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Making Sense of Late Academic Careers: Stories, Images, and Reflections

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Four late-career academics take a "first person" view of their careers over time, using written autobiographies. These stories were coded for common phases, themes, and tensions, retold as narratives, reimagined as metaphors, and recreated as visual stories. A brief overview of relevant career theory and identity theory is presented, and various activities undertaken during the self-discovery process are described and linked to storytelling or narrative theory. Interpretation focuses on similarities and differences in the four late academic careers and identity work during role transitions. Connections are made to career theory and identity theory. The authors believe this article might serve as a catalyst to others wondering about their careers, their identities, and future possibilities. *Organization Management Journal*, 11: 273–287, 2014. doi: 10.1080/15416518.2014.963835

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Many faculty members reach a point in their careers where the paths of the past—successful, traditional academic careers—are not the desired paths for their future. Nonetheless, they still want to remain associated with higher education in some way. Such was (and is) the case for the four authors of this article, all of whom have different stories to share about their career paths and the changes they have undertaken or are anticipating in the future. Diana left a full-time academic position to create a "portfolio" career; Jill had a nontraditional career path and now continues her career in nontraditional ways; Stephen became a faculty member after a long career as an academic administrator; and John is considering different options and preparing for life and work later on.

A few years ago, casual conversations among the four of us revealed that we all had begun to assess our current career status and contemplate future activities. We talked about ongoing and future career possibilities. Eventually, the conversations became part of our research agenda, sparked by several topical books. We were interested in our late-career changes, turning points, and how we responded to them. We decided that narratives or stories would be the best tool for examining these phenomena (Linde, 1993). So we wrote our stories, reflected on them, considered commonalities and differences, and then looked to extant literature for models and perspectives that might help give a theoretical context to our experiences.

Although unarticulated at the time, we each wanted to make meaning, or sense, out of our career activities and trajectory, and to discover more about ourselves as academics in our next career steps. Understanding our professional lives through examining our careers involved more introspection than we first anticipated. Doing it with several others was more powerful than working alone, but the process also involved risks in self-revelation, including the need to accept supportive process feedback and recognize unforeseen characterizations. As we developed a process that was part deliberate, part emergent, we all agreed to complete all the steps and support the efforts of the others, no matter how we felt individually about the usefulness of any particular step, recognizing that self-learning and self-understanding can come from activities and processes that are difficult or even distasteful. In the end, we each felt a sense of achievement and comfort in better understanding our identities within the context of our late academic career.

As we began our process of self-understanding, we were not guided by career or identity theory, but over time we came to see connections to important theoretical perspectives within the literature. In this article, we introduce theory related to academic careers and to identity before describing our own process, because we feel the reader is better grounded by reading about theory first. We then summarize the process we actually undertook individually and together, and formalize our storytelling/narrative methodology. We subsequently present our interpretations of our conversations, reflections, and illuminations. In the final section, we share some conclusions that link

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back to the literature about academic careers, and discuss implications of our process that may be useful for others in a similar career stage.

THEORY

Late Careers

A review of faculty retirement literature (American Council on Education, 2010) provided little that was immediately relevant to the options, decisions, and activities in the "fuzzy" area between full-time employment at a single institution and full-time retirement, apart from signs of institutional interest (Mole, 2012). Much of the extant faculty retirement literature focuses on considerations of the "graying professoriate" (cf. Bahrami & Stockrahm, 2011; Bland & Berquist, 1997; Ehrenberg, 2001; Fairweather, 2002), while the faculty perspective is presented in Dorfman's studies (1980, 1992, 2009) that began in the 1970s, well before the lifting of a mandatory retirement age in 1994, and in a more recent case study by Johnson (2011).

Our interest was in how individual faculty members make decisions within their late career, the period following tenure and senior status, including decisions they make about retirement. We turned to the psychology literature, very little of which actually seemed to address retirement issues specifically of faculty members. Just as Wang and Shi (2014) did, we ran a PsycINFO search using "retirement" as a keyword. While some of our numbers may be slightly different from theirs, the trend is the same, with peer-reviewed articles growing with each decade. We also ran another PsycINFO search using "retirement" as a keyword and adding the following keywords: "faculty," professor," or "higher education." Results of our simple searches show that while the interest in psychological perspectives on retirement has grown rapidly, there has not been a comparable expansion of work that looks at retirement among faculty members. While the numbers have been rising, articles dealing with faculty retirement (within the psychology literature) continue to represent a very small proportion of the more general retirement articles.

The limited amount of work that deals explicitly with faculty retirement (Table 1) suggests a need for attention in this area. In fact, the need is more than to fill a void in the literature. Within higher education, there are systems, policies, and practices that may make faculty retirement issues somewhat different from those faced by people in other lines of work. Specifically, the lack of a mandatory retirement age coupled with the widespread system of tenure suggests that faculty retirement issues and concerns might be a special case. In addition, most full-time faculty members have retirement plans over which they have a good deal of control. Many, though not all, faculty members have ties and social networks beyond their immediate institution, resulting in a more cosmopolitan rather than local orientation. And finally, most faculty members have strong professional identities and attachments to work. With no mandatory retirement age and with tenure, faculty members have both more flexibility to decide when to retire and protection against institutions pushing them to retire before they might want to. Institutions rarely impose that decision.

Although this article focuses on faculty retirement issues and processes, we take the general psychological retirement literature as a theoretical foundation, using reviews by Wang and Shi (2014) and Feldman and Beehr (2011). The Wang and Shi review discusses a number of different models and issues related to psychological aspects of retirement. Its "temporal process model" considers retirement as a process that occurs over time, embodying a perspective that retirement is not necessarily a distinctly different departure or severance from work (Schlossberg, 2009). It may begin with some general planning—a forward-looking phase of the process that "helps in generating more accurate expectations for retirement as well as mobilizing and organizing resources to serve the needs of the individual" (Wang & Shi, 2014, p. 215). The data for making decisions can be affective or cognitive. "When workers decide to retire, they make a motivated choice to decrease their psychological commitment to work and behaviorally withdraw from work-related activities" (p. 211). The authors suggest that the temporal process model "allows researchers to investigate retirement as it unfolds over time from one phase to another . . . [and] to

TABLE 1
Numerical comparison of general and academic retirement literatures

	Number of citations to peer-reviewed journal articles		Percent of retirement articles
Dates	Keyword: retirement	Keywords: retirement and (faculty or professor or higher education)	Keywords: faculty, professor, or higher education
1970s	112	5	4.5%
1980s	254	8	3.1%
1990s	277	4	1.4%
2000–2014	1271	22	1.7%

further examine the interdependence among these retirement phases" (p. 217). They also acknowledge that retirement issues and processes may "not be homogeneous across individuals" (p. 217).

