded to include access to secretarial and administrative services, but otherwise is the same as that in the helpful section above. For the most part these services elicited a shrug from participants in that they had home offices and equipment set up at home so did not find this useful. The same three main themes arose in this category as in the corresponding helpful incidents category: (a) office space (e.g., had an office at home); (b) equipment (e.g., had a PC, Internet access and telephone voice-mail available at home); and (c) supplies (e.g., had to pay to have business cards printed).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #6 (52 years old)

Well overall I did use the office because it was downtown and I was downtown a fair bit but then when I had a home office I wasn’t relying on that. When we did up my resume we had the outplacement telephone number in it. Some of the calls would go through to the outplacement firm, but that wasn’t really necessary these days because I have voice mail and it was confusing to have two numbers versus one.
EXAMPLE 2

Participant #8 (43 years old)

... now in their office they have good connections to the Internet. I didn't use too much of that because I have a good Internet connection at home, his office was downtown Vancouver and I live in White Rock so I didn't want to spend too much time commuting there every day ...

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #10 (39 years old)

Didn't take advantage of the administrative service there to help you with your resume, typing it up etc. I didn't take advantage of that because I worked on it at home. Not the content but just typing it up for me – I didn't need them to do.

Category 5: Job search skills training (47% participation rate; 18 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above. Participants reported experiencing a sense of frustration that the subjects were treated superficially, therefore not giving them the skills they needed to be really effective in their job search. They did not achieve a feeling of mastery. The three themes that emerged in this category were: (a) lacking depth (e.g., superficial coverage in a variety of training workshops); (b) not enough (e.g., not enough practice, video interviewing, role plays, feedback, etc.); and (c) specific
skills training (e.g., how to use the Internet, aspects of interview training, networking).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #11 (54 years old)
...there has not been enough coaching, enough working with me on an individual basis to enhance my interviewing skills. Without practice you don't get there. When you're looking for employment you're interactive with people, so to sit and just read a manual about how to do it doesn't create the event of having this interaction.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #12 (48 years old)
One of the services they had was computer training, for instance how to use the Internet to search for jobs, etc. I didn't find that useful personally just because I was an experienced computer user and have been on the Internet for a long time and felt pretty confident about my job search skills so that particular session wasn't one that I was at all interested in attending.

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #13 (50 years old)
...they went through it in some detail, how to handle the interviews, the questions you're going to get asked, questions you should ask. Maybe what wasn't quite so helpful was what information you don't
have to supply legally. I had been through that enough times to
know, so I guess the main thing that wasn't useful was just
information that I'd already known.

Category 6: OPC representative traits and characteristics (33%
participation rate; 9 incidents).
The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section
above. The outcomes were a sense of not being listened to, lacking a common
ground of understanding, feelings of being overwhelmed, frustrated, constrained,
and intimidated. The two major themes that arose are: (a) lack of support skills
(e.g., did not listen, could not appreciate how the client was feeling); and (b) lack
of experience or knowledge.

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #3 (52 years old)
... you're talking to an individual who self-admittedly never had a
failure in her life, and she confessed that to me which is fair
enough. She's obviously doing very well and the offices were
extraordinary, and so I just didn't know how much she could
appreciate how I felt. It's really tough, when you've just recently
been let go, to talk to an individual who never fails.
EXAMPLE 2

Participant #4 (63 years old)

The OPC rep was assertive and clear about the services available and how he wanted to proceed. He was very controlling, controlled the first interview. One and a quarter hours later I left feeling overwhelmed with details and expectations ... it was too much, too soon. The OPC rep showed a complete disregard for my feelings.

Category 7: Assessments (33% participation rate; 6 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above. These incidents left participants wanting more but not getting it, feeling overwhelmed by the volume of questions and frustrated that the assessments did not go to a deeper level. This was translated in some cases into not completing the assessment worksheets. The same two themes emerged in this category as in the corresponding category in the helpful section: (a) psychological testing (e.g., report didn’t fit, aspects of it weren’t right); and (b) self-assessments (e.g., too much homework, not enough depth).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #7 (41 years old)

The assessment was a couple dozen pages long anyway and it became more of a hindrance to fill the thing out than a help. I mean, it must have been 25 or 30 pages long. And they’d say rate yourself based on this, and then they’d give you like thirty choices
asking you to rate them in ascending to descending order. Things like, “are you energetic?” I don't know, I don't even remember half the stuff that's filled in there. Then they give you 25 things to pick from and rank them in order ... so that was definitely a bit much.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #13 (50 years old)

...the less helpful parts were the psychological tests. Maybe I'm just getting too old to go through those. To sit there and go through these questions, like “one to five what do you like best, which would you rather do,” those type of things. I've been working for thirty years so to go through it again, personally I didn't get much out of it.

Category 8: OPC office environment and location (33% participation rate; 6 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above. The impacts of these incidents were feelings of being constrained, frustrated, and having an unwritten taboo broken by bringing emotional issues to their employer's workplace. Only one theme arose from these incidents, that of geographic location (e.g., long-distance commute from client's home to the OPC office, the OPC firm set up an office on site at the terminating employer's premises).
EXAMPLE 1

Participant #8 (43 years old)

... his office was downtown and I live in White Rock so I chose to
do all my work from home

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #12 (48 years old)

... they actually opened up an office on site so that when the
outplacement counselling actually started in full swing the people
were able to attend right at work, they didn't have to go anywhere.
But you're in the work place, and you're career counselling and
everything is going on right there in the work place. I mean there's
an enormous taboo right off the bat about expressing our emotions
in the work place.

Wish List Categories

The wish list is comprised of responses to the question, “Were there any
services you would like to have received that the outplacement firm did not
offer?" The wish list differs from the expectations discussed in the next session
in that these items represent ideas and observations about OPC services,
activities, actions, and formats participants felt would have been helpful for them
that arose during or following their participation in the OPC program. Rather than
discuss outcomes or impacts of these items should they be offered, instead this
section will provide information on why the participants would find these elements
helpful. Table 6 presents a summary of the 12 wish list items categories, their participation rates and respective frequencies.

Category 1: OPC program elements and design (67% participation rate; 44 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above, and includes providing an orientation and overview of OPC services and process at the start of services. Participants said these services would facilitate their movement through the job loss and job search processes, engender feelings of connection with professionals and peers, and help them rebuild their network and access experts to assist them. Several themes arose in this category: (a) information (e.g., providing an orientation to what OPC services entail, industry information, trends, clarifying the ex-employer's relationship with the OPC firm); (b) personal contacts (e.g., personal introductions to search firm professionals, lawyers, alumni of the OPC program); and (c) program delivery (e.g., workshop timing/schedules, more interaction in program elements, one-on-one follow-up after workshops).
Table 6: List of wish list categories, participation rates and respective frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Percentage of participants providing items under these categories) N=15</td>
<td>(Total number of items cited for each category and percentages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. OPC Program Elements &amp; Design</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>44 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tailored/Flexible Services</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>27 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. OPC Rep Activities/Actions</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>23 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. More Structured/ Hands-on Services</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>10 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Counselling Skills/Services</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>38 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Group Work</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>12 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Closure/Follow-up at end of OPC</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Reference Materials</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>5 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Technical Skills Assessment &amp; Upgrading</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Job Search Skills Training</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. OPC Rep Traits/Characteristics</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Relationship with OPC Rep</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of items</td>
<td></td>
<td>194 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXAMPLE 1

Participant #2 (52 years old)

... so I think what they ought to do is don’t assume that just

because you say yes to the outplacement counselling it’s going to

mean that you remember a damn thing. I don’t remember being

given an overview the day I walked in: “Okay (name of client), I

know that so and so talked to you but here’s an outline of what we’d

like to do to help you and the stages in which it’s going to go.”

Because I’m a very organised person, I always like people to lay

out things for me.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #13 (50 years old)

I would probably like to have seen more involvement with a

placement agency, when you’re in that situation you suddenly don’t

know where you are you’re kind of lost, you’re in a fog for a few

hours, few days and you really don’t know where to start looking...

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #9 (29 years old)

...but I think there was two or three workshops offered a week and

myself I would want to go Monday to Friday because I’m just that

way. It would be nice if it was more tightly scheduled. I would like

to have had that all up front. It was just too piecemeal for me.
EXAMPLE 4

Participant #14 (48 years old)

...maybe what would be helpful is, a little bit more understanding of what the relationship is between (name of ex-employer) and the outplacement person. I mean on the one hand I'm thinking (name of ex-employer) is paying the bill, how completely independent really is that service and what really is the relationship? I think when you come new into the situation you're a little bit uneasy about the relationship and the autonomy and confidentiality.

Category 2: Tailored/flexible services (53% participation rate; 27 incidents).

This is a new category that did not appear in either the helpful or not helpful critical incidents and refers to a stated desire for OPC services designed to fit the client's specific needs, whether they be related to age, career-change, or some other area requiring targeted support and services. Participants suggested these services would help them feel respected and that their needs were being met. It would mean they are being seen as unique individuals, giving them control and a sense of receiving value for the time they spend attending OPC programs. Two themes arose in this category: (a) more help with individual weak areas or needs (e.g., making a career shift, age-related issues, specific training needs); and (b) flexibility (e.g., cafeteria or menu style options that allow the client to build a program based on what he or she needs).
EXAMPLE 1

Participant #3 (51 years old)
I needed help making a career shift. When I say help it’s really specialized services to target the specific change that I was trying to make.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #2 (52 years old)
...maybe a bit more reading the situation and the client so that they can tailor their services to meet that client’s needs as opposed to just, “This is the service, like it,” approach for everybody.

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #4 (63 years old)
I felt like I was being treated just like a client of any other age with no consideration for my age and how close I was to retirement. I needed something more tailored to meet my age issues and the employment difficulties I faced because of that.

Category 3: OPC representative activities and actions (53% participation rate; 23 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the corresponding helpful section above. Participants indicated that receiving these services would help them to keep moving forward in their job search and would be seen as evidence that the OPC representatives cared about them and were committed to
helping them. Four themes emerged from this category: (a) creating a sense of direction (e.g., doing their homework before client meetings, asking what they are working towards and how activities fit in); (b) planning and preparation (e.g., helping clients prepare for an interview, coaching, acting as a sounding board); (c) follow-up (e.g., calling the client regularly, reviewing what the client has done during the week, providing status reports on OPC services/time remaining); and (d) showing interest in the client (e.g., acting like the OPC representative cares about the client).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #5 (54 years old)

...or actually coming up with jobs. They must have had access to jobs that were available, but they never specifically said well we think this will work or we think that will work or why don't you try applying for this one. It seems like they should have actually given me something to go out there and try for and they never did so that bugs me.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #11 (54 years old)

I would like my OPC counsellor to have initiated a review of what have I done this week, did I see “x” ad in the newspaper that pertains to, that has your qualification on it. Those kinds of things would be very encouraging.
EXAMPLE 3

Participant #15 (43 years old)

I guess I was expecting them to follow up with me more than me following up with them all the time, and I'm surprised at the lack of communication in the past several months. They should have been phoning all along. They don't want you to follow up, that takes their time, but the first six or eight weeks I think is vital to anybody who leaves employment.

