

CAREER CRISES ARE MORE THAN THEY'RE CRACKED UP TO BE

ABSTRACT

by

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Transitions are ubiquitous phenomenon in modern life. This research sets forth a grounded theory phase sequence model of the transition process. The model is used to explore the midlife transition in terms of emotionality, changing career investments, and movement towards autonomy. Implications for careerists and human resource management are suggested.

"The career development perspective encourages one to consider the total person who comes to work. In practice this point of view means that we must consider how activities related to self development, career development and family development interact throughout the entire life span of that person...Much has been said in books on management about the need to manage the whole person, but not much help has been given to the manager to understand the whole person, to gain insight into how needs change throughout the course of life." (Schein 1978, p 6,7)

From such a perspective, the organization seeks to create multiple matching processes to bring together its own changing needs and the changing career needs of individuals.

Schein (1978) and Boccialetti (1982) have identified midlife as one of several crucial times for career. That crisis and transition occur at midlife has been well documented (Erikson 1951, Jacques 1970, Jung 1971, Levinson 1978, Gould 1978, Wolfe and Kolb 1979). These theorists have all explored the forces that drive the midlife transition, as well as the possibilities and directions for personal growth inherent in that transition. Just how these transitions unfold has been less thoroughly studied. This study seeks to better understand the process of transition between two major stable eras of life: early adulthood and midlife.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Jung (1923) was perhaps the first to lend theoretical support to the notion of change and growth at midlife.

"In youth we limit ourselves to the attainable...the better that we have succeeded in entrenching ourselves in our personal attitudes and social positions, the more it appears as if we had discovered the right course and the right principles and ideals of behavior. For this reason, we suppose them to be eternally valid and make a virtue of unchangingly clinging to them...We overlook the fact that the social goal is attained only at a cost of a diminution of the personality. Many find that too many aspects of life lie among dusty memories, but sometimes they are glowing coals among grey ashes...we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of the morning." (Jung, 1971, p 12,17)

Jung placed high emphasis on the process of individuation, the drive of the self to become increasingly differentiated from its environment in its own unique way. Such a differentiation allows for a wider contact with the world as it truly exists. This process of individuation becomes most prominent during periods of transition. The non-dominant functions and aspects of self (and the potential satisfactions associated with them) press for attention and expression.

Jacques (1965) coined the phrase, "midlife crisis", in a study of artists' lives and their creativity. For many, creativity either expressed itself for the first time, dried up, or qualitatively changed at midlife. His conclusion was that this midlife crisis was precipitated by an awareness of death, an emotional recognition. The working through of this awareness (assessment of accomplishments against dreams and goals, becoming oriented to the time left, finding worthy purpose, and facing up to death) often served as a background to more truly appreciating and affirming life. Similarly, denial and repression of one's mortality can cut one off from the possibility of new vitality and often results in stagnation or an overcompensation.

Wolfe and Kolb (1980) have argued that early adulthood is generally a phase of specialization. The individual finds his place in the adult world and masters some specific portions of it. Confidence, resources, and knowledge about the workings of the outer world accumulate, but the uncertainty of specialization is growing towards the end of this phase. Life becomes more routine and less challenging; the rewards seem less satisfying. There is,

"a dawning awareness that one's early life course has been shaped by role bound choices of work and family made at a time when opportunities seemed more limited and consequences less clear." (Wolfe and Kolb 1980, p 239)

These dynamics set the stage for the quest for integration. While the life structure of early adulthood may be adequate to succeed, it is generally not well anchored in the self. Integration requires a balancing of life investments as well as a turning inward. However, personal integration is not a state to be achieved once and for all, but rather a process to be pursued throughout life.

Adulthood has also been described as containing a series of alternating phases of stability and transition (Levinson 1978). He observed that the dynamics of having a life structure, as well as external forces and events, are what trigger the regular transition of adult life. A person's life structure is the pattern of activities, relationships, and life spaces at a given time which enables one to pursue a set of life choices and values. Typically, such a structure outlives its usefulness in about seven years. More interestingly, Levinson found that it generally takes approximately five years of transition to fully establish a new life structure suitable to the new conditions.