Of the different models that Wang and Shi (2014) discuss, the temporal process model frames the work of Feldman and Beehr (2011) very well. Both adopt a temporal perspective. For Wang and Shi, the three phases are retirement planning, retirement decision making, and retirement transition and adjustment. Feldman and Beehr focus on decision making and look at it temporally. In their model this decision-making phase is itself made up of three phases. (In order to avoid confusion between the phases of Wang and Shi and the phases of Feldman and Beehr, the latter are termed "decision phases" for this article.) Feldman and Beehr's model includes Decision Phase 1: imagining the future and the possibility of retirement, Decision Phase 2: assessing the past and deciding the time to let go, and Decision Phase 3: transitioning into retirement by putting plans into action. The first decision phase is forward looking, the second is looking back in time, and the third phase is here and now. Taken together, the two articles underscore the importance of time and of phases in the process of moving from full-time employment to retirement. In addition, our own work seems to underscore a point made by Wang and Shi, namely, that the phases are not separate or homogeneous across individuals (p. 217).

Feldman and Beehr (2011) rely on several theoretical perspectives to explore psychological processes within and across their decision phases. For example, they identify approach–avoidance motivation theory as particularly relevant. Approach motivation energizes individuals to seek out and pursue positive aspects of their current environment. Working with students, conducting research, and meeting with colleagues could be positive factors that attract and cause faculty members to remain on the job. Avoidance motivation comes from sensitivity to negative aspects of the work environment. If the workload is excessive, colleagues are highly critical, or poor students plague their instructors, faculty members are more likely to feel it is time to retire. The popularity of bridge employment is easy to understand from approach–avoidance motivation theory (Feldman 1994; Stephens & Feldman, 1997). One can enjoy the positive and minimize the negative until one is drawn to other positive cues outside of work or the negative aspects become sufficiently aversive to lead to the decision to withdraw completely from employment.

Feldman and Beehr (2011) also suggest that self and social identity theories may play a strong role in retirement decision-making. Retirement of faculty members may be a special case because of the importance they place on their professional identities—as doctors do. This is because of the time it takes and the many career hurdles to overcome before a faculty member earns the rank and status of a senior member of the faculty. After the long "slog" of earning a PhD and a getting a first job, there are still rungs to climb and performance reviews to go through. For many folks, the big one leads (or not) to tenure. And, after tenure, there is one more hurdle—promotion to full professor. Not everyone decides this rung is worth the effort, but by this point in faculty members' careers, they are deeply immersed in being a faculty member and identifying as a professor. For many academics, being a senior faculty member is a lifestyle and not just a job.

Identity

As seasoned academics entering our late career phase, each of us was comfortable with our institutional identification—we were aware of and valued our membership and had an emotional investment in this—and we seldom thought about the importance of our academic identity and its institutional context. We looked to a future without an institutional "home," and faced the need to craft a new understanding of "Who am I?" and to ponder our connection to a collective. Similarly, Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) explain in their comprehensive review of the literature on these root constructs in organizational studies, "Every entity needs to have a sense of who or what it is, or what other entities are, and how the entities are associated." (p. 126).

Identity constructions may be framed as a process of sensebreaking and sensegiving (Pratt, 2001, Weick, 1995, cited in Ashforth et al., 2008). In sensebreaking, an existing identity is deliberately stripped away to motivate a search for a new one that in turn is created by a process of sensegiving that serves to reduce knowledge gaps. This process, in which an individual enacts a potential identity and interprets feedback, "encourages individuals to tie their emerging identity into their overall identity narrative(s). Constructing a narrative is always retrospective . . . and also projects into the future, containing identity aspirations" (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 345) By writing and analyzing biographies or career narratives, we capture the context that helps to develop and sustain identities. The events in narratives are what LaPointe (2010) calls the *identity work*. Our writings and conversations become discourses depicting our identities as they change at different career stages.

According to Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010), "People 'story' their role transitions, making use of narrative to [establish] a sense of continuity between who they have been and who they are becoming" (p. 136). The key events that represent turning points are important in understanding both the process of identity work and the larger master career identity (i.e., career content). Responses to these events and how we cope with them impact identities. We occupy multiple roles and hence the identity work often involves resolving competing demands. The process of negotiating these disparate parts and events constitutes the dialectic that influences our identities. It is both the broad similarities and the unique peculiarities, such as those revealed in our study, that provided us with insight into our own careers.

Presenting this informing theory for our "first person" work may suggest a process that was more deliberate and rational than was actually the case. In fact, our process gradually evolved as we followed a reflexive approach as an abductive process, interpreting and giving new meaning in a new context, as opposed to using inductive or deductive logics (Pierce, 1903/1955). Our framework developed in reflections between reading the stories and applying different approaches to interpretation, rather than starting with a priori questions. In the following, we itemize the steps in our process, or method.

METHOD

We believe that it is important to acknowledge this somewhat lengthy and drawn-out process in order to alert others to the fact that coming to personal and conceptual conclusions is neither quick nor simple. As participants, we are a convenient sample of four individuals (two women, two men, all Caucasian), based at the time of their late-career decisions at small to mid-sized private colleges or universities in the northeastern United States. We are colleagues through institutional and Eastern Academy of Management connections and had been talking about our experiences before deciding to explore our situations more formally.

Our research involved an emergent process as a series of actions taken sequentially in our search for meaning. Retrospectively, we linked these actions with a storytelling/narrative methodology as our mode of inquiry leading to and into the artifacts generated through our process. Thus, each step in our process was linked with research on storytelling/narration (Gabriel, 2004). We drew on particular approaches within the broad fields of storytelling and narrative studies depending on our needs in a particular step of our overall process.

Our process/method is summarized in the following steps:

1. *Conversation.* Our early, general conversations acted as a means of collective centering and collective sensemaking (Boyce, 1995). We socially constructed a collective sense of planned/unplanned late academic career changes and possibilities of shared meaning across the wider academic community. Talk may be the work (with apologies to Gronn, 1983), but our oral stories were liable to change with subsequent telling, so we committed to a written form of data.
2. *Writing our career stories.* Having agreed on some very general guidelines, we wrote our career stories individually without communicating with one another. The guidelines were straightforward: a story of 2000–3000 words, structured according to each person's preferred way of describing his or her own academic life, focusing on "getting to now" and "moving forward." The prompts ensured that our stories included the three elements indicative of narrative form: an original state of affairs, an action or event, and the consequent state of affairs (Greimas and Courtés, 1979, quoted in Czarniawska, 1998). These narratives were autobiographies—written portions of the author's lifestory, frequently written to make a point for a specific audience (Linde, 1993). By using narrative as a form of data, a methodological approach, and a theoretical lens, we committed to use time as a central organizing concept. This focus connects with the notion of career as an individual's journey through learning, work, and other aspects of life.
3. *Share stories and discuss: individual reflection on story, rewrite if desired; share final stories.* Our initial stories were long and contained many details about our early careers. Again, probing each other's work, often asking about incidents that were not in the stories, led to revisions that were shorter and more focused.