Category 4: More structured/hands-on services (47% participation rate; 10 incidents).

This is a new category that did not appear in either the helpful or not helpful critical incidents and refers to an expressed desire for a more formal framework in the OPC program, and more active involvement by the OPC representative. These more structured and active items would increase the OPC representatives' accountability for helping clients, many of whom are suffering from shock and stress over their job loss, to move through the program. They would also provide more opportunities for feedback and critical evaluation by the OPC representatives regarding the clients' completion and level of understanding of the various components. One theme arose in this category, that of "hand-holding" (e.g., walking the client through the binder material, reviewing the client's responses to exercises at the end of each workbook section, asking how the client is doing with the materials and in their job search).
EXAMPLE 1

Participant #5 (54 years old)

... searching the Internet for Web sites for job searching, they really sort of just said, “It’s out there, here’s some, go to it.” I think it would have been a lot more helpful if they would have actually walked you through some of them.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #9 (29 years old)

But it could maybe be more successful if you made it into a bit more of a boot camp, but obviously you don’t want to condescend or patronize or belittle anyone. But the way I learn is boot camp. It’s like, “Alright, let’s go through this.”

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #15 (43 years)

... I just thought okay she (OPC consultant) should be caring what I’m doing, I’m expecting more feedback from her and more on handedness or, ... hands on, I was expecting that from her but it’s not there.

Category 5: Counselling skills and services (40% participation rate; 38 incidents).

This is a new category that did not appear in either the helpful or not helpful critical incidents. It refers to counselling skills possessed by OPC
representatives, or counselling services provided by them, that help clients deal with emotional and transition issues. This would include such skills as effectively probing below the surface to help the client deal with his or her deeper feelings. Participants said that having such services available would afford them an opportunity to heal and normalize their emotions before starting to learn the mechanics of conducting a job search. They also felt these services would ensure they were heard and understood, their emotional needs would be met, attention would be paid to the depth of their needs rather than a more superficial treatment, and it would help with cohesion (someone pulling all the pieces together). The five themes that arose are: (a) depth (e.g., probing, seeing below the surface, more dynamic and deeper one-on-ones); (b) establishing rapport (e.g., empathize, listen, hear the client's story, realize the client has mixed feelings about being there); (c) awareness (e.g., that people are feeling down, even executives are scared, people are experiencing stress); (d) putting the pieces together (e.g., resolve divergent perceptions of reality, integrate the psychological testing results with what the person has done, tie up loose ends); and (e) working with the client's emotions (e.g., help restore self-esteem and self-confidence, deal with feelings of having been demeaned, assist with grief and loss).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #2 (52 years old)

I might have felt more comfortable with somebody who could allow me to let my guard down a little bit and get inside me a little bit. Not
in a condescending way, and it wouldn't necessarily have had to be a woman, just somebody who is very adept at the skills they want to pass along to you but also has very very strong counselling skills and that's sometimes hard to mesh up.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #6 (52 years old)
...if you're going to have a one-on-one, then let's have some real nuts and bolts one-on-one, almost like psychological cases and a real sounding board or something. It's almost like we didn't get into cutting below the surface and going deep on the one-on-ones.

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #4 (63 years old)
It would have been helpful if the OPC representative had been trained to listen, empathize, hear my story, to help me deal with my unfinished business. I was really angry and frustrated and needed counselling.

Category 6: Group work (40% participation rate; 12 incidents).

This is a new category that did not appear in either the helpful or not helpful critical incidents and refers to an expressed desire to work more in a group setting. Group work would help clients feel less isolated by giving them opportunities to interact with others, learn from others’ experiences, and create a team environment. It would also afford them a forum for discussing their fears,
anxieties and other emotions during this time. Two themes emerged from this category: (a) comradeship (e.g., feeling less isolated, sharing experiences with others); and (b) learning (e.g., opportunity to learn from others, practice new skills).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #3 (51 years old)

... but one thing I'd like to add is that I think at that point in anybody's life isolation is very bad. I think it really helps to be with a group that have been in the same situation. I think that I would have myself felt better meeting. What they could have integrated into the program was having you meet with half a dozen other individuals, just sharing your experiences.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #6 (52 years old)

...I would have chosen one that would have had more group activities, like group sessions. Something that included workshops rather than just one-on-one with the volume of things that I would want to learn from other people. They need to be more up on group learning.

EXAMPLE 3

Participant #12 (48 years old)

... a more relaxed group environment where you could talk about the issues that were important to you and not worry about
constraining everybody else or being constrained by them yourself.

One of the neat things about a group interaction is that oftentimes if it's facilitated properly I think that people actually bring out the fears and anxieties that other people have.

Category 7: Closure/follow-up at end of OPC services (27% participation rate; 11 incidents).

This is a new category that did not appear in either the helpful or not helpful critical incidents and refers to an expressed desire for a less abrupt end to the OPC services at the point the client finds work or the OPC service contract expires. Having such attention paid to the end of OPC services would decrease the clients' feelings of abandonment while contributing to their sense of still having a support system available to them. They also suggested that having an action plan to take with them would provide incentive to continue activating the plan. It would also afford them the opportunity to continue dealing with feelings, stresses, and successes through ongoing sharing. Two themes arose in this category: (a) closure as the expiry of OPC services approaches (e.g., being given a choice about whether to continue receiving OPC services, creating action plans, being asked about their level of satisfaction with OPC services and new employment); and (b) follow-up after OPC services end (e.g., phone calls, creating a support group).
EXAMPLE 1

Participant #3 (51 years old)

I obtained a four month temporary position with a company and so she (OPC representative) says, “Oh well I guess we can consider you employed.” So that was a bit of a disappointment. I guess it was more or less my choice but I wasn’t offered the choice it was just, “Well you found employment.” I think I would like to have heard, “Well are you satisfied with this, or did you want to complete the whole process?” For me to be asked, “Are you comfortable with this employment or how do you want to do it? Would you rather meet for the next two months to find a permanent position?” Something like that, just to be asked rather than when I told her, “I am working for this company for the next four months,” and being told, “Oh well I guess we can consider you employed.”

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #10 (39 years old)

One of the things I would like to have seen, they did send a survey by mail, but I thought what would have been nice is to conduct an interview with people either by phone or in person. Just ask exactly the questions you’re asking because they did provide a service and in some cases people go on to find jobs and there’s not a closed loop there, just a service that came to an abrupt end and that was it.
Category 8: Reference materials (27% participation rate; 5 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above. Having current, comprehensive reference materials available for use after the OPC services have ended would give the participants a sense of receiving value for the high fees paid by their previous employers for this service while at the same time filling their desire for a reference resource or toolkit should they be looking for work again in the future. The themes that arose were: (a) access to materials (e.g., handouts, books reference library); and (b) an efficient way to store them (e.g., being given a binder to store handouts in).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #12 (48 years old)

They could have provided you with an empty binder at the beginning, and then every single day, oh this is something I would have loved, handouts, lovely, wonderful, loads of handouts so they'd talk about it, you'd experience it, and then you'd have handouts so you could remember.

EXAMPLE 2

Participant #12 (48 years old)

I wish they had a huge library where, for instance if you want to become an entrepreneur you can go in and you can find all of that kind of stuff and they'd have all kinds of business reference material.
Category 9: Technical skills assessment and upgrading (20% participation rate; 10 incidents).

This is a new category that did not appear in either the helpful or not helpful critical incidents and refers to an expressed desire for assessments and upgrading opportunities around the client's professional skills (such as secretarial, accounting, computers, etc.). This was primarily important for participants who had either been with one employer for a long time or who wanted to return to work they had not done for some years. These services would enable the participants to recalibrate their skills for today's work setting and technology requirements, thus giving them a sense of being competitive and competent in today's job market. Three themes emerged in this category: (a) assessing technical skills (e.g., testing against established criteria, feedback on skill level); (b) upgrading (e.g., actual training or coaching to turn weaknesses into strengths); and (c) information (e.g., where to go for training, costs, what standards do they need to meet?).

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #3 (51 years old)

... I think I just felt too overwhelmed and I've always felt my administration skills and my skills in typing are exceptional, but that was 20 odd years ago, so how was it changed? What applied 25 years ago I'm not sure applies today and so I wanted to find out, even though I took computer courses, I felt it would have been
helpful if somebody had been able to look at me and test me, talk to me and say, “Okay, I'm familiar with what's going on out there, this is what I think you need to brush up on.”

Category 10: Job search skills training (13% participation rate; 8 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above. Having more in depth job search training would enhance the clients' competitiveness and confidence when applying for work and relieve some of the frustration caused by what they felt was the often superficial or too general training received. Two themes arose in this category: (a) more depth in the treatment of the subjects; and (b) more opportunity to practice what they learn.

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #5 (52 years old)

I think there did need to be more focus on the job search skills, the negotiating skills, your marketing of yourself skills, the survival skills of going out and finding a job.

Category 11: OPC representative traits and characteristics (13% participation rate; 4 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above. The importance of the OPC representative's characteristics to the
participants reflected a need to be in a relaxed environment where they feel cared for. The OPC representative set the tone for how welcome the participants felt. Two minor themes emerged: (a) style (e.g., smiles, conservative); and (b) accessibility.

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #2 (52 years old)

I found the face to face interaction with the particular individual that looked after me to be helpful, although he tended to be a very conservative kind of person. I might have found it easier to have dealt with somebody who was say a little less structured.

Category 12: Relationship with OPC representative (13% participation rate; 2 incidents).

The definition for this category is the same as that in the helpful section above. Having a sense of connection with the OPC representative was important to these participants because, like the OPC representative’s traits and characteristics, it sets the tone for the nature of the working relationship. Rapport or a sense of connection was the single theme that came through in this category.

EXAMPLE 1

Participant #4 (63 years old)

What I wanted was more of a one-on-one partnering with him (the OPC representative), a relationship provided in a warm fashion
rather than the long distance calls. I wanted him to provide emotional support or understanding and because it was missing the relationship wasn’t effective.

Part II: Clients’ Expectations

The final open-ended question asked during the first interview was, “Were your expectations realized? Why or why not?” This information differs from the items discussed above in the wish list categories in that it captures the services, activities, or interventions participants anticipated they would receive before starting the OPC program. Table 7 summarizes the responses to the first half of that question – were your expectations realized?

Insert Table 7 about here

The intent behind asking this question was to view the data collected through the various lenses of the demographic information, such as education level, OPC firm, gender, age, etc. to see what trends emerged, if any. However, the unexpected response of “had no expectations” received from six (40%) of the participants made meaningful interpretation of this data difficult. The “some” response also presented a challenge because the participant said he had
Table 7: Summary of responses to the question, "Were your expectations realized?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency (total of responses and percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had no expectations</td>
<td>6 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some were met</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
negative or neutral expectations going into OPC, and that some of his expectations were met. Because the responses were not clear-cut and no meaningful patterns or trends emerged regarding the demographic data and whether expectations were met or not, only the frequency of expectations results sorted by gender are presented in Table 8.
Table 8: Frequency of expectations results sorted by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations Met?</th>
<th>Frequency (and percentage)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>3 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No expectations</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>3 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part III: Job Satisfaction

One of the questions asked as part of the demographic information collected for this study was "If you are currently employed, what is your level of satisfaction with your present job (assuming this is the job the person accepted immediately following receipt of OPC services)? If you are not currently employed, what was the level of satisfaction with the job you accepted immediately following OPC services?" This question was included for two reasons. First, it was to follow-up on the point raised by Davenport (1984) that one way in which OPC firms define the success of their services is the speed with which an individual client becomes re-employed. She suggests that this definition of success may not be adequate because it does not address the satisfaction of the displaced worker in the new job, long range performance in that job, or worker adjustment. Second, this question was intended to provide information against which the participants' expectations could be viewed to see if any trends emerged.

Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction on a 5-point scale: 1 = very dissatisfied; 2 = dissatisfied; 3 = neutral; 4 = satisfied; and 5 = very satisfied. Three participants rated their level of satisfaction with the jobs they obtained during or immediately following their OPC program as "1"; one rated it as "3." When asked about their satisfaction with their current jobs, one rated it as "3", one rated it as "3.5", five rated it as "4", one rated it as "4.25", and two rated it as "5". These results are summarised in Table 9. The numbers do not add up to 15 because four participants have not found work since their job loss, and three
participants responded twice to this question because their current job is not the job they accepted while in the OPC program or immediately after completing it. In two cases their ratings went from “1” for the first jobs they accepted to “4” for their present jobs. In the third case the participant’s rating was “3” for both her first and current jobs. The average rating for the jobs accepted during or immediately after receiving OPC services was 3.0; the mode was 1.0. The average rating for the participants’ current jobs (a combination of first jobs since the job loss occurred and second or third jobs after job loss) was 4.075 with a mode of 4.0.

During the course of the first interview, several participants mentioned the fact that they felt pressured by the OPC representative into producing results (finding a job). Their explanation for this pressure was the OPC firm’s desire to report back to the hiring company that the client had successfully “landed,” since speed of reemployment is often used as a measure of success. From the hiring company’s perspective that measure of success makes sense because, as Burdett (1988) points out, the shorter the time between job loss and re-employment, the less likely the terminated employee is to initiate a wrongful
Table 9: Summary of job satisfaction levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction Rating</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job immediately after job loss or OPC program (if not current job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
dismissal law suit against the former employer. This translates into lower costs for the ex-employer.

Part IV: Validation Procedures

Independent Extraction of the Critical Incidents

An independent rater (a Counselling Psychology program MA student) with some knowledge of OPC services read all fifteen transcripts and highlighted the helpful and not helpful critical incidents, the wish list items, and the expectations using a colour-coding scheme. We worked through the first interview together, then the rater completed the next two interviews alone. Upon the rater's completion of the first three interviews, we met again to compare results and discuss any discrepancies or difficulties that occurred. The rater then finished highlighting the items in the remaining twelve interviews before we met a third and final time to compare results. The initial agreement rate between the two raters was 81%. The differences were primarily attributable to: (a) lack of agreement on whether something constituted a critical incident (e.g., it might have been an outcome rather than a critical incident); (b) inferences being made about whether a service that was partly not helpful should be categorized as not helpful or as a wish list item; (c) the same incident was captured but in different parts of the interview transcript; (d) inconsistency over what level constituted the critical incident (e.g., the binder of materials, or each individual section within it); (e) whether to include as an incident a service the participant said was good, but did not use; and (f) it was unclear whether the incident mentioned was helpful,
not helpful, or a wish list item. After discussing differences with the independent rater, one of two outcomes ensued. We either came to a mutual agreement on how to treat the incidents and items and jointly decided whether or not to include them in the results of the study, or we agreed to disagree. For these latter incidents and items I then used my professional judgement, experience, and familiarity with the interviews and transcripts to decide whether to include these incidents and in what group. The final agreement rate on the critical incidents and wish list items extracted from the transcripts therefore rose to 93%.

Participants' Cross-checking

Since one of the stated desires of this study was to give participants a voice, an opportunity to share their OPC experiences for the benefit of others, it was important to ensure their words and meaning had been captured correctly. From a postmodern perspective, “each person is the narrator of his or her own story, the expert on his or her life, and the knower of his or her narrative experience” (Anderson & Levin, 1998, p. 48). Postmodern narrative approaches also recognize the power of language (White & Epston, 1990), so it was particularly important to check that my use of language for creating the categories reflected the participants' meaning and honoured their experience. Taking the data back to the participants for their input and validation is consistent with Alfonso (1997) and others, and is in keeping with Maxwell's (1992) concept of interpretive validity discussed earlier.

I attempted to contact each of the fifteen original participants by telephone to initiate a second interview, explain what the next steps were, and arrange to
send them the critical incidents and wish list items that had been elicited from their own interviews and sorted into categories. Two of the fifteen participants could not be contacted because they had either moved or changed employers and left no forwarding addresses or phone numbers. In order to maintain confidentiality I did not ask for contact information from the individuals who had originally sent out the introductory letters to these participants. The critical incidents and wish list items extracted from each of the remaining 13 (87%) participants' transcripts were sorted into categories and either mailed or sent to them via e-mail with electronic attachments. At the participants' request, and for their convenience, all the second interviews were conducted either by telephone or e-mail.

Of the 13 participants who received this information, 11 (85%) responded. Ten of the 11 participants (91%) who responded reported no changes to the categories. They indicated the incidents were correctly captured from the interview transcripts and their meaning was appropriately represented by the category headings. Of these ten, two edited the wording in a total of four helpful critical incidents and six not helpful critical incidents, with one of these participants adding a critical incident under the helpful category and one adding a wish list item. These changes clarified the details of the incidents but did not alter their meaning or affect their categorization. One of the 11 participants who responded suggested changes to five of the categories that were common to both the helpful and not helpful groups. After a careful review of his proposed changes it was decided not to implement them. There were two main reasons
for this decision. First, he was the only one of the 11 participants to suggest any changes to the categories. This suggested the categories were robust since they were supported by 91 percent of the participants who responded. Second, the participant's changes were either fairly superficial in nature (e.g., adding "skills" onto the end of the OPC Representative Traits/Characteristics category) with no resulting change in incidents sorted into that category, or the suggested change would have resulted in losing some of the distinctions between categories (such as merging Reference Materials with Access to Offices, Supplies and Equipment). One of the aims of this study was to obtain as wide a range of helping, hindering, and wish list items as possible, so while the logic behind the recommendations was sound, some of the richness of the detail would have been lost. There were therefore no changes to the original categories as a result of the participants' cross-checking.

Independent Rater

In accordance with the suggestion made by Andersson and Nilsson (1964) and following the example set by Alfonso (1997), an independent rater, a Counselling Psychology program MA student, took 25 percent of the helpful critical incidents (85 items), not helpful critical incidents (45 items), and wish list items (49 items) and placed them into the category headings provided under each of the three groups. This rater had no prior knowledge of outplacement so was provided with a verbal explanation (via telephone) of what OPC services usually entail and a written set of definitions for the categories in each of the three groups. She also received three electronic lists containing the reduced
number of critical incidents that had been extracted from a large electronic master list, and three electronic templates with the category headings already in place for each of the three groups. The master lists from which the 25 percent of incidents were chosen were produced by using word processing cut and paste methods from previously created documents, then randomly moving the incidents around within the document. The 25 percent of incidents were then chosen by highlighting every fourth entry of the master list and copying it to the subset list for checking by the independent rater. Checks were done at each stage of data manipulation to ensure the total number of incidents had been appropriately transferred to the new documents and that the new documents represented 25 percent of the total original incidents. An additional check was done for each of the groups to ensure that the incidents encompassed all of the categories.

The independent rater was also provided with an e-mail message detailing what she was being asked to do, with an invitation to call me if she had any questions not covered by the telephone conversation or e-mail. Doing one group at a time, the rater printed and read the category definitions, printed out each group's critical incidents or items, wrote the category definition numbers beside each of the incidents or items on the hard copy, then transcribed this information into the electronic documents containing the categories for each group. The rater double-checked her electronic copies and provided me with both her electronic copies and her original hard copies in case of any discrepancy between them. One phone call was placed by the rater asking for clarification between two of the helpful categories. The rater and researcher met to discuss
the incidents and items that proved difficult for the rater to put into categories.
The two sets of categorizations were then compared.

According to Andersson and Nilsson (1964), the necessary level of agreement is between 75% and 85% for the categories. If an agreement level of 80% is reached, the categories can be considered valid. The match rates for the three groups in this study were: 91% (77/85) for the helpful incidents; 84% (38/45) for the not helpful incidents; and 76% (38/49) for the wish list items. The differences were for one of three reasons: (1) the original categorization was incorrect; (2) the independent rater lacked context for the incident and therefore was not able to categorize it correctly; or (3) the item could fit equally well into two categories. Maxwell’s (1992) observation that “it has become increasingly apparent that ambiguity and fuzzy boundaries are the rule rather than the exception in categorisation” (p. 285) seems particularly germane in this case. After discussing the differences and clarifying category themes, we either jointly agreed on how to categorize the items, or we agreed to disagree. For these latter incidents I again used my professional judgement, experience, and familiarity with the interviews and transcripts to decide where to place them. The agreement rates therefore rose to 98% (83/85) for the helpful incidents, 96% (43/45) for the not helpful incidents, and 92% (45/49) for the wish list items.

Exhaustiveness

Andersson and Nilsson (1964) defined exhaustiveness as whether enough data has been collected to be “sufficiently comprehensive to include all types of behavioral units that the method may be expected to cover” (p. 399), and
discovered that the category system tended to emerge after a relatively small number of incidents had been classified. For this study, incidents or items in the first three interviews within each of the three groups (helpful, not helpful, and wish list) were examined and placed into categories. The next three interviews were then examined and incidents/items placed into the existing categories, with new categories being created as needed. This process continued until incidents from all fifteen interviews had been placed in categories. For the helpful critical incidents, new categories stopped emerging after the third interview; for the not helpful critical incidents, new categories stopped emerging after the sixth interview; and for the wish list items, new categories stopped emerging after the fifth interview. Given the number of interviews and large number of critical incidents they elicited, this method was deemed appropriate. The fact that 100% of the remaining helpful incidents, not helpful incidents, and wish list items (80%, 60% and 67% of the total incidents in each respective group) could be placed into the existing categories suggested that the categories were comprehensive and complete.

Expert Opinion

Following Alfonso (1997), expert validation of the categories was sought by asking two experienced outplacement professionals to judge the relevance and usefulness of the categories. This validation process was done in person to encourage open discussion and facilitate free exploration of questions. These experts were asked to comment on the completeness of the categories in each of the three groups, whether they found them useful, and whether there were any
surprises (e.g., categories that they did not think fit or had not previously thought of as being important to clients). Both experts indicated they were not surprised by the categories that emerged and could not think of any others that they might have expected to see. Their only surprise was not seeing the category "OPC Office Environment and Location" included in the wish list categories. Discussion on this point suggested that perhaps the office environment and location was a base expectation participants held around OPC services and was therefore not considered as important as other issues cited. This hypothesis could be checked out in a future study.