Levinson offers three perspectives with which to contrast the differing characters of midlife and early adulthood: 1. changes in biological and psychological functioning, 2. the sequence of generations (each generation having particular functions and roles in the overall work of society), 3. the evolution of careers and enterprises (culminating events often occur which symbolize the outcome of youthful strivings). The midlife transition is thus a time to come to grips with these changing realities that circumscribe the individual. Powerful forces have helped set the life structure of the thirties in place and they are still acting within that structure to hold the individual steady in his or her place. The generic tasks of every transition are:

"to question and re-appraise the existing structure, to explore various possibilities for change in the self and the world, and to move towards commitment to the crucial choices that will form the basis for a new life structure in the ensuing stable period" (p 49, 59).

Levinson observed that 80% of his sample underwent moderate to severe crisis during the midlife transition, suggesting a new criteria for normality at midlife. Given such forces and pressures for change and the long periods of adulthood spent in transition, it becomes sensible to ask about the nature of the transition sequence and its regularities.

METHOD

This research took place in and emerged an extensive program of research into adult development and midlife. Its purpose has been to explore the learning processes in adult development and the social, emotional and cognitive factors of midlife transition.

Sample. 64 subjects (33 men, 31 women ranging in age from 35-50) were drawn from a wide range of occupations, e.g. law, medicine, nursing, teaching, entrepreneurs, engineering, managers, CEO's, etc. Each was engaged in or considering significant changes in their lives or careers.

General Design. The general design of the overall project was guided by the philosophy of co-inquiry (Wolfe 1980). A challenge of co-inquiry is to create conditions of trust and openness where the participants are able to join with the staff to examine their lives and experiences. The researcher's need for valid self disclosure on topics that are highly complex and very personal, can link, under favorable conditions, with the participants' personal stake in uncovering, examining, and making sense of their own data. Activities within the project were continually designed to insure the participation of and benefit to both the researchers and the subjects.

The four major activities were:

1. An initial two to three hour intensive interview covering current career, family, self, and interpersonal issues, as well as personal history. A battery of personality inventories was also given at this time.
2. An initial three day self assessment workshops with different groups of participants. These contained eight four-hour modules each focused on a specific theme. Each module included an introduction by the staff, individual work centered on an inventory or exercise, and a sharing of the information in subgroups with two other participants and a staff member.
3. A clinical review was held after the first workshop. The total staff spent two to four hours reviewing each case.
4. A second set of three day workshops with the same sample was held one and a half to two years later.

Transition Sequence. The transition sequence concept and model emerged from our attempts to understand the process of transition. It became clear that the people in our sample were at several different points in transition, some only beginning to contemplate change, others consolidating changes that they had already made. Those who had progressed further often

talked about past experiences that others were currently going through. A grounded theory approach (constant comparative method) was used to construct a set of meaningful categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The interview data were subjected to an inductive analysis in which tentative hypotheses concerning steps in transition were constructed and revised. Themes and categories eventually emerged from the back and forth movement between data and concepts and these formed the basis for the conceptual model of steps in the midlife transition sequence. A fuller description of this method, along with several case studies, can be found in the original work (O'Connor 1984).

After the model had been constructed, each participant was identified in terms of the transition scale in Table 1, in order to further explore the nature of each step using quantitative data.

Other Measures. One subset of measures draw on data from the clinical reviews which involved a considerable weighing of each case from a holistic viewpoint. Because of these reviews, it became apparent that the transitions under study varied in ways that had not been captured by other measures. Some people were undergoing narrow, well-bounded changes, while others were being plunged into extensive changes; some were only mildly dissatisfied with their current situations, while others were in the midst of emotional upheavals; some felt good, while others displayed a highly negative affect. Several theoretical constructs emerged from this process which had not been adequately instrumented.