   Each story, written in the author's rhetorical style, was reread for coherence (a recognizable beginning, middle, and end) and whether it contained the structural elements identified by Labov and Waletzky (1997) as being essential for a narrative.[1] We investigated the stories as narratives using the two methods described by Polkinhorne (1995): paradigmatically to search for career-related categories from elements common to all four stories, and narratively by focusing on each author's way of constructing a plot for his or her narrative to discuss individual identity work within the role transition. A coherent self-narrative depicts a career as a series of unfolding events that make sense sequentially, in which the protagonist's agency provides a key narrative thread or causal explanation for the story's events. Rhetorically, coherence is conveyed through the plot structure by which the author—the protagonist—makes sense of his or her unfolding situation.

   In our conversations and in this article we generally refer to our texts as stories, following Gabriel's (2004) observation that stories have a unique combination of two qualities: having a plot and representing reality (p. 64). However, when applying narrative analysis, it seemed more natural to write of them as narratives.
4. *Stories coded by all co-researchers; discussion of commonalities.* Without an a priori structure for analysis, one author suggested this approach, which we agreed to follow, and subsequently recognized it as a formal method for investigating narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). The stories were coded in "grounded theory style" (Locke, 2001), first by one researcher, who named the categories (but not the details) so that the three others could use them to try to code all stories, resulting in conversation until we were all satisfied with the coding scheme. The results were insightful, confirming impressions of similarities and differences in our stories, which later led to a direct link to career theory.
5. *Revisit career theory (see Wang & Shi, 2014).* Note links to Feldman and Beehr's (2011) retirement decision phases.

6. *Narrative analysis to interpret plots and description of protagonist*. Intuitively, we recognized that we were doing identity work, so we followed a second approach to analyzing our stories. We compared our stories with those with archetypal plots (Booker, 2004; Kirkman, 2002), reflecting on similarities or differences with each until we were confident in naming our own plot structure, and hence insights into ourselves as protagonists. Again, this was insightful, but still left us saying, "So what?" Uncovering the *plot* suggested the way in which the author was making sense of events to bring them into a meaningful whole, and provided a picture of the protagonist (Boje, 2001; Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Polkinhorne, 1995; Riessman, 1993). As Rhodes and Brown (2005) note, "Narratives are thus regarded as the means through which experience is reflexively reconstituted, made meaningful and made communicable" (p. 172).
7. *Individual work with metaphors and graphic representations of career, and reflection on process.* Now we each reached an "Ahah! moment." This step in our sensemaking process involved working with two other language-related approaches: metaphor, whereby naming something in terms of another entity creates meaning and promotes understanding of complexity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; G. Morgan, 1996), and visualization, through which the mind as a pattern-making system interprets information (de Bono, 1970). Our examples can be described as visual metaphors that organize the story content meaningfully and convey the main message in an understandable way (Eppler, 2006). The approach provided specific interpretation methods that appealed to individuals.
8. *Reflection on identity.* Identifying with narratives is recognized as one of the principal areas within organization studies to which narrative has been directed (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). From our perspective in this research, we consider our late academic career identities to be constituted though our narratives, also that the grand narrative of the academic community influences these identities.
9. *Going public.* Present at conference (Stork, Woodilla, Brown, & Ogilvie, 2013); prepare journal submission. As researchers we were now "storying" our research process and findings (Czarniawska, 1998; Rhodes & Brown, 2005).

INTERPRETATION

We next present significant parts of the interpretation process that provided insights into our changing careers and identity, and hence to career theory and identity theory. The stories that comprise the data were long (each around 3000 words); in keeping with research tradition, we do not include them here, but provide abbreviated versions in Appendix A for readers who are curious or desire more context.

Coding for Commonalities and Differences: Connections to Career Theory

We found commonalities across the stories and we found differences. In all of the stories we found several common categories, which we called "Getting to the academic career," "The academic career," "The time before change," "The tipping point," an event (or series of related events) that clearly marked a transition moment, and "After the tipping point."

Although these career phases can be found in all of the stories, the phases were enacted differently and each story is unique. Even so, when we reviewed our coding across the four stories, some common themes and common tensions were evident. Career development included career processes that were planful or emergent, responding to a career challenge that could be learning, doing, or serving. Career moves occurred in traditional or unconventional ways. Impetus for a decision could be internal or external, while the locus of the decision process involved thinking or feeling. Connections, whether making them, keeping them, or losing them, were also a part of the stories. These themes and tensions were distributed across people and across phases.

In Table 2, for common career phases, we quote segments from each of the four stories and identify the themes or tensions we saw in them. We structure these quotes according to the phases we identified in our stories. Later, after returning to the literature, we attached Feldman and Beehr's retirement decision phase that we felt was exemplified by the quoted material. Our themes and tensions illustrate individual differences in how these phases are enacted.

From Table 2, one can see that the three phases we have chosen to highlight here (from the five we identified) are analogous to the three phases that Feldman and Beehr (2011) discuss. We also see, in the quotes in this table, evidence of approach–avoidance motivation theory playing out in the decision process and the relevance of self and social identities throughout (Feldman & Beehr, 2011). In the second phase, which we called the tipping point, we are reminded of Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010), who write about identity work in macro role transitions beginning long before an actual role change and often extending significantly beyond it. Also, the name of this phase acknowledges the work of Gladwell (*The Tipping Point*, 2000).

Reflection and Insights

As we reflected on our own careers and talked among ourselves, we began to focus on the different points of inflection and changes in direction, even with threads of continuity running through our professional careers. Some of us experienced little things that led to a gradual tipping point. For others, there were events and experiences that led to a sudden tipping point, where what came after was different from what came before. We saw instances of "punctuated equilibrium," a concept first applied to living systems at the most macro