This validation process confirmed that all 10 helpful categories, 8 not helpful categories, and 12 wish list categories were useful in the experts' professional opinions and therefore strengthened the validity of the categories.

Participation Rate

Participation rate is determined by adding the number of participants who reported incidents in each category and calculating the percentage of participation. According to Flanagan (1954), the higher the participation rate, the more valid the category. Borgen and Amundson (1984) suggested that a 25% participation rate could be considered sufficient in establishing validity of the categories. For the helpful and not helpful categories this test was met by all but one of the categories. The one exception was left as a stand-alone category because it did not readily fit into the other categories and one-fifth of participants mentioned incidents that came under this heading. That suggested it was significant enough to warrant inclusion as a category.
The participation rates for the helpful categories ranged from a low of 20% (OPC Office Environment and Location) to a high of 87% (OPC Representative Activities and Actions). The participation rates for the not helpful categories ranged from a low of 33% (OPC Office Environment and Location) to a high of 80% (OPC Program Elements and Design). Tables 4 and 5 (presented earlier in this chapter) summarize the frequency and participation rates for the helpful and not helpful categories. Participation rate is the percentage of participants in a specific category. Frequency corresponds to the total number of critical incidents in a category.

The participation rates for the wish list items ranged from a low of 13% (Relationship with OPC Representative, OPC Rep Traits/Characteristics; and Job Search Skills Training) to a high of 67% (OPC Program Elements and Design). Table 6 (presented earlier in this chapter) summarizes the frequency and participation rates for the wish list items. Although four of the categories in this group did not meet the 25 percent test mentioned above (Borgen & Amundson, 1984), it was decided to include participation rates as low as 13% for three reasons. First, the incidents in these categories did not obviously fit into any of the other categories. Second, given the exploratory nature of the study it was thought important to include as broad a range of data as possible. This latter point was particularly important in light of the study's stated desire to give participants a "voice." Third, these categories already existed in the helpful and not helpful groups so it would have been somewhat misleading not to include them here since incidents were cited that fit into them. Including them also
highlights the differences between the services that are being offered by OPC firms, and the services that individual clients would like to receive. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

**Theoretical Agreement**

As mentioned earlier, Flanagan (1954) suggested the results could be compared against relevant literature to check the critical incidents' construct validity. This is consistent with Maxwell's (1992) concept of theoretical validity and acts as a test of the assumptions underlying this study that were mentioned in the validation procedures in the previous chapter. For the purpose of this comparison, the ten helpful, eight not helpful and 12 wish list categories were arranged into 16 category headings, some of which span all three groups and some of which are discrete to a specific group. The categories from all three groups are dealt with together in this section.

Finding relevant literature that supports a specific category suggests that it is sound. However, it was decided that categories that could not be supported by relevant literature would not be discarded, but rather looked at in light of the participants themselves and the opinions of experts in the field. A review of the relevant literature found theoretical agreement for all 16 categories, so this further consideration of the categories was not required.

**Assessments and Technical Skills Assessment and Upgrading.** Both skills training (or upgrading) and assessments form a large part of the work done in career counselling (Aquilanti & Leroux, 1999; Niles, 1996; Rudd & Strong, 1997; Zunker, 1994). Much of the literature focuses on skills upgrading or
training for specific populations (Abbott, 1979; Food and Beverage Workers Union, 1992; LaFleur, 1990; Miles, 1980; Pont, 1995; Smith, 1998; Thompson, 1998). However, Mastie (1996) suggested competency testing is also an important component of career assessment. Lucas (1999) reported that displaced adults receiving career guidance at a counselling centre requested clarity regarding interests and talents, which was accomplished through use of assessment tools. Although the research does not focus specifically on training or skills upgrading for displaced workers who receive OPC services, the participants' desire for skills training or upgrading to be made available as part of their OPC program is reflected in the career counselling literature, which lends credence to this category.

Job Search Skills Training. Providing job search skills training is generally accepted as a basic component of both career resource centres and OPC firms (Aquilanti & Leroux, 1999; Kirk, 1994; Newman, 1988; Zunker, 1994), and forms a large portion of career development books (e.g., Bolles, 1996). As the economic landscape has changed, the need for new job search competencies has emerged (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999). The career counselling literature also suggests programs aimed at helping displaced workers and unemployed individuals with job search skills that are consistent with employers' interests are being designed and implemented (Barham & Hoffbrand, 1998; Davies, 1996). This category therefore appears to be supported by the literature.

OPC Program Elements and Design. Informational support is one of three types of supportive career counselling acts discussed by Niles (1996). Miles
(1980) suggested that counsellors must have information about education and jobs. Information on industry trends, employer needs, personal contact lists, and more of an orientation to the OPC services were wish list items participants raised under Program Elements as services they would like to have received but did not. This theme therefore appears to be supported by the literature.

McNerney (1995) reported on the trend of OPC firms to move towards a workshop format and the superficial treatment of topics that often ensues as a result. This issue was raised by participants and included under this category. Other themes that arose under this category in the helpful and not helpful groups are discussed in other categories because of the finer division of categories that occurred in the wish list group (e.g., tailored/flexible services; counselling; more structured/hands on services, group work; closure/follow-up; and skills assessment and upgrade).

Reference Materials. As mentioned above, support for the reference materials category can be found in the literature as it pertains to the importance of informational support. It is also supported by references in articles about outplacement services that discuss the importance of providing clients with a comprehensive transition and job search workbook (Branham, 1983; Friedman, 1995; McNerney, 1995; Simon, 1988). This category appears to be supported by the literature.

OPC Representative Activities and Actions. The participants in this study voiced a number of different OPC activities and actions that they found helpful, not helpful, or wish they had received but did not. Only a few of the major
incidents or items are discussed here. Wojcicki and Kaufman (1990), Friedman (1995), and Brown (1996) stress the importance of counsellors keeping current on cutting-edge industry information, acting to pull personal and vocational information together to help the client make informed, relevant decisions about their career options. This is consistent with the participants’ desire for the OPC representative to tie up all the loose ends and help them make meaning out of the psychological profiles and self-assessments, among other things. Aquilanti and Leroux (1999) and Lucas (1999) discuss the importance of the counsellor’s role in helping the client gather information, make plans and decisions, and explore their options. Again, this appears to support the participants’ comments that being left on their own by the OPC representative was not helpful and they would like to have received more active participation from the OPC representatives. Finally, Branham (1983) discusses the value of OPC representatives negotiating references with the client’s previous employer, a service that many participants in this study found helpful. This category seems to be supported by the literature.

**OPC Representative Traits and Characteristics.** Burdett (1988) suggests that OPC representatives need to be knowledgeable, resourceful, and collaborative when dealing with their clients. Simon (1988) suggests that the traits and characteristics of an OPC representative are important and should be considered by a hiring company before engaging the services of an OPC firm. Pickman (1994) devotes a chapter to the OPC representative’s background qualifications and suggests that he or she needs to possess specific personality
attributes or attitudes in order to be most effective. These include genuine respect for other people, curiosity, excellent communications skills, professionalism, and knowledge about job search, business, and counselling. This literature supports the category and sub-themes shared by the participants.

**Relationship with OPC Representative.** In any counselling endeavour, even a specialized form of career counselling such as OPC, the client’s relationship with the counsellor and the counsellor’s engagement with the client is important. According to Waterman, Waterman, and Collard (1994), “the human dimension is perhaps the most crucial element” (p. 93) in career counselling. They stress the importance of counsellors and career-research specialists being present to add a personal touch because without them clients may not know how to effectively use the information they obtain, and many may not even try. Pickman (1994) discusses the intricacies of establishing a viable OPC client/counsellor relationship and highlights the importance of trust, sharing, creating common ground, and fostering a sense of connection. Dawson and Dawson (1994) stress the importance of creating a bond with the displaced worker as soon after the individual’s job loss as possible as an important step towards helping the displaced worker to become comfortable enough with the situation to discharge negative feelings, address personal family and professional concerns, defuse anger and start restoring self-esteem. Borgen (1997) discusses the importance of setting the tone and building the relationship between client and counsellor when dealing with clients who are faced with
changing career opportunities. The literature is consistent with incidents reported by participants in this study and therefore lends credence to this category.

**Access to Offices, Supplies and Equipment.** Secretarial and Administrative Service. **OPC Office Environment and Location.** Although enough critical incidents were mentioned under each of these areas that they warranted their own categories in this study, in the literature these often come under the heading of facilities and support materials. It is generally accepted that basic outplacement services usually include the provision of a work-like office environment that includes access to a desk, telephone, word processing and secretarial support, and library resources (Branham, 1983; McNerney, 1995; Pickman, 1994; Simon, 1988). An additional consideration, according to Branham, is whether the OPC firm maintains offices in locations convenient for the individual clients, either in light of their current residence, or to support them if they decide to move elsewhere. The literature echoes the incidents and items raised by this group of participants that gave rise to these three categories.

**Tailored/Flexible Services.** One of the criteria for evaluating OPC firms is the extent to which they tailor their services to the client's needs according to Branham (1983). In their study of the Shaughnessy Hospital downsizing, Havlovic et al. (1998) suggested that offering people a choice of support services better meets the needs of displaced employees. Friedman (1995) provides a list of questions the hiring company should ask when deciding which OPC firm to hire, many of which are focused on the type of individual, tailored services the firm will be able to provide to meet the special needs of the person(s) being
terminated. McNerney (1995) states that it is important for the hiring company to partner with a firm that can customize a program to meet the needs of each of the displaced workers. Newman (1988) suggests a critical question to ask OPC firms is "how individually tailored is the outplacement program . . . A cooky-cutter approach won't work" (p. 85). The literature appears to support this category.

More Structured/Hands-on Services. Duffy et al. (1988) suggest outplacement services can be much more effective, resulting in faster re-employment, if a behavioural approach is taken. This entails a much more structured and hands-on approach by the OPC representative. It includes helping the client set specific and measurable goals, providing feedback on performance, and giving positive reinforcement. The outcome of this structure and high OPC representative involvement was an increase in the job search activity of the clients. This is consistent with Borgen's (1997) suggestion that providing structure in career counselling allows people to assess their needs. Simon (1988) stresses the importance of OPC clients receiving hands-on practice and services from their OPC service provider. He eschews the common OPC approach of "give 'em a book" (p. 53), likening it to learning to play golf by reading a book – it simply cannot be done. Greenwood (1987) describes the success of a university job search centre with a focus on structure and goal setting, among other things. Stevens (1999) suggests career counsellors need a structured process to help them and their clients navigate through the non-linear career-planning and job search journey. Others (e.g., Brown, 1996; Hiebert, 1993; McWhirter, 1994; Rudd & Strong, 1997) discuss the importance of career
counsellors providing hands-on services such as reframing career around learning, benchmarking work content and work strategy skills, developing a future focus and plan, and setting goals – all of which require structure and a hands-on approach. This category appears to reflect both the career counselling and OPC literature.