Scope and Intensity of the Current Transition. While most of the participants spoke of changes taking place, some referred to changes occurring in only one life context, while others made reference to multiple changes. We labelled this dimension as "Scope of Transition". Similarly, some spoke of modest changes that were not really core to their makeup, while others vividly described in tense transitions that were very central to their sense of self. We called this dimension "Intensity of Transition". Originally, these two dimensions were rated separately, but because the outcomes were so highly correlated, they were collapsed into a single scale (see Table 1).

Table 1. Scales and Inter-Judge Reliability

Transition Step (.98)*

- 1) stable or pre-transition: no evidence of engaging in change
- 2) Rising discontent: expression of much discontent with current state
- 3) Crisis: critical juncture, peak of the transition process in terms of uncertainty and upheaval
- 4) Re-direction and adaptation: evidence of tentative new directions
- 5) Re-stabilizing: re-committing to new directions.

Scope of Transition (.81)*

- 1) Undergoing minor transitions of low intensity
- 3) Experiencing some significant amount of transition of moderate intensity
- 5) In the midst of extensive changes in important arenas of life; intense involving issues central to makeup

Emotional Tone (.91)*

-2) Predominantly negative affect and tone; depressed, despairing, angry, etc.

0) Neutral or expressing both negative and positive emotions equally

+2) Positive, optimistic, zestful tone. Able to express negative emotions, but not dominated by negative affect.

Emotional Arousal (.86)* **

1) Generally under aroused, content, subdued, lacking energy

3) Well-energized; energy channeled well by purposes in life

5) Over aroused emotionally; spending significant time and energy in dealing with or defending against own emotions and responses to current situation

* (Numbers in parentheses indicate interjudge reliability for each scale. Each participant was independently ranked by two judges who had access to all the qualitative data. These rankings (and disagreements in particular) were reviewed by a third judge, who had worked extensively with many of the participants, and this generally led to resolutions of the differences. While these are rough measures, the inter-judge reliability coefficients gave us some confidence that they are indeed dimensions that can be replicated.)

** Categories one and two were eventually collapsed resulting in a four point scale.

Emotional Tone. Participants also varied in their emotional states in relation to the transitions that they were in. Some were vocal and loud in their frustration and anger; others were enthusiastic and positive about their current state. Observations on the affect and tone of each participant during the first three day workshop were recorded at the clinical reviews and were the basis for rankings on the "Emotional Tone" scale. (see Table 1)

Emotional Arousal and Alignment. Degree of arousal was another dimension on which participants varied. Some were rather subdued during this period of life, while others were highly keyed up. A five point scale of emotional arousal was built to capture this dimension. We eventually collapsed categories "one" and "two" because they seemed very similar and they were under-represented. (see Table 1)

Instruments: Outer vs. Inner-Directedness. A 39 item instrument with five point Likert-type scales measured the participant's orientation to outer and inner directedness along five dimensions: 1) power owning or power attributing, 2) roles defined by self or other's wishes and expectations, 3) self or other as primary source of values and behavior, 4) initiating or passive stance, and 5) independent or dependent (see Schott, 1981). An alpha reliability coefficient of .77 was computed for a 15 item inner-directedness scale and .82 for a 15 item outer-directedness scale.

Life Investments. Relative investments in the areas of career, family, self, and interpersonal relationships were measured by simply dividing a circle into four areas. Participants were also asked to rate what they believed would be the ideal set of investments for themselves. This helped to insure that some easily confused dimensions of experience (actual and ideal) would serve as reference points for each other and would increase validity.

Personal Life Issues. Participants rated the personal importance of a set of 23 issues related to career, family, and self on a 1 (not and/or less important) to 7 (very important; a key issue now) scale.

Career Frustrations. Participants in the study rated a set of 24 career frustrations from 1 (no experience of this) to 4 (moderate experience) to 7 (a lot of experience of this) (Bocialetti 1982).