TABLE 2
Common career phases

Phases and quotes	Themes/tensions
The time before change: Thinking about a future without change and a future with change (Feldman & Beehr: *Imagining the future*): *Stephen*: I had a sabbatical. I was bored and lonely. I got a lot done, but I really didn't like it. . . . I was fearful of losing my organizational affiliation, I wanted to be around colleagues, and stay connected to the world of ideas. The social and connection part of my work is really important to me. *John*: I approached my 60th birthday. . . . What remains? . . . How to fill the remaining years of university service and what to do beyond that? . . . I agreed to teach an MBA course on-line next semester. Though daunting, I began training at my institution to prepare for this brave new world. . . . I want to find some useful things to do, both personally and professionally. Some part-time academic work would be nice . . . to develop international contacts for work assignments and travel . . . if I am aware and courageous enough to move on emerging prospects. . . . post-retirement activity that is enriching without too much stress . . . I see my future involving some part-time professional activities, international travel, volunteer work and grandparenting.	Connections: keeping them Career process: planful Career challenge: learning Decision process: feeling and thinking
The tipping point: Thinking about what has happened over time or what has just happened (Feldman & Beehr: *Assessing the past*): *Diana*: About four weeks before my hip surgery, there was (as a friend described it) a "shot across the bow" that I needed to pay attention to. So, awake in a hospital room at 3:00 in the morning, I decided not to take a medical leave after my upcoming hip surgery and instead to walk away from my full-time position and spend some time figuring out what I wanted to do next. *Stephen*: One day . . . it hit me. I said, you guys . . . actually think you can do this job! Why don't you do it? I will step aside. . . . They were surprised, and a little taken back. I did follow through. . . . This was earlier than I expected, but it did seem right.	Decision impetus: external Career process: emergent Decision process: feeling Decision impetus: internal
After the tipping point: Thinking about the "now what" questions (Feldman & Beehr: *Transitioning into retirement*): *Stephen*: I worked like a dog until the very last day. I then had the rest of the summer off. . . . I got nervous that I would not have enough to do. I started filling the time for September with things I wanted to do. *Diana*: I ordered books online that sounded interesting. Books like *Composing a Further Life* by Mary Catherine Bateson (2010) and *The Third Chapter* by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (2009). They were great to read at a time when I didn't have other pressing obligations. . . . I was redesigning my life. I was excited and energized. I had the chance to craft a new phase of my life. And, that's what I did. . . . After the surgery, I spent time reading and thinking about next steps. . . . Everything I was doing during recovery was helping me hone the answers I could give myself about what I wanted to do next. I was guided by a few BIG questions and some smaller (but not really less important) questions. . . . I had read a story in *Learning Journeys* (Goldsmith, Kaye, & Shelton, 2000) . . . about making to learn lists rather than to do lists. I started there. What do I want to learn about in higher education? What's happening that I don't know much about? What else did I want to know more about? . . . learning commitments . . . a way to learn from others and to expand my connections . . . I met people, I started conversations, I asked questions . . . I reached out to several people . . . It hit me hard—that's what I wanted, a portfolio career. *Jill*: I didn't know what I would to do . . . Finding an academic "home" where I would have e-mail and library privileges became a priority.	Career process: emergent Career process: planful Connections: making them Connections: making them

level—evolution (Gould, 1989). It has since been applied to smaller systems—namely, groups and organizations (Gersick, 1988; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). Very roughly, the theory depicts systems as going through periods of relative stability (equilibrium) that can be disrupted by revolutionary change. A new and different equilibrium emerges after that. As with the concept of the tipping point, we see the concept of punctuated equilibrium as applicable at the individual career level.

Whether as the result of a series of little things or some more singular big event, our senior faculty careers faced disruptive moments or periods, where what worked before, what was comfortable before, and what allowed for a life in some equilibrium was thrown out of balance. In our experience, the recognition of a disruption prompted reflection. Like the disruption itself, reflection could take place very quickly or over a longer period of time. The "resolution" of the reflective period doesn't have to mean big change followed by a quite different equilibrium state. For some it was; for others, it was reflection followed by an equilibrium that looked similar to the earlier one—similar, but not identical. Regardless of its details, the disruption–reflection cycle led to conscious choices that generally benefitted each of us.

These choices involved both thought and feelings. For some, we thought about and reflected on our strong feelings. For others, we reflected and felt about our thoughts. The two are linked and perhaps need to be joined for action or movement to occur. When we feel strongly enough and have thoughts about some options/alternatives, we move or make plans to move. According to Gross and Thompson (2007), strong feelings without thoughts about what could be done lead to distress resulting in inaction.

Being able to identify some commonalities and differences within our four stories suggested that the phases, themes, and tensions could be used as questions and prompts for other "elder colleagues" wishing to reflect on their careers and possible future changes. But questions of process and decisions and change are also very personal ones, with implications both for the authors and our readers.

Identity Work: Exploring Our Stories Through Archetypical Plots

Our analysis then moved to the personal perspective through narrative analysis (Polkinhorne, 1995; Riessman, 1993). All four stories seemed to be variations of what Aristotle described as *Romance*, described by Bojie (2001) as a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero or heroine's victory over the world of experience, thereby being redeemed or liberated. Using Booker (2004) for guidance in specific plot types, we reinterpreted our stories:

- Diana's story plot is rebirth, where the protagonist is considered (by some) to be an unlikeable character, but redeems herself over the course of the story. Diana's protagonist is an exemplary faculty member and chair, searching for a new academic life of meaning.
- Jill's story plot is a quest. Setting out on a journey in search of an important object or location, the protagonist faces many obstacles and receives much help along the way. Jill's protagonist is a risk taker with multiple identities on a quest for learning (see Table 3).
- Stephen's story plot goes from rags to riches. Starting out poor, the protagonist acquires things like power and wealth before losing it all, and then gaining it back, growing as a person during the process. Stephen's protagonist has two "competing" identities or senses of self—the underdog striving to better himself, and the successful academic (dean and professor) doing his best.
- John's story has a plot of journey and return. Journeying to a strange land, the protagonist overcomes the threats it poses for him, then returns with nothing but experience. John's protagonist makes a series of decisions about what to do next in order to advance.

As an example of this process of exploring our stories through archetypical plots, Table 3 presents Jill's quest.

Visualizing Our Careers

Writing and interpreting our stories as emplotted narratives, however, was not sufficient. We each had an understanding of ourselves as a protagonist, but not a deep sense of our own identity as a late career academic. We each had glimpses of continuity in our academic identity and tensions in identity, but nothing we could easily articulate. We talked and explored ideas together, then agreed to work individually, reflecting and creating a visual of our career process, then shared our process and results.

Our purpose was to understand where we have been and how we have done what we did, and to construct a representation that fit. Each person made progress toward a new understanding of his or her academic self and career in their own way. We present Diana's process as an example, since space limitations prevent including all the visuals before summarizing the other three reflections.

Diana's Reflections

Diana began by rereading her story and reflecting on conversations with co-authors.

> When I read my story, I thought it sounded pretty good—the story of someone who adopted a "sensible" process and set about identifying future activities and steps. Yet, it didn't feel quite like me. It almost felt as though I was reading about someone else. The part that did "ring true" was about planning and organizing. I was very planful about next steps and very thorough in how I went about learning and doing.