Counselling Skills and Services. A number of researchers and writers have found that the line between career and personal issues is often blurred. Anderson and Niles (1995) found that clients often bring non-career concerns into career counselling and considerable overlap exists between the content of career counselling and that of psychotherapy. Zunker (1994) stresses that career counselling includes all aspects of an individual's needs, such as family, work, and leisure, and that all should be recognised as integral parts of the career counselling process. Niles (1996) found that supportive career counselling occurs within a framework that encompasses three types of support, one of which is emotional support. Burdett (1988) contends that counselling forms an integral part of outplacement, ideally coming first in the process before consulting services begin. In her article, Davenport (1984) emphasizes the need for professional counsellor involvement in outplacement activities, especially in light of the literature that cites the emotional needs arising from job loss. She contends that it is premature to enter into the assessment, goal setting and training phases of OPC without first attending to the client's emotional issues. The counselling role also is key in addressing the needs of the client's whole self: spiritual, cultural, intellectual, moral, physical, social and economic (Drevets,
1989), a sentiment that was clearly stated by several participants in this study. Duffy et al. (1988) state "the importance of the counselor's role as the bridge between the depression of failing to find a job and the ecstasy of job procurement must not be underestimated" (p. 32). Specifically applied to outplacement, Chamberlain (1997) discusses the need for counselling the whole person through exploration and discovery of each individual's context of concerns and "the personal meaning of work in their lives" (p. 36). It is her contention that clients will raise personal issues within the outplacement context if they are sufficiently affecting the person's ability to engage in the job search process. Again, this category appears to be well supported by the literature.

Group Work. There is ample literature supporting the use of groups in career counselling (e.g., Anderson, 1995; Borgen et al., 1989; Davies, 1996; DiNuzzo & Tolbert, 1981; McKnight, 1991) and the contributions they make to providing displaced workers with structure, shared experiences, networking opportunities, emotional support and catharsis. This often leads to increased job searching activity, personal effectiveness, self-esteem and self-confidence, and a sense of connection or community (DiNuzzo & Tolbert). As mentioned in Chapter II, unemployment often triggers a loss of work "family" and social contacts, structure, sense of purpose, and community, while also signalling feelings of isolation and aloneness. Groups have been demonstrated to be effective in dealing with these and other issues according to the authors cited above. Taking a contrarian view, Miller (1987) discusses the concept of group outplacement services, suggesting they are not effective because they "cannot
provide the constant resource for program solving that is one of the most important features of professional outplacement counseling" (p. 29-30). Whether for it or against it, the literature around career and group counselling appears to reflect the participants' incidents around group work, both helpful and not helpful, elicited during this study.

Closure/Follow-up at End of OPC Services. Borgen (1997) suggests that the final stage of the counselling process when helping people who are facing career change is planning the next steps. Having a set of actions helps clients achieve a sense of control and purpose. Branham (1983) suggests the ongoing relationship between the OPC firm and the individual client is an important part of the service, one that prospective hiring firms should consider as part of the criteria when deciding which OPC firm to retain. According to Branham, a good outplacement firm "will continue the close relationship it has established with the individual client after he or she is situated in a new position" (p. 326). He goes on to stress that the overriding concern of the OPC firm should be ensuring the client is satisfied with his or her new situation, maintaining periodic contact with the newly situated person, and providing continued support and consultation when necessary. The literature certainly echoes the participants' experiences and appears to support this category.

In summary, the category system developed for this study appears to be valid. There was a high degree of agreement obtained by independent raters and participants cross-checking, which supports the robustness and
completeness of the categories. Two experts in the outplacement field found the sixteen categories to be consistent with their experience, providing no surprises. The test of exhaustiveness did not result in any new categories emerging, thus supporting the soundness of the category system. Participation rates were over 25% for nine of the ten helpful categories, all 8 not helpful categories, and eight of the 12 wish list categories. The fact that none achieved a 100% participation rate and the results were spread across categories will be discussed in the next chapter. Theoretical agreement was found for all 16 categories in examining related career counselling and outplacement literature. This agreement of previous literature suggests the category system is well founded and credible.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Interviews with 15 participants produced 712 critical incidents and wish list items pertaining to services they received that were reported to be helpful, not helpful, or they would like to have received but were not offered during their outplacement consulting (OPC) experiences. These incidents and wish list items were placed into the following 16 categories: (1) OPC representative activities/actions; (2) job search skills training; (3) assessments; (4) OPC program elements and design; (5) reference materials; (6) OPC representative traits and characteristics; (7) access to offices, supplies and equipment; (8) secretarial/administrative services; (9) relationship with OPC representative; (10) OPC office environment and location; (11) tailored/flexible services; (12) more structured/hands-on services; (13) counselling skills/services; (14) group work; (15) closure/follow-up at end of OPC; and (16) technical skills assessment and upgrading.

This chapter will discuss the results of the current study against the backdrop of OPC’s historical and operating contexts. It will review the results of this study as they relate to Wooten’s (1996) study on OPC client satisfaction, and highlight the major patterns, themes and results that emerged. Limitations of this study will be discussed. The implications for clients, practitioners, and future research are also examined.

Outplacement Consulting’s Historical and Operating Context

Although the focus of this study was the helpful and hindering OPC services experienced by individual clients, OPC cannot be looked at in isolation
from its entire roster of services or without reference to its historical beginnings. When OPC began in the 1960's, it was to fill a need experienced primarily by white, middle-class, middle-aged, male senior executives who found themselves unexpectedly unemployed (Pickman, 1994). It is important to remember that while individual clients might glean some benefit from receiving OPC services, that was not the primary reason the services were offered. As previously mentioned, OPC came into being to protect the employer's interests on four fronts: minimizing lawsuits, enhancing public relations, maintaining employee morale, and therefore maintaining productivity (Burdett, 1988; Mirabile, 1985; Wooten, 1996). The primary benefactor of these services was therefore the company who decided to terminate an individual's employment.

In the 1970's, OPC services were extended to middle managers, technical professionals, and non-officials (Pickman, 1994). Since then the trend has been moving toward offering OPC services to a wider range of employees at all levels of the organization representing both permanent employees and fixed-contract workers (Anonymous, 2001; Lee Hecht Harrison, 1998; Murray Axmith, 2000). While the individual client profiles have changed during this time, as has technology (with the advent of personal computers, cell phones, automated voice-messaging, and other technological innovations not available when OPC services were first designed and offered), the actual design of OPC services has not changed much since its inception. This background helps us put the current OPC services into context and understand why OPC looks the way it does today.
OPC spans two distinct worlds, those of business and of counselling. The context in which a program is offered dictates most, if not all, of its design and components. In the case of OPC, it is imbued with the language and expectations of the business community. Many OPC firms advertise “consultants” rather than “counsellors” because the former term may be thought more acceptable to corporate clients. It appears that in general, OPC firms offer services that the business community can relate to – office space, job search skills, resume preparation, and assessment as it relates to career and career choices. The business culture is one of action and tasks, generally eschewing anything it perceives as being “warm and fuzzy.” It appears that OPC services are designed within this business context and are reflecting that culture.

Relating the Results to Wooten's Study

Wooten (1996) found that outplacement content components (job search training, preparation) and process components (consultant relationship, clarity of expectation, assistance in maintaining focus) were better predictors of client satisfaction than were contextual components (library, software, administrative support). Although the present study did not set out to measure client satisfaction, it did ask what services clients found helpful or not helpful. It therefore seemed a reasonable comparison to look at the services that participants in this study found most helpful with the services that participants in Wooten's study found most satisfying. Similarly, it seemed reasonable to compare the services the participants in this study found not helpful with those services that Wooten's participants found least satisfying. Doing such a
comparison would see the 16 categories from this study allocated to Wooten’s three types of components as follows:

(a) content components: job search skills training, assessments, technical skills assessment and upgrading;

(b) process components: OPC representative activities/actions, OPC program elements and design, OPC representative’s traits/characteristics, relationship with OPC representative, group work, tailored/flexible services, more structured/hands-on services, counselling skills/services, closure/follow-up at end of OPC;

(c) contextual components: reference materials, access to offices, supplies and equipment, OPC office environment and location.

The majority of incidents that the participants in the current study found helpful (262 or 77%) would fall under the content and process components. Likewise, 131 (68%) of the not helpful incidents fall under these same two components, suggesting the participants thought them to be important components of OPC services but superficial or lacking in some way. All six (100%) of the new categories that emerged in the wish list would fall under the process and content components classification, and 189 (97%) of all the wish list items fall under these same two component categories. The results of this study appear to support Wooten’s findings that “client satisfaction is more related to quality of the job search training, counseling support, and so forth than to the surroundings that support job search” (p. 114). This is consistent with Borgen’s (1999) findings that
both the task and process aspects of a group-based needs assessment program for unemployed people emerged as most relevant to the participants.

In addition to supporting Wooten’s (1996) study, the findings of this present study extend his work by providing new information on the OPC services individual clients would like to receive but did not. As mentioned in Chapter I, Wooten asked his participants to rate their levels of satisfaction with ten services offered by the OPC firm: (1) consultant relationship; (2) clarity of expectations; (3) job search training; (4) job search preparation; (5) positive focus; (6) offices; (7) library materials; (8) office equipment; (9) computer software; (10) administrative support; and an eleventh category, overall client satisfaction. While this furthered our understanding of the OPC components with which individual clients were most satisfied, it was based on pre-determined categories that reflected the OPC program being offered and therefore did not ask whether there were other services clients would like to have received but did not. The wish list items that emerged in the current study, particularly the six categories unique to that group, suggest that there are new services clients would find helpful (counselling, technical skills assessment and upgrading, and closure or follow-up at the end of the OPC program), and changes in the way OPC services are delivered that would make them more helpful to clients (more group work, structured/hands-on services, and tailored/flexible services). This is an important message for both OPC firms as they design their programs, and for the hiring companies when deciding on the criteria they will use to choose an OPC firm that best suits the needs of their employees.
Overall Results, Patterns and Themes

Upon review of the participation rates across the 16 categories (Table 10), it is apparent that there were no consistent helping or hindering critical incidents or wish list items. The highest participation rate was 87% for two of the helpful categories (OPC representative actions and activities, and job search skills training). However, 73 percent of participants also found OPC representative’s actions and activities not to be helpful, and 47 percent found the job search skills training not to be helpful. This pattern repeated for all eight of the categories that were common to both the helpful and not helpful critical incidents. This may explain the emergence of a new category in the wish list group, namely that of tailored and flexible services, which appears to be supported by the literature and suggests OPC programs need to be tailored to meet each individual’s needs in order to be most effective. This desire for tailored, flexible services may also explain the varied participation rates that emerged across the 16 categories.

The varied participation rates across the helpful, not helpful, and wish list groups (Table 10), it becomes equally obvious that there are OPC
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Helpful Critical Incidents</th>
<th>Not Helpful Critical Incidents</th>
<th>Wish List Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OPC Rep Activities/Actions</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search Skills Training</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPC Program Elements &amp; Design</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference Materials</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPC Rep Traits/Characteristics</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Offices, Supplies &amp; Equipment</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretarial/Administrative Services</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with OPC Rep</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPC Office Environment &amp; Location</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailored/Flexible Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>More Structured/Hands-on Services</td>
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<td>53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counselling Skills/Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Work</td>
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<td>33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closure/Follow-up at End of OPC</td>
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<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical Skills Assessment &amp; Upgrading</td>
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<td>20%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
services the participants would have found helpful but were not offered. These include tailored/flexible services, more structured/hands-on services, counselling skills/services, group work, closure/follow-up at the end of OPC, and technical skills assessment and upgrading. This suggests a gap exists between individual OPC clients’ needs, the career counselling and OPC literature cited as support for the 16 categories in this study, and the services being offered by the OPC firms. As mentioned in the section on theoretical validity in Chapter IV, the existence of each of these new wish list categories is supported by the literature.