RESULTS

A. The Transition Sequence. The five steps in this model of transition are: Stability, Rising Discontent, Crisis, Re-Direction, and Re-Stabilizing. While it is useful to visualize these steps as linear, in the concrete realities of individual cases, each step can vary in length from one case to another and within a single case. The boundaries between steps can often be gray in that a specific frame of time may contain elements of two steps. With this understanding, the steps of this model will be presented as if they are distinct and linear.

Transition Step One: Stability Stability seems like the most solid place to begin anchoring our understandings of the transition sequence. One moves into a transition from a more or less stable life structure with established roles and relationships allowing for productivity, dependability, and the pursuit of selected purposes. Periods of stability allow the elaboration and enactment of one's values and beliefs. In the absence of fairly strong internal or external pressures, the stable structure persists.

Transition Step 2: Rising Discontent From periods of stability will arise discontent; no life structure stays constant and well attuned to needs for more than a few years. This discontent is a source of energy for change and new directions for growth. A new and often critical inner voice is emerging. There is a desire to change without knowing exactly how and without a realistic grasp of the consequences. Old aspects of self are finding less satisfaction in the current state of affairs and previously ignored or neglected parts of self (often in conflict with the current structure) begin to demand attention and energy. The logic and inevitableness of one's basic and often unarticulated understandings of the world now tend to be called into question. Significant change often begins with little or no conscious planning or direction. It is often felt in the gut and happens in the real world.

Transition Step 3: Crisis Crisis has many different sources, comes in a variety of forms and flavors, and plays many functions, depending on the person and the situation. Crisis can be externally imposed (e.g. accident, job loss), or be brought on due to one's own actions, intended or not. In the former case, step 2 tends to be brief or nonexistent. In either case, one's familiar world and style might be collapsing, but new directions are often lacking; or there is a deepening sense of stagnation and alienation; or many experience having a foot in two contrasting worlds or styles. The new inner voice has been given some free rein, but it is not yet whole. The old voice may regain its sway, particularly during times of turmoil.

Often there is a chain reaction of adjustments as the previous life structure loses its grip and inevitableness. These experiences increasingly call into question important parts of self: core

beliefs and values, self worth and concept, and fundamental ways of behaving and getting needs met. Consequently, deep emotions are usually evident: anger, depression, anxiety, grief (loss), confusion, despair, boredom, and alienation, or intense efforts to stay in control and maintain an image.

Transition Step 4: Re-Direction and Adaptation Crisis provides the shock, the motivation, the frame breaking, the unfreezing necessary for change to take place. Some make a defensive response. Feeling worn and exhausted after a near escape from disaster, they will plan to prevent any future brushes with uncertainty and will quickly retreat to the old tried and true ways, now that the pressure is off. The person may be pulling disparate pieces together, but the pieces are being fit according to outdated resolutions. If growth is to take place however, one must actively pursue the new directions that may have brought on the crisis or create tentative experiments to adapt to the changing conditions of self and circumstance.

The individual exercises many choices during this period. People actively pursue and create changes at different rates with different sensitivity to its consequences on other significant actors in the life structure. And there are aspects of transition beyond the control of anyone. On the whole, there is some zone of influence: one can open up to and revel in change, strongly resist and defend against it, or, as is more often the case, manage it imperfectly.

Transition Step 5: Re-Stabilizing Re-stabilizing is the last step in the transition sequence. It is the time for more permanent commitments to a particular life structure that has been taking shape. There are limits to one's time and resources and in the process of experimenting, many will overextend themselves. At some point, the person needs to begin converging on choice of directions, given the data of the more expansive crisis and re-direction phases of transition. The life structure becomes streamlined as choices are made. The full elaboration and meaning of one's choices requires a secure life structure and a sufficient period of time for development.

Re-stabilizing rescues the person from the uncertain straits of the previous periods, but its choiceful aspect is most important. Re-stabilizing is an existential stance--it is an asserting of some particular identity and purpose: it is a statement in the grand conversation.