TABLE 3
Jill's quest

Jill's quest: Stages in the heroine's journey	Link to own story
1. *The call*: Life in some "City of Destruction" has become oppressive and intolerable, and the hero recognizes he can only rectify matters by making a long, difficult journey.	Walking away from PhD studies in England
2. *The journey*: The hero sets out across hostile terrain, encountering a series of life-threatening ordeals that alternate with periods of respite, where the hero receives hospitality, help, or advice.	Going to United States: falling in love, visa issues, again renouncing academe, marriage and family life, return to academe
3. Arrival and frustration: The hero arrives within sight of his goal. But he is far from having reached the end of his story, because now, on the edge of the goal, he sees a new and terrible series of obstacles looming up between him and his prize, which have to be overcome before it can be fully and completely secured.	Faculty position, socialization, acceptance
4. The final ordeals: The hero has to undergo a last series of tests (often three in number) to prove that he is truly worthy of the prize. This culminates in a last great battle or ordeal that may be the most threatening of all.	Accreditation, associate dean position, no time for research.
5. The goal: After a last "thrilling escape from death," the kingdom, the "Princess," or the life-transforming treasures are finally won: with an assurance of a renewed life stretching into the future.	Resignation, offer of visiting professorship, renewed energy and appreciation.

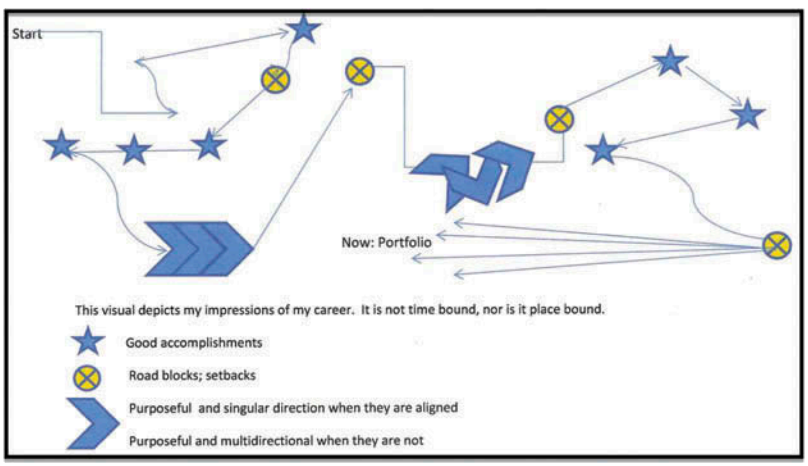

FIG. 1. Diana's emotional mind map.

She created a visual.

I just drew (as best I could) using arrows and stars and whatever else seemed right from the array of shapes available in MS Word. I "drew" without referring to my story and without a lot of thinking. I let the drawing happen. [See Figure 1.]

I looked at it. In fact, I almost marveled at it. It seemed to allow me to "see" myself and my career in a whole new way. Words and phrases like "bounce," "ricochet," "change," "Candyland" (the board game), and "fits and starts" fell into my head.

I found myself thinking differently about what I had done and what was likely in the future. I had thought of myself as very planful (and it is a stage of any project that I really do enjoy). I had used the phrase "portfolio career" (Templer & Cawsey, 1999) before and I still think that fits, at least somewhat. But after creating the drawing, even that phrase seemed to describe something more intentional than what I am now experiencing. I am doing different things, and I say yes to things I want to do and no to things I don't want to do. I bounce among a number of activities and places and people and experiences. I am reminded of the conversation I had with my father about chemistry being both his hobby and his job. I guess I bounce around because I have always held it in my head that unless I loved what I was doing, maybe I should move on to a new place or to different activities. My professional/academic identity was more nuanced than I had thought before doing my mind map. I came to see myself as not needing an institutional home to feel complete as an academic. What I needed to sustain my identity as an academic were academic challenges and opportunities.

Jill's Reflections

Recognizing my life as a "quest" enabled me to experience the emotions of different stages of my journey in a new way. At the deepest level, my sense of peace was more than just pleasure at having constructed a compelling story. It was a sense of peace with myself, with my academic identity and how that fit into my overall sense of self as I related to others. I no longer wondered why my career had taken so many twists and turns, and, perhaps more significantly, I no longer "fought" for my academic career and identity to be the prominent facet. My time as a tenure track/tenured faculty member was rewarding, yet other "stops along the way of my life" had value. By the end I gained a schematic view of the territory of my wanderings and a set of morals that provided directions.

Stephen's Reflections

I see myself as either climbing (the conqueror) or a stranger in a strange land (the explorer). The climber narrative tells me the importance of success and status in my journey. The new insight is this in relationship to the impostor syndrome. In some ways the visitor, outside, or stranger narrative is a different take on this same set of phenomena. Never felt like I belonged in any of the career places where I went. The explorer comes from the place that I learned the role of my position, then moved on to the next. It's more anthropological than existential. The climber narrative is the external view of the career, and the explorer is more the internal view. I used the analogy of the stranger in a strange land. This self as the other has also empowered me to see things differently and say and act differently. As a younger person this was confining. However, it became more and more liberating.

John's Reflections

I see my career as paddling downstream, exploring a river. Go with the flow but then encounter forks or rapids in the stream. Select a branch and a different experience is found. Movement is not highly intentional but some choice points are encountered. While paddling I anticipate some later routes. The notion of online learning to prepare me for the next stage requires some preparation, so I paddle closer to shore to grab the fruit of online teaching to fortify me for the next stage. Upon rereading my story, I have a sense of gratitude that my career turned out reasonably well given the lack of intentionality in providing my own guidance. Our discussions about the stories made me feel more comfortable that my journey was a legitimate route. Validation is important in the face of uncertainty, especially near career end.

Identity

Each of us identifies as an academic, whether we are still engaged in a traditional academic career or not. What we have realized is that the academic identity is very powerful and important to each of us. Even as we wind down the traditional career, we continue to think of ourselves as academics. This "identity bridges the particularities of individual career trajectories and their historic, socio-cultural and local contexts (via discourses and narratives)" (LaPointe, 2010, p. 7). We continue to do many things that academics do; we just do them differently or in a different setting. Threads of academic identity that we see continuing in some form include teaching, scholarship, advising, and service. This includes doing what we love, being less of a stranger in a strange land, exploring ideas and doing the research that is most satisfying even if not prestigious, and not hiding facets of the past that were atypical.