Another interesting result of this study was the absence of the Access to offices, supplies and equipment; Assessments; Secretarial/administrative services; and OPC office environment and location categories from the wish list group. If you combine that result with the 53 percent of participants who cited not helpful critical incidents under the access to offices, supplies and equipment category, and the 33 percent who found the OPC office environment and location category not to be helpful, it suggests that these traditional/historical OPC services may no longer be of value to individual clients. As mentioned earlier, the advent of personal computers, home offices, personal voice-mail, pagers, and other technological advances may account for this change in what individuals find useful. As one participant in this study put it, OPC firms “need to always be right on top of technology” and alter their services accordingly.

Several other patterns emerged from the data collected in this study. First, no obvious pattern emerged between whether the participants’ expectations were met or not and the participants’ age, sex, marital status, length
of unemployment, OPC firm, current employment status, reason for termination, or education level. It was not possible to determine whether there might have been a possible connection between participants’ expectations and services that were helpful or not helpful due to the six participants (40%) who stated they had no expectations prior to starting the OPC program because they did not know what OPC was. A seventh participant indicated that he had negative or neutral expectations going into his OPC program, and that at least some of his negative expectations were met. These unexpected responses meant that any further attempt to analyze the data along the lines of participants’ expectations would not elicit any meaningful results.

Several strong messages emerged from the wish list items that are supported by the helpful and not helpful critical incidents. First, the message from 53 percent of the participants was loud and clear that they would like to receive OPC services that are tailored and flexible. This took different forms for different participants, which is not surprising given the nature of the category. The individual themes that emerged from the participants around this category were (1) having their prior expertise in a particular area taken into account so they do not have to work through material they already know; (2) getting individualized help with specific weak areas clients want to focus on and strengthen; (3) receiving help targeted to specific age concerns; (4) being assisted with making a career change, either into a new and different field, or returning to a field the person has been out of for a number of years; and (5)
being able to build their own OPC program based on a menu of services that could be tailored to fit their particular needs.

Related to the lack of consistency around helping and hindering critical incidents and wish list items was the fact that for each person who said he wanted individualized services, another said she wanted to work in groups. There were participants who enjoyed the seminar/workshop formats offered by the OPC firm, and others who wanted individual one-on-one sessions with an OPC representative. Some found the psychological testing helpful; others did not. Sixty-seven percent of participants found the reference materials helpful; 67 percent of them did not. This pattern continued throughout the interviews, with participants often sharing elements of an OPC service that they found helpful, not helpful, and they wish had been offered but were not. This lack of agreement about what clients find helpful and not helpful with respect to OPC services is consistent with the desire for more tailored and flexible services. This finding is one that OPC firms might want to take into consideration as they redesign their programs to meet the changing needs of a more diverse population of clients.

The literature suggests OPC firms should offer individual clients both counselling services and consulting services (Burdett, 1988; Davenport, 1984; Mirabile, 1985; Wooten, 1996). Ideally, counselling services are offered first in order to normalize the client’s emotions over losing his or her job before moving on to the consulting phase of teaching job search skills (Burdett, 1988). The results of this study suggest that participants may not be receiving counselling services before moving into the consulting phase of the OPC programs, as
evidenced by the number of individuals who cited wanting these services under the wish list category of counselling. Another indicator that this group of individuals would have benefited from counselling services was the participation rate under the not helpful categories “OPC representative activities” and “OPC representative traits/characteristics.” With two exceptions, the incidents cited in these two categories reflect a lack of depth, caring, respect, recognition of the client’s emotions, and interest on the part of the OPC representatives. The participants who provided incidents in these categories also mentioned they had a sense that the OPC representative was following his or her agenda rather than supporting the decisions and direction being set by the client. They also reported a lack of rapport or connection, as well as failure by the OPC representatives to follow-up and follow through. The two exceptions were incidents around other OPC representative activities, such as dropping the names of high-profile business people who were OPC firm clients.

It was interesting to note that none of the individuals who said they had a good relationship with their OPC representatives and received support from them voiced a desire for counselling services under the wish list category. Conversely, 100 percent of the participants who mentioned OPC representatives’ actions and activities as being not helpful listed counselling items they would like to have received in the wish list “counselling skills and services” category. These results suggest the participants would have appreciated receiving counselling services as part of their OPC experience, and appear to support the literature that stresses the importance of counselling as part of an effective OPC program.
An interesting aspect of the not helpful critical incidents started to emerge during the first interviews with participants. This had to do with the passive nature of many of the not helpful incidents or services participants were offered. The term "passive" here is used to refer to services they did not find useful because they either did not need them or they chose not to use them. Examples include using the OPC office's computers, secretarial services, library resources and office space. Unlike the helpful incidents that were all the result of active participation with or use of specific services, the not helpful incidents had two components – "passive" services and "active" services that did not help. Examples of the "active" services include an OPC representative who dropped the names of high profile clients, psychological testing results, and the specific format of some of the workshops and other program elements. This was an unexpected result that again suggests OPC firms may want to revisit their mix of services.

Another pattern that emerged from this study was the depth of emotions associated with the participants' discussion around the not helpful OPC services. This suggests a build-up of unexpressed emotions over the OPC services they received. While participants cited more helpful incidents in this study than not helpful incidents, the numbers do not reflect the difference in the emotions exhibited by participants when discussing these two groups of incidents. The helpful incidents were discussed in a conversational tone with no obvious emotion or heightened animation, almost like they were the baseline price of doing business and as long as those needs were met, everything was fine. It
was the absence of, or some lack associated with, these baseline services that generated the emotion, particularly in relation to the categories associated with OPC representative actions, activities, traits and relationship.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by a number of factors. First, a limitation often attributed to the critical incident methodology is that it produces large amounts of data that can often seem overwhelming. This study was no exception, producing a very large volume of data that could have been interpreted in a number of different ways. Some incidents could have been placed in two different categories. One example is the helpful incident "provided encouragement" that could have gone under either of the categories "OPC representative action/activity" or "counselling." This problem was addressed by incorporating a second interview into the study's design that gave participants an opportunity to view the categories and the critical incidents or wish list items attributed to each category. They were then encouraged to either confirm that the incident had been categorized correctly or provide their input on how it should be changed.

Second, critical incidents are self-reported, not observed. Flanagan (1954) addressed this potential limitation by comparing reports based on daily memory with those obtained from daily reports, finding that recalled incidents could be relied upon to provide adequate data. As previously mentioned, this was later confirmed by Woolsey (1986). Flanagan further suggested that if "full and precise details are given, it can usually be assumed that this information is accurate. Vague reports suggest that the incident is not well remembered" (p.
According to Alfonso (1997), self-reports often include only those incidents an individual can remember during the interview and can be hampered by the style of the interview. The design of this study minimized the likelihood of these limitations being a concern by its use of open-ended questions and invitation to participants to phone or e-mail any additional incidents they thought of after the first interview. It also provided another opportunity for participants to add incidents by building in a second interview. Any incidents found in the transcripts that were vague or unclear as to where they belonged (e.g., helpful, not helpful, or wish list) were not included in the final results of this study. Participants had an opportunity to review the remaining incidents and wish list items, comment on their categorization as well as the category headings themselves, and add any incidents or items. Only two new items arose as a result of this second opportunity for input.

The second interview served two additional purposes, those of validating the categories and introducing a phenomenological element to this study. At the same time it gave participants a chance to confirm that their “voices” had been accurately captured and translated into language and categories that fit their experiences. Introducing this second interview also helped minimize the limitations of the study previously mentioned.

Since this study is exploratory and descriptive, the results cannot be generalized. Its intent was to expand what we know about whether the OPC services that are being offered help or hinder individual clients, and whether there are services they would like to receive but are not. My hope was to shed
light on a little-researched, uncharted aspect of individual clients' OPC experience in order to provide a direction for future research and perhaps a starting point for both theory generation and the creation of OPC guidelines or standards.

Finally, all participants were volunteers who may have been predisposed to “surviving” and making the best of things. This may have contributed to the high number of helpful vs. not helpful incidents. During the interviews, several of the participants stated they were reluctant to discuss incidents or services that they did not find helpful for fear that they would be considered “bad mouthing” the OPC firm and being disrespectful to their previous employer who provided this service for them. Despite that potential bias the participants may have introduced into this study, these results are consistent with current career counselling and OPC literature, as well as my professional and personal experience.

Implications for Clients

The first step in a critical incident study is to determine the aim of the activity to be studied (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986). This proved to be difficult for two reasons. First, there are varied and often conflicting aims OPC services are reported to have with respect to individual clients. These range from supporting individuals to move into a new situation (e.g., retiring, returning to school, finding a new job), to maximizing the chances of rapid re-employment for the displaced worker. Given this wide range of aims associated with OPC
services, both in OPC corporate brochures and academic or business literature, it is not surprising it was difficult to determine the aim for OPC services.

Second, there is the added complexity of OPC firms serving two clients, the hiring company and the individual client. In a review of their marketing brochures, it was observed that OPC firms cite several aims for their corporate clients. These range from providing them with support as they move through organizational change, to helping them minimize their exposure to law suits, high costs, adverse public opinion, decreased employee morale and productivity. It would therefore be in the corporate and individual client's best interests for the corporate client to gain a very clear understanding of what the OPC firm's aims are with respect to their activities, on both the corporate client's behalf and the individual client's. It would then be important for these aims to be clearly communicated to the individual client, either in writing as part of the severance package literature the corporate client provides to the departing employee, or as part of the orientation program provided by the OPC firm. A combination of both would be ideal.

As previously mentioned, there are two clients who receive OPC services, the corporate client who hires and pays the OPC firm, and the individual client whose employment has been terminated. It was on this latter client that this study focused, yet the results of this research do have some implications for the hiring company. When discussing the purpose of this study with the eleven hiring companies approached in the course of procuring participants for this study, all the human resource professionals to whom I spoke indicated they did
not have an effective checklist or set of criteria against which to assess an OPC firm's ability to deliver services. What they are often given is a list of the OPC firm's services and fee schedule. Word of mouth and personal experience may influence the human resource professional's decision about which firm to hire, but they rarely obtain direct feedback from their ex-employees. There are several reasons for that. First, the ex-employee is in an awkward position after having been terminated from a company, making it difficult to initiate contact with his or her ex-employer for the purposes of providing such input. Second, the terminated individual is generally trying to maintain a professional relationship with the ex-employer because he or she is dependent on the company for a reference. This also makes it difficult to provide candid feedback.

The results of this study could be used by hiring companies as the basis for a checklist of items they discuss with an OPC firm prior to contracting their services. The wish list categories might be of particular use in this regard since they give voice to the needs of individual clients for the first time. Although each hiring company will have geographic, budgetary, and other considerations it needs to take into account when making a decision, it could be helpful to the hiring company to know what services individual clients find most helpful and assess the OPC firm on its ability to deliver those services.