B. EMOTIONALITY

The scope of transition at midlife varied by individual. Table 2 shows the means of this variable by stage of transition. Scope of transition is very low for both the stable and the rising discontent groups. Those in the Rising Discontent group have not yet taken major plunges into new relationships or activities, nor have they dropped important old ones. Their life structures are not yet unfrozen. The life structures of those in the Crisis group are in flux. This trend lessens for those in Re-Direction, while scope of transition reaches a second peak for those in Re-Stabilizing. Re-Direction almost seems like a moratorium to re-gather after crisis; to tighten up and focus on a few experiments and/or ideas. Those in the Re-Stabilizing group however, are re-committing to new choices and letting those new choices run their course through changes in the life structure. Scope of transition is highest for this group.

Table 2 also illustrates the changes in emotional arousal and tone. The Stable group is relatively de-energized with a slightly negative affect. They are more contented than vital. The Rising Discontent group is emotionally aroused, even though they have not yet begun to change their life structures. They are expressing negative emotions almost exclusively. In a sense, they are building steam for change. Emotional arousal reaches its peak for the crisis group, approaching the top of the scale, and the tone is still very negative. Despite the distress, there are not yet clear and compelling channels for resolution. They are spending a considerable amount of time dealing with these sharp feelings and making sense of such an experience. They are beginning to alter their life structures and their lives are in flux, but, for them, it is still too early to tell whether these changes will work well and bring satisfaction.

The level of arousal drops sharply for those in step four; there is some calm after the storm. The moves that they have made are paying off to some degree. These folks are feeling better. The Re-Stabilizing group is at the ideal level of arousal. Those in this group are sufficiently aroused and their energies are well aligned with their new purposes. They are committing to new directions and they seem congruent in this endeavor. They are feeling quite positive and optimistic. They are still in the midst of pervasive and intense changes, but they have re-committed to new purposes and are looking forward to the future.

Table 2 BREAKDOWN OF MEANS BY TRANSITION STEP

	<u>Transition Steps</u>					tot	
	1	2	3	4	5		
N's	(11)	(11)	(16)	(15)	(11)	64	
Scope of Transition	1.5	1.6	3.6	2.9	3.9	2.8***	
Emotional Arousal	1.4	2.8	3.8	2.2	2.0	2.5***	
Emotional Tone	-.6	-1.7	-1.4	.3	1.5	-.4***	
ONEWAY ANOVA	*** p < .001						

C. Rebalancing Life and Career Investments

Transitions at midlife, whether mild or intense, positive or negative, are manifested in the outer world through one's life structure and the relative investments in its different aspects. The midlife transition is a time to address the imbalances inherent in and created by the life structures of the twenties and the thirties.

Table 3
MEAN PERCENTAGES OF CAREER INVESTMENTS
BY TRANSITION STEP AND GENDER

	<u>TRANSITION STEP</u>					tot
	1	2	3	4	5	
men	46	60	36	30	35	40

women	10	48	51	39	31	39
total	33	54	44	34	33	40

TWOWAY ANOVA F values: Transition Step 3.80** Gender .49 Interaction 4.90** **
 p<.01

 With career, it is important to discover how gender makes a difference for investments during midlife transition. From table 3, we can see that "Transition Step" accounts for significant variance, while the main effect of gender does not. There is a significant interaction effect, though. The stable group (step one) reflects the traditional pattern of early adult career investment: males high and females low (the latter are strongly invested in family). This group has not yet entered the midlife transition. As men begin to feel a rising discontent (step two), they begin to invest in career more than ever, perhaps in a last ditch attempt to "make it". The increase for women is even more dramatic. The large investments by women in steps two and three probably reflect the zest and commitment of those re-entering or newly entering a long neglected arena. Career was often the focal point of the midlife transition for women in our sample. Interestingly, men in step three (crisis) have strongly reduced their investments in career and this trend continues for step four, before leveling off for those who are re-stabilizing. Women, however, peak at step three in the transition sequence and then drop to the same level of relative investment as the men have by step five. In this last step, men and women both approximate their ideal, an equal distribution of investments across career, family, self, and interpersonal relationships.