When I first left my full-time institutionally based position, there were rumbling questions in the back of my brain: "Who are you now?" "What do you call yourself?" I realize that I was experiencing some loss of identity. . . . Over time and also through this project, I understand that I have had and continue to have an academic identity, as I continue to do many similar things now to what I did before. I teach, I have students, I do career advising, I do consulting, I write, and so on. I am an academic, for whom the notion of a virtual or dispersed "home community" (Morgan, 1996) is more important than having an academic home. (Diana)

Now I accept my past as a nontraditional path, and present an identity as an ethical colleague, committed researcher, and lifelong learner. I enact this in interactions with others through my choice of topics, words, and displayed emotions. I no longer need to create an aura of the "compleat academic" (Darley, Zanna and Roediger, 2003). (Jill)

I do identify as an academic in terms of my profession. I have done it for a long time. The term academic helps to define who I am, and how others see me. . . . My personal identity as being a doer and excellent in what I did still holds up. . . . My career identity is of a climber, very successful, a leader and a climber. I took on very difficult challenges and successfully accomplished them. I was very productive. I worked a lot, and enjoyed doing it. I was a blue-collar worker in a white-collar world. (Stephen)

Our personal experiences are reminiscent of LaPointe's concept of career identity as "a practice of articulating, performing, and negotiating identity positions in narrating career experiences" (2010, p. 4). During this project we used various modalities to help each other realize our ongoing, ever-unfolding sense of selves related but not tethered to academia. Career identity is thus co-constructed in interaction out of discursive resources (discourses, master narratives, biographic particulars) available within the boundaries of a given local, sociocultural and historic context. Hence, career identity is never fixed or unitary but always a local, narrative accomplishment at the intersection of multiple positions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this article we have used the opportunity of first person research to make sense of our different unfolding late academic careers. From our autobiographical stories, content coding provided links to stages of transitioning into retirement from career theory and identity theory. Narrative analysis prompted recognition of our changing identities. Our overall process was emergent and reflexive throughout. Naturally, as a case study of four academic friends, this research has many points for critique, including our subjective interpretations, but we take precedent from other contributions in the "First Person Research" section of this journal (cf. Leigh, Beatty, & Szwed, 2008).

We believe we have made a small contribution to career theory by showing that, at least for the four authors, late academic career decision-making processes resonate with Feldman and Beehr's (2011) broader three-phase career perspective. The fit is not perfect, but the connection suggests that the theoretical model may be a useful framework for further research on academics' decisions during the retirement process. An interview study, in keeping with traditions of storytelling research, may be most appropriate for pursuing further work in this area, since story writing may gloss over relevant experiences.

In our process, rather than collapsing our stories into a single narrative of the late academic career, we envision the late academic career as a construction of multiple stories and storytellers, with changes realized and interpreted differently depending on the participating people/stories. However, we may have presumed that our stories really have the closure implicit in a traditional narrative and forced them into this structure through our prompts. If the "now" or ending proposed by the storyteller is just one resting point in what could be a series of posttraditional academic career phases, then perhaps we should be dealing with antenarrative theory (Boje, Rosalie, & Gardner, 2004). As Boje and colleagues (2004, p. 1) explain, "An antenarrative is a gambler's bet that a before-story (pre-story) can take flight and disrupt and transform narrative practice. . . . [through] emergent storytelling where plots are not possible, or at least contested, and speculative, rich in polyphony and polysemy." Our stories, while interpreted here as narratives of accomplishment at a certain point in time, could be seen as before-stories that inspire emergent storytelling by others of their late academic careers. Thus, while our first-person stories provide solace for individual identities, and make contributions to career literature, they do not yet construct a theory of late academic careers.

There are some experiences of retirement decision making for the academic profession that need further emphasis. For example, a very strong identification with the role of professor may make the retirement decision more difficult and more often avoided. This was made clear to us when we coded our stories and could identify a phase we called the tipping point. It appears that a push or force may be needed to initiate the decision-making process. Much of the literature focuses on cognitive processes that are gradual and incremental. We found that some external event precipitated changes. At times strong feelings of being out of place or that something was wrong initiated a contemplative process. For others, thoughts or comments from others led to stronger feelings that then led to action. For example, cognitive reappraisal, as described by Gross and Thompson (2007), asserts that cognition plays an important role in the regulation and control of emotion. Cognition was also part of Mayer and Salovey's (1993) description of emotional intelligence.

Feldman and Beehr noted that regardless of whether the decision to retire is made cognitively or affectively, "Individuals making retirement decisions weigh the pros and cons of their current life situations versus their imagined 'futures' in retirement" (2011, p. 194). We weighed these factors but did not find the process to be gradual. Each could point to some event that pushed us into the second phase. The approach–avoidance motivation approach suggests a scale metaphor where small grains are added to each side until one event put more grains of sand on the negative side or more on the positive side, leading to a retirement decision. For us, the tipping point was generally a large amount of sand on the negative side of the scale that quickly shifted our outlook. Further research could explore this aspect. This line of reasoning also points toward a nonlinear aspect to decisions, as others have suggested (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Bergmann Lichtenstein, Ogilvie, & Mendenhall, 2002). Events did not steadily move in one direction. A disruptive event (or sudden realization) caused reflection and eventual movement.

Our work also points to the importance of recognizing identity work that accompanies academic retirement decisions. For each of us, articulating our emerging identity was a satisfying part of the first person research process, and thus may be important to note in retirement counseling. Also, Ashforth et al. (2008) note the dearth of research explicitly focusing on the process of identification. Even as noted earlier, semistructured interviews about participants' career stories might be a fruitful research design for this purpose.

Questions remain for all of us about how to get ready for something when that something is not clear yet. What career signs and signals do we pay attention to? How do we prepare for opportunities that may arise? How do we define the kinds of opportunities to prepare for? How can we be open to new things while remaining highly effective at current things? And how do we continue to see ourselves as academics when institutional affiliations and everyday activities may change?

During our own investigation, we talked about ways in which what we did might inspire others. We believe that our process, our reflections, and our insights might be interesting and potentially useful to others who are at similar life stages and even for those in mid-career. They may want to embark on a similar journey, reflecting on their careers, their identities, and the possibilities and opportunities they might find for themselves. We make no assumptions about what opportunities and possibilities might be—they could mean a large change, little change, or a decision not to change. We reiterate that this reflection is best done with trusted others who can comment and challenge our thoughts and feelings.

The four of us began this project with the idea that we might create more intentional professional futures if we examined and understood the past—identifying the threads of continuity in our careers, as well as the fits and starts we experienced along the way. We each ended the project with a deeper understanding of our career and insights into our present professional lives and our lives looking forward. Prior academic experiences had a profound impact on us and hence we will always carry them with us into the next phases. While there are neither roadmaps nor role models to follow, our identities as academics still guide us, even after leaving a traditional career. By sharing our stories and our insights, as well as our processes for reflection and sensemaking, we hope readers are energized to give thought to their own future careers.

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NOTE

1. *Abstract* or summary of the substance of the narrative (the writing prompts); *orientation*, identifying the time, place, situation and participants; *complicating action*, describing the sequence of events; *evaluation*, expressing the significance and meaning of the action and the attitude of the narrator; *resolution*, describing what eventually happened: *coda*, returning the perspective of the narrative to the present.

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APPENDIX: SHORT VERSIONS OF AUTHORS' CAREER STORIES

Note that the story versions used as data in this study are each around 3,000 words and include considerably more detail.

Diana's Short Story

25 years. That's about how long I spent as a "traditional" academic, working on-ground, teaching face-to-face, getting to know my students and their lives, writing, serving, and being a faculty member and good colleague. Along the way, I earned tenure, gave up tenure, taught undergraduate and graduate students, did scholarly work, served on committees, and I took on many other roles within the academy—some formal and some informal.

Then things got a little rocky, and I stumbled a bit. My sister became ill. I began to have hip problems. My sister passed away, and it was time to take care of me for a while. I had planned to take the fall semester off—medical leave after a hip replacement. But then, following an unrelated medical issue, I decided to walk away from my full-time position and spend some time figuring out what I wanted to do next.

After having my hip replaced, I spent time reading and thinking about next steps. I thought back to the peak experiences in my academic career. I ordered books online like "Composing A Further Life" by Mary Catherine Bateson and "The Third Chapter" by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot. They were great to read at a time when I didn't have other pressing obligations.

I spent my recovery honing answers to questions I was asking myself about what I wanted to do next. I was guided by questions like: What are my values? What do I care about? What do I enjoy doing? How can I continue to make a difference? And, I sort of figured it out . . . my values included learning, growing, caring, and serving. I figured out that I really cared about higher education, not just teaching in higher education, but higher education itself. That's where I wanted to put my energy. But, I knew I didn't want a full-time position. I wanted what I later heard described as a "portfolio career" (Estella Lopez, presenter at HERS, 2010–2011). I wanted to put together things I wanted to do; I wanted to be able to say no to things I didn't want to do; I wanted to be less tied to place; I wanted new experiences—from traveling to building and sustaining relationships with old and new friends (and family).

I had read a story in Learning Journeys . . . about making *to learn* lists rather than *to do* lists. I started there. What do I want to learn about in higher education? What's happening that I don't know much about? I wanted to know more about online teaching, and I wanted to learn about online education in a for-profit setting, in part because of a damning PBS documentary about the for-profit sector of higher education and, in part, because I figured that the for-profit online folks probably did it well. After all, it's their business, their only business. So online teaching became my first learning commitment.

What else did I want to know more about? When I thought back to the kinds of institutions I had taught in, I realized I had pretty broad experience. What was missing? Community colleges. I didn't necessarily want to teach in a community college, but I wanted to know more about what I thought would be an increasingly important sector of higher education. Community colleges became my second learning commitment.

At about this time in the self-discovery process, I attended the HERS Program, a four-weekend program for women in higher education held across the academic year at Wellesley College. I met interesting women in higher education from around the country. I learned a lot from the many different conversations, and I expanded my network of professional relationships and friendships. It was at the HERS program that I first heard the phrase "portfolio career." It was also at HERS that my third learning commitment emerged: change in higher education, transforming our traditional institutions of education to be "better" than they have been.

It's been two years since I stepped away from my full-time faculty appointment. It's been a path laid with steppingstones, not a neatly paved path. Looking back over my last two years, I have been able to learn and grow. I have been productive and have earned enough money to be OK. I have been able to travel and spend time with family and friends. The life I lead now has been possible because I have created a professional portfolio in which what I do is not place-bound any more than I want it to be.

Jill's Short Story

The moment. I still remember the moment when I first realized that I needed to drastically change my lifestyle. I was at a conference without a paper: I'd been too busy with the rest of my academic life to write. I thought, "What has happened to me? I became an academic because I wanted to do research, and here I am without even the time to write a conference paper?" I had plenty of material, but new responsibilities as associate dean consumed my life. I knew my situation would not change unless I did something about it, so, after considering many scenarios, I handed in my resignation without knowing what I would do now, except that it would involve research.

A Swedish colleague and friend was the director of the Business & Design Lab, a collaboration between the business and design schools at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, with the purpose to develop cross-disciplinary opportunities for education, research, and "interaction with the surrounding society." She invited me to join the research group; now I had an academic "home," e-mail, and library access.

Earlier careers. This disruption was hardly the first abrupt change in my life. I'd grown up in England, and when lack of funding prevented me from continuing for a PhD in physics, I worked in industry, then accepted an offer to work on a PhD at MIT. I moved to the United States, did well in classes, fell in love, and ran into visa problems, with the outcome that I withdrew from the program to break the visa condition. I married, obtained a green card, had children, and, like many women of that era, became a stay-at-home mom. Following a number of part-time occupations unrelated to science, I decided to resume my academic career, but in organization studies, since I appreciated that nothing happened without organizing. Several years later, a master's degree and PhD in hand, I accepted a tenure-track position at a smallish faith-based university in southwestern Connecticut.

I soon felt comfortable in my academic role. A few years later, a new dean invited me to help with the school's AACSB [Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business] accreditation effort. I agreed, became the project manager, and when we were successful I was proud of being a key part of the leadership team. But, two years later when I became associate dean to another new dean I couldn't let go of my desire for perfection, and found myself in the situation described above.

My current situation. On my first visit to Gothenburg as an affiliated researcher, I negotiated a three-year contract as a visiting professor at the School of Business, Economics and Law. My agreement was to be "in residence" two or three times a year for about three weeks each, give at least one day per visit to consult on AACSB, produce two conference papers or publications a year attributed to the University, and help with the Business & Design Lab program as needed. I had my airfare paid for, an apartment while there, and a generous stipend. My colleague, Ulla, was my official liaison, and a program administrator made all arrangements and answered all queries about everyday life. Not a bad gig!

It's turned out to be everything I could hope for. I enjoy being in Sweden, though one winter visit was quite enough! Everyone speaks English, and, because I've traveled a good deal, I am sensitive to cultural differences and can quickly adjust. My academic work is very satisfying. I've been plunged into a cross-disciplinary and international arena and take every opportunity to learn about the design side, including taking community classes at a U.S. university to experience studio pedagogy—so different from that of management! I enjoy working with PhD students virtually when I am not on site, and even the AACSB obligation has been more enjoyable than I expected. Faculty and administrators know me and respect me, and I'm doing something I'm good at without the responsibility for actually making the changes happen. I also continue to write with my U.S. colleagues.

Reflection. What has made my career changes possible? I know myself and my values, so life-changing decisions have been (relatively) simple to make—or rather, I can make such decisions at the point at which they need to be made. I have had financial stability, the support of my family and colleagues, a great gift in life, as well as an intense curiosity and love of learning for its own sake. And I never say, "If only . . ."

Stephen's Short Story

I am a full-time professor. I am 62 years old. Not completely in my third chapter of my career. I am still paying a mortgage and helping the kids financially. However, what I do is considerably different then what I had done for the 25 years before. I was a dean, the guy in charge, the leader. I built things.

At two universities I was dean of two different schools. I like to think I became a dean because I am a doer, a man of action. As we say in the management discipline, I have a propensity to action. I also like to think I have leadership abilities, and rose to the top based on ability. It is true, I accepted big challenges, and built things. Sometimes from scratch—I was the founding dean of two schools. Sometimes I rebuilt things. Either way, I was successful. Without a doubt, whatever university I was at, I was the best at it.

I never felt like I belonged or was powerful or capable. Based on my background of being brought up poor and in a family that was extremely uneducated, I always felt like an outsider, an imposter actually. I actually realized my power and impact after I left the job. I would be a dean, leave, reflect and have insight into the situation past. I stayed at two institutions for a long time, but had several positions in those places. I am not sure if this is laziness, commitment, or a manifestation of my lack of confidence. I was not confident, so I stayed in the place where I was established and knew where I stood.

I am a professor. I teach to undergraduate and graduate students. I write and research. I love the classroom. I always wanted to teach. As I tell my students, I have an audience, people who laugh at my jokes, and I am in charge. I get to show that I am smart. I was born to do this. I love working with the students.

I am the recipient of respect and appreciation from my colleagues. I am the senior person on important committees. It is a very privileged position. Much like being the elder in a tribe in some cultures. It is quite special.

When I was asked what I wanted to do in retirement, the answer always included many elements of this position. I wanted control over my time, to teach, do some writing and traveling. I was fearful of loosing my organizational affiliation; I wanted to be around colleagues, and stay connected to the world of ideas. The status was a hope, but not in my plan. My current position looks a lot like my retirement. Remember, I never was just a faculty member. I always had some administrative title. So, this is what I always wanted to do in higher education. I do not feel like the time in class is work. I absolutely feel fully alive when I am in the classroom. I think I could do this job as long as I am physically able. Which could be a long time.

I transitioned into this job after I met my goals as dean, and had been very successful. I naively thought that the other senior administrators would give me more autonomy based on my success that did make them look pretty good. The opposite happened. They wanted to be involved in the success.

The transition was difficult, but exciting. I ended on June 30, the end of our fiscal year. I worked like a dog until the very last day. I then had the rest of the summer off. I retreated to my house on Cape Cod. I got nervous that I would not have enough to do. I started filling the time for September with things I wanted to do. I worked on an article. I called to become a mentor to an eighth-grade boy. I got on the board of a not-for-profit organization. I did volunteer evaluations for the accrediting association. I guess it is the fear of not having anything to do. I also took a large pay cut. I was scared.

I am very successful at teaching. My students like my classes and rate them very high. What is quite important is that I have learned a lot in this new role. I have learned how to be a better teacher. I have also learned great amounts of content. That has been fun. For me that is the bottom line. I am having fun, feel useful and successful at what I do. It is a great life. I will do this for quite a while.

I have started a new chapter in my professional life. I now only write things I want to write, and work in collaboration with colleagues that I want to work with. This is a new stage of not caring about the institutional ramifications of what I do, and doing things for me. It is exciting. I still work all the time, but it is different. I do the work I that I want to do, It is meaningful, and enjoyable.

John's Short Story

In retrospect, my career has been a series of serendipitous movements, rather than the execution of highly deliberate steps. While I was applying to graduate programs, Michigan State (MSU) had the latest application deadline. Instead of electing a clinical concentration, I checked the box for Industrial/Organizational instead. While at MSU, I had the opportunity to work on a number of applied projects, including an internship at General Motors and traveling with one professor who spent 50% of his university time as consultant for companies seeking to adopt participative management. For my master's thesis I gathered data at one of those companies, and met with teams to feedback the data and set action plans.

Thus, my training prepared me for a career in industry; nonetheless, my summer at GM taught me that I really preferred academia. My job search yielded offers from three institutions: the Civil Service Commission, a psychology department, and a school of business. I chose the business school because I had the opportunity to teach a wider range of subjects.

My initial teaching load was 4-3 with five preps, only one of which I had taught previously. My colleagues were fun but more focused on curricular issues. It was not a supportive environment for research. With a top-tier journal publication, I began to look around for other jobs. Rising criteria for tenure and hostile interdepartmental politics lead to fears that I would never receive tenure.

Prior to this point, I had let the unfolding of events drive my career options. I could no longer let "fate" dictate the next step. I searched, and received two offers. I chose one that was a step up in reputation and was within driving distance from a relationship I had started in the Northeast. The working environment at job number 2, though highly political, was supportive of research with moderately high expectations for productivity. Now, married to my Connecticut relationship with a baby on the way, I went up for tenure and was denied.

Forced again to search, a former Northeast office mate asked me to reapply. This institution had changed. Several strong colleagues were now present in the department, the old contentious faculty were gone, and the institution made a commitment to pursue AACSB accreditation. Along with that pursuit came policies more aligned with publication goals.

After a few years, I was granted tenure. Shortly thereafter, I was persuaded to become department chair when the prior occupant was voted out by the faculty. With a new dean and restructuring, I was asked to move into the dean's office. First, I served under a corporate dean who then retired. I was appointed acting dean for the summer. A new outside academic dean entered, and under her guidance, we were accredited.

Over time, being Associate Dean wore on me. I also worried about my lack of any publications in recent years. Suffering from burn out, I decided to take my first sabbatical for an entire year and re-focus on research and teaching. The sabbatical proposal addressed developing a negotiations course. Moving into that area also proved to be one of my best career moves. The sabbatical yielded several publications and a new focus for my career. Teaching negotiations also proved very enjoyable. My focus then shifted to institutional and professional service, including leadership roles in the Eastern Academy of Management.

I then decided that I should try to become full professor. It wasn't the status per se that I sought. A sizable pay raise was attractive with a child in college, and I felt that I had been serving in roles congruent with that rank. I was promoted in part based on my service record.

Since then, I still enjoy work most of the time, though the pace can be too hectic. How to fill the remaining years? I want to find some useful things to do, personally and professionally. Part-time academic work would be nice. Online teaching is growing in popularity; however, colleagues have told me that experience is needed to obtain an online position. Consequently, I agreed to teach an MBA course online.

Another goal is to develop international contacts to fund international travel and create potential contacts for research. With one sabbatical left before retiring, teaching in another country would further this goal. Relationships formed there may blossom into some teaching or lecturing roles that would fund travel to other countries.

Are there other part-time roles available that could generate income and professional gratification? Opportunities may exist to work part-time on curriculum design, module creation, and exam writing. The future may provide new paths for a third career.

Beyond these professional goals, community service could be one post-retirement activity that is enriching. Volunteering to maintain local trails bring new friendships with those who share similar values. Social linkages there would substitute for current collegial interactions. Volunteer work at a local food pantry is another possibility. Social responsibility activities are important to me. Thus, I see my future involving part-time professional activities, international travel, and volunteer work.

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