There are two major implications arising out of this study for individual clients. First, while some of the needs of individual OPC clients are being met, a significant number of them are not. This is suggested by the wish list categories that emerged as items of importance to the participants in this study.
second implication is that some level of emotional harm is being done as a result of the way certain OPC programs are being delivered. This contention is extrapolated from the emotional way in which 40 percent of the participants expressed their desire for counselling services, and the anger, pain, frustration, and feelings of abandonment that were still obvious even several years after the end of their OPC programs. These two implications are related in that neither the hiring companies nor the OPC firms are intentionally setting out not to meet the individual clients' needs or inflict harm, yet in some cases that is the result. It is an important implication of this study and something that can be put right. Hiring companies, as mentioned above, could begin to use the 16 categories that emerged from this study as a checklist against which to evaluate OPC service providers, and OPC firms could consider making some changes to the way they deliver services that would alleviate this for future individual OPC recipients.

**Implications for Practitioners**

OPC representatives may or may not be trained counsellors. A review of the marketing materials from two OPC firms in the Greater Vancouver area profiles the extensive business backgrounds and education achievements of their OPC practitioners. While one had a peer-counselling certificate, the rest had educational backgrounds that were not obviously related to counselling or psychology. An implication arising from this study is that perhaps the degree of counselling training OPC representatives have needs to be revisited and that OPC firms need to both help practitioners upgrade their skills, and review their hiring profiles. As already discussed, OPC firms are providing services to a more
diverse group of individuals within the context of a rapidly changing world and business environment. The OPC business itself is maturing and becoming increasingly competitive (Pickman, 1997). Given the trend in the career counselling literature towards more of a cross-over between career and personal counselling (Anderson & Niles, 1995; Niles, 1996), the call of OPC experts to ensure counselling is an integral part of the OPC process (Burdett, 1988; Davenport, 1984; Pickman, 1994) and the desire of the participants in this study for more counselling, it seems reasonable to suggest that perhaps a different mix of business and counselling skills might help OPC representatives be more effective in serving the needs of their individual clients. Pickman (1994) states the optimal background for an outplacement practitioner is one that combines both relevant business experience and specialized counseling training. One needs to be knowledgeable about the corporate world in order to be credible and helpful to clients. In addition, one needs to be skillful in counseling in order to meet the challenges of outplacement (p. 73).

A number of other implications for OPC firms arise from the results of this study. First, 40 percent of the participants did not know that OPC services existed prior to their job loss. This translated into the fact that these participants had no expectations around OPC services prior to receiving them. Therefore, it would appear that a necessary first step when meeting a new individual client is to provide an in-depth orientation around what the OPC program entails. Such an orientation might include the terms of the package that the client's ex-
employer has agreed to fund, an overview of the firm's services and amenities, specific details around what OPC can do for the client, how the OPC representative will work with the client, and the exact relationship between the OPC firm and the client's ex-employer. This is consistent with a number of participants in this study who said they would like the OPC program elements and design to include a thorough orientation to the firm's services that includes the components just mentioned. One participant stressed the importance of realizing that the clients are in shock and therefore OPC firms should not assume that they are absorbing the information that is being provided. This suggests the information should be shared with the client over the course of several meetings, or reinforced more than once.

Second, the 53 percent of participants who said they would like to have had an opportunity to tailor their OPC program to fit their specific, individual needs highlights the need for flexible, cafeteria or menu style OPC programs. The academic and business literature supports this as an element of OPC program design, yet it appears only one of the six OPC firms represented in this study was designed to build an individualized program for each client to meet his or her specific needs. Based on the observations of several participants who did have a somewhat flexible program, the key to the success of such a design would be having sufficient options for people to choose from. For instance, two participants mentioned that they liked the OPC firm's flexible approach where they could pick and choose from among a variety of services, but if they were not interested in going into business for themselves they could eliminate about one-
third of the menu options, leaving them few components of interest or use to them. This was a source of frustration to these participants, and therefore is something OPC firms might want to consider carefully if they are thinking about providing a menu of options.

Third, since 53 percent of the participants did not find it helpful to have access to office space, computers, telephones, and secretarial services on the OPC firm’s premises, this suggests that technological advances (personal computers, personal voice-mail, e-mail, pagers) and telecommuting arrangements (home offices, greater self-sufficiency with respect to producing correspondence) may have diminished the value of these once invaluable OPC services. OPC firms might consider paring back these services and only offering them to those who really need them rather than making it a staple for all clients. Another alternative might be contracting these services out to a firm that provides secretarial services to an array of clients. Either of these suggestions would still provide the services to those who require them while saving the OPC firm the cost of staffing up or maintaining large offices that are not needed by all candidates.

Fourth, a variety of OPC services and delivery methods appear to be in use based on the experiences of the participants in this study. Services ranged from group sessions at the employer’s workplace that included one 30 minute one-on-one meeting with an OPC representative, to full-service 6 month programs including individualized career planning and job-search assistance, to flexible programs where the clients chart their own course and set the pace, to
start to finish programs that are entirely one-on-one without any group work, to a combination of group and individual work. This reflects Pickman's (1997) and McNerney's (1995) observations about the new pressures being put on OPC firms to boost sagging revenues and deal with a much larger and diverse group of individual clients.

This has two major implications. One is for the training of OPC representatives. Given an increasingly diverse clientele and the emergence of specialized work environments, Pickman (1997) writes that OPC practitioners "require a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the counseling process, a broader repertoire of counselor interventions, and more knowledge about job search and marketplace conditions" (p. xi). This is consistent with Anderson and Niles (1995) and Krumboltz (1998) who have found the line to be blurring between career counselling and personal counselling. In fact, there is such an overlap between career and other life components that Krumboltz states "people have complex problems that involve personal, emotional, family as well as career concerns ... (career counsellors) need to be able to address complex interpersonal problems at the same time" (p. 562). Although already mentioned earlier in this section, this message is an important one that ought not to be forgotten by either corporate clients or OPC firms.

The second implication this change in clientele has for OPC practitioners is that their current mix of core services and group workshop/seminar protocols may be cost-effective, but they may not be meeting the needs of the individual clients. This is supported by the emergence of the six new wish list categories
that have in common a desire among the participants in this study for more
connection, individualized attention and an opportunity to share their experiences
with others in a meaningful way. This highlights the potential conflict of interest
that OPC firms find themselves in as they serve two clients with very different
needs. It is in the corporate client's best interests to keep costs down, which is
facilitated by workshop formats that focus on job search skills training with a
minimum of individual service. However, the results of this study suggest it is in
the individual client's best interests to have access to highly individualized,
tailored services. This conflict will not be easily resolved as OPC firms face
pressure from their corporate clients to keep costs down. One way to approach it
might be to make the aims of all parties explicit from the outset and clearly
communicate them, particularly to the individual client. If everyone is operating
from the same set of expectations, disconnects between expectations and actual
services delivered can be minimized.

Finally, adult development literature emphasizes the pivotal role work
plays in our lives. It defines who we are, what we do, our socio-economic status,
social class, who our friends are, how we spend our leisure time, and society's
expectations of us (Lemme, 1999). Suddenly losing one's job is much more than
an economic crisis or a change in routine, it cuts to the very core of one's
identity. Low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence and purpose, hopelessness,
despair, anger, and other powerful emotions are often the result. Yet the
participants in this study did not mention as either helpful or not helpful OPC
services designed to help them deal with the emotions triggered by their job loss
and the resulting transitions that ensued. The mention of such services emerged only in the wish list discussions with participants, suggesting they were absent in the OPC programs this group of people experienced.

Given the fact that these participants were all facing a transition of one sort or another, it was surprising that none of them mentioned receiving transition counselling. Two participants referred to it as a wish list service they would like to have received in relation to their specific age requirements (one male was over 60; one female was in her late 40's). Anecdotal information obtained from a number of displaced workers in 1996 and 1997 suggested that mid-life and mid-career transition counselling would be welcomed by individuals who are grappling with these issues in addition to being unemployed. Bridges' model (1991) of endings, the neutral zone and new beginnings is easy to understand and apply, providing workbooks as well as reference material. Schlossberg's (1984, 1990) transition model would also be useful since it encompasses coping responses, understanding the context in which the change occurs, the impact the change has on one's daily life, taking stock of one's resources, taking charge, and control. Her model deals directly with the special requirements of facing unanticipated change, which describes unexpected unemployment since it is not a consequence of natural life-cycle transitions. The stated desire of the participants in this study for counselling and hands-on, structured services could be met at least partially if OPC firms introduced these transition management concepts to their clients.
Implications for Future Research

A number of implications for future research arose out of this study. First, as mentioned in Chapter IV, the participants' levels of satisfaction with the jobs they took while engaged in their OPC program or immediately after its conclusion provided a tantalizing hint that Davenport's (1984) suspicions may be correct that an individual client's best interests may not be served by encouraging him or her to get a new job quickly. Davenport raised the point that one way in which OPC firms define the success of their services is the speed with which an individual client becomes re-employed. She suggested that this definition of success may not be adequate because it does not address the satisfaction of the displaced worker in the new job, long range performance in that job, or worker adjustment. While this clearly fell outside the scope of the current critical incident study, the results obtained from the question about level of job satisfaction suggest that individual clients' best interests may not be served simply by obtaining new employment quickly. They also suggest that hiring companies might want to rethink their definition of what success looks like when evaluating an OPC firm's services. This is an area that warrants future research in order to determine whether these preliminary results hold up in a study designed to address this specific question.

Second, the context in which OPC services are being delivered gives rise to a question. Since OPC is being provided to corporate clients, and is reflective of the business culture, would counselling be effective even though the participants of this study have identified it as a need? The environment created
by some OPC firms might not be conducive to self-exploration and dealing with raw emotions, even if trained counsellors were available. Two participants directly mentioned this. One suggested there was a real taboo against bringing emotions into the workplace, thus finding it impossible to deal with her emotions while at the OPC offices that had been set up at her employer’s work site. The second participant mentioned he felt constrained by the pleasant but very businesslike atmosphere created by the OPC firm, preferring instead the less formal and more relaxed environment offered by a different program he attended after completing his OPC program. Often OPC offices speak of money, power, and success, sending a message to which corporate clients respond but which does not necessarily create an inviting, encouraging, or welcoming environment in which to share one’s vulnerabilities.

The Aquilanti Integrated Model (AIM) of outplacement (Aquilanti & Leroux, 1999), proposes a four-phase integrated approach that deals with loss, grieving, and transition; personal development; job search; and ongoing counselling and support. Although AIM appears to offer all the components this group of participants voiced in the helpful and wish list categories, Aquilanti herself suggests it may have limited applicability since it requires considerable training to be able to effectively deliver it, it needs to be tailored for each individual candidate (which makes it expensive), and OPC firms tend to use their own policy with a focus on tasks rather than process. Future research around the delivery of counselling services as part of an integrated OPC model within the all
pervasive business context in which it would be situated would help shed light on this question.