D. Autonomy and the Processes of Self Awareness and Learning

People approaching midlife are seldom content to have their lives completely defined from the outside. The earlier role demands, that they had bought into, must be relaxed so that new sources of direction can be constructed. "A growthful transition inevitably involves the person in new learning ventures, directed both outwards and inwards" (Wolfe and Kolb 1980). This is essentially the challenge of turning inward: to deeply question and build self knowledge and to grasp new external realities in terms relevant to one's new purposes and to build the necessary skills. In this frame, learning at midlife is both highly personal and applied.

The movement from outer to inner directedness during adulthood is amplified at midlife (Wolfe and Kolb 1980). To examine this trend during the midlife transition, only the composite inner directedness score are presented (see Table 4), since all subscales, except the role bound/role determining subscale, presented the very same pattern of scores at the same significant level.

Inner directedness rises sharply from step 1 to step 2, while outer directedness drops sharply. Those in the Rising Discontent group are making a break from dependence and renouncing their outer directedness. They are beginning to see themselves as responsible (power owning) and are seeking to take initiative. This constellation of factors would seem to be an important part of the process that leads to crisis at midlife.

As we have seen, the Crisis group is experiencing much flux in their life structures, are emotionally aroused to a high level and feeling distressed. The turmoil of being in crisis seems to temporarily undermine the trend to inner-directedness and there is a return to the relatively strong outer directed tendencies of the Stable group. Those in crisis have come up against new limits and need to re-adapt, in order to bring inner drives and outer realities into new balance. Post crisis proves to be a more fertile and enduring soil. As life begins to settle down again, the trend to inner directedness re-establishes itself in steps four and five. The inner-directedness is now becoming more firmly rooted and helping to inform a newly re-configuring life structure.

Two variables from the Personal Life Issues survey also revealed a movement towards greater autonomy. Table 4 shows that those in step two (rising discontent), as well as those in steps three to five (crisis and post-crisis) have all rated becoming my own person with identity and direction, not dependent on anyone else as an important issue. Those in the Stable group do not. This break from both validation by others and feelings of dependence is sharp and strong in the service of becoming one's own person. This issue reaches a peak for group three (crisis) and becomes less strongly asserted by those in steps four and five, as one feels more confirmed.

From table 4, we can also see that those in steps three to five (crisis and post-crisis) all rate becoming more in touch with feelings and values as a very important issue (5.6 to 6.7). Group two has proclaimed independence, but is not quite as far along in the actual work of self awareness. Examination of feelings and values is a major work and often part of the experience of being in crisis.

This overall move towards autonomy also expresses itself in relation to the workplace in terms of frustrations about lack or loss of autonomy, oppressive organizational structure, and feeling exploited. Table 4 reveals the trends. The Stable group experiences relatively little frustration on these dimensions, but frustration steadily increases for the Rising Discontent and the Crisis groups. Frustration about "lack or loss of autonomy" dips for the Re-Direction group, but rises to its peak for those who are Re-Stabilizing. Frustration related to feeling exploited and oppressive structure remains high for the last two steps. In the post crisis groups, any constraint to self-directedness is frustrating.

Table 4 BREAKDOWN OF MEANS BY TRANSITION STEP

	<u>Transition Steps</u>							
	1	2	3	4	5	tot		
Inner Directedness		3.9	4.2	3.8	4.3	4.3	4.1**	
Becoming Own Person			3.8	5.9	6.3	5.5	5.7	5.5**
Becoming More in Touch with Feelings and Values			5.0	5.2	6.7	5.6	6.1	5.8**
Lack or Loss of Autonomy			2.7	3.5	3.9	2.9	4.8	3.6@
Being Exploited		2.0	2.8	4.1	4.2	3.9	3.5*	
Oppressive Organizational Structure		2.8	3.3	4.5	4.8	4.8	4.1@	

ONEWAY ANOVA ** p<.01 * p<.05 @ p<.06
SUMMARY

The transition sequence model was derived from qualitative data in a grounded theory approach. A scale was constructed and a number of different quantitative variables have proven helpful in further delineating the contours of this transition sequence.

Emotionality, shifting life investments, and a move towards autonomy all play important roles in the midlife transition. Rising Discontent is a time of negative emotion, increasing arousal, and shifts in career investments; even though few actual changes in the existing life structure are taking place. This group portrays themselves as strongly inner directed, in sharp contrast with those in the Stable category. They want to "become their own person" and are increasingly irritated with lack of autonomy at work.

Negative emotions and overall emotional arousal hit their peaks during the Crisis step. Becoming in touch with one's own feeling and values is particularly important. Actual changes in the external life structure are now taking place. Women are feeling their most invested in career, while men's career investments have dropped sharply as they look to other areas of life. Both men and women, however, are frustrated with a lack of autonomy at work. Self ratings of inner directedness have dropped and may actually be a more accurate assessment.

The emotional storm passes for those in the post crisis groups. Strong negative emotions eventually turn to strong positive emotions for those who have fully weathered their midlife transitions. Emotional arousal has subsided and settled at the more ideal level for productivity and satisfaction. Ratings of inner directedness are at a peak and probably reflect the individuals' influence in shaping their transitions. Career investments have leveled out at a relatively high level for both men and women, but frustrations concerning autonomy at the workplace have reached their highest points.

Personal growth and increased maturity, though, are not necessary outcomes, in spite of the scope of situational changes and adjustments undertaken. If the previous work of the midlife transition has been well managed, re-stabilizing can be an exciting time with new purpose and goals solidly grounded in newly discovered inner needs and aspects of self. If the previous work has been less well done, the work of converging and pulling together may not have sufficient drive and energy. But where that work is done well, the transition tends to be growthful, leading to positive emotional tone, improved balance in life pursuits, and increased self-directedness.

Implications for Careerists and Human Resource Management

Adulthood is clearly not a long, rational plateau. It is rather more akin to rolling hills; a series of alternating phases of stability and transition (Levinson 1978). In this context, the functions of transition are many. It is a critical juncture, not to be lightly missed or dismissed. Crisis, in its mobilizing of passions and energies, can serve to motivate the individual to change. For others, it provides sharpened perspectives for new aspects of the real world, both internal and external. It can also be healing and lead to new adaptations. Crisis may provide the cover story and vehicle for changes and related to hopes that have been waiting in the wings or

it can overwhelm and close the individual to further growth in the efforts to cope and stay afloat. In all cases though, crisis is the period of peak uncertainty and emotionality for that person. The midlife transition, like others, is a time when people have both a need for change and a fear of chaos. In a similar fashion, organizations have needs for self-regulating individuals who are actualizing their potentials, but they also have a fear of disruption.

Perhaps a key message to those responsible for themselves, for organizations, and for others' careers is one of tolerance for hiatus and change. As open systems, human beings, as well as work organizations, need to grow and develop. Growth and development always sound good, but as we have seen, the developmental process is not always neat and clean. People experience crisis, emotional arousal, and negative feelings. These are best viewed not as weaknesses or deficiencies of character, but as necessary to growthful change. Often the pendulum must swing to the other polarity for a period of new imbalance before more solid and lasting balances are established. Organizations and managers, who can recognize developmental potential and enable the person to come out the other end of crisis, can reap some of the payoffs of such a developmental process.

Tolerance for self-directedness is another message of this study. Autonomous decision making requires some degree of self-directedness. Self-directedness, however, is a hard-fought struggle with early attempts and efforts often being clumsy, rigid, and overdrawn. As the person resists others' influence, these efforts at self-directedness are often treated as an interpersonal problem. Movement towards self-directedness is an internal dilemma though, as the person strives to come to grips with himself or herself. The self-directed person can eventually achieve an interdependence far beyond the overly malleable, outer-directed person. True self-direction goes beyond simple resistance to external influences or being subject to one's impulses. Just how mutual advantage can be taken of greater needs for autonomy, I will leave to the human resource manager. These developments however, would seem in line with major trends towards autonomous work groups, decisions being made as close to the source as possible, and increased participation and involvement of all personnel.

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