Third, it was interesting to note that the participants' experiences of OPC services as either positive or negative did not appear to correspond to the OPC firm used or program of services they received, but rather to the individual representative with whom the clients worked. Although this question was not one that was asked, it was information volunteered by the majority of the participants. Six OPC firms provided services to the participants in this study, and while some participants reported a positive OPC experience with a particular firm, others did not. For instance, two participants received the identical program of OPC services from the same firm, although they worked with different OPC representatives. One participant indicated it was a positive experience while the other said it was a negative one. A second firm that provided OPC services to six participants also received mixed reviews: two participants reported negative experiences and four reported positive ones. Reviews were mixed for a third firm that provided services to two participants: one found the experience to be positive; the other found it to be negative. Since this was not the focus of this study, and not enough data was collected to shed any real light on the possible relationship between positive or negative OPC experiences and the individual's relationship with his or her OPC representative, it would be interesting to follow-up on this with more research. The results could have implications for OPC program elements and design and the training of OPC representatives.
Fourth, as previously mentioned, the aims of OPC activities appear to be unclear for both corporate and individual clients. The results of this study could be used to help corporate clients define what they want or need from an OPC firm and determine the aim of the activity for the individuals who will be receiving them. Future research on this could be of interest to see if clarifying the aims of OPC activities increases the corporate and individual clients' levels of satisfaction with the services.

A fifth aspect of OPC services that could benefit from future study is around which services are most important to individual clients and which ones could be eliminated. This question arises from the observations during this research that participants expressed high emotion around certain not helpful incidents, particularly those with respect to their relationship with the OPC representative, and the OPC representative’s actions, activities, traits, and characteristics. While this study elicited information about what services were helpful or hindering, and whether there were services participants would like to have received but did not, it did not make any attempt to prioritize the services or rank them in order of importance. To help corporate clients decide what services they want to provide to their departing employees and guide OPC firms in determining the mix of cost-effective yet helpful services for their individual clients, additional research in this area would be helpful.

Sixth, an unexpected finding emerged from this study, although it was not pursued because it did not relate to the study’s critical incident design and intent. Two of the participants described at length the ineffective and damaging ways in
which their managers handled the termination interview, and both these individuals stated that they found nothing helpful about the OPC services they received. The idea that the quality of the termination interview is linked to the individual client’s OPC experience is not new. Finnie and Finnie (1993) state “in the early 1970’s, earning my spurs in outplacement-reemployment, I quickly learned that an employer’s good termination practices helped our reemployment efforts dramatically. People discharged decently carried much less ‘baggage’ into the marketplace and landed good jobs faster” (p. 2). This hint of a connection between how OPC services are received by the individual clients and the manner in which their terminations are handled by their ex-employers was outside the scope of this study but was thought important enough to mention as an area that might warrant future exploration.

A seventh implication for future research that arose from this study is a bit obscure but none the less important. It stems from the apparent gap between the recent career counselling literature and the existing OPC literature. The findings of this study suggest there is perhaps a disconnect between emerging best practices in career counselling and current OPC services. This arose out of the literature review in Chapter II, the theoretical agreement discussion for the categories in Part IV of Chapter IV, the pressure OPC firms are under to provide more cost-effective services (Pickman, 1997), and the categories that emerged in the wish list group. Specifically this was noticed in relation to Mastie’s (1996) contention that competency testing was an important component of career counselling; Niles’ (1996), Zunker’s (1994), and Anderson and Niles’ (1995)
assertions that career counselling needs to encompass all aspects of a person's needs; and the career counselling studies suggesting the effectiveness of career groups (Anderson, 1995; Borgen et al., 1989; Davies, 1996; DiNuzzo & Tolbert, 1981; McKnight, 1991). When the current OPC services as represented by the 15 participants in this study are looked at against these elements of effective career counselling, the practice seems to be somewhat different from the theory emerging from research. Further research would be needed to verify that this is, indeed, occurring. If it is, it could have important implications around stakeholder expectations, OPC aims, program design and delivery, and most of all the emotional well being of the individual clients.

The eighth area where further research might be warranted arises from many of the points just made. The findings of this study suggest it might be appropriate to take the time to review best practices in career counselling, survey OPC firms to see the extent to which they are incorporating these best practices, then update the OPC literature to reflect the realities of today's business environment and clients' needs. The results of this study could be used as a starting point for designing the questions around emerging best practices and individual clients' needs. Pickman (1997) and Axmith (1997) appear to have started this review, but more research is needed. Much of the OPC literature is from the 1970's and 1980's when downsizing was at its peak and the OPC industry was experiencing unprecedented growth. Perhaps it is time to revisit OPC - its purpose, aims, clients' needs, services, and delivery models in light of the changing career counselling and business landscapes.
Finally, the individual client was the focus of this study rather than the corporate client. However, the extent to which the needs of the corporate client are being met remains an unanswered question that warrants further research (Davenport, 1984; Pickman, 1994; Wooten, 1996). In the course of conducting this study, strong messages were received that perhaps the corporate clients' needs are not being met. First, the human resource professionals contacted when recruiting participants for this study could not say whether they were satisfied or not with the OPC services they were receiving, mostly because they did not know what criteria they should be assessing their performance against. Second, the aim of OPC activities is not clear, with differences apparently existing between marketing materials and actual services delivered to individual clients. This might also be the case for corporate clients. Third, it is not clear whether corporate clients are expecting their ex-employees to be provided with counselling services to help with transition and other issues that arise as a result of job loss, or whether they are expecting only that the terminated worker be provided with job search skills to facilitate rapid re-employment. Future research might help clarify these expectations and expand our knowledge of whether the corporate clients' expectations are being met by OPC firms. It is important to know what corporate clients expect since they pay the bills and are therefore in a key position to influence the services being offered by the OPC firms to their individual clients. Communication of these corporate clients' expectations would then be important in order to manage the individual clients' expectations.
Conclusion

This study has addressed and met its purpose. Sixteen categories emerged from this research that describe the OPC services individual clients find helpful, not helpful, and wish they had received but did not. A variety of methods were utilized to validate the categories. Participants were given an opportunity to voice their OPC experiences and contribute to the final formulation of the data collected. A number of implications emerged for clients (both corporate and individual), OPC firms and OPC practitioners. In addition, areas for future research were identified.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of counselling psychology, and outplacement counselling in particular, by supporting Wooten’s (1996) findings and extending our knowledge of whether the current OPC services meet the needs of individual clients. This study was done without using pre-determined categories, placing the emphasis instead on giving individual clients full range to describe their OPC experiences in terms that were meaningful to them. Major results of this study include the need for counselling services to be incorporated into OPC programs, the need for tailored, flexible services to better meet the needs of individual clients, and the need for more structured/hands-on services through more active OPC representative involvement. It also highlighted that a gap exists between current OPC services and those services individual clients would find helpful. The categories that emerged from this study can be used by hiring companies as a checklist for evaluating services as part of their due diligence prior to engaging an OPC firm. The wish list categories
provide OPC firms with information they can use when reviewing their roster of services and delivery methods with a view to providing services that are helpful to their individual clients. Finally, these results suggest the need for a review of OPC representatives' qualifications and training, indicating there is a need for more counselling skills in combination with good business and job search knowledge.

On a personal note, I was touched by the number of individuals who participated in this study in order to make a difference. Many relived difficult experiences in order to provide the data for this study. They shared with me their pain, humour, and insights as a gesture of generosity and goodwill towards those who follow in their footsteps – individuals facing unexpected unemployment and an unwanted introduction to an OPC professional. By their actions they either transmuted a difficult experience into a learning opportunity that will contribute to making things better for others, or they shared what worked well so more OPC firms might incorporate or increase the use of those elements in their programs. It was a privilege to witness their stories and learn from them all.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introductory Letter Sent to Professional Colleagues for Distribution
to Colleagues Who Had Received OPC Services

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Lee Butterfield and I am investigating the experience of individual clients who receive outplacement counselling. This research is part of my master’s work in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia. It is a study that is close to my heart since I have both engaged outplacement firms in my role as a human resources manager, and received outplacement counselling myself when my job was declared redundant in 1996 and I personally had to deal with unexpected unemployment.

I am seeking adult volunteers who were provided with outplacement services as part of their termination package from a previous employer within the past 3-5 years. Participants will be asked a series of questions in a face-to-face interview: Tell me about your experience with the outplacement services you received. What services did you receive that you found helpful? What services did you receive that you did not find helpful? What were your expectations of the outplacement counselling service provider? Were your expectations realized? There will be one 90-minute interview and one 60-minute interview, both of which will be audio-taped. The tapes will later be transcribed and given a code number in order to ensure confidentiality. The tapes will be erased upon completion of the study. The information obtained will be kept confidential. Participants will not be identified by the use of names or initials.

The purpose of these interviews is to collect information about your outplacement counselling experience and the incidents that helped or hindered you in that experience. The second interview is to have you review the way in which the information collected has been organized to ensure it properly reflects your experience. It is my sincere hope that this research will give a voice to recipients of outplacement counselling and that the information obtained through this study might shed light on the outplacement counselling services that would be most effective in meeting individual clients' needs.

Your involvement in this study is voluntary and you may decide to participate or not participate, or you may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind.

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Appendix B: Introductory Letter Sent by Medium and Large-sized Organizations in the Lower Mainland to Ex-employees Who Had Been Offered and Received OPC Services

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Lee Butterfield and I am investigating the experience of individual clients who receive outplacement counselling. This research is part of my master's work in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia. It is a study that is close to my heart since I have both engaged outplacement firms in my role as a human resources manager, and received outplacement counselling myself when my job was declared redundant in 1996 and I personally had to deal with unexpected unemployment.

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Your involvement in this study is voluntary and you may decide to participate or not participate, or you may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind.
Appendix C: Introductory Letter Sent to the Professional Employment Group at the Human Resources Management Association of British Columbia

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Lee Butterfield and I am investigating the experience of individual clients who received outplacement counselling. This research is part of my master's work in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia. It is a study that is close to my heart since I have both engaged outplacement firms in my role as a human resources manager, and received outplacement counselling myself when my job was declared redundant in 1996 and I personally had to deal with unexpected unemployment.

I am seeking adult volunteers who were provided with outplacement services as part of their termination package from a previous employer within the past 3-5 years. Participants will be asked a series of questions in a face-to-face interview: Tell me about your experience with the outplacement services you received. What services did you receive that you found helpful? What services did you receive that you did not find helpful? What were your expectations of the outplacement counselling service provider? Were your expectations realized? There will be one 90-minute interview and one 60-minute interview, both of which will be audio-taped. The tapes will later be transcribed and given a code number in order to ensure confidentiality. The tapes will be erased upon completion of the study. The information obtained will be kept confidential. Participants will not be identified by the use of names or initials.

The purpose of these interviews is to collect information about your outplacement counselling experience and the incidents that helped or hindered you in that experience. The second interview is to have you review the way in which the information collected has been organized to ensure it properly reflects your experience. It is my sincere hope that this research will give a voice to recipients of outplacement counselling and that the information obtained through this study might shed light on the outplacement counselling services that would be most effective in meeting individual clients' needs.

Your involvement in this study is voluntary and you may decide to participate or not participate, or you may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind.