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Career helpers and career hinderers: a qualitative study exploring the role of others in shaping individuals’ careers

by Sara Bosley

A Doctoral Thesis

For submission in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of

Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies, characterises and contextualises the role of others in shaping the careers of non-managerial employees. Seeking individuals' perspectives, the qualities and characteristics that employees value in their helpers are identified and discussed in relation to those expected of professional careers advisers. In so doing the study addresses limitations that arise from: the dominance of traditional differentialist theories; philosophical differences between positivist career research and constructivist guidance practice; and the division between sociological and psychological perspectives.

From a constructionist perspective, qualitative data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with 28 non-managerial employees in 6 different organisations. Participants were asked to give accounts of their career from the time they left school to the present day. Particular attention was paid to their sense-making about the role of others. Both narrative and thematic analysis were used in order that the role of career helpers and hinderers could be understood in both the diachronic and synchronic context.

Two conceptual frameworks that develop understanding of career help and career helpers, along with the paired concepts of career self-view and career world-view are proposed. First, a typology of career helpers distinguishes and contrasts helper categories according to their roles and impact on individuals' career world-view and career self-view. Second, an 'anatomy of credibility' shows the interrelationship between valued qualities and characteristics of career helpers. In discussing credibility, knowledge and impartiality are conceptualised, a distinction proposed between power and influence, and the concept of 'care' is introduced.

It is suggested that valued careers helpers are those who are aware of their subjective frame of reference, their position on partiality, and of external pressures and internal beliefs that may shape their practice.
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Having said this, I accept full responsibility for the content of this thesis, and acknowledge any errors and oversights as my own.
CONTENTS

List of Figures .............................................................................................................. x

List of Tables .................................................................................................................. xi

1  CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION .................................................................. 1

1.1 Purpose and aims of this study .......................................................................... 1

1.2 Limitations of formal career guidance theory ................................................... 2

1.3 Contributions and limitations of empirical studies ........................................... 4

1.4 My interest in career guidance .......................................................................... 5

1.5 Methodology and research process ................................................................... 6

1.6 My contributions to knowledge ......................................................................... 7

1.7 Overview of the thesis ....................................................................................... 8

1.8 Chapter summary .............................................................................................. 9

2  CHAPTER TWO - UNDERSTANDING CAREER ‘GUIDANCE’ ................. 10

2.1 Section one: Why research career ‘guidance’? ............................................ 10

2.1.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 10

2.1.2 Changing context, changing careers? ...................................................... 10

2.1.3 Defining and conceptualising career ....................................................... 14

2.1.3.1 Inclusivity ......................................................................................... 15

2.1.3.2 Subjectivity and objectivity ............................................................ 16

2.1.3.3 Temporality and change ................................................................. 17

2.1.3.4 Relationality .................................................................................. 18

2.1.4 Managing careers ...................................................................................... 19

2.1.5 Career guidance .......................................................................................... 23

2.1.6 Career help ............................................................................................... 27

2.1.7 Government policy and the provision of career guidance ....................... 28

2.1.8 Summary of section one .......................................................................... 31
2.2 Section 2: Career theory and career guidance practice ............................. 33

2.2.1 The purpose of theory ............................................................................. 33

2.2.2 Epistemology and career theory .............................................................. 34

2.2.2.1 Positivism and career theory ............................................................... 35

2.2.2.2 Constructionism and career theory ...................................................... 36

2.2.3 Theory and practice ................................................................................. 39

2.2.4 Psychology, sociology and understanding careers ..................................... 42

2.2.4.1 Psychological perspectives .................................................................. 42

2.2.4.2 Sociological perspectives .................................................................... 45

2.2.4.3 Interactive perspectives ....................................................................... 46

2.2.5 Summary of section two .......................................................................... 48

2.3 Section three: research on career helpers .................................................... 49

2.3.1 Introducing the research literature ........................................................... 49

2.3.2 Epistemological underpinnings and research methods ........................... 50

2.3.3 Research populations: individuals who receive career help .................... 51

2.3.4 Career helper roles and functions ............................................................ 55

2.3.4.1 Mentoring functions ............................................................................ 55

2.3.4.2 General helper functions ..................................................................... 56

2.3.4.3 Career planning roles .......................................................................... 57

2.3.4.4 Types of guidance ............................................................................... 59

2.3.4.5 Career discussions .............................................................................. 61

2.3.4.6 Helpful guidance interventions ........................................................... 63

2.3.5 Comparing categories and classifications ............................................... 65

2.3.6 Sources of career help ............................................................................. 68

2.3.6.1 Types of helping relationships ............................................................. 68

2.3.6.2 Informal career helpers ....................................................................... 71
5.8 Some observations on participants’ recall and descriptions of helpers........ 211
5.9 Towards a typology of career helpers....................................................... 214
5.10 Chapter summary .................................................................................. 223

6 CHAPTER SIX - VALUED CAREER HELPER CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITIES................................................................. 225

6.1 Introduction............................................................................................. 225
6.2 Identifying valued characteristics and qualities......................................... 225
6.3 Credibility............................................................................................... 226

6.3.1 Structural knowledge........................................................................... 227
  6.3.1.1 Insider knowledge ........................................................................ 228
  6.3.1.2 Outsider knowledge .................................................................... 233
  6.3.1.3 Structural knowledge and the literature........................................ 235

6.3.2 Power and influence........................................................................... 238
  6.3.2.1 The meaning and context of power relations .............................. 238
  6.3.2.2 Distinguishing between power and influence ......................... 239
  6.3.2.3 Influence and structure ............................................................... 240
  6.3.2.4 Power and structure ................................................................. 242

6.3.3 Knowledge of participants ................................................................. 242
  6.3.3.1 ‘Person knowledge’ and the literature ....................................... 245
  6.3.3.2 Expert and experiential knowledge .......................................... 246
  6.3.3.3 Fragmented or holistic knowing? ............................................. 248

6.3.4 Care.................................................................................................... 249
  6.3.4.1 Care, skills and attitudes ............................................................ 253

6.3.5 Objectivity or partiality? ..................................................................... 255
  6.3.5.1 Partiality, impartiality and accepted career guidance practice .... 257

6.3.6 Anatomy of credibility: how the concepts interrelate ......................... 258
APPENDICES

Appendix one: Letter inviting employees to participate in the research ............... 328

Appendix two: Interview guide ........................................................................................ 329

Appendix three: Example of the letter to gatekeepers inviting participation in the study ........................................................................................................ 332
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 - Summary of the impact and perceived impact of changes in the world of work on careers and career help.............................. 32

Figure 3.1 - Summary of the analytic process.............................................. 133

Figure 3.2 - Summary of the methodology and research process................... 139

Figure 4.1 - A diagrammatic representation of community-interaction theory (Law, 2003b).................................................................. 141

Figure 4.2 - A diagrammatic representation of my analytical framework based on Law’s community-interaction theory............................ 143

Figure 4.3 - Peter’s story: Finding a vocation................................................. 145

Figure 4.4 - Jill’s story: Career and leisure interests....................................... 147

Figure 6.1 - Anatomy of credibility.............................................................. 260

Figure 7.1 - Anatomy of credibility.............................................................. 283

Figure 7.2 - Concluding adaptation of the community-interaction model........... 289
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 - The career planning roles of line managers, adapted from Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) ..................................................... 58

Table 2.2 - The types of guidance identified by Wilson and Jackson (1998)........ 60

Table 2.3 - Categories of roles and functions of helpers in relation to individuals and structure.............................................................. 67

Table 2.4 - The formality and structural nature of relationships between helpers and individuals receiving career help......................................... 70

Table 3.1 - Age range and sex of the sample............................................. 118

Table 3.2 - The participants by pseudonym and job title................................ 120

Table 3.3 - Occupational sectors in which participants were working at the time of the interview............................................................ 122

Table 3.4 - Number of participants in each organisation................................ 122

Table 3.5 - Length of time with current employer......................................... 123

Table 4.1 - An early categorisation of career helpers.................................... 151

Table 5.1 - A summary of the role and impact of advisers............................. 166

Table 5.2 - A summary of the role and impact of informants......................... .... 176

Table 5.3 - A summary of the role and impact of witnesses............................ 185

Table 5.4 - A summary of the role and impact of gatekeepers......................... 198

Table 5.5 - A summary of the role and impact of intermediaries.................. .... 207

Table 5.6 - An emerging typology of career helpers................................. 218

Table 6.1 - Tentative links between helper roles, and helper characteristics and qualities................................................................. 266

Table 7.1 - Concluding typology of career helpers..................................... 272
CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as an introduction to my study, stating its purpose and aims. I explain my choice of topic, both in terms of the limitations of the existing literature and my personal motivation. I summarise my methodology and the research process. I identify my contributions to knowledge and close with an outline of the chapters that follow.

1.1 Purpose and aims of this study

The purpose of this study is to identify, characterise and contextualise the role of others in shaping individuals' careers. I seek to understand and explain how participants perceive encounters with other people and the actions of others as helping and hindering their careers. My focus is on non-managerial employees, their everyday life-worlds (Giorgi, 1970) and accounts of the help they have received with their careers through informal encounters and relationships, and their experiences of formal career guidance and organisational career management. From reviewing the literature, I devise a series of research questions (2.3.10) which, through the process of data collection and analysis, I refine into the following aims:

To construct new conceptual frameworks which explicate, from an individual perspective, the role of others in shaping careers, and to extend and provide insight into existing knowledge about career helpers.

1. To identify the roles that non-managerial employees perceive 'career helpers' and 'career hinderers' as playing in shaping their careers.

2. To understand and contextualise encounters these employees perceive as shaping their careers.

3. To identify the characteristics and qualities that these employees value in their career helpers.

4. To examine how these characteristics and qualities relate to the characteristics of accepted professional career guidance practice and the qualities expected of professional careers advisers.
1.2 Limitations of formal career guidance theory

As a trainee careers adviser, I was interested in the different insights offered by career guidance theories, but I was also frustrated by their limited application to practice. In particular, theory seemed to offer little to individuals who expressed unhappiness or dissatisfaction about their jobs and were unable to identify ways of thinking or acting which might improve their sense of well-being in the context of their careers. The proliferation of popular self-help books, and advice in the professional literature indicates a demand for help with individual career management, but these sources have been criticised for their weak empirical or theoretical bases (Cohen and Mallon, 1999). Research suggests that many careers advisers address the limitations of theory by adopting eclectic techniques derived from different theories (Kidd et al., 1994), and developing their own personal philosophies of career guidance and their own interviewing models (Watson, 1994). Like critics of career theory and career guidance theory, I believed in the potential for improving the help provided by careers advisers, managers and others. This led me to pose two questions: why is career theory perceived as having limited application to career guidance practice? Why is there so little exchange between researchers and careers advisers? In attempting to respond to these questions, I identified three key limitations of existing theory which I then sought to address in my study.

First, in the context of rapid and intense structural change where lifelong learning and movement between jobs and occupations is expected, and more careers are perceived to be boundaryless (Arthur, 1994), traditional differentialist career theories, based on the assumption of stability seem less relevant (eg Savickas, 2000a; Watts and Kidd, 2000). The extent and impact of changes such as globalisation, technological development and organisational restructuring on careers, and their implications for career guidance and career management are unclear, but suggest a need for new and different theory which better facilitates an understanding and explanation of career (Collin, 2000). Although the rapid pace of change exacerbates the complexities of theorising, it also increases the need for useful guiding principles and fresh theoretical perspectives to be considered alongside established theories. Constructivist responses such as Kelly's personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955) and social constructionist theories such as community-interaction (Law, 1981; 1986) and action theoretical approaches (eg Young and Valach, 1996) offer alternatives to differentialism but have had limited impact in the UK.
Second, knowledge construction is constrained by "trouble in paradigms" (Savickas 2000a), that is, fundamental philosophical differences between largely positivist research and the primarily constructivist career guidance practice. Research in the positivist tradition tends to be based on the belief that behaviour is governed by environmental and genetic forces (Cochran, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1990) and researchers are generally more interested in epistemology and groups (Savickas, 2000a). Careers advisers base their practice on an understanding of the individual as a free agent responsible for, and capable of, making decisions (Cochran, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1990) and focus on ontology and individuals (Savickas, 2000a). Reconciliation and knowledge exchange between research and practice requires a common epistemological base which may be achieved by using constructionist assumptions and a narrative approach to research. Some researchers have adopted these approaches, but most commonly in the study of career rather than career guidance.

Third, much of existing theory is polarised between sociological and psychological disciplines with relatively few attempts being made to integrate the two. Humanistic theories (Law, 1981) based on individual uniqueness and person-centred counselling (eg Rogers, 1951), and on developmental psychology (Super 1957) adopt a psychological perspective. Sociological theories, such as Roberts' opportunity structure theory (1981), address the criticism that psychological theories tend to give excess attention to person-related constructs at the expense of cultural and structural forces (Fitzgerald and Betz, 1994). Shifting the focus of attention from psychological to sociological factors does not resolve the problem of dualism - the practice of studying career from one or other of a series of well-defined and opposing perspectives - although interactive perspectives such as social learning theory (Krumboltz, 1994) and community-interaction theory (Law, 1981) attempt to do so. Community-interaction theory focuses on the interaction between individuals and their families, peer groups, neighbourhoods and ethnic groups, and offers a framework which highlights the interface between psychological and sociological influences: this approach is rarely applied to career research.

In summary, existing career theory does not seem to make adequate sense of current careers. The flow of knowledge between research, theory and practice is limited, partly because of philosophical differences. The division between sociological and psychological theories means that the role of others in shaping individuals' careers tends
to be neglected. I wanted to move towards reconciling these dualistic distinctions through the research aims I constructed and research methods I applied.

1.3 Contributions and limitations of empirical studies

Through reviewing existing career research, I identify a number of key limitations of knowledge about individuals who help others with their careers, and studies which offer significant contributions to the topic. A notable limitation in the current literature is the bias towards particular population groups and the relative neglect of others. Managers, potential managers and professional staff are most frequently the subjects of career management research, whilst young people, students and people registered as unemployed are commonly studied in research on careers guidance provision. Less attention is given to non-managerial employees and their views, despite exhortations for everyone to manage their own careers. UK studies on the views of cross-sections of the population are commonly constructed for market research, (eg Wilson and Jackson, 1998; MORI, 2001) rather than academic purposes. Consequently, as Fitzgerald and Betz (1994) observed, career development theory is of little use to large segments of the population.

Despite some exceptions, much of the existing research on career management and guidance engages US populations whose economic, educational and cultural contexts differ from those of UK-based groups. Generalisation is also limited by national differences in the theoretical underpinning of careers counselling and in the organisation of services.

The literature on organisational career management most commonly adopts a business rather than an individual perspective, although some studies explore the difficulties of reconciling the needs and wishes of employees with employing organisations' business objectives (eg Feldman 1988; Mayo, 1991; Herriot, 1992; Harding and Macaulay, 1996). Employees' perceptions of the help they receive with their careers and the help they would like, remains less well explored.

Although some studies explore individuals' perceptions, research commonly seeks to identify causal links between particular interventions and career outcomes rather than the perceived role of helpers in the context of an individual's career story. Research based on traditional positivist assumptions is limited by difficulties of isolating the impact of guidance from other influences, and identifying the most appropriate point at which to
assess the effects of guidance (Killeen, White and Watts, 1992). Positivist approaches risk over-simplifying the complex processes which shape careers by focusing on individual characteristics, and by affording inadequate attention to the role of environment. With notable exceptions (eg Wilson and Jackson, 1998; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001), research that includes a constructionist perspective tends to focus on career rather than career guidance or career management. The lack or limited use of analytical frameworks to structure studies also inhibits efforts to compare studies and identify their contributions to knowledge.

Professional codes of guidance principles and practice identify the characteristics and qualities expected of careers advisers, and research studies identify the qualities that individuals value in their career helpers. However, helper qualities and characteristics are rarely the central focus of studies. Exploration and analysis of the meaning of terms such as impartiality, knowledge and client-focus, especially from the client's perspective are limited; the power and influence of career helpers is neglected in favour of their personal qualities and interpersonal skills. One reason for this may be the paucity of studies which attempt to explore and analyse the role of informal helpers, despite the general consensus that individuals seek and value help from a range of non-professional sources.

Despite these limitations, I identify studies which offer useful contributions to understanding individuals' perceptions of career help and career helpers. Of these I focus on six which I consider to be particularly relevant and enlightening. Three US studies analyse and categorise: mentoring relationships (Kram, 1986); the characteristics and general helper functions of career mentors (Shapiro and Farrow, 1988); and the career planning roles of line managers and supervisors (Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981). In the UK, a market research study of a cross-section of UK adults generated a list of eight types of guidance and two superordinate categorises (Wilson and Jackson, 1998). Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) analysed career discussions, identifying key skills and behaviours of 'givers' and the perceived impact of such discussions on the 'receivers' of help. Wilden and La Gro (1998) categorised clients' and careers advisers' perceptions of the helpfulness of different interventions during the course of guidance interviews.

1.4 My interest in career guidance

My interest in career guidance is professional and personal. In part I am motivated by the wish to improve my understanding of my own career and to find new ways of exploring
and thinking about my future. Long before I considered embarking on a doctoral thesis, I stumbled across Dorothy Rowe's exposition of personal construct psychology (Rowe, 1989) which illuminated constructivism in a personally meaningful way, and helped me to re-interpret and reconstruct my own experiences. Working on my doctoral study became a struggle to reconcile an education system that taught me to search for 'the truth' with interpretivism which made more intuitive sense to me and allowed for greater creativity in the development of my understanding of my research topic.

Recognition of this struggle helped me to understand why career self-help books, which offered 'sensible' and practical advice about activities such as job search, also seemed fragmented and were less helpful on abstract issues such as values and life-career purpose. I thought that illuminating other people's experiences would give me access to a broader range of interpretations and possibilities of career and career help. My personal goal was to progress beyond the limitations of the familiar and known to a consideration of other "possible selves in possible futures" (Law, 1996: 65). As I worked on my study, I had to confront my anxiety about uncertainty and ambiguity. Coming to terms with this feeling became a personal goal, and amongst the greatest challenges of the project.

1.5 Methodology and research process

Given previous comments it is not surprising that this research is based on the assumption that reality is subjective, internal and socially constructed, and that knowledge is socially constructed and interpretative. I use a qualitative approach, in part because of my philosophical assumptions, but also because of my research aims and my skills. Qualitative methods enable me to: explore the under-researched topic of career helpers; be flexible in collecting and analysing my data; illuminate meaning and sense-making processes; and develop new conceptual frameworks inductively. In conducting my research, I particularly attend to internal and propositional validity, regarding these as more relevant than replication, consistency and population generalisability, although I also take account of the latter.

Using semi-structured interviews I collect participants' stories about their careers from the time they left school. I focus on their sense-making about how their careers have been shaped and in particular on their perceptions of the role of career helpers. These career stories provide access to participants' explanations, clues to their personal beliefs
and hints about their social context, as well as placing helpers in the context of participants' career development.

I use personal contacts to identify a purposive sample of participating organisations and, through gatekeepers in these organisations, I recruit 28 non-managerial employees. The group comprises both men and women, ranging in age from 18 to 50 years of age and employed in different occupations, and across a range of industries.

Using narrative and thematic analysis enables me to understand the historic development (diachronic context) of the participant's career and their current career-related issues (synchronic context). From the interview transcripts, I construct a career story or chronological account for each participant, highlighting key encounters and career helpers. For the thematic analysis I identify meaningful statements from all of the transcripts, group statements into themes, describe the themes, and revisit the data to review and clarify themes until I am satisfied with my master lists of career helpers, and helper qualities and characteristics.

1.6 My contributions to knowledge

I introduce the paired concepts of career self-view and career world-view, and propose two conceptual frameworks that develop understanding of career help and career helpers. First, I develop a typology of career helpers which distinguishes and contrasts helper categories according to their roles and their impact on individuals' career world-view and career self-view. The typology offers tentative links between the helper categories and valued helper qualities and characteristics. Second, I offer an 'anatomy of credibility' which shows how the qualities and characteristics of career helpers interrelate. In discussing credibility I conceptualise knowledge; analyse and distinguish power and influence in relation to structure (defined as social systems); introduce the concept of 'care' in helping relationships; and suggest that partality in the context of career help can be conceptualised as negative or positive.

I discuss the implications of my findings for career theory, focusing on meaning and process. In particular, I relate my findings to community-interaction theory (Law, 1981, 1986) and contextual action theory (Young and Valach, 1996, 2004).

My methodological approach differs somewhat from previous studies. I adopt a constructionist perspective, explore the perspectives of a diverse group of non-managerial
employees, include informal and formal helpers in a single study, and explore helper characteristics and qualities as a major area of investigation.

1.7 Overview of the thesis

The thesis is arranged in seven chapters, with contents, figures, appendices and references listed separately.

Comprising three sections, chapter two reviews the relevant literature. The first section places the study in the context of economic and technological change, explains key concepts and justifies research into career guidance. In section two, I review key career theories and discuss their contributions to knowledge of career guidance, and their limitations. The third section focuses on research studies and professional codes of practice, and identifies the limitations of these literatures and the research questions they raise.

In chapter three I explain the philosophical assumptions that underpin this research and my use of qualitative methods. I outline the methods and techniques I use to collect and analyse the data and I describe the research process.

Chapter four serves as an introduction to the data and discussion chapters that follow. I explicate my conceptual framework and I illustrate the concept of narrative analysis with two participants' career stories. I introduce the notions of career helpers and career hinderers, and the concepts of career world-view and career self-view.

Chapter five is the first of two data and discussion chapters. Here I describe and illustrate each of the five helper categories and compare them with categorisations of career guidance, mentoring, career discussions and career planning roles developed in other studies. I introduce a preliminary typology of career helpers, and I discuss and develop the notions of multi-role helpers and relationship constellations.

In chapter six I identify and discuss helper qualities and characteristics valued by participants and draw comparisons with relevant studies and codes of professional practice. Tentative links between helper categories and qualities are suggested, and a framework of subordinate and superordinate qualities is presented.

Chapter seven concludes the study by summarising the project, identifying my contributions, and suggesting some implications for careers advisers, other career helpers and individuals seeking career help. Here I also reflect on the research process, discuss
the limitations of my study and suggest how it may be developed through further research.

1.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have stated the purpose and aims of this study, and explained my choice of topic in terms of the limitations of the existing literature and my personal interest. I summarised the methodology and the research process, identified my contributions to knowledge, and outlined the chapters that follow.
CHAPTER TWO - UNDERSTANDING CAREER 'GUIDANCE'

This chapter comprises three sections. In the first section I discuss key concepts and explain my choice of career guidance as a research topic and in so doing locate the study in the context of economic and technological change. The second section reviews a selection of career theories and discusses their contributions to current understanding of career guidance. In the third section I focus on research studies about career helpers, their role, functions, qualities and characteristics, and on professional codes of career and educational guidance. I close by summarising the contributions of researchers and theorists, and identifying key gaps and limitations of existing knowledge.

2.1 Section one: Why research career 'guidance'?

2.1.1 Introduction

The study of career guidance is pertinent as structural changes affecting the world of work are challenging our understanding and conceptualisation of career. In this section, I review the evidence of change in the world of work, and how such change may be impacting on careers, conceptualisations of career and career management provision. I define career guidance and introduce the notion of career help. Moving on I discuss the Government’s interest in career guidance as a means of stimulating and sustaining lifelong learning and improving economic competitiveness. Finally, I outline the availability, adequacy and usage of current career guidance provision.

2.1.2 Changing context, changing careers?

...we are in an era of unprecedented changes, at both global and local levels, which have the capacity to transform the nature and structure of careers. (Jackson et al, 1996).

In the UK and USA, researchers and commentators have argued forcefully that profound changes are taking place that will affect aspects of the way people work, and how careers and organisations are structured and develop (eg Arnold 1997; Collin and Watts, 1996; Jackson et al 1996; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999). Economic change - notably globalisation and technological developments and the consequential increase in competitiveness - have triggered changes in the world of work
Increased competitiveness and the capacity of information technology to improve efficiency have resulted in the automation of work processes, and organisational restructuring such as downsizing, delayering and outsourcing. The effects of globalisation and new technology are compounded by changes in business culture such as privatisation, and refocusing around core business activities (Jackson et al, 1996).

Together these changes have impacted on the structure of the labour market, organisational practices, and employment and career opportunities. New technologies in particular have affected some previously labour-intensive sectors such as manufacturing and financial services, and enabled small businesses to enter markets formerly dominated by large corporations (Jackson et al, 1996). Changing technologies increase the need for the workforce to be adaptable, flexible and willing to engage in lifelong learning in order to sustain employability and progress their careers (PIU, 2001). Some occupations have contracted whilst others have expanded (Young and Collin, 2000).

There is some indication of change in employment contracts. For example, Finn (1999) cited an OECD survey which reported that about a quarter of the British workforce were employed part-time and nearly one in ten were employed on temporary contracts. Arnold (1997) discerned a trend towards the use of short-term contracts of employment for senior managers. Hogg Robinson Skillbase (1998) found portfolio careers to be a reality amongst professional and managerial employees: over half of the companies surveyed reported using fixed-term contracts, part-time working and outsourcing, and 98% used at least one form of flexible working.

Academics and commentators have speculated about future trends, including changes in the content and nature of occupations (Sennett, 1998; Young and Collin 2000) and the growth of knowledge-rich managerial, technical and technician level jobs, and low paid, low skilled, low status jobs (eg Young and Collin, 2000). A negative vision of the future suggests increased societal polarisation in terms of income and status (eg Arnold, 1997; Colley, 2000; Hutton, 1995; Young and Collin, 2000), with highly skilled and knowledgeable core workers enjoying greater job security than those at the periphery (Handy, 1989). More - and different - sorts of transitions and a wider diversity of career patterns (Jackson et al 1996) are predicted. Boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) are expected to increase, with growth in more flexible work patterns (Arnold, 1997; Young and Collin, 2000), self-employment (Young and Collin 2000),
portfolio working (Handy, 1989) and lateral, as opposed to linear, careers (Collin 2000). Herriot and Pemberton (1995) anticipated an increase in new psychological contracts based on employability rather than job security. Bridges (1995) predicted the end of ‘jobs’ in their present form. For some people these changes contribute to a heightened sense of job insecurity, and the acceptance of a ‘job for life’ as an outmoded concept (Handy, 1994; Hutton, 1995; Arnold, 1997).

Despite evidence of change and predictions of further change, the extent and the impact of change is unclear and may be exaggerated (Watts and Kidd 2000). Anticipated or predicted impact of change is mainly based on implication or inference (Collin, 2000) and theorising is based on modest empirical evidence (Cohen and Mallon, 1999). As yet many changes to careers may have affected only large organisations and higher level jobs (Collin, 2000). Focusing on the recent past tends to over-emphasise disjuncture, while a longer-term perspective provides more balance (Collin and Young, 2000a). In support of this view, I suggest that people are more sensitive to contemporaneous and personally-experienced change than to events and trends which pre-date their lifetime. When events are more distant there is time for reflection and for evaluation in the diachronic context (of historical development). In other words, an understanding of both the diachronic and synchronic context (current career-related) are helpful in assessing the impact and extent of change.

Empirical data also challenge the extent and impact of change. Jackson et al (1996) noted that despite restructuring, major blue-chip companies persist in developing managerial staff early in their careers. Guest and Mackenzie Davey (1996) found evidence of structural change, flatter hierarchies and the deployment of consultants, temporary staff and subcontractors, but also that traditional hierarchies and traditional careers remained intact, and that very few managerial staff were employed on fixed-term contracts. Storey (2000) cited evidence that restructuring had little impact on executive career patterns and (in contrast with the Hogg Robinson Skillbase survey, 1998 noted above) found few organisations making extensive use of flexible working and limited evidence of flexible forms of working impacting on traditional careers. She also pointed out that the ‘new psychological contract’ had little meaning for employees who had no experience of job security or of a traditional psychological contract where security is exchanged for loyalty. Claims about experiences and perceptions of increased insecurity
at work are challenged by data gathered from in-depth interviews with nearly 2,500 employees across a range of occupational groups and levels (Taylor, 2003). This study showed that: the proportion of workers with permanent employment contracts and average job tenure increased between 1992 and 2000; that most workers do not feel insecure in their jobs; and many felt that they had promotion prospects. To some extent Taylor’s findings are supported by Gregg and Wadsworth (1999) whose analysis of data sets from the British Labour Force Survey and General Household Survey identified relatively stable average job tenure between 1975 and 1998. However, Gregg and Wadsworth also showed that aggregated data hide considerable variation; contrasting the rise in job tenure amongst women with children and fall in tenure amongst men and women without children.

The complexity of interpreting data is further compounded by regulative, legislative, demographics and economic change. Different interpretations may also suggest that perceptions of job security are time-bound and need to be considered in the context of current, past and predicted economic and political events. In addition, the effect of economic and technological change differs between sectors, types and sizes of firms and occupations (Storey, 2000). For example, much of the personal service sector has been unaffected by changes in the global market (Hutton, 1995), while job losses in finance and the public sector appear to be particularly significant because of their traditional image of security.

To sum up, a number of structural changes have affected the world of work in recent years and continue to do so at a fast pace (Arnold, 1997; Storey, 2000) and with intensity (Storey, 2000). The impact of change may have been simplified and exaggerated, and discontinuity over-emphasised at the expense of continuity (Storey, 2000; Taylor, 2003). Although the evidence about the impact of change on career seems inconclusive and open to interpretation, careers seem to be changing in some respects and for some groups. A wider incidence of atypical forms of work suggests a need for a broader conceptualisation of career in order to embrace more diverse career patterns (Storey, 2000). The lack of identifiable and predictable routes (Arnold, 1997) makes it difficult to use employment and occupation to “grade and group people” (Young and Collin, 2000), and for individuals to base their careers on established paths, or to identify or follow career scripts (Barley, 1989). Importantly, the perception that careers may be changing for some
individuals suggests a need to consider what change might mean for those who want help with their careers.

2.1.3 Defining and conceptualising career

Career has been described as a "moving target" (Ornstein and Isabella, 1993: 244) which changes with organisational practices and economic structures. The changes described above present the traditional conceptualisation and discourse of career with new challenges, and raise questions about the viability of the concept of career (eg Hall and Associates 1996; Collin and Watts, 1996; Jackson et al 1996; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Cohen and Mallon, unpublished; Collin and Young, 2000a). Titles of books and articles about career give explicit and powerful expression to these concerns, for example: The death and transfiguration of career - and of career guidance? (Collin and Watts, 1996); The future of career (Collin and Young, 2000b) and The career is dead - long live career: a relational approach to careers (Hall and Associates, 1996).

The significance of career and the range of different conceptualisations of career are explained in part by its cross-disciplinary appeal. Disciplines differ in their focal interests and concerns, and within each discipline career may be studied from different theoretical perspectives. Ornstein and Isabella (1993) identified eight disciplines or sub-disciplines that address career issues. El-Sawad (1997) found that some aspect of career was studied in nine different disciplines and sub-disciplines including sociology, psychology, management, business, human resources, education and training, as well as career studies itself. Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989) cast an even wider net, including anthropology, economics, geography, history and political science. In this study, I draw upon relevant literature from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, business management, human resources and education.

Young and Collin described career as "flexible and elastic", rich, multi-layered and ambiguous and able to "adapt well to a variety of functions and contexts" (2000: 1). Despite this ambiguity, there is wide agreement among academics and careers advisers that work and time are central themes in career (Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989): the concept and meaning of the term ‘work’, and the different dimensions of career are more controversial. Comprehensive coverage and a lengthy discussion of different conceptualisations of career are beyond the scope of this study, however, clarification of
what I mean by career will help sense-making in the later discussion of career theory and research. The following discussion is intended to provide a flavour of the dimensions of career commonly discussed in the literature, namely, inclusivity, subjectivity and objectivity, relationality and temporality.

2.1.3.1 Inclusivity

According to the traditional lay definition, often expressed in terms of 'ladders', a career is an upward progression in work through a hierarchy involving a commensurate increase in responsibility, status and remuneration. In this "bureaucratic" form (Kanter, 1989), career is "a reality for a few, a beacon for many" (Collin and Watts, 1996: 386) and is elitist (Young and Collin 2000) because it excludes the majority of working people. This exclusive image of career maintains, even when the two other career forms identified by Kanter (1989) are taken into account. "Professional" careers develop through increasing challenge and reputation, and "entrepreneurial" careers are characterised by independence and autonomy, and develop through extending territory.

The notion of the 'boundaryless' career (Arthur, 1994) extends and develops Kanter's (1989) three forms and in so doing offers a more inclusive conceptualisation. Like Kanter's professional and entrepreneurial career forms, the boundaryless career at its simplest is 'unbounded' by, and independent of, traditional organisational principles. However, boundarylessness is intended to convey more than the idea of movement between organisations. It refers to careers which are: validated by sources external to the employing organisation; sustained by extra-organisational networks; and involve non-hierarchical forms of advancement. A boundaryless career may also be one where family and personal reasons guide decisions about career opportunities, and where individuals perceive their careers to be without boundaries regardless of structural constraints.

However, by defining boundaryless careers with reference to organisational career, Arthur continues to give prominence to the latter. Neither is his notion of a boundaryless career socially inclusive: many working people are unlikely to associate their progress through working life with any of Arthur's definitions of boundarylessness. More appealing, at least to academics and careers advisers, is the claim that, "Everyone who works has a career" (Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989: 9). Such a fluid and individualised conceptualisation also suggests that every career is unique, and gives precedence to subjectivity, recognising that each person constructs her career differently.
2.1.3.2 Subjectivity and objectivity

That career can be at the same time objective and subjective is well established in the literature (Young and Collin 2000). There seems to be agreement that the notion of subjective career represents a first-person perspective, and objective career a third-person perspective. However, there are subtle differences in definitions of subjective and objective; internal and external careers. Arthur (1994), in adopting a career management perspective, defines subjective career as the individual’s own interpretation of his or her career situation, and objective career as an institution’s version of the same career situation. Jackson et al (1996) define objective career as a person’s patterns of positions and work experiences, and subjective career as the sense an individual makes of her history, skills, attitudes and beliefs, and they emphasise the dynamic dimension of career. For Collin and Watts (1996) ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ careers have both descriptive and interpretative dimensions; both are constructed socially and individually over time, through sense-making processes. Thus an external career is only objective in the sense of being based on third-person perspective rather than being ‘real’ or ‘true’. Nicholson and West (1989) overcome this problem by referring to ‘work histories’ as distinct from ‘careers’ which they regard as a way of making sense of work histories.

Individual sense-making, personal history and subjective careers assume more importance with the decline of socially-agreed referents such as career paths, job descriptions and role models, and measures of success such as income, career advancement and job security (Mirvis and Hall, 1996; Arnold and Jackson, 1997; Collin 2000; Littleton, Arthur and Rousseau, 2000). The possibilities and models of career may be bewilderingly numerous, requiring individuals to identify and use internal referencing to make career choices and construct their careers. Notions of subjectivity and dynamism build on the concept of the protean career which is unique, adaptive and idiosyncratic, and psychological success is achieved through personally meaningful goals, rather than those determined by society, organisation or family (Hall, 1976). The protean career may foreshadow Giddens’ notion of the “reflexive project of self” which involves “the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives” (Giddens, 1991: 1).

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1 The female pronoun is used throughout to apply to both females and males. I have chosen this form to counter-act the convention of using the male pronoun for the same purpose and in preference to options such as “s/he” and “he and she” which I consider cumbersome, and “they” which seems inappropriate in a study where individuality is central.
5). As career is closely bound with identity, constantly "starting over" risks "corrosion of character" as individuals struggle to construct a coherent and sustained narrative from fragmented work-based experiences and relationships (Sennett, 1998). It could be that while individuals construct internal referents, they will also continue to value socially-accepted referents, perhaps choosing from a wider range of different external referents than in the past.

### 2.1.3.3 Temporality and change

According to Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989) time is a central theme in the concept of career. Other academics concur. Jackson et al (1996) emphasise the dynamic dimension of career and Young and Collin (2000) regard career as an individual’s movement through time and space. For Arthur and Rousseau (1996) the concept of movement through time and space distinguishes a career from a job; and Cochran (1994) uses the notion of temporal organisation through life story:

*A career is the course of a person's life in working to produce ends [...] a career has a past (available through memory) and a future (available from anticipation and imagination).* (1994: 205.)

The notions of sequencing and stages also convey the notion of time. For example, Super (1980) used his life-career rainbow to identify life stages and changing roles across life-span (Super 1980). Hall defined career as:

*...the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life.* (1976: 4.)

Arthur, Hall and Lawrence define career as: “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time” (1989: 8). Young and Collin observed that a common meaning attributed to career is: “the pattern and sequence of occupations and positions occupied by people across their working lives” (2000: 3). Arnold adopts a broader perspective, defining career as: “a sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person” (Arnold, 1997: 16). Here ‘sequence’ is intended to convey the notion of experiences unfolding over time in predictable and unpredictable ways sometimes, but not always, connecting with one another, meeting changing needs and enabling skill development.
Notions of change and development also imply a temporal dimension. In applying a broad conceptualisation of career, Watts (2000) focuses on learning which, in his view, encompasses: informal learning; work in the community and the family; unpaid work and self-employment. For Watts, career: "... should be viewed as the individual's lifelong progression in learning and work" [...]. Being "more than mere biography" (Watts, 2000: 261) career, by definition, includes some form of development in terms of skills, lateral movement or advancement. Whether everyone would interpret their career as one involving professional or personal development and learning is perhaps questionable, but the word "should", suggests an ideal conceptualisation of career rather than Watts' interpretation of peoples' actual experiences. Hakim adopts a similar standpoint, both in extending the concept of work beyond the workplace and stressing the notion of progression as inherent in career as: "a sequence of jobs or activities that offer some kind of progression or personal development within the chosen sphere" (Hakim, 2000: 165).

Metaphors and models also express the temporal and changing nature of career. Hall's notion of the protean career (1976) stresses on-going adaptation and self-regeneration in order to survive. Driver presents a model of four career "concepts" or shapes (Driver, 1982 cited in Dalton, 1989), three of which - transitory, linear and spiral - describe the movement and direction underpinning a person's thinking about her career. Driver's fourth concept - 'steady-state' - describes a career pattern whereby an occupation or field is chosen early on and maintained throughout working life. Steady-state could be interpreted as a static, although this is not necessarily the case as occupations and occupational fields require adaptation, and workers move between organisations.

Thus, the notion of time is expressed in general terms in the conceptualisation of career, and specifically through reference to sequencing, progression or development and in terms of models which convey the dynamic nature of career.

2.1.3.4 Relationality

Relationality has been particularly emphasised by Collin and Young (2000a) who called for career to be reframed with a focus on this dimension. Relationality refers to interactions between individuals and other people which contribute to the construction of career, and also to interactions between individuals and economic and social structures. At the interpersonal level, Collin and Young (2000a) perceive career as a joint, rather
than an individualistic construction, with career development arising through interdependence (Collin, 2000). Hall (1976) acknowledged the overlap between work and non-work life (including social networks) and the contribution of both to shaping identity. Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989) described career as reflecting the changing relationship between people and providers of position in organisations. Taking a broader perspective, Collin and Watts expressed the view that the conceptual power of 'career' derives "from its capacity to link the private world of the individual to the social and economic structure" (1996: 393). Career is regarded by some as the property of collectives because its social meaning is derived from orientation to a reference group (Derr and Laurent, 1989). Career scripts are seen as mediating between institutions on the one hand, and individual actions and interactions on the other (Barley, 1989); and community as playing a mediating and modifying role on the influences that shape career (Law, 1981; 1996). In other words, rather than being a solely individual project, career is perceived as a joint construction which unfolds through interactions: between individuals; between individuals and their communities; and through interactions between the individual and wider social systems.

As I am conceptualising career as inclusive, subjective, temporal and relational, and these dimensions are captured by Arnold's definition, I have chosen to use his definition here. In summary, Arnold defines career as:

...a sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person (Arnold, 1997: 16).

2.1.4 Managing careers

As well as challenging conceptualisations of career, changes in the world of work have affected the policy and practice of career management. Confusingly, the term 'career management' has two related but different meanings. The first refers to an individual's efforts to shape her own career and is commonly used by authors of self-help books (eg, Hopson and Scally, 1991; Ball, 1989; Bridges, 1995, 1997; Bolles, 1999). Such publications encourage individuals to acquire useful skills, knowledge and attitudes, and to act in ways that increase their control over their careers.

The second meaning, usually applied in management and management-related literature (eg Feldman, 1988; Greenhaus and Callanan, 1994; Arnold, 1997), refers to the efforts of
others, particularly the representatives of an employing organisation, to influence employees’ careers. The prime - although not exclusive - aim of organisational career management is to further business objectives. Organisational career management may be defined as: “the things organisations do to try and develop employees in line with business needs.” (Hirsh, Jackson and Jackson, 1995: 9). Other definitions take more account of employees’ wishes and needs: “the design and implementation of processes that enable the careers of individuals to be planned and managed in a way that optimizes both the needs of the organization and the preferences and the capabilities of individuals” (Mayo, 1991: xiv). For the purposes of this study, I assume that organisational career management practices are intended primarily to serve the business, with individuals’ needs and wishes being secondary. I use the term organisational career management to distinguish this concept from individual career management or career self-management.

These different meanings are echoed by two different models of career management which are distinguished by different levels of organisational intervention in individuals’ careers. In the first model, organisations endeavour to control employees’ careers; in the second, individuals are seen as responsible for their own careers and are provided with minimal support from the organisation. In addition, Hirsh and Jackson (1996) identified a third ‘partnership’ model whereby career development processes are adapted to meet both individual and organisational needs. I will describe each of these models and the shift from one to another.

In its traditional form, organisational career management is an aspect of human resource (HR) planning and its purpose is to meet current and future business objectives: HR policy and practice aim to shape individuals’ careers using interventions such as career development and career assessment centres, and succession planning. Only a limited number of companies - generally larger ones - use organisational career management practices and most of these confine access to senior managers, professionals and graduates (Watts and Kidd, 2000; CIPD, 2003), leaving the majority of employees with little or no formal help with their careers.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, changes in the world of work - especially the increasing emphasis on employability and on subjective careers - led to a shift of responsibility from employers to their employees (Bridges, 1995; Hirsh and Jackson, 1996). In this model, employees are expected to take responsibility for planning their
own self-development activities, constructing personal profiles, finding appropriate mentors, establishing and sustaining networks and seeking in-depth career guidance if needed. Employers might provide self-help resources such as career resources centres and career workbooks, but individuals are largely unsupported. A key disadvantage of this model is the weak or non-existent link between individuals’ career needs and business objectives. The apparent shift to self-managed careers was only significant for those who had previously benefited from organisational career management, and had very limited impact on the majority of employees who had always been dependent on their own resources. Nevertheless, a sense of greater uncertainty about careers may have encouraged more people to actively engage in - or feel the need to actively engage in - the process of managing their own careers.

Advice on individual management in self-help books (e.g., Bridges, 1997; Bolles, 1999) and the academic literature (e.g., DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996) has been criticised for its modest empirical and theoretical base (Cohen and Mallon, 1999). Self-help books tend to offer very positive visions of self-managed careers, emphasising the opportunities and ‘liberation’ of boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Less emphasis was placed on the threats posed to subjective career and self-identity, and the relational aspects of career. Others suggested that people would have difficulty constructing a coherent and sustained narrative (Sennett, 1998) and reflexively planning their lives so as to structure their self-identity (Giddens, 1991). These more critical viewpoints suggest that many people may want and need help to manage their careers successfully.

Traditional forms of career management appear incongruent with the structural changes described above; individual career management and self-development are more in tune with concepts of subjective, protean and boundaryless careers and internal referencing. There is evidence to support the view that some employees who previously benefited from traditional career management are accepting a self-managed approach. For example, a survey conducted by Hogg Robinson Skillbase (1998) found that over half of the human resource managers believed that employees should be responsible for their career development, as did 60% of managers and professional employees. However, the weight of evidence suggests that traditional career management practices persist, although some organisations are experiencing difficulty with effective implementation.
Amongst the 33 leading public and private organisations in their study, Guest and Mackenzie found little evidence of more recently advocated forms of career management such as mentoring, networking and self-development. Newell (2000) found that during the 10 to 15 years preceding her study, employers expected their employees to be more flexible about their career expectations and to accept responsibility for their careers; a model which seemed to be an augmented version of traditional career management. Doyle (2000) reported that companies were struggling to find an appropriate career management response to the new psychological contract, and suggested that inadequate systems and structures, along with HR and line managers’ attitudes and behaviours, might be responsible for these difficulties. Other researchers found that many line managers lacked time and incentives to prioritise their own career management (Guest and Mackenzie Davey, 1996); the confidence and skill to help others (Hirsh, Jackson and Jackson, 1995; Jackson et al, 1996); or did not take career management seriously (CIPD, 2003).

Changes in the world of work suggest that employers need to develop the skills of all of their employees (Jackson et al, 1996). Weak links between individual careers and business objectives; difficulties in successfully implementing self-development approaches; and the lack of help for key groups of employees, initiated a perceptible shift back towards organisational intervention in careers, at least for some groups of employees (Hirsh and Jackson, 1996). A recent CIPD survey (2003) found that over 90% of HR staff in over 700 companies expected individuals to take responsibility for their careers but also believed that individuals needed support from their organisations to do so effectively. Some organisations (such as Lloyds-TSB) provide their employees with support through career development programmes, easily accessible information about internal opportunities and, in a few cases, access to individual careers advice (PIU, 2001). Through these ‘partnership’ models (Hirsh and Jackson, 1996) employee and employer engage in on-going negotiations about development and employment with the aim of achieving mutual benefits. Although individuals are responsible for their careers, organisationally-based careers are shaped through dynamic interactions between individual and employing organisation. To facilitate individual careers, organisations offer activities and mechanisms such as appraisal schemes, personal development plans, mentoring schemes, access to networks, career workshops and in-depth career guidance. For this model to be effective, individuals need information about the internal job market
and help to understand current and future business requirements (Hirsh, Jackson and Jackson, 1995).

In sum, traditional approaches to organisational career management may have been appropriate in a more stable and predictable economic environment, but changes in the world of work and careers have led to a more widespread acceptance of the notion of self-managed careers. Some employers consider it important to develop all of their employees, rather than the select few. Some also believe that individuals need help and support if they are to take greater responsibility for their careers. However, there is little evidence of such help being widely provided, perhaps because of uncertainty about what sort of help might be most useful. One way to better understand this is to consult employees.

2.1.5 Career guidance

...much more discussion is warranted about the concept of career guidance, how it is changing and the future of the term... (Herr, 1997: 83)

As work, career and career management policy and practices appear to be in flux, it is not surprising that the concept and content of career guidance are also the subjects of debate. Conceptual and linguistic problems beset the definition, meaning and usage of the term ‘guidance’, both within the profession guidance community and amongst users and potential users of guidance services. Reference to the international dimension, and comparison between career guidance and educational guidance, compound these difficulties. The selection of definitions discussed below is not intended to be comprehensive but includes those recognised by, and influential within, the guidance community.

One source of confusion is the use of ‘guidance’ both as a generic term and with reference to a specific activity (Watts and Kidd, 2000), and the lack of clarity about which meaning is intended in any given context. The Institute of Career Guidance (ICG), the body that represents professional careers advisers and awards relevant professional qualifications, recently defined guidance as:

...a process of interventions designed to empower individuals to make realistic and well-informed decisions about work and learning which are right for them [...] The process has benefits to both individuals and to society” (ICG, 2002: 1).
The context of this definition suggests that it is intended to convey the generic concept of guidance. Others express a similar conceptualisation. For example, Wilson and Jackson (1998), in a report on adults’ expectations of guidance, describe guidance as:

*Any process (or processes) that helps clients to explore a range of options about learning or work, to relate information to their own needs and circumstances, and to support decision-making about short and long-term goals and the identification of next steps* (Wilson and Jackson, 1998: 2).

Watts and Young (1997: 149) offer the broad definition of guidance as:

...a range of processes designed to enable individuals to make informed choices and transitions related to their personal, educational and career development.

They acknowledge that different commentators and guidance systems give different weight to personal, educational and career aspects. However, the application of the term ‘guidance’ both to careers and education may have contributed to different conceptualisations. Interestingly, all of these definitions imply that career is an individualistic project, despite the view expressed in some academic literature and by some careers advisers, that career is shaped through social interaction, and the interaction of individuals and social systems within which they act (Jackson, 1999).

Whilst guidance workers are likely to perceive similarities in the activities and content of educational and career guidance work, most would also differentiate in terms of expertise, professional training and institutional context. When I refer to educational guidance workers and careers advisers collectively in this study, I use the term ‘guidance workers’. I confine my use of ‘careers advisers’ to those who are trained, qualified in career guidance, although I acknowledge that a number of other designations are used, most commonly the term Personal Adviser in the context of Connexions services for young people.

Using the generic conceptualisation of guidance, and drawing on a list previously devised by Watts (1980), the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE, 1986) identified seven activities of guidance: informing, advising, counselling, assessing, enabling, advocating and feeding back. The UDACE list has been influential within the guidance community (Watts and Kidd, 2000), and is subscribed to by the Institute of Careers Guidance (ICG) and the National Association for Educational Guidance for
Adults (NAEGA). The activities identified by UDACE (1986) relate specifically to educational guidance services for adults, and were subsequently expanded by the Standing Conference for Guidance in Educational Settings (SCAGES, 1993) to apply to all educational settings and to include the institutional role of guidance-providing organisations. SCAGES added the activities of: teaching, networking, managing, and innovating/systems management. Later Ford proposed the addition of signposting, mentoring, sampling, and following up (including tracking) (Ford, 1997; 2001).

To make sense of these 15 activities, and to consider their potential application, it may be helpful to use a tripartite categorisation. The first category comprises activities which involve direct encounters between client and guidance worker, such as advising, counselling and mentoring. The second consists of activities in which the guidance worker interacts with a third party on the client's behalf such as advocating, feeding back (to providers of learning and career opportunities on unmet client needs) and networking. The third group comprises activities such as managing, innovating/systems change and tracking which are the concern of guidance services. These categories are not wholly discrete. Informing, for example, can be interpreted as an interpersonal interaction, but also as an institutional activity if information is collated and disseminated through printed and web-based media. In this study I am primarily concerned with the first and second categories, that is with encounters and interactions between individuals and their career helpers; and career helper interventions with a third party on behalf of the individual.

The generic definition of career and educational guidance is rivalled by a more specific one. When careers advisers and government policy documents refer to guidance they commonly mean 'in-depth guidance' (Watts and Sadler, 2000) as distinct from information and advice. For example, the National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance (NACCEG), a body which includes guidance professional organisations and other 'stakeholders' such as employers' organisations, and education and training organisations, defines professional guidance as:

An in-depth interview or other activity conducted by a trained adviser which helps to explore a range of options, to relate information to their own needs and circumstances and to make decisions about their career (i.e. their progression in learning and work) (NACCEG, 2002).

Advising is defined as:
Providing an immediate response to the needs of clients who present an enquiry or reveal a need that requires more than a straightforward information response. It is usually limited to helping with the interpretation of information and with meeting needs already clearly understood by the client and may or may not include signposting to a guidance interview where a more in-depth response can be provided. (NACCEG, 2002).

This distinction is helpful as many of those who contribute to the guidance process - such as trade union learning representatives (Ford and Watts, 1998) and education and community-based advisers (Watts and McCarthy, 1998) - may be trained to help people with their educational and career choices, but not usually to deliver in-depth guidance. Careers advisers who are trained to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 4 and hold the Diploma in Careers Guidance or have Qualified Careers Adviser status would be expected to include in-depth guidance in their repertoire. However, in the delivery of professional career guidance, distinguishing between advice and guidance is not always straightforward or practical.

As careers advisers themselves struggle to define and to convey the meaning of guidance, it is hardly surprising to find uncertainty among the public. Research shows that: the term has little meaning for users and potential users of guidance services (eg Bosley et al, 2001; Hawthorn, Haughton and Maguire 2002); many adults regard advice and guidance as synonymous (MORI, 2001); have a poor understanding of what guidance might involve (SQW, 2000); or do not see career guidance as relevant to finding a job (Wilson and Jackson, 1998).

Reference to non-UK literature adds further difficulties of interpretation and understanding. For example, in the USA career guidance is defined as: “a systematic programme of coordinated information and experiences designed to anticipate and facilitate selected knowledge and skills important in individual career development and career management” (Herr and Cramer, 1992 in Herr, 1997: 83). In the American context career guidance includes a broad range of activities such as counselling, classroom instruction, work experience and placement. In the UK some of these activities might be included in the generic conceptualisation of career guidance, but the notion of a systematic programme suggests closer parallels with careers education or career management programmes. In the USA, ‘career counselling’ equates to the UK concept of
in-depth guidance, but with a greater emphasis on personal, psychological and emotional issues than a UK-based careers adviser might traditionally encounter. Also career counselling suggests a series of encounters (Herr, 1997), which would be less usual in the UK where a client is more likely to experience a single in-depth guidance interview.

A review of these definitions, suggests a reasonable consensus that guidance is concerned with the client's issues, and specifically with helping her with decision-making about learning and work. Definitions seem to diverge over the range of activities regarded as guidance, and the degree of attention given to client groups or potential beneficiaries other than the guidance seeker. The relative importance of choice and transition, decision-making and on-going individual career management is not always apparent in the definitions. The main source of confusion seems to be the use of guidance both as a generic and a specific term. In this study I use the term 'professional career guidance' to mean any of the activities of guidance undertaken by a qualified careers adviser. However, lack of clarity about the meaning and usage of existing terms is one reason for introducing the notion of 'career help'.

2.1.6 Career help

Despite conceptual confusion, the terms career guidance and career management are useful within their own contexts. However, I am proposing the notion of 'career help', a term derived from the Egan's (1994) concept of the skilled helper which has been a powerful influence on professional career guidance practice. The choice of language is intentional: I am endeavouring to convey a sense of ordinariness so as to reflect the contributions of a range people and everyday encounters which may shape individuals' life-worlds, experiences and careers. Mirroring the concept of boundaryless careers, career help is not confined by the boundaries of profession, organisation or formal relationship but also embraces the informal provision of information, advice and support. In the context of the workplace, career helpers may include training officers, human resource specialists, senior managers, line managers, supervisors, co-workers and trade unionists. Outside of the workplace, careers advisers, along with family, friends, professional contacts, employment agency staff and tutors may adopt the role of career helper.
Career help includes opportunities to interweave experience, ‘talk’ and reflection that may assist individuals to identify their life-career purpose (Ballantine, 1993). The concept is intended to cover encounters and actions which enable individuals to explore, identify and pursue their career ideas or career direction. The process may involve helping individuals to identify their abilities, aspirations, interests and values, and to develop their career management skills. Career helpers may also interpret and negotiate formal and informal social systems which impact on careers.

2.1.7 Government policy and the provision of career guidance

The evidence suggests that career guidance has a positive impact on the careers and personal lives of some groups (eg Kidd and Killeen, 1992; Iles and Mabey, 1993; Jackson, 1990; Bolton and Gold, 1994; Hughes et al, 2002), although the extent and nature of that impact are subject to debate (eg Killeen, White and Watts, 1992; Hughes et al 2002). Arguments in favour of researching career guidance are also fuelled by assertions about the value and power (or potential power) of professional career guidance. Some academics (eg Watts, 1996; and Colley, 2000) perceive career guidance as an instrument of social control or social reform. This view seems to be shared by the Government who regard the provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) for adults and young people as an important strand of the social inclusion agenda (OECD, 2003). Local, good quality and impartial IAG for learning and work are regarded as key to raising labour force skills and improving economic competitiveness (DfEE, 2001; 2000 and undated; PIU, 2001; Humphries, 2002). Consequently, the Government funds a national network of local IAG partnerships, comprising a range of publicly- and privately-funded provision, and services provided in a community and voluntary settings (OECD, 2003). Connexions and careers services, Jobcentre Plus and education and training providers such as further and higher education institutions are key members of IAG partnerships.

People who are unemployed and those with low skills regard the Department of Pensions and Work’s Jobcentres Plus as major sources of IAG (Wilson and Jackson, 1998; MORI, 2001). The main source of ‘independent’, in-depth career guidance for young people and adults are the publicly-funded Connexions services. In some areas career services provide career guidance on a contractual basis to Connexions partnerships (OECD, 2003). Connexions and careers services provide adults with information and advice free
of charge, but access to in-depth guidance may depend on employment status, degree of
disadvantage and geographic location. As employed adults may be required to pay for in­
depth guidance, some advisers and commentators have raised concerns about the
accessibility of such help for all of those who need and want it. The creation of
Connexions services which focuses on young people has raised concerns that insufficient
attention may be paid to the needs of adults (eg DfEE, 2000). Some adults can access
workplace guidance provided by independent services, but this is most commonly
redundancy and outplacement counselling, psychological testing and in-depth guidance
interviews (Jackson et al 2001).

Education providers are also key IAG partners. Research has shown that adults regard
FE colleges as significant sources of IAG (MORI, 2001), specifically for help with
learning, although less so for help with career choice (Wilson and Jackson, 1998).
However, the training and qualification of college staff to provide IAG may vary. Staff
may have limited knowledge of learning provision beyond their own institution or of
career opportunities (Bosley et al 2001). In addition, the impartiality of college staff is
open to question because of the tension between recruiting learners and advising
(potential) students (eg Connelly, 1998).

Employers are less commonly members of IAG partnerships, although they are regarded
by employees as a major source of IAG (Hawthorn, Maguire and Haughton 2002;
Aldridge and Tuckett, 2002) primarily for help with learning and skill development,
rather than careers (MORI, 2001; Wilson and Jackson 1998). Employees look to their
employers as a source of help, especially in sustaining their ‘employability’ through
developing transferable knowledge and skills (eg Hirsh, Jackson and Jackson, 1995;
Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999). Low skilled and unskilled manual workers are less
likely than those in manual and non-manual skilled social classes to seek help from their
employers (MORI, 2001). At first sight employers seem to be an appropriate source of
IAG for people in employment and who wish to develop their careers within their
employing organisation. Work-based IAG has the potential for linking individual
preference and skill with opportunities, and for negotiating a mutually acceptable fit
between the two (Kidd, 1996a). Less positively, impartiality and the scope of
information employers and managers are able and willing to provide may be
compromised by organisational and personal interests (Arnold, 1997). As noted above,
formal career management programmes are often confined to managers, professionals and graduates, and are usually designed to promote internal career development, rather than to helping employees who wish to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Employees may regard trade unions (TUs) as more ‘independent’, trustworthy and credible (Ford and Watts, 1998) sources of workplace IAG than employers. The training of learning representative to provide information and initial advice about learning, and about other sources of advice and guidance (TUC, undated) is one way in which trade unions encourage members to sustain their employability. Government has identified Trade Union Learning Representatives and other informal workforce advisers as effective sources of information about learning and encouragement to participate in learning (PIU, 2001).

The preceding description suggests that IAG provision is extensive, although this is not the perception of many adults. Awareness of IAG services amongst adults is low or lacking (SQW, 2000; Hawthorn, Maguire and Haughton, 2002); some adults have difficulty in finding personally relevant IAG (MORI, 2001); and accessing suitable careers guidance services (Wilson and Jackson, 1998). Unmet demand for IAG has been reported (Wilson and Jackson, 1998; MORI, 2001), particularly amongst people in employment (SQW 2000). These market research studies were conducted before, or in the early stages of the development of IAG partnerships when marketing and communications between partners may not have been well established. However, as the IAG providers themselves pre-date the partnerships, the findings seem likely to reflect adults’ perceptions of provision at the time I gathered data for this study.

Limitations of existing provision are threefold. First, the impartiality and comprehensiveness of employer and education-based providers is concerning, particularly as adults regard these as amongst the key sources of IAG. Second, career management provision in workplace settings is underdeveloped and limited. The need for more inclusive and enhanced provision may become increasingly pressing as publicly-funded provision is targeted at young people and disadvantaged groups, leaving many employed adults more dependent on their employers.

*There is also clearly a pressing need for the development of more structure and effective guidance provision within workplace settings, with union as well as employer*
involvement and especially ones which address concerns over the objectivity and impartiality of employers providing IAG. (Hawthorn, Maguire and Haughton, 2002: 2)

Third, IAG on learning and occupations is more readily available than in-depth guidance or help with career planning and management (Humphries, 2002). As structural changes affect the world of work and some careers, there may be a greater demand for help in dealing with uncertainty, identifying and managing opportunities, and handling transitions.

2.1.8 Summary of section one

Here I developed my claim that career help is a relevant and legitimate topic of study at this time. I defined and discussed the key concepts of career, career management and career guidance and introduced the notion of career help. I highlighted economic and technological changes and how these are: challenging conceptualisations of career; impacting on organisational career management; increasing Government interest in IAG; and raising questions about the need for individuals to manage their careers, whilst complicating understandings of how individuals can be best helped to do this. Employees appear to rely heavily on education and employment providers as sources of IAG, although the help they receive from these sources may be limited in terms of scope and partiality. Neither government-funded IAG nor employer provision seems adequate to help employees with their careers. Figure 2.1 summarises the impact and perceived impact of the changing world of work on careers and career help.
Figure 2.1 – Summary of the impact and perceived impact of changes in the world of work on careers and career help

Changing world of work (technological and economic change)

Government strategy for economic competitiveness

Organisational change

Changing and diverse career patterns

Different concepts of career

Policies on lifelong learning and social exclusion

Disturbs traditional career management and encourages self-management

Primacy of subjective careers

Need and demand for career support / help / guidance
2.2 Section 2: Career theory and career guidance practice

My intention here is to provide an overview of the contributions and limitations of existing theory to our understanding of career. My concern in this section is with 'big', mid-range or formal career theory which addresses high levels of abstraction (Creswell, 1998). The contribution made by research studies to the development of substantive theory about career help is discussed in section three. As a comprehensive review of the massive career-related literature is beyond the scope of this project, I focus here on key criticisms of career theory, giving examples to illustrate. Examples are those most familiar to UK careers advisers Kidd et al (1994), namely theories formulated by: Super (1953, reproduced in Super, 1990) and Holland (1973; 1985) who have been particularly influential in the UK; and Ken Roberts (1981) who turned attention away from individual agency (the capacity of individuals to bring about outcomes) to emphasise the role of structural constraints. I have also included the less well-known community-interaction (Law, 1981; 1986) and social learning (Krumboltz, 1979; 1994) theories along with some more recently formulated ones which offer insights based on different perspectives.

The theme of this section is dualism, that is, the practice of studying career from one or other of a series of paired, well-defined and opposing perspectives (Jackson, 1999), and how this practice limits understanding of career and the contribution of career theory to career guidance practice. Beginning with a discussion of the purpose of theory, I then identify and discuss the contributions and limitations of positivist and constructionist theory, and of sociology and psychology. Moving on, I identify and explore the reasons for the disjunction between theory and practice; summarise the limitations of existing theory; and identify gaps in knowledge.

2.2.1 The purpose of theory

Theory is commonly expected to: describe what happens; explain or suggest why things happen in the way they do; and predict or anticipate what might happen in particular circumstances. In terms of career theory, some researchers and careers advisers have greater expectations of theory than others. For example, Closs (2001) argues that it is inappropriate to theorise about social phenomena. Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989) and Krumboltz (1994) require theory to provide explanations and to assist in sensemaking, but not to predict. Walsh and Chartrand (1994) suggest that differences in perceptions
arise from epistemological differences, with positivism being associated with the predictive capacity of theory and constructionism with description and explanation. Epistemological differences are discussed in more detail in 2.2.2: my point here is that attempts to predict careers when persons and context are changing and changeable seem ambitious, although valuable theory must provide some insights and explanations which guide action.

*A good theory is a simplified representation of some domain constructed so that users can ask questions about that domain with an increased probability of receiving valuable answers* (Krumboltz, 1994: 12)

Three broad categorises of ‘career theory’ - distinguishable by their different aims - are relevant here. Occupational or career choice theories are based on a ‘point-in-time’ perspective, and are primarily concerned with how people choose a field of work or an occupation, either on initial entry to the labour market or when wish or necessity initiates job or occupational change. Rather than focusing on isolated points of choice and decision, theories of career development adopt a longitudinal perspective and are concerned with how career unfolds over a person’s lifetime. Theories of occupational choice and career development have *implications* for career guidance and how to “foster career development in clients” (Savickas and Walsh 1996: xii), although guides for action are more explicit in some theories than others. Career guidance or career counselling theories are formulated specifically to guide practice.

### 2.2.2 Epistemology and career theory

Traditionally, career research and theory in the USA (Brown and Brooks, 1996) and the UK (Collin, 1996) are grounded in positivism, although interest in constructionism is increasing. Both perspectives contribute to current understanding of career and career guidance, and to the development of theory, and both have their limitations. The discussion that follows focuses on the contributions and limitations of these different perspectives and the effects of adopting a philosophically dualistic approach to the study of career.
2.2.2.1 Positivism and career theory

Positivism assumes that reality is external and objective, and that knowledge can be developed by observing people objectively and separately from their environment, and measuring their behaviour in order to discern cause and effect. Applied to career theory, positivism implies determinism. In other words, behaviour is assumed to be governed by genetics and the environment, although individuals retain some degree of freewill and choice. Career research rooted in this tradition, highlights and focuses on a particular foreground phenomenon or relationship so as to deepen understanding of, for example, the effect of aptitude, personality, social class or economic structure on career choice or development. In terms of practice, an individual’s ‘career problem’ is ‘diagnosed’ through careful analysis, and the appropriate formula suggested or prescribed by the espoused theory is selected and applied. For example, differentialist theories provide frameworks for thinking about individuals in relation to, and using similar terms as, those used to describe jobs and occupations. Decision-making theories and models (eg Peterson et al, 1996) are concerned with the readiness for decision-making and its content and/or process.

Of the career theories rooted in the positivist tradition, differentialism - sometimes referred to as ‘trait and factor’ or matching theory - has perhaps been the most influential. Betz, Fitzgerald and Hill (1989) described it as the cornerstone of traditional career theory; and Fielding (1999: 30) as having “... a huge impact on the practice of careers guidance in the UK”. Krumboltz observed that: “Its [differentialist] assumptions are so pervasive that almost every career counselor uses trait-and-factor theory to some extent, although many do so without awareness and even with denial” (1996: 56).

Of the differentialist approaches, Holland’s congruence theory has been particularly influential and is the most familiar to careers advisers in the UK (Watts and Kidd, 2000; Kidd et al, 1994). According to Holland (1992), job satisfaction and success are associated with congruence between a person’s vocational personality and their occupational environment or occupation. As occupations are dominated by people of a given personality type, occupations and persons can be most usefully described as resembling a combination of three of the following types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising or conventional. With or without help, individuals seek to identify their vocational personality and to ‘match’ this with potentially congruent occupations.
Differentialist theories have the significant advantage of being relatively straightforward to apply in practice.

Positivist theory has been criticised for its tendency to: be mechanistic; isolate particular factors at the expense of other key phenomena; over simplify the multiplicity of relationships and interactions that shape career; separate subject from context (Collin, 1997); and for application to general populations rather than individuals. The role of structure and culture tends to be overlooked, or the structure of opportunities are assumed to be set (Watts and Kidd, 2000). In other words, theory based on positivist assumptions risks simplifying the complexity of career to the extent that it no longer resembles individuals' experiences.

Differentialism in particular has been challenged for assuming that job and occupational stability are the norm, and for having less relevance in the context of changing economic structures and uncertain labour markets where career patterns are more diverse (eg Law, 1981; Savickas, 2000c; Watts and Kidd, 2000). Changes - perceived and experienced - along with the reconceptualisation of career, suggest a greater need for individuals to review their careers during the course of their lives, and for theorists to develop innovative theory based on constructionist assumptions.

The experience of discontinuity challenges the fundamental principles and standards on which career theory, research and practice have stood. (Young and Collin, 2000: 8).

Developmental theories, such as Super's life-span, life-space theory (2.2.4.1) more readily take account of individual change than differentialist ones and are more applicable to the changing world of work, but are also based on a positivist assumptions.

2.2.2.2 Constructionism and career theory

Offering a different perspective, constructionism is predicated on the belief that people actively construct their own 'reality', rather than accepting an imposed, external 'reality'. According to this view, there are no absolute truths, human behaviour can not be reduced to laws or principles or explained in terms of cause and effect but needs to be understood in the context within which it occurs (Brown and Brooks, 1996). More attention is paid to “purpose and passion” (Kidd, 1998: 282) in constructionist theories than in positivist
ones (Young and Valach, 1996). Some academics favour constructionism over positivism (eg Collin and Young, 1986); regard a constructionist approach as a useful complement to positivism (Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989); or suggest the development of dynamic theory which encompasses how people construct, make sense of, and manage their careers (Watts and Kidd, 2000).

Crotty (1998) identified several different branches of constructionism, including constructivism - where career is regarded as an individual construction and the process of construing as individual and subjective - and social constructionism which espouses the view that career is jointly or socially constructed. Constructionist career theories and counselling theories more commonly adopt an individual (constructivist) perspective than a social constructionist one.

Constructivism

Most constructivist theory which informs professional career guidance is drawn from humanist approaches to counselling developed in the 1950s. Such theories focus on intrapersonal processes and individual meaning-making (Collin and Young, 1992), although the sense a person makes of her experience is taken to reflect and be reflected by her construct systems (Young and Valach, 1996).

One example of career theory based on a constructivist perspective is Kelly’s personal construct psychology (PCP). Although not widely used in career guidance practice (Kidd, 1996b), PCP is introduced to trainee careers advisers on some courses (Kidd et al, 1994) and promoted for use in practice (eg Offer, 1995). According to Kelly (1955), individuals make sense of the world by identifying themes from perceived similarities and contrasts in their experiences. These similarities and contrasts or constructs only have meaning in the context of the person doing the construing. An individual’s constructs cohere into a construct system which she tests and changes over time (Neimeyer, 1992; Kidd, 1996b). Thus individuals make choices which elaborate or extend their construct system. For a careers adviser applying PCP, this means seeking to understand how a client construes the world, helping her to identify and expand her personal constructs and her constructs about the world of work, and to relate her constructs of herself to occupations.
Of the counselling theories, Carl Rogers' (1951) non-directive, client-centred approach and Egan's goal-oriented skilled helper model (1994) have had a considerable impact on the skills, attitudes and training of careers advisers in the UK (Kidd et al., 1994). Both Rogers and Egan were primarily concerned with personal (development) counselling, as opposed to career guidance, but believed their approaches to be of value in other professional and personal relationships. Rooted in the notion of client-centredness, Rogers’ approach provides a good illustration of constructivist counselling.

Underpinning Rogerian counselling is the hypothesis that individuals have the capacity for finding self-initiated and constructive ways of handling life issues. Counsellors can help by adopting their client’s internal frame of reference, and by perceiving the client and her world through her eyes. The counsellor’s empathetic identification enables the client to accept herself in her totality and to take responsibility for her own decisions. This client-centred approach is based on the thesis that a person’s value system is formed through her interaction with the environment and particularly through evaluative interactions with, or feedback from, other people. The individualised value system that clients develop will have considerable identity with the value systems of other people, enabling the client to experience both personal and social acceptance.

UK careers advisers are rarely trained as therapeutic counsellors, but the attitudes of non-directive, client-centred career guidance practice are based on Rogerian principles. Interviewing techniques are intended to convey empathy, to seek an understanding of the clients’ “life-worlds” (Giorgi, 1970) and everyday life from that person’s perspective. Clients are assumed to be free and proactive agents (Watts and Kidd, 2000) responsible for, and capable of, making their own decisions. The adviser’s role is to help clients construct solutions based on their own value system and to develop autonomy and agency (Collin and Young, 1992).

Social constructionism

The role of others in careers is acknowledged by Super (1980) through the notion of life roles; Rogers through his explanation of how individuals construct their value systems; and Rogers and Egan through their emphasis on helping relationships. However, all of these approaches focus on the individual or self as the foreground phenomenon. Other theories, such as Law’s community-interaction theory (1981), action theory (Young and Valach, 1996; Young, Valach and Collin, 1996) and sociodynamic theory (Peavy, 2000)
focus on the role of others or of joint action in the construction of careers. Community-interaction is introduced and discussed in detail (2.2.4.3). Action theory is described here because - although not well-known amongst careers advisers in the UK - it is prominent in the literature and brings a fresh perspective to our understanding of career and career guidance.

Central to action theory is the notion that career, rather than being individually or structurally determined, is socially constructed through joint action. Joint action includes social interchange between individuals and careers advisers, and between individuals and significant others such as employers, co-workers, family members and friends. According to Young and Valach (1996), action theory is unique in perceiving goal-directed action - both individual and joint - from three different perspectives. Those perspectives are: observed or 'manifest' behaviour; thoughts and feelings or 'conscious cognition' or 'internal processes'; and the 'social meaning' of action to the actor and others. The purpose of career guidance is to help the person identify the themes which permeate and make sense of her career, and to understand her constructs and construing processes. Narrative may be used to illuminate an individual's construct system and her history, culture, society and relationships. As career is seen as constructed through social exchange, it may be appropriate to involve significant others in the guidance process (Young, Valach and Collin, 1996). Action theory has been explicated and applied to research (Young and Valach, 1996), and seems to offer a promising framework for in-depth analysis of encounters between individuals and their career helpers.

To summarise, both positivist and constructionist perspectives offer useful contributions to our understanding of career and career guidance practice. Although some constructionist career theories have been developed, the positivist tradition continues to dominate career research and theory.

2.2.3 Theory and practice

Assuming that useful theory provides some guides for practice, observations about the limited contribution of career theory to professional career guidance practice are concerning. Lent and Savickas (1994) commented on the gulf between career development research and theory on the one hand, and career counselling practice on the
other. Savickas and Walsh (1996) devoted an entire volume to a discussion about why vocational psychologists have failed to develop an explicit theory of career counselling.

From a careers adviser's perspective the picture is complex. With the exception of developmentalism, counselling theory is perceived by careers advisers as having a stronger influence on practice than career theory (Kidd et al., 1994). Professional career guidance practice - like counselling theory - is concerned with individuals and as such needs to take account of exceptions to general theory about population groups.

Counselling theory, particularly Rogers' non-directive, client-centred approach (Rogers, 1951) and Egan's skilled helper model (Egan, 1994) most commonly influence the purpose and shape of interviews, and the skills and attitudes that careers advisers regard as helpful. Counsellors (Egan, 1994) and most careers advisers (Kidd et al. 1994) report using an eclectic blend of techniques derived from different theories. Inexperienced careers advisers may struggle to reconcile the predictive and directive approach suggested by much career theory with non-directive counselling techniques (Watson, 1994; Watts and Kidd, 2000). As they gain experience, the interplay of theory and practice enables careers advisers to develop a personal philosophy of career guidance and a personal model of interviewing (Watson, 1994). Their personal approach may be shaped by a multiplicity of interacting influences including their experiences, personal beliefs and training, along with their interpretation of each client's expressed career concerns, and the adviser's own perceptions of the client's needs.

The contrasting epistemological positions of researchers and careers advisers may limit the contribution of theory to practice (Polkinghorne, 1990). According to Savickas (2000c) this "trouble in paradigms" represents a fundamental philosophical difference between careers researchers who are interested in epistemology and groups, and advisers whose focus is on ontology and individuals. Collin and Young (1992) also draw attention to the conflict between the assumptions of positivist research and the 'therapeutic' relationships of career counselling. Epistemological differences may be at the root of the minimal flow of knowledge from practice to theory and limited insights into individual's perspectives of career help. The lack of action research and the consequent under-theorising of career guidance practice (Edwards and Payne, 1997), suggest that careers advisers need to combine reflective practice with action research (Collin, 1996). Interestingly, two key contributors to career guidance practice developed
their ideas by relating research, theory and practice: Rogers synthesised techniques shown by research and practice to be successful; and Egan translated what he judged to be the best of research and theory into practical techniques.

An eclectic, personal and flexible approach to practice may be regarded by careers advisers as compatible with the Rogerian client-centredness (2.3.7.2). Eclecticism offers a means of reconciling theory and practice, and may be the most helpful way of tailoring career guidance to a client's individual needs and context. For this reason, Sharf (1997) suggested that careers guidance professionals base their practice on a range of theories of counselling, decision-making, and career and lifespan development; and Krumboltz (1994) advised professionals to select theories which foreground the phenomenon most relevant to an individual's particular purpose, rather than espousing and applying a single theory.

This discussion raises questions about whether individuals seeking guidance value help based on the their own philosophical assumptions, different assumptions or a combination of positivist and constructionist perspectives. Research studies suggest that a combination may be preferred. For example, Nevo (1990) and Wilden and La Gro (1998) reported that clients found effective process and interpersonal skills - informed by counselling approaches and guidance models - to be necessary but insufficient in helping with career issues. Clients attributed the limitations of career guidance interviews to a lack of clear constructs and frameworks to organise their thoughts. This suggests that explicating the underpinning theoretical framework may increase the perceived value of career help, and/or a need for further career theory to provide more helpful guides to action.

One way of reconciling epistemological differences is to approach career research, theory and practice from the same perspective. For example, researchers such as, Polkinghorne (1990) and Cochran (1990) advocate applying narrative method to research and practice. As a research method, narrative is accessible to advisers engaged in action research (reflecting on, and learning systematically from their day-to-day practice) as well as professional researchers.

To summarise, because career theory is predominately based on positivist assumptions, and practice is informed by constructivist counselling theory, the flow of knowledge
between theory and practice is limited. This dualistic distinction may generate internal conflict for careers advisers as they struggle to reconcile positivist theory with constructivist practice. Eclecticism offers a means of reconciling theory and practice, and acknowledges their interdependence. Epistemological differences also raise questions about potential discrepancies between the philosophical assumptions of guidance seekers and professional careers advisers from whom they seek help. For example, do individuals perceive career help to be most valuable if based on philosophical assumptions that are the same as, or different to, their own? Do they perceive multiple perspectives to be helpful? I will return to these questions in the discussion of knowledge (6.3.1.3).

2.2.4 Psychology, sociology and understanding careers

A further dualistic distinction is between the academic disciplines of psychology or sociology which have traditionally dominated the study of career (Law, 1981; Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989). In this section I identify some of the limitations and contributions of psychology and sociology, and show that understanding of careers is limited by the tendency to adopt one or other of these perspectives.

2.2.4.1 Psychological perspectives

By psychological theories, I mean theories that give foreground attention to the individual. They may vary in the emphasis they place on different aspects of individuality such as aptitude, interest, skill and physical attributes, and the relative weight they attribute to individual agency (the capacity of individuals to bring about outcomes) as opposed to culture and structure (social systems) in shaping careers. Psychological theory based on positivism suggests that innate, inherited and learned factors have a significant role in determining career. Careers guidance involves matching individuals’ features and attributes to the available opportunities. Constructionist psychological theories such as those using narrative and biography, suggest a more prominent role for agency. Career guidance is tailored to individual needs and interpretations:

...people should be helped, through reflection on their own and other people's career biographies, to become their own career-development theoreticians... (Law, 1996: 65.)
Of the psychological career theories, Super's life-span, life-space theory (1980) is perhaps the best known amongst careers advisers and the most influential in the UK (Kidd et al, 1994; Fielding, 1999). Super made two important contributions to the advancement of theory which are relevant here. First, by drawing attention to development and change over time, Super introduced a longitudinal perspective to supplement the predominantly cross-sectional view of differentialism. In considering the temporal nature of career development, Super (1953, reproduced in Super, 1990) identified a series of career stages - growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and disengagement - each with a different career concern or career task. According to Super, life stages are associated with the prominence of particular life roles but are only loosely associated with age. An intended or enforced change which affects a person's job or occupation results in her re-cycling through the growth, exploration and establishment stages.

Second, Super elaborated on the notion of career development as the implementation of occupational self-concept and in so doing drew attention to subjective meaning, individuality and the uniqueness of self. Super's notion of self-concept adopts the perspective of self as subject as distinct from vocational identity or self as object (Super, Savickas and Super, 1996) which is the traditional focus of differential theorists. Self-concept is concerned with the personal meaning of abilities, interests, values and choices and how they coalesce to form life themes. Everyone has a constellation of self-concepts each relating to their different life roles and situation. One of these self-concepts is occupational and relates to the attributes that an individual considers to be vocationally relevant.

Despite its value and impact, Super's theory has been criticised for summarising the key elements of existing theory rather than adding original ideas (Super, Savickas and Super, 1996). If the roles of structure, culture and other people in shaping career are taken fully into account, "life-span, life-space theory" becomes too complex to apply in practice. The notion of self-concept has intuitive appeal but is too broad and non-specific to be theoretically or practically useful (Betz, 1994). Super's developmental theory is not easily accessible to careers advisers (Wilden and La Gro, 1998), perhaps because of the inherent difficulty of integrating the constructivist notion of self-concept into an essentially positivist theory. And, like other developmental theories, Super's life span,
life-space theory is stronger on description than explanation (Watts and Kidd, 2000) and does not adequately account for women's career experiences (Sullivan, 1999).

The need for theory which addresses women's experiences was highlighted by Gallos (1989) who also alerted career helpers to the potential significance and meaning of gender for the individual they are trying to help. By studying the literature on career development from a psychological, developmental perspective, Gallos concluded that men and women face the same dilemma of reconciling the tension between separation and attachment but approach that dilemma from different directions. Early in career, men emphasise the importance of individuality and workplace achievement, leaving the exploration of intimacy until later in life. Women start out by connecting to significant others, and move on to exploring ways of separation as they grow older. However, her conclusions do not amount to a theory of women's career development which is still lacking (Sullivan, 1999).

In more general terms, psychological perspectives have been criticised for focusing on person-related constructs and failing to take account of the constraints and opportunities of structural and cultural factors (eg Fitzgerald and Betz, 1994; Thomas, 1989) and particularly institutional barriers and practices (Maranda and Comeau, 2000). By structural factors, Fitzgerald and Betz meant:

...characteristics of the society or organization, including its members, that limit access to or opportunities in the occupational and/or organizational environment (1994: 107).

Cultural factors refer to:

...beliefs and attitudes commonly found among group members - often these are socialized by society [...] but after internalization they serve as self-perpetuating barriers to the individual. (1994: 107).

Psychologically-based theories may accept structural factors as established, unchanging or unchangeable. The application of psychological theories alone risks overlooking the role of structural factors in shaping career (Watts and Kidd, 2000). Some careers advisers may be unaware of structure and the consequences of structure for careers, or may perceive their role as helping clients to accept and assimilate into existing structures.
2.2.4.2 *Sociological perspectives*

Sociological career theories are primarily concerned with social mobility (Maranda and Comeau, 2000) and illuminate the role of structural and/or cultural forces that enable or constrain opportunities and choices, and mediate or direct careers. However, they tend to be ‘formal’ or highly abstracted, and require interpretation if they are to apply to career guidance practice (Roberts, 1981; Maranda and Comeau, 2000).

The sociological theory best known to UK careers advisers is Roberts’ theory of opportunity structure (1981). Roberts argued that peoples’ jobs are largely determined by socialisation, the structure of the labour market, and educational institutions and employers’ recruitment and selection practices. Access to opportunities depends on educational attainment, and to a lesser extent family and social networks, with individual choice playing a far more modest role.

*The crucial fact is that choices, both in education and the labour market, are ‘determined’ within parameters that are independently and previously cast by structural processes,* (Roberts, 1981: 290).

The economic and social context of the late 1960s when Roberts formulated his theory and the 1980s when he published the work cited above, were somewhat different from the current context. In addition, his prime concern was to explain the transition of young people moving from school into work. Nevertheless, Roberts has more recently (1997) reiterated his view that young people’s life chances are dependent on their social class background and their attainment in compulsory education.

It could be argued that opportunity structure theory merely makes explicit an accepted belief: that careers advisers have very little scope for action. In Roberts’ view, practice based on developmental theory and non-directive counselling techniques, is largely futile unless the structures that constrain and enable opportunities are also changed. Thus, careers advisers have limited (and not always palatable) ethical choices: they can either help people to enter the jobs which they are structurally obliged to enter, or they can encourage people to develop career aims that are at odds with the opportunities available. That is, they must assume existing structures to be adequate, and work with and within those structures, or challenge existing values and structures (Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989). In response to the client’s immediate concerns, careers advisers may raise
individuals' awareness of the constraints and injustices of the labour market and intervene where appropriate on behalf of their clients. They may also: challenge and encourage others to challenge stereotyping; use role models; and support individuals who make choices that are counter to the norm (Hotchkiss and Borow, 1996).

2.2.4.3 Interactive perspectives

One way of addressing the shortcomings of psychology-sociology dualism is to highlight the interface between them. In other words, theory that foregrounds the interaction between individual and society, or individual and institutions adds a further dimension to our understanding of career. Authors have expressed concern about the need to give more attention to interactive theory. Watts and Kidd (2000) called for more theory which takes account of the relationship between individuals and social and economic institutions. More specifically, Maranda and Comeau (2000) identified a need for theory which recognises the role of work colleagues in career.

Although essentially sociological, some theories focus on the interface between individuals and institutions. Barley (1989) applied Giddens' structuration theory to an understanding of the way in which individual actions and interactions shape and are shaped by institutions through the mediation of career. Bell and Staw (1989) theorised that people shape, as well as being shaped by, their work and organisational environment. Kanter (1989) perceived careers as mediated by informal social networks, and by organisational structures which provide (or withhold) employment, promotion, funding, education and guidance.

More well-known amongst UK careers advisers is social learning theory (Krumboltz, 1994; 1996) which explains career in terms of a two-way learning process in which individuals interact with their environment. According to Krumboltz, an individual's personality and skills arise from her unique learning experiences which consist of positively and negatively reinforcing events. Her genetic endowment (including gender and physical make-up), her environment (including economic forces and employment opportunities), her learning experiences and her task approach skills (including work habits, performance standards and emotional responses) interact to develop a set of personal beliefs. These beliefs comprise self-observation generalisations about her values, interests and skills; and world-view generalisations, such as observations about
particular industries or occupations. Such beliefs may or may not be shared by others. Together beliefs and task approach skills lead to specific career actions. Thus career evolves through interactions between the individual and her interpretation of her environment, and through the interaction of different aspects of self. Professional careers guidance based on social learning theory might involve engaging clients in appropriate learning through experience and networking, and cognitive restructuring to challenge unhelpful attitudes and assumptions.

Other theories focus on interpersonal interactions and the role of others in constructing career. For example, the concept of career as a joint construction is central to action theory (Young and Valach, 1996); sociodynamic theory emphasises the interactivity of human social life (Peavy, 2000); and community is at the heart of community-interaction theory (Law 1981; 1986). Of these, community-interaction theory is the best known in the UK. According to this theory, career is not a matter of choice (voluntarism) or allocation (determinism) or direct interaction between the two. Instead, community - family, peer group, neighbourhood and ethnic group - mediates and modifies psychological and sociological influences on career development. Law expressed this central principle as follows:

...whatever explanatory or predictive significance we may wish to assign to self-concept or to opportunity structure as influences upon career development, that significance will be modified by exchanges occurring between the individual and the groups of which he or she is a member. (Law, 1981: 148).

...who-does-what in society is [...] the product of a plurality of interpersonal transactions conducted in local settings, and on the basis of interaction within and between groups of which the individual is a member - the 'community'. (Law, 1981: 145).

Thus, community-interaction processes modify the effects of the predictions of functional sociology such as the expectation that membership of a particular class or ethnic group will determine a person’s career. Community also transmits its own influences to individuals through: expectations in terms of what is demanded of them; feedback about the suitability of different roles; support in terms of encouragement and reinforcement of their aspirations or line of action; models who represent new possibilities for their lives;
impressions about new environments and relationships; and contact with people who can facilitate careers (Law, 1986). Importantly the shaping process is not always benign: “Community-interaction theory suggests how people may be both trapped and liberated by significant encounters” (Law 1999: 44). The role of the careers adviser is to help people “... have more than one way of conceiving of possible selves in possible futures” (Law, 1981: 155-156).

Law’s key contribution was to foreground the mediating and modifying role of community. Modifying processes explain how neither self nor situation is fixed and why one individual may act differently from other members of the same group. In this way community-interaction gives prominence to the role of interactions in career development and addresses concerns about the division between sociological and psychological perspectives. However, community-interaction was originally formulated from a review of literature about child development, education and school leavers, and theoretically grounded in the work of R. J. Roberts (1980), rather than being based on empirical research. The primary purpose of community-interaction theory was to explain school-leavers’ occupational and job choices, and to inform school-based careers education. This raises questions about the adults’ experiences of the role of community and individuals in mediating and modifying influences on their careers.

2.2.5 Summary of section two

This discussion identified the limitations of ‘big’ or formal theory. I discussed the way in which the development of career theory has been limited by a number of dualisms: between dominant career theories and career guidance practice; between positivist and constructionist career theories; and between the disciplines of sociology and psychology. Although there is growing interest in understanding career from a constructionist perspective, the positivist tradition predominates. Both traditions inform our understanding of career, but both have limitations. Positivist theories are useful in bringing specific foreground phenomena into sharp relief, but in so doing risk being mechanistic and decontextualising the phenomena being studied. They also tend to oversimplify the complex interplay of influence and perception, interpretation and response. Constructionist theories take account of complexity but may over-emphasise description and offer limited guides for action.
Positivist career theory predominates in the literature, whilst career guidance practice is guided by constructivist counselling theory. This may be a source of tension for inexperienced careers advisers as they attempt to apply career theory to their practice. A way of resolving tension which is compatible with a client-centred approach, is to select the theories which seem most appropriate to the particular client and her needs. Importantly, I suggest that the dualism between positivism and constructionism, and between sociological and psychological theory, tends to neglect the role of other people in shaping career. A social constructionist perspective, which focuses on interactions and takes account of joint as well as individual construction, addresses both of these dualist divisions. Existing research studies of encounters between individuals and their formal and informal career helpers further illuminate our understanding of how social interactions contribute to the construction of career.

2.3 Section three: research on career helpers

This section opens with a description of the scope of the research review and my reasons for choosing to discuss these particular studies. The contributions and limitations of relevant studies are discussed in terms of: their epistemological underpinnings; research populations and contexts; and potential for generalisation to other contexts. I focus on six specific studies, describing and discussing the career helper roles and functions identified therein. I move on to consider the range of helpers used by individuals, and the relationships between helpers and those in receipt of help. I analyse the characteristics and qualities of career helpers before closing with a summary of the present state of knowledge about career helpers, and the gaps in, and the limitations of current knowledge.

2.3.1 Introducing the research literature

Theorising about career helpers and their actions and role in shaping careers is limited. A comprehensive and detailed review of all the studies that touch on this subject is beyond the scope of this study. Instead I focus on research which specifically seeks to understand individuals’ perceptions and experiences of career helpers, and the help individuals would like to receive. I include studies which explore ‘formal’ help provided by trained, qualified careers advisers, and those which are concerned with the role of ‘informal’ career helpers.
On the grounds that career and career help can be best understood in economic and social context, I concentrate on recent research studies, however I also include relevant studies published during the mid or late 1980s. US-based studies are discussed because of their predominance in the literature, although I am aware of the need for cautious interpretation given the differences in economic and social contexts, organisational culture and the nature of professional career guidance. For pragmatic reasons, I confine myself to English language material.

2.3.2 Epistemological underpinnings and research methods

Like career theory, career research is traditionally based on positivist assumptions. Quantitative methods are used to separate variables in order to discern direct causal links. This approach is beset with problems. For example, researchers need to identify the most appropriate point at which to evaluate the effects of career guidance and career management programmes, activities and techniques, and to distinguish their role from other influences (Killeen, White and Watts, 1992). By examining a limited number of variables (and ignoring others), quantitative research can test and develop theories which are relatively easy to apply in practice, but risks over-simplifying the complexity of how careers work. Non-evaluative research studies often focus on understanding and explaining career, rather than informing career guidance:

*The overwhelming majority of our career-related research deals with topics that focus on career development choices. Very little of this research deals directly with issues involved with providing career-related services to clients who need them or to better understanding the process of career counseling.* (Osipow, 1994: 404).

Recent studies based on a constructionist or phenomenological perspective which use qualitative methods are also geared to understanding career, not career help (eg Cohen, 1997; Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999; Collin, 1999a). A few qualitative studies explore career help: in terms of organisational career management and workbased career helpers (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001); school students and guidance teachers (Kidd and Wardman, 1999; Howieson and Semple, 2000); and adults’ experiences and perceptions of information, advice and career guidance services (Wilson and Jackson 1998; SQW, 2000).
2.3.3 Research populations: individuals who receive career help

Career research tends to select and focus on particular populations - such as students, people who are registered as unemployed, managers, professionals or male workers - whose shared status distinguish them from other groups. The particular population is then associated with other differences such as: the type of career help they might need; the context in which they make career plans and decisions; the considerations that shape their decisions; the degree of urgency about making choices; and the number and range of options they perceive as viable. The discussion that follows identifies the populations which are most commonly studied in career research and those which tend to be neglected.

Published research of workplace career helpers is dominated by US-based studies on the effectiveness of career management and development programmes (eg Hall, 1986; Feldman, 1988; Greenhaus and Callanan, 1994; Russell, 1991; Noe, 1996; Kossek et al 1998). Such studies tend to adopt an organisational perspective and evaluate the impact of programmes (eg Crabtree, 1999) on retention, performance, productivity and motivation. Other US studies which include employed adults tend to be concerned with topics such as: the relationship of career counselling interventions to outcomes (eg Oliver and Spokane, 1988); the impact of career counsellor training and practice on clients (eg Blanton and Larrabee, 1999); or the categorisation of career problems (eg Lucas, 1999), rather than focusing on clients' perceptions of their career helpers. A few US studies explore employed adults' perceptions of professional careers counselling (eg Kirschner, Hoffman and Hill, 1994; Anderson and Niles, 2000).

In the UK, the literature includes analysis and synthesis of existing studies of career management (eg Ballatine, 1993; Mayo, 1991; Herriot, 1992 Hirsh, Jackson and Jackson, 1995), along with some empirically-based studies (eg Deaves, 1994; Hirsh and Jackson 1996; Orpen and Pool, 1995). As in the US, the purpose of empirical research is often to evaluate career management programmes or specific practices designed to help professionals and managerial staff (eg Bolton and Gold, 1994; Iles and Mabey, 1993; Jackson, 1990; Pemberton, Herriot and Bates, 1994). With a few notable exceptions (eg Wilden and La Gro, 1998) there is a dearth of in-depth studies exploring employed adults' perceptions of professional career guidance.
Studies of career help in the workplace are mainly (although not exclusively) concerned with the careers of managers and professionals: few studies explore the help that less qualified and more junior employees receive or would like to receive. Over three-quarters of the articles published in five interdisciplinary journals during the 1980s and early 1990s focused on internal organisational issues and were confined to managerial, professional or hierarchical careers, leaving considerable scope for research on other working populations (Arthur, 1994). Despite the recent increase in knowledge about women’s career development, research has been criticised for its focus on white middle-class males and bias towards college students and college-educated or professional people and for generating theory which is of limited use to large segments of the population (Fitzgerald and Betz, 1994). More recently, Kidd identified a similar bias in UK-based research:

...For the last twenty years or so, writers on adult career development have been predominantly concerned with the careers of managers within organisations with internal labour markets...(Kidd, 1996a: 142).

Non-managerial and non-professional workers may share with managerial employees some concerns, ambitions and attitudes but there may also be some differences. For example, workers who use few skills in the workplace or have little responsibility may perceive themselves as having few viable options (Thomas, 1989).

Studies that focus on, or include non-managerial and non-professional employees, commonly explore work or career (eg Goldthorpe et al, 1968; Sennett, 1998; Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999; Thomas, 1989) rather than career help and career helpers. Unusually, Leibowitz, Feldman and Mosley (1992) explored the career help needed by hourly- and weekly-paid US workers. However, rather than collect data from workers themselves, researchers sought the views of human resource specialists about the career aspirations and expectations of this group. The need to attend to non-managerial groups is reinforced by the findings of a market research study which suggested that, as a group, employed people would like more help with their careers, and identified low paid and low skilled employees as amongst those who face particular barriers to accessing career guidance (Wilson and Jackson, 1998).

Much of the existing research is concerned with evaluating career guidance provision for students, and for people who are unemployed and on government employment
programmes. The reasons for this may be pragmatic, political and historic. Students and unemployed people are reasonably accessible and regarded as appropriate subjects because career guidance provision was (and still is to some extent) traditionally oriented to educational and occupational choices, and transition into work. In the UK, studies have been conducted of school students’ experiences of careers education and encounters with careers advisers (eg Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988; Morris, Golden and Lines, 1999; Kidd and Wardman, 1999; Howieson and Semple, 2000; Millar and Brotherton, 1996, 2001) and school students’ approach to decision-making (eg Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993).

In both the US (Herr, 1990) and the UK, university students are commonly the subjects of career guidance research. As adults, university students may have more in common with the general adult population than with school students, but their career issues may differ considerably from those facing employed adults. Focusing on the experiences of university students may skew research data towards higher socio-economic and white groups. As in the case of other populations, studies are often evaluative and geared to identifying the outcomes of a programme of career guidance or comparing the outcomes of different interventions (Barnes and Herr, 1998). For example, Galassi et al (1992) explored students’ preferences and expectations of one-to-one career counselling and testing, and Nevo (1990) sought Israeli university students’ views of the effectiveness of different career counselling procedures and their satisfaction with the outcomes of those procedures.

Many studies of unemployed people are designed to assess the effectiveness of techniques and programmes intended to help participants return to the labour market (eg Killeen 1996; Davies and Irving, 2000; Hasluck (2000); Van Reenen (2001) and Winterbotham, Adams and Hasluck (2001), and rarely give more than cursory attention to understanding the role of career helpers. The extent to which it is appropriate to generalise from studies of unemployed people is also open to question. Financial imperatives may instil in members of this group a greater sense of urgency about making career decisions and finding work than is experienced by people who are employed. The level of anxiety and the need for emotional support may also be greater amongst people without paid work. Skill obsolescence, anger and a sense of ‘bereavement’ and loss of self-esteem may add further emotional pressures, especially for people who have
experienced redundancy. In other words, employed and unemployed groups are likely to differ in some respects in terms of their wants and needs, and their perceptions of the purpose of career help.

Recent market research studies which aim to identify and understand the nature and extent of the demand for career guidance explore the experiences and guidance preferences of a cross-section of adults. For example, Wilson and Jackson (1998) sought the views of executives, lower-paid workers and unemployed/unwaged individuals. Using focus groups, Segal Quince Wicksteed (SQW, 2000) collected data from adults with a variety of educational and employment backgrounds. DfES (2003) identified the information, advice and guidance preferences of older people. MORI (2001) interviewed 1,000 working age adults (aged between 16 and 65 years) from the general population and 300 who had recently received information, advice or guidance about education, training and work opportunities. Of these, only Wilson and Jackson's study (1998) is reviewed in the discussion below on career helper roles and functions because the others explored the market and potential market for IAG in order to inform provision and did not develop categories of career help and career helpers.

To sum up, studies of career help have attended primarily to the experiences and wishes of managers, professionals and students, while neglecting non-managerial and non-professional employees. Generalisation from these well-researched populations and contexts to other populations and contexts can only be tentative, although findings may be indicative of the career help favoured by non-managerial employees who share common experiences with participants or have similar life stories. This supposition is supported by Wilson and Jackson (1998). They found that perceptions of the purpose and value of professional career guidance are linked to a number of influences such as domestic responsibilities, labour market status and age which may be associated with specific groups, but also with self-confidence/self-esteem, motivation and personal or life crisis, which may be experienced by individuals regardless of population. For example, anxiety and urgency may be experienced equally powerfully by a student approaching course completion, an unemployed person and a worker fearful of losing her job.
2.3.4 Career helper roles and functions

While evaluative studies may directly inform career management and career guidance practice, their contribution to the development of theoretical understanding of career help and career helpers is more limited. The six studies reviewed below, which include academic and market-oriented research, were selected for their contributions and particularly for their analysis and classification of career help and career helpers. The studies explore: mentoring functions, general helper functions, career planning roles, types of guidance, career discussions and helpful career guidance interventions.

2.3.4.1 Mentoring functions

Mentoring has a significant place in career management (Arnold, 1997), and academic interest in the subject has increased considerably during the last decade (Colley, 2001a). The literature on mentoring is extensive and covers a range of different contexts and protégé groups ranging from socially excluded young people (e.g., Ford 1998; Colley, 2001a) to managers and aspiring managers (e.g., Shapiro and Farrow 1988; Kram, 1986, 1988; Phillips-Jones; 1989; Fagenson-Eland, Marks and Amendola, 1997; Jackson, 1993; Allan and Poteet, 1999). I focus here on the work of Kram (1986, 1988) and Shapiro and Farrow (1988) which I relate to career help and career helpers.

Kram defined mentoring as: "relationships between junior and senior colleagues, or between peers, that provide a variety of developmental functions" (Kram, 1986: 161). Such a broad definition allows comparison of her findings with other studies of career help and career helpers. Kram studied mentoring relationships between junior and senior managers, and between peers who held professional and managerial jobs in two large, US-based organisations. As she was interested in the role of mentoring at different career stages and their associated developmental tasks, Kram contextualised mentoring relationships within individuals’ career histories. Kram identified two broad categories of developmental relationships: one serving ‘career’ and the other serving ‘psychosocial’ functions. Each broad category comprises a number of more specific functions which are served by peers or by senior colleagues, although usually in different ways.

Career functions are primarily concerned with promoting a protégé’s advancement through the organisational hierarchy. Where the mentor is a senior colleague, specific career functions were identified as: sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching,
protection, and challenging assignments (Kram, 1988). Capacity to fulfil these functions arises from the structural relationship between mentor and protégé, that is, the mentor’s experience, organisational rank and influence relative to her protégé. Peers tend to serve different career functions such as sharing information and career strategies, and giving job-related feedback.

Psychosocial functions enhance a sense of competence, identity, effectiveness and self-worth, and affect an individual’s relationship with self and significant others within and outside of the organisation. Senior colleagues serve the specific psychosocial functions of role modeling, counselling, acceptance and confirmation, and friendship. These arise from interpersonal bonds which foster mutual trust between the two parties. Trust, rapport and listening are particularly important in serving the counselling function; ongoing support, respect and admiration are needed to provide acceptance and confirmation; and mutual caring is needed to serve the friendship function. In terms of psychosocial functions, peer mentors can provide confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback and friendship.

Kram’s study focuses on mentoring relationships reported by managerial or professional employees who were interested in developing bureaucratic careers, making generalisation to other contexts and populations tentative. However, the conceptualisation of mentoring in terms of career and psychosocial functions may be used in understanding the role of other career helpers, particularly if applied within a wider theoretical framework, such as community-interaction theory (Law, 1981). If Law’s concept of sociological forces is taken to include the formal and informal processes and social systems which operate within an organisation, then Kram’s career functions may be interpreted as mediating between protégé and social systems or structures, and modifying those systems and processes so as to shape her protégé’s career. For example, mediation may involve transmitting formal and informal knowledge and understanding about the organisation or the wider labour market in which the protégé wishes to develop her career. Psychosocial functions may be construed as shaping a protégé’s view of self in relation to career.

2.3.4.2 General helper functions

Kram’s career and psychosocial functions are roughly comparable to the “general helper functions” which Shapiro and Farrow (1988) identified by grouping similar helper
characteristics. One helper function refers to having a personal interest in, and/or commitment to the relationship, and comprises four helper characteristics: being present at a turning point; being interested in the subject’s growth and development; willingness to commit time and emotion to the relationship; and willingness to take risks on behalf of the subject. The second function concerns the helper’s ability to influence an individual’s career. To serve this function the helper needs to be: a recognised authority in the field, an influential leader and able to provide opportunities for upward mobility. In other words, Shapiro and Farrow highlight ‘relationship’ and ‘influence’ which are similar to Kram’s psychosocial and career functions respectively. These similarities mutually reinforce and validate the categorisation as a way of understanding how career helpers and interactions between helpers and individuals may shape career through a process of mediation and through modifying influences on both individuals and structure.

However, Shapiro and Farrow’s study needs to be interpreted in the context of the research design and methods. Subjects were drawn from a group of senior executives aged between 39 and 41 years old with management aspirations. Employees of different ages, with different job roles and/or different career aspirations may have responded differently to the same set of questions. Respondents were required to identify their career helpers and the characteristics of those helpers from predetermined lists, a method which may have resulted in the omission of some significant helpers, and the selection of helper qualities which were not meaningful. Also respondents were only asked about career advancement: had they been asked about help with other career issues they may have responded differently.

2.3.4.3 Career planning roles

Unlike Kram (1986) and Shapiro and Farrow (1998), Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) were interested specifically in line managers as potential career helpers. Using critical incident interviews with US-based employees and their supervisors or managers, the authors identified nine career planning roles which are defined in table 2.1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career planning role</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Related roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicators</td>
<td>Discuss careers with the employee.</td>
<td>A - concerned with communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisers</td>
<td>Evaluate an employee’s performance, give feedback and help to design development plan.</td>
<td>B - focus on jobs and work or work-related issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches</td>
<td>Teach job-related skills.</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellors</td>
<td>Help employees to clarify their goals and identify the steps they need to reach those goals.</td>
<td>C/1 - focus on careers and interactions with individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisers</td>
<td>Communicate the realities of advancement within the organisation; suggest appropriate training and strategies for advancement.</td>
<td>C/2 - focus on careers and interactions with other parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral agents</td>
<td>Identify and refer employees with problems eg personal, health and career, and help employee to access resources to help address these problems.</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokers</td>
<td>Link employees with appropriate resources such as people, institutions who can provide information.</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>Facilitate growth within the organisation through sponsorship activities such as arranging for the employee to participate in high visibility activity, serving as role model and communicating the individual’s effectiveness to others.</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates</td>
<td>Intervene on employee’s behalf for promotions, benefits etc.</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</table>
Constructed as the first step towards devising a training programme for managers, this taxonomy was intended to be descriptive rather than to contribute to theory. However, if the roles are grouped into three categories a more sophisticated analytical model can be developed. In this formulation, the communicator (A) has an overarching role, reflecting the importance of communication skills and discussion in all of the remaining roles. The second category (B) comprises appraisers and coaches whose functions suggest a focus on jobs and work-related issues. The functions of the counsellor, mentor, adviser, advocate, broker and referral agent, which form the third category (C) are associated with having the potential to shape career either through interactions with the individual, or with other people in the organisation. Counsellors and advisers primarily interact with the individual (C/I), while mentors (according to Leibowitz and Schlossberg’s definition), advocates, brokers and referral agents mainly mediate between the employees and other helpers. In community interaction terms roles in B and C/I involve shaping an individual’s view of self in relation to career and those in C/2 focus on modifying structures which may impact on career.

2.3.4.4 Types of guidance

The studies described so far focus on the role and function of work-based career helpers. In contrast, the aim of Wilson and Jackson’s study (1998) was to understand adults’ perceptions of a range of guidance services, including those provided by professional careers guidance services, employers and colleges. Data were collected from adults employed in executive and lower-paid jobs and unemployed adults, using focus groups and ‘hidden customers’ (individuals briefed to visit a service in the role of a customer.) Views were sought from people who had experience of guidance and those who did not.

The overwhelming majority of participants in the study reported wanting help in obtaining work or higher status work. To help achieve these aims, participants requested a number of different services from which the researchers devised eight types of guidance and two main categories which I present in Table 2.2.
Table 2.2 - The types of guidance identified by Wilson and Jackson (1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of guidance</th>
<th>Superordinate categories guidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life guidance to address personal issues;</td>
<td>Personal development-based and orientated guidance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal development guidance involving in-depth analysis of abilities;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning guidance to help decide upon and access learning;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring (on-going support)/outreach to reach those not engaged in work or learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work expert guidance from specialists who have knowledge of a particular field;</td>
<td>Work-based and orientated guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work appraisal guidance on performance;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience guidance that facilitates experience of different sorts of work;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job search, focusing on the technical aspects of securing a job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wilson and Jackson's study contributed a UK dimension to Leibowitz and Schlossberg's categorisation, identified a wide range of informal helpers, and highlighted the potential roles of professional careers advisers. Less helpfully, the different types of guidance are not explained in detail or discussed in relation to existing theory.

Comparing Wilson and Jackson's study with Kram's extends the contributions of both. While Wilson and Jackson (1998) considered a wider range of helper functions than Kram, the latter provides more detail about the quality and nature of helping relationships in each category. The categories they propose are similar: Wilson's concept of work-based and orientated guidance has parallels with Kram's career function, whilst her notion of personal development based and orientated guidance relates to Kram's psychosocial function. Wilson and Jackson's study can be further extended if the subordinate types of guidance identified are considered within the framework of community-interaction. For example, guidance may serve to mediate between individuals and structures by the transmission of knowledge (in terms of work expert guidance and learning guidance). Through interactions career helpers may modify an individual's view of self in relation to career (personal development guidance and work appraisal); and her career action (mentoring and job search). To a lesser extent guidance may have a role in modifying existing structures by facilitating work experience.

Overall, Wilson and Jackson's categorisation suggests that the primary function of guidance is to shape the individual's self-view and her capacity to act within existing organisational and labour market structures. Modification of structures is a secondary consideration.

2.3.4.5 Career discussions

I have chosen to review studies of career discussions and career interviews for three key reasons. First, the guidance interview continues to dominate professional practice, suggesting that attempts to inform theory and practice need to develop our understanding of the processes and outcomes of these interactions. Second, as noted above, interest in mentoring suggests that career discussions have a valuable role to play in personal and career development. Third, and perhaps most importantly, individuals seem to value career discussions. Israeli students aged between 18 and 49 years ranked interpersonal counselling above ability tests, interest inventories and vocational reading in terms helpfulness (Nevo, 1990). School students preferred individual career discussions above
other types of career education and guidance (Morris, Golden and Lines, 1999) and favoured regular one-to-one interviews with a guidance teacher (Howieson and Semple, 2000). In the work context, Marsland (1996) reported that most of the newly qualified registered nurses she surveyed would have liked some, or more individual career discussions; and Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) found that managers and professionals wanted more, and more regular opportunities to talk about their careers. Because of its relevance and currency, I discuss this latter study in detail.

Using semi-structured telephone interviews, data were collected from over a hundred ‘receivers’ of effective workplace career discussions and about 30 ‘givers’ of good career support. An effective career discussion was defined as one identified by the receiver as having a “significant positive value” (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001: 4). The authors identified 13 categories of key skills and behaviours which interviewees associated with positive career discussions and grouped these into five clusters comprising: helper characteristics; behaviours arising from the giver’s role (such as status, knowledge and experience); management of the discussion process; interpersonal skills; and content of the session. Of these clusters, only “content of session” is solely comprised of behaviours which are: giving information; relating individuals to opportunities (including offering new perspectives); giving feedback on potential, strengths and weaknesses; using tools such as frameworks; and orienting the session to future action. As categories within the remaining four clusters include a combination of behaviours, skills and qualities, they are discussed in chapter six.

Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) also identified the impact of effective career discussions on career action and on the receiver’s thoughts and feelings. The main type of impact was on: future direction; self-insight; information (about the organisation and opportunities) and “feeling good” (reassured, valued and motivated). Receivers also benefited in terms of job moves, development opportunities and on-going career dialogue about career.

Tentative parallels may be drawn between impacts such as “feeling good” and the psychosocial function of “acceptance and confirmation” (Kram, 1986; 1988); and between “self-insight” and the career function of “coaching” (Kram, 1986; 1988). Further comparisons are possible if Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd’s clusters are interpreted using the community-interaction framework (Law, 1981). From this perspective, career
discussions can be interpreted as most commonly serving to modify receivers’ feelings, thoughts and actions. As most actions arising from career discussions were reported as being taken by receivers, it seems that givers had a more modest role in modifying organisational structures. Some types of impact, such as gaining information, indicate that helpers were perceived as mediating between individuals and the organisation and/or the labour market.

Through detailed analysis and the construction of frameworks which connect data about settings, career helpers and the impact of career discussions, this study does much to illuminate how and why discussions are or are not effective. Recommendations based on the study offer individuals and organisations useful guides to action. Translation of the findings to other populations and organisational contexts may be limited as nearly 80% of receivers were 39 years of age or younger, and all were employed by large organisations. Despite the researchers’ efforts, most receivers were managerial or professional staff: employees in other groups may have different experiences and perceptions of career discussions, and different expectations and preferences of their career helpers. Like Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981), Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd explored career discussions as point-in-time interactions rather than in the context of individuals’ career stories. As yet there is little discussion about how their findings relate to other studies of career helpers or to career theory. A recent article by the researchers (Kidd, Jackson and Hirsh, 2003) which does relate findings to relevant literature, focuses on outcomes rather than givers of effective career discussions. As noted above, limited discussion of findings is not uncommon (eg Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981; Wilson and Jackson, 1998), largely because of the purpose and nature of research studies. However, this practice tends to result in fragmentation of knowledge.

2.3.4.6 Helpful guidance interventions

Wilden and La Gro (1998) also studied career help at a single point in time, but in contrast with the other studies discussed here, they explored the helpfulness of interventions during career guidance interviews. The six participating clients ranged in age from 14 to 42 years, and had different education and employment status. Careers advisers and their clients separately viewed a video of the interview shortly after it finished and were asked to identify and comment on the helpfulness or otherwise of
different interventions. Helpfulness was defined here as increasing the client’s understanding, or helping her to make sense of herself in relation to her situation.

The researchers categorised helpful interventions as affective, organisational or transformational. Affective interventions refer to comments about feeling understood, especially in terms of concerns and motivations. Positive affective interventions serve an affirmative function and involve recognising clients’ motivations and reinforcing their feelings of self-worth. Organisational interventions help to structure the interview and to clarify meanings by identifying, clarifying and ordering key issues and focusing on specific foreground issues. These interventions serve procedural functions (relating to the interview process) or declarative functions (specifying, clarifying and sharing information about career). Interventions in the transformational category provide insights that lead to a re-interpretation or re-structuring of the situation, and serve an integrative function of drawing relationships between disparate factors and helping clients to better integrate or to change their conceptual map.

Of the 34 helpful interventions identified by clients, only two were categorised as transformational, possibly indicating that clients placed greater value on organisational and/or affective help. Clients’ perceptions are affected by the time-frame: that is, immediate responses may differ from responses arising after a period of reflection. The apparent dearth of transformational interventions may mask the difficulty of recognising and articulating skill development and learning, as opposed to more tangible gains. Although the categories may need to be assessed, refined and developed with reference to a larger number of clients or to clients in different contexts, they constitute a classification which may be used in the analysis of informal career help. In community-interaction terms, Wilden and La Gro’s study suggests that clients perceive careers advisers as shaping their view of self in relation to career, and as mediating between the individual and the world of work by transmitting knowledge and understanding of that world.

Despite differences in the studies, Wilden and La Gro’s categories can be compared with others. For example, affective interventions (Wilden and La Gro, 1998) relate to the psychosocial mentoring function (Kram, 1988), and the ‘feeling good’ impact of career discussions (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001). Similarities and contrasts are discernible between Wilden and La Gro’s categories of helpful interventions and those identified in a
US study conducted by Anderson and Niles (2000). The latter invited 43 adult clients who had experienced at least four career counselling sessions to identify the most helpful and important counsellor interventions. Participants were either interviewed or asked to give written responses to open questions. Of the six categories of helpful interventions, participants most frequently identified 'self-exploration', 'support' and 'educate/suggest' as most important and helpful. According to the definitions used by Anderson and Niles, 'support' relates to positive affective interventions identified by Wilden and La Gro (1998), while 'self-exploration' and 'suggest/educate' together bear some similarity to transformational interventions. This apparent contrast with Wilden and La Gro's report of few transformational interventions may be due to differences in the context and research methods and the categories generated.

2.3.5 Comparing categories and classifications

The key studies discussed above generated different classifications of career helpers working in different contexts and with different adult populations. Table 2.3 compares categories of helper roles and functions relative to individuals and structure. It could be concluded from this table that helping functions may be allocated to one of two broad categories which equate to Kram's (1986) psychosocial and career functions. This would be an oversimplification. Further analysis using community-interaction theory (Law, 1981) as a framework suggests a more complex categorisation based on two processes and two types of perceived impact. The first process concerns the helper's role in mediating between an individual and organisational structure by transmitting (filtered versions of) the influences, ideas and knowledge of wider social structures. The second involves the helper conveying her own subjective influence, ideas and knowledge. Disentangling these two processes may not be easy or even possible. However, construing knowledge as subjectively, culturally and socially constructed may affect interpretation and application of help offered. Impact may be construed, first in terms of modifying an individual's perceptions of self in relation to career, for example, by providing feedback on skills and qualities, or emotional/affective support; and second in terms of modifying and negotiating existing structures by intervening on the individual's behalf to secure development opportunities.

All studies hint at the mediating role of helpers, although some (eg Wilden and La Gro, 1998) are more explicit in this respect than others. Differences are more apparent in the
modifying and shaping roles of helpers. Categorisations generated from three of the workplace studies (Kram, 1986; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981) place equal weight on the role of helpers in modifying structure and their role in shaping an individual's view of self. Categories of professional career guidance (Wilson and Jackson, 1998; Wilden and La Gro, 1998) and of career discussions (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001) indicate a very much more minor role for helpers in the modification of structure. Wilden and La Gro's study of professional careers guidance interviews and Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd's study of career discussions at work may be similar in this respect because both focus on one-to-one encounters.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Function/role in relation to the individual.</th>
<th>Function/role in relation to structure.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kram (1986)</td>
<td>Psychosocial functions affect self-view and relationships with significant others. Depend on interpersonal relationships.</td>
<td>Career functions serve to promote advancement, including modifying the influences of structure eg through sponsorship. Depend on structural relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981)</td>
<td>Counselling, advising appraising and coaching (categories B and C/1) shape individual’s self-view.</td>
<td>Mentoring (= sponsoring), advocating, referring and brokering with others on the individual’s behalf (category C/2) modify the influences of structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transmitting knowledge about the organisation and opportunities serves a mediating role.</td>
<td>Impact on job moves and development opportunities may indicate a modest role in modifying the influences of structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilden and La Gro (1998)</td>
<td>Affective interventions and transformational interventions suggest a role in shaping self-view and individual’s conceptual map. Organisational and transformational interventions involve mediation.</td>
<td>Mediates by transmitting knowledge and understanding of the world of work. No indication of helper’s role in modifying the influences of structure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3.6 Sources of career help

Studies report that individuals who seek help with their career generally use multiple sources, including informal ones (eg Kram, 1986; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Jackson, 1993; Wilson and Jackson, 1998; MORI, 2001; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001). In other words, a person's boss, peers, subordinates, senior managers, friends outside of her employing organisation and her family member(s) may be numbered amongst her career helpers. Collectively helpers who contribute to an individual's development form a "relationship constellation" (Kram, 1986: 170), which changes over time according to the needs of the individual and the employing organisation. Helpers are linked to the individual through networks. The value of networks in individual career management is widely recognised by (eg NACCEG, undated; Sullivan, 1999; Raider and Burt, 1996). Having widely spanning networks of disconnected contacts generates greater career management benefits than tightly knit network systems (Raider and Burt, 1996). Using an extensive network of multiple sources increases the chances of an individual obtaining the type of helper she wants with the qualities and characteristics she values.

2.3.6.1 Types of helping relationships

Classifications proposed by Kram (1986) and Watts and Sadler (2000) can be used to frame a discussion of helpers in terms of the formality of their role and the structural nature of their relationship with the individual. Formality of helping relationships is addressed by Watts and Sadler (2000) who distinguished between 'independent' careers advisers and two categories of informal helpers. Members of the first informal helper category provide IAG as part of another formal role, for example, as a tutor, manager, supervisor or community worker, and are sometimes referred to as "first-line" (eg Bingham, 1998: 68) or "front-line" (Jackson and Haughton, 1998) providers. I propose the alternative term 'semi-formal helpers' which emphasises the interpersonal nature of the relationship, rather than the helper’s position within the employing organisation. Watts and Sadler's second group of informal helpers comprises helpers with whom the individual has a social or personal relationship, such as friends and family members.

Kram (1986) used the notion of structural attachment to distinguish between different types of mentor-protégé relationships. Structural attachment refers to relationships where the mentor is the protégé's superior, peer or subordinate, while a structurally detached
mentor is one who is external to the employing organisation. Kram does not distinguish between direct and indirect structural attachment, or between proximate and more distant structurally attached relationships, although the nature and proximity of attachment may affect the characteristics and qualities the helper is able and willing to offer. For example, a line manager who has a direct and structurally proximate relationship with her protégé, is more likely than a more senior manager or 'off-line' manager to have useful knowledge about an individual's strengths and weaknesses in the work context. More distant helpers, such as senior managers or human resource staff, however, may be more knowledgeable about the employing organisation as a whole and potential opportunities therein. Conflicting interests and therefore partiality are also likely to vary according to the nature of structural attachment. Line managers may not wish to support a team member who wishes to change her job or role (even internally) if such a move is perceived as negatively affecting the team's skill set or requires the inconvenience of recruiting new staff. Because of their position, it may be difficult for line managers to reconcile their roles as both assessor and counsellor (Kram, 1986; Herr and Cramer, 1992). In other words, proximity and directness are useful dimensions in classifying structurally attached helpers. Table 2.4 shows that mapping formal, semi-formal and informal helper categories (Watts and Sadler, 2000) on to the notion of structural attachment and detachment (Kram, 1986) produces a more sophisticated classification than either of these alone is able to offer.
Table 2.4 - The formality and structural nature of relationships between helpers and individuals receiving career help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formality of the helping relationship (adapted from Watts and Sadler, 2000)</th>
<th>Structural relationship (Kram, 1986)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structurally attached</strong></td>
<td><strong>Structurally detached</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal</strong></td>
<td>eg Designated, trained and qualified career manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eg Professional careers adviser employed by independent company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semi-formal</strong></td>
<td>eg Line manager, HR staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eg College tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal</strong></td>
<td>eg Colleague, non-line manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eg Family member, friend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3.6.2 Informal career helpers

It is commonly recognised that informal and semi-formal career helpers, as well as professional careers advisers play a significant part in shaping careers. Jackson and Haughton for example, argued that ‘front-line’ guidance: “delivered informally in community settings as part of a broader individual agenda, cannot be over-stated” (1998: unpaginated). Watts and Kidd stressed that: “professionals may have a distinctive contribution to make to such processes [help with life decisions], but cannot credibly claim exclusive ownership of them” (2000: 489). Colleagues and former colleagues provide a source of connection and continuity (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999; Arthur, 2002). Informal career helpers are well placed to fulfil psychosocial mentoring functions (Kram, 1986); to help individuals cope with structural constraint (Goldthorpe et al, 1968) and are likely to bring greater benefits than helpers constrained by bureaucratic ties (Raider and Burt, 1996).

Despite such comments, researchers have been more concerned about the impact of professional careers guidance/education and career management programmes on careers, and paid less attention to the role of informal career helpers, especially those outside the workplace (Arthur, 2002). Although included in some studies, informal career helpers rarely take centre stage. More specifically Maranda and Comeau (2000) identified a need for theory which recognises the role of work colleagues in career.

One study which I identified as contributing to our understanding of the role of informal helpers, focused on the usefulness of different sources of career help (Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988). Students aged between 15 and 18 years old rated sources in descending order of helpfulness as: family members, employer talks, books and leaflets, an external careers officer, housemasters and friends (including their parents’ friends). Perceived usefulness of sources varied across age groups: 17 and 18-year-olds found their friends to be more useful than did the 15 to 16-year-old participants. By grouping sources of help according to purpose, Arnold, Budd and Miller identified three approximate categories of career help: practical help with job search, information-giving and sympathetic listening. Family members were identified as the only source of practical help with job applications, and were valued for their personal experience and first-hand knowledge of particular jobs and of work in general. Family and friends were identified as the main
sources of sympathetic listening and discussion; employers as the main source of careers information; and housemasters as useful providers of information about jobs, careers, qualifications, and further and higher education.

As the authors observed, students' perceptions of the purpose of each source of career help is unclear. This is significant as perceptions of purpose and the ratings of usefulness are likely to be related. Ratings of usefulness may also be linked to the quality of the relationship between student and helper, and perceived helper qualities. For example, school students expressed concern about the conflict facing subject teachers who have disciplinary and assessment roles and the pastoral responsibilities of guidance teachers (Howieson and Semple, 2000).

The significant role of informal helpers is reflected in other studies of young people. Parents, teachers and friends were identified as more influential than careers advisers in 16- and 17-year-olds' choice of course (Kidd and Wardman, 1999). Most of the 15- and 18-year-olds who had clear ideas about the type of work they wished to do, reported being influenced by close relatives, friends and neighbours with experience in the same fields (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993). Informal sources may offer valuable knowledge about the help-seeker but dependence on such sources may have long-term disadvantages (Law, 1981; Hodkinson and Sparkes (1993). "Pragmatically rational" decision-making (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993: 248) based on partial information from familiar and known sources or fortuitous contacts may unnecessarily constrain career options. Having said that, individuals are not confined to their existing helper constellations which may be changed through individuals' own actions, the intervention of others or by events.

Caution needs to be exercised in generalising from studies of school students' experiences of career decision-making to those of adults who may be influenced less by their parents and more so by friends. Arnold, Miller and Budd's (1988) found that friends were rated as more useful by older students than by younger ones, suggesting that - in terms of career - the influence of peers relative to parents may increase as young people approach adulthood. School students and adults may also differ in the reach of their networks, the variety of (potential) helpers available to them, and their perceptions of the influence helpers have over their careers.
Structurally attached helpers

The relationship between a student and her teachers and school friends is one of structural attachment within the school context. However, when the focus is on employed adults, structural attachment refers to workplace relationships. Within an organisation many helpers in different relationships with the individual may play a part in shaping her career. Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) remarked on the diversity of people with whom effective career discussions were held. Having multiple helpers within an organisation reduces over-dependency or being too closely associated with one helper and that person’s career (Shapiro and Farrow, 1988). Managers are commonly regarded as particularly helpful and much of the research about structurally attached helpers focuses on their role. Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) reported that managerial and professional staff had the most effective the career discussions with managers, although human resource staff were also valued by some. Structural attachment tends to be associated with help over internal job changes, developmental moves, training and career advancement, but evidence about the relative merits of proximity over distant is unclear, as the following studies illustrate.

Shapiro and Farrow (1988) asked senior executives to select up to four people who had been most significant in assisting them with their career development and advancement, and to rate these helpers according to their helpfulness. Helpers were ranked in descending order of helpfulness as: immediate superior; a person with a higher rank than immediate superior, parent, spouse and colleague. Immediate superiors were cited much more frequently than any other helpers, a finding that is supported elsewhere. For example, Fagenson-Eland, Marks and Amendola (1997) reported that protégés who were mentored by their boss reported receiving more career guidance and psychosocial support than those who had other mentors.

In contrast, Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) found that career discussions were more frequently cited as effective when conducted by a ‘giver’ who was not the ‘receiver’s’ direct boss. Most negative comments related to career discussions with the person’s direct boss, and seniors other than the individual’s boss were preferred as informal mentors. This study also suggests that the importance of familiarity in the helping relationship should not be over-emphasised. Although the majority of positive career discussions took place between people who knew one another well, many (about a third
of) such discussions involved a ‘giver’ who was not known or not previously well-known by the ‘receiver’.

These different findings may reflect differences in the research aims, methods, participant populations and context, particularly in terms of the organisation delivering career help. While Fagenson-Eland, Marks and Amendola (1997) focused on mentoring in a North American context, Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd’s study (2001) was UK-based and explored career discussions. Research participants may have different career aspirations and expectations of their helpers, in part because of differences in context.

**Structurally detached helpers**

As noted earlier, some qualities and characteristics associated with structural attachment may not be valued by individuals, suggesting that structurally detached helpers have a role. Although this group includes professional careers advisers, my concern here is with informal and semi-formal helpers. Friends and family are frequently cited as helping young people and adults with their careers (Kram, 1986; 1988; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988). A significant number of adults who accessed IAG about work and learning used semi-formal helpers such as teachers, social and youth workers (MORI, 2001); health and social care workers, tutors and community education staff were included in adults’ networks of helpers (Jackson and Haughton, 1998). Despite recognition that informal and semi-formal structurally detached helpers play a part, there appears to be little in-depth study of their role.

Similarly, the characteristics and qualities that structurally detached helpers bring to the relationship do not seem to be widely explored, although their role in helping individuals find new jobs is commonly recognised and implies knowledge of the labour market and of specific jobs (eg Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999). Helpers who are structurally detached and have a social or personal relationship with the individual may be able to offer a more holistic understanding of that person and her life than those who are structurally attached. However, like young people, adults who depend on informal sources of career help risk unnecessarily limiting their options and acting on partial, irrelevant or out-of-date information. Neither can the impartiality of structurally detached helpers be assumed as they too have their own interests and agendas which may not be compatible with help-seekers’ aims.
To sum up, individuals use multiple sources of career help, including informal and semi-formal helpers and professional careers advisers. Classifying helpers according to formality and structural attachment facilitates understanding of such relationships. The role of structurally attached, semi-formal helpers, and particularly managers is better researched than the contributions of other semi-formal helpers and of informal helpers, although they are thought to be important.

Who acts as a helper, and why individuals value particular helpers may be influenced by a number of considerations such as: the nature and extent of an individual's relationship constellation; the career issue and context; and the individual's purpose in seeking career help. Equally important are her perceptions of the interrelated issues of: the type of help each potential helper is capable of providing; the formality and quality of the relationship between her and her helper, and the helper's qualities and characteristics.

2.3.7 Qualities and characteristics of career helpers

The following discussion draws on market research, academic and professional literature. In terms of professional literature, codes of professional principles and practice devised by organisations which represent professional guidance workers explicitly state or imply the attitudes, skills, personal qualities and knowledge expected of professional guidance workers. Different organisations represent guidance workers according to the sector in which they practise. The organisations most relevant to this discussion are: the Institute of Careers Guidance (ICG) which primarily represents careers advisers working for publicly-funded, 'independent' services; and the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) which is concerned with the professional conduct of fee-charging career and outplacement consultants. Reference is also made to the National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance's (NACCEG) code of principles which reflects a general consensus within the guidance sector about good practice (Watts and Sadler, 2000).

Despite different conceptualisations of career guidance (2.1.5), and variations in the wording of codes of practice, a number of common principles can be discerned. All codes require advisers to respect confidentiality, regard the interests of the individual guidance-seeker as paramount and to act in the best interests of that person. Professionals are expected to be impartial in the sense of avoiding situations where their
own interests or those of their employing organisation may conflict with the interests of their clients. Where a conflict of interest can not be avoided, or guidance is otherwise constrained, this must be disclosed. Impartiality and client centrality are discussed in more detail below.

Academic and market research studies provide insights from individuals' perspectives about the qualities they value in their career helpers. In considering findings it is worth bearing in mind that perceptions of the relative value of particular qualities and characteristics may depend on a range of contextual and individual factors such as: the purpose of seeking or giving help; perceptions and expectations of a particular career helper's role; and the nature and quality of the helping relationship. The qualities of helpers, help seekers and the relationship between them are closely interwoven, meaning that attribution of a particular quality is a matter of perception. For example, if an individual feels that she relates well to a particular helper she is likely to have a different estimation of that person's qualities than if she considers the relationship to be lacking. A helper may use different skills and qualities according to the qualities, skills and needs of the individual, and her relationship with that person. Although my concern is with career helpers, I recognise that the qualities and skills of individuals who receive career help play a part in forming and maintaining helping relationships and in enabling career help to be effective (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001; Howieson and Semple, 2000).

From the literature, I identified five interrelated categories of helper qualities and characteristics: impartiality, client centrality, personal qualities, interpersonal skills and knowledge. Separating categories, such as personal qualities and interpersonal skills, for example, may seem an artificial exercise but one I attempt here for the sake of clarity.

### 2.3.7.1 Impartiality

As a commonly accepted key principle of career guidance, impartiality is described in Egan's influential skilled helper model (1994) and Roger's person-centred approach to guidance (1951). For Egan impartiality meant that counsellor would set aside her own concerns; be open, not have a hidden agenda; and would not take sides with the client or act as an advocate on her behalf. The counsellor's role, according to Egan, is to help the client set and work towards her own goals, not those of the counsellor or a third party. By taking an 'objective' stance the counsellor can challenge the client's perspectives and frame of reference. The Rogerian approach suggests a less clear-cut conceptualisation of
impartiality, veering towards the notion of ‘being on the client’s side’. The counsellor sets aside her personal issues and conflicts, and accepts the client’s choices about the direction and outcome of the counselling process. She enters the client’s internal frame of reference, and expresses the clients’ attitudes, confusions and perceptions, but without the associated emotions. In this way the counsellor helps the client to see herself objectively and can offer alternative perspectives.

The notion of impartiality is embodied in professional codes. For example, the ICG’s code professional principles and practice is introduced as follows:

*Effective and impartial careers guidance, founded in the principle of equality of opportunity, aims to ensure individual clients are aware of the full range of opportunities which could be available to them in education, training and work and know how to access them.* (ICG, undated, unpaginated).

Impartiality is defined as:

*Precedence of professional objectivity above institutional pressures and personal interests*...

Other guidance organisations offer similar definitions. For example, NACCEG states that in all activities and situations:

*Information, advice and guidance should be impartial. Providers should be able to demonstrate any claim that they offer of an impartial service*... (NACCEG, 2002)

A separate document entitled, *Good practice guidelines for individual development in organisations*, (NACCEG, undated) recommends that employers have a policy and processes which allow individuals access to external, impartial advice and guidance when individuals need or want this. The IPD (now CIPD) required all providers of career and outplacement services to divulge known and potential conflict of interests before accepting a contract and:

*...remain independent of the individual’s affairs and the opportunities they seek to pursue, and ensure that counsel and advice remains objective throughout the assignment* (IPD, 1999).

Constraints on impartiality are also acknowledged in codes of practice which require:
...the declaration of any factors which might limit the impartiality of guidance offered to the individual (ICG, undated).

and that guidance workers:

...make explicit in any statement or undertaking the capacity and constraints within which they are acting (ICG, undated).

...declare any factors which might limit impartiality of the service offered to the individual. This includes provision reflecting the vested interests of the provider/and or the provision of incomplete information on opportunities for learning and work. (NACCEG, 2002).

While outplacement and independent consultants are expected to ensure that:

Any actual or potential conflict of interest should be disclosed as soon as it is recognised by the consultant... (IPD, 1999).

In practice, careers advisers - like structurally attached career helpers - experience pressure from interested parties and stakeholders. Some careers advisers may find it difficult to reconcile career guidance as a means of helping clients to make decisions which are “are right for them” with the notion of a process which “has benefits to both individuals and to society.” (ICG, 2002: 1). Tensions may become explicit if the compatibility of an individual’s interests and those of society (as represented by government policy) is questioned. (Whether government policy is socially beneficial may also be open to interpretation.) Concerns about conflicting interests have been raised, for example, by Roberts (1980) who commented that guidance can not be ethically neutral as it either supports or works counter to existing structural and cultural norms. Colley (2000) argued that if careers advisers promote an exclusively optimistic view of globalisation, they are providing inaccurate, partial information. Impartiality is limited if guidance workers do not challenge constraints on opportunities (Payne and Edwards, 1997) or offer models of self as socially interconnected and engaged in power relationships (Edwards and Payne, 1997).

As constructions and interpretations of impartiality differ, intersubjective agreement about meaning - even within the guidance profession - can not be assumed (Payne and Edwards, 1997). Connelly (1998) found that the meaning of impartiality depends on the
context in which guidance workers practised, with careers advisers regarding their practice as impartial by definition and college-based guidance staff being more accepting of practical and political limitations on their impartiality. Analytical frameworks may help guidance workers to identify the extent and limitations of their impartiality. One such framework is offered by Watts and Young (1997) who proposed that, in the context of educational establishments, impartiality can be understood and operationalised on two levels and in two ranges. The “reactive” level of impartiality is passive, minimalist and involves responding to help-seekers and providing information which is unlikely to have negative implications for the guidance provider. In contrast, “proactive impartiality...involves making positive efforts to provide information and advice about the full range of opportunities” (Watts and Young, 1997: 156).

In terms of range, the authors regarded “comprehensive impartiality” (Young and Watts, 1997: 156) as presenting the individual with all of the possible options, while “intra-institutional impartiality” involves only giving information about those options which are offered within the guidance-providing organisation. This raises the question of how, and by whom, comprehensiveness is assessed. Assuming intersubjective agreement amongst guidance workers, comprehensive proactivity appears to the most impartial level-range combination.

This framework may be more readily understood if re-conceptualised in terms of process (level) and content (range). Having said that, direct application to ‘independent’ careers guidance practice is not straightforward. The previous discussion suggests that comprehensiveness and proactivity may be strained by (possibly conflicting) pressures such as government policy and targets, and the expectations and requirements of careers advisers’ employers. These pressures may also conflict with advisers’ personal and professional beliefs and theories; their interpretation of their responsibilities towards their clients; and their clients’ expectations and preferences about the help they would like to receive. Whether an adviser is perceived to be impartial may depend on how impartiality is construed by the client, suggesting that we need a better understanding of what impartiality means to individuals, and whether they value helper impartiality.

Existing studies provide some clues. Impartiality, objectivity and honesty were identified by managers and professionals as key qualities of effective helpers, although as employees of the same organisation, helpers were rarely ‘neutral’ (Hirsh, Jackson and
Kidd, 2001). In this study, impartiality was variously described as: putting the interests of the individual first, not having their own agenda and setting aside organisational interests. Other research suggests that individuals seek to avoid subjection to the political, organisational or personal agendas of others, rather than value impartiality as such. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1993) reported that school students trusted inside information provided by a person whom they perceived as not having a vested interest in promoting a particular job vacancy. Some school students criticised careers advisers for pressuring them towards a particular course of action (Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988). Many unemployed young people (aged 18 to 20 years) on a Government New Deal programme reported feeling that their Personal Advisers were only interested in getting them into jobs, regardless of their aspirations (Davies and Irving, 2000). Adults expressed a wish for 'independent' help that focused on their best interests and considered their long-term aspirations (SQW, 2000). Research on college-based guidance workers' views and understanding of impartiality, led Payne and Edwards (1997) and Connelly (1998) to conclude that impartiality does not necessarily ensure the primacy of clients' interests which may be better served by guidance that is partial in the client's favour. In other words, Payne and Edwards argued that there is tension between the principles of client centrality and impartiality. Connelly (1998) also suggests that individuals may not want or expect impartiality in all circumstances. Whether receivers of guidance experience this tension depends to some extent on how they construe and value these as helper characteristics.

2.3.7.2 Client centrality

As noted earlier, the Rogerian approach to counselling has had a significant impact on professional career guidance practice. Central to this approach is the notion of client- or person-centredness and associated counsellor attitudes. Underpinning client-centredness is the hypothesis that individuals have the capacity for finding self-initiated and constructive ways of handling life issues. In other words, the counsellor respects her client, and places trust in her capacity to achieve insight and self-direction. To facilitate this process, the counsellor endeavours to assume the client's internal frame of reference, and to empathise from a position of deep understanding and to accept her attitudes. Within the context of a safe and accepting relationship, the counsellor is able to challenge to the individual's perspective without being perceived as threatening. Rogerian attitudes
are commonly summarised as: genuineness (being integrated, real and sincere within the relationship), unconditional positive regard (respecting the client in a non-judgemental way) and empathy (understanding the client from her own internal frame of reference) (Kidd, 1996b; Sharf, 1997).

References to the client centrality in professional codes of practice suggest a somewhat different construction. For example, the IPD (now CIPD) required career consultants to act in the “best interests of the individual” (IPD, 1999: 49). The ICG expresses the idea of “individual ownership” as the:

Belief that every individual has the right to self determination in a free society and the guidance process focused therefore on the needs of the individual, recognising his/her rights and responsibilities. (ICG, undated, unpaginated).

The NACCEG refers to “client focus” where the:

The process should be focused on the needs of the individual, whose interests are paramount (NACCEG, 2002).

Terms such as “client focus”, “individual ownership” and “acting in the best interests of clients” suggest a diluted interpretation of Rogerian client-centredness and take account of the requirement that careers advisers:

...satisfy obligations not only to their primary clients, i.e. those individuals who seek career guidance, but also, as appropriate, to parents or guardians, to providers of learning opportunities, to employers, to colleagues in related disciplines and to each other. (ICG, undated, unpaginated).

In other words, the codes recognise that client-centredness is tempered in practice by other obligations.

Guidance workers may also face social and cultural barriers to client-centredness and to showing the attitudes associated with a Rogerian approach. In the context of engagement mentoring (schemes designed to engage disaffected or excluded young people in education, employment and training), Colley (2001b) argued that Rogerian principles are more apparent in discourse than in practice. Colley found that middle class mentors had difficulty in relating to, and entering the frame of reference of, the young working class protégés whom they tended to judge as ‘deficient’ or ‘deviant’. She concluded that
mentors can only genuinely empathise with socially excluded youth if they acknowledge the different values of their protégés’ culture.

2.3.7.3 Personal qualities

Whether or not careers advisers practise or see themselves as client-centred in the Rogerian sense, research suggests that individuals value helpers who exhibit the attitudes associated with this approach. Relevant studies explore, from an individual perspective, the personal qualities valued by school students, employed and unemployed adults. For example, Scottish school students reported that their guidance teacher’s attitude and approach determined their opinions and experiences of the help provided (Howieson and Semple, 2000). They valued regular one-to-one interviews as a means of enabling guidance teachers to get to know them well, and viewed this first-hand knowledge as a basic requirement of the job. They wanted a guidance teacher who was concerned about them as individuals, and they commented that lack of time and large caseloads inhibited access to guidance teachers. The clear and consistent message was for guidance teachers who listened, treated them with respect, were understanding, approachable, non-judgemental and trustworthy.

Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) found that similar helper characteristics were associated with effective career discussions. Valued characteristics were identified as: personal qualities such as honesty, openness, frankness and being non-judgemental; and intellectual qualities such as clear-sightedness and credibility. Personal qualities seemed to be more highly valued than intellectual skills, and were regarded as instrumental in establishing trust. Receivers appreciated helpers who took an interest in them, were committed to helping and who tailored discussions to their needs.

The mentoring literature stresses the importance of relationships and, as relationships and helper qualities are closely entwined, observations about the former provide insights into the latter. Kram (1986) reported that willingness to build a supportive relationship and an interest in so doing were key conditions for successful mentoring. This finding was supported by Shapiro and Farrow (1988) whose participants identified ‘having a personal interest in/commitment to the relationship’ as a strong mentor characteristic. Relationships which provided both psychosocial and career functions were characterised by greater intimacy and commitment, and were viewed as more indispensable and more
critical to development than other work-based relationships (Kram, 1986). Psychosocial functions, which are particularly pertinent to a discussion about personal qualities, were possible because of interpersonal bonds that fostered mutual trust. Trust, rapport and listening were particularly important in providing counselling; ongoing support, respect and admiration were needed for the acceptance and confirmation function; and mutual caring for friendship. Conversely, formal mentoring schemes - where mentors were assigned and the conditions described above did not exist - frequently failed to achieve their goals.

Studies of other population groups describe preferred relationships and identify valued helper qualities. Unemployed people on the New Deal programme appreciated the personalised service and the encouragement and support they received from Personal Advisers (Hasluck, 2000; Winterbotham, Adams and Hasluck, 2001). Ford (1998) found that disengaged young people identified ‘successful’ mentors as those who were client-centred, non-judgemental, empathetic and showed knowledge of, and genuine care for, their protégés. Market research into the preferences of general adult populations showed similar findings. Segal Quince Wicksteed (2000) reported that adults valued one-to-one relationships with a careers adviser who could develop an understanding of them. Personalised help that recognised individuals’ changing needs (Wilson and Jackson, 1998) and informality and friendliness (Wilson and Jackson, 1998; MORI, 2001) were valued. With specific reference to professional careers guidance, emotional support was regarded as one of the most important aspects of the relationship and positively related to career counselling outcomes (Anderson and Niles, 2000). The most commonly disliked characteristics were lack of understanding, respect or openness (Galassi et al, 1992).

These studies suggest that individuals value helpers who know and understand them, and are interested in them as individuals. From an individual’s perspective, a helping relationship requires the helper to show friendliness, respect, support, trust and to be non-judgemental. These qualities match those associated with a Rogerian approach to counselling. Whether guidance workers have the capacity to offer these qualities given the practical constraints they face; their obligations to other customers and stakeholders; and differences between their own and their clients’ frames of reference, may be open to question.
2.3.7.4 Interpersonal skills

Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) distinguished between: 'facilitative' skills, such as active listening, reflecting back, using effective questioning techniques and showing empathy; and the 'interpretative' skills of challenging and advising. Although I have categorised empathy as personal quality or attitude, facilitative skills identified by these researchers are commonly regarded as underpinning accepted careers guidance practice (Watts and Kidd 2000) and are required of aspirant careers advisers (ICG, 2001). Studies of mentoring (eg Kram, 1986), informal careers help (eg Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988; Williams et al, 1998), and professional careers advice (Millar and Brotherton, 2001), indicate that managers, professionals and young people value these skills. Kram (1986) stressed the need for interpersonal skills in order to build supportive mentoring relationships. Arnold, Budd and Miller (1988) found that school students valued sympathetic listening and discussion - particularly from friends and family - and the support and encouragement of their families. The encouragement of others was reportedly significant in shaping counselling psychologists' choice of career (Williams et al, 1998). School students' satisfaction with their careers guidance interviews was more strongly related to the careers adviser's interpersonal and communications skills than to the task-related behaviours associated with guidance (Millar and Brotherton, 2001). Support, focus on feelings and on the relationship were helpful to an adult career counselling client (Kirschner, Hoffman and Hill, 1994), as were social support in form of encouragement, constructive feedback, advocacy and positive reinforcement.

Despite the importance and value of facilitative skills, alone these may be insufficient. According to Egan (1994) communication skills have a role in facilitating the helping process but should not be over-emphasised. Challenge to the client's self-view and world-view are necessary if she is to develop more creative perspectives. Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) agree. They suggest that professionals and managers regarded facilitative skills as secondary to the interpretative skills of challenging and advising. Important aspects of challenge were questioning an employee's self-view or the constraints on her development, and expanding her thinking about self and career. It could be argued that these participants might value different interpersonal skills in careers advisers and/or informal helpers, and that other population groups might have different views of valuable helper qualities. However, studies of other population groups indicate that challenge is widely valued.
Nevo (1990) found no significant correlation between university students' perceptions of their counsellors' communication skills and their overall satisfaction with counselling. Kidd and Wardman (1999) found that 16- and 17-year-olds commonly regarded careers advisers as friendly and personable, but did not find the guidance interview helped with decision-making or exploring other options. Some of these young people criticised careers advisers for failing to challenge them. From a study of six guidance interviews, Wilden and La Gro (1998) concluded that the proficient use of facilitative skills did not necessarily lead to a shared understanding between adviser and client. Clients in counselling valued new perspectives (Paulson, Truscott and Stuart, 1999); senior executives on a career counselling programme needed to be challenged (Pemberton, Herriot and Bates, 1994); and informal career helpers typically opened options and opportunities, and changed the self-concepts and careers of female counselling psychologists (Williams et al., 1998). Kirschner, Hoffman and Hill's client (1994) reported insight and challenge as the most helpful of the careers counsellor's interventions, although the same interventions also generated negative reactions. From reviewing the literature on adult cognitive development theory, Arnold (1997) concluded that challenge, including presenting new perspectives, can indeed help individuals to develop their career thinking. Whether advisers always have the requisite skills and opportunities to build trust and to deliver effective challenge, may be open to question. Limitations of opportunity and skill may be among the reasons that very few of the interventions identified by clients in Wilden and La Gro's study (1998) were perceived as helping them to restructure their thinking or change their conceptual maps.

Some individuals in Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd's study (2001) also valued the interpretative skills of positive advice and direction, as did participants in other research studies. Students (aged between 18 and 41 years) wanted: advice, opinions and answers; help in matching their characteristics and skills with appropriate careers, and valued their career counsellors' decisiveness and knowledge (Galassi et al., 1992). School students expected and received direction and advice about their careers (Millar and Brotherton, 2001). Such findings raise questions about the sufficiency of a non-directive Rogerian approach, and suggest that individuals may appreciate a helper who can use a range of different skills according to the context and/or multiple helpers (see sources of help 2.3.6) with different skills.
A tentative conclusion is that individuals value skills which facilitate helping relationships, and that they need to feel positively about the relationship before helpers can use their interpretative skills in a way that is effective and welcome. In other words, studies suggest that individuals value communication skills and support, challenge and advice. As Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) emphasise, timing is crucial, especially in delivering challenging and giving advice.

2.3.7.5 Knowledge

The terms information and knowledge tend to be used synonymously in professional career guidance literature and government documents. Here I follow this practice, whilst recognising that knowledge or ‘what is known’ can be distinguished from information or communicated knowledge.

Official publications such as professional literature and government policy documents stress the need for careers advisers to have “professional knowledge, skills and expertise” (ICG, undated) in order to help clients “make realistic and well-informed decisions” (ICG, 2002: 1) based on “good quality impartial information, advice and guidance” (DfEE, undated). The terms ‘realistic’ and ‘impartial’ suggest that careers advisers are repositories of superior knowledge or truth. However, if ‘realism’ is interpreted as a social construct (Colley, 2000), careers advisers and clients who inhabit very different worlds may have radically different interpretations of what constitutes ‘realism’. The adviser’s world-view - including her understanding of realism and her actions based on that view - are shaped by internalised and taken-for-granted social and cultural assumptions, which may not be at the forefront of her consciousness. Also, careers advisers can not be regarded as a homogenous collective in this respect. Although there may be intersubjective agreement within the profession about some aspects of knowledge, advisers filter and select information and construct their world-view from a range of sources, not only official documents and ‘authoritative’ verbal sources, but also their own and colleagues’ experiences and interactions with other people (Connelly, 1998). Whether a careers adviser’s constructs and knowledge are superior to those of her clients depends on context as clients may have cultural resources outside of the adviser’s sphere of knowledge and understanding. This view of knowledge raises questions about: the complexity of guidance-related information; how guidance workers gather and use information; and how it is received and used by clients (Brown, 1999).
Studies show that young people and adults value helper knowledge and distinguish between types of knowledge provided by different sources. For example, school students found family members, working friends and parents' friends useful because of their personal experience and first-hand knowledge of particular jobs and of work (Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988). Employers were regarded as useful sources of inside information about the nature of different jobs and work environments (Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988) while careers advisers and housemasters were useful sources of information about careers and qualifications. Many more students identified employers - as opposed to careers advisers - as sources of information about jobs, perhaps indicating their limited expectations of careers advisers' knowledge. Similarly, young people choosing courses of study did not expect careers advisers to know about course content (Kidd and Wardman, 1999). Reliance on informal sources or a limited range of sources disadvantages young people by limiting their horizons and view of self (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993), and by shaping decisions that they may later regret (Kidd and Wardman, 1999). This is not to say that young people are unaware of the limitations of informal knowledge. Some students in Arnold, Budd and Miller's study (1988) considered their parents' knowledge of the job market to be too out-of-date to be helpful.

Market research studies of general adult populations highlight the importance of information to those seeking help with their careers from formal sources. Adults: wanted knowledgeable careers advisers (Wilson and Jackson, 1998); gave high priority to the expertise of IAG providers; and criticised incomplete information (MORI, 2001). More specifically they wanted: specialist advice or in-depth understanding of different occupations from experts in particular employment sectors (Jackson and Wilson, 1999; SQW, 2000); learning information (Jackson and Wilson, 1999; SQW, 2000; MORI, 2001) and local labour market information (Jackson and Wilson, 1999; SQW, 2000).

For employed adults who wish to develop their careers with their existing employer, colleagues are more likely than external careers advisers to be knowledgeable about the organisation’s structure and its formal and informal processes. Colleagues who are experienced, politically aware and well networked may provide alternative perspectives to the official messages communicated by HR specialists and senior managers. Such speculations about the role of colleagues as information providers are supported by the research literature. Kram (1988), for example, found that senior mentors used their
experience to provide knowledge and understanding about the informal and political processes in an organisation, and ways of navigating careers. Peer mentors shared information - including different perspectives - on the employing organisation. Participants in Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd's study (2001) valued career discussions with people who were knowledgeable about the employing organisation - especially about internal politics - and had a wide experience of internal and external career opportunities.

What seems to be missing from these studies is a detailed exploration and analysis of what individuals mean by knowledge and what they expect to receive when they ask for information. Do they expect their helpers to have a 'true' picture of the world of work? Do they expect some helpers to have a more realistic view than others? How do individuals assess the knowledge available to them? I will return to these questions in chapter 6.

2.3.8 The complexity of cross-study comparisons

Comparing studies is complex for three main reasons. First, as the meaning and use of terminology differs, it is not always clear when similar concepts are being discussed. Some studies use different terms to describe the same concept, while others use the same terms to mean different concepts. Consider, for example, the term 'mentoring'. Wilson and Jackson (1998) describe mentoring as on-going support. To Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) mentoring is akin to Kram's (1986) career functions of sponsorship and exposure, and her psychosocial function of role modeling. While Kram's own definition of mentoring embraces a wide range of activities and help which contribute to career development.

Second, differences in research aims, methods of data collection and analysis, and interpretations of data generate a range of configurations of functions, roles and helper qualities or characteristics. Sometimes function and qualities appear to be conflated. For example, embedded in Kram's psychosocial functions (1986) are a number of helper qualities. Similarly, the category of help identified by Arnold, Budd and Miller (1988) as 'sympathetic listening and discussion' describes a helper's skills, unlike their other two categories of 'practical help with job search' and 'information' about the nature of careers.
Third, researchers have constructed useful categories and classifications but less commonly discussed their findings and interpretations in relation to existing career guidance theory. This may be because career helpers were not their focal concern (e.g., Williams et al., 1998; Galassi, et al., 1992); or because the development of conceptual and theoretical frameworks was not central to the study’s purpose (e.g., Marsland, 1996; Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988; SQW, 2000). One way to promote comparison and further the development of theory is to apply an existing theoretical framework within which categories generated by different studies can be analysed. Hence, my application of community-interaction theory (Law, 1981) to mentoring functions (Kram, 1986), general helper functions (Shapiro and Farrow, 1988); career helper categories (Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981) and types of guidance (Wilson and Jackson, 1998).

2.3.9 Summary of section three

US studies dominate published careers literature: generalising to UK populations needs to be cautious, given the differences in social and economic context and in the meaning and content of professional career guidance in the two countries. Much of the existing research about career help is based on positivistic assumptions, adopts quantitative methods and is concerned with evaluating specific career guidance or career management techniques or programmes which are geared to managers, professionals, students or people who are unemployed. Evaluation studies of career management programmes generally adopt an organisational perspective or use structured questionnaires to gather individuals’ perceptions. Recent studies which are based on constructionist assumptions and use qualitative methods are more often concerned with exploring careers than with contributing to knowledge about career help and career helpers. However, I identified and discussed some key studies which offer useful classifications of: career help and career helpers; helping relationships and the qualities and characteristics of career helpers. Knowledge contributed by these studies and the gaps and limitations of knowledge are summarised below.

2.3.10 Chapter summary and conclusions

In this chapter I defined and discussed the key concepts of career, career management and career guidance, and I introduced the notion of career help. I argued that a study of career guidance is relevant and topical because economic, technological and organisational
changes have stimulated debate about career and career help. The notions of self-managed careers and lifelong career guidance present considerable challenges for individuals, managers and careers advisers. There is widespread agreement that people need help, not only at points of transition but throughout their careers. Concerns about social inclusion and economic competitiveness have raised the profile of IAG in Government policy, but provision of publicly-funded, in-depth guidance does not seem adequate to meet the demand of those who want or need help. Currently employees rely heavily on education and employment providers as sources of IAG, despite limitations of their scope and impartiality.

I identified the limitations of ‘big’ or formal theory and suggested that these limitations may be rooted in a tension between the wish for simplification so as to aid sense-making on the one hand and sophistication in order to relate theory to lived experience on the other. I discussed the way in which the development of career theory has been limited by dualistic divisions between: the dominance of positivist approaches to career research and constructivist career guidance practice; positivist and constructionist career theories; and between sociological and psychological perspectives. I suggested that existing eclectic practice may be construed as an attempt to reconcile these different perspectives. I proposed social constructionism - where the focus is on interaction and the joint construction of career - as a perspective which may progress understanding of career theory, build on existing knowledge and inform career guidance practice. I identified community-interaction as an established and practical analytical framework within which to explore interactions between individuals, career helpers and structure.

I reviewed a number of notable research studies which contribute to understanding of helping relationships, career help and helpers, and helper qualities and characteristics. These studies paint a picture of individuals who have constellations of career helpers from different sources and fulfil different functions in the context of different types of relationships. Career helpers may be professional careers advisers, but informal or semi-formal helpers often feature. Helping relationships can be understood in terms of formality and structural attachment. Using this classification it seems that the role of structurally attached, semi-formal helpers, and particularly managers, is better researched than the contributions of other semi-formal helpers and of informal helpers.
I used a community interaction framework to compare disparate but relevant key studies. All studies suggest that career helpers mediate between individuals and structure, and particularly transmit their knowledge about unfamiliar worlds of work to individuals. In terms of impact, three of the workplace studies (Kram, 1986; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981) placed equal weight on helpers’ role in shaping individuals’ view of self and on their role in modifying or negotiating structure. This is not surprising as structurally attached, semi-formal career helpers are usually better positioned to modify and negotiate organisational structure than structurally detached helpers. Where the focus is on encounter (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001; Wilden and La Gro, 1998) or professional career guidance (Wilden and La Gro, 1998; Wilson and Jackson, 1998) helpers played a much more minor role in modifying structure.

Helpers were perceived as bringing a range of valued qualities and characteristics to the helping relationship, although potential conflict of interest between individual and helper, and the limitations of helper knowledge may constrain the individual’s career. Individuals seemed to value helpers who: are impartial and able to enter their frame of reference; have good communication skills and knowledge of opportunities, systems, networks and the labour market; and provide appropriately-timed challenge in the context of a supportive relationship. Communication skills and personal qualities are perceived as important but insufficient without the interpretative skills required to challenge and advise. Professional codes of practice require guidance workers to be impartial, knowledgeable and to act in the best interests of their clients. How these notions are construed varies between individual help-seekers, between groups of help-seekers, and between career helpers according to their philosophies and the organisational context. The obligations on careers advisers to stakeholders other than the guidance-seeker may give rise to tension between the key principles of impartiality and client centrality.

Along with these significant contributions, I identified a number of limitations and gaps in knowledge. First, many studies are more descriptive than explanatory and the relationship between findings and career theory are not clearly drawn. Consequently, categories and classifications generated by many studies contribute more to practice than to the coherent development of existing knowledge. Second, comparison between studies and theory-building are inhibited by the use of different constructs and language, and the lack of an overarching analytical framework. Third, more attention is paid to the way in which helpers shape individual’s actions, thoughts and feelings about career and less to
helpers' roles in shaping or negotiating organisational structures on behalf of individuals; and neither is explored in depth. Fourth, with the exception of Kram's mentoring studies (1985; 1988), research decontextualises respondents' perspectives by focusing on specific interventions or guidance activities rather than career help in the broader context of the individual's career story. Fifth, few studies give in-depth attention to helper qualities and characteristics, and relationship constellations. Attention to the role of informal helpers is particularly limited. The interweaving and sometimes conflicting qualities and characteristics expected of careers advisers is inadequately addressed. The meaning of qualities and characteristics commonly valued by individuals are rarely explored. Sixth, in-depth studies of employed adults' perceptions and experiences of career help commonly focus on managerial and professional groups.

As a consequence of this analysis I identified a need for UK-based research exploring the experiences and views of non-managerial and non-professional employees. Such a study would explore the career help this group would like, and the qualities and characteristics they value in their career helpers. The focus needs to be on career development and career guidance, rather than on occupational choice. The role of career helpers needs to be examined in the context of individuals' career stories. Attention needs to be paid to the role of informal and semi-formal helpers; and how helpers modify structure as well as shape individuals' view of self in relation to career. Importantly, findings need to be compared with existing research, build on existing theory and develop new conceptual frameworks.

From this description of a hypothetical study I devised the following questions to guide my research:

1. How do non-managerial employees understand and account for the role of others in shaping their careers?

2. In the context of their careers, what do they perceive to be the consequences of receiving or not receiving particular types of career help?

3. What other types of help would they like and how do they envisage this being useful?

4. What characteristics and qualities do they value in their career helpers?
5. How do valued characteristics and qualities relate to accepted professional career guidance practice?

6. To what extent do existing studies and classifications of career help and career helpers adequately reflect the reported experiences of these non-managerial employees?
CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESS

My intention here is to: explain the philosophical assumptions which underpin my research study; to explain and justify my approach; to outline the method and techniques of data collection and analysis I used; and to describe the research process. I open by explaining why I am adopting a constructionist stance and using qualitative methodology. Next I explore validity and reliability in qualitative research and explain how I endeavoured to promote these in my study. Moving on, I describe life story and explain why I chose this method. I describe the process I used to recruit participants and explain why I used qualitative interviews to collect the data. Before summarising the chapter, I give my reasons for analysing my data using thematic and narrative techniques, and I describe the data analysis process.

3.1 Introduction

Technically, ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, and epistemology with the study of knowledge and what constitutes valid knowledge. However, the literature suggests that the boundaries between ontology, epistemology and research method lack clear delineation, each fusing with, and having implications for, the other. It is unsurprising therefore to find that authors use terms and apply labels differently. For example, Bryman (2001) applies the term ‘constructionism’ to an ontological position which contrasts with positivism, whilst conceding that constructionism is increasingly associated with epistemology. Crotty (1998) classifies constructionism as a theory of knowledge which represents an alternative to both objectivism and subjectivism; and interpretivism and positivism as theoretical perspectives or philosophical positions - seemingly ontological - that inform methodology. Meanwhile, Symon and Cassell (1998) talk about subjectivist and objectivist ontologies, and constructivist and positivist epistemologies. They also question whether reality can exist independently of the process of knowing, a point which is supported by Denscombe (2002) who suggests that interpretivism or constructionism applies to both an ontological and an epistemological position.

I concur with the view that ontological and epistemological assumptions are interwoven with one another, and with a researcher’s choice of method. Constructionism or interpretivism (like Denscombe, I am using these terms interchangeably) is the stance I favour and the one underpinning this study.
3.2 Underpinning assumptions: taking a constructionist stance

Constructionism - if regarded as both an ontological and an epistemological position - is predicated on the belief that reality is internal and subjective rather than externally imposed, and that knowledge is interpretive, constructed and in a state of constant revision (Bryman, 2001). According to the constructionist view, there is no absolute truth or reality: instead the external social world is composed of labels, concepts and names which are used to structure, describe and explain what we perceive to be “reality”. The interpretivist researcher aims to reach behind the labels used by individuals to describe their social worlds in order to access their world-view, rather than imposing an external logic which may risk distorting and misrepresenting their world (Shotter, 1975). In this way the researcher grasps the subjective meaning of social action and gains understanding of participants’ subjective frames of reference.

However, constructionism does not necessarily assume that meaning-making is an individual project. Crotty (1998) identified several different strands of constructionism, including constructivism (or relativism) and social constructionism. From a constructivist perspective, individuals have their own internal logic and subjective frame of reference which guide interpretation and mediate action. Meaning-making is an individualistic and unique process, and all sense-making is equally valid. Whereas from a social constructionist perspective, social reality is “a network of assumptions and intersubjectively shared meanings” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 28-31). My view is that knowledge is socially as well as individually constructed, with individual meaning-making being mediated by social interaction (eg Crotty, 1998; Denscombe, 2002) and shaped by culture (Crotty, 1998). Consequently, gaining access to individual meaning may also illuminate inter-subjectively derived systems of meaning.

As I regard knowledge as constructed through layers of interpretation, subjectivity is fundamental at every stage of the research process: “Interpretations cannot escape background preconceptions embedded in the language and life of their authors” (Gill and Johnson, 1997: 144). That is, the researcher interprets participants’ accounts using her own interpretations of the concepts, theories and literature of the discipline (Bryman 2001), just as participants understand interview questions and give accounts according to their subjective frame of reference and their reading of the interview situation. The researcher can only approach data collection and analysis from her own perspective,
based on her own theory and frame of reference. In this study my philosophical assumptions, my perception of what constitutes valuable career help, and the relevant literature all contributed to the shaping of data collection and analysis. That is, my frame of reference affected what I attended to, what I regarded as relevant or irrelevant, how I interpreted the data and the categories I constructed to make sense of the data.

Acknowledging the role of the researcher's frame of reference in shaping her interpretation, may be regarded as accepting the imposition of an external logic critiqued above. However, Weick (1995) justifies this approach on the grounds that we use our frame of reference to interpret and make sense of everyday life. Provided the researcher is explicit about her conceptual framework, others can assess the quality of her research and understand her interpretations. I explained my philosophical assumptions above and my conceptual framework in 2.1.3-2.1.6. My assumptions about, and attitude towards career and career help are described in 3.4.2.

Importantly, interpretivism rejects the application to social science of traditional methods used in the natural sciences, and specifically the dualistic division of the social world into subject and object. Interpretivist assumptions are that: social worlds are socially constructed; person and environment inseparable; human action understood within its social context; and knowledge construction is on-going (Symon and Cassell, 1998).

In specific terms this study draws upon elements of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (Crotty, 1998). Taking a phenomenological perspective, I seek to understand how people make sense of the world, and to access the meanings upon which human action is based (Bryman, 2001). I acknowledge that culture shapes the way in which people think and act (Crotty, 1998); and I focus on a particular phenomenon, in this case 'career helpers'. Unlike Husserlian phenomenologists, I acknowledge rather than bracket (set aside) my presuppositions (Creswell, 1998) and go beyond pure description - often associated with phenomenology - to build conceptual frameworks. From symbolic interactionism, I draw the notion that meaning is derived from interaction, and is modified through the interpretive process (Crotty, 1998). My justification for this eclectic and selective approach is that: "In a very real sense, every piece of research is unique and calls for a unique methodology" (Crotty, 1998: 13-14).

To summarise, this research is underpinned by constructionist or interpretive assumptions. In specific terms, I am working on the assumption that social reality is
internal and subjective, and that knowledge of the social world is interpretive and socially constructed. The researcher gains access to a participant’s sense-making processes, that is, how she understands, interprets and constructs meaning. Individual meaning and interpretations shape and are shaped by social interaction, so that accounts of social interaction contribute to our understanding of individuals’ meanings and interpretations, and individual meanings and interpretations provide some insight into a person’s social context. These philosophical assumptions are central to my choice of a qualitative approach: other reasons are discussed below.

3.3 Qualitative methodology

Constructionism or interpretivism is most commonly associated with qualitative methodology and with ideographic methods which seek first-hand accounts through life story (3.5). Van Maanen (1983: 9) defines qualitative research as:

...an array of interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomenon in the social world.

Qualitative research is most commonly used in exploratory studies and is associated with inductive theory-building. The aim is to develop a contextually-embedded, holistic picture of the phenomenon being studied, to focus on interpretation and to emphasise subjectivity. Research is flexible and the researcher is concerned about process and context. In particular, the researcher needs to explicitly recognise reactivity, that is, the tendency for participants’ actions and responses to be influenced by the social situation and the impression they wish to make. This requires an understanding of the context in which data are collected and awareness that the researcher’s presence and projected personality will affect participants. Through monitoring her impact on, and role in the situation, the researcher may be able to adjust her behaviour to encourage participants to construct further data (3.7.2).

I have several interrelated reasons for choosing a qualitative approach, including my assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge outlined above. Other reasons relate to the appropriateness of a qualitative approach to my research topic, my aims and my skills.

First, my choice was influenced by the nature of my study which explores a relatively under-researched area. Most existing research focuses on students’ experiences and
perceptions of career guidance, or managers’ experiences and perceptions of organisational career management (e.g., Mabey and Iles 1991; Iles and Mabey, 1993; Kossek et al. 1998), and is based on careers in the US (e.g., Hall, 1986; Feldman, 1988; Russell, 1991; Gutteridge, Leibowitz, and Shore, 1993; Greenhaus and Callanan, 1994). In contrast, my research is concerned with the perceptions of non-managerial employees who work in UK-based organisations. My study involves collecting rich, in-depth, language-based data from a relatively small number of participants in order to contribute to theory-building.

The exploratory nature of my study favours the flexibility of qualitative methods. As Cassell and Symon (1994) note, initially qualitative research is loosely structured within a framework of ideas, allowing questions to evolve as research progresses. Throughout the process of collecting and analysing data, structure becomes apparent, the emphasis and relative importance of different issues anticipated at the outset may change, and the focus becomes clearer.

Second, a qualitative approach allows me to explore the subjective meaning of social action and to uncover individual sense-making processes. My principal concern here is: “with an understanding of the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 3). Specifically, my aim is to appreciate the different constructions and meanings people place on the career help they have received or would like to receive (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe 1991). I am not concerned with collecting quantifiable data on issues such as the number of people who report a particular career intervention as useful, or comparing the relative effectiveness of different career activities. By gathering subjective accounts, I aim to understand the participants’ frame of reference and to elucidate their meanings, interpretive systems and sense-making processes. In particular, I aim to understand participants’ perceptions of how career helpers and hinderers have shaped their careers and in so doing to access participants’ beliefs and assumptions. In specific terms, this means exploring participants’ perceptions, interpretations and experiences of career helpers in the context of their life story and their current career situation.

Third, and related to the previous point, qualitative research is most commonly associated with an inductive approach to theory-building. My intention here is to construct conceptual frameworks by drawing primarily on themes derived from my data although - consistent with my previous comments about recognising rather than bracketing
presuppositions - I also draw on existing theory and research which I perceive to be relevant and informative.

Fourth, a qualitative approach seems most appropriate to the subjective nature of my topic. At a time when the subjective dimension of career is regarded as increasingly important (2.1.3.2) a research approach which seeks to understand individuals’ perspectives is in tune with the Zeitgeist. As noted earlier, there is increasing interest amongst career theorists in contextually-based narrative (eg Savickas 2000c; Cochran, 1997; Law, 2003a) and interactionist approaches (eg Law, 1981; Young, Valach and Collin, 1996; Peavey, 2000). In terms of career guidance practice, the notion of client centrality is acknowledged and promoted as fundamental (eg Killeen, White and Watts, 1992; Ford, 1997; Niles, 1997).

Finally, with my academic roots in history and my experience of interviewing gained as a careers adviser and freelance researcher/evaluator, I considered my skills to be best suited to a qualitative approach.

3.4 Rigour and quality in qualitative research

Research is commonly evaluated on the basis of its reliability, validity and generalisability. As Silverman (2000) notes, some social researchers argue that any form of ‘measurement’ is inherently incompatible with an approach predicated on the notion of multiple realities. Others suggest alternatives to a positivist approach to the evaluation of qualitative studies. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Bryman 2001) proposed trustworthiness as an appropriate way of assessing qualitative research where trustworthiness comprises: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The notion of devising specific criteria for evaluating qualitative research is appealing. Lincoln and Guba have merely renamed concepts which are currently used to evaluate quantitative research, that is, internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Little is gained by deviating from conventional terminology if the concepts themselves remain unchanged. However, I agree that qualitative studies need to be evaluated somewhat differently from quantitative ones. Revising the meaning of conventional terms seems more appropriate than re-labelling existing concepts. In discussing the techniques I used to promote the quality of this research, I apply the meanings of reliability and validity expressed by LeCompte and Goetz (1982).
3.4.1 Reliability

LeCompte and Goetz (1982) distinguish between external reliability which they define as replication, and internal reliability which is concerned with consistency. It is difficult to apply these criteria to qualitative research, and attempting to do so seems incompatible with research predicated on a subjective world-view where researcher sensitivity is an essential aspect of the process. My contention is that an interaction like a semi-structured interview can not be replicated because it is shaped by the personalities and states of mind of the participants, and the way in which those individuals interact on a particular occasion. In other words, reactivity (the tendency for people to modify their responses, language and body language in response to their interpretations of others) which is characteristic of qualitative research, precludes replication as a relevant way of assessing the external reliability of this project. However, in case other researchers wish to conduct similar studies, I have - as recommended by LeCompte and Goetz (1982) - included data about research participants (3.6.5) and a detailed account of the methods of data collection and analysis I used (3.7 and 3.8).

A commonly proposed strategy for assessing internal reliability is a process variously known as inter-observer consistency (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982), inter-rater reliability (King, 1994) or inter-coder agreement (Silverman, 2000). This approach, where the researcher seeks the views of others about their perceptions and interpretations of the data, has limited application in the construction of a doctoral thesis. Also, consistency between researchers does not establish or refute the validity of a particular interpretation. Agreement does not prove the ‘truth’ of an interpretation, although the researcher may feel more comfortable about its credibility. Neither does a divergent view mean that the researcher’s interpretation is ‘untrue’ or wrong, although it may challenge her reasoning or the articulation of her argument. In other words, inter-rater reliability does not necessarily contribute to the evaluation of the quality of the research outcomes, although considering other perspectives and interpretations may aid the intellectual rigour of the interpretative process. For this study I shared a number of my interview transcripts and interview tapes with my supervisor and discussed my interpretations. I regarded this as part of the process of exploring, questioning and developing my interpretations, rather than a ‘test’ of internal reliability.
3.4.2 Internal validity

Validity seems to be more fundamental to the rigour of qualitative studies than reliability and indeed is one of its strength as research is usually conducted in naturalistic settings using techniques such as unstructured or semi-structured interviewing (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). For King, a qualitative study: “is valid if it truly examines the topic which it claims to have examined” (1994: 31). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) distinguish between internal validity (the match between the researcher’s observations and the theoretical ideas she develops), and external validity which equates to generalisability.

While evaluation of validity in quantitative research is determined by the rigour of the methodology employed, in qualitative research self-understanding, communication skills, respondent verification, triangulation and feedback loops may be employed. In particular, the researcher needs to be aware of, and develop her personal skills and sensitivities, and her interpretative and analytical skills. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 223) note: “Data in themselves cannot be valid or invalid; what is at issue are the inferences drawn from them”. As with all aspects of qualitative research, data collection and interpretation are closely entwined and both must be rigorous.

In-depth self-understanding and a high level of communications skills are required by the qualitative researcher (Reason and Rowan, 1981a). Importantly, the researcher needs to be aware of, and explicitly acknowledge her own prejudices, assumptions and values. By doing so she facilitates her openness and willingness to be surprised by new ideas and perspectives, and enables others to evaluate her work. For Denscombe (2002), willingness to question existing beliefs and knowledge is one of several aspects of detachment or objectivity which are appropriate to qualitative research. I applied the notion of openness in this study by: explaining my philosophical assumptions (3.2); identifying my conceptual framework (2.1.3-2.1.6); describing the research process (3.6-3.8.4); and explicating my assumptions and values about career and career help (below).

I was aware from the outset that my beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions about work, career and the value of career guidance, underpinned my frame of reference and as such would mediate data collection and interpretation. For me, work is a significant source of personal fulfilment and a crucial aspect of my identity. I see my career as a means of developing skills, knowledge, understanding and relationships. I accept that not everyone values career guidance, although I believe that many people value help with
clarifying their career ideas or acting on their career plans. I believe that opportunities to interweave experience, ‘talk’ and reflection can assist individuals to identify their life-career purpose (Ballantine, 1993). ‘Talk’ is a helpful medium for clarifying thoughts, stimulating reflection and developing self-understanding. An isolated, ‘one-off’ encounter may be of value, but is more likely to be helpful if integrated into an individual’s career story of layered experiences and encounters. Career sense-making is retrospective and evolving: consequently, an individual’s understanding of herself in relation to her unfolding career and the experiences that shape it are complicated to formulate and access, both for the individual and her career helper.

These are my beliefs and may not be shared by others. Indeed, during the research interviews I realised that some participants’ perceptions and interpretations of their careers, and their hopes and their expectations of career help differed substantially from mine. I was alert to the risk of assuming that gender, job role, employment status or age may predispose an individual to a particular perception of their career. I was aware that participants may not use the same criteria to evaluate career help as those commonly used by careers advisers, and that some participants - for a range of different reasons - may not value career guidance.

While self-understanding and awareness provide an essential foundation for social science research, well-developed communications skills also aid validity. Language mediates interviewees’ understanding of questions, and the nature and manner in which they respond. Interviewees’ and the interviewer’s proficiency with language and their understanding and interpretation of language and terminology affect the possibility of achieving shared meaning. For example, in this study, I noticed that young male technical engineering apprentices (aged 18 to 21 years) reacted defensively to questions about career ‘help’ and ‘influences’ on career choices, whilst older participants were willing to identify sources of influence and to credit other people with providing help. The apprentices may have wished to dissociate from terms which they perceived as indicating personal weakness, or diminishing their sense of identity or autonomy. The environment of a mechanical engineering firm, and the robust language and images of the shopfloor (described by one of these young men), may have shaped the image they chose to present to me as a 40-year-old female researcher. Many participants introduced terms such as supportive, independent, objective and impartial, the meanings of which I could
only understand in the context of the topic under discussion and in the broad context of their career stories.

Concepts and language are interrelated. For the researcher to enter the frame of reference of an interviewee, the two parties need to have a shared understanding of key concepts (Cohen, 1997). As Heron (1981) observes, ‘truths’ about participants are only valid if the researcher takes account of their values and norms. The language I used to introduce my project, both in my invitation to participate (Appendix one) and during the interview itself, was intended to provide participants with the space to define and express their own meanings of career and career help. During the interviews I asked participants to describe their career since leaving school; to identify and talk about people and events that had helped or hindered them; and what or who had influenced their choices about learning, occupation, employment and change (Appendix two). Although aware of possible differences in conceptualisations, I thought that I would be unable to address my research questions if I avoided reference to both career guidance and career. Rather than offering my own definition of career, I attended to participants’ discourse in order to access their meaning. Where possible I underplayed the term ‘career’ - because of potentially different meanings - by asking questions such as: “How did you come to be working in your present job?” and “Where do you see yourself going from here?”.

Participants seemed to conceptualise career as a form of development involving hierarchical progression, skill development and/or challenge. Several participants explained how family considerations had affected their career decisions, thus identifying one dimension of the boundaryless career (Arthur, 1994).

As well as being attentive to language, I endeavoured to use appropriate interviewing techniques. I found that open questions, and especially exploratory probes were particularly useful in allowing participants the opportunity to decide which aspects of the topic were important to them, and enabling them to express themselves freely using their own words. Focused probes helped me to obtain and clarify specific understandings. Except to clarify factual information (such as dates or the order of events), I avoided leading questions as these risk eliciting responses which do not convey interviewees’ intended meaning.

Both validity and integrity are strengthened if the researcher uses respondent validation or verification to check understanding. I identified three possible ways of seeking respondent verification. The first, and most crucial is to check understanding during the
interview. For example, I used clarifying questions and offered tentative summaries which allowed participants to confirm my understandings and correct any misunderstandings. Second, the researcher may seek verification by asking interviewees to comment on the accuracy of a summary of the interview or the transcript. However, if interviewees are to recall more than the general substance, the researcher needs to produce a summary almost immediately, which was not practical in my case. More importantly, as Bryman (1988) observes, interviewees may introduce further data, rather than merely confirming or refuting the account. Additional data may be enlightening, but does not further the researcher’s attempts to validate the original account. Third, the researcher may seek respondents’ validation (or otherwise) of interpretations and developing theory (Reason and Rowan, 1981a). This may produce interesting ideas but presents difficulties of interpretation. Neither does respondent validation of developing theory necessarily aid overall validity. Interviewees can only apply the researcher’s emergent theory to their own experience, while the researcher has access to the perspectives of all participants, and may interpret the data in a different light or apply different criteria to those used by participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In my study I was concerned that requests for post-interview involvement might strain the goodwill and interest of research participants and ‘gatekeepers’ (who secured access to organisations and individual participants). Out of courtesy I provided each participant with an aggregated account of my interpretations of the interviews conducted within their employing organisation, and invited comments about these accounts. I did not receive responses from any of the participants.

Threats to validity may also be countered by triangulation. This may involve using different data collection techniques, comparing data from different sources and comparing interpretations with others “who share a similar world” (Reason and Rowan, 1981a: 243). If the concept of triangulation is interpreted as assuming the existence of ‘truth’ or ‘reality’, it seems inappropriate in a study based on phenomenological assumptions (Silverman 2000) where the aim is to access individuals’ meanings. However, if triangulation is used with the purpose of addressing the rigour of the research process, rather than providing evidence of a definitive interpretation or outcome, it may be relevant to qualitative research. For example, as noted in the section on reliability, I sought the views of my supervisor and other researchers on my interpretations, reasoning and explanations (Reason and Rowan, 1981a). In order to gather a range of perspectives
on the concept of career help, I selected organisations that contrasted on a range of
dimensions and I involved participants whose experience was embedded in contrasting
contexts (Collin, 1999b).

Validity can also be strengthened by the systematic use of feedback loops which
progressively extend and refine concepts and categories (Reason and Rowan, 1981a).
This process is similar to “constant comparative method” (Silverman, 2000: 179)
whereby the researcher starts by analysing a small section of her data and moves
progressively to larger datasets to test emerging categories and theoretical ideas. In the
sections on data collection (3.7) and analysis (3.8) I describe the cyclical process used to
review and refine categories, and to develop conceptual frameworks.

3.4.3 External validity

External validity or generalisability is concerned with the application of findings and
interpretations of a study beyond its immediate scope in terms of populations and
theoretical propositions. In quantitative studies, population generalisability refers to the
validity of generalising from the research sample to the population it purports to
represent. In qualitative studies, where the purpose is to form a unique interpretation
(Creswell, 1994) from a research sample not intended to be statistically representative of
a particular population, external validity - in terms of theoretical propositions across
contexts - is more appropriate (eg Bryman, 1988; Hartley, 1994). In other words, the
issue is not whether participants are typical of a particular population but whether the
processes that may influence their perceptions and the context in which those processes
occur have commonality with the experiences of others. As: “Every man is in certain
respects a) like all other men b) like some other men, and c) like no other men” (Clyde
Kluckholm and Henry Murray in Polkinghorne, 1990:102), even small studies are
applicable to some other people and a single case or life generates insights into the human
condition, different ways of thinking and different perspectives Collin (1999b).

I used three techniques to promote the external validity. First, I sought a diverse sample
on the basis that common themes and systematic differences would be more clearly
highlighted and more significant than if the sample were homogeneous. This in turn
would aid the building of conceptual frameworks. To increase the likelihood of
involving people with different experiences, perceptions and interpretations of career
helpers, I recruited participants who worked in different types of jobs, workplace environments, organisations and sectors.

Second, I followed Hartley's suggestion (1994) to promote the validity of theoretical propositions by developing an understanding of context and processes which underlie actions in order to specify the conditions in which actions may be expected to recur. For example, I identified similarities and differences in participants' perceptions of career helpers and hinderers in the context of their career stories and these helped me to define concepts and relationships between concepts.

Third, I identified consistencies and differences in findings, interpretations (Hartley, 1994; Reason and Rowan, 1981a) and constructs from similar career studies (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982), and I used Law's community interaction theory (1981) as an analytical framework to structure my writing and to relate emerging theory to existing literature (Hartley, 1994).

To summarise, external reliability (replication) and internal reliability (consistency) seem incompatible with research based on a subjective world-view. External validity, and internal validity where the researcher's observations match the theoretical ideas she develops, are more appropriate ways of assessing the quality and rigour of qualitative research. The methods and application of methods used to assess the validity of qualitative research differ somewhat from those used to assess quantitative studies. To address external validity in this study, I selected a diverse research sample, attended to context in terms of participants' career stories and career issues, and compared my study with other relevant studies. I endeavoured to promote internal validity by: being explicit about my assumptions and values; attending to language and meaning; applying appropriate interviewing techniques; verifying my understandings during the research interviews; using triangulation as a challenge to intellectual rigour; and using feedback loops/constant comparative method in the development and refinement of concepts and theory.

3.5 Life story as a research method

I open this section with a discussion of the concepts of narrative, life story and life history. This discussion leads into a clarification of the terms as I am using here. Next I describe the key characteristics of life story and explain my choice of life story as a research method.
3.5.1 Narrative, story, life story and history

Confusingly, the terms narrative and story; life history and life story are used synonymously by some researchers and given distinct meanings by others. For Cochran (1990), story and narrative are interchangeable. Polkinghorne defines stories as: “narratives that combine a succession of incidents into a unified episode” (1995: 7).

Gabriel regards story as “emotionally and symbolically charged” (1998: 136), and distinct from history which is story devoid of emotional or symbolic charge. Riessman (1993) expects stories to have a protagonist, inciting conditions and culminating events; and narratives to be thematic, hypothetical or habitual (without a climax). Other authors distinguish life story from life history. For example, Grell (1986 in Bujold, 1990) defines life story as an individual’s account of her life, and life history as a construction based on the interweaving of a number of accounts derived from different sources including the subject. Linde (1993) uses ‘life story’ in preference to life history which she associates with its anthropological use where an account is guided by the researcher’s questions rather than shaped by the teller.

To understand research studies which use life story and narrative methods, I needed to be clear about each author’s meaning and usage. In the discussion that follows I respect author’s meanings by using their preferred terms when referring to their work. In reference to my own study, I use ‘life story’ as a generic term meaning an individual’s account of her life, and ‘career story’ to mean those aspects of a participant’s life story which relate specifically to her career. My focus is on the career stories constructed from the taped research interviews and transcripts of those interviews. I distinguish life story from narrative which I regard as the spoken story: “narrative refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot” (Polkinghorne 1995: 5).

3.5.2 Characteristics of life story

The literature suggests that purpose and temporality are the key characteristics of life story, and that a valuable research narrative is reflexive and illuminates personal constructs and social worlds.

Purpose is contained in the notion of “extended reportability” (Linde, 1993: 21) where an event or experience is sufficiently unusual to be told and retold over time. Extended reportability and the importance of conveying a particular message were indicated in my
research by participants who used different events to illustrate a recurring theme or themes, or revisited the same story during the interview. Accounts of episodes, events or encounters illustrated aspects of the whole career story or reinforced a particular point.

Temporality is expressed through the notion of change and sequence in accounts of personal experiences (Linde, 1993). More specifically, a story can be defined as “an account of a sequence of episodes, in each of which people’s overlapping - and, at times, contradictory - beliefs and feelings, roles, points of view, conflicts and alliances move towards resolution - or dissolution” (Law, 2000:1). Through the process of narration an individual interprets and re-interprets her ‘reality’ over time, so that “fluid and dynamic” meanings are “continually being created and re-created” (Musson 1998:10).

Reflexivity is concerned with the relationship between present self and past self, and with a person’s reflections on the assumptions she uses to understand and interpret a situation (Musson, 1998). Personal constructs may be indicated in a person’s narrative through comparisons between herself and others; while descriptions of social context extend beyond the individual.

At one level, narrative provides a vehicle for self-presentation in which a speaker expresses continuity of self, self in relation to others and reflexivity. Levels of reflexivity (and willingness to share reflections) vary between individuals, and may differ according to social context. Proximity to an event, the power of emotion it evoked and its perceived consequences, along with the personality of the researcher and the relationship between researcher and participant may all affect narrator reflexivity. A reflexive speaker is inclined to detach herself from her role as protagonist in her story, enabling her to evaluate freely her past behaviour and to identify her impact on situations. References to errors of judgement may be recounted as well as justifications and defences of past actions and the attribution of error to others. The degree of a narrator’s reflexivity affects how she describes problems, ambiguities, dilemmas and uncertainties and her theorising about those experiences. The narrator’s description will, in turn, affect the nature and quality of the researcher’s access to her sense-making processes. Being able to unpack the meaning of personally-defined turning points or pivotal events (Creswell, 1998) may be particularly enlightening.

At a second level, narrative exceeds attribution, explanation and individual theorising and provides clues about personal beliefs and constructs (Smith, 1995). The narrator
endeavours to create a story which seems coherent in terms of her interpretive framework of assumptions, beliefs and ‘common sense’ views, and/or a story she thinks will be accepted as coherent by the listener. In my study, participants expressed both uniqueness and relatedness by referring to similarities and differences between themselves and others. For example, many participants compared their careers and their values with those of their line managers and co-workers. Participants’ attributions illuminated their perceptions and interpretations of their sense of agency, and the influence and power of career helpers and hinderers.

From a phenomenological perspective, ‘subjective’ accounts may contain a third layer of meaning through their potential for providing access to an individual’s social and cultural context. In other words, life story is the “crossroads of personal and social meanings” (Linde, 1993: 219). From this perspective a subjective account is embedded in the relationship between the narrator and her social reality as defined and interpreted by her. So that:

*Of all research methods, it [life history] perhaps comes closest to allowing the researcher access to how individuals create and portray the social world surrounding them.* (Jones, 1983: 147.)

Life story provides access to the individual’s ‘life-world’ (Giorgi, 1970) which may include her taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs, ‘stocks of knowledge’ and interpretive systems (Jones, 1983). Thus, descriptions of, and judgements about career helpers and hinderers provide clues to socially-contextualised beliefs about who is able to shape careers and the ways in which they can do this. In other words, narrative provides a means of conveying a ‘cultural story’ (Miller and Glassner, 1997 in Silverman, 2001) in which the narrator attempts to make her actions intelligible to people who might not otherwise understand. Any single cultural story is just one of many possible stories which involve accepting some publicly-held views and challenging others. In this study, participants’ narratives seemed to be mediated by the messages they wished to convey to me and through me to other people such as their managers. For example, in my view the car production workers were very open about their frustration with barriers to progression because they wanted me to convey this (unattributed) message to company managers in the hope of effecting change. Intended messages may also have been mediated by participants’ perceptions of me, and where they placed me socially. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that the narrator’s perception of her own social location will
affect her perspective, interpretations and actions. In the case of my research, having some understanding of how participants perceived and interpreted their position in the employing organisation helped to inform my understanding of the career help they described as valuable.

To summarise, participants' narratives can be perceived as an amalgam of subjectively-based and socially-embedded expectations, perceptions and interpretations filtered through participants' sense of their social location, their perception the researcher's social location and their interpretation of what the researcher might consider to be an acceptable story.

3.5.3 Why I have chosen life story method

My reasons for choosing life story or ideographic method relate to my epistemological stance and my research aims. As life story is predicated on the assumption that knowledge is grounded in everyday life and in the constructions that individuals use to explain their reality and their actions (Jones, 1983), this method seemed to be compatible with my philosophical assumptions.

My prime aim-related reason for selecting life story method was my wish to take account of the diachronic context (the development of participants' careers over time). Initially I was attracted by the idea of asking participants direct, specific questions about their experiences of career help (eg see Hirsh, Kidd and Jackson, 2001), as this seemed an efficient way of collecting contained and focused data whilst also being exploratory. However, I was concerned about the implications of decontextualising the data and thus diminishing participants' meaning and the value of data for my project. An interviewing technique which elicited participants' career stories would enable participants to explain, understand (Cochran, 1990), and make sense of the dynamic relationship between self, the social world and the environment through the process of narration (Musson 1998). More specifically life history seemed particularly appropriate as I was concerned with exploring the way in which "individuals account for and theorize about their actions in the social world over time" (Musson, 1998: 10). I thought that participants were more likely to recall and describe encounters and career helpers - particularly informal helpers - in the context of preceding and consequential events, than in response to questions about temporally-isolated incidents.
A key advantage of a narrative approach is that it allows for a holistic, rather than a dualistic approach to career research. Career story takes account of the subjective and the objective dimension of career, and links individuals with social structure while privileging the individual's perspective (Mallon and Cohen, 2000). In addition, narrative and life story are endorsed by some careers advisers and careers researchers. Researchers advocate the use of narrative, life history or biographic approaches in career counselling practice (eg Polkinghorne, 1990; Savickas, 1992; Collin and Watts, 1996; Cochran, 1997; Reid, 2002; Young, Valach and Collin, 1996). Cochran (1990), Collin and Young (1992), Gabriel (1998) and Mallon and Cohen (2000) are amongst those who argue for the application of story to career research. A few researchers have used stories or biographical accounts in this way (eg Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999; Law, 2003a; Mallon and Cohen, 2000; Colley, 2001c). Life story provides a means of understanding career, and career is a central theme in the life stories of most individuals: “Career in the sense of occupation or profession is the framework for constructing one's life story in our culture” (Collin and Young, 1992: 8).

3.6 Research process

Described simply, the research process I followed involved defining the key research questions, creating an interview guide, recruiting participants, carrying out interviews and analysing the data. This suggests a linear process, although in practice it was cyclical. I started to analyse my data while collecting new data, and I monitored the effectiveness of my data collection throughout. I was aware that concurrent data collection and analysis had implications for the nature and quality of my research. If I allowed early data analysis to drive later collection too strongly, there was a risk that I might determine key themes prematurely, overlook other relevant themes and exaggerate those which might be specific to limited individual contexts. To guard against this, I maintained a careful balance between focused exploration and open-mindedness by pursuing emergent themes that appeared promising, while avoiding dwelling on any single theme that failed to engage participants or to elicit expansive responses.

The sections that follow address the practical issues around recruiting participant organisations and individuals. I then describe and explain the data collection process, and discuss the characteristics of qualitative interviews. I describe and justify my approach to data analysis before summarising the chapter.
3.6.1 Criteria for selecting participating organisations

To identify potential participating organisations, I used purposive sampling (Silverman, 2000), also known as opportunistic non-probability sampling (Hornby and Symon, 1994). Members of a purposive sample are chosen because they are capable of generating meaningful data about the questions under investigation, and are willing and able to participate in the research. With this definition in mind, I set out to select organisations which fulfilled four criteria. First, I was interested in organisations which offered some form of career help to their non-managerial grade employees. Career help could take the form of performance appraisal, development review, personal development plans, career resource/action centres, career assessment/development centres, employee development schemes, career guidance interviews, career development workshops, career workbooks, mentoring or work shadowing. Second, organisations needed to have lateral or vertical development opportunities for non-managerial grade staff and/or opportunities to participate in developmental projects. Third, I sought organisations which would allow me to interview five employees about the help they received with their careers and their views of that help. Fourth - for logistical, access and financial reasons - I chose organisations with a presence in the Midlands.

As I noted earlier, I did not regard my research sample as statistically representative of any particular population. Nevertheless, I thought it worth considering whether the geographical boundaries were likely to generate particularly atypical career stories. The issue here seemed to be possible regional differences in rates of unemployment and in concentration of particular industries. Potentially these might affect interviewees' perceptions and expectations of their careers and the help they received and valued. For example, if the regional rate of unemployment is perceived to be low and inter-organisational mobility relatively easy, employees may feel in less need of career help than if they perceived the reverse to be the case. High rates of unemployment might increase employees' concerns about job security and internal opportunities. I concluded that unemployment may not be a major issue in this study given that the rate for the East Midlands was 5% (ONS, 1998) compared with the national average of 6.2% (GOEM, 1999). Having said that, I recognise that official statistics do not necessarily indicate people's perceptions of unemployment, job security and the relative ease or difficulty of finding work. Perceptions are as likely to be shaped by personal and vicarious experience as by official statistics, possibly more so.
As the ‘Midlands’ is a large geographical region which includes a range of different industries, I did not consider it to be atypical, neither could I identify any reasons why the perceptions of employees in this region should be distinctively different from those of employees in the other regions of England. However, to guard against any possible implications of my choice of region, I selected organisations from a range of different sectors and avoided declining industries or those which appeared to be under particular economic threat such as clothing, hosiery and shoe-making. Any regional bias may also have been mitigated by inclusion of one national and three international organisations.

Having said that, my decision to involve organisations from a range of different sectors was largely influenced by my aim to access a range of different versions of career and career help (Silverman 2000: 85) so as to promote theory-building about the phenomenon of career help. My intention was to involve a total of six organisations, including at least one small or medium-sized organisation (employing up to 250 employees) and for participating organisations to be spread across service (e.g. finance, leisure and retail), manufacturing and the public or voluntary sectors. Within each of these categories I intended to include organisations with diverse activities and functions.

### 3.6.2 Identifying participating organisations

Although I tried a variety of approaches to identifying participant organisations, using personal and professional networks, and appropriate informants proved the most successful. Assuming that organisations interested in the Investors in People (IiP) award would already have, or be in the process of developing some form of staff development review, I approached staff at Leicestershire Training and Enterprise Council (LTEC) who agreed to contact on my behalf half of those organisations in their region then registered for IiP. In the event LTEC was unable to do this and I contacted several existing holders of IiP directly. None expressed interest in participating. My next move was to work with a contact at Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services who suggested several companies which she considered strong in terms of career management provision and likely to be cooperative. Three of the organisations she suggested agreed to participate and interviewees in these organisations provided useful data.

Other personal contacts from whom I sought advice included: the Manager of Centre for Guidance Studies (University of Derby), the Gateway Coordinator at Loughborough University; the Secretary of Leicester Rotary Club; Loughborough University careers
staff; the Director of Career Strategies Ltd and staff employed on the Adapt ‘Agent for Change’ programme in Derbyshire Careers Services. All provided some useful leads. I also wrote to several large retail organisations and some public sector organisations, none of whom were willing to participate. However, through a contact at the Centre for Enterprise Leicester I engaged a small, local company which had recently won the ‘Beacon award’ for staff development.

I also pursued more formal channels such as the East Midlands Branch of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) and the local Chambers of Trade and Commerce (CTC). The President of Loughborough CTC agreed to the participation of the site he managed. Unfortunately, he subsequently moved on, necessitating further negotiation with a new, less enthusiastic manager. The nature of the data I collected in this organisation may have been shaped (at least to some extent) by this recent change in management.

Preliminary analysis of my first 16 interviews revealed rich data on the topics of career and informal career help, although less in terms of formal career guidance and career management. Taking a theoretical sampling approach (Charmaz, 1995), I decided to tighten my criteria for selecting organisations in order to include participants with more experience of - or more to say about - formal career help. Consequently, I required the last two participating organisations to provide non-managerial employees with access to one of: specialist careers advice via a training officer, career manager or external careers adviser; career workshops; a careers resource centre; or a mentoring scheme.

I began this stage by identifying careers services companies in the Midlands which undertake corporate careers work. In some cases corporate activity was confined to redundancy interviews or workshops, and in most others workloads constrained the help my contacts could give. However, one careers adviser who had a regular company contract, facilitated access to that company and to five employees who were interested in participating. Personal networks also led me to contact a financial institution which was developing its career management provision by training human resource staff as career coaches. Disappointingly, because these developments were relatively recent, my invitation to participate was declined. However, I secured the cooperation of a pharmaceutical company with whom I had been negotiating for over a year and purported to meet my new criteria.
Organisations which declined to participate gave a number of reasons including: restructuring, redundancies, recent involvement in other research projects, too few staff who met my criteria (see 3.6.4), the recent appointment of a new human resource manager, pressure of work and more pressing priorities. Those organisations which agreed to participate seemed to be motivated by concerns about their image with the local community, and with the University as a potential source of business and of graduate recruits.

Overall, personal contacts with direct knowledge and experience of human resource and training staff in potentially participating organisations were the most fruitful source of suggestions. My contacts suggested named gatekeepers to whom I could address correspondence, and allowed me to use their names in my initial contact with gatekeepers.

3.6.3 Contacting and engaging organisations

Once I had identified organisations which appeared to meet my criteria, I wrote an exploratory letter (Appendix three) to the named gatekeepers (general manager, human resource or training manager). A few days later I telephoned gatekeepers to discuss the research in more detail and assess their level of interest. If they wished to be involved and appeared to be appropriate, I arranged an initial visit to explain my research in more detail, address any concerns, explore suitability in greater depth, and to negotiate access if we agreed to proceed.

Within each organisation I sought employees from a range of functions and contexts. My decision to interview only five employees within each organisation was influenced by my research aims and practical considerations. From a research point of view, I aimed for diversity in terms of experiences, perceptions and interpretations. Although involving six organisations was more time-consuming than restricting myself to two or three, I thought this approach would increase the likelihood of recruiting participants employed in different jobs and occupations, and who had diverse experiences of career help (3.4.3). As it was not my intention to evaluate organisational career management provision, I was not concerned about the limited opportunities for comparing the perspectives of employees within each organisation.

From a practical point of view, I envisaged gatekeepers within organisations being more receptive if I requested interviews with a small number of employees as this would
minimise disruption to workflow, be inexpensive in terms of work lost, and limit administrative and organisational demands on gatekeepers. I had anticipated some difficulty in convincing gatekeepers of the value of gathering unattributed feedback from a small, unrepresentative sample of their workforce. However, I successfully argued that my account might inform more extensive surveys of employees' views of career management provision, and that participating organisations would receive a final report containing an aggregated account of the comments from all research participants. Gatekeepers in three participating organisations reported that my account of their employees' perceptions was interesting and valuable, and one sought permission to share the account with an external body.

The final group of six organisations comprised: a small hotel (a member of wider hotel group); a pharmaceutical company; a general hospital; a car manufacturer; a weighing machine servicing company; and a small precision engineering company.

3.6.4 Recruiting participants

Once I had identified participating organisations and informed gatekeepers of the criteria for employee participation (see below), the process of recruiting participants was largely dependent on gatekeepers and the level of confidentiality needed to protect participants. Again I sought a purposive sample (Silverman, 2000), requesting expressions of interest from employees who wished to develop their careers and had experienced some form of organisational career management or formal career guidance. In contrast with many previous career research studies, my intention was to focus on non-managerial employees, which I defined as those who do not have an input to, or an official role in, strategic and policy decision-making, and do not regard themselves as managers.

My initial intention was to recruit participants personally, but in practice I found that the gatekeepers preferred to recruit participants themselves, either directly or via departmental managers. This approach was more convenient for the gatekeepers and had advantages for me as gatekeepers were well-placed to identify articulate participants who were interested in their careers. Potentially there was a risk of including only employees who were uncritical of their employing organisation and its career management provision, and consequently generating a more positive picture of provision than if I had recruited participants myself. As I was not seeking to evaluate organisational career management provision, I did not regard this as a threat to validity. In the event I found
that many respondents expressed both negative and positive views about organisational career management and formal career guidance provision.

Importantly, I specified that all participants were to be willing volunteers who had experienced some form of help with their careers from their workplace (3.6.1) and had opportunities to develop their careers through projects, or lateral or vertical moves. Participants needed to be interested in, and willing to discuss their career and the help they had received or would like to receive. They needed to be free to participate in an interview lasting up to one and a half hours - either during or outside of their working hours - and be willing for the interview to be recorded on tape.

I recognised that my approach to sampling and my criteria for participation might have some unintentional effects on the range of employees who volunteered and their motivations, and in turn affect the data collected. One concern was that the range of participants might be limited by the nature of employees’ work. To some extent this was the case. In the weighing machine company I was only able to interview two employees, partly because many of those who were eligible worked ‘in the field’ and were not easily accessible or available. In the engineering company, only apprentices or those who had recently completed their apprenticeships participated, partly because their absence from work was less disruptive to work flow than that of qualified, experienced employees. In contrast, I was able to interview five assembly line workers in a car manufacturing company because all volunteered to meet me at their workplace on their non-work days.

In terms of motivation to participate, my impression was that some participants had volunteered with the intention of conveying a particular message. In some cases, participants expressed concern or disappointment about the help provided by careers advisers and school teachers. Other participants wanted to express their appreciation or displeasure about career help (or lack of help) they had received from current or previous employers. In a few cases participants were explicit about their reasons for participation, expressing keenness to help or appreciation of the opportunity for a break from work.

The diverse reasons for participation and participants’ willingness to volunteer despite the inconvenience, led me to conclude that my chosen approach to sampling and the practical restrictions imposed on my sample did not undermine the quality and relevance of my data.
3.6.5 Description of the sample

I started my research with the intention for interviewing 30 people. In the event, I found that I had sufficient data after interviewing 28 participants. Tables 3.1 to 3.5 and the accompanying commentaries describe the sample's profile.

Table 3.1 - Age range and sex of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 and above</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 50 years. Age-diversity was part of my strategy to access a range of experiences and perspectives of career help. I had hoped to achieve a more even spread of ages but was constrained by the practicalities of recruiting participants and dependence on volunteers. The concentration of volunteers in the 20- to 39-year-old groups may reflect the level of interest people have in their careers during these years.

Gender

Although the research was not conducted from a feminist perspective, I was aware that gender might arise as an issue and endeavoured to recruit roughly equal numbers of men and women. As in the case of the age profile, dependency on volunteers may have affected gender mix. The nature of the occupational sectors (Table 3.3) may also have been a factor.
Ethnicity

That only one of the 28 participants (Prakash) was non-white is not surprising, given that I had not aimed for ethnic diversity and I had worked with gatekeepers to recruit volunteers. It is important however to examine the data in light of the fact that Prakash - whom I frequently quote - differs in ethnicity from the predominantly white sample.

Employment

Most participants over 20 years of age had been employed in more than one job, and in some cases more than one occupation. I recorded job and career change in participants’ career stories but tables (3.2. and 3.3) record only the job titles and occupational sectors in which participants were employed at the time of the research interview.

Job titles may be specific to a particular organisation or industrial sector and can be misleading. For example, ‘workshop manager’ and ‘service officer manager’ suggest managerial responsibilities, although the jobs were supervisory, rather than managerial according to my definition (3.6.4). Other job titles are misleading or confusing in a different way. For example, Clinical Trials Management Systems Coordinator might suggest a technical role, although Belinda described her work as administrative and organisational.
Table 3.2 - The participants by pseudonym and job title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geoff</td>
<td>Engineering Technician (planning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>Engineering Technician Apprentice (purchasing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Engineering Technician Apprentice (quality assurance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Engineering Trainee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Engineering Technician (Machine Tools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Pre-admissions Sister/Nurse Adviser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Cardiac Clinical Scientific Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>Personnel Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn</td>
<td>Staff Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Training Administrator/Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayle</td>
<td>Health Care Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Hotel Receptionist/Team Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Hotel and Conference Steward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td>Conference and Events Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Hotel Room Attendant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Waitress (part-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Service Officer Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>Production Operative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>Production Monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>Production Operative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prakash</td>
<td>Production Operative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>Production Monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Workshop Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek</td>
<td>Acting Team Leader, Waste Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Senior Animal Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Clinical Trials Management Systems Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>Engineering Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvonne</td>
<td>HR Development Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3 - Occupational sectors in which participants were working at the time of the interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational sector</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel and catering</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stores</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 Number of participants in each organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of organisation</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighing machine servicing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car manufacturer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.5 - Length of time with current employer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time in years</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 &lt;4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4 &lt;5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7 Data collection

As the individual is the prime source of data in life story and data are primarily oral (Linde, 1993), interviewing is the most appropriate form of data collection. I used semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide (Appendix two) designed to enable participants to tell their career story around the themes of how they came to be in their present job and the events, influences and people they perceived as shaping their career.

As the process of data collection and analysis developed, my aims became more focused on accessing the employees' sense-making about career helpers and eliciting their abstractions and implicit theories about the role of others in shaping careers (Jones, 1983).

Before interviewing employees, I gathered the gatekeeper's perspective on the employing organisations and workplace career management provision. I regarded these perspectives as subjective and possibly indicative of the 'official' management image. The views of gatekeepers prepared me for some issues which arose in my interview with employees, and helped me to identify specific topics which were potentially worthy of exploration. For example, if a gatekeeper stated that all employees had an annual performance review or staff appraisal and interviewees did not spontaneously raise this topic, I enquired about their experiences of review or appraisal.

I collected data between November 1999 and February 2001 using qualitative interviews. Interviews varied in length from half an hour to one and a half hours, with the majority being around one hour in duration. After each interview, I evaluated the data collection
process by listening to the tape-recording to identify any possible bias I may have introduced as a result of my questioning, and I noted areas for improvement.

### 3.7.1 Qualitative interviews

The qualitative interview, also known as a depth, exploratory, semi-structured (King, 1994), focused or guided interview (Bell, 1993), "...is ideally suited to examining topics in which different levels of meaning need to be explored" (King, 1994: 33). The goal is to understand the topic from the interviewee's perspective, and to understand how and why she comes to have this perspective. The researcher needs to understand the constructs on which interviewees base their beliefs and opinions, and which they use to explain and predict events (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). Using qualitative interviewing allows interviewees to raise issues significant to them, and to express themselves in their own words. Internal validity is promoted because the researcher has opportunities to check and clarify meanings during the data collection process.

According to King (1994), semi-structured interviews are characterised by: a low degree of structure; a high proportion of open, searching questions; exploration of specific situations relevant to the interviewee; and by stressing the importance of the interviewer-participant relationship.

One way of achieving a low degree of structure is to use an interview guide (Appendix two) or framework of topics, rather than a schedule of predetermined questions as is characteristic of structured interviews. In an interview with a low degree of structure, the participant is more able to play an active part by introducing issues that she perceives to be relevant and significant to the topic, and by making her own associations between related issues. Structured interviews are more likely to decontextualise questions and may compel respondents to answer questions which lack personal meaning or relevance.

The use of semi-structured interviews has implications for the data collected. Respondents will provide different kinds of data, requiring the researcher to identify themes that emerge during the process of data collection, and to review interview questions and topics as she proceeds. Many themes may emerge, requiring the researcher to analyse a large volume of data before selecting the themes she considers to be most significant for her research topic and those which she chooses as her focus.
In my case the issues for inclusion in the initial interview guide were generated from my literature search (see research questions in 2.3.10), my personal knowledge and experience as a careers adviser and careers researcher, and from discussions with other careers specialists. As I progressed with data collection and analysis, I modified the guide by dropping some topics and introducing new ones in response to participants and as my focus became clearer. For example, in the first set of (five) interviews I asked about participants’ perceptions of the fairness of the employment relationship and the balance of expectations and responsibilities in terms of career. I abandoned this topic when I found that responses were not enlightening and when I recognised that I had too many topics to pursue in a single study. While using ideas from my initial interviews to inform later ones and the analysis, I was aware that the first group differed in many respects from other participants in that all were young men who worked in the same industry and had little experience of other work or work environments beyond engineering. Other participants were likely to have wider experiences of work and career help, and to have wider life issues to take into account. Consequently, I remained open-minded so as to avoid overlooking or losing important and relevant themes.

As I continued collecting data I made further adjustments to my interview guide. Composing and reviewing questions for the guide helped me to focus my reflections and evaluate the interviews. I became very flexible in my conduct of the interviews: exploring topics rather than using specific questions; revising topic areas; focusing on the role of other people; and stressing the diachronic context. From the outset I had intended to gather career stories, but my first group of interviewees were relatively young and they had little (or no) employment history prior to their present employer. In subsequent interviews with older participants, I asked more questions aimed at eliciting their career stories from the point at which they left school to present day. I included questions about how and why participants made career choices, and who and what they perceived as shaping their careers. I also paid more attention to informal sources of career help from within and outside of the organisation. I learnt to probe more deeply when questions on these topics generated promising responses. And I abandoned questions about the content of a participant’s present job which I had intended as an ‘easy’ introductory topic but proved difficult for some participants who seemed unsure about what to include.

As well as being flexible about content, I adopted a more flexible approach to the interview structure. For example, when I was aware that a participant had concerns about
their career (indicated by a recent appointment with a careers adviser), my initial questions focused on their current career, their reasons for seeking careers advice, their experiences of the careers guidance interview, and any other help they would like. I then asked them to think back to leaving school and to talk me through their career story, what they perceived as shaping their career, and the help they had received and would have liked.

3.7.2 Interactions in qualitative interviews

The richest data can be obtained when there is trust and rapport between researcher and participant, and the latter feels able to express herself fully by being open and expansive, and able to describe her feelings and views, rather than giving brief, socially-acceptable answers. I used four techniques to promote trust.

First, I sent all participants an introductory letter, explaining the research project and their role should they wish to participate. In a few cases I made email or telephone contact prior to the interview and this helped me to feel more comfortable and relaxed on meeting participants and, I hope, had a similar effect on them. Face-to-face meetings with participants prior to the interviews may also promote trust, but was only possible for me in two cases.

Second, being aware that responses in the later part of the interview may be shaped by the earlier stages and by participants' anticipation of lines of discussion, I spent time establishing rapport and clarifying what the interview would cover. I explained the purpose of my research, clarified and confirmed confidentiality, and I assured participants that responses would not be individually attributed. I explained my reasons for using a tape recorder and checked that participants were comfortable with this. All participants were willing to be recorded. To help set interviewees at ease, I opened with straightforward questions about age, job title and the length of time they had been with their current employer.

Third, I sought to conduct the interviews in the style of a “non-directive, phenomenologically aware counsellor” (Plummer, 1995: 53), recognising the uniqueness of each participant and her situation, and being empathetic and genuine. Using this Rogerian (Rogers 1951) approach may have encouraged participants to be more forthcoming and open than might otherwise have been the case.
Fourth, I projected an encouraging and interested attitude by using appropriate body language and open questions, and by being aware of the possible effects of my self-presentation on the content and presentation of participants' stories. Reactivity (the tendency for both interviewer and interviewee to modify their contributions and body language in response to their interpretations of the other) is characteristic of qualitative approaches to research, and needs to be recognised in life story interviews. For example, each participant has implicit (and possibly explicit) reasons for presenting herself in a particular way to the researcher. As stories are constructed and reconstructed over time, a participant's account represents how she is construing her experiences of career help at the time of the interview and what she chooses to reveal to the researcher. Another listener, at a different time may be offered a different account of the same story. The narrator's purpose may be to create a story which is coherent in terms of her own interpretative systems of assumptions, beliefs and 'common sense' views, and/or a story that she thinks will be accepted as coherent by the listener. In addition, the account that the researcher hears is filtered by her own perceptions and interpretations.

My experience was in line with King's (1994) observation that employees are often keen to talk about their work with an interested outsider. Most participants in my study were forthcoming and quickly became engaged in the process. Some expressed feelings of dissatisfaction, regret and anger about past career decisions, perceived constraints - including the actions of other people - on their careers. Occasionally, some digressed into detail that was not of immediate relevance to the research questions, requiring me to help them refocus. Participants who were dissatisfied with their present role or who considered themselves to be at a turning point in their career, provided particularly helpful data, enabling me to explore issues of immediate concern and the type of career help they perceived to be valuable in addressing those issues. Participants generally discussed current career issues differently from the way in which they discussed past issues, especially those which had not been satisfactorily resolved. Not surprisingly, I found that discussion of career disappointments, frustrations and grievances were emotionally charged.

3.7.3 The interview context

The physical and 'psychological' environment is likely to affect the relationship between interviewee and interviewer, and consequently the interviewee's responses. I planned to
conduct the interviews in the participant’s own workspace, on the assumption that familiar territory is more conducive to relaxed participation. In practice few participants had a private workspace and the interviews were held in ‘neutral’ territory such as meeting and training rooms.

My main criteria for choosing interview venues were that they should be quiet and private, with minimal likelihood of interruption. Such conditions encouraged participants to engage in the interview process and generally resulted in audible and transcribable tape-recordings. External noise and interruptions were temporarily distracting in a very few interviews, and in one case the quality of the recording was affected.

I had considered interviewing participants in their own homes where they might feel more relaxed, but rejected this idea for a number of reasons. First, participants might not have had a space which met my criteria. Second, a workplace venue seemed more appropriate to a study on workplace career help and might help to maintain that focus. Third, there was a risk that some participants would regard an interview in their homes as intrusive and consequently be reluctant to volunteer. Also I recognised that I might feel uncomfortable (and possibly unsafe) in participants’ homes. Fourth, in very practical terms, home-based interviews would be more costly in terms of time and expense, necessitating visits to 28 different venues. Workplace venues would enable me to access several participants at a single site.

As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) observed, the temporal, as well as the physical, context of the interview needs to be taken into account. As memory and sense-making processes mediate participants’ responses, it is not appropriate to assume that an interviewee’s responses reflect attitudes, behaviours or views that are stable over time and across settings. What precedes, and what is anticipated as following an interview may influence participants’ responses. A brief exchange about the participant’s current work activities and workload helped me to interpret their responses to more focused questions. As noted (3.7.1) I abandoned a direct question about participants’ work activities but I found that current work issues and concerns tended to emerge as the interview progressed and trust strengthened. Awareness of these issues was important - even if they did not emerge from the outset - as they guided me about potentially fruitful areas for exploration and helped me to review and interpret the interview as a whole.
3.8 Data analysis

In this section, I explain my interpretation of the role of data analysis in phenomenological research and my approach to data analysis. I then describe the analytic process and explain the reasons for my choices.

From a phenomenological perspective, the processes of collecting, interpreting and analysing data are not totally separate. Prior theories influence what the researcher attends to, how she interprets and analyses data which, in turn, affects further data collection. From a constructionist viewpoint, the data collected in interviews are locally-produced, plausible accounts generated by the interviewer and interviewee (Silverman, 2000). The purpose of data analysis is to access participants' psychological worlds and what those worlds mean to participants.

My approach to data analysis followed the phenomenological tradition in that I sought to explore and describe the phenomenon of a career helper and the characteristics of valued career helpers as identified by research participants. I aimed to categorise career helpers and their characteristics, and to construct conceptual frameworks linking the categories in order to inform my understanding of similar types of career helpers and their characteristics (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). I used my assumptions, interests and understanding of career and career help as “points of departure” (Charmaz, 1995: 32) to assist in the identification of key themes. I recognised the importance of seeking contradiction and being open to surprise whilst approaching data analysis in an informed way. This approach marks a departure from Husserlian phenomenology (Creswell, 1998; Crotty, 1998) whereby assumptions and presuppositions are usually ‘bracketed’ or ‘set aside’.

3.8.1 Computer-assisted analysis

Early in my data analysis I explored the use of several computer-aided data analysis packages. I selected and purchased Ethnograph V because it was intuitive and fairly straightforward to understand and use, and seemed to serve my purposes effectively. I regarded Ethnograph as an aid to data analysis which would enable: quick retrieval of data coded according to a single or multiple codes; comparison of segments; refinement and development of codes; and identification of relationships. However, once I had started to analyse my data, I became increasingly uncomfortable about using Ethnograph
as I felt that I was losing the integrity and shape of each career story and the inter-relatedness of themes within each story. These feelings are mirrored by other researchers. For example, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) criticised code and retrieve methods for overlooking the form or gestalt of the data, and fragmentation as a significant weakness of computer-assisted qualitative analysis.

As a result of my discomfort, I abandoned Ethnograph and set about cutting, pasting and grouping data segments using Word software. This approach proved to be more engaging than using Ethnograph, because I felt closer to the data whilst being able to further develop and refine themes that cut across career stories (3.8.3.) I continued to have some doubts about losing the integrity of the career stories. In my view, contextualisation requires more attention to the diachronic and synchronic context than merely ‘topping and tailing’ segments. Sometimes, I found that a particular data segment was only meaningful in the light of the whole career story. In other words, I thought that statements needed to be understood in relation to a participant’s career story and her current situation. Beginning to feel that the process of managing the data was becoming overwhelmingly complex, I decided to use a combination of narrative and thematic analysis.

3.8.2 Narrative analysis

I constructed a career story for each participant based on the transcript of my interview with that person. In so doing I highlighted key and contrasting examples of the themes and concepts I had previously identified, and which I continued to develop and revise. In adopting this approach I drew upon the notion of ‘narrative analysis’ (Polkinghorne, 1995) and the practice of writing pro formas and pen portraits (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Narrative analysis involves collecting descriptions of events and encounters which the researcher then configures into a story by means of a plot (Polkinghorne, 1995). The plot gives meaning to the data by showing how they contribute to a particular goal or outcome. My interview questions were designed to collect chronological accounts which would allow me to explore turning points, encounters, individuals and experiences that participants perceived as shaping their careers. Some participants constructed their own plots through their narratives, but in most cases I needed to use appropriate questions to unravel chronology and to probe meaning and explanations. Participants themselves revisited events and encounters when they wished to expand on a
point previously mentioned or to add a further dimension to their story. Transcripts were not therefore chronologically ordered and some contained references to, and details about, a particular person or encounter in several different places. To construct each career story, understand its chronology and the way in which a participant perceived her career being shaped, I needed to move back and forth through each transcript.

At the end of each career story I summarised the most prominent themes and concepts, and noted and commented on the absence of themes which were significant in other stories. To complement the career stories, I constructed spider diagrams to show career helpers and helper roles identified by each participant.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) used their descriptive pen profiles and proformas to substitute for whole transcripts and to compare interpretations. Like Hollway and Jefferson, I found that the career stories enabled me retain and convey a sense of the whole; to highlight and contextualise key themes; and to help identify quotes illustrating those themes. Constructing and using the career stories also enabled me to better focus on the uniqueness of individual cases, and their idiosyncrasies and complexities. Examples of career stories are included and discussed in chapter four (4.2).

3.8.3 Thematic analysis

While narrative analysis requires primarily diachronic data (Polkinghorne, 1995), thematic analysis allows data to be viewed synchronically. As the interview transcripts encapsulated participants’ representations of their perceptions and interpretations at a particular moment in time, using thematic data analysis can illuminate participants’ descriptions of their present situation and their beliefs about how careers are shaped. Combining narrative and thematic analysis allowed me to use narrative cognition to consider situated action and the uniqueness of career stories, and paradigmatic cognition (Bruner, 1986) to recognise the similarities between individuals’ perceptions of career helpers, and to generate categories and concepts.

Although Smith expressed the view that: “There is no one correct way to do qualitative analysis” (1995: 18), methods described by different authors seem remarkably similar, varying more in terminology and scope than process or substance. The process I followed is based on an adaptation and synthesis of steps suggested by Smith (1995) for application to symbolic interactionism and phenomenological research, and by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991) for use in grounded theory analysis.
The analytic process begins with the researcher familiarising herself with the data. Methods of proceeding are broadly similar. Following Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991), I reflected on the data in light of previous research, questioning whether the data supported or challenged existing knowledge and whether they addressed previously unanswered questions. I sought to identify interesting patterns, puzzles, surprises, apparent contradictions and inconsistencies between different groups or individuals, and to identify features that transcend contexts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). For example, one puzzle was the apparent lack of any pattern or characteristics that distinguished participants who identified and described a particular type of career helper from those who did not. Nevertheless, I was able to identify qualities of valued career helpers (chapter six) which seemed to be common across contexts.

Initially concentrating on my first five interviews, I gradually introduced more data to the analysis process as I completed further interviews. I returned to previous transcripts to check themes across cases, and to revise and refine concepts. The account and the diagram (Figure 3.1) are simplified representations, suggesting a linear process, whereas in practice it was lengthy, complex and cyclical.
Figure 3.1: The analytic process

1. Read transcripts and reflected on data.
2. Allocated codes to categories and data segments.
3. Described clarified and refined categories.
4. Revisited data and refined categories.
5. Identified meaningful statements.
6. Grouped meaningful statements and noted emerging themes.
7. Generated master list of categories; described categories in detail; observed links between categories.
8. Listed themes and described their characteristics.
9. Selected focal themes and elevated these to status of category.
10. Revisited data to clarify themes and to check newly emerging themes.
I began by thoroughly reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to identify surprising, unusual or meaningful statements which seemed to support or contradict existing research or theoretical viewpoints about career help. By means of the cut and paste facility on Word, I grouped these meaningful statements into themes which applied across career stories. I compared and contrasted statements in order to refine and clarify the themes and their parameters. I listed emergent themes which I then defined and clarified by identifying key characteristics and by comparing themes with one another. I further developed themes through a process of constantly reviewing the data, and by comparing data segments and themes across and between participants. In this way I was able to identify connections between themes and to cluster and merge some. I found that other groupings did not seem to connect in a coherent way. I checked back to previous transcripts as new themes emerged, and tested and modified themes as appropriate.

I started to consider the type and level of explanations that were emerging, and where the most interesting themes from the data might be leading (Smith, 1995). Amongst the most interesting and relevant themes and oppositions were: temporal context; talk as opposed to experience in career decisions; career helpers and hinderers; happenstance and luck; agency, communion and structure; cumulative career learning in contrast with key decisions and turning points; and individuals' abstractions or theories about how the world of career works. Clearly, there were too many here to pursue in a single study. Following Smith's advice (1995), I selected a central theme - in this case career helpers - and set others aside.

The term career helper relates to the concept of career help introduced in 2.1.6. By career helper, I mean someone who is perceived by a participant as having a role in shaping their career, their career ideas or actions in a way that participant regards as positive. The concept of a career helper is discussed in more detail in section 4.3. My decision to focus on career helpers was influenced by the richness of the data on this topic and the apparent centrality of other people to participants' perceptions of how careers are shaped. In addition, the concept of career helpers is compatible with the community interaction theory (Law, 1981) which I identified as an analytical framework (4.1). By this stage, participants' responses suggested to me that the research was moving towards the development of a typology of career helpers and a categorisation of the qualities and characteristics of valued helpers. Focusing in this way enabled me to retain a body of
manageable and coherent data. Therefore the research questions were refined into more explicit aims (3.9) to guide the interpretation and structuring of the data.

I identified, distinguished and clarified the meaning of the initial helper categories and several helper qualities (chapter four, table 4.1). I then allocated an identifying ‘code’ to each helper category and each helper quality, and coded data segments as appropriate (3.8.4). I began the lengthy and cyclical process of reviewing and refining the categories, keeping in mind the need for codes to be meaningful in relation to the data and to one another (Dey, 1993), and for initially flexible codes to become more specific and exclusive. The process of review and refinement involved checking each category for internal coherence by comparing the data segments within and between participants’ accounts. It involved distinguishing the parameters of each category by comparing usage between accounts, within an individual’s account, and between participants’ accounts and my own constructions. I also checked to see if different categories occurred consistently and frequently together, suggesting that one or another of the categories was obsolete. Splitting (subdividing) and splicing (joining and interweaving) categories (Dey, 1993) eventually led to five helper codes and a master list of categories which I arranged in a coherent order. As I worked on the process of refining the categories, concepts emerged from amongst the key themes and I began to see how they might be linked to form conceptual frameworks.

As stated above, qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to identify themes which are meaningful and relevant to participants, and to the research topic. ‘Meaningful’ themes are those which recur and are interrelated throughout an individual’s career story and across career stories. Relevant themes may be identified from participants’ accounts and theory using “systematic thematic analysis” (Plummer, 1995: 61). As noted above, Law’s community interaction theory (1981) provided an analytical framework which guided me (to some extent) in identifying themes. I recognised that in privileging this theoretical perspective, I was effectively setting aside other valid perspectives and issues such as the role of gender, agency and communion (Marshall, 1989), life stage (Super, 1990), emotion (Kidd, 1998) and opportunity structure (Roberts, 1981).

Referring back to themes and concepts in career theory and research, helped me to identify abstract and concrete concepts which address participants’ interpretations of both the process and outcome of career help. In terms of career research, many of the existing studies focused on managers’ experiences of career management or on students’
experiences of professional career guidance. Although the career issues and aspirations of managers and students, and their expectations of career help may differ from those of my participants, the literature on these studies highlighted some themes which helped to inform data analysis. Potentially illuminating themes in the literature on career research included: the quality of helping relationships; the value of multiple sources of help; the importance of individual career discussions; and the role of affective help. Having said that, my aim was to use the data as the prime source of ideas about categories and key concepts. Thus, relevant themes were those identified by participants as shaping career and in particular the career helpers they valued.

3.8.4 Coding

Codes enable the researcher to ‘tag’ or label relevant sections of text, to identify where particular themes occur in each interview transcript, and to retrieve and compare data segments. Codes words can be in vivo (participants’ own words) or abstract (based on theory) or reflect participants’ concerns (Charmaz, 1995). Codes may be descriptive, in which case they do not involve interpretation, or they may be interpretative, in that they incorporate the researcher’s interpretation of meaning. The codes I used were constructed from my interpretation of participants’ descriptions of career helpers and the qualities of valued helpers. Career helper codes were intended to convey the role played by those helpers, whilst codes used to identify valued characteristics and qualities summarise the essence of these qualities.

In some cases I used ‘parallel coding’, that is, I allocated several same-level codes to a single data segment. For example, some descriptions of a particular encounter or career helper illustrated more than one helper category or combined a helper category with a description of helper qualities. If superordinate themes are identified, hierarchical coding can be used to indicate different orders of coding and to analyse data at different levels of specificity. Higher order codes give a good overview of general direction, whilst lower-order ones allow for fine distinctions between and within career stories. King (1998), in describing template analysis, suggests that the most manageable and helpful numbers of hierarchical codes are 2, 3 or 4. In this study, I used hierarchical codes to distinguish the different constituents of key helper qualities, but only parallel coding for the career helper categories.
3.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter I explained and justified my methodology and the research process: these are summarised in diagrammatic form (Figure 3.2) and verbally as follows. I explicated my philosophical assumptions, namely that reality is subjective, internal and socially constructed, and that knowledge is socially constructed and interpretative. I explained that my choice of a qualitative approach was shaped by my world-view, the nature of the research questions and my skills. I described how I used semi-structured interviews to collect career stories with the intention of exploring employees' sense-making about the role of career helpers and hinderers in shaping their careers. I argued that subjectivity adds to, rather than detracts from, the research process and findings.

I discussed the relevance of reliability and validity in qualitative research and how I promoted the quality and rigour of data collection and interpretation. I noted that validity is more relevant in qualitative research than replication and consistency, and that it is more appropriate to think of external validity in terms of theoretical propositions rather than specific populations. I promoted validity by: clarifying, summarising and verifying my interpretations with participants during the interviews; seeking the views of others in order to challenge my thinking; and using feedback loops to review and revise my interpretations.

I explained my choice of purposive sampling and described the criteria, process and issues around recruitment of organisations and participants. I described how data collection, data analysis and interpretation are interwoven in qualitative research, and how focusing is shaped by both. Although the process of reviewing the focus of the research was on-going, I identified two key points of review. First, after the initial set of five interviews I revised the interview guide by adding some questions and abandoning others. Second, once immersed in the data analysis, I selected the focal themes I intended to pursue. By the time I had collected all my data and made substantial progress with the data analysis, my key research aim was to:

To construct new conceptual frameworks which explicate, from an individual perspective, the role of others in shaping careers, and to extend and provide insight into existing knowledge about career helpers.
I then divided this into the following aims:

1. To identify the roles that non-managerial employees perceive ‘career helpers’ and ‘career hinderers’ as playing in shaping their careers.

2. To understand and contextualise encounters these employees perceive as shaping their careers.

3. To identify the characteristics and qualities that these employees value in their career helpers.

4. To examine how these characteristics and qualities relate to the characteristics of accepted professional career guidance practice and the qualities of professional careers advisers.
Figure 3.2 - Methodology and research process

Assumptions

- Reality – subjective and internal

Knowledge – interpretive, individually and socially constructed

Research Approach

- Qualitative and based upon elements of two interpretivist traditions

Method

- Phenomenology
- Symbolic Interaction
- Ideographic

Data collection

- In-depth interviewing to collect career stories

Data analysis

- Narrative and thematic
- Identify focal phenomena and refine aims

Interpretation

Discussion and conclusions
CHAPTER FOUR - FRAMING AND CONTEXTUALISING THE DATA

In chapter three I described the process I used to construct participants' career stories and I identified career helpers as the focal phenomena of this study. The current chapter serves to frame and contextualise the two data chapters that follow. First, I describe and explain my choice of analytical framework. Next, I introduce two career stories to illustrate the career helper roles in the diachronic context of participants' careers. Moving on, I describe how I developed the helper categories, and I introduce concepts which are key to understanding chapters five and six.

4.1 The analytical framework

I have chosen to base my analytical framework on an adaptation of Law's community-interaction theory (Law 1981, 1986) which I introduced in chapter two (2.2.4.3) and revisit here. According to community-interaction theory, the influences of self-concept and sociological forces on career development are mediated and modified by exchanges between the individual and her community, rather than being wholly a question of psychological need or sociological incentive. Community refers to family, peer group, neighbourhood and ethnic group; mediation to the flow of influence through communities; and modification to the way in which influences are filtered and changed by the perceptions and interpretations of communities and their interactions with participants. In this way, community-interaction processes modify the predictions of functional sociology, for example, the expectation that class or ethnic group determines a person's career. Community transmits its own influences to individuals which in turn modify their self-concept. Influences are transmitted through: expectations about what is demanded of a person; feedback about the suitability of different roles; support which reinforces aspirations and a particular line of action; models who represent new possibilities for a person's life; contact with people who can facilitate career; and impressions of new environments and relationships derived from observations, verbal reports and shared experiences (Law, 1986). Law does not suggest that community interactions are always benign: indeed he warns of the risks and negative effects of such interactions (eg Law, 1999; Spurling, 1995). Law (2003b) suggested that community-interaction theory might be represented diagrammatically as Figure 4.1.
I have a number of reasons for choosing a community-interaction framework. First, community-interaction is predicated on the notions of knowledge as interpretive and socially constructed, and interaction as playing a key role in shaping individuals' careers. Thus community-interaction is consistent with my epistemological assumptions and my research method.

Second, I was interested in illuminating individuals' perceptions of their encounters with other people and the roles of those people in shaping careers. Community-interaction theory provides a framework which foregrounds the personal exchange between individuals and the people with whom they are in contact. The framework also enables me to access and analyse data rich in accounts of the role of others - friends, family members, colleagues, managers and professional contacts - in shaping participants' careers.

Third, by adopting a "mid-range focus" (Law 1981: 142), community-interaction theory links and unifies sociological and psychological perspectives; a link that is strengthened in my study by the use of life story method. Through participants' accounts I gained access to their perceptions and understandings of the relationship between: their own roles as agents whose actions impact on the world (a psychological perspective); the roles
of other people; and the interactions between participants and others (a sociological perspective).

Fourth, I wanted to explore the relevance of community-interaction theory to the analysis of adult career development and guidance as opposed to the study of the development, education and career choices of young people upon which it was originally based. Although Law (1986) and Spurling (1995) provided ideas for the practical application of community-interaction theory, I found little research on the subject and concluded that an exploratory study into individuals’ perceptions of the role of career helpers in shaping careers would be a valuable contribution to existing knowledge. Having said that, my intention was not to systematically test, prove or disprove the validity of community-interaction theory, but to use the theory as a framework to assist with the data analysis process.

Fifth, as illustrated in chapter two (2.3.4), community-interaction provides a framework for cross-study comparisons. Finally, community-interaction approach makes intuitive sense to me and resonates with my experience as a careers adviser when I observed that peers and parents seemed to play a significant role in shaping the career choices of young people.

Despite acknowledging the relevance and value of community-interaction, I have taken some liberties with the original formulation in order to apply the theory to my study. First, although Law stressed personal exchange (1981), he used the term ‘communities’ which suggests to me a greater emphasis on collective influence than I intend in this study. As my immediate concern is to understand participants’ perceptions of the role of individuals, I refer to career helpers and hinderers rather than communities. However, I contend that understanding helpers and hinderers also provides some insight into participants’ social worlds, and I offer such insights where my data permit.

Second, both community-interaction theory and my research data address the role of structure in shaping career, but with some differences in scope. To me, structure means the social systems of institutions. I concur with the following definition of structure as the:

...characteristics of the society or organization, including its members, that limit access to or opportunities in the occupational and/or organizational environment.

(Fitzgerald and Betz, 1994: 107).
However, I contend that structure can enable as well as constrain agency. In specific terms, participants in my study commonly discussed helpers in relation to: microsystems such as their employing organisations, families and social worlds; mesosystems such as professions and occupations; and exosystems which impinge on their immediate setting, including the world of work and the mass media (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Community-interaction theory refers to perceptions of the labour market, but also to class and ethnicity which are less discernible from my data.

Third, while Law (1981) emphasised the role of social communities and personal contacts, I wished to include formal, as well as informal, relationships and encounters. As a result of these differences, I adapted community-interaction theory to suit my study (Figure 4.2.)

**Figure 4.2 - A diagrammatic representation of my analytical framework based on Law's community-interaction theory**

![Diagram of community-interaction theory](image)

Community-interaction theory suggests a two-way process in which career helpers’ perceptions and interpretations are modified by - as well as modifying - those of participants. Community-interaction emphasises the collective level, with groups of helpers and hinderers, as well as individuals, playing a part. Although I concur with this interpretation, the modifying role of groups and the modifying effects of individuals’ perceptions on helpers did not emerge as themes in my data and analysis of these processes is beyond the remit of my study.

I recognise that the apparently neat delineation between participants, helpers, structure and careers oversimplifies what is essentially a complex process of interacting.
relationships. Linearity of the written form further simplifies the different dimensions of individuals' career stories and the overarching story of this study. However, to access participants' perceptions of the role of others in shaping their careers, and to present a clear and accessible account, I will separate strands which are essentially interwoven. Using different methods of data analysis and approaching the discussion from different perspectives, I aim to reconstruct some of the complexities. One way I do this is by presenting examples of participants' career stories.

4.2 Career stories

The stories that follow illustrate the notion of narrative analysis described in 3.8.2. and the sense-making process of two research participants. However, my main purpose in presenting these stories is to illustrate, from participants' perspectives, the synchronic and diachronic contexts in which career helpers act. Synchronic context includes an understanding of the way in which careers are shaped by the complex interplay of career helpers, structure and participants' agency. Placing helpers and hinderers in the diachronic context of participants' careers highlights the integrity and uniqueness of each story: aspects which risk being lost if analysis is wholly thematic. Neither of the stories I have chosen can be described as typical, although both illustrate the complexity of careers, and the concepts which are relevant to, and prominent in, other participants' career stories.

The stories are my constructions based on the research interviews and as such are summaries which have been edited: first by their narrators who selected and focused on particular encounters, events and individuals; and second by me in the recording and recounting. That is, the career stories have been filtered by two sets of understandings and interpretations; shaped by issues that we attended to and focused on, and those we overlooked or chose to ignore. They are not intended to be definitive versions of the participants' careers.

Peter, whose story I recount first (Figure 4.3), described himself as having a "vocation" and being "saddened" by negative public perceptions of his profession. In this respect, he is atypical of the participants in this study. When I met Peter, he was 39 years old and had been working for 13 years as an animal technician for a pharmaceutical company.
Peter left school at the age of 16, without qualifications and with very little idea about what he wanted to do, although he “had always been interested in working with animals”. He tried a number of different jobs including brick laying, panel beating and window cleaning, with the aim of earning enough money to buy a motor bike, and finding out “what the world of work was like”.

Believing that he needed some qualifications and confident in his ability to pass exams, Peter enrolled for evening classes to study for O levels. At college he discovered enjoyment in studying and a particular love for Biology. During this period of “maturation”, Peter came to feel confident that he could work with animals, and that this was “the obvious step”.

In 1980, he started work as a veterinary nurse, a job he subsequently held for four years. Peter enjoyed his work reporting that: “Once I started working as a veterinary nurse, I found my vocation if you like. I’m quite happy, very happy – working with animals”. During this time he learnt from his employer about the importance of animal experimentation in the development of veterinary drugs. Through his friendship with a veterinary nurse, who subsequently became an animal technician, Peter learnt a great deal about animal technology and revised his previously negative image of this work.

The constraints of poor pay and lack of development as a veterinary nurse, led Peter to explore avenues that would enable him to “build a future”, whilst continuing to work with animals. A job as an animal technician seemed to fulfil his aims and was attractive since his employer and a former colleague had portrayed the work as valuable and humane. In 1984 Peter went to work in a university as an animal technician. He very much enjoyed his new job and came to see himself as the “right type of person to do the work”.

Although on a fixed-term contract, Peter could have applied for an extension but he wanted to work for a pharmaceutical company where he envisioned having more opportunities for training and progression. Using his contacts, Peter’s boss found out about vacancies at the pharmaceutical company where Peter subsequently went to work.
Here Peter was impressed by the ability, sense of vocation and care exhibited by two other technicians whom he endeavoured to emulate.

With the support of his new employer, Peter studied for six years to achieve full qualification as an animal technician. His successful work was rewarded with pay rises and a re-grading, but Peter felt his progress was inhibited by the Performance Development Review system and his line manager’s “inability to enrich people”.

Peter thought of his work as essential for the development of drugs, and regarded the role of animal technician as that of “advocate” for the animals in his care. However, he was “saddened” that negative media representation of animal experimentation which inhibited open discussion of his work in social settings.

Peter hoped to progress to the next management level in the coming year and envisaged staying with his employing company, because his pension was tied up with the company, and because of his family responsibilities.

From the time Peter decided that he was suited to working with animals, the theme of career helpers and hinderers begins to emerge. The veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse provided new perspectives on the world of animal technology. His university boss spoke to a former colleague about the possibility of a job in a commercial organisation when Peter expressed an interest in such a move. In contrast, Peter regarded his current boss as hindering his career. Peter’s story illustrates how the role of other people, structure and individual agency are interwoven to shape career. For example, lack of opportunity for progression, first as a veterinary nurse and later as an university technician, motivated Peter to seek development opportunities elsewhere. In other words, Peter’s account shows how the mesosystem of occupation and the microsystem of organisation (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) played a part in shaping his career.

Jill’s story provides similar insights. Jill (Figure 4.4) describes how, with the help of friends and colleagues, she found a means of earning a satisfactory living while pursuing her keen interest in horse-riding. Jill was 39 years old when we met and had been employed for 9 years by a company which manufactures, sells and services weighing machines.
Jill left a private boarding school at the age of 16 and went to a typing college, although her only interest was in working with horses. After finishing college, and much to her parents' disappointment, Jill found work as a groom. After a few years in this job, she began a period of alternating between sales work and horse grooming.

When Jill was 24 years old, her parents opened a shoe shop where Jill subsequently worked for two years. By the time a friend invited her to be a director of his new garden furniture business, she had decided to "make a career" that would enable her to save enough money to buy her own horse. Her friend's offer looked like an opportunity which might further this aim.

Through her new job, Jill gained her first experience of administration which she enjoyed, and field sales which, to her surprise, she neither enjoyed nor could do. Consequently, her friend took over field sales while Jill concentrated on administration. She continued in this job until the company's suppliers ran into difficulty and Jill began to doubt the wisdom of combining friendship with business. At this time, another friend drew her attention to a telesales job with a loan company for which Jill successfully applied.

At first shift work, customer liaison and the busy atmosphere of telesales were enjoyable, but after a while the shifts and lack of challenge began to pall and Jill applied to move to a newly-created department with the same organisation. However, because of her limited numerical aptitude and the inadequate training she received, Jill soon hated this job.

About this time, Jill and her boyfriend (who worked for the same company) were both made redundant.

After about five months 'temping' with an agency, Jill found a job as a service administrator which she described as second only to working with horses. She enjoyed the "buzz", the variety of problems and the telephone work. After about 18 months, the desire for promotion and the wish to extricate herself from a situation where she was "at logger heads" with a co-worker, motivated Jill to apply for, and secure, a job in the customer services department.
Initially she did not want to progress beyond this position, but her aspirations changed as her line manager identified skills of which Jill had not previously been aware, and encouraged her to move on. After gaining experience as the team “guru”, Jill felt ready to apply for a more senior post, which she secured with encouragement and help from colleagues.

At the time of the research interview, Jill regarded her job situation as “a good compromise”, which enabled her to earn enough money to own a horse, and to ride and compete regularly. She expressed a lack of interest in further advancement.

Like Peter, Jill identified more career helpers than hinderers. In her story, social contacts seemed more significant than in Peter’s. By offering her a directorship and administrative role, Jill’s friend introduced her to new career worlds, as did the friend who told her about the telesales vacancy. Importantly, her line manager showed her a different view of herself by highlighting skills that Jill had not recognised, and by encouraging her to advance her career.

The co-worker with whom Jill had a difficult relationship might be described as a career ‘hinderer’, although in Jill’s view this relationship had a positive dimension as it provided additional impetus for her to apply for promotion. From Jill’s perspective, the main constraints on her career related to micro and mesosystems such as lack of training, supplier chain problems and company redundancies, some of which may reflect exosystems including economic fluctuations. In this way Jill’s story illustrates the interplay of structure, career helpers and individual agency in shaping her career and enabling her to sustain a key non-work interest.

As Jill, Peter and the other participants seemed to perceive career helpers as playing a significant role in shaping their careers, this is an appropriate point at which to discuss what I mean by career helpers and hinderers, and to identify the people who might fulfil these roles.

4.3 Career helpers and career hinderers

Career helpers are people whom participants perceived as having a role in positively shaping their career. Help may involve: direct encounters with participants; the impact of action on organisational structure; or intervention with another individual (a third party)
on the participant's behalf. Helpers may act: on their own initiative; in response to a request from the participant; or through organisational processes and systems such as staff review or appraisal. In most cases participants perceived career helpers as acting intentionally.

Although my prime concern is with career helpers, I also discuss the role of career hinderers who were identified by some participants as significant in shaping careers. This is most apparent in respect of 'gatekeepers' (5.5) who were perceived as barring, as well as enabling, access to opportunities. In some instances, participants expressed the belief that their careers may have been limited by the inopportune absence of a particular category of helper. I have included career hinderers because their role is less well documented and because contrasting helpers and hinderers helps to clarify the roles, valued characteristics and qualities of the former. By 'career hinderers', I mean individuals whom participants perceived as constraining their careers by frustrating their career hopes and ambitions, barring access to desired opportunities, discouraging their efforts to pursue their goals, or failing to provide appropriate help when requested. In some instances participants perceived career hindrance as inadvertent, and in others as deliberate.

Career helpers and hinderers were not only those with whom the participants had formal or professional relationships. Indeed, participants varied in their experiences of professional career guidance and organisational career management, and many were more forthcoming about informal career helpers. In the work context, career helpers included training officers, human resource specialists, senior managers, line managers, supervisors and co-workers. Outside of the workplace, helpers included career guidance professionals, family members, friends, professional contacts, employment agency staff and tutors.

A more sophisticated understanding of career helpers and hinderers can be attained by understanding the process I used to develop the categories.

4.4 Developing the categories

The categories were derived primarily from my interpretation of the data (with some reference to the careers literature) and as such are intended to reflect the helper roles identified by participants. In developing and refining the categories I attended to helper actions, and to their interactions with participants, other individuals or with structure.
These actions and interactions illustrate helpers' roles in mediating between participant and micro and mesosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) by conveying information, ideas or images; transmitting their own influences; and modifying structure and participants' perceptions of themselves and of careers. Table 4.1 summarises an early categorisation of career helpers.

Using a cyclical process, I rearranged and compared relevant data segments to ensure that those allocated to a particular category did indeed share a central theme and common characteristics, and to ensure that categories were distinguishable one from another. I compared and cross-checked the categories, seeking out overlapping and obsolete categories. This led me to revise and refine the helper roles many times. For example, I amalgamated the categories of sponsor/advocate and conduit because they did not seem to be sufficiently distinct to warrant separate categories. I labelled this combined category ‘intermediary’, a word which seemed to best represent the main theme of the relevant data segments. I found that coaches/mentors formed a coherent category, but the term adviser better defined their role in offering opinions and recommendations. I was wary about using the term ‘mentor’ because of the wide range of associated meanings and connotations (2.3.4.1) while ‘coach’ seemed too narrow to convey the underpinning theme. Further examination of the data showed that very few participants referred to role models (as defined here), and that helpers whom I had defined as role models were effectively acting as insightful informants. Comparing data segments in the informants category with those I had categorised as examples of role models, reinforced this view. Consequently, I merged role models with informants.
Table 4.1 – An early categorisation of career helpers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career helper role</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gatekeepers</td>
<td>Provide or deny access to development opportunities, training and jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnesses</td>
<td>Provide feedback on the quality of participants’ work, and their strengths and weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors or advocates</td>
<td>Intervene with a third party on a participant’s behalf, or promote that person to a third party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduits</td>
<td>Provide access to contacts and networks of other people with influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informants</td>
<td>Offer ‘insider’ or expert knowledge about careers and jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective providers</td>
<td>Offer ‘outsider’ knowledge/an external, impartial or objective perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporters/encouragers/</td>
<td>Provide support; build participants’ confidence; challenge their self-perceptions; and encourage perseverance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches/mentors</td>
<td>Help participants to learn about jobs or occupations and/or develop their understanding of how careers work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role models</td>
<td>People with whom the participant identifies and who provide insights into a job or career through their behaviour and actions, rather than (or as well as) offering verbal descriptions of their work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I continued to be troubled by the 'perspective provider' and 'supporter, encourager, motivator' categories. Many participants had referred to the importance of encouragement and support. However, these strong and recurring themes were usually associated with other helper roles, and especially with gatekeepers, witnesses and advisers. After once again comparing the data segments allocated to these categories, and reflecting further on the meaning of each, I concluded that encouragement and support, rather than representing helper categories, were indicative of the qualities which participants associated - in varying degrees - with all of the helper categories (chapter six). The remaining career helper categories were: adviser, informant, witness, gatekeeper and intermediary. I was confident that each had a distinct core, but I also recognised a degree of overlap at the periphery. Through a further review of the data to identify simultaneously occurring categories, I noticed that it was not uncommon for a single helper to fulfil more than one role: an issue I return to in chapter five (5.7).

However, I also observed that all categories of helper occurred alone as well as in combination with others and that no two categories occurred consistently in combination. This gave me confidence that my categories were sufficiently robust.

4.5 Career helpers, world-view and self-view

In chapter five I use data segments embedded in their diachronic context to show the participant's perception of her career before encountering her helper and her interpretation of the impact of that encounter. My intention is not to suggest a direct causal link between a single encounter and a participant's current career - many intervening events, actions and encounters are likely to have contributed to outcomes. Also, participants are likely to have re-constructed and re-evaluated encounters, their impact and meaning in light of subsequent events. It is important here, not to identify the 'real' impact of an encounter, but to understand how participants construed that impact at the time of the research interview.

To relate my data analysis to community-interaction and to further develop that framework, I am introducing the concept of 'career world-view'². This refers to an

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² The terminology, although not the concepts, career self-view and career world-view derive from the terms 'self-observation generalisations' and 'world-view generalisations' (Mitchell and Krumboltz, 1990).
individual's perception, interpretation and understanding of jobs, occupations and how careers unfold. Career world-view is not therefore limited to the static notion of job or occupational knowledge but includes personal theories about process. This concept is supported by other researchers, notably proponents of story as a means of illuminating career. Law, for example, suggested that:

...people should be helped, through reflection on their own and other people's career biographies, to become their own career-development theoreticians... (1996: 65)

A person's career world-view may relate to careers in general, to a specific job, occupation, company or organisation. It is subjective and unique to each individual, although it may overlap in some respects with the career world-views of others. In other words, an individual's career world-view contains some consensual or intersubjective understandings and some that are unique to that person. Peter's career world-view, for example, included the theory that line managers played an important part in shaping his career. In his account, line managers variously influenced his perception of animal technology, helped him to find a desirable job and blocked his advancement.

Paired with career world-view is the concept of 'career self-view' by which I mean a person's perception of herself in relation to her career at a particular point in time. A person's career self-view includes her ideal career if she perceives that ideal to be attainable. Similarly, if a person's job, occupation and work environment are in tune with the way she sees herself and the possibilities open to her, her current career situation can be said to correspond with her career self-view. For example, when Peter, who had a long-standing interest in working with animals, started work as a veterinary nurse he felt that he had found his vocation. In other words, his ideal career, his career self-view and his career situation converged at that time. Later, as he became dissatisfied with the pay and prospects associated with this occupation, and learnt about animal technology, he began to reformulate his career self-view.

At first sight career self-view may seem superfluous because of similarities with the established concepts of occupational self-concept (Super, 1953) and subjective career. I justify the introduction of career self-view on the grounds that it highlights different focal concerns, as well as being a subtly different concept.

In keeping with his focus on adult development and personal meaning, Super conceptualised career in terms of an individual's system or constellation of self-concepts.
and her changing life roles. He defined self-concept as a "picture of self in some role, situation or position, performing some set of functions, or in some web of relationships" (Super, 1990). The prefix 'occupational' identifies the context in which the individual is picturing herself. The notion of self-concept is valuable for studies which seek to understand and categorise individuals' pictures of self in different life contexts and roles, but this is not my purpose here. Instead, I foreground individuals' perceptions of self in relation to career and their perceptions of the role of social systems in shaping careers. Thus, the paired concepts of career world-view and career self-view are more relevant to my purpose. Also, it seems appropriate to use self-concept sparingly in light of Super's comment that personal construct would have been a better term because it reflected a person's perception of her environment as well as her perception of self.

Comparisons between career self-view and subjective career also highlight differences in focal concern. Subjective career is defined as the sense a person makes of her work history, skills, attitudes and beliefs, and objective career as a person's pattern of positions and work experiences (Jackson et al., 1996). In other words, the terminology highlights the contrast between subjective and objective dimensions, which is not a central to my study. As noted in 2.1.3.2, a more fundamental problem with subjective career is conceptual. In one sense any account of a career is subjective because it is constructed from a particular perspective and based on the account-giver's own perceptions and interpretations. A person other than the owner of a career can give an outside perspective but not one that is objective in the sense of being 'real' or 'true'. That is, the conceptualisation tends to obfuscate the notion of subjective career as constructed through its owner's sense-making processes. Neither are the terms external and internal career entirely satisfactory as they suggest that career unfolds either outside of, and detached from a person, or within the person and disconnected from her context. These concerns suggest a need to review terminology and concepts, and potential for additional, if not alternative, terminology.

Setting aside these concerns, subjective career and career self-view are similar in that both are characterised by re-interpretation and reconstruction. As a person interprets and re-interprets her past and present experiences and encounters, she constructs and reconstructs her subjective career, thus her present construction may differ from past and future ones. Similarly, an individual's career self-view changes over time and is shaped
by her perceptions and interpretations of her experiences. However, definitions of subjective career commonly focus on the past, whereas career self-view is present- and future-oriented. It is important to note that this is only a question of emphasis: some definitions of career (eg Cochran, 1994) include a future dimension. Also career self-view is intended to acknowledge the shaping role of past experiences and encounters. By prefixing self-view with career - as opposed to occupation - my intention is to convey the notions of breadth and temporality, and to suggest that past experience precedes and shapes a person’s view of her present self and her possible futures. Attention to future and changing career self-view also provides a further distinction between career self-view and occupational self-concept: although Super (1990) proposed that self-concepts change over time, he regarded them as increasingly stable from adolescence to late maturity.

To further illustrate the difference between subjective career and career self-view, I will refer again to Jill and Peter. Their career stories are effectively abbreviated versions of their subjective careers at the time of the research interview. The stories include sequence and perceptions of cause and effect which are absent from career self-view. For example, Jill’s career self-view was as a service office manager, happy with her current level of responsibility and earning sufficiently well to support her riding activities. In other words, her career self-view corresponded with her career situation. Peter’s career self-view, on the other hand, was not: he saw himself as capable of handling greater responsibilities.

To sum up, I have introduced the term ‘career self-view’ to convey a perspective and an emphasis which are subtly different from either occupational self-concept or subjective career. Career self-view and career world-view are important concepts in the description and discussion of career helpers.

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter framed and contextualised the data analysis discussed in chapters five and six. I revisited Law’s community-interaction theory (1981, 1986) and explained my reasons for choosing this theory to frame my analysis. I described my adaptation of community-interaction where career helpers are construed as mediating between micro, mesosystems and exosystems, and participants and in so doing modify structure, participants’ career self-view and career world-view. I defined career self-view as an
individual's perception of herself in relation to career, and career world-view as her perception, interpretation and understanding of how careers unfold.

To illustrate the role of career helpers in the diachronic and synchronic contexts of participants’ careers, I presented two career stories. I showed how career helpers were perceived as playing a part in shaping participants’ careers, and how the roles of career helpers, hinderers, structure and participant agency are interwoven in the shaping process.

I developed the concept of ‘career helper’ which I defined as a person perceived by participants as having a role in positively shaping their careers. I described how helpers do this through encounters with participants, their action in relation to structure and/or their intervention with another individual on the participant’s behalf. I explained how including analysis of career hinderers furthers understanding of career helpers.

I described the process used to categorise career helpers and how I identified five helper roles: adviser, informant, witness, gatekeeper and intermediary. I explained how I reached the conclusion that encouragement, challenge and support could be interpreted as valued helper qualities, rather than helper roles. Roles and helper qualities are explored in more detail in chapters five and six respectively.
CHAPTER FIVE - CAREER HELPER ROLES

This chapter seeks to address the following aims:

1. To identify the roles that non-managerial employees perceive 'career helpers' and 'career hinderers' as playing in shaping their careers.

2. To understand and contextualise encounters these employees perceive as shaping their careers.

5.1 Introduction

In chapter four I set the scene for the current chapter by introducing the concept of career helpers and the five helper roles of adviser, informant, witness, gatekeeper and intermediary. In the present chapter I describe each helper category in detail using data segments from the interview transcripts to clarify and illustrate my meaning. I embed data segments in their diachronic context to show participants' perceptions of their careers before encountering each helper and their interpretation of the impact of that encounter. The description and analysis of each helper category follows a common pattern. First, I describe the participants who identified helpers in the category under discussion and the relationship between those participants and their helpers. Moving on, I analyse and illustrate participants' perceptions of helper actions and the impact of their actions on the participant and her career. I compare each category with types of career guidance, mentoring, career management and career helpers described in the literature. I close each section by summarising the key learning points. I then discuss multi-role helpers and relationship constellations (5.7), before concluding the chapter by drawing together the main threads and reviewing my progress towards my research aims.

5.2 Advisers

When I refer to an 'adviser', I mean a career helper (or hinderer) who offers opinions, suggestions or recommendations which participants report as having shaped their careers. Advisers included professional career advisers, but also managers, colleagues, family members and friends. As information and advice were strongly interwoven in participants' discourse and some - although not all - advisers were also identified as informants, it is not always easy to distinguish between these two categories. On the other hand, many informants (over half) were not perceived to be advisers. A key
distinguishing feature is that informants only communicated knowledge, whilst advisers offered suggestions and recommendations based on knowledge.

5.2.1 Participants and advisers

Twenty-six participants identified a total of 60 helpers who acted as advisers. Twenty-two participants reported receiving advice from more than one person. Encountering advisers does not appear to relate to gender as 11 of the 12 women, and 15 of the 16 men referred to advisers.

I identified a range of participant-adviser relationships, although workbased or structurally attached (Kram, 1986) advisers, including managers, training staff and personnel staff and colleagues were most prominent, accounting for nearly half (27) of those mentioned by participants. Most advisers were semi-formal or informal helpers. A few (three) participants regarded their line manager or supervisor as a person from whom they would definitely not seek advice, suggesting that helper-participant relationship and helper qualities are relevant here (see chapter six). Nine participants identified or described the qualities of a range of potential advisers including line managers, training staff, friends and college lecturers.

Professional careers advisers featured significantly (mentioned by 14 participants). This is unsurprising given that participants were asked to recount their career stories from the point of leaving school. Also, five of the participants (the car production workers) had been invited to participate in the study because of their recent contact with a careers adviser. Interestingly, careers advisers were commonly perceived as directive, although advisers themselves usually regard their practice as influenced by non-directive counselling approaches (Kidd et al., 1994; Watts and Kidd, 2000).

Thirteen participants identified advisers who were friends or family. Three of those who referred to receiving advice from their parents were over 30 years of age and talked about the role of parental advice in shaping their early decisions and subsequent careers. Three participants reported that their parents had been unable to offer advice because of work pressures or lack of relevant knowledge. Two expressed the view that advice was not forthcoming from anyone.

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3 See 2.3.6.1 for an explanation of the meaning and limitations of attachment and formality as relationship descriptors, and a discussion of proximity as a way of refining the attachment/formality framework.
5.2.2 The role and impact of advisers

Participants' discourse suggests that advisers were perceived as helping them to identify a career direction, and/or to take action in pursuit of a career idea or aim. Participants' accounts illustrate the positive, negative and unintended impact of advice on career, and the varied consequences of not heeding advice.

5.2.2.1 Career direction

Not surprisingly, uncertainty about career direction appears to be associated with the expectation of receiving advice, and willingness to accept advice about career direction. For example, Prakash reported following his school careers adviser's recommendation partly because of feeling "so stupid and confused at the time".

That participants associated advice with help in finding a career direction is exemplified by William's encounters, first with a careers adviser at school and later with his line manager:

I had advice from a careers adviser at school, but I wasn't quite sure that I wanted to do [...] I said to [his line manager] I felt like at a crossroad. I want to move on [...] I was kind of a bit confused and I wanted a bit of help.

Advice about career direction could be general or very specific. Atypically, Andy's parents gave him general careers advice, seemingly based on their career world-view:

...get something behind you like a trade or some qualification then if you go on and do something that you want to do and it fails, you've got something to fall back on, something that you can always do". If you trained in this and then say I go and, I don't know, to do anything and it goes wrong, you can always come back and do engineering, can't you, because it's like sense really to get something behind you before you try other things that are more likely to fail, something like owning a bar or something like that. If you go bust, you can always go back to something that you can do and get paid for.

Andy appears to have assimilated this advice and used it to underpin his career thinking. At the time of the research interview, he was training to be an engineer, despite his
professed lack of interest in, or commitment to, the occupation, and his expressed long-term ambition to run a pub in Ireland.

Some participants perceived advice as helpful and significant in shaping their longer-term careers. For example, having left an unsatisfactory job as a trainee accountant, Belinda approached an employment agency for help in finding temporary auditing work while she decided whether or not to pursue an earlier idea to train as a teacher:

*I needed to work for most of another year and I went to see this lady and I think it was really her who sort of put it for me that if I had sort of skills like typing and word processing I'd pick up a job really quickly [...] I'd keep myself employed. And I think it was really on her advice that I did do that...*

Belinda subsequently “changed direction completely” and funded herself through a secretarial course. Regarding secretarial work as short-term, Belinda started to accept temporary assignments. At this stage, she seemed to have acted on her advisers’ interpretation of labour market contingency, rather than being attracted to the work itself. That is, her encounter with the employment consultant played a part in changing her career world-view and her actions, but left her career self-view intact. However, following this advice may have had longer-term repercussions, initiating a chain of events which led Belinda to a responsible position in a company where she had previously been employed on a temporary basis.

Belinda regarded the employment consultant’s advice as having a positive outcome, but this was not always the case, particularly when advisers’ recommendations did not resonate with participants’ career self-view in terms of their ambitions, interests or abilities. For example, Prakash interpreted his school careers interview as pivotal in the subsequent shape of his career:

*He [the careers adviser] was saying that [...] that I should apply for a technician engineering place [...] I wasn’t really into my maths and science. I was more like business roles and you know like marketing and stuff [...] that was the crucial point [...] If I’d made the right choice then, maybe I’d be a lot happier with what I’m doing now [...] I was guided the wrong path...*

Prakash applied for, and was accepted on the recommended training scheme but found the work too difficult and left to study business. He was successful on this course but, enticed by high wages, he applied for and secured a job as a production operative on a car
assembly line where he felt frustrated and unhappy. For Prakash, acting on his adviser’s world-view, without being able to relate to that view and without changing his career self-view, had a negative outcome.

Not all participants heeded advice which did not resonate with their career self-view. Rachel’s colleagues and peers advised her against moving from ward-based nursing to an outpatients department which they regarded as a sanctuary for inadequate or physically unfit nurses. Rachel ignored this advice because it did not take account of her wish to establish a work pattern compatible with family life. Once established in her new role, Rachel registered for a degree course to further her longer-term career prospects and set about raising the status and profile of the outpatient department. In this way, not only did Rachel pursue her career self-view, and her preferred family role, but she endeavoured to change her colleagues’ career world-view of nursing.

Like Rachel, Tony ignored advice, although in his case because his career world-view was incompatible with that of his advisers. Whilst working part-time in a car showroom, Tony was attracted to a career in car sales. Sales staff were discouraging, pointing to the poor commission-dependent pay, and the highly competitive nature of the work. However, Tony had his own image of life as a car salesman:

*All I could see was the fact that they could get to drive around in all these lovely cars and it looked like a fairly easy sort of job really. And that’s what appealed to me.*

Tony found that he could not achieve his sales targets, and bowed to the pressure to resign, attributing this outcome to inadequate training.

Unusually, the advice Fred received from his father conflicted with both his career self-view and his career world-view. When Fred was about to leave school, his father urged him to accept an offer to join the county cricket team. Instead, Fred chose the Navy, both to defy his father and because of his anxieties about whether he would succeed at professional level. After training as a radio electrical technician and serving in the Navy for nine years, Fred was discharged but by this time he was too old by to play professionally. During the research interview Fred expressed considerable regret about his original decision.

*Why did I do that? Why didn’t I follow my dad’s wishes and go and try for it big time and the hell with the rest of it?*
Two accounts in particular highlight the role of individual interpretation in participants' perceptions of the impact of advice. Atypically, Rachel and William reported valuing the opportunity to gather different opinions and perspectives. For example, William valued his line manager as an adviser because of his ability to provide “a different angle” and “food for thought”. He sought different opinions in order to “take into account of both sides [...] try and look at where they’re coming from and try and see how they got there.” Similarly, Rachel reported that before making a career decision:

... I'd go to my manager and probably my practice development nurse again and - I think, colleagues as well - other F Grades within the pre-admission team. You know, bounce ideas off and what do you think about this? Or would you consider going for this job? Just to get different perspectives really before you can make your mind up on what you want to do for yourself.

It seems that, rather than seeking answers or directive advice, William and Rachel were interested in gathering a range of opinions and insights into their advisers’ career worldviews which they could then compare and contrast in order to inform their career choices. Other participants did not mention using career help in this way, although they may have done so.

A further example reinforces the point that the impact of advice is shaped by the recipient’s interpretation. Lyn interpreted her line manager’s advice very differently from the way in which it was intended.

...it is easy to be a big fish in a little pond. You need to get your head out of the water. And I put my head right out of the water and the whole bucket went with it [...] we [line manager] just talked about my role on the ward and developing other staff. [...] she encouraged but she didn’t mean it in that way at all. She was thinking more of expanding [...] she had it with reference to palliative care and I took it on a much broader scale - that there is more going on in the world than just in this unit...

The suggestion that Lyn specialised in palliative care, sowed the seed in her mind of a more radical change, with unanticipated results. Subsequently, Lyn applied for and secured a more challenging job in a different hospital. In this way her line manager offered Lyn a vision of a new career-self which inadvertently sparked in Lyn’s mind a number of possible and different career self-views which, when acted on, significantly shaped her career.
5.2.2.2 Career action

Participants who had an idea of their preferred career direction but were unsure about how they could best pursue their ideas, described wanting or receiving advice which helped them to do this. A few explicitly made this association:

I'd only thought about what I wanted to do, not about how you do it. [...] She [the careers adviser] like sort of loaded me up with so much information then about all the aspects of things, like CVs and how to sell yourself... (Barry on his encounter with a careers adviser.)

I knew roughly what I wanted to do [...] And I thought having a word with the careers adviser would focus me or give me a road to go through, or the route to go through [...] She pointed me on the right path and I was pleased... (Neil on his expectations of the careers adviser.)

They [other people] couldn't really help me out because I don't know what I want to do really. (Andy in response to a question about whether he would consult other people about what to do after completing his engineering training.)

Advisers suggested ways in which participants could expand their work experience, improve their skills and develop appropriate job search techniques. This required advisers to understand the structure of specific occupational and organisational worlds. For example, Gayle, an outpatient health care assistant, aspired to qualify as a nurse but first needed experience of health support work on the wards. By suggesting that she joined the 'nursing bank', Gayle's line manager offered her informed insight into the workings of the career world of nursing. Following this advice, Gayle gained experience of the different wards and found that she particularly enjoyed orthopaedic work where she later secured a full-time job.

With only experience of the production side of car manufacture, Barry appreciated insights into the world of administration which he wished to enter. Personnel staff, Barry's wife (a senior administrator) and a careers adviser agreed that his first step was to develop information technology (IT) skills:

...the first thing someone's going to ask you if you're moving into an office environment is, "What's your IT skills like?" And if you say, "zero", you don't even get through the door. So they told me, "Start learning" (Personnel staff)
Well, you've no chance to do anything unless you start learning this sort of stuff [using a computer] and getting involved [...] You've got to know the environment else [...] you're going to be out of it before you start. (Barry reporting his wife's advice.)

While Gayle and Barry received advice which they perceived as helpful, several other participants reported advice that was - at least potentially - limiting. For example, Belinda, who wanted to pursue a career in dentistry, reported that her teachers had “pushed” her into studying A level sciences, despite her doubts about her ability. After a year, Belinda realised that she was unlikely to secure the required grades and left school to study Economics, Business Studies and Law at a college of further education. From an external perspective, the teachers’ advice seems appropriate given Belinda’s career goal. However, Belinda’s sense of being pressured and her doubts about her ability, suggest that (from her perspective) her advisers did not understand her concerns. It is also possible that her advisers were influenced by the school’s need to retain students.

Perhaps if these helpers had explored the reasons behind her interest in dentistry and discussed her abilities with her, the outcome might have been more positive. This story also highlights the retrospective nature of sense-making: Belinda may have perceived the situation differently at the time she chose her A levels, and only after struggling with her studies for a year, begun to question her ability and her motivation to pursue dentistry.

Similarly, Dave reported receiving advice that appears appropriate although - at least in retrospect - was not experienced as such. Dave’s school careers adviser recommended A levels as the best route to achieve his aim to study for a degree in engineering. Dave followed this advice but did not achieve high grades and decided to leave full-time study for an engineering apprenticeship. He described his careers advice as “rubbish”, because he had not been informed of all the possible routes into professional engineering.

According to Dave’s account, his careers adviser had offered a narrow, rather than a broad perspective on the career world of engineering.

Dave’s complaint was essentially about the incomplete nature of the information on which advice was based. Neil, on the other hand, felt that the attitudes of college staff discouraged him from pursuing his career aims:

_I did make enquiries about HNC, ONC and the people I talked to at the colleges were saying, [...]"it will be a long, drawn out affair. You know it’ll take you up to at least_
when you're 40" and this was when I was 32 [...] so that initially put me off [...] I thought, "okay. I'll see if I can work my way in at the company I'd just joined"

Neil continued to believe in his ability and later registered for a degree course in engineering. That is, his career self-view remained intact despite discouraging advice.

Typically advisers offered suggestions, opinions or recommendations about how to pursue career ideas or implement career plans. A few participants (6) reported receiving practical advice about job-seeking, mainly (in 4 out of 6 cases) from careers advisers. For example, Barry and Prakash praised their careers advisers for helping with job applications, curriculum vitae and interview techniques. Barry reported that his encounter with a careers adviser had a transformational impact (Wilden and La Gro, 1998) on his career world-view. As noted earlier, Barry's only work experience was of production. When he wished to move into administration, he needed advice about seeking “career-orientated” opportunities. A careers adviser offered him insight into a career world where applicants were expected to “sell themselves”:

That was one of the most informative things [...] she opened my eyes so much. Stunning [...] she like sort of loaded me up with so much information then about all the aspects of things, like CVs and how to sell yourself [...] that got my old brain working sort [...] straight away.

Practical advice was not only offered by careers advisers. For example, colleagues helped Jill to prepare for an internal promotion - possibly in breach of company policy - by providing case studies of previous interviews and details of the selection criteria.

Table 5.1 summarises, from participants' perspectives, the key role played by advisers and the impact of their advice.
## Table 5.1 – A summary of the role and impact of advisers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant-helper relationship</th>
<th>Helper role</th>
<th>Mediation and modification processes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most commonly structurally attached, semi-formal (e.g. managers, training and personnel staff) or informal helpers (colleagues). Also structurally detached formal helpers (professional careers, advisers) and informal helpers (friends and family).</td>
<td>Offered opinions, suggestions and/or recommendations based on their career worldview. Some similarities with Law’s notion of expectations.</td>
<td>Conveyed their career world-views of organisations, occupations and the world of work. Advisers’ career world-views were rejected, accepted and/or employed by participants to revise their career world-views. Subjective interpretation of advice was pivotal in shaping participants’ consequent action.</td>
<td>Typically had considerable impact on career world-views but little direct impact on participants’ career self-views. Revised or reaffirmed career world-views played a part in participants’ identification of a career direction and their action in pursuit of career ideas. Most commonly, although not always, perceived as helpful. ‘Negative’ advice was most commonly at variance with career self-view and sometimes with career world-view.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.3 Discussion

Advisers conveyed their career world-views of the exosystem of the world of work (e.g., Barry, Neil, Andy, Prakash and Belinda), mesosystem of professions (e.g., Lyn, Dave, Tony and Belinda), and microsystems of organisation (e.g., William and Gayle). In community-interaction terms, advisers mediated between participants and structure, perhaps by conveying their 'expectations' to individuals (Law, 1986). Expectations reflected the adviser's values which are shaped by that person's career world-view, including her view of the suitability of different work roles for different social groups. Although Law was primarily concerned with informal influences on individuals and their careers, the same processes may apply to formal helping relationships. That is, the perceptions of careers advisers are also shaped by their interactions with structure, although they may be more aware of these influences than informal or semi-formal helpers. If this is the case, the extent to which advisers and participants share social contexts and career world-views may affect the degree to which their expectations overlap. Advice based on shared values may have a greater impact than advice which lacks resonance (see 6.3.1 and 6.3.3).

The role of adviser (as defined here) cannot be easily compared with mentoring functions (Kram, 1986), general helper functions (Shapiro and Farrow, 1988) or the subcategories of either set of functions (2.3.4.1 and 2.3.4.2), particularly because of differences in aims and research populations. Although all three studies aimed to understand work-based helpers, mine differs in its explicit exploration of the role of non-work-based helpers. Perhaps more significantly, the other two were concerned with managers and the help they received with career advancement, while my study focuses on non-managerial staff and examines a wide range of career issues. It is not surprising to find that managers in Kram's (1986), and in Shapiro and Farrow's (1988) studies valued people who helped with career goals rather than with identifying career direction which my participants valued. The views expressed by managers may have shaped and been shaped by attitudes towards organisational career management and expectations of bureaucratic careers which were prevalent in the 1980s. Also some participants in my study had early careers contemporaneous with participants in Kram, and Shapiro and Farrow's studies when there may have been a greater divergence between managerial and non-managerial employees' expectations of the career help employers should provide.
Participants in research on career discussions (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001) were mainly managers and professionals who worked in large organisations, nevertheless some findings are similar. As advisers fulfilled a mediating role, conveying their career world-views to participants, so career discussions provided a forum for mediation between individuals and their employing organisation. Career discussions afforded the opportunity for individuals to access the career world-views of their helpers. More specifically, like Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001), I identified help with clarifying future career direction as a key impact of encounters with advisers.

The career planning role of an adviser identified by Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981), although described in the context of bureaucratic careers, is similar to my concept of adviser in that both are concerned with helping an individual to pursue a career idea or aim, and both help by suggesting how individuals may gain access to career worlds with which they are unfamiliar.

Overall, the adviser role appears to have more in common with categories of career help identified in studies of professional career guidance than those identified in studies of organisational career management. At first sight, this is surprising as - according to my definition of this category - advisers are directive, while professional careers advisers reportedly regard their practice as non-directive. It is perhaps less surprising given that participants in my study tended to associate professional careers advisers with a directive approach.

Three of the eight types of guidance identified by Wilson and Jackson (1998) - work expert guidance, job search and learning guidance - share some features with my adviser role in terms of content (that is the topics they discussed). In community-interaction terms these types of guidance and my adviser role suggest a process of mediation, whereby knowledge and perspectives of unfamiliar career worlds are communicated to participants. However, the term ‘guidance’ and the way in which Wilson and Jackson describe different types of guidance suggest non-directive, in-depth guidance where the process is emphasised and tailored to individual need and circumstance. In-depth guidance is fundamentally different from both the professional definition of advice (2.1.5) and the definition of adviser I am using in this study. In other words, content - but not process - appears to be similar, and my study adds a broader understanding of career help.
Wilden and La Gro (1998) identified three categories of helpful guidance intervention: affective, organisational and transformational. The second two are particularly relevant here. As the declarative function of organisational interventions was to specify, clarify and share information, it bears some resemblance to my adviser role which involves introducing participants to new career world-views. A different career world-view could have a considerable impact on an individual’s career thinking and/or their career action which, in Wilden and La Gro’s terms, might be categorised as ‘transformational’. Thus the impact of interventions identified by Wilden and La Gro, and of encounters identified in my study is similar, but the process by which that impact is achieved differs. It could be that ‘advisers’ base their advice-giving - although not necessarily with awareness - on a differential model, while careers advisers apply non-directive approaches grounded in counselling theory. However, the differences could be more subtle. It might be assumed that lay advisers make suggestions on the basis of their career world-view, whereas professionals organise information according to inter-subjective career world-views, based on wider or more firmly evidenced knowledge. Both of these assumptions could be challenged, given my contention that some aspects of any ‘subjective perspective’ are inter-subjective, although others are unique to the individual. A professional careers adviser’s career world-view might have many common features with that of others in the profession and possibly with employment and education specialists but is, nevertheless, that person’s perspective. There is also the issue of presentation. When a careers adviser offers a model of how careers work, is she proposing a definitive career world-view, her own career world-view or one of several possibilities? Perhaps more to the point in this context is the client’s interpretation of the help she is offered. A client may perceive her careers adviser to be proposing a ‘real’ career world-view and suggesting the ‘best’ route for her client, regardless of the careers adviser’s intention. In other words, transformation depends largely on subjective interpretation. My conclusion is that the adviser role does not directly relate to any single category identified by Wilden and La Gro but cuts across the organisational and transformational categories.

Overall, comparison of the adviser role with categories identified elsewhere is complicated and relatively unproductive given the differing aims of relevant studies. From the studies of organisational career management reviewed here, Leibowitz and Schlossberg’s career planning role of adviser most closely resembles my adviser category.
in terms of helping to identify career direction, if not in terms of scope of activity. Studies of professional career guidance suggest similarities in terms of the content of advice-giving but differences in process. A theme common to all studies is the mediating role of helpers. That is, advisers are fundamental in introducing individuals to different perspectives and new career world-views.

Existing studies focus on either workplace career help or professional career guidance, while my study develops categories of helpers applicable to a range of contexts and contributes understanding to the content of help and the helping process. Differences between this study and existing research make it complex and not always productive to compare findings, however the mediating role of career helpers as described here is reflected in other studies.

5.3 Informants

Informants provided participants with knowledge about job vacancies or occupations. I explore and discuss the concept of ‘knowledge’ in more detail in chapter six (6.3.1 and 6.3.3) on helper qualities: the point here is that possessing knowledge - in the form of job vacancy information and occupational information - together with willingness to share that knowledge are characteristic of informants.

Unlike advisers, informants were not seen as intentionally promoting a particular point of view or seeking to influence participants. Having said that, the knowledge imparted by informants was selected, edited and filtered by their world-view, and as such cannot be regarded as neutral. Like advisers, informants mediated between career worlds which they were able to access and participants who were unfamiliar with these worlds, but wished to learn about and gain access to them. As noted above, the key difference between advisers and informants, and my justification for distinguishing between these categories, is that informants did not offer opinions or recommendations.

5.3.1 Participants and informants

Nineteen participants reported encountering a total of 36 informants. Thirteen received and acted on information about job vacancies; 11 reported receiving occupational knowledge which shaped their subsequent career decisions; and some reported being recipients of both. Seven of the 12 women, and 12 of the 16 men identified informants,
suggesting that gender does not play a part in distinguishing those who identified informants from those who did not.

Informants and potential informants were most commonly family and friends (15). Less prominent were line managers (5), colleagues (5), training and development staff (5) and professional careers advisers (6). The richest and most illuminating descriptions were of encounters with informal, structurally detached helpers who had insider knowledge based on first-hand experience (6.3.1.1). This might suggest that participants’ expectations of formal and semi-formal informants differed from their expectations of informal helpers. Friends, family and colleagues were the main sources of information about jobs external to participants’ employing organisations and were reported as proactively sharing knowledge rather than responding to participants’ requests. When participants sought information about internal job moves and development opportunities they most commonly looked to professional careers advisers and to semi-formal, structurally attached helpers, such as managers and training staff.

5.3.2 The role and impact of informants

My analysis suggests that participants regarded informants and the absence of informants as playing an important part in shaping their careers. Sally was one of six participants who expressed disappointment about the absence of helpful informants at a point of career uncertainty and choice. A few participants implied that their careers may have taken a different course had they been better informed about the breadth of choices open to them. For example, Rachel criticised her school for failing to provide adequate information about different occupations. She suggested that first-hand accounts of work experiences would have been valuable:

...maybe they could have got people from industry to come in and talk, maybe people who’d finished their A Levels [...] just to get a perspective...

After completing a course in business and finance, Caroline decided to pursue a career in personnel and would have appreciated information about the different specialisms:

It would have been good after leaving college for somebody to say, ‘these are the areas you could look into’ because at the time you’ve just done a course and you’re very narrowing of information [...] All of a sudden there’s a big, wide world out there
and you don't realise [...] where personnel departments exist and how broad they are...

As her children grew up, Lyn began to have doubts about returning to hospital-based nursing and would have liked access to a source of specialist information about the options for qualified nurses. She did not know of any appropriate sources and dismissed the nursing professional body, the trade union, and National Health Service personnel staff as too biased to be helpful.

5.3.2.1 Job vacancy information

Informants drew participants' attention to job vacancies and to development opportunities in their employing organisations and elsewhere. A few participants identified particular informants as potential sources of job vacancy information, and some (11) reported securing work after being informed of job vacancies. Seen within the context of participants' career and life stories, the impact of securing a new job could be far-reaching, affecting participants' career, their occupation and even their personal lives. Ron, for example, described an opportune encounter with an informant. Although he was not looking for a new job, Ron's marriage was under strain from his long working hours and absences from home. He was 'trouble-shooting' in a contractor company, when a fellow engineer drew his attention to an appropriate vacancy in that organisation. Timing and good employment conditions encouraged Ron to apply for the job, with successful outcomes in career and marital terms.

A steady supply of job vacancy information seemed to have played a part in perpetuating Derek's "transitory" (Driver, 1982) or "cycling" career pattern (Marshall, 1989). Derek was atypical of the research participants in having a career characterised by a series of low-skilled jobs. He attributed his frequent job changes to his mother and to friends who kept him informed of vacancies. For example:

*Engineering sort of happened. A friend was already working there and he said there were some jobs going and so I went there [...] Again it was a friend of a friend that worked there, said they needed somebody so I went and applied and got the job.*

It would be simplistic to suggest that merely knowing about job vacancies was the sole reason for Derek's frequent job changing. Indeed he attributed his choice of work, at
least in part, to the belief that he was dyslexic. If this then led him to believe that his chances of developing skills and pursuing a bureaucratic career (Kanter, 1989) were limited, jobs changing may have been one way of instilling variety into his working life.

5.3.2.2 Occupational knowledge

Eleven participants reported that through informants they gained occupational knowledge. Insights into occupations were commonly regarded as having a greater impact on participants' careers than job vacancy information, and often as contributing to a change in occupational preferences or in the participant's actual occupation. The richest and most illuminating descriptions were of participants' encounters with informal, rather than formal or semi-formal informants. These informants offered insider knowledge based on first-hand experience (6.3.1.1). When such encounters were also opportune, impact was perceived as significant, and sometimes as initiating a turning point in a participant's career. For example, whilst trying to make a post-school career choice, Sally learnt about physiological measurements from a family friend who was a cardiac consultant:

_I wanted to be a police woman. Either a police woman or working in television as a sort of engineer. So it all sort of got changed [...] I actually got into this work because my parents knew the cardiac consultant at [...] and he happened to mention would I be interested in this sort of work [...] I had my eyes opened because I just really thought hospitals was doctors and nurses because that's all that we'd ever been told at school._

S Sally was sufficiently interested to arrange a week of 'work shadowing' with a physiological measurements technician at the local hospital. The experience gave her greater insight into the world of physiological measurements, and shaped her career self-view and subsequently her career direction.

Many social contacts or informal helpers shaped participants' career thinking and career direction by conveying insider knowledge of occupations and jobs. For example, at a time when Peter felt frustrated by poor pay and the limitations on his development prospects as a veterinary nurse, he gained a deeper understanding of animal technology from a friend and former colleague:
One of the girls in particular that I worked with as a veterinary nurse [...] she left to go and work [...] as an animal technician. We were very good friends and probably in that next sort of two and a half years I learned an awful lot more about the type of work that she did and knowing the type of person she was as well as, you know, the type of person I was, realised that, you know, I could probably enjoy that type of work as well... .

Through his friend, Peter learnt that as an animal technician he would earn more and have better prospects than in his current job. Seeing animal technology from an inside perspective enabled him to revise his view of the work and, partly because he could identify closely with his informant, to revise his career self-view. Subsequently Peter secured a job as an animal technician and embarked on a lengthy training to achieve the relevant qualifications.

However, insider knowledge was not always influential. Despite “the horror stories” recounted by hotel room attendants, Rebecca pursued her aim to change from waitressing to housekeeping. In her view housekeeping offered more opportunities for progression and hours that better suited her family life. For Rebecca, job content seemed to be less significant than the opportunity to pursue her career aims and a workstyle compatible with her priorities.

In addition, informants could (inadvertently) confuse rather than help to clarify participants’ thoughts. Prakash enjoyed and valued the high earnings he received as a car production operative but was bored and frustrated with the work. He aspired to a career with prospects of advancement but was reluctant to seek a more promising job or to apply for a degree course which might open new doors, because his graduate friends and relatives reported working long hours for low pay with little challenge and responsibility:

I’ve got to put the idea of, you know, the failures of my mates’ studies [...] out of my mind, thinking the same is going to happen to me. I think that [...] definitely plays a big role in my thinking of things. I’ve seen so many people that have failed [...] my brother-in-law, who’s got a degree, an engineering degree, he’s had so many failures with applications...

Although he was atypical in referring explicitly to his peer group, rather than a single individual, Prakash’s comments illustrate how interpretation of other people’s accounts
can exert a powerful influence on participants' career world-views and inhibit their willingness to act.

The role and impact of informants are summarised in Table 5.2.
### Table 5.2 – A summary of the role and impact of informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant-helper relationship</th>
<th>Helper role</th>
<th>Mediation and modification processes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tr>
<td>Most commonly structurally detached and informal (e.g., friends and family) or structurally attached and semi-formal (e.g., managers, co-workers and training staff). A few informants were professional careers advisers.</td>
<td>Informed participants about job vacancies / opportunities and about the content of occupations, rather than their views about career processes. Did not recommend a course of action. Occupational knowledge relates to Law’s concept of impressions.</td>
<td>Conveyed knowledge about the career worlds of organisations, occupations and the world of work. In some cases new knowledge encouraged participants to revise their career self-views. Whether they perceived knowledge to be temporally and personally relevant affected participants’ interpretations.</td>
<td>Some impact on participants’ career self-views. Informants and their absence played a part in shaping participant’s career direction. Most commonly perceived as helpful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.3 Discussion

Informants’ knowledge related to the content of three of the ecological systems of human development identified by Bronfenbrenner (1977). (See 4.1.) For example, information about job vacancies which benefited Derek, Ron and Pauline can be categorised as knowledge about the microsystem of organisations. Sally, Dave, Peter gained knowledge of the mesosystem of professions and Prakash learnt about the exosystem of the world of work. In community-interaction terms, informants mediated between structure and individuals by conveying their knowledge of job vacancies and occupations to participants. Occupational knowledge based on first-hand experience is similar to those “impressions” which Law defined as “testimony” (1986: 123) presented from an individual’s point of view and based on their personal experience. In particular both are informal and are without pretensions of neutrality.

The general points about differences between this and other studies which I raised in the section on advisers pertain here. Differences in the breadth of the studies are particularly relevant. I explore a range of different career helping contexts in a single study rather than focusing specifically on organisational career management, career advancement and managerial level staff. Some comparisons are worth making despite these differences.

The role of informant (as defined here) is similar to the career function of peer mentors who share information (Kram, 1986). However, my study places far greater emphasis on informants and the role of knowledge in shaping career. Shapiro and Farrow (1988) emphasised the nature and quality of relationships, and gave less attention to the role of informants. Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) conflated advice and information into the single career planning role of adviser, as do Wilson and Jackson (1998) who distinguish between different types of guidance in terms of content rather than function or activity. Thus, work expert guidance and learning guidance (Wilson and Jackson, 1998) embrace information and advice, and are both comparable with the roles of both adviser and informant.

Information is more prominent in Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd’s categorisation (2001). These researchers identified information-giving as a distinct category within a cluster entitled ‘content of session’. They also identified information (about the organisation and opportunities) and clarity about future direction, as two of the main impacts of effective
career discussions. The way in which Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) describe 'information' suggests the conveying of knowledge about opportunities and careers within the organisation and beyond, but also their insights into the processes of how careers work at the level of microsystems, and sometimes at meso and exosystems level. A degree of similarity is evident between this notion of information, and the knowledge and insights conveyed by helpers in my informant category, although informants were more commonly associated with conveying knowledge as content rather than process.

Wilden and La Gro (1998) identified three categories of helpful guidance intervention: organisational, transformational and affective. Transformational interventions are most relevant in the context of this discussion as they provide career world-views which led clients to restructure or re-interpret their situation. Similarly, informants who offered participants new knowledge may have contributed to revised career self-view and in turn a change in career direction. The informant and transformational categories are similar therefore in terms of content and impact, but not process. This is not surprising as Wilden and La Gro studied the interventions of professional careers advisers who act as informants but also have a wider role as providers of in-depth guidance.

5.4 Witnesses

The term 'witness' derives from Young and Rodgers (1997) who defined a witness as a person who observes and encourages talent in another. In this study I have identified two forms of witnessing. The first is most akin to Young and Rodger's definition and refers to helpers who communicated their perceptions of participants' specific skills and personal qualities. The second form of witnessing involved giving general praise about the quality of participants' work. Verbal feedback was sometimes accompanied by 'rewards' such as training and development opportunities and increased responsibilities. Witnesses gave feedback to participants about their weaknesses as well as their strengths.

5.4.1 Participants and witnesses

Mainly in response to focused questions, 23 participants described encountering witnesses, and 11 of these reported encountering more than one witness. There is little difference between the number of women (10 of 12) and men (13 of 16 ) who reported encountering witnesses. Most (four out of five) of those who did not report encountering
witnesses were preoccupied with conveying messages about their aspirations or current situation. For example, Andy dwelt on his belief in self-employment and his ambition to run his own business; Karen focused on her current job dissatisfaction and recent negative experiences at work; and Caroline on her lack of progression and her unhelpful line manager.

Witnesses were commonly managers, that is, structurally attached, semi-formal helpers predominated. Other witnesses were educational or training professionals, colleagues, family members, personnel/HR staff and, in one case, a careers adviser. Overall, witnesses were most commonly informal or semi-formal and work-based.

Many (approaching half) of the witnesses were also identified as fulfilling roles as gatekeepers or advisers, indicating a degree of overlap between these categories. Most witnesses who were not associated with other helper roles were supervisors or managers.

5.4.2 Role and impact of witnesses

General witnessing refers to remarks such as “you were fine” (feedback from a personnel officer to Barry following a job interview); “she thinks I am really a star” (Belinda describing an international manager’s views); “I felt very valued and everybody kept telling me that, you know, I was actually a more valuable asset to [employer] than I ever have been” (Belinda); and “he’s happy with my work” (William talking about feedback from his line manager). General witnessing of this sort was associated by participants with helper qualities (chapter six) but not with a particular impact, perhaps because feedback was too imprecise for any associations to be made. Specific witnessing on the other hand was associated with impact on participants’ choice of career direction and their career aspirations. For this reason I concentrate on specific feedback, and I structure and present data according to its impact on participants’ career direction and their career aspirations.

5.4.2.1 Career direction

Eight participants described encounters with witnesses as having a considerable impact on their career direction, although not necessarily in a direct, dramatic or sudden way. Witnesses offered their perspectives on participants in relation to career, and helped them to consider new career directions. For example, when Richard heard that the Head of the
Drawing Office was “very impressed” with his rapid mastery of a computer-aided design package, he was encouraged to consider specialising in engineering design. Hal, frustrated with his lack of advancement at work, enrolled on a course in information technology (IT) which he greatly enjoyed. His skills were praised by the course tutor who reportedly described him as a “star student” and invited him to join the teaching team. In the event, he was unable to do this, however, the combination of feeling negative about his job, enjoying IT and receiving such positive feedback, raised the possibility of changing from car production to IT tutoring.

Positive witnessing also encouraged Pauline to embark on a new career direction. Having ‘retired’ at the age of 40 from a job as a bank cashier, Pauline later accepted a post as a temporary events administrator in a hotel. From here she developed her career in a new occupational area, acquiring first a part-time job and later being promoted to the post of wedding co-ordinator. She described her experience of positive witnessing as follows:

\[ I \text{ mean obviously people recognised something in there that I probably don’t recognise […] it was with the customers and my relationship with the customers that came over […] she [the hotel manager] quite soon recognised that I would probably be good with weddings and she asked me to if I’d like to take on that. \]

In all of these examples positive feedback offered participants new perspectives which challenged their existing career self-view and suggested different possible career self-views. The examples also illustrate the importance of timing. Encounters described as having an impact on participants coincided with times when they were seeking a change, or feeling ready to change. Being receptive to feedback opened up possibilities of new career directions and encouraged participants to review their career self-view.

5.4.2.2 Career aspirations

Unlike other career helpers, witnesses were perceived as having a role in raising participants’ aspirations. Altogether 14 participants associated positive witnessing with raising or affirming their career aspirations and encouraging them to seek more challenging work. In some cases witnesses were described as prime movers in stimulating participant action. For example, Ron described how his wife influenced his
career by commenting on his potential and encouraging him to seek a more challenging job after he had finished his apprenticeship:

'Look, this is a dead end job. It's going nowhere'. The money was rubbish anyway. And she said, 'You need to do something.' And I think she sort of gave me the push to do something more, do something better. She said, "You've got the potential". Go out there and do it". And I think that gave me the push to leave and go to [...]. And the time at [...] opened up my world really. It just changed my whole outlook.

Particularly potent was witnessing of previously hidden or unrecognised talent (as in Pauline's case cited above). Interestingly, all four witnesses of 'latent' talent were female managers who nurtured and raised the aspirations of other women. For example, Jill described herself as lacking in confidence and ambition but was encouraged by both her line manager and a colleague to apply for a more responsible post.

I think you should do it. I think you've got the qualities. (Colleague)

...I think she [line manager] saw something in me that I didn't see myself. So really I've got her to thank for that because she [...] Encouraged me to see probable qualities that I couldn't believe were there [...] She very much wanted me to move forward [...] she gave me confidence [...] and said, 'you know, you can do this. I know you can do this'. And that's all you ever need to hear, isn't it, if you're lacking in confidence.

With positive witnessing and encouragement from her line manager, Jill's confidence grew, she began to see herself in a more responsible role, and progressed "naturally".

Sally, a physiological measurements technician, gave a similar account:

...when I started I thought [...] I'll settle for a grade 2 or 3, and then when I got the grade 4 and I know that I could get the grade 5 from what people have said, you sort of don't want to stop for second best. I want to get to the top and get grade 5. Get to the sort of top of my career ladder [...] [senior manager] encouraged me and said, you know, you have the potential to get a Technical Head post.

Gradually, through success, praise and encouragement, both Sally and Jill raised their aspirations. From having images of themselves in relatively junior and technical jobs,
they revised their career self-views and began to see themselves in more senior and responsible roles.

Positive feedback also motivated participants to apply themselves in their existing jobs and take on greater responsibilities. A few participants indicated that their efforts were rewarded with developmental opportunities and more responsibility, so establishing a ‘virtuous circle’ whereby positive witnessing increased motivation, and success led to more opportunities for growth. For example, Belinda reported working “very hard” for her line manager who:

...thought I was really, really good. He thought I was the best secretary he’d ever worked with and he knew I was probably too ... He always used to think that I was perhaps a bit too intelligent to work in the role I was in, which I’m not saying is actually right, but I think I have a lot about me that perhaps ... a lot of potential that could have been tapped. I think he thought I should have been doing something more of a graduate standard and it wasn’t.

Yvonne described how a “wonderful boss” helped her to develop her confidence and her skills in a way that she had not previously experienced.

I have felt [her line manager] developed me in leaps and bounds. [...] she’d developed me along the way, taught me business acumen, encouraged me to be part of the management team, which I probably wouldn’t have thought that I was capable of doing, but she nurtured me and encouraged me and never sort of totally put me in a position that I felt uncomfortable [...] she was always there sort of saying, “Oh, Yvonne, you know, is this something you’d like to be interested in? Why not come along and listen and see? See if it fits, but I think you’d be really good at it.” And so she was always lifting me by boosting my own confidence to think, “Oh, if she thinks I can do it, maybe I can. I’ll go along and see.

This account also illustrates how the role of witnesses and gatekeeper (5.5) may be combined in one person. By offering her opportunities which challenged, but did not over stretch her, Yvonne’s line manager introduced her to new career worlds (such as that of business) and enabled her to revise her career self-view.

In other cases, affirmation of abilities supported and encouraged participants to pursue their existing career aspirations. For example, Gayle’s line manager encouraged her to
seek ward-based nursing, agreeing that working in an outpatients department was insufficiently challenging. Lyn described how her husband encouraged her to apply for acute nursing after 12 years working in a community hospital:

He's always extremely supportive and he would have me running the Health Service [...] He's [...] 'Yes, don't be silly, of course you can! You've done this, you've done that. Look at what you've achieved! Off you go!

Identification of weaknesses, reported by eight participants, was also interpreted in a way that raised aspirations and motivated participants to take action, especially when other helpers - often gatekeepers - provided practical help. For example, when a company-funded educational consultant confirmed that Derek was dyslexic, his line manager offered to fund a learning programme to meet his needs. When Fred unsuccessfully applied for a managerial post, he was offered a responsible technical position, plus management training to help him compete more effectively in the future.

Atypically, Neil and Rebecca were motivated to disprove what they considered to be inaccurate assessments of their abilities. Rebecca’s line manager set her a complex calculation in order to prove that she lacked numeracy skills and was surprised when she reached the correct solution. To Rebecca this incident reaffirmed her opinion that she would be unable to progress with this particular manager, and she subsequently moved to a different department.

After being advised by his school careers adviser that he lacked the ability to pursue his ambition to train as a draughtsman, and his experience of several unsuccessful job applications, Neil accepted an apprenticeship in welding:

...they [careers advisers] give you the indication whether they think you're bright enough to do this, and that and the other [...] they didn't think I'd make the grade...

Neil did not attribute his thwarted career ambitions solely to the careers adviser: he thought that his parents also played a key role in shaping his career because they could not encourage him or express confidence in his ability. Despite these early experiences, Neil continued to believe in himself and, with the help of another careers adviser, started a part-time degree course in engineering while continuing in his job as a production monitor. Neil reported enjoying the course and gaining in confidence, but believed that at 34 he was too old to reap any career development benefits from his degree. In the
context of his story, it is not surprising that Neil wanted careers advisers to act as witnesses who:

...should be looking at people's potential and having it more customer-based [...] actively pushing them [...] I know if somebody had pushed me all the way whilst I was at work, you know, I would have done a lot better than I have.

That both Rebecca and Neil continued to believe in their own abilities despite discouraging feedback suggests strong - if not clearly delineated - career self-views. Others, such as Sally and Jill who lacked confidence and ambition early in their careers, developed these attributes over time, and revised their career self-views. The differing interpretations and responses to witnessing illustrated by these and other encounters described earlier, raises questions about why some participants interpreted witnessing in a particular way and why they chose to respond as they did. Any explanation is likely to be highly complex and I lack the data to draw any conclusions. However, of particular relevance here is why participants valued the opinions of some helpers and not others.

As many witnesses were informal or semi-formal helpers, the nature and quality of the helper-participant relationship may be important. In addition, the extent to which a participant felt known and understood by a witness may have contributed to her perceptions of witness credibility. Resonance - whether feedback makes sense in participants' own experience - may also have affected perceptions of witness credibility.

I will return to a more detailed discussion of these issues in section 6.3.3.

Table 5.3 summarises the role and impact of witnessing.
Table 5.3 – A summary of the role and impact of witnesses

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most commonly structurally attached and semi-formal or informal helpers. Managers predominated.</td>
<td>Offered general feedback on participants’ work, and specific feedback about their skills and personal qualities.</td>
<td>Conveyed their views of participants in relation to career and thus played a part in shaping participants’ career self-views. Similar in content to Law’s concept of feedback but not in terms of process.</td>
<td>By playing a part in shaping participants’ career self-view, witnessing affected participants’ career direction, and more commonly their career aspirations. Did not directly impact on participants’ career world-view. Most commonly perceived as helpful, even when identifying participants’ weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.3 Discussion

Law, in community-interaction theory, defines feedback as a means by which community transmits influences to an individual about their abilities, personal qualities and preferences. In terms of content, feedback is similar to my concept of witnessing but there are differences in terms of the process of how feedback and witnessing are communicated. Feedback, as defined by Law (1986), is often unintentional, implicit and expressed through interpersonal behaviour. Witnessing, on the other hand is verbal, explicit and usually intentional. The impact of feedback and witnessing depends very much on the individual’s interpretation. Both may support and affirm an individual’s existing career self-view. Both may encourage individuals to question their existing career self-view and consider occupations or career opportunities they had not previously considered. While, participants in my study described the role of witnessing as expanding their vision of “possible selves in possible futures” (Law, 1981: 155-156), Law pointed to the potential of feedback for limiting individuals’ purview.

Reference to relevant research studies suggests parallels between the concept of witness and categories of help and helper roles identified by other researchers. Kram (1986; 1988) defines the general psychosocial mentoring function in terms of enhancing a person’s sense of competence, identity, effectiveness, self-worth and her relationships within and outside of the organisation. While positive witnessing was reported as increasing participants’ confidence, a detailed analysis of the psychosocial benefits is not possible from my data. On the other hand, I stress the contribution of witnesses to shaping career self-view which is implied rather than explicit in Kram’s account. Of Kram’s specific functions - role-modelling, counselling, acceptance, friendship, emotional support, confirmation and personal feedback - only the last two have clear links with the role of witness. The psychosocial function (Kram, 1986; 1988), and the ‘personal interest’ helper function identified by Shapiro and Farrow (1988), stress the nature and quality of the helping relationship. I also acknowledge the importance of relationship, which I discuss in more detail in sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.4. In addition, my witness category is more specific than the broad functions identified by Kram, and Shapiro and Farrow, and makes explicit the link with career self-view.
Of the line manager's career planning roles identified by Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981), the appraiser and most closely parallels my concept of witness. Although I noted that line managers were prominent amongst those identified as witnesses, this category also includes semi-formal and informal helpers. In other words, my data suggest that people other than line managers act as helpful witnesses who contribute to participants' career self-views. My concept of witness also has parallels with the notions of 'appraisal guidance' on performance and 'personal development guidance' involving in-depth analysis of abilities identified by Wilson and Jackson (1998). However, as these authors focused on professional career guidance services (formal helpers), and colleges and employers (semi-formal helpers) my analysis offers a further dimension. More significant perhaps are their phrases 'appraisal' and 'in-depth analysis' - which imply a formal process. Although generally intentional, witnessing may also be casual and informal. As with the other studies discussed above, Wilson and Jackson (1998) imply an association between appraisal, analysis and career self-view, rather than making an explicit connection.

Witnesses give feedback on potential, strengths and weaknesses which Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) found was associated with effective career discussions. In common with the other studies discussed above (and my own), feedback is regarded as explicit and verbal. Unlike others, my study and that of Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, include informal as well as formal situations in which participants received feedback. The notion of self-insight identified by these authors as one of the main types of impact of effective career discussions, is similar to my notion of reviewing career self-view, but with two key differences. First, self-insight suggests the notion of a single and a static view of self, whereas career self-view implies one, among several possible perspectives on self. Second, self-insight suggests a broader notion than career self-view because the latter is defined as how a person sees herself in relation her career. Unlike Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001), my methodology allowed me to place encounters with witnesses in the diachronic context of participants' career stories and to access their interpretations of the impact of witnessing on their careers in both the short and longer term.

There are loose parallels with Wilden and La Gro's concept of transformational interventions (1998) which provide insights leading to the reinterpretation of a situation and help clients to better integrate or change their conceptual map. Transformation
suggests a revision of what I would term career world-view and/or career self-view. Witnesses according to my definition contribute to the shape of a participant’s career self-view. Career world-view may also be affected as a consequence, but if this is so the impact is indirect and less apparent.

5.5 Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are defined here as helpers who provide or deny access to jobs, promotions and developmental opportunities. Power is the key characteristic of gatekeepers and distinguishes them from the other categories of helper, and particularly from the related category of intermediary (5.6). In this context, power refers to a helper’s capacity to modify the influences of structure, and not to the relationship between helper and participant. (See section 6.3.2 for a discussion of power.) Some gatekeepers were reported to be proactive as they approached participants with offers of jobs, promotions or developmental tasks; others were responsive, acting positively (or negatively) to participants’ requests for help in accessing jobs, promotions or developmental opportunities. My concern here is with participants’ perceptions, although it is worth reflecting that some gatekeepers who were credited with power may not, in practice, have been as powerful as participants supposed.

5.5.1 Participants and gatekeepers

Twenty-one participants reported encountering a total of 41 gatekeepers, or expressed the belief that gatekeepers played a part in shaping careers. Nine of the 12 women, and 12 of 16 the men talked about gatekeepers, suggesting that gender does not adequately distinguish between those who identified gatekeepers and those who did not.

Line managers (12) and senior managers (8) were most commonly perceived as fulfilling the role of gatekeepers. Managers of other departments in the same organisation (5), former bosses (2), external work contacts (2), training officers (2) and friends (2) were also associated with gatekeeping. Human resource staff and a colleague were each mentioned by one participant. Three people also referred to an unspecified “they” which - because of the context - I interpret as referring to managers. Overall, most gatekeepers were structurally attached, semi-formal helpers, with managers predominating.
5.5.2 The role and impact of gatekeepers

Gatekeepers were perceived as having an impact on participants’ career direction and their career action because of their power to offer opportunities which opened up new possibilities and directions. Eleven out of the 21 participants who referred to gatekeepers regarded them as playing an important part in shaping their career direction or their pursuit of a career idea. My intention in the examples that follow is to show how, from participants’ perspectives, gatekeepers shaped careers, but not to imply that participants were passive. I return to the issue of gatekeeper and participant agency in section (5.5.3).

5.5.2.1 Career direction and proactive gatekeepers

Most (16) participants who described gatekeepers associated them with access to jobs and internal promotions, and some associated them with access to developmental opportunities. Ten participants identified proactive gatekeepers who offered them either a new job with their existing employer, or a new job with a new employer. For example, several months after a period of work experience in a hotel, Amanda was offered a part-time job for the duration of her college course, followed by full-time work after she graduated. Other participants were offered jobs by personal and professional contacts. Jill was working in a shoe shop when a friend invited her to join him as the director of field sales. By accepting this offer, Jill began to see herself in an administrative role but to question her ability at field sales. For Jill this was the beginning of a process of revising her career self-view in which a job working with horses was central.

On two separate occasions Leon was contacted with job offers, which he accepted. First, friends arranged a job for him in Jersey which led to a successful three-year partnership running a vehicle body repair shop:

*I got a postcard [...] one day - to say ‘You start work next week.’ And as at the time I was sort of not doing anything that specific moment if you like, I thought, well, you know, we can’t turn that down. At least it’ll be a working holiday and which we sort of ended up spending three years in Jersey.*

Later, he was invited by a work contact to set up a body repair shop which he later took over and ran as an owner-manager for 16 years:
I actually had a phone call one day from ZB Motors, the Director of ZB Motors [...] asked me if I would like to go and meet him in order to start a body repair facility for ZB, which I did.

Gatekeepers also initiated internal job moves or promotions such as those described by Tony, Dave and Pauline. While training as an engineering technician, Dave was offered a job in quality assurance by the company’s Managing Director. Tony was working at weekends in a car showroom when he was invited by his managers to join the full-time sales team. While on a part-time, temporary contract in a hotel, Pauline was asked to take on additional roles and responsibilities:

And then I was asked if I would take on - when one of the girls in the Conference office left - could I come a bit more? An extra day a week to make it three full days rather than part days. And then I was asked if I would like to learn silver service and help out in the restaurant. Yes, I’d love to. And it’s just gone on from there [...Later her supervisor] just asked me ‘Would you like to take on the wedding co-ordinator?’

These examples show how gatekeepers offered participants opportunities to review their existing career self-views and to test new ones.

Many (12) participants associated gatekeepers with enabling or denying access to developmental opportunities. Here the term, ‘developmental opportunity’ refers to activities which stretch and challenge individuals, and enable them to develop existing skills and/or learn new ones. Unlike new jobs and promotions, developmental opportunities involve new responsibilities or projects within an existing job role. A quarter of participants identified at least one gatekeeper who provided access to opportunities which helped them to develop new skills. Some reported valuing particular gatekeeper interventions or the general attitudes of gatekeepers. For example, Tony was pleased to be given a customer care role alongside his car sales work. Terry reported that a company director who, having noticed the excessive length of time he had spent training in one department, secured his transfer to another. In more general terms, William appreciated his line manager who enabled him to “better” himself, and allowed him “freedom and creativity”.

The most striking examples of the impact of gatekeepers are the atypical stories of Belinda and Yvonne who credited gatekeepers with having a significant role in their
career success. Both reported having positive relationships with particularly helpful managers and were effusive in their praise for the development opportunities these gatekeepers offered:

...my original boss [...] was wonderful. I mean he really was, I suppose, a mentor. He was always trying to push me into doing different things. [...] any opportunities that came up in the department he didn't just stick ... He just didn't let me sort of type all day and take his phone calls and arrange meetings. I mean he used to have me doing all sorts of things for him and, you know, he really, really pushed me. You know, I'd do budgets. You know, anything he thought I could do he would give to me. (Belinda).

Yvonne and Belinda were effectively rescued from redundancy by the headhunting managers of other departments within their employing organisation. When Belinda's boss left and was not replaced, Belinda was without a job. One of the organisation's deputy directors demonstrated his power by intervening on her behalf, (apparently) circumventing equal opportunities and conventional selection procedures in order to recruit Belinda:

I was head hunted by the Deputy Director of the site, who – I'm sure it was a move that was perhaps not exactly kosher, but he basically side ... sort of moved his secretary to another role and he put me in her job

This move - presumably in combination with Belinda's abilities - resulted in rapid promotion from departmental secretary to a senior secretarial position involving responsibility for the supervision of 35 secretaries.

I ended up managing a department for 2 years [...] he [her line manager] broke new ground [...] every year I had different things to do and, you know, he pushed me to do things. [...] there were always these other little projects, initiatives, that he would get me involved in as, you know, an extra resource. [...] I do see him as a very, very big influence in my career.

Gatekeepers seemed to be a feature of Yvonne's career, affecting her job and developmental opportunities, and the range of her work experiences. According to Yvonne she secured five of her 14 jobs through gatekeepers who invited her to join their organisations. For example:
... the previous firm of solicitors then contacted me and said, "Well, how about 
coming back to be a secretary?" So I was offered promotion. So I said, "Oh yes! I'd 
probably like that!"

... then one of the guys who I'd worked for at the first firm was then setting up a firm 
of solicitors together with a colleague of his and I was contacted to say, you know, 
"Would you fancy coming and helping us set it up?" So I thought about it and I 
thought, "Hmm, well, you know, that's another angle that you don't really get much of 
an opportunity to do ...

... the guy who I'd worked for in the commercial sense - I'd kept friendly and he'd 
heard that I was divorcing and he just rang me out of the blue and said, "Well, if 
you're changing your private life, why not have a change in work life and come back 
to work for me?" And so I said, "I'll consider it." And so I did go back and I ended 
up working for him a second time and thoroughly enjoyed it...

Yvonne also appreciated the development opportunities provided by a solicitor who 
employed her for 12 years:

I was encouraged to take an awful lot of responsibility so I ended up sort of... because 
by that time I was a lot older and I'd got quite proficient at conveyancing work and so 
they used to give me a lot of responsibility and I used to see the clients, go through 
certain documents, so I felt very, very valued there, liked it so much, treated very, very 
well,

Yvonne's story, like the other examples given above, show gatekeepers providing 
participants with opportunities to enter and learn about new career worlds, to test new 
career self-views and to review their career self-views.

5.5.2.2 Career action and responsive gatekeepers

Five participants described encounters with gatekeepers who responded positively, and 
six described encounters with those who responded negatively to requests for help in 
pursuing a job change. It might be argued that anyone who appoints a participant to a job 
could be categorised as a gatekeeper, however I have only included appointments 
resulting from conventional application procedures where participants reported receiving 
- what they considered to be - privileged treatment. For example, having been made
redundant as a field engineer at the age of 48 years old, Fred contacted a firm where he had previously undertaken training, and was subsequently offered a job in the engineering workshop:

...as soon as they knew I was on the market they virtually offered me the job there and then [...] And they made no bones about the fact that they wanted me to take it as well. So although they have to go through the process, of course, of interviewing other people, but it was quite obvious to me anyway from the outset that they wanted me just to say “yes” and they’d say, “absolutely, it’s yours”

As he began to appreciate his new job, and especially the opportunities for career advancement which he had unsuccessfully sought in previous jobs, Fred re-interpreted his experience of redundancy in a more positive light.

Derek’s career self-view seems to have changed when he was appointed as acting team leader. Previously, Derek’s career had been characterised by a series of short-term, low skilled jobs, but after three and a half years as storesperson, he applied for the promotional post of team leader. Derek appreciated his senior manager offering him the post and the chance to advance his career, despite recognising his lack of some requisite skills.

In other cases, participants used informal methods to initiate job change. For example, Karen, wished to transfer from hotel housekeeping to reception. Significantly, the manager arranged Karen’s transfer as a supernumerary member of the reception team:

[hotel manager] Got me a job on Reception really! I got on there because I’d done all the training at first and there was quite a lot of staff in Reception at that point. So I wasn’t really needed there. They didn’t really need an extra person, but he got it so I could actually go in and work in there full-time.

At the same hotel (although on a different occasion) Rebecca expressed a wish to move to housekeeping from the restaurant where she felt her progression was blocked by a manager who was reluctant to delegate and lacked faith in her ability. Motivated by the attitude of a hindering gatekeeper, Rebecca approached the head of housekeeping who secured the hotel manager’s approval for a month’s trial as a room attendant. In the context of both her career and her wider life story, this move was important to Rebecca
because her new job in housekeeping offered better prospects and also working hours which were compatible with her family responsibilities.

Belinda’s story, like Rebecca’s, illustrates how the complex interplay of helper, hinderer and participant action may shape career. Having worked as personal assistant for two different managers, both of whom had actively promoted her development, Belinda was assigned a new boss with different ideas about her role. Belinda felt that his expectations were hindering her career development:

...what he expected of me [...] had not been expected of me in the past. [...] He just sort of like saw me as a very traditional secretary of possibly the order of the ‘50s. I don’t know. But he expected me to just do everything for him and when I say everything – I had to do all his personal business.

Faced with this new constraint, Belinda complained to human resource staff, and as a result of her complaints, her abilities and the organisation’s business needs, a new developmental job was created for her.

I think in the end it probably just hit a pitch where it was actually simpler, easier, neater to move me into a different job and I didn’t get interviewed. They just created this job for me. [...] it wasn’t a case of like they just created something out of thin air for me. There was a need for it. There was a definite business need for it and it was an area I definitely was interested in. So in that respect it was all proper and right.

Belinda construed this unhappy experience in terms of its positive outcome, speculating that she might have continued in the less challenging role of personal assistant had she been treated more positively by her boss.

Although gatekeepers were more commonly described as career helpers - as the previous accounts illustrate - they could also play a hindering role. Six participants reported encountering gatekeepers whom they perceived as intentionally constraining or attempting to constrain their careers by blocking job moves. For example, after several unsuccessful attempts to secure a job as a supervisor, Hal attributed his lack of success, at least in part, to the power of individual managers.

I was confident to get it [supervisor’s job], but there’s just this one stepping stone [...] the monitor on the zone where the job is coming up was very, very pally with the
manager, who sits in on the interview. Now if that manager wants that person, he has that person. And I know for a fact he didn’t have his NEBS or anything else.

From Hal’s perspective his own abilities were not in question and his career self-view remained intact. Instead, he attributed his lack of success to inequitable organisational social systems. This situation was particularly galling to Hal who felt excluded from these systems, and lacked the knowledge and resources to access them. It seems that the experience of unsuccessful job applications challenged Hal’s career world-view that appointments depended on personal ability and qualifications, and suggested a new career world-view in which he felt powerless.

Similarly, Peter considered that ‘unjust’ constraints on his career progression were caused, at least in part, by a line manager who lacked the ability to “enrich people” and refused Peter the re-grading he felt was his due. Peter’s circumspect account of the performance review with his manager explains his point of view:

*I had a review whereby I had achieved certainly all that had been asked of me from the previous review. During that period I’d also been given extra responsibilities, quite important extra responsibilities, which I met and achieved and was praised quite highly for, you know, on the site, including by my manager’s manager, who was extremely pleased with what I had achieved. But at the time of the review, that didn’t — wasn’t reflected in terms of re-grading which, quite honestly, at the time I couldn’t see how that could be justified. And I think it came down to really the fact that out of maybe a team of 14 people, there were only going to be a certain number of re-gradings and I think they chose accordingly, but I don’t think they chose necessarily the most deserving cases on that particular review. But like I say, I’ve had many reviews and, you know, that’s just one of those things, but I think in that instance they were wrong.*

*I think my career path could have gone faster than it has done, although I can say financially I think that I’ve always been rewarded fairly, but I think my career could have moved faster than it has.*  [I: Are you saying that you feel that barrier has been to do with the managers you’ve had?] Yes.

Frustration was also caused by unfulfilled promises and ‘promotions’ which participants felt left their situations unchanged. For example, when Karen expressed a wish to
develop her career but was unsure about applying for the post of reception manager, the hotel manager created the role of team leader for her, but did not change her responsibilities. Prakash complained that his supervisor suggested job rotation as a way of alleviating the boredom of work on the assembly line but failed to implement this idea:

*He [the supervisor] did suggest that, you know, because it's the main motivating factor for you to swap around and it'd be a good thing, you know, it'd kind of break the day a bit. But he didn't really follow it through.*

Apparently constraining gatekeepers sometimes had a motivating effect. For example, boredom with routine work and the lack of response to his requests for development, motivated William to apply for a new job. As a result, he was re-graded but, like Karen, his role and responsibilities remained unchanged. William interpreted the re-grading as a placatory gesture to keep him in post:

*she [his senior manager] sort of made me up to a Grade 3 instantly, within that same day, which was okay, but it was kind of, all right, well I've got a grade high, but it's not the way that I wanted to get the grade. I felt like I'd sort of not gone the right way round it for me. It was kind of a case of do or die for [senior manager] because, you know, who else could they get to sort of sit there and add up figures all day and, you know... So that was kind of instantly gratifying - got a Grade 3! But I felt cheated at the same time, because it was just like a make-shift thing, you know?*

As he continued to be denied appropriate development opportunities, William later obtained a more challenging job in another department where he particularly valued the help he received in developing his skills.

Overall, participants seemed to associate responsive gatekeepers with: helping or hindering entry new career worlds; movement towards their career self-view and; in some cases with challenges to their existing career world-views.

### 5.5.3 Context and complexity

My description of gatekeepers, especially of those who played a part in shaping career direction, might suggest that I regard the flow of influence as unidirectional - from helper to participant. However, this is not my interpretation of the helping process. My view is that participants' careers were shaped by the interplay of: participants and their helpers;
the interactions between participants and helpers; and helpers’ interactions with structure. Participants’ actions played a part in generating gatekeeper interest and help, and participants’ interpretation of opportunities, and their responses to opportunities were crucial in shaping their careers. For example, Belinda and Yvonne apparently encountered a number of enabling gatekeepers, suggesting that their skills and attitudes towards work and career played an important part in attracting and maintaining gatekeepers’ help. While gatekeepers played a part in shaping careers, it seems likely that participants’ success in tackling new opportunities was also important. It is worth noting that some participants may have encountered gatekeepers who offered opportunities which they chose not to pursue or to describe in the research interview, and that there may be attributional differences between participants (5.8).

Although organisational and occupational context do not seem to be helpful in distinguishing participants who identified gatekeepers from those who did not, there are some indications of possible links between organisational context, gatekeepers’ readiness to provide opportunities and the impact of gatekeeper interventions. For example, Karen and Rebecca worked in a hotel where, according to their manager, there were difficulties recruiting staff because of high rates of local employment and a shortage of low-skilled labour. In this context, managers’ willingness to transfer staff between departments could be regarded as an attempt to promote staff retention in response to the local labour market. The relative ease of movement between hotel departments may also reflect the informal structure of the hospitality industry and of small organisations generally. In addition, mobility between roles and departments in the hotel sector is likely to be easier than in other occupations, such as nursing and engineering where higher levels of qualification demand more specialist training.

In some cases, participants believed that specific structures could constrain their careers, but also that gatekeeper action could modify the influences of structure or reinforce structural constraints. As noted above, Hal believed that gatekeeper actions inhibited his career progression, but also that the organisation’s informal culture supported and encouraged this modus operandi. Peter perceived his manager as a constraining force, but also questioned the relevance of the Performance Development Review system to technicians and junior staff. Table 5.4 summarises the role of gatekeeper and the impact of gatekeeper action.
Table 5.4 - A summary of the role and impact of gatekeepers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant-helper relationship</th>
<th>Helper role</th>
<th>Mediation and modification processes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most commonly structurally attached, semi-formal helpers. Predominately managers.</td>
<td>Helped or hindered access to jobs, promotions and development opportunities. Some similarities with Law’s concept of contacts.</td>
<td>Used their power within informal and formal structures to enable or deny participants’ entry to new career worlds. In so doing provided opportunities for participants to test and revise their career self-view, and pursue their career self-view.</td>
<td>Proactive gatekeepers were commonly associated with shaping participants’ career direction and responsive ones with shaping career action. Most commonly experienced as helping, although some regarded as hindering careers.</td>
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</table>
5.5.4 Discussion

Gatekeepers modified the influences of structures, most commonly the microsystems of organisations, but also the mesosystems of occupations and the exosystem of labour markets. My concept of a gatekeeper is similar to Law's (1986) notion of 'contacts' in that both have the capability to open career doors for others. 'Contacts' may have power and/or influence, whereas gatekeepers are characterised by their power and position in social structures which enable them to negotiate - and in some cases circumvent - formal systems and to use informal ones.

The notion of 'helping gatekeepers' is reflected in some of the studies discussed in chapter two (eg Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001; Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Williams et al 1998). The role of hindering gatekeepers and participants' perceptions of their impact on careers are less well documented.

The notion of a gatekeeper is echoed to some extent in Kram’s (1986; 1988) general career function, although only one (challenging assignments) of her five specific career functions clearly equates with my gatekeeper role. Mentors who provide career functions are characterised by Kram in terms of experience, organisational rank and influence. Organisational rank implies power, although Kram does not emphasise this characteristic. A more significant difference however is that Kram’s career function serves primarily to promote bureaucratic careers, whereas gatekeepers also helped participants to achieve career aims which involved lateral moves.

The importance of organisational rank - with its connotations of influence and power - is apparent in my study and others previously discussed (eg Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001; Williams et al, 1998; Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981). However, research (along with community-interaction theory) generally conflates the characteristics of influence and power. For example, Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) noted that raising participants’ profiles, and providing access to networks, job moves and development opportunities were noteworthy types of impact, although not the main ones. Such categories of impact suggest similarities between both my intermediary and my gatekeeper categories. As Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) focused on career discussions, and found that receivers of career help reportedly took action more frequently than givers, the role of givers in shaping careers is not clear.
Gatekeepers are similar to mentors identified by Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) as both arrange participation in high visibility activity. However, mentors as defined by Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) also equate to my informant and intermediary categories. To some extent gatekeepers who provide access to education and training opportunities could be perceived as providing learning guidance “geared to deciding upon and accessing learning” (Wilson and Jackson, 1999: 4). In other words, the notion of powerful or influential career helpers is common to all the studies discussed, despite methodological differences. Unlike other studies, my categorisation of helpers distinguishes between power and influence.

5.6 Intermediaries

Intermediaries are defined here as helpers who intervene with a third party on participants’ behalf. The position held by intermediaries enabled them to exert influence in order to promote a participant to a third party (usually a gatekeeper). They usually did this by using informal social systems to circumvent formal ones. Distinguishing between intermediaries and gatekeepers was often difficult because of ambiguities in the data. When participants talked about contacts and networks which facilitated their careers, it was not always clear whether they were referring to influential intermediaries or powerful gatekeepers, and the notion of influence was often implied rather than explicitly stated. Ambiguity here is interesting as it may reflect participants’ uncertainty about: how informal social systems operate; who makes decisions; and who has power or influence in different situations or in relation to particular individuals. Although relatively few participants reported encountering intermediaries, those who did provided detailed descriptions which illustrate the distinction between intermediaries and gatekeepers.

5.6.1 Participants and intermediaries

Twelve participants - ten men and two women - referred to the role of intermediaries in shaping careers. Most of these expressed beliefs about the role of intermediaries rather than describing encounters with them. The comparatively low number of women suggests that gender may be significant in distinguishing between participants who referred to intermediaries and those who did not. It could be that in this study, the men placed a higher value on the instrumental role of social and professional relationships, and regarded networking as more influential in securing opportunities, than the women.
Further analysis of the demographic data suggests that job status (skill and responsibility levels) may also be a distinguishing characteristic. Of the participants who referred to intermediaries, nine (out of 12) were employed either in jobs which required low levels of skill; little responsibility (six); or had been in junior posts when they encountered intermediaries (three). Conversely, many of the participants who did not refer to intermediaries held more responsible positions and technical or professional qualifications. Attribution of the role of intermediaries might therefore be related to participants’ sense of agency in particular social systems. Nine of the 12 participants who discussed the role of intermediaries were employed in engineering-related occupations. This might be striking were it not for the fact that a disproportionate number of the participant group were employed in these occupations, and five were engineering apprentices or recently qualified engineering technicians who may have limited direct access to powerful helpers.

My conclusion is that I lack the necessary data to make any clear association between the role of gender, occupation or job status in distinguishing participants who referred to intermediaries from those who did not. My hunch is that job status is significant, along with participants’ career aspirations and their career world-views, particularly their perceptions of the microsystems of recruitment processes.

Not surprisingly, most intermediaries were managers (7). Others were family members employed in the same industry or organisation (3); a training officer (2), a former colleague (1); and a friend (1). In other words, structurally attached, semi-formal helpers predominated.

### 5.6.2 The role and impact of intermediaries

Nearly half of the participants expressed the belief that intermediaries play a part in shaping careers, and six reported experiencing intermediary intervention. As with most other helper roles, intermediary action shaped participants’ career direction and their action in pursuit of career ideas.

#### 5.6.2.1 Career direction

Intermediaries influenced the career direction of three of the six participants who reported benefiting personally or believed themselves to have benefited from the intervention of
intermediaries. Atypically, Fred secured a significant change in career direction through the intervention of a former colleague. Fred was not seeking a change of job but responded positively when:

...he [former colleague] rang me up completely out of the blue and said, "Do you want a job?" I said, "Pardon?..." "Well, I'm leaving. Bla, bla, bla. If you want to, I'll arrange for an interview and get the area manager to have a talk with you if you're interested." I said, "Yeah, no harm in talking. Yeah." ...So I talked [to the area manager] and again I wasn't looking for a move, but it was attractively put to me that, you know, if you come you'll get a better area, you get a better car, you get better wages, there's more chance of progression, supervisor's role, area manager, this and that. I went, "Yeah, fine. Let's do that. If you want me, fine." There was nobody else. They only interviewed me and that was it. They said, "Yeah, you're just what we want. When can you start?"

Here Fred's former colleague acted as an informant, but also as an intermediary by indicating that he would secure an interview between Fred and the area manager, and implying that he might be able to influence the outcome of that interview. By accepting this offer of help, Fred secured a new job with development opportunities and came to be recognised as an "unofficial expert". He remained with this company for 14 years until his contract was acrimoniously terminated.

In Fred's case, intermediary action was overt, but this was not always the case. Two participants described their beliefs about the role of intermediaries in securing opportunities. For example, Belinda was under threat of redundancy when she was head-hunted by a manager within her employing company. She speculated about how she came to be approached by her new boss:

...the Deputy Director [...] I don't know how he got to hear of me particularly except I know my ex-boss would have done a very good PR job on me when he was about to leave and I know he would have been sort of singing my praises from the roof tops.

If Belinda's former boss was as influential as she believed, his intervention had a very significant impact on Belinda's career as her new job involved a substantial promotion and a considerable increase in responsibility.
Similarly, Richard suspected that his uncle (who was also a line manager and department head) helped him to secure a permanent job in the Machine Tools department at the end of his apprenticeship:

*I was moved into Machine Tools. I don’t exactly know why. I think maybe my uncle had had some influence in it because this – well there’s always rumours going about – that they want me to take over and do some design work like what [his uncle] does because he’s – I think he’s only got about five years left till, you know, he might come up to retirement or choose early retirement or whatever. And I think that was the idea – to bring me into Machine Tools and get me involved, which I certainly don’t mind*

At the time Richard wanted to work in another department where he believed a job had been earmarked for him, and he was concerned about the prospect of working in the same department as his uncle. Consequently his initial reaction was surprise and disappointment at this apparent change of plan. However, as he came to enjoy his new job, to identify possibilities for career development and to value his uncle as a role model, Richard began to see the move as “a big favour”. In Richard’s case, as in the others - intermediaries were perceived as playing a part in easing entry into new career worlds which participants had not particularly sought. In so doing intermediaries offered participants the opportunity to review and revise their career self-views.

5.6.2.2 Career action

Other participants sought the assistance of intermediaries in helping them to pursue their career aims. Karen secured a move from housekeeping to reception with the help of her supervisor who spoke to the hotel manager on her behalf. Perhaps for reasons of appropriateness and personal comfort, Karen felt unable to approach the manager directly and she regarded supervisors as having an important role to play in helping to secure internal job moves:

*She’s [the hotel manager] is top lady, isn’t she really? It’s just kind of scary so I kind of avoid the situation... I’m very shy in things like that [..] I think I’d have to go through somebody.*

Intermediary intervention also helped to secure job opportunities with external organisations. For example, when Peter wished to move into industry from his job at a
university, his boss discussed opportunities with a former colleague who was employed by a pharmaceutical company. In Peter's view, his success in securing employment with this company was, at least in part, due to his boss' intervention:

...it was partly through the fact that people I knew at the University [...] - one of them who'd worked there for many years had gone to [...] and my boss contacted him and said, "Look, we've got somebody who, you know, would like to go on. Do you know of any positions?"

Peter commented that in the career world of animal technology - where animal activists were regarded as a constant threat - intermediaries were important in reassuring recruiters about the bona fides of new employees:

A little bit of networking to it. I think to be honest with you that's quite important in this type of work in that you have to sort of checkable history.

Andy believed that a similar system governed the music world. Having secured a part-time job as a disc jockey through his contacts, Andy believed that networking was the only way to enter this type of work:

Djing [...] it's more who you know, not what you know. If you know people, you're straight in...

In these examples, intermediaries were regarded as enabling entry into new career worlds which participants wished to enter. Other participants, although they had not experienced intermediary help themselves expressed the belief that entry to particular career worlds was largely dependent on intermediaries. For example, two apprentice engineering technicians believed that if their placements did not work out, the training officer could and would influence managers and supervisors who had the power to secure interdepartmental transfers:

He [the training officer] calls you in ever so often to check up and see how you're doing, if you're doing the work all right, if you want to move. When you first move he says if you really don't like it come in and see me and I'll try and get you moved. (Andy)

But if you're really not happy where you're working, you'd go and see [the training officer]. He'd ask you why you're not happy there, things like that and he'd then
probably have a word with management and ask if he could move you somewhere else. There wouldn't be no problem, not when you're an apprentice, not while you're being an apprentice. (Geoff)

Interestingly, four of the five car production workers expressed beliefs about the role of intermediaries, although not all in the context of their current employer. For example, Neil and Hal felt that their careers were constrained by the absence of intermediaries who could influence and negotiate formal recruitment and development systems on their behalf. The nuances of the influencing process were implied rather than explicitly expressed, possibly because the subtleties were unclear to the participants themselves.

For example, when rationalisation of the coal industry required Neil to transfer to a pit where he lacked contacts, he started “from the bottom again”:

_With the Coal Board [...] it's not what you know, it's who you know. [...] at the time it was all families [...] my family were all in the coal mines and generations and generations and generations of them. Then as I moved to another pit my family wasn't there and I hadn't got all the contacts…_

In Hal’s view, intermediaries (like gatekeepers) were part of the promotional system within his employing organisation: advancing from production monitor to supervisor required the help of an intermediary:

_The chances of actually getting them [supervisors' posts] are even less because of the buddy buddy network [...] If you've got the right people shouting for you at the right place, at the right time, you'll get the job, regardless of how good or bad you are, how capable you are._

Barry and Prakash, who were employed in production in the same organisation, had similar views, although they attributed more weight to personal ability in securing promotion. For example:

_...the longer I've been here the more I realise, unless you have connections, it's a pretty tough call to take it that one step further [...] I feel that, you know, if somebody who can pull a few strings for you kind of thing. If you're kind of pally with the guys above, I think they can pull a few strings for you. But obviously you've got to have the aptitude yourself to be able to ... they know that. They're not going to take an idiot on, doesn't matter how much they love them, but it does help! (Prakash)._
In these examples, intermediaries were perceived as having the capability to help or hinder participants' action in pursuit of their career goals. In other words, intermediaries could facilitate participants' entry to new career worlds and their movement towards their career self-view, but lacked the power secure these changes. Table 5.5 summarises, from participants' perspective, the role and impact of intermediaries.
### Table 5.5 - A summary of the role and impact of intermediaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant-helper relationship</th>
<th>Helper role</th>
<th>Mediation and modification processes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainly structurally attached, semi-formal helpers, especially managers.</td>
<td>Used or were believed to use, their influence to intervene with powerful gatekeepers on participants’ behalf. Some similarities with Law’s concept of contacts</td>
<td>Used their influence in formal and informal structures. Facilitated participant access to new career-worlds which may have encouraged participants to reflect on their career self-view, although this is not explicit.</td>
<td>Played an indirect part in shaping participants' career direction and career action in pursuit of their career self-views. Generally perceived as helpful, and their absence as a hindrance.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
5.6.3 Discussion

In community-interaction terms, intermediaries modified the influences of formal systems by accessing and using informal ones. In the examples given here, modification mainly affected the microsystem of organisations' recruitment and development processes, and to a lesser extent mesosystems which govern inter-organisational mobility within an occupation. Intermediaries played a part in shaping participants' career direction by facilitating their introduction to new career worlds and their access to desired career worlds. In specific terms, intermediaries fulfilled a role similar to that of 'contacts' who, according to Law (1986), facilitate an individual's career, primarily through their influence and power.

As noted in the discussion of gatekeepers, researchers tend to conflate power and influence. According to Kram (1986, 1988) senior mentors who fulfil general career functions have organisational rank (which implies power) and influence. Two of the five specific career mentoring functions ('exposure-and-visibility' and sponsorship) suggest influence rather than power and are reflected in my intermediary role. Similarly, Shapiro and Farrow, defined one of their two general career helper functions in terms of their ability to influence an individual's career and refer to power (being in a position to provide opportunities for upward advancement) as a characteristics of helpers in this category. Given the difficulty in distinguishing between influence and power, it is not surprising that authors (Kram, 1986, 1988; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Law, 1986) conflate these notions. I have taken a different approach. Although I recognise the ambiguities, I regard the distinction between power and influence as relevant to the type of help a participant expects and her perceptions of the impact of any help she receives.

The concept of intermediary bears some resemblance to four of the career planning roles identified by Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981), who use the notion of purpose to distinguish roles one from another. Thus, brokers are associated with linking employees to resources; advocates with promoting the individual to a third party; referral agents with referring employees to other helpers and resources; and mentors with sponsorship, role modelling and communicating an employee's effectiveness. I recognise these differences in purpose but there were too few examples in my data to justify these subdivisions. In
my data the overarching notion of capability and willingness to intervene on the behalf of another person is more useful in distinguishing helper roles.

Not surprisingly, classifications of professional guidance and categories of careers adviser interventions focus on individual-helper interaction and little attention is paid to a helper's intervention with a third party. For example, Wilson and Jackson (1998) suggest that the guidance process is primarily one of an interpersonal exchange between helper and client, in which the former helps the latter to recognise, review and revise their career self-view and career world-view. Less attention is paid to helper's role in negotiating or modifying the influences of structure. There are tenuous links between my intermediary category and work experience guidance which involves facilitating (rather than securing) access to opportunities for work experience (Wilson and Jackson, 1998). A key difference is that the prime purpose of work experience in the context of Wilson and Jackson’s research was to help individuals with their occupational and career choices, while intermediaries in my study were primarily concerned with facilitating career development. Further comparisons are limited due to the lack of detail about Wilson and Jackson’s category. By identifying and conceptualisation the role of helpers in relation to structure, my study extends Wilson and Jackson’s typology which is primarily concerned with professional guidance.

All of the studies discussed here indicate that influential others play a part in enabling career by using informal structures. All identified people or activities which involved intervention with a third party on participants’ behalf. However, studies use different ways of distinguishing intermediary interventions and, unlike my study, tend to conflate influence and power.

5.7 Multi-role helpers and relationship constellations

Whilst identifying categories of career helper roles I observed that participants typically reported: encountering at least one helper who fulfilled more than one role; having a constellation of helping relationships; and valuing different categories of helper.

Most participants (25) reported encounters with a single helper who filled more than one helping role (multi-role helpers), and some described encounteringhelpers with three or four different roles. Some helpers were reported as playing different roles at a single point in time; and others as playing different roles sequentially or in the context of an on-
going relationship. Combinations of roles varied, but the most common were: adviser and informant (reported by 13 participants); witness and gatekeeper (reported by 12 participants) and witness and adviser (9 participants). The apparently common-place nature of multi-role helpers might cast doubt on the categories had I not previously justified their validity (4.4). It is possible that participants preferred multi-role helpers and/or found such people to be more helpful than those who fulfilled only a single role. Preferences for multi-role helpers might be associated with their perceived status and power or the quality of relationship between participant and helper. As line managers and senior managers are most common amongst multi-role helpers, it could be that role multiplicity is associated with seniority or status. I return to a more detailed discussion of helper qualities and relationships in sections 6.3.3-6.3.4.

Participants reported having constellations of helping relationships, and several expressed regret at the lack of helping relationships at particular points in their past, or a current wish for particular helping relationships with line managers or experts in their occupational area. With one exception, participants' accounts suggest constellations of between three and six helping relationships. My use of the term 'relationship constellation' is based on Kram's definition as

...the range of relationships with superiors, peers, subordinates, and (outside work) of family and friends that support an individual's development at any particular time.

(Kram, 1986: 171).

However, my emphasis is on career rather than development and my interest is in relationships which were reportedly influential in participants' career stories, rather than at a single point in their careers. These differences reflect the aims of my study rather than any divergence of views about the changing nature of relationship constellations. The emphasis in both studies is on the constellations of relationships within which career help was provided, not on the range of individuals who provided that help. For example, managers, teachers, an employment consultant and human resource staff were identified as playing a part in shaping Belinda's career. As she identified several different managers who played helper and hinderer roles, the number of individuals whom she perceived as shaping her career exceeded these four relationships. The concept of relationship constellations is supported by Law (1981) who recommends that people use

The concept of relationship constellations is associated with that of social capital and the way in which participants mobilise their social and professional networks (Raider and Burt, 1996) to shape their careers. A lengthy discussion of social capital is beyond the remit of this study, although Raider and Burt’s (1996) assertion about the importance of the content and structure of individuals’ contact networks is relevant. These authors suggested that networks which are rich in structural holes provide stronger social capital than smaller and more closely knit ones. Such networks provide a diversity of disconnected contacts which have more potential for helping secure jobs and advance careers through: the provision of more diverse information; increased control over the flow of information between people who are not directly connected; and a greater number of opportunities for referral. Informal networks - as opposed to networks of colleagues, juniors and line managers - are likely to be greater sources of social capital because they are not constrained by relationships intended to maximise corporate authority. Relating Raider and Burt’s proposition to my study suggests that both the breadth and nature of an individual’s network affect access to helpers who may fulfil the roles of gatekeepers, intermediaries and informants.

All participants reported valuing and needing more than one category of helper at some point in their careers. Most (26) reported experiencing at least two different categories of help and many (15) had experienced and valued at least four different categories of help. This finding is mirrored by Wilson and Jackson (1998) who found that, as a group, participants in their study wanted eight different types of guidance services. It is not clear from their study whether participants sought multiple helpers at a single point in time or over the course of their careers.

5.8 Some observations on participants’ recall and descriptions of helpers

I searched my data for possible reasons why some participants referred to particular categories of helper and others did not. In so doing I referred to some of the literature on
autobiographical memory and built on ideas about the construction and presentation of stories discussed in sections 3.5 and 3.7.2. I had anticipated that industrial or commercial sector and ownership status (public as opposed to private) might have an effect on career management and development opportunities offered to different groups of employees and that occupational and organisational structures might affect reports of encounters with different categories of helper. For example, I expected some differences between organisations in terms of the acceptability of gatekeeper and intermediary activity, and consequent variations in the pattern of participants referring to these categories of helpers. However, analysis of my data did not support these expectations. For example, two of the women who had hospital-based, caring roles identified gatekeepers, whilst two others with similar roles in the same context did not. Neither are differences in gender and occupational status enlightening as these only relate to intermediaries and not other helpers. In the absence of clear patterns, and of the relevant data to confirm or refute my ideas, I offer some speculative explanations which relate to: participants’ career stories, social context, individual characteristics; and the role of recall and selectivity.

One simple explanation is that some participants had not encountered particular categories of helper, or could not access occupational and social networks which might bring them into contact with particular categories of helpers. Some participants with potentially valuable and relevant career contacts and networks, may not have identified them as such, or may have been unwilling or unable to tap into their networks for career help. There is likely to be some variation in the degree to which participants: reflected on their careers; associated particular individuals with their careers; and discerned patterns and themes in their careers. The role of recall and selectivity is particularly pertinent to ideographic methods. In this study the related themes of: perceived needs, expectations, career world-view, memory, attribution and impact emerged as relevant.

Recall of particular helpers or categories of helpers may be related to participants’ perceptions of their needs and the strength of those needs. Feeling in great need of a particular type of help, whether or not a helper subsequently fulfilled that need, is likely to promote recall of both the time the need was experienced and the type of help needed. For example, Rachel and Sally referred to the dearth of helpful informants when they were at school and uncertain about their career choices. In contrast, Barry and Jill did not
refer to informants having a role at this stage in their lives, perhaps because they were confident about their career choices.

Expectations and whether expectations were met, disappointed or exceeded may have affected recall of helpers. A helper who met expectations might be regarded as literally unremarkable, while encounters which highlighted discrepancies between expectation and experience may have evoked emotional responses such as disappointment and anger. Emotionally laden encounters are more likely to be memorable and considered worthy of recounting than those devoid of emotional associations. In this way, proactive gatekeepers may have been more memorable than responsive ones because of their unsought (and perhaps surprising) interest in participants.

Expectations may, in turn, shape and be shaped by participants’ career world-views and in particular their perceptions of the relative roles of personal agency, helpers, hinderers and structure in shaping careers. For example, the way in which unhelpful advisers and absent advisers featured in Prakash’s career story suggests a career world-view in which advisers play a significant role and only friends and family are helpful. Yvonne’s recall and interpretation of the role of helpful gatekeepers and witnesses may have shaped and been shaped by her beliefs about the role of these categories of helpers in her career. In other words, expectations, career world-views, and memory and recall of career helpers are interwoven through participants’ career stories.

Impact and attribution are also relevant here. It seems likely that participants differed in their readiness to attribute outcomes to external causes such as events, circumstance and other people, as opposed to their own actions. The impact of an encounter or action is also likely to have affected recall: actions perceived as significantly impacting on career self-view, career world-view and career are likely to be recalled and recounted more readily than those regarded as having little impact. For example, Prakash regarded following inappropriate careers advice as triggering a series of negative experiences and false starts, although when he later encountered a helpful careers adviser, he acknowledged that his own inertia played a part in the continuation of his unsatisfactory career situation. Yvonne’s story illustrates a contrasting outlook. She was effusive in her descriptions of five helping gatekeepers, suggesting that she attributed much of her success to them, although it seems likely that her ability and personal qualities also played a significant part. How helper impact is interpreted also owes much to
participants' consequent action and their perceptions of the outcomes of this action. Advice or opportunities ignored or overlooked were only likely to be memorable if participants interpreted their careers as shaped by these choices. For example, Fred expressed regret about ignoring his father's advice, while Rachel was satisfied with her decision to discount the opinions of colleagues.

The autobiographical memory literature and the theory of cognitive reactions to memory offer theoretical frameworks for understanding the processes which are at play here. According to Beike and Landoll (2000), people strive for consistency between their life story and remembered life events, and employ cognitive processes to stave off threats to consistency. One way they maintain consistency is to use an abstract, hierarchical system of autobiographical memory comprising representations of personal episodes (specific events) arranged into generic groups (general events) and ordered in chronologically organised time periods (lifetime periods). The theory raises questions about the processes and criteria used to categorise specific events and delineate lifetime periods, but may be applied to participants' career stories. Thus, Prakash might be described as interpreting his current lifetime period as a consistently downward trajectory from the time of his school careers interview and constructing a consistent account of this time period by recalling other encounters (specific episodes) which he categorised in the same group of general events. Although I am not able to confirm or refute this using my data, the autobiographical memory literature contributes by reinforcing the importance for individual meaning and the need to explore career from the individual's perspective.

5.9 Towards a typology of career helpers

By drawing together the helper categories and using community interaction as an analytical framework, I constructed a typology (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992) which compares and contrasts the career helper categories (Table 5.6). Similarities and differences between helper categories are considered in terms of: participant-helper relationships; helper roles; the mediating and modifying processes enacted by helpers; and the impact of helpers as perceived by participants. In terms of relationships, helpers were commonly structurally attached and semi-formal, with managers in particular

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4 I discussed the limitations of structural attachment and detachment as concepts for understanding participant-helper relationships in 2.3.6.1, and I revisit this issue in 6.2.3.
playing the roles of witness, gatekeeper and intermediary. Structurally attached, informal helpers were also prominent in the adviser and witness categories. Many informants and some advisers were structurally detached and informal. Formal helpers (careers advisers) were most commonly mentioned in relation to advising and informing, but were generally less prominent than semi-formal and informal helpers in participants' career stories.

The helper categories can be broadly defined and distinguished by their roles in providing: suggestions (advisers), knowledge (informants), feedback (witnesses), opportunities (gatekeepers) or interventions with others (intermediaries). My proposition is that all categories of helper had a mediating function, serving as conduits for the flow of knowledge and influence based on helpers' career world-views. Helpers' interactions with structure shaped and were shaped by their career world-views which, in turn, played a part in the suggestions, information, feedback, opportunities and interventions they offered to participants. However, the processes of mediation and modification differ between helper categories.

Advisers conveyed their career world-views of microsystems (organisations), mesosystems (occupations) and exosystems (world of work) which participants chose to reject, accept and/or employ to revise their own career world-views. Revised or reaffirmed career-world views then shaped participants' choice of career direction and pursuit of their career self-view. Participants' subjective interpretation of advice was pivotal in shaping participants' consequent action.

Informants differed from advisers in that they conveyed knowledge about the content of career worlds of organisations, occupations and work rather than their understanding of, and insights into, the processes of career worlds. Participants' interpretation of knowledge was filtered by their perceptions of its temporal and personal relevance. In some cases new occupational knowledge introduced participants to the possibility of new career self-views, encouraged them to revise their career self-views and their decisions about their career direction. The primary role of both advisers and informants was to mediate between structure and participants. Their impact on participants' and their
careers depended on participants' interpretation of the information and advice they received and their consequential action.

As in the case of advisers and informants, my construction of the witnessing process is based on the premise that witnesses' perceptions of participants and careers were rooted in their own career world-views which were shaped in part by their interactions with social systems. However, the process is less explicit in data relating to witnesses than in that pertaining to advisers and informants. In other words, the emphasis in witnessing is on the interrelationship between witness and participant, with the witness-structure relationship being less marked. The role of witnesses in: reinforcing and challenging participants' career self-view; stimulating ideas about different career self-views; raising, affirming or subduing their career aspirations is explicit. To a lesser extent witnesses played a part in shaping participants' choice of career direction.

In describing informants, advisers and witnesses, I refer to helpers' roles in challenging and encouraging participants to revise their career self-views and their career world-views. In Law's terminology these helpers might be described as modifying participants' career self-view and career world-view. The term modify is not intended to connote a direct causal relationship in which the helper-participant encounter changes the participant's career world-view and their career self-view; rather a process by which participants perceive, interpret and construct their own understandings of the world from the help offered. Importantly, I stress that encounters do not necessarily result in a revised career self-view or career world-view but may reinforce existing views. Reinforcement or affirmation may (and may not) initiate the participant's decisions and/or actions.

Encounters between helpers and participants are central to the roles described above, whereas helper-structure interaction is highlighted in gatekeeper and intermediary roles. Here the modification process applies to the way in which gatekeepers and intermediaries used formal and informal structures to help or hinder participants' access to new career worlds. Gatekeepers used their power, especially within organisations, to modify the influence of formal organisational structures. Access to new career worlds, enabled participants to test and revise their career self-views, or to pursue their career self-views. Proactive gatekeepers were commonly associated with shaping participants' career direction and responsive ones with shaping career action.
While gatekeeper action was inclined to be more overt, intermediary intervention tended to be covert. By facilitating entry to new career worlds, intermediaries may have encouraged participants to reflect on their career self-view, although this is not explicit. Their part in shaping participants' career direction and their career action in pursuit of their career self-views was indirect. Participants' career world-views are most explicit in their descriptions of encounters with intermediaries, although this is the most anonymous helper group.

As well as highlighting the differences and similarities between the helper categories, this discussion is intended to illustrate the complex processes which shape individuals' careers and specifically the interplay of career world-views, career self-views, agency, participant-helper interaction, and helper-structure interaction.
Table 5.6 - An emerging typology of career helpers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helper category</th>
<th>Participant-helper relationship</th>
<th>Helper role</th>
<th>Mediation and modification processes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adviser</td>
<td>Most commonly structurally attached, semi-formal (eg managers, training and personnel staff) or informal helpers (colleagues). Also structurally detached formal helpers (professional careers, advisers) and informal helpers (friends and family).</td>
<td>Offered opinions, suggestions and/or recommendations based on their career world-view. Some similarities with Law's notion of expectations.</td>
<td>Conveyed their career world-views of organisations, occupations and the world of work. Advisers' career world-views were rejected, accepted and/or employed by participants to revise their career world-views. Subjective interpretation of advice was pivotal in shaping participants' consequent action.</td>
<td>Typically had considerable impact on career world-views but little direct impact on participants’ career self-views. Revised or reaffirmed career world-views played a part in participants’ identification of a career direction and their action in pursuit of career ideas. Most commonly, although not always, perceived as helpful. Negative advice was most commonly at variance with career self-view and sometimes with career world-view.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helper category</td>
<td>Participant-helper relationship</td>
<td>Helper role</td>
<td>Mediation and modification processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant</td>
<td>Most commonly structurally detached and informal (eg friends and family) or structurally attached and semi-formal (eg managers, co-workers and training staff).</td>
<td>Informed participants about job vacancies / opportunities and about the content of occupations, rather than their views about career processes. Did not recommend a course of action. Occupational knowledge relates to Law’s concept of impressions.</td>
<td>Conveyed knowledge about the career worlds of organisations, occupations and the world of work. In some cases new knowledge encouraged participants to revise their career self-views. Whether they perceived knowledge to be temporally and personally relevant affected participants’ interpretations.</td>
<td>Some impact on participants’ career self-views. Informants and their absence played a part in shaping participant’s career direction. Most commonly perceived as helpful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helper category</td>
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<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>Most commonly structurally attached and semi-formal or informal helpers. Managers predominated.</td>
<td>Offered general feedback on participants’ work, and specific feedback about their skills and personal qualities.</td>
<td>Conveyed their views of participants in relation to career and thus played a part in shaping participants’ career self-views. Similar in content to Law’s concept of feedback but not in terms of process.</td>
<td>By playing a part in shaping participants’ career self-view, witnessing affected participants’ career direction, and more commonly their career aspirations. Did not directly impact on participants’ career worldview. Most commonly perceived as helpful, even when identifying participants’ weaknesses.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Helper category</strong></td>
<td><strong>Participant-helper relationship</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Gatekeeper</strong></td>
<td>Most commonly structurally attached, semi-formal helpers. Predominately managers.</td>
<td>Helped or hindered access to jobs, promotions and development opportunities. Some similarities with Law’s concept of contacts</td>
<td>Used their power within informal and formal structures to enable or deny participants’ entry to new career worlds. In so doing provided opportunities for participants to test and revise career self-views, and pursue their career self-view.</td>
<td>Proactive gatekeepers were commonly associated with shaping participants’ career direction and responsive ones with shaping career action. Most commonly experienced as helping, although some regarded as hindering careers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helper category</td>
<td>Participant-helper relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediary</td>
<td>Mainly structurally attached, semi-formal helpers, especially managers.</td>
<td>Used or were believed to use their influence to intervene with powerful gatekeepers on participants' behalf. Some similarities with Law's concept of contacts.</td>
<td>Used their influence in formal and informal structures. Facilitated participant access to new career-worlds which may have encouraged participants to reflect on their career self-view, although this is not explicit.</td>
<td>Played an indirect part in shaping participants' career direction and career action in pursuit of their career self-views. Generally perceived as helpful, and their absence as a hindrance.</td>
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5.10 Chapter summary

In this chapter I described and illustrated the five career helper categories - adviser, informant, witness, gatekeeper and intermediary (aim one). I described the relationships between helper and participant and explained how participants perceived the role of career helpers and hinderers in shaping their careers (aims one and two). By drawing together the descriptions of the different helper categories, I constructed a typology of career helpers which summarises the differences and similarities between helper categories in terms of their roles, their mediating and modifying functions, and their impact on participants' career aspirations, direction and action. I found that other people were commonly identified as helpful, although most categories included some accounts of people who were perceived as hindering careers.

I observed that most participants reported encounters with at least one person who played more than one helping role. The most common combinations were: adviser and informant; witness and gatekeeper; and witness and adviser. Most participants had constellations of helping relationships and used multiple sources of help. Participants reported valuing or needing more than one category of helper at some point in their careers.

Despite differences in research aims and populations, I compared each of my helper categories with similar concepts in the literature and identified my contribution to existing knowledge. Unlike other studies, I used a theoretical framework to analyse my data and I linked my findings to theory. In particular, I applied Bronfenbrenner's (1977) conceptualisation of structure and Law's (1981; 1986) community-interaction theory to develop my understanding of the data. By introducing and using the concepts of career world-view and career self-view, I added a further dimension to the analysis of career helpers. While other studies have tended to focus on either work-based career help (eg Kram, 1986; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001) or professional guidance services (Wilson and Jackson, 1998; Wilden and La Gro, 1998), my typology is developed from, and intended to relate to, a wide range of helping relationships - informal, semi-formal as well as formal - in different organisational and non-organisational contexts.

Regarding specific categories, I found that the adviser role shared some features with similar categories identified in other studies, in terms of content but not scope or helping
process. In contrast with most of the other studies reviewed here, I distinguished between informants and advisers. Importantly, I explored the role and impact of informants in some detail, thereby raising their profile. As many informants were informal career helpers, I also drew attention to the role of friends and family in shaping career. I found that the role of witness is supported by the findings of relevant research which refers to feedback, appraisal and confirmation. However, my definition of a witness differs in some respects to related concepts and integrates several ideas not previously expressed in a single category or study. In contrast with Law (1986) - but consistent with other researchers - I described feedback as explicit, intentional and verbally delivered. While most studies identify the role of feedback in the context of either formal or informal relationships, I discuss witnessing in informal, semi-formal or formal helping relationships. Unlike community-interaction theory and research studies reviewed here, I am explicit about the impact of witnessing on career self-view. My gatekeeper role is similar to ‘contacts’ (Law, 1986) as both modify the influences of structure. The notion of gatekeeper is mirrored by the research literature. Unlike community-interaction theory and other research studies, I distinguished between influential intermediaries and powerful gatekeepers. I also explored the less studied notion of hindering gatekeepers. My contributions are developed and discussed further in chapter seven. Helper qualities and characteristics, and helping relationships which I have hinted at in this chapter are explored and discussed in detail in chapter six.
CHAPTER SIX - VALUED CAREER HELPER CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITIES

This chapter addresses the following aims:

3. To identify the characteristics and qualities that employees value in their career helpers.

4. To examine how these characteristics and qualities relate to the characteristics of accepted career guidance practice and the qualities expected of professional careers advisers.

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe, analyse and discuss the characteristics and qualities which participants identified as valuable in their helpers. I open with a brief review of the process I used to identify valued qualities and characteristics, and I discuss some of the difficulties encountered. Moving on, I describe and illustrate each of the key characteristics and qualities identified as valuable by my participants and draw comparisons with relevant studies and with accepted guidance practice. I suggest some tentative links between helper roles and helper characteristics and qualities. I highlight my contributions to the literature, the most significant being a framework of subordinate and superordinate concepts of valued characteristics and qualities.

In the discussion sections of this chapter I introduce literature not reviewed in chapter two and I analyse in more detail some literature which I previously only mentioned. By taking this approach rather than integrating the ‘new’ material into the literature review, I show how my thinking evolved through analysing my data. Specifically, I aim to show how, as I explored my data in increasing depth, I became aware of the different meanings, subtleties and complexity of terms and the value of using conceptual frameworks to illuminate meaning.

6.2 Identifying valued characteristics and qualities

The analysis and discussion address the characteristics and qualities most commonly and explicitly attributed to career helpers or expected of potential helpers, and the implicit characteristics of influence and power which were introduced in the previous chapter (5.5
Participants’ accounts provided three types of data which illuminate their views of helper characteristics and qualities. These were: encounters with career helpers and hinderers, particularly ‘turning points’ where ‘ideal’ and ‘real’ diverged (Weick 1995; Musson 1998); explicit descriptions of ‘ideal’ helpers; and participants’ reasons for seeking or valuing help from some individuals rather than others.

The interpretation that follows evolved from analysis of my initial set of interviews with five engineering apprentices and newly qualified engineering technicians. This group seemed to value helpers who were: approachable, accessible and generous with their time; credible/trustworthy and reliable; knowledgeable; aware of participants’ situations; able to offer personally-relevant help; and willing to share their learning. As I analysed the corpus of the data, I reviewed and developed these early categories, and found that references to support and encouragement were also common. Further analysis enabled me to group data segments into themes, to develop categories and, through a process of splitting and splicing (Dey, 1993), to identify subordinate and superordinate concepts.

An important aspect of the data analysis process involved accessing participants’ meanings. I examined the context in which participants used different terms in order to help me to interpret their meanings, and to make comparisons with other participants’ meanings and my own. In so doing, I found a range of similar but subtly different meanings. For example, participants talked about independence, objectivity and honesty which they seemed to associate with notions of distance, detachment and an external point of view, but also with helpers who set aside their own interests and adopted participants’ perspectives (6.3.5). Returning to the narratives and reflecting further on participants’ discourse enabled me to refine the categories and to be satisfied that each had a distinct core, despite some overlapping and blurring of boundaries.

6.3 Credibility

My contention is that participants valued helpers whom they perceived to be credible or worthy of belief. Participants did not refer to credibility per se but the term encapsulates their reasons for identifying some people as career helpers and others as hinderers. The helper qualities and characteristics that participants valued, and which constitute the concept of credibility in this context are: knowledge, power, influence, care and ‘partiality’. Building on the framework introduced in chapter two (Table 2.3),
characteristics and qualities can be framed in terms of the relationships between: helper and help-receiver; helper and structure; or helper and both structure and participants.

I identified three types of knowledge: two of which are associated with helper-structure relationships, and the other with helper-participant relationships. By knowledge I mean ‘knowing’ or ‘what is known’ and, as noted in the methodology (3.2), I regard knowledge as both individually and socially constructed. While acknowledging the interrelationships, I find it useful to distinguish between structural knowledge, social capital and ‘knowledge of participants’. By structural knowledge, I mean declarative knowledge (Hart, 1998) about the content of career worlds such as jobs, occupations, organisations, industries, employment sectors, and procedural knowledge (Hart, 1998) about the processes and social systems that shape career worlds at the level of micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Structural knowledge is similar to the concepts of social capital (Raider and Burt, 1996) and ‘knowing-whom’ (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996). However, I distinguish between social capital, by which I mean specific useful contacts and networks, and structural knowledge of the social systems which underpin career worlds. Although social capital and structural knowledge may well be found in combination, it is possible for a helper to have contacts but lack an understanding of social systems which enables effective use of those contacts. Equally, a helper may have relevant structural knowledge, while lacking the personal contacts or access to relevant networks to enable exploitation of her knowledge. The notion of social capital is implicit in descriptions of intermediaries and referred to in the discussion about influence (6.3.2.3). Knowledge of participants, which I discuss in detail in section (6.3.3), refers to participants’ sense of being known and understood.

Participants valued three interrelated characteristics associated with the helper-structure relationship: structural knowledge, power and influence. I describe and develop these concepts, before relating them to the career guidance and mentoring literature.

6.3.1 Structural knowledge

Many (18) participants referred to helpers whom they perceived to be knowledgeable about structure. Participants valued knowledge based on different constructions of ‘reality’ and distinguishable by helper proximity to, and perspective on, the object of their knowledge. Insider knowledge is perceived to be grounded in the ‘reality’ of first-hand
experience. This category of knowledge relates to jobs, occupations and organisations, and has parallels in the concept of experiential knowledge (Heron, 1981) and the narrative mode of thought (Bruner, 1986). Outsider knowledge is perceived as based on expertise and a perspective that extends beyond personal experience, and may relate to occupations, industries and the world of work. The concept of outsider knowledge bears some resemblance to propositional knowledge (Heron, 1981) and to the paradigmatic mode of thought associated with the notion of universal truth (Bruner, 1986). I pursue this discussion in 6.3.1.3. Suffice to say at this juncture, that the notions of insider and outsider knowledge are intended to convey my interpretation of participants’ meanings; no judgement about the relative value of different categories of knowledge is intended.

6.3.1.1 Insider knowledge

Participants referred to insider knowledge more commonly than to outsider knowledge. This is not surprising given my focus on the workplace, and participants’ typical concern to develop within their employing organisation. Participants provided rich descriptions of insider knowledge and clear explanations of their reasons for valuing career helpers who had acquired knowledge through first-hand experience. Whether insider knowledge was valued seemed - at least in part - to be affected by the proximity of the helper to the object of their knowledge, be it occupations, training and development opportunities or employing organisations.

Helpers with first-hand experience of a particular occupation were identified as sources of knowledge about that occupation. For example, Rachel, who criticised the careers information provided at school, suggested that personal accounts of individuals’ work experiences would have been helpful. Some participants expressed the view that occupations could only be understood from within. For example, Geoff commented that his parents could not advise him about his career because: “...they’re not engineers! They don’t know much about it!”, Terry observed:

When you tell people you’re an engineer they go ‘oh’. They don’t really know what to say [...] But I don’t think anyone at all has a stereotype of engineering [...] no one really knows unless they do it....

He was willing to follow his family’s advice to persevere with his studies despite his flagging enthusiasm because:
...most of them have been in engineering so they all generally know what they are on about. Everyone’s been in some sort of trade or other, so there’s quite a wide family for knowledge about careers and stuff.

Participants looked to current and past trainees and students for insights into training and education. Sally sought advice about the suitability of a particular course from a senior manager who had previously undertaken that course. Rachel thought that her practice development nurse, who was studying for a degree in nursing, would give her: “a realistic idea of what to expect”. William regarded his line manager as a credible adviser and informant about training and development because, as a training manager: “he’s in the right neck of the woods”.

Senior colleagues and managers were regarded as sources of insider knowledge about employing organisations. For example, four of the engineering apprentices sought information and advice from their training officer. Terry’s views exemplifies those of the group:

...for the evidence and the skills that you’ll learn, you’re perhaps best to go to [the training officer] because he does pretty much know what he’s on about. He’s been there [in the company] a few years, so I trust him.

Caroline described her training manager as having “a very clear picture of the organisation”, while Barry was dismissive of his supervisor as a source of feedback and advice because of her limited insider knowledge:

...she’s straight out of university [...] been in the plant one or two years [...] doesn’t know anything [...] struggling with her own job [...] making mistakes left, right and centre

Participants seemed to have more confidence in insider knowledge based on more than one internal perspective. For example, Dave regarded his managing director as credible because of his experience in quality assurance; his overview of the company and the engineering industry; and probably because of his seniority:

I’ve been told there are big prospects, a big move up from my job. That’s by the managing director because he was in quality assurance, he’s now the managing director. There’s quality places, it’s getting bigger and bigger due to people wanting
higher specs on machinery and ... they just want it checked again. So there’s plenty of places going but I’m just going to move up the ladder in quality.

Dave’s faith in this informant is demonstrated by his decision to abandon an apprenticeship designed to develop a range of skills, in favour of a technician’s post in quality assurance. Richard regarded his uncle - a respected and long-serving employee, a line manager and a qualified engineer - as a credible source of insider knowledge about the company’s training:

...my Uncle John, he won’t admit this, but he’s a very, very clever bloke and there’s so many people out of the factory come in and ask him stuff, and “Will you help us with this?” and “Will you help us with that?”, and they respect him for that. And I suppose in a way I would like that. [...] I want to be able to be really good at the CAD or whatever so that I can help people out and people can appreciate me for my job more than knowing that you’ve done a good job yourself.

Barry valued his wife’s insider knowledge which was based on her seniority and her administrative experience in the company. As Barry’s aim was to transfer to an office-based role, he regarded his wife as a source of information about relevant vacancies and insight into administrative work:

...she’s [his wife] seen quite a few jobs come up down there which never even get this far up [to the production area] [...] they’re usually administrative type jobs [...] some would probably be suitable for me [...] It’s good to have somebody on the inside keeping an eye open for you! [...] she’s like my eyes in the camp [...] She’s always been involved in the motor trade and always the office side of things...

Knowledge provided by helpers with whom participants could identify - either at a collective or individual level - seemed to have a powerful impact on participants, as Prakash, Andy and Peter testified. Although bored and frustrated with his job as a production operative, Prakash was fearful about sacrificing high earnings for the uncertain future of university study or a different job. He explained why his friends’ and his brother-in-law’s experience fuelled his fears:

Still at the age of 22 some of my mates aren’t happy with what they’re doing. They’re being bossed around by their employers. You know, a lot of them - my mates - are like working in offices and they’re coming out with like £70 after deductions, you know,
for like a 54 hour working week, I've been told. My mates are always like complaining about their employers bossing them around, you know, treating them like dirt. So there's not many people that I know, that I've grown up with, that are happy with what they're doing...

[...] at the time I applied here [car manufacturing company], my brother-in-law, who's got a degree, an engineering degree, he's had so many failures like with applications and he was working - he'd just got a job with [xxxx] doing the same kind of work as a production operator ...I've just got to put the idea of, you know, the failures of my mates' studies and what have you, I've got to put that out of my mind, thinking that the same is going to happen to me. I think that is definitely - plays definitely a big role in my thinking of things. I've seen so many people that have failed [...] - thinking the same will happen to me.

As these friends were Prakash's mates "... the people you've grown up with", he seemed to interpret their first-hand experience as particularly meaningful and relevant to his situation. The unsatisfactory outcome of following an adviser's recommendation (5.2.2.1), may have affected his perceptions of the relative credibility of insider knowledge and outsider knowledge.

Andy's account also illustrates how identification with sources of help might reinforce the value of the knowledge helpers provide. Andy valued self-employed people as informants because of their relevant, insider knowledge: "they know what they're talking about. They've done it". Andy had a positive image of self-employment, seemingly shaped by his father's values and experiences as a self-employed farmer in Australia, and he identified with people who shared this world-view:

Some people you speak to ...they're quite happy in a dead end job doing that and they're not really bothered...Some people want to get on and do whatever, own their own businesses...People I know who own businesses say you're better to own your own business than work for someone else. I knew that anyway. It is obvious that is! You'd be pretty stupid not to see that.

On the interpersonal level, Peter identified with a friend and former colleague whose insider knowledge seemed to play a significant part in his decision to change from veterinary nursing to animal technology:
One of the girls in particular that I worked with as a veterinary nurse - I was there four and a half years. She was there for the first two years of that period and she left to go and work for [xxx] as an animal technician. We were very good friends and probably in that next sort of two and a half years I learned an awful lot more about the type of work that she did and knowing the type of person she was as well as, you know, the type of person I was, realised that, you know, I could probably enjoy that type of work as well and started to look around for possibilities then...

Perhaps because Peter identified with his friend, he could see the world through her eyes and came to the conclusion that he was “the right type of person” to work as an animal technician.

In contrast, without a sense of identification, participants were dismissive of potential helpers, despite their position and access to insider knowledge. For example, Caroline, who was studying for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development qualifications, perceived as credible those helpers who shared her aspirations and her career world-view of personnel work. Her line manager was not such a person because he:

... would... come here to do the job. It could be anything. It's not a career. It's not what they would build on...They're not bothered about progression, they're not interested in IPD...(Caroline).

Whether knowledge resonated with participants’ experiences also seemed to affect their perceptions of credibility. For example, Hal sought feedback from personnel staff following an unsuccessful job application:

When I went for feedback, they were telling me that why don’t I go out and get a degree to get the monitor's job. Now the guy who got the monitor's job, he didn't have a NEBS. So it's just contradiction after contradiction. You have to do this then you find the person who’s actually doing the job - he’s just attained the position hasn’t got what you’ve got. So contradictions all over.

Hal did not accept as credible personnel staff’s ‘knowledge’ of the formal selection process because it conflicted with his experience. Dissonance was not always interpreted in this way. The car salesmen who worked alongside Tony, advised him against entering their occupation on the grounds that the pay was poor and commission-based, and the
work highly competitive. Tony ignored this advice, despite his helpers' first-hand experience, because it conflicted with his image of life as a car salesman:

*All I could see was the fact that they could get to drive around in all these lovely cars and it looked like a fairly easy sort of job really. And that's what appealed to me.*

6.3.1.2 Outsider knowledge

By outsider knowledge I mean expertise based on a wide perspective which extends beyond personal experience and is provided by a helper who is distant from the object of their knowledge. Outsider knowledge could cover occupations, organisations, the labour market and the wider notion of the world of work.

Positive descriptions of helpers as sources of outsider knowledge are sparse compared with negative ones. This may be because many participants who reported accepting and successfully acting on career help did not express their views about helper knowledge. Conversely, participants whose expectations of outsider knowledge were not met, discussed those experiences and identified the qualities they perceived as lacking in their potential helpers. References to the absence of helpers with specialist occupational knowledge, and to disappointments about the helpfulness of outsider knowledge are illuminating. For example, after leaving college with a diploma in business and finance, Caroline would have appreciated information about the different specialisms in personnel. When she was uncertain about continuing in the nursing profession, Lyn wanted - but was unable to obtain - specialist information and advice about alternative occupations which might be suitable for nurses.

Careers advisers were most commonly identified as likely sources of outsider knowledge. Rich descriptions of encounters with careers advisers who were perceived as less than helpful suggest that participants' expectations were not met, and disappointments may have undermined helper credibility. At school, for example, Geoff wanted, but felt that he was not given, information about jobs, and advice about what he should do. Neil described his expectations:

*...you think they're giving the best advice that they know, at the time [...] you've got to take advice from people that have the experience [...] because you could bury yourself in things that when you come out of it are obsolete...*
Prakash followed the careers adviser's recommendation, because:

*You're thinking he's got the job because he must have worked for it and he knows what he's about and you put full confidence in them.*

After unsuccessfully following this advice, he concluded that he had made "such a wrong decision" and "lost total confidence" in the profession (although he later consulted another careers adviser and reported appreciating her help). These examples may indicate 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about careers advisers as sources of expert knowledge. A speculative thought (explored in 6.3.1.3) is that participants expected careers advisers to transmit facts about occupations and work. In other words, if careers advisers were regarded as sources of propositional knowledge (Heron, 1981) and universal truth (Bruner, 1986), participants may have been disappointed when they failed to deliver.

Credibility may be strengthened when insider and outsider knowledge are mutually reinforcing. Barry received advice based on insider knowledge (from his wife and personnel staff) and outsider knowledge (from a careers adviser). Referring to his wife Barry said:

*She's even emulated exactly what personnel have told me that. She says, "well, what are you like on the computer?. And I says, "Well I ain't"...And she says, "Well, you've got no chance to do anything unless you start learning this sort of stuff".*

Dave chose to study for A levels with a view to applying for a degree course in engineering, having been advised to do so by his father - an experienced engineer - and a careers adviser. Dave was not successful at A level, discontinued his studies and joined an apprenticeship programme. In retrospect he felt that that the careers adviser had misled him by failing to provide comprehensive information about the different routes into engineering. Interestingly, he did not attribute any blame to his father, perhaps because of their relationship, or because he had different expectations of the careers adviser as a source of outsider knowledge. In Dave's case, corroboration seemed to have strengthened his confidence in the advice he received, although in the longer term this experience undermined his confidence in careers advisers.

To summarise, participants valued insider knowledge based on first-hand experiences. They described seeking or wanting outsider knowledge, suggesting that they would have
valued this, although few reported receiving helpful and credible outsider knowledge. Participants seemed to value knowledge more highly if it resonated with their own experiences and perceptions; was corroborated by both insider and outsider sources; and if they identified with their helpers.

6.3.1.3 **Structural knowledge and the literature**

In the context of community-interaction theory, the concept of insider knowledge can be compared with ‘impressions’ transmitted through community interaction processes. ‘Impressions’ refer to points-of-view rather than ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ data and, like insider knowledge, are based on the first-hand experience of “being there” (Law, 1986: 123). However, impressions and insider knowledge are differently delineated, with the former encompassing not only the verbal reports, but also knowledge acquired by individuals through their observations and experiences (Law, 1986). In setting aside the contribution of observation and experience to individuals’ stock of knowledge, my intention is not to discount the value of these processes of knowledge acquisition, merely to highlight participants’ perceptions of their helpers’ knowledge.

Although the terms insider and outsider knowledge are not used as such, these concepts are echoed in other careers research. For example, Arnold, Budd and Miller (1988) referred to family members’ personal experience and first-hand knowledge; the insider knowledge of local employers; and to housemasters and careers advisers who shared their outsider knowledge of careers. That students attached a relatively high value to employers’ talks in comparison with the help provided by careers advisers, may suggest a preference for insider, over outsider, knowledge. Equally, this may reflect students’ expectations of careers advisers and advisers’ knowledge and skills, and the relevance and timing of knowledge offered. Arnold, Budd and Miller’s tripartite categorisation (1988) of the functions of different sources of careers information and advice includes ‘information about the nature of careers’ which roughly equates to my concept of structural knowledge. By also conceptualising knowledge in terms of insider and outsider perspectives, I offer a refinement to their classification.

Market research studies suggest that adults value both insider and outsider knowledge. In terms of outsider knowledge, expertise in learning (Jackson and Wilson, 1999; SQW, 2000; MORI, 2001) and the local labour market (Jackson and Wilson, 1999; SQW, 2000)
were identified as important. The request for specialist advice or in-depth understanding of different occupations from experts in particular employment sectors (Jackson and Wilson, 1999; SQW, 2000), suggests a demand for insider knowledge or at least knowledge based on close proximity to these sectors. Academic studies (eg Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999) show that adults depend on their networks to find new jobs, suggesting that informants are valued for their insider knowledge and/or intermediaries for their influence.

As many employed adults look to their employers for career help (eg MORI, 2001), insider knowledge seems to be highly valued. In specific terms, research shows that individuals value knowledge of organisational politics, and internal and external career opportunities (Kram, 1988; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001). Structurally attached and structurally detached helpers were seen as providing insider knowledge of external structures based on their current or previous first-hand experience. The possible limitations of powerful insider messages, highlighted by other researchers (eg Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1998; Kidd and Wardman, 1999) were also identified by some participants in my study. For example, Prakash’s dilemma about whether to stay in a well-paid but undemanding job, or to leave and study for a degree was fuelled by his friends who, despite their university education, were employed in poorly paid, unsatisfactory jobs. In other words, his friends’ insider knowledge affected the way in which Prakash perceived his options.

Earlier (2.3.7.5), I raised some questions about what knowledge might mean to participants and what they might expect of their helpers’ knowledge, specifically in terms of realism. Perceptions of helper credibility may depend on whether helpers present their knowledge as the truth, the dominant reality or one reality among many, and also how individuals interpret that knowledge. Expectations may be influenced by the time and attention the helper gives to ‘contracting’, particularly to clarity about the responsibility of each party in the helping process and the parameters of the adviser’s help (Kidd, 1996b). Individual interpretations may, in turn, relate to generalised beliefs about knowledge and the value and credibility of different sources. Disappointment may ensue if, either in a particular context or in general terms, individuals regard knowledge as propositional or factual (Heron, 1981) but find that a particular piece of knowledge conflicts with their experience, as in Hal’s case. The outcome may be different if
propositional knowledge is perceived as superior to the individual's experiential knowledge and is accommodated and acted on. For example, Prakash's faith in his school career adviser's training and experience led him to accept and follow advice that conflicted with his career self-view. In addition, if helpers explicitly offer experiential knowledge based on sustained acquaintance (Heron, 1981), individuals who are seeking or expecting propositional knowledge may be disappointed.

Insider knowledge is more likely to be interpreted as experiential (Heron, 1981) and outsider knowledge as propositional. Comments made by some participants suggest that careers advisers were regarded as the prime source of outsider, propositional knowledge. For example, Prakash, Neil and Geoff expected careers advisers to "know", "have the experience" and to provide comprehensive information about jobs and training routes. Disappointments with careers advisers may arise from participants' assumptions that careers advisers possess and communicate propositional knowledge. This may be one reason that Dave blamed his careers adviser for providing inadequate information about routes into engineering, but not his father whose advice was the same.

In 2.3.7.5 I argued that rather than offering a 'realistic' career world-view, careers advisers draw upon informal and formal sources to construct a view that is - to some extent - shared by others from a similar world. If careers advisers (and other career helpers) are not explicit about their sources and do not explain the processes by which they construct knowledge, clients may assume to be propositional what is a combination of the experiential and propositional knowledge. I am not proposing that careers advisers should attempt to offer only propositional knowledge, rather I am arguing for greater openness about the basis of their knowledge, including its boundaries and limitations.

In summary, I have contributed to understanding of career-related knowledge and to existing theory in five ways. First, unlike previous studies, I explored in-depth the concept of knowledge as a valued helper quality, and offered a conceptualisation of insider and outsider knowledge. Second, I suggested reasons why individuals might value some helpers' knowledge and reject others. Third, I placed the concept of knowledge in a framework of characteristics of valued helpers. Fourth, I reinforced studies which identified the role of insider knowledge and showed that such knowledge is valued by some employees in non-managerial posts. Finally, I contributed to the
operationalisation of propositional and experiential knowledge (Heron, 1981) and related my work to the philosophical issues of reality and knowledge.

6.3.2 Power and influence

In chapter five, I defined gatekeepers (5.5) in terms of their power to provide or deny participants access to jobs, promotions or developmental opportunities, and intermediaries (5.6) as helpers who influence gatekeepers. I used examples from participants' accounts to illustrate gatekeeper and intermediary action, and the consequences of their action. Rather than reproducing here the data segments used in that chapter, I discuss power and influence as perceived by participants in my study and compare their meanings with conceptualisations used elsewhere. My interest is in illuminating participants' perceptions of power and influence, whilst acknowledging that helpers may not perceive themselves as possessing or exercising the power and influence attributed to them. Although participants' comments suggest that they perceived power and influence as helper characteristics, I concur with Bacharach and Lawler's view (1980, in Kidd, 1996b) that power may be more accurately described as the property of a relationship where one party is perceived to have some degree of dependence on the other.

6.3.2.1 The meaning and context of power relations

Wilson (1999) cites Weber's definition of power as the ability to get others to do what you want them to do, even if it is against their will. Power is seen as deriving from control, ownership and knowledge. Lukes (1974, in Wilson, 1999) regarded power as the means by which peoples' perceptions and preferences are shaped so that they accept their role in the existing order. More specifically, attention has been drawn to power within helping relationships, for example, by Goodyear and Robyak (1981, in Dorn, 1990) who identified expert, legitimate, informational, ecological and referent power as possible social bases of a career counsellor's power. King discussed the likely effects of power differentials between gatekeepers, "who have a controlling interest over one's personal career outcomes" (2001: 68) and individual career self-managers. Colley (2001b) drew attention to the imbalance of power in engagement mentoring; and Watts and Kidd (2000) suggested that an examination of power and social influence might provide the key to a better understanding of the effectiveness of guidance practice. Having said that,
power tends to be glossed over in conceptualisations of career (Collin, 2000), and in optimistic suggestions about negotiating and explicating the new ‘psychological contract’ (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995).

Codes of professional guidance practice imply, rather than highlight, the role of power within the helping relationship. For example, the ICG (undated) defines career guidance in terms of empowering individuals, which suggests that careers advisers are endowed with power which they may choose to confer on, or share with, their clients. There seems to be a tension between the notion of powerful advisers and client-centred practice where the emphasis is on the adviser as facilitator rather than expert (Kidd, 1996b). Indeed, Bozarth and Fisher (1990) regard adviser authority as incompatible with the person-centred approach. Whether advisers share this perception may depend on how they conceptualise empowerment. For example, Dom (1990) argued that counsellors working within a social influence framework regard empowerment as a process which involves helping clients to reattribute their difficulties to factors within their control.

Participants in my study seemed to associate power with the ability to provide or deny access to opportunities, and did not focus on power within the helping relationship. Recognition of power differentials between them and their helpers, and of the relationship between power and structural knowledge is implicit in participants’ references to gatekeepers and the potential of these helpers to modify the influence of structure. Hence, the emphasis in my definition of gatekeepers and intermediaries is on their relationship with structure. Other authors adopt a similar perspective. For example, King (2001) defined power as the capacity to make or influence decisions affecting career outcomes; Wilson (1999) identified creating and using institutional practices as a means of exercising power to enable and constrain employees’ action.

6.3.2.2 Distinguishing between power and influence

Careers researchers and authors (eg Law 1986; Dom, 1990; Kram, 1986, 1988; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001) do not commonly discuss the distinction between power and influence. Both are associated with contextually-relevant social capital, and the capacity to provide or deny access to opportunities, and are invested in a position or a person. In my study, whether participants’ comments about contacts and networks referred to
powerful gatekeepers or influential intermediaries was not always clear. Also it seemed to me that powerful helpers were likely to be influential.

Nevertheless, for conceptual and empirical reasons, I suggest drawing some distinction between power and influence. In conceptual terms, Dorn (1990), for example, perceives influence as based on power: it would be tautological to suggest that one concept derives from another if they share the same meaning. Despite ambiguities in some of my participants’ accounts, others include detailed descriptions which show substantial differences between intermediaries who could influence gatekeepers and gatekeepers who had power to effect (or obstruct) change. Gatekeepers were readily identifiable and their exercise of power was overt, while intermediaries were less easy to identify and their influence was inferred and covert. Importantly, participants seemed to attribute some helpers with influence but not with power, suggesting that they perceived the two concepts to be different and independent.

6.3.2.3 Influence and structure

Participants primarily associated influence with intermediaries and their capacity to shape the views and actions of gatekeepers. Implicit in the notion of influence are the concepts of contextually-relevant social capital (Raider and Burt, 1996) or ‘knowing-whom’ (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996). Intermediaries’ social capital is implied in the accounts of Belinda, Karen, Richard and Peter who believed that their careers were shaped by people who knew, and could influence powerful gatekeepers. Andy, Barry, Neil, Prakash and Hal expressed the view that career advancement is generally shaped by influential others. As most intermediaries had managerial roles, influence seems to be associated with position. This interpretation is validated by research on organisational career management. For example, Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) found that managerial and professional employees valued helpers for their status and the influence they exercised through advocacy and sponsorship. Kram (1986) described mentors’ career functions as flowing from their experience, organisational rank and influence in the organisation. King (2001) suggested that, as part of their career self-management strategy, employees identify helpers with direct or indirect access to gatekeepers.

Being independent of education and employment, careers advisers are, at least in theory, well-positioned to influence both sectors. That career guidance has the capacity to
influence structure is explicit in definitions of educational and career guidance, and codes of professional practice. For example, the guidance activities identified by UDACE (Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education, 1986) includes advocacy on behalf of individuals, and ‘feeding back’ unmet learner needs and encouraging providers of educational opportunities to respond to those needs. The ICG’s code of practice refers to advisers’ responsibility to promote equal opportunities and “work towards the removal of the barriers to personal achievement resulting from prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination” and “to promote the interests of the prime client with those who influence and control the range and number of specific opportunities…” (ICG, undated). Commentators (eg Watts, 1996; Colley, 2000) have argued that careers advisers have the potential to perpetuate or challenge social inequality. Indeed government policy and funding of information, advice and guidance is predicated on the belief that IAG can play a part in promoting social inclusion, raising labour force skills and improving economic competitiveness (DfEE, 2001; 2000 and undated; PIU, 2001; Humphries, 2002; OECD, 2003).

However, current government policy can be interpreted as promoting practice which supports and encourages clients to comply with existing structures, rather than influencing structural change. In addition, the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of advisers’ practice may affect their perceptions of their role and responsibility in bringing about structural change. A Rogerian approach (Rogers, 1951) to practice which focuses on individuals and the client-adviser relationship, may underestimate the constraints of structure and particularly the role of helpers in shaping careers. Technically rational decision-making models commonly promoted by careers advisers tend to overplay individual power, and ignore oppression and inequality (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993). Whether careers advisers are able to influence education and employment structure may depend on their interpersonal relationships with powerful others. However, they have little influence over opportunities and constraints, or the implementation of agreements about opportunities within organisations where structural attachment is an advantage (Watts and Kidd, 2000). Indeed a key argument in favour of work-based career helpers is that they have the potential to engage in a dynamic interchange about opportunities with representatives of the employing organisation (Kidd, 1996a).
6.3.2.4 Power and structure

In my study, I define power as the capacity to provide or deny opportunities. The association between power and structural knowledge is implicit because understanding career worlds and how these career worlds work is needed in order to exert power. Both power and structural knowledge seem to be associated with position, rank, status or social location. Thus, Dave, Jill, Leon and Yvonne reported being offered jobs by powerful company directors and business owners; Belinda, Karen, Pauline, Tony and Yvonne were offered developmental opportunities by managers; and Hal and Peter felt that their careers were constrained by their managers. The importance of organisational rank is highlighted by other studies (eg Kram, 1986, 1988; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001; King, 2001; Williams et al, 1998; Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981). For example, managerial and professional employees were found to value career discussions with people who had status, and the power to “open doors” (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001: 15); mentors are associated with experience, organisational rank and influence (Kram, 1986); and individuals are urged to identify and influence people who have a controlling interest in the career outcomes they seek (King, 2001) and the capacity to promise and deliver opportunities.

To sum up, unlike most other studies, I explore and analyse the concepts of power and influence in respect to structure, rather than within interpersonal relationships between helper and individual. Power and influence seemed to be distinguishable in terms of capacity to bring about change and, to a lesser extent, their derivation. Structural knowledge seems to be amongst the bases of power. Influence, although associated with structural knowledge, is more obviously linked to social capital.

6.3.3 Knowledge of participants

As noted in chapter two (2.3.7) it is commonly agreed that relationships play an important part in clients’ perceptions of the helping process. In my study, participants associated positive helping relationships with helpers who knew and cared about them. Participants described a sense of ‘being known’ by helpers who expressed views about their skills, abilities, personal qualities and potential. Most (23) participants identified the value of having helpers who knew them, or discussed the limitations of potential helpers or hinderers who did not. In some instances, participants referred to their helpers’
knowledge in general terms. For example, Sally talked about seeking advice from her training manager because he knew her well. More specifically, participants identified helpers whom they believed to be knowledgeable about their abilities. For example, Terry said that he would consult his former college lecturers before deciding whether or not to apply for a degree course in engineering:

"I'd go and see my old college lecturers... have talk with them, see what they decide because it's their opinion if I can do it [cope with a degree course] as much as mine really, because they know how capable I am as far as I do.

He believed that his lecturers were well-placed to assess his ability in relation to the course requirements. Possessing knowledge of participants and insider structural knowledge about the degree course, and the capacity to relate one to the other, may have reinforced the credibility of his lecturers as witnesses and advisers.

Credibility may also be reinforced if the helper's perception of an individual resonated with that person's career self-view and experiences. For example, Gayle's aspiration to train as a nurse was supported by her line manager who agreed that working as a healthcare assistant in outpatients was insufficiently challenging. Fred and his managers agreed that he had "the technical ability by a mile" to undertake the role of Workshop Manager, although he lacked managerial experience. Less positively, Neil abandoned his career self-view as an engineering draughtsperson when the careers adviser's opinion about his lack of ability to succeed in this occupation was reinforced by his failure to secure a job:

"I'd applied for draughtsman positions, but didn't get them. You know, didn't get the interview, which led me to believe that the career information was right..."

Dissonance did not undermine credibility if the helper offered a view which participants deemed to be attractive. For example, positive feedback that challenged participants' career self-view was valued by Sally, Pauline and Jill who described how their line managers' confidence in their abilities and recognition of their potential helped to raise their aspirations.

Proximity, in the sense of inhabiting a shared world, played a part in participants' sense of being known. As noted above, line managers were valued for their knowledge of participants' work-related abilities. Family and friends provided help based on their perceptions of participants' personal qualities and characteristics. One reason that
Caroline valued her sister's advice, was that: "she would [...] have a look at what she would think suits me a little bit more, because I can make rash decisions...". However, proximity could not guarantee a sense of being known: some participants described how friends and colleagues seemed unable (or unwilling) to understand their perspective. For example, Rachel's peers advised her against a move from ward-based nursing to outpatients, although Rachel regarded this as the best way to accommodate her family life. Rebecca was not dissuaded from transferring into hotel housekeeping by the "horror stories" recounted by staff, because she wanted a job with hours to suit her home life, and the opportunity to progress. In both cases, friends and co-workers possessed insider knowledge of particular jobs, work environments and occupations, but perhaps only limited understanding the participants' priorities and values.

More distant relationships were sometimes associated with inadequate knowledge of participants. Some careers advisers were criticised for this reason. Prakash felt that in recommending a career in engineering, his careers adviser had failed to think about him as an individual or to understand and take account of his abilities and interests:

I think he told say about - out of every ten students he told nine of them all the same thing, saying 'Do you like maths? Do you like science? Yeah - this is the career for you?' [...] I wasn't really into my maths and science. I was more into like business roles and you know like marketing and stuff like that, because I like to think of myself as more dynamic.

Just as proximity did not ensure knowledge of participants, distance did not necessarily preclude it. A few participants commended careers advisers for their efforts to get to know and understand them. For example, Tony reported appreciating his careers advisers' efforts to explore his interests, and Prakash perceived his (employer-funded) careers adviser as "very helpful" because "she was keen to see me get out of this place, she understood my situation".

To sum up, knowing or endeavouring to understand participants as individuals contributed to helper credibility, and lack of such knowledge tended to undermine it. Proximity - where participants and helpers inhabited a shared world - could strengthen helper credibility, but people who were close to participants as well as those who were more distant were reported by some participants as using nomothetic knowledge (applying to general populations), rather than knowledge about participants as
individuals. Credibility seems to be strengthened when: helpers affirmed participants’ career self-view; offered attractive alternative views; used structural knowledge as well as knowledge of participants; and when helper knowledge resonated with participants’ own experiences.

6.3.3.1 ‘Person knowledge’ and the literature

The term ‘knowledge of participants’ is useful in the context of my study but less so in cross-study comparisons and developing conceptual frameworks. For these purposes ‘person knowledge’ is more useful in conveying a sense of being known. Person knowledge can be conceptualised as insight into an individual’s career self-view and their career world-view. I also introduce here the term ‘help-receiver’ to move the discussion beyond the limits of my study.

The wish to be known as an individual is consistent with the increasing emphasis placed on subjective careers (2.1.3.2). The wish for ‘person knowledge’ to include an understanding of social and cultural context is in tune with constructionist approaches to career guidance theory and practice (eg Collin and Young, 1986; Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989; Young and Valach, 1996; Watts and Kidd, 2000). To use constructionist approaches in a way that individuals value, may require helpers to develop a deep level of person knowledge as discussed below.

Research studies support my (unsurprising) interpretation that individuals value informal and semi-formal career helpers who know them through existing relationships (eg Kram, 1986; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001) and helpers who get to know and understand them (eg Howieson and Semple, 2000; Wilden and La Gro, 1998; Hasluck, 2000; Winterbotham et al, 2001; Segal Quince Wicksteed, 2000; Wilson and Jackson, 1998; Ford, 1998). The value of being known is also implicit in references to the quality of the helper-individual relationship and the impact of encounters with career helpers. For example, to fulfil psychosocial functions (Kram, 1986), especially that of acceptance, requires a strong interpersonal bond between mentors and protégés. Managerial and professional staff reported valuing the self-insight and feedback gained from career discussions (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001). Kirschner, Hoffman and Hill’s research

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5 This derives from Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) who refer to receivers and givers in career discussions.
participant (1994) reported that self-insight was helpful, although this also evoked negative reactions. Criticisms were levelled by students at school and careers staff for providing irrelevant information (Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988), suggesting that these 'helpers' were perceived as lacking person knowledge.

Together these studies covered a range of helpers - informal, semi-formal and formal - operating in different contexts and with different groups: this extensive coverage lends support to the claim that being known and understood is commonly valued by individuals. The relative value of person knowledge may depend on the context, and specifically the individual seeking help and their career issues. Although validating my interpretation in general terms, the studies cited above did not seek to understand and categorise different levels of person knowledge, as I do below.

6.3.3.2 Expert and experiential knowledge

From my data I identified two categories of person knowledge which mirror the concepts of experiential (or first-hand) knowledge and expert knowledge which I used to categorise structural knowledge (6.3.1.). Experiential is distinguished from expert knowledge along the dimensions of proximity and perspective. In the case of persons, experiential knowledge is based on the helper's sustained acquaintance with an individual (Heron, 1981) and is acquired through proximity and/or familiarity. For example, Caroline valued her sister's knowledge of her personality, and Terry valued his lecturers' opinions of his ability to cope with higher education. However, participants did not always associate proximity with a sense of being known. Rachel and Rebecca, for example, cited peers and colleagues whom they felt did not understand their priorities.

The importance of proximity may vary according to the career issues being addressed, the type of career help sought, the relationship between helper and helper-receiver, and any conflicting interests associated with that relationship. These issues were discussed in detail in chapter two (2.3.6.2). The point here is that potential helpers who work or live in close proximity to a help-receiver, whether they are friends, family, colleagues or line managers, have the opportunity to get to know that person through regular observation and interaction. Whether receivers perceive these potential helpers to know them may depend on the personal qualities and skills of both parties and how they interrelate. Experiential knowledge is likely to be incomplete as it is constructed from observations
and experiences of individuals in one role or a limited number of roles and contexts. Helpers with experiential knowledge of a receiver may be unable to visualise that person in a different role and context.

Expert knowledge, on the other hand, is not primarily based on proximity but is grounded in a relationship between helper and help-receiver which focuses on career and career-related issues and is constructed using specific skills, personal qualities and attitudes. Whether a potential helper's expert knowledge is valued may be affected by the receiver's readiness and capacity for self-disclosure, and her perception of the helper's credibility. The helpers' skills and personal qualities play an important part in building trust, developing a helping relationship and enabling the receiver to feel that she is known and accepted. Expert knowledge may be narrower than experiential knowledge, as it is commonly constructed from a single encounter or a few brief encounters and decontextualised from work or occupational settings. As guidance needs to be socially, economically and culturally located (Edwards and Payne, 1997), person knowledge may be more highly valued when it is thus contextualised.

One way in which careers advisers may develop their knowledge of their clients is by using a client or person-centred approach (Rogers, 1951; Egan, 1994). As noted earlier, the person-centred approach - in some form - is influential in UK career guidance practice (Kidd et al., 1994; ICG, 2001). A central principle of Rogerian person-centredness is that the helper assumes her client's frame of reference, with acceptance and empathy. To achieve 'advanced empathy' the helper reaches behind overt messages to themes and resources at which the client only hints (Egan, 1994). When the helper is able to enter the client's frame of reference, the latter experiences a sense of being known. According to professional discourse, careers advisers adopt a 'client-focus' (ICG, undated) or client-centred approach (ICG, 2001). Careers literature published by the ICG explains guidance in terms of helping clients to understand themselves, investigate opportunities, evaluate options and implement their plans for learning and work (ICG, 2001). These documents suggest that the client is central to the helping process, but are not explicit about the careers adviser entering her client's frame of reference.

A comprehensive review of how professional discourse translates into practice is beyond the remit of this study but, given the discourse of the professional literature cited above,
and the resource limitations imposed on adult career guidance services (2.1.7), it seems likely that Rogerian principles are loosely interpreted and applied. Research suggests that clients regard affective interventions - when advisers show that they understand and value clients’ feelings and motivations - as helpful (Wilden and La Gro, 1998). However, this may be challenging for careers advisers who inhabit different social worlds from those of their clients. Colley (2001b), for example, highlighted the difficulties experienced by middle-class mentors who attempted to enter the frame of reference of socially excluded young people. Although Colley explored mentoring relationships between undergraduates (most of whom were studying education or applied social science) and disaffected young people, her interpretations may be indicative of the experiences faced by some careers advisers. My study offers mixed messages. Some participants experienced careers advisers as less than empathetic. Prakash and Leon, for example, reported feeling that their school careers advisers had little understanding of them as individuals. Tony, on the other hand, felt that his careers adviser made efforts to find about him, and Prakash described a very supportive and empathetic relationship with an employer-funded careers adviser.

Adopting a Rogerian approach may be difficult within the limited contact time available in many professional guidance situations, and requires specific attitudes and personal qualities, and high levels of skill. It could be that careers advisers who disappointed my participants and the mentors who struggled in Colley’s study (2001b) had insufficient resources and lacked understanding of the cultural location of those they were trying to help. Helpers who lack the prerequisite resources, including social and cultural resources, may be perceived as having limited value as sources of expert person knowledge. Unhelpful encounters may undermine the credibility of expert knowledge relative to experiential knowledge and lead individuals to place a higher value on the help provided by people with whom they have close and sustained relationships.

6.3.3.3 Fragmented or holistic knowing?

Both expert and experiential knowledge may be fragmented or holistic. By fragmented, I mean knowledge confined to one, or a few isolated aspects of an individual. Holistic knowledge is not intended to mean complete or absolute knowledge, but refers to a deeper and wider level of understanding of the person and how different aspects of that person may interrelate. The individual’s perception of her career and the type of career
help she seeks in a given context may affect the degree of fragmentation or holism that she regards as acceptable. For example, Terry wanted his lecturers’ opinions of his academic ability, while Prakash wanted his school careers adviser to have an understanding that extended beyond knowledge of his abilities and took account of his interests and career self-view.

Positivism, in which career theory is traditionally rooted, tends to be helpful in generating fragmented knowledge, while constructionism is more likely to contribute to holistic knowledge. In discussing the relationship between helper and help-receiver, research studies hint at the value of holistic knowledge in references to: the role of interpersonal bonds in enabling psychosocial mentoring functions, specifically friendship, trust and rapport (Kram, 1998); and having a personal interest in/commitment (Shapiro and Farrow, 1988). Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) identified the counselling function of line managers, and Wilson and Jackson (1998) identified the categories of personal development and life guidance. On the other hand, references to appraisal (Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981); and feedback and self-insight (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001) suggest a more fragmented sense of being known. Unlike the studies I identified, Giddens (1991) directly addresses the notion of fragmented and holistic knowledge, arguing that increasing expert specialisation brings single issues into sharp focus, while tending to blur the surrounding areas of knowledge. In terms of career guidance, it could be argued that if advisers focus too closely on, for example, skills and abilities, they lose sight of their clients’ values and motivations, and their social and cultural context. ‘Knowing’ at a holistic level requires the helper to commit time and attention to the helping relationship.

6.3.4 Care

The notion of care is commonly implied in, and interwoven with, descriptions of person knowledge (6.3.3) and partiality (6.3.5). In specific terms, my interpretation is that participants valued care which they associated with helpers who gave them time and attention, and/or support and encouragement.

Some (12) participants specifically reported valuing helpers who were accessible, willing to listen and to spend time discussing their careers or providing practical help. For
example, two of the engineering apprentices commented on the accessibility of their training officer:

You can always speak to the training officer about any problems. He's also there for us. (Richard)

His door's always open as it were so if you have any problems you can go and see him [...] you don't have to wait for a review...(Terry)

Jill described a friend and colleagues as: “a good pair of ears and very, very helpful”. Sally appreciated friends outside of work who “always have an ear for you”. Rachel valued the weekly meetings with her Practice Development Nurse (PDN) where she could reflect on her experiences and discuss any problems. She felt able to consult her PDN, her line manager and colleagues about her career because of their willingness to spend time discussing ideas and providing different perspectives. William valued helpers who have “got a bit of time [...] and don’t mind you coming back ten times”. Time for career discussions may have been particularly important to William in the context of his experience with a previous manager who, despite her claims of accessibility, always seemed to be busy:

I was never sort of sat down and, you know, “Well have, here are some options. Have a look and come back with a bit of feedback or something like that”. [...] I just don’t think she had enough time in her schedule [...] Her door was open. It was just a case of whether she was there or not [...] she was always so busy...

William was not the only participant who complained about potential career helpers being too busy. Hal talked of his frustration with personnel staff who failed to respond to his enquiries about moving between departments. His words graphically illustrate the association between time and care which is common in other participants’ discourse:

I mean I asked personnel countless times, “How could I do this? How could I do that? [...] Nobody knows. “Will you get back to me?”.” “Yeah”. Never happens. They’re too busy. [...] They’re not really there for the personnel, they’re there for themselves, come in, get paid, go home. That’s it.

Geoff criticised his school careers adviser for spending little time helping him with his career decisions:
other schools had careers advisers coming round all the time. I think I saw one once
the whole time I was in school. That was nothing really. That didn’t help me out or
anything. [...] I remember it was about ten minutes long and that was about it.

Despite reporting that one careers adviser showed “a genuine concern…” for him,
Prakash generalised about careers advisers’ lack of care:

... just turn up for their work and see a couple of people [...] I don’t think they’ve
given full attention to what’s best for them. They’re just concerned about doing their
job and getting out...

While some helpers provided opportunities to discuss careers; others were reported as
giving time to help with practical tasks. For example, Rachel’s husband took over the
domestic tasks while she prepared university assignments or studied for examinations;
Gayle’s colleagues searched the Internet for job opportunities on her behalf. If Caroline
was considering changing jobs, her sister:

... would probably go off and do some research [...] she would have a look on the
Internet and go off and do her own little bit of background and ask people, “Do you
know about this company? Or what is it that Caroline’s getting into or thinking of
getting into?”

Particularly powerful is Rebecca’s description of a member of college staff who, although
not her designated tutor, gave substantial time and attention to help her with her studies.

... I did struggle ever such a lot when I first started because I hadn’t done it before
and I didn’t know what I was doing [...] there was a lady who worked behind the bar
[...] she took me under her wing a lot and helped me a lot more than I think she
should have [...] I think I would have struggled a lot if [tutor’s name] hadn’t have
been there. I think I’d probably not got as far as Level 3 [...] She gave me the
motivation to do it.

Difficulties associated with dyslexia, meant that Rebecca was particularly pleased to
achieve an NVQ level 3, which she felt proved her ability to those who had doubted her.

Despite the examples above, a few participants expressed the view that only family and
friends were likely to give them time and attention:
...only the people that are close to you are the ones that give you a listen [...] you can talk to people and you can see it goes in one ear and out the other... (Neil).

...I think a lot of people just, you know, do for themselves from what I've seen. Yeah, unless you know somebody, like if you have connections, I don't really think that people really do have much care in that sense [...] people, strangers, you expect them to listen to you and you expect them to help you in the long run. I don't think it really works that way unless ... I suppose unless you've got a lot to offer. That helps a lot as well, but if you're looking help, then a lot of the time I feel that they're not really there to give that. (Prakash)

Prakash's parents could not help because they were too busy and preoccupied:

...my parents - a lot of their time is put into the shop and it's hard for them to - I'm not saying they don't want to know. It's because they have a lot on their mind anyway...

Many participants (18) referred explicitly to the support and encouragement they received from managers, colleagues and family members who were willing to help out in difficult or pressured situations, and who provided support with learning and development. For example, Barry described his wife as being: "pretty keen. You know she's given me a lot of support in what I am doing here". Hal referred to four supervisors who were "very very supportive, very motivating basically. I mean without them I just wouldn't have bothered. I would have gave up". Conversely, Prakash talked about a supervisor who broke his promise about job rotation because he: "doesn't really care for the employees".

As noted in chapter five (5.4), participants valued encouragement which helped to raise their aspirations and suggested possible new career self-views. A few participants complained about the lack of: support over excessive workloads; gratitude or praise for their work; and encouragement with their career development.

The value of care is also implicit in descriptions of positive relationships. As I observed in chapter two (2.3.7), it is difficult to separate the qualities of helpers and participants from the relationship between them. Thus having a sense of being cared about may relate to the qualities of both parties and their relationship, rather than to helpers' qualities. A few participants expressed the view that only personal relationships can be genuinely caring, but overall a wide range of helpers - including structurally attached helpers - were
described in this way. Reports of helpers who fulfilled multiple roles (5.7) suggest that participants perceived the quality, rather than the structural nature of relationships as important in shaping careers.

Participants' descriptions of work-based relationships tended to be richer than those of personal ones, perhaps because the former were regarded as more relevant in the context of the research interview, or because the positive qualities of personal relationships were taken for granted. Positive work-based relationships were commonly described in general terms. For example, Belinda “hit it off so well” with her manager that he offered her a permanent, highly responsible position and numerous development opportunities. Jill described as “very good” her relationship with a witnessing line manager who encouraged her to take on new challenges and “very much wanted me to move forward”. Rebecca praised her line manager for being “very friendly” and “very easy to talk to”. William reported having “a good bond and a good rapport with” his line manager who acted as an adviser, informant and witness. Among the reasons that Caroline sought advice from her training manager was that they “get on very well”.

6.3.4.1 Care, skills and attitudes

I have introduced the concept of ‘care’, despite its similarities with client- or person-centredness⁶ for four interrelated reasons. First, codes of professional practice suggest a meaning that is somewhat different from that described by Rogers (1951). Consequently, using the term person-centredness risks confusion, unless its contextualised meaning is clarified.

Second, although some of the attitudes associated with person-centredness are reflected in the helper qualities valued by my participants, there are also differences in meaning and configuration of qualities. Genuineness (being integrated, sincere and real in the relationship) is similar to my notion of helpers’ willingness to give time and attention to individuals; empathy (as noted in the previous section) relates to person knowledge; and ‘unconditional positive regard’ has parallels with the notion of ‘positive partiality’ (6.3.5) and ‘being encouraged and supported’. Encouragement and support were reportedly valued by participants in other studies (eg Kram, 1986, 1988; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd,

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⁶ Person-centredness seems more appropriate in referring to the attitudes of a broad range of helpers
Third, the concept of care is intended to shift the focus from helpers’ skills to the individuals’ experiences of encounters with helpers who have valuable skills and attitudes. Researchers agree on the importance of interpersonal skills such as attending and active listening (eg Egan, 1994; Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001; Kram, 1986, 1988) and developing rapport (eg Kram, 1986; Kidd, 1996b). From an individual perspective, these skills were experienced by participants in terms of helper’s generosity with their time and attention. Lack of helper time, commented on by William, Geoff and Hal, was also a concern for school students (eg Howieson and Semple, 2000).

As well as privileging a helper perspective, over-emphasis in the literature on skills may distract attention from the helping process (Egan, 1994) and from helpers’ concern for receivers’ well-being. Wilden and La Gro (1998) found that even the proficient use of facilitative (communication and interpersonal) skills did not necessarily lead to a shared understanding between careers advisers. Nevo (1990) reported that clients’ overall satisfaction with career counselling did not correlate closely with their perceptions of counsellors’ communications. According to Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001), professionals and managers regard facilitative skills as secondary to challenge and advice.

Apart from references to listening (Jill, Sally and Rachel), participants in my study did not describe their helpers in terms of skills but focused on their knowledge (6.3.1 and 6.3.3), attitudes (Prakash, Barry, Richard, Hal, Jill, Terry and William) and practical help (Rachel, Gayle, Caroline and Rebecca). Participants’ responses may be explained in part by my use of open questions to explore their reasons for preferring particular helpers and the qualities they sought in potential helpers. Although I did not ask directly about helpers’ skills, it seems likely that participants would have mentioned any skills they particularly valued. Fourth, as an everyday word, care can be more easily applied to informal and semi-formal helpers.
6.3.5 Objectivity or partiality?

Participants' descriptions suggest an association between helper 'objectivity' and participant-helper relationship on the one hand and the helper-structure relationship on the other. About a third of participants (9) reported valuing helpers whom they perceived to be honest, objective, independent and willing to set their own interests aside. William described how he would gather a range of different, “honest”, “unbiased” opinions. Caroline’s training manager and sister would express “independent” and “objective” views. Rachel, Sally and Prakash referred to objectivity, specifying that they valued career helpers who were external to their situation or did not have a stake in their careers. For example, in seeking career advice, Rachel said that she would:

Get two objective opinions really: I’d go to my manager and probably my practice development nurse again and - I think, colleagues as well - other F Grades within the pre-admission team. You know, bounce ideas off and what do you think about this? Or would you consider going for this job? Just to get different perspectives really before you can make your mind up on what you want to do for yourself.

When participants elaborated on “objectivity” and “independence”, rather than favouring neutrality, they expressed a preference for helpers who were ‘on their side’ or at least did not seem to be promoting their own or another party’s interests. For example, Caroline valued her sister’s advice because she would:

... tell me what she really thought. Usually you get people that say, ‘Yes, that would be lovely, that’s nice! because they think that’s what you want to hear or whatever. But she would actually say, ‘No! I’m not sure about that. Something’s not right’. Or she would actually tell me straight down the line, which is what I need.

While helpers in close personal proximity to the participant might be expected to take their side, the opposite might be expected of formal, structurally detached helpers. This was not always the case. Rachel identified her line managers as appropriate career helpers because she believed them to be concerned about her interests:

She [Rachel’s current line manager] would never say, “No, you can’t do that”, or “I don’t think you should leave this department”. She would also get me to consider all the options and do what’s best for me to be honest. And I think I’ve found that all the way through [name of employing organisation]. When I left the ward to come to out-
patients my manager at the time said, "If it's the right decision for you" [...] I think I've been very lucky with my managers. You know, they've always said, you know, what's right for you. They never put obstacles in my way, which is good.

Gayle reported how her line manager encouraged her efforts to move from outpatients to the challenge of ward-based nursing with the comment: "...obviously we don’t want to lose you but we’d rather you’d be happier on the wards." Karen’s line manager spoke to the hotel manager in support of her wish to transfer to reception. These helpers enabled participants to pursue their career self-view even though doing so appeared to be against the helpers’ immediate interests. Unusually, Yvonne described an encounter with a manager who encouraged her to explore an opportunity outside of her employing organisation. When presented with the choice between an internal promotion and an external opportunity to help establish a new business, Yvonne’s manager encouraged her to move on:

> You must try these things when you get these opportunities because they only come by every now and again [...] if you don’t like it, you can hot foot it back here [...] You think about it. You decide. [...] But don’t worry about my feelings" [...] because I got his blessing I decided to go.

Conversely, structurally detached helpers were not always perceived as taking participants’ side, and some were thought to be influenced by the requirements of their jobs and their employers’ interests. For example, Prakash suspected that his New Deal Adviser’s persistence in discussing a particular job vacancy was motivated by her wish to achieve her targets:

...I'd been signing on, and I suppose it's drummed into them to get their clients, you know, find them jobs.

Lyn regarded staff in the nursing professional body, trade union and hospital as too biased to provide useful information and advice about alternatives to nursing. Lyn and Prakash perceived the absence of appropriate helpers as shaping their careers. For example, Prakash applied for, and was recruited to, a job as a production operative, which he rapidly came to dislike. Lyn continued in nursing, at least in part, because she was unable to find a source of impartial information and advice about alternatives. Prakash was later pleasantly surprised by a careers adviser who, despite being funded by
his employer, supported his search for jobs outside of, as well as within, the organisation: “the careers adviser was very helpful. I couldn’t believe she was working for the company...”.

To sum up, although some participants said that they valued objectivity, their discourse suggests a preference for helpers who were positively partial in the sense of being on their side and willing to give priority to their wishes. Alternatively, they wanted helpers who were not motivated by self-interest or the interests of a third party, that is, helpers who were not negatively partial. An association between structural detachment and partiality might be expected, but this was not always reflected in participants’ accounts. As noted earlier, there is a link between positive partiality and person knowledge (6.3.3).

6.3.5.1 Partiality, impartiality and accepted career guidance practice

William, Caroline, Rachel, Sally, Lyn and Prakash used words such as impartial, unbiased, honest, independent and objective to describe their helpers. However, as I have shown their discourse suggests that they valued helpers who were positively partial (Caroline, Rachel, Gayle and Yvonne), and/or were not negatively partial (Rachel, Sally, Lyn and Prakash). The apparent preference for positive partiality is further evidenced by the few occasions when gatekeepers and intermediaries seemed to circumvent formal processes in order to help participants (Belinda and Ron), effectively denying opportunities to others. I am not here assuming that positive partiality is necessarily altruistic: indeed gatekeepers may benefit from, or anticipate benefiting from, helping participants.

Partiality is mirrored in studies which report a preference for helpers who did not have their own agenda (eg Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993, Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001; Arnold, Budd and Miller, 1988; Davies and Irving, 2000) and focus on individuals’ interests (SQW, 2000). This suggests a wish to avoid or minimise negative partiality rather than a clear preference for impartiality. Whether help-receivers regard positive partiality as necessary, or the absence of negative partiality as adequate, may be affected by their personal preferences, career issues and needs, and the particular helper they consult.

At first sight careers advisers seem to be well-positioned to be positively partial and avoid negative partiality. A client-focus, in the sense of helping individuals to move
towards their own goals, as opposed to other peoples’ (Egan, 1994), seems compatible with the notion of positive partiality. The requirement to give precedence to “professional objectivity above institutional pressures and personal interests” suggests protection against negative partiality, rather than the impartiality that codes of practice claim to advocate (ICG, undated). Like Prakash’s New Deal Adviser and Lyn’s trade union, careers advisers may, at some level, have a stake in their clients’ career decisions, thus creating a tension between the principles of impartiality and client-focus. As Connelly (1998) suggested career helpers can not offer ‘perfect impartiality’, however qualified impartiality and effective guidance may be compatible, especially if helpers declare the limitations of their impartiality. Indeed, the ICG’s code of practice recognises the limitations of impartiality and advisers’ obligations to non-guidance seeking groups and society as a whole (ICG, 2002; ICG, undated). The extent to which careers services and advisers are explicit about the constraints within they act (as required by the code) is unclear. Even less easy to discern are the personal belief systems which underpin practice, including advisers’ acceptance of, or willingness to challenge, structural constraints on careers (Roberts, 1981; Colley 2000; Payne and Edwards 1997). In addition, advisers may not always recognise or acknowledge their belief systems and how these might impact on their practice.

6.3.6 Anatomy of credibility: how the concepts interrelate

Each of the concepts described and discussed above has a distinctive core although, all interrelate and none is wholly discrete. For example, care, person knowledge and positive partiality are linked, although they are not necessarily combined in a single helper. Structural and person knowledge, as well as helpers and their actions, were perceived in terms of partiality. Having structural knowledge enabled helpers to identify their contextually-relevant social capital. Helper credibility is reinforced if person knowledge is supported by structural knowledge and vice versa.

The relative value of different helper qualities and the most prized combination of qualities is likely to vary between individuals, according to their career issues and the type of help they seek. For example, Prakash commented on his school careers adviser’s lack of knowledge about him, but seemed to take for granted the adviser’s objectivity and structural knowledge. On this occasion, Prakash appeared to value person knowledge above objectivity. However, the adviser’s limited knowledge of Prakash meant that the
help he offered lacked client focus and Prakash experienced his recommendation as inappropriate.

Figure 6.1 summarises the relationship between the superordinate and subordinate characteristics and qualities which comprise credibility, and in so doing uses notions from the framework introduced in chapter two (Table 2.3) to analyse help roles and functions.
Figure 6.1 - Anatomy of Credibility

Credibility

Helper – Structure Relationship

- Structural Knowledge
  - Outsider Knowledge
  - Insider Knowledge
  Reinforced by:
  - Identification
  - Resonance
  - Corroboration
  - Person knowledge

- Power
- Influence
- Social Capital
- Absence of Negative
- Positive

Helper – Help-receiver Relationship

- Person Knowledge
  - Expert
  - Experiential
  - Encouragement and Support
  Reinforced by:
  - Resonance
  - Proximity
  - Structural knowledge

- Care
- Time and Attention

260
6.4 Comparisons with other studies

In previous sections I compared individual helper qualities valued by my participants with those identified in other studies. In this section I discuss differences in the configuration of qualities, focusing on areas of variance between my study and others, namely, challenge, credibility and trust.

Participants in my study did not seem to welcome challenge, although resonance and dissonance seemed to contribute to perceptions of helper credibility. Knowledge which challenged their experiences and perceptions was not welcomed (eg Neil) or not considered credible (eg Hal and Tony) unless it was more attractive than participants’ own career self-view (eg Sally, Jill and Pauline). Knowledge that resonated with or supported their existing career self-view and experiences was accepted as credible (eg Gayle and Fred). Participants’ comments which suggest that challenge might be valued, are less convincing in the light of the discussion about partiality.

In this respect, what my participants reported valuing seems to conflict with the findings of other studies where challenge was identified as playing a major part in the helping process (eg Egan, 1994; Rogers, 1951; Kidd, 1996b; Kirschner, Hoffman and Hill, 1994; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001; Pemberton, Herriot and Bates, 1994; Arnold, 1997). In the literature, challenge is associated with: helping individuals to consider alternative perspectives, conceptual frameworks and different ways of thinking about themselves and their situation; checking consistency between individuals’ goals and values; and testing their ideas and goals against some notion of ‘reality’.

The discrepancy between my participants’ preferences and those reported elsewhere may be attributed to a number of factors, possibly reflecting different research aims and methods. My participants may have been less comfortable with, or accustomed to, seeking challenge. They may have perceived the challenges they encountered as threatening or unwelcome because of the context, their relationship with their ‘helpers’, or the way in which challenge was delivered. The importance of support and trust in a helping relationship is accepted (eg Egan, 1994, Rogers, 1951 and Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001). Dorn (1990) argued that challenge is more likely to be accepted if the helper is perceived as a trustworthy expert with whom the client can identify. For some participants, the time lapse between receiving dissonant knowledge or advice and the
research interviews was considerable, consequently they may have recalled only those challenges which they perceived as having a significant impact on their careers.

I found that credibility was rarely mentioned in the literature, with the exception of Law’s career learning theory (1996) and SQW’s market research study of the demand for adult guidance in Scotland (2000). Findings from the SQW study suggested, rather than explicitly identified, an association between credibility and: independence; understanding individuals; focusing on individuals’ best interests; having a sound knowledge of the local labour market; and supportive on-going relationships. Compared to my study, these roughly equate to person knowledge, positive partiality, structural knowledge and care respectively. Given the research population in the SQW study - which included non-employed adults - and the breadth of this study, it is not surprising that the qualities of influence and power were not mentioned.

Law (1996) discussed credibility in the context of the career learning process. He suggested that individuals attend to influences they perceive to be: salient (relevant and central), valued (attractive and welcome) and credible (making sense and corroborated). Although I have configured these concepts differently, there are similarities between Law’s categories and my framework in terms of resonance, corroboration and person knowledge. In my framework, knowledge that resonated with individuals’ experiences and their career self-view reinforced helper credibility, and structural knowledge was strengthened by corroboration. Salience is echoed in my concept of person knowledge, while valued influences relate to resonant knowledge, and to knowledge that is dissonant but positive and welcome.

The reasons for differences in analyses may be explained in part by different focal concerns. Law’s purpose was to explicate the career learning process and specifically why individuals might attend to some influences rather than others. Impartiality, partiality and knowledge were not relevant to his discussion. In contrast, my aim was to develop my understanding of career helpers and to illuminate valued helper qualities. My empirical data lend support to Law’s theoretical reasoning, but also extend his ideas and provide the foundation for a more developed formulation, with credibility as a superordinate concept.

In other relevant studies trust is more prominent than credibility. For example, Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) emphasised the value of trustworthiness and the importance of
establishing trust at an early stage in career discussions. Mutual trust was identified as the source of interpersonal bonds which enable psychosocial mentoring functions (Kram, 1986). Howieson and Semple (2000) found that school students valued trustworthiness in their guidance teachers. It seems to me that trust and credibility are related concepts whose appropriateness depends on the philosophical assumptions which underpin the context. Trustworthiness is more relevant within a positivist frame of reference where reliability and ‘truth’ are being sought. Credibility, on the other hand, is more appropriate from a constructionist perspective where believability and plausibility are at issue.

6.5 The relationship between roles, characteristics and qualities

Initially I had hoped to identify links between particular helper roles and specific characteristics and qualities, or sets of characteristics and qualities. However, as I studied my data, I became increasingly aware of the complexity of my task and began to doubt its appropriateness. My doubts centred on four concerns. First, participants reported multiple reasons - including helper qualities and the helping role - for valuing a particular helper. For example, Caroline valued her training manager because she perceived him to be: independent and objective; knowledgeable about potential employers; and because she felt that he understood her. Second, some helpers were perceived as fulfilling several roles, thus precluding the confident association of any one role with specific qualities. For example, over half (23) of the total number (42) of gatekeepers fulfilled more than one helper role. Third, whether a participant valued particular qualities may be linked to the synchronic and diachronic context of her career as well as to helper qualities. Andy, Geoff and Rachel, for example, may have particularly valued insider knowledge because they were seeking in-depth understanding of self-employment, engineering and professional development respectively. Caroline, Lyn and William wanted advice based on outsider knowledge, perhaps because of previous experiences when they sought, but were unable to access, such help. Fourth, as sense-making is on-going, retrospective and self-referential (Weick 1995), participants’ perceptions of helper qualities are likely to change over time and be re-evaluated in light of their interpretation of their careers. Thus participants may have associated career success (as subjectively defined) with particular helpers and hinderers whom they then credited with specific qualities. Autobiographical memory literature (Beike and Landoll, 2000), which contends that people seek to
construct a life story consistent with their beliefs about their lives, supports this view. For these reasons the associations discussed below and summarised in Table 6.1 can only be tentative. Table 6.1 uses and develops the framework first introduced in chapter two (Table 2.3), and used to frame valued helper qualities and characteristics (Figure 6.1).

Most references to structural knowledge suggest an association with advisers, informants, and occasionally with witnesses. Participants did not explicitly link structural knowledge with gatekeepers and intermediaries, although an association is implicit in their descriptions of these helper roles. Participants may have assumed gatekeepers and intermediaries to be knowledgeable or may have been unaware of the structural knowledge used by these helpers. Thus, gatekeepers and intermediaries may have conferred the benefits of their knowledge (by modifying the influences of structure or influencing others to do so) without conveying knowledge to participants. For example, Belinda suspected that her internal promotion was engineered informally, although she was not cognisant of the process. After his experience of redundancy, Fred secured a job through a gatekeeper, although ostensibly the normal application procedure was followed. Similarly, intermediaries influenced gatekeepers, apparently without explaining how they did this or sharing their informal networks with participants. This line of thought suggests that, by protecting their knowledge, gatekeepers were able to retain their power and intermediaries to retain their influence. In other words, although appearing to help participants, by applying but not sharing their knowledge, gatekeepers and intermediaries may have limited participant agency.

Person knowledge was most commonly associated with advisers and witnesses, some of whom were also perceived to have structural knowledge. Being able to link these two sets of knowledge may have strengthened helper credibility.

Not surprisingly, partiality (both positive and negative) was most commonly associated with advisers, and in a few instances with informants and witnesses, generally when these roles were combined with that of adviser. In a few instances gatekeepers and intermediaries were perceived as being positively partial by circumventing formal procedures to enable participants to access opportunities which effectively meant denying those opportunities to others.

Although not all helpers were explicitly described as caring or interested in participants, this was implicit in participants' discourse about their helpers. Hinderers were
commonly associated with lack of care. Associations are most commonly explicit in
descriptions of advisers, also those of witnesses and informants, but only rarely in
descriptions of intermediaries and gatekeepers. It is possible that participants took for
granted the caring attitude of helping gatekeepers and consequently only commented on
the absence of care. This speculation is supported by examples of helpers or hinderers
who were perceived as breaking promises or treating participants unfairly. For example,
Karen and William were formally promoted, but not given increased responsibility;
Prakash’s supervisor promised him job rotation but failed to keep his promise; and Peter
felt that he was not appropriately rewarded for taking on increased responsibility.

Interestingly, participants rarely referred directly to the characteristics and qualities of
intermediaries, although some are implied. This may simply be because relatively few
participants referred to intermediaries. However, there may be other explanations. For
example, most of those who talked about intermediaries expressed their beliefs about
their influence, rather than describing experiences of intermediary action. Consequently
descriptions of intermediary qualities were relatively thin. Influence was identified as the
key characteristic of intermediaries, but this was generally assumed or implicit, and often
believed to be exercised covertly.
Table 6.1 - Tentative links between helper roles, and helper characteristics and qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction focus</th>
<th>Helper role</th>
<th>Aspects of credibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Structural knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adviser</td>
<td></td>
<td>Power/influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common association, especially with insider knowledge.</td>
<td>No association.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informant</td>
<td>Association with insider knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Implied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediary</td>
<td>Implied, along with social capital.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter I described and analysed helper characteristics and qualities valued by participants (aim three) and made comparisons with previous studies and codes of professional career guidance practice (aim four).

Moving beyond the practice of labelling and listing as is common in other studies, I analysed and discussed valued qualities and characteristics in detail and developed a framework to show how superordinate and subordinate concepts interrelate. Unlike other studies, my analysis encompassed the qualities and characteristics of informal and semi-formal helpers as well as those of professional careers advisers, and tentatively linked helper roles with characteristics and qualities.

Central to my formulation is the concept of helper credibility comprising: structural knowledge, power, influence, person knowledge, care and partiality. Each has a core meaning, although the concepts are overlapping and interrelated. Credibility rarely features in studies of helper qualities, although the related concept of trust is more prominent. I consider credibility to be more relevant than trust in the context of this study where my concern is with perception rather than ‘truth’.

Like other researchers, I reported that participants valued insider knowledge. The evidence for the value of outsider knowledge is weaker, although participants in my study - and some others - said that they wanted outsider knowledge. I analysed and developed a detailed conceptualisation of knowledge as a valued helper quality, suggesting comparisons between insider and outsider knowledge on the one hand, and propositional and experiential knowledge (Heron, 1981) on the other. My study indicated that participants preferred resonance over challenge. Both my study and others point out the limitations of depending too heavily on insider and resonant knowledge.

Unlike other relevant studies I analysed the concepts of power and influence in relation to structure, rather than interpersonal relationships. I conceptualised power in terms of the capacity to act on structure. In line with other studies, my research indicated that power and influence are partly derived from position (which gives access to structural knowledge and/or social capital), although the association may be stronger in relation to power than influence.
Unlike other studies I distinguish between power and influence. Although to be exercised effectively both power and influence require structural knowledge and social capital, I suggest that structural knowledge more clearly underpins power and social capital is more clearly associated with influence.

The concept of care - comprising encouragement and support, and time and attention - is comparable with the attitudes of a person-centred helper (Rogers, 1951), although the combination and configuration of constituents differ in some respects. In specific terms, there are similarities between: time and attention, and genuineness and; between support and encouragement and unconditional positive regard. Empathy is more akin to person knowledge. I introduced the concept of care because of these differences and because of ordinariness of the term makes it more easily applicable to informal and semi-formal helpers as well as formal ones. ‘Care’ is intended to reflect participants’ descriptions of their feelings on encountering helpers who exhibited or failed to exhibit particular attitudes and skills, in contrast with other studies which commonly focus on skills.

Some participants referred to objectivity and independence, but their discourse suggested a preference for positive partiality or at least a wish to avoid negative partiality. Other studies indicate similar preferences across a range of populations. Positive partiality is compatible with Rogerian person-centredness. In spite of advocating impartiality, codes of professional practice seem more designed to protect against negative partiality. Given their own interests and career world-views and the pressure from other parties, it may be challenging for careers advisers (and other helpers) to avoid negative partiality. Discussion of impartiality and knowledge raises concerns about the transparency of advisers’ ontological and epistemological position, how this shapes the help they offer and how that help is perceived by help-receivers.

I concluded that links between helper roles, characteristics and qualities can only be tentative and, in descriptions of intermediaries and gatekeepers, were commonly implicit. Advisers were associated with all qualities except power and influence; witnesses were particularly associated with person knowledge; and in some instances informants were associated with care and structural knowledge. Gatekeepers were characterised by their power in relation to structure and intermediaries by their influence over others thought to be powerful.
CHAPTER SEVEN - CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

As noted in the introductory chapter, my research aims were:

To construct new conceptual frameworks which explicate, from an individual perspective, the role of others in shaping careers, and to extend and provide insight into existing knowledge about career helpers.

1. To identify the roles that non-managerial employees perceive ‘career helpers’ and ‘career hinderers’ as playing in shaping their careers.

2. To understand and contextualise encounters these employees perceive as shaping their careers.

3. To identify the characteristics and qualities that these employees value in their career helpers.

4. To examine how these characteristics and qualities relate to the characteristics of accepted professional career guidance practice and the qualities expected of professional careers advisers.

In concluding this study I summarise my project, demonstrate that I achieved my aims, and I identify my key contributions to knowledge. I compare my typology of career helpers with similar existing frameworks, and contextualise my findings vis-à-vis other studies. I detail the contribution of the anatomy of credibility, identify the implications for career theory of both the typology and the anatomy and suggest some implications for career helpers and individuals seeking career help. Moving on, I reflect on the research process and discuss the limitations of my study before closing with suggestions for further research.

7.2 Summary of the project

In this study I explored how individuals account for the role of others in shaping their careers. My focus was on non-managerial employees, their everyday life-worlds (Giorgi,
1970) and their perceptions of the impact of encounters with informal, semi-formal and formal helpers and hinderers.

I showed how changes and perceived changes in the world of work are challenging conceptualisations of career, career guidance and career management theory and practice. I discussed the limitations on the development of career theory imposed by applying dualistic approaches, and specifically the divisions between: the dominance of positivist career theory and constructivist career guidance practice; positivist and constructionist career theory; and sociological and psychological perspectives. By reviewing relevant studies I identified the need for research into non-managerial employees' perceptions of the role of others in shaping their careers, and the valued qualities and characteristics of career helpers. I also identified a need to further develop analytical frameworks to aid understanding of the role of career helpers.

Taking a social constructionist perspective and a qualitative approach, I used semi-structured interviews to gather participants' career stories. I focused on helpers and hinderers whom participants perceived as playing an important role in shaping their careers. This approach placed helpers in the diachronic context of participants' careers and gave me access to participants' theorising about how careers work. I illustrated my use of narrative analysis by recounting the career stories of two participants.

I adapted community-interaction theory (Law, 1981; 1986) for use as a framework for comparing relevant studies and analysing my data. Law described how community-interaction mediates between, and modifies the influences of sociological forces and self-concept on career development. From this notion and my data, I constructed a framework in which career helpers and hinderers mediate between structure and individuals, and play a part in modifying individuals' career self-view and career world-view, thus shaping their careers.

I showed that participants perceived other people to have a significant impact on their careers, both as helpers and hinderers. A person may play more than one helper or hinderer role, although not all helpers and hinderers have dual or multiple roles. Some helpers initiated help-giving, and others responded to requests for help. Individuals valued some
types of help over others, their preferences being influenced by the career context and/or their personal experiences.

From my data I constructed a typology of five career helper categories, described each category in terms of action, role in community-interaction terms and impact on help-receivers and their careers. I identified credibility as the superordinate quality which participants valued in their helpers and constructed an anatomy of credibility to show the relationship between credibility and subordinate qualities and characteristics. I suggested tentative links between the helper roles and valued characteristics and qualities. The typology and the anatomy of credibility constitute my key contributions to knowledge.

7.3 Contributions to knowledge

My overarching aim was:

To construct new conceptual frameworks which explicate, from an individual perspective, the role of others in shaping careers, and to extend and provide insight into existing knowledge about career helpers.

Drawing on my data I constructed a typology of career helpers and an anatomy of credibility. I contribute to social constructionist perspectives of career and in particular I present a fresh perspective on community-interaction theory and enrich action theory.

7.3.1 The helper typology and similar frameworks

I developed my early typology (Table 5.6) of career helpers by adding tentative links between the helper roles and valued qualities and characteristics (Table 6.1) to construct the typology shown in Table 7.1. This typology addresses my first and second research aims:

To identify the roles that non-managerial employees perceive 'career helpers' and 'career hinders' playing in shaping their careers.

To understand and contextualise encounters that employees perceive as shaping their careers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction focus</th>
<th>Helper category</th>
<th>Associated qualities and characteristics</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Role in community-interaction terms</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adviser</td>
<td>Structural knowledge Person knowledge Partiality Care</td>
<td>Suggests and recommends.</td>
<td>Mediates between individual and structure. Conveys content and process of career world-view.</td>
<td>On career world-view, career direction and action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helper-individual</td>
<td>Informant</td>
<td>Structural knowledge Care?</td>
<td>Provides knowledge about jobs and occupations.</td>
<td>Mediates between individual and structure. Conveys content of career world-view.</td>
<td>On career self-view, career world view and direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>Person knowledge Care?</td>
<td>Gives feedback on skills and personal qualities.</td>
<td>Mediation is implicit. Modifies career self-view.</td>
<td>On career self-view, direction and aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helper-structure</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Power Structural knowledge (implied)</td>
<td>Provides/denies access to opportunities.</td>
<td>Modifies the influences of structure and career self-view, and possibly career world-view.</td>
<td>On direction and aspirations and possibly on career self-view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediary</td>
<td>Influence Implied along with social capital.</td>
<td>Facilitates access to opportunities.</td>
<td>Modifies the influences of structure and possibly career self-view.</td>
<td>Indirectly on direction and aspirations, and possibly on career self-view.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As far as I am aware, my typology is unique in: linking empirical analysis to theory; integrating structure as an organising concept; analysing impact on career self-view; and identifying the roles of career helpers in a range of contexts and situations. Only Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) have attempted a similar project and as a result developed a list of managers’ career planning roles. Differences and similarities with my typology are discussed in more detail below. The other key studies considered in this thesis and Law’s modes of influence (1986) are also compared, although the process is complicated by differences in research aims and the nature of categories and frameworks.

I turn first to the relationship between frameworks and theory. My typology is unusual in meeting both criteria required of a typology (as distinct from a taxonomy), in that it distinguishes and contrasts categories, and links empirical analyses with theory (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992). Helper categories are compared in terms of roles and actions and related to interactions between helper and help-receiver, and between helper and structure. The process of relating my typology to theory was assisted by using community-interaction theory as an analytical framework, and specifically by applying the notions of mediation and modification. From the notion of modification, I developed the new concepts of career self-view and career world-view to elaborate and clarify the nature of helper/hinderer impact. Career self-view highlights the relationship between perceptions of how careers work and perceptions of self and career, as opposed to life roles and self-concepts (Super, 1953, 1990) or subjective and objective career (2.1.3.2 and 4.5). Career world-view refers to an individual’s perception, understanding and interpretation of jobs, occupations and how careers unfold. Impact on career is categorised as career aspiration (raising or affirming ability to undertake more challenging work), career direction (identifying a direction) and career action (pursuing a career idea or aim).

In contrast, those studies most comparable to mine in terms of subject matter meet neither of Ackroyd and Hughes’ criteria (1992). Instead they develop lists of career planning roles (Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981) or activities of guidance (SCAGES, 1993; Wilson and Jackson, 1998), without comparing the different elements or making links with theory. Although modes of influence (Law, 1986) are contextualised in community-interaction theory, they are not compared with one another. Other frameworks are more developed. Kram (1986) and Shapiro and Farrow (1988) position their research in relation to the literature and identify relationships between mentoring categories. Wilden
and La Gro (1998) and Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) discuss the relationship between different helper qualities. However, in texts referenced here, none of these frameworks is then related to theory.

Second, my typology pays more attention to the role of structure. In particular I use structure as a key organising concept and describe helper roles in terms of mediating and modifying the influences of structure. Although only Law (1981) uses the term ‘structure’, all six key studies indicate that helpers mediate between help-receivers and ‘structure’ by transmitting ideas, influences and knowledge about social systems (Table 2.3). Helpers’ roles in modifying the influences of structure are explicit and central to some of the categories identified by Kram (1986), Shapiro and Farrow (1988), and Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981). In other frameworks, the role of helpers in modifying the influences of structure is more modest. Although Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) identified some help-giver action, the nature of their study means that the role of givers in modifying the influences of structure is not clear. Wilden and La Gro (1998) did not identify how careers advisers might modify the influences of structure, and Wilson and Jackson (1998) identified only a very modest role for guidance workers in this respect.

Third, the typology proposes a different interpretation of the impact on help-receivers in terms of explicitness, concepts and the relationship between transformational stages. In some of the frameworks discussed in this thesis, the role of helpers in modifying individuals’ self-perception is not explicit but implied through references to mentoring functions (Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981) or guidance activities (Wilson and Jackson, 1998). Others are explicit, and variously interpret impact in terms of: self-worth and preparation for hierarchical advancement (Kram, 1986, 1988); cognition and affect (Wilden and La Gro, 1988); and thoughts, feelings and action (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001). In contrast I introduce and focus on the transformation of career self-view and career world-view, and in so doing interpret impact specifically in terms of the help-receiver’s perceptions. In this respect my typology is closely aligned to Law’s (1986) modes of community influence (expectations, feedback, support, models, contact and impressions) over individuals’ perceptions of their career development opportunities. However, my typology is distinct in linking these perceptual changes to help-receivers’ career actions, aspirations and direction.
Fourth, I extend the notion of helpers to include a range of organisational contexts and helping relationships. Other frameworks concentrate either on workplace or professional career guidance contexts, while my typology is based on, and intended to apply to informal, semi-formal and formal helpers within and beyond these settings. Informal influences (Law, 1981; 1986) and informal career helpers are regarded as important by researchers (2.3.6), but little attention is paid to exploring the role of informal, non-workplace helpers in shaping adults' careers. Most existing frameworks are intended to apply to specific contexts. For example, SCAGES' list of activities of guidance (SCAGES, 1993) was designed for educational guidance settings. Although Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001), Kram (1986; 1988), and Shapiro and Farrow (1988) mention non-workplace helpers, their frameworks are based on workplace contexts; while Law (1981) focuses exclusively on the informal influences of communities. Being drawn from individuals' experiences of career help in a range of contexts and situations and framed by theory, my typology links career guidance theory with the workplace, and bridges the divide between career guidance and career development and management. In other words, the typology is applicable to individuals seeking career help from informal, semi-formal and formal helpers in professional guidance services and in their place of work (7.3.6), and to career helpers with different levels of responsibilities for career development or guidance in a variety of contexts (7.3.5).

7.3.2 Contextualising findings vis-à-vis other studies

Although some other career studies adopt a constructionist perspective, use qualitative methods and explore related topics, none is based on the particular combination of philosophical perspective, research aims, methods and population used here. Variations between my study and the six key studies preclude confident explanation of differences between the frameworks. Nevertheless, the possible effects of social and economic circumstances, philosophical perspective, semantics, research methods and populations are considered below.

7.3.2.1 Social and economic circumstances

It seems plausible that social and economic circumstances may account for some differences in interpretation between my study and those reported in the 1980s (Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981; Kram, 1986; 1988; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988).
However, I can only speculate about how, and to what extent this may be the case. As noted earlier (2.1.2), structural changes between the 1980s and late 1990s/early 2000s have affected labour markets and in some respect the careers of some groups. Reports also indicate a heightened sense of job insecurity among some people. Individuals might be expected to respond by increasingly valuing helpers who can modify the influences of structure, and especially those who afford protection from the adverse effects of change. Findings of my study and others reported here do not lend support to this hypothesis. Both my typology and the early frameworks show that some helper roles have an explicit and central role in modifying the influences of structure. Indeed the frameworks developed around the same time as mine (Wilden and La Gro, 1998; Wilson and Jackson, 1998; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001), which present helpers as playing a prominent role in relation to individuals and a more modest one in modifying the influences of structure, suggest the converse argument. According to this line of thought, changes in the career world reduce the importance of structure and increase the value of helper roles concerned with individual navigation, such as witness and adviser. However, as all of the early studies focused on workplace career help and two of the later studies on professional career guidance, organisational context and helping situation are more likely explanations of differences and similarities between frameworks.

7.3.2.2 Philosophical perspectives

Some studies of career have been based on constructionist perspectives, while career guidance research is more commonly grounded in positivism (2.3.2). Identifying researchers' philosophical position is inhibited by limited explication, although inferences can be drawn from literature reviews, research aims and methods (7.3.2.4). On the basis of this information, I suggest that Shapiro and Farrow's quantitative study (1988) is based on positivism. Wilson and Jackson's (1998) exploratory study involving focus groups and Wilden and La Gro's study (1998) focusing on individual cognition and affective change, are more characteristically constructivist. Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd's (2001; 2003) exploratory study, which uses a phenomenological approach to analysis and is positioned in literatures on relationships and mentoring, may be categorised as broadly interpretivist.
In contrast, my study explores career help from a social constructionist perspective. On the premise that social world is changing and jointly constructed, participants' career stories are interpreted as versions of 'reality' constructed by participant and researcher and situated in a particular place and time; and close attention is paid to meaning and interpretation (7.3.2.3). Using this approach enabled me to identify themes across narratives and to elucidate the dimensions identified in 7.3.1. which are less prominent in other frameworks.

7.3.2.3 Semantics

As noted earlier, a questioning approach to meaning is a feature of social constructionism. My endeavour to reach behind labels distinguishes my project from the key studies which give less attention to, and take for granted the meaning of, many terms, especially those applied to valued helper qualities and characteristics (7.3.3.). Concern for meaning permeates my study from preparation and conduct of the research interviews through analysis and interpretation. I had qualms about using the term 'career' because of its colloquial association with hierarchical progression, and 'career guidance' because of its vague and multiple meanings. However, explaining my research aims to human resource staff and potential participants necessitated reference to both career and career guidance. I recognised that my use of language may have deterred some potential participants who were not interested in progression but had other relevant and interesting experiences of career help. To some extent my request for non-managerial participants may have helped to counter any impression that I was only interested in people with high aspirations. In a letter to potential participants (Appendix one) I outlined the topics to be covered in the research interview and clarified my interest in informal career help as well as professional career guidance. During the course of the interviews (3.4.2) I sought to underplay, although not totally avoid, the term 'career', for example, by asking how participants came to be in their current job. Avoiding assumptions about the meaning of career for particular participants, I listened carefully to their discourse. As a group, participants seemed to associate career with development involving hierarchical progression and/or skill development and/or challenge. That is, participants' definitions extended beyond the notion of career as hierarchical progression.
Researchers in the key studies are not always explicit about their definitions of career or whether they shared their definitions with participants. This could imply that meaning is regarded as assumed and unproblematic. Findings give an indication of researchers’ definitions. Four of the key studies (Kram, 1986; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001) suggest that researchers and participants interpreted career in terms of hierarchical advancement. Clients in Wilden and La Gro’s study (1998) may have attributed a broad meaning to career and career guidance as they brought a range of issues to their guidance interviews. In the context and aims of their particular study, definitions may not have been necessary. In a working definition of career guidance (2.1.5), Wilson and Jackson (1998) neatly side-stepped the problem of defining career by referring to exploring: options about learning and work; relating information to self; supporting decision-making; and identifying next steps. Their research showed that employed participants were interested in higher status jobs, implying an association between career and higher pay, greater responsibility, recognition and skill development. In other words, my study and two of the key studies share a broad definition of career.

Different meanings and interpretations of key concepts may have contributed to variations in the frameworks. For example, most of the studies in which career is associated with internal hierarchical advancement (Kram, 1986, 1988; Shapiro and Farrow, 1988; Liebowitz and Schlossberg, 1981) generate frameworks in which some categories of helpers have a role in modifying the influences of organisational structure. In contrast, those in which career is interpreted more broadly (Wilden and La Gro, 1998; Wilson and Jackson, 1998) scarcely acknowledge the role of helpers in modifying structure. The picture is complicated however if meaning is perceived as situational. Wilden and La Gro’s (1998) study can serve as an example. As the focus was on cognitive and affective change in a career guidance interview, participants may have interpreted guidance as confined to one-to-one exchanges between client and professional adviser and had little expectation of receiving help that might modify the influences of structures which impact on their careers. In other words, the research focus, situation and context in which a career helper was encountered may have affected the meaning attributed to guidance and consequently the framework developed by Wilden and La Gro.
Combining a workplace research context with a broad, participant-derived meaning of career is likely to have contributed to the inclusion in my typology of helpers who modify the influences of structure and those who shape individuals' perceptions. My participants' interest in skill development and challenge, not just hierarchical development, may have affected the range of career helpers they identified and particularly the inclusion of informal, semi-formal and formal helpers from within and beyond the workplace. Informal, non-workplace helpers, for example, were valued as informants about external opportunities.

7.3.2.4 Research methods

As noted earlier (3.8), my choice of community-interaction as a theoretical perspective privileges the notion of career as a joint construction over other interpretations of career and may also have affected the attention I gave to structure in my analysis. Interpretations based on other theoretical perspectives may highlight different themes and result in differently structured frameworks. An opportunity structure perspective (Roberts, 1981), for example, would place greater emphasis on structural constraint and less on helpers or help-receivers as agents. Other approaches might highlight happenstance (Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz, 1999), cumulative career learning (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999) or developmental tasks (Kram, 1986) and result in typologies which focus on helpers' roles and contribution in relation to luck, learning opportunities or career stages.

Both similarities and differences are discernible between my research methods and those employed in the key studies. As I selected the key studies for a combination of reasons including relevance, contribution to knowledge and use of qualitative methods, it is not surprising that only one (Shapiro and Farrow, 1998) adopted a quantitative approach. The remaining five key studies gathered qualitative data using semi-structured or depth interviews (Kram, 1986; Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001; Leibowitz and Schlossberg, 1981; Wilden and La Gro, 1998) or focus groups and hidden customers (Wilson and Jackson, 1998). Within these broadly qualitative approaches are other differences that may have affected findings and interpretations. Here I focus on contrasts between recalled and current or recent experience; and between direct questioning and career
narrative. I also discuss how my use of community-interaction as an analytical framework may have affected my interpretation.

My methods differ from those used by Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) and Wilden and La Gro (1998). Both of these studies sought to understand how, at a particular point in time, persons in specific roles or encounters helped or might help individuals with their careers. An important feature of Wilden and La Gro’s study is the use of ‘interpersonal recall processes’ where participants were questioned as they viewed a video recording of their careers interview. Adopting this method necessarily affected findings and the focus on interventions that shaped (or did not shape) immediate affective and cognitive change, as opposed to perceptions of advisers’ longer term impact on careers. As perception and interpretation of causal links are constructed and reconstructed over time, individuals are likely to give different accounts of helpfulness immediately after an encounter than after more time has elapsed.

In contrast, my study, like those of Wilson and Jackson (1998), Kram (1988) and Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001), draw upon participants’ recall of recent and more distant experiences and encounters, and how impact on careers is perceived. Research that depends on memory can be challenged on the grounds of reliability. This would be a valid criticism of my study if I were claiming participants’ accounts as reflections of ‘reality’, rather than situated in a particular perspective and point in time. Both Kram (1986) and I collected data using narrative method, which, I claim, promotes recall as participants locate and identify key career helpers and hinderers in relation to preceding and subsequent events. However, this approach is not without difficulties, most notably the need to carefully balance breadth and focus, and to abstract relevant themes from large volumes of data.

Using a different approach, Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) and Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) asked participants to identify positive and negative encounters or helpers. Differences between focused direct questions and the breadth of narrative may account for some differences between frameworks. For example, my use of career narrative may be responsible, at least to some extent, for the role of structure in my typology, the range of helpers and contexts I identified, and the way in which I relate my typology to theory. Telling career stories rather than answering temporally decontextualised questions may have contributed to the identification in my study of a wide range of helpers and
hinderers within and outside of the workplace. A narrative approach may also have encouraged more individual theorising about cause and effect, and thus enabled me to construct a typology which links helper roles with impact on career self-view, career world-view, career direction, aspiration and action. By viewing their current occupation and job in diachronic context, participants may have identified as particularly significant individual helpers or hinderers whom they might otherwise have presented as less prominent. For example, narrative method may have resulted in more prominence being given to some career helper roles, such as gatekeepers than might have been the case if I had asked decontextualised questions about helpers and hinderers.

7.3.2.5 Research populations

My study contrasts with others by including as participants only non-managerial employees. Participants in Wilson and Jackson’s (1998) and Wilden and La Gro’s (1998) studies included people with a range of different socio-economic, educational and employment backgrounds. Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1981) did not identify their participants by organisational position but referred to the career planning roles of participants’ supervisors and managers, suggesting that ‘employees’ in their study were relatively junior. The three remaining key studies gathered data from junior and senior managers (Kram, 1988), senior executives (Shapiro and Farrow, 1988), and managerial and professional staff (Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd, 2001).

Any differences between managers’ and non-managers’ career ideas and goals, may contribute to differences in the frameworks. For example, managers may focus more on hierarchical progression, the development of generic managerial skills and pursuit of internal development opportunities than non-managerial employees. Lateral or developmental moves within and outside of the employing organisation, or choices between specialisms or between technical development and managerial routes may be more relevant to non-managerial employees than to managers. Hierarchical position and access or lack of access to people perceived as powerful and influential, may affect how the two groups perceive structural barriers. Indeed, the prominence of gatekeepers and intermediaries in my typology might be due to awareness among my non-managerial participants of the limitations of their own power and influence. My study, and that of Liebowitz and Schlossberg (1981), show that helpers have a role in modifying structure
as well as in shaping individuals’ perceptions, although neither study explores the careers of managers. This suggests that helpers with the capacity to modify the influences of structure are important to non-managers as well as managers, and that differences in frameworks are more likely to be due to organisational context, than the hierarchical position of participants.

The same conclusion might be drawn about the role of non-workplace helpers. For example, if non-managers take a greater interest than their managerial counterparts in a wider range of opportunities beyond internal hierarchical progression, I might expect non-workplace helpers to have a higher profile in the accounts of non-managers. Indeed, my typology identifies and gives more prominence to the role of non-workplace helpers than other frameworks. However, none of the other frameworks, regardless of research population, pays much attention to informal and semi-formal non-workplace helpers. Only in the studies of professional career guidance (Wilden and La Gro, 1998; Wilson and Jackson, 1998) are non-workplace helpers prominent and this is more readily explained by research aims and the organisational contexts within which career help is delivered than by the population group.

7.3.3 The anatomy of credibility and the key studies

By constructing the anatomy of credibility (Figure 7.1) I achieved my third research aim:

To identify the characteristics and qualities that these employees value in their career helpers.

The anatomy, an integrated and detailed hierarchical framework of valued helper qualities and characteristics, constitutes one of my key contributions to knowledge. Unlike other studies, I focus on qualities and characteristics as a major area of investigation, relate qualities and characteristics to one another and attend to the meaning behind the labels used by participants. Importantly, I construe credibility as a superordinate category, identify the relationships between categories and use the notions of helper-structure and helper-help-receiver relationships as intermediate organising categories.
Figure 7.1 - Anatomy of Credibility  
(reproduced from chapter 6)
In contrast, the key studies and many others (eg SQW, 2000; Kirschner, Hoffman and Hill, 1994; Hasluck, 2000) present valued helper qualities and characteristics as lists of distinct items without relating them to one another or illuminating meaning. Of the key studies, Kram (1986, 1988), Shapiro and Farrow (1988) and Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) grouped characteristics into sets of two categories. Shapiro and Farrow (1988) developed their helper functions by grouping individual helper characteristics and Kram associated mentor characteristics with either a psychosocial function or a career development function. Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd focused on behaviours, skills and impact and constructed a sophisticated analysis by grouping their 13 categories of giver’s skills and behaviours into five clusters, three of which relate specifically to skills and qualities. Despite differences in focus, our findings are similar in some respects. For example, the category that Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) label ‘behaviours arising from a giver’s role’ (comprising status, knowledge and experience) resembles the characteristics I associate with the helper-structure relationship. Their interpersonal skills category has parallels with the characteristics I associate with the relationship between helper and help-receiver. However, I also include in the latter category some characteristics that Hirsh, Jackson and Kidd (2001) allocate to personal characteristics.

While other key studies assume shared meanings or are not concerned with the meaning, looking for the meaning behind the participants’ words was central to my study. In particular I unpacked the concepts of knowledge, power, influence, partiality and care. Of these only impartiality has been much debated (eg Payne and Edwards, 1997; Colley, 2000), although not in the key studies.

I proposed a conceptualisation of knowledge comprising structural and person knowledge. My distinction between insider and outsider structural knowledge is supported by the literature, although not expressed in these terms. Importantly, I drew parallels between insider and outsider knowledge on the one hand and the concepts of experiential and propositional knowledge (Heron, 1981) on the other. I highlighted the value of understanding how individuals assess different types of knowledge, the knowledge they value in different contexts and the knowledge they expect from different helpers.

Not surprisingly, other studies corroborate my finding that individuals value helpers who know and understand them or endeavour to do so. However, I introduce the concept of
'person knowledge' and, unlike other researchers, categorise person knowledge in terms of expertise and experience - concepts which parallel outsider and insider structural knowledge mentioned above. The notion that valued person knowledge needs to be individual, rather than generalised, supports the Rogerian concepts of person-centredness and empathy.

In contrast with other studies (6.3.7) and career counselling theory, I found that resonant knowledge was more commonly welcomed and regarded as more credible than knowledge that challenges career self-view or career world-view. This may be peculiar to my study, and/or be indicative of insufficiently supportive relationships and/or the unconstructive delivery of challenge. Both my study and others suggest that careers may be constrained by over-reliance on insider and resonant knowledge.

I analysed the concepts of power and influence, which are not commonly studied in career research, and focused on these concepts in relation to structure, rather than within interpersonal relationships. In line with other studies, my research indicates that power and influence are partly derived from position or status. Unlike other studies I distinguish between power and influence. Power is more strongly associated than influence with structural knowledge and providing or denying access to opportunities. Influence is more strongly associated than power with social capital and shaping the perceptions and actions of powerful others.

In addressing my fourth aim:

To examine how these characteristics and qualities relate to the characteristics of accepted professional career guidance practice and the qualities expected of professional careers advisers -

I highlighted credibility, a quality not previously identified as significant in career guidance practice. Importantly, I identified and explored the different qualities and characteristics that constitute credibility and in so doing introduced the concepts of care, and positive and negative partiality. In line with accepted professional career guidance practice, I found that Rogerian attitudes (Rogers, 1951) and interpersonal skills and qualities identified in the literature were valued. However, 'care' - as opposed to person-centredness - highlights individuals' perspectives and experiences of encountering helpers with particular personal qualities and skills; the ordinariness of the word makes it
more easily applicable to informal and semi-formal helpers. I found that care was experienced as feeling encouraged and supported, and being afforded time and attention.

The concepts of positive and negative partiality capture individuals' preferences for helpers whom they perceive to be on their side or at least not pursuing their own agenda or that of a third party. My findings are corroborated by other studies (6.3.5.1), and supported by authors who regard impartial career guidance as unachievable (Fielding, 1999) or not necessarily in the best interests of individuals (Edwards and Payne, 1997). Positive partiality is also compatible with Rogerian person-centredness. The ICG's code of professional career guidance practice (eg ICG, undated) advocates 'impartiality', but on close examination seems to protect against negative partiality. This is a more practical aspiration, especially as advisers have their own ontological and epistemological positions which shape the help they offer and how it is perceived by individuals.

7.3.4 Implications for career theory

In this study I addressed the limitations of dualistic approaches to understanding career development and career help (2.2.3) by using community-interaction to bridge the divide between psychological and sociological theory (2.2.4). I reinforce this bridge by using narrative and thematic approaches to data collection and analysis to link career theory with career guidance theory.

I contributed to social constructionism by showing the relationship between different stages in the helping process and in accessing meaning. I illustrate the first claim by discussing how the typology refines community-interaction (Law, 1981, 1986) and enriches contextual action theory (Young and Valach, 2004). I then show how the anatomy of credibility, which explores language, meaning and interrelationships of qualities and challenges assumed meanings, contributes to mentoring theory (Kram, 1986), and extends aspects of career learning (Law, 1996) and contextual action theory (Young and Valach, 2004).

7.3.4.1 The typology

Relating my findings to Law's notions of sociological and psychological influences, I developed the idea of categorising career helpers according to the focus of their interactions with either structure or individuals. My study as a whole and the typology in
particular add to, and impact on, community-interaction theory (Law, 1981; 1986) by offering new perspectives and an explication of the relationship between stages in the community-interaction process. New perspectives are offered by using a theory developed from the literature on the education and career choices of young people to frame an empirical study of employed adults’ careers. More specifically, the typology refines and explicates community-interaction by relating mediation and modifying processes to specific helper actions, roles and impact.

Law (1981) defined mediation in terms of transmitting knowledge, ideas and values, and modification as the process by which these are filtered and changed. He did not explore how mediation and modification might differ in practice; understandably given that mediation is likely to affect both helpers’ and help-receivers’ perceptions in some way. However, my typology distinguishes helpers who have a primarily modifying role from those whose role is primarily mediation. Advisers and informants, for example, were perceived as mediating between individual and structure, while gatekeepers and intermediaries modified the influences of structure.

Comparing Figures 4.1 and 7.2 shows the three ways in which my study has impacted on formal community-interaction theory, and the substantive model I have developed as a result. First, I emphasised individual helpers and explicit, intentional action as opposed to influences transmitted both intentionally and unintentionally by communities. Having said that, some of my participants associated individual helper action with membership of communities. Consider, for example, Neil’s reference to the importance of family networks in facilitating career progression in the coal mining industry; the influence of his peer group on Prakash’s thinking; and the value Peter placed on his colleagues in the context of public hostility to his profession. I suggest that from a social constructionist stance, isolating subjective influence and knowledge from community influence is not possible.

Second, I moved away from the broad and loosely defined notion of “perceptions of sociological influences” through concepts of “micro-, meso and exo-systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) proposed in my initial adaptation (Figure 4.2 in chapter 4) to “career development opportunities”. Bronfenbrenner’s systems approach was useful in analysing data, but “career development opportunities” better reflects my interpretation of
the data; shifting the emphasis away from systems to the perceived role of systems in enabling or constraining career opportunities.

Third, I abandoned the general notion of "perceptions of psychological influence" in favour of the more specific concepts of career self-view and career world-view. I further refined community-interaction processes by distinguishing between the impact of mediation and modifications on career self-view and career world-view, and I explicated the process by which career development opportunities, and career world-view and career self-view play a part in shaping career aspiration, career action and career direction.

Much of the above discussion suggests a shift in my thinking from the broader perspective to a closer focus on interrelationships and individuals' more immediate social worlds. In this respect, my work is situated in close proximity to contextual action theory (Young and Valach, 2004). We also share an emphasis on encounter, change and process; concern for meaning; the notion of career as a joint as well as an individual construction; and narrative as a means of accessing cultural, societal and relational as well as subjective aspects of career. I suggested that my typology brings a new perspective to, and extends, action theory's conceptualisation of action. According to Young and Valach, action includes discourse and can be seen from the perspectives of manifest (observable behaviour), internal processes (cognition and feelings) and social (shared) meaning. By mapping my typology on to this model, manifest helper behaviour can be categorised in terms of helpers' roles, such as suggesting, providing knowledge and giving feedback. Internal processing can be described in terms of change to, or affirmation of, career self-view and career world-view. Social meaning is expressed through impact on aspirations, career action and direction, which locates an individual in relation to others in the career world.
Figure 4.1 A diagrammatic representation of community-interaction theory (Law, 2003b) (reproduced from chapter 4)

Figure 7.2 - Concluding adaptation of the community-interaction model
The concept of credibility, the anatomy and an articulation of the meaning of valued helper characteristics and qualities, all enrich existing career theory. In particular, these developments help to explicate why people attend to some influences rather than others, and why particular career helpers acting jointly with individuals are valued more highly and have a greater impact on career construction than others. I illustrate this contribution with reference to three career theories: career learning (Law, 1996), mentoring (Kram, 1986) and contextual action (Young, Valach and Collin, 1996; Young and Valach, 2004).

Career learning theory (Law, 1996) suggests that individuals attend to influences that are salient (relevant and central), valued (attractive and welcome) and credible (make sense and corroborated). However, these qualities were not identified through empirical study, neither are they related to one another or their meaning discussed in detail. The anatomy supports Law’s suggestion that credibility may affect which experiences and people an individual attends to, and which are less influential. My work identifies valued qualities from empirical data, offers detailed descriptions of these qualities and a sophisticated framework showing the interrelationships between concepts, thus better informing our understanding of influences.

Similarly, the notion of credibility as an overarching quality may contribute to our understanding of mentees’ choice of mentor and their perceptions of the mentoring process. The anatomy also sheds light on Kram’s theory (1986) by highlighting the helper-structure relationship as opposed to the relationship between mentee and mentor. In part this may be explained by differences in approach to the development and ordering of constructs and categories. While I identified and then grouped valued qualities and characteristics, Kram linked mentor qualities with psychosocial functions derived from interpersonal bonds between mentor and mentee or career functions derived from their structural relationship. In other words, Kram’s process flows from relationship through function to qualities and mine operates in the reverse order.

Action theory is similarly enriched by my use of helper-structure relationship as a means of grouping qualities and characteristics. The relationship signals an understanding of differentiated, sometimes overlapping social systems differently perceived according to location within them. In other words, helpers and help-receivers are perceived as having...
different relationships with structure and their differential positions contribute to the helper’s credibility. Action theory is based on the thesis that social worlds are individually and jointly constructed and (in part) understood through identifiable social meaning. The notion of joint construction is a central feature of action theory (Young, Valach and Collin, 1996; Young and Valach, 2004) but little attention is given to the reasons for individuals’ choice of co-constructors and why encounters with particular co-constructors are more highly valued than others. The anatomy offers a framework for exploring the reasons behind successful and unsuccessful encounters.

7.3.5 Career guidance theory

My study suggests that careers advisers need to develop an understanding of individuals and resist the temptation to draw too heavily on nomothetic knowledge implied by differentialist approaches. I suggest that person knowledge extends beyond identifying skills and personal qualities to include an understanding of clients’ career world-view and career self-view. My contention is that help is most valued if advisers have insight into, and base their help on, their clients’ perspectives. This may be furthered by using a narrative approach to career help: that is, by inviting clients to recount their career stories and explain how they perceive their careers unfolding.

I raised fundamental questions about structural knowledge and impartiality. While advisers may be aware of the need to establish their credibility with clients, they may not know how clients assess credibility. The anatomy of credibility offers a framework for advisers to identify the qualities and characteristics that clients may value in their helpers. If, as my research suggests, individuals value and use insider knowledge to help them construct their career world-views and career self-views, then advisers could help individuals to critically assess the credibility of knowledge and sources of knowledge. Other authors agree. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1993), for example, suggested that ‘insider’ knowledge can be more helpful to young people who: have a better understanding of social and cultural constraints; challenge cultural constraints; and are more receptive to categories of information which they might otherwise dismiss. Career learning theory describes and explains how individuals may progress from ‘sensing’ impressions about work and self, through sifting and focusing, in order to understand and develop their own explanations and theories about careers (Law, 1996).
Advisers may be most helpful if they understand whether their clients expect and want insider or outsider structural knowledge, and if they are explicit about which they are able and intend to offer. In other words, advisers need to know if their clients want and expect them to offer a definitive career world-view or one of many possible world-views. This level of clarity will help advisers to manage and meet clients' expectations, and clients to assess the credibility of the help they are offered.

Transparency and awareness about impartiality are also important. Given the caveats in codes of practice (2.3.7.1), and the preferences expressed by participants in this study, it might be more appropriate to rephrase the professional position on impartiality in terms of negative and positive partiality.

7.3.6 Career guidance practice

The following suggestions are directed at professional careers advisers but may also be of value to semi-formal and informal helpers. My research suggests that careers advisers need to be aware of: their subjective frame of reference, particularly their career world-view; their position on positive partiality; and of external pressures and internal beliefs which may shape their practice. Where practical and appropriate, their position needs to be conveyed to clients.

The frameworks, particularly the typology (Table 7.1) and my revised version of the community-interaction model (Figure 7.2), may help advisers to locate their roles and purpose. I suggest that careers advisers consider the following questions:

1. Which of the helper roles do I see myself currently playing? Are these the roles that my clients, employer and other stakeholders expect of me? Where might conflicting expectations occur? Am I comfortable and satisfied with my current helper roles?

2. Do I perceive myself primarily as mediating between individuals and structure or modifying the individuals' career self-view and/or the influences of structure? To what extent does my practice support these perceptions?

A key issue here is advisers' perceptions of their influence and/or power and their capacity to exert influence or power in ways which are appropriate to their perceived roles and are helpful to their clients.
The importance of relationship - discussed elsewhere - is reiterated in this study. The association of care with time and attention means that it is particularly important for advisers to attend fully to clients during the limited time available. Advisers can also demonstrate care through support and encouragement, which play an important part in motivating individuals. However, they need to balance encouragement with challenge. As my research suggests, challenge may not be welcomed or regarded as credible if the ‘helping’ relationship is not experienced as caring. On the other hand, challenge may help individuals to question their career world-view and career self-view. These ideas do not suggest a radically new approach to careers guidance, although my research: brings the importance of both care and challenge into sharp relief; emphasises the importance of skills and training; and supports arguments for the provision of in-depth guidance for adults (eg McGowan, 1999; Watts, 2000).

Much of the above addresses ways in which constructivist-based practice might be developed. My research also suggests the need to take into account the social constructionist perspective and particularly the role of informal and semi-formal helpers and hinderers in shaping individuals’ careers. For careers advisers this may mean helping individuals to identify people who play a part in modifying their career self-view and career world-view by exploring the roots of clients’ perceptions in ways that are supportive but may also be challenging. Advisers could help individuals to map their constellation of current helpers and the part each helper plays or might play in exploring, or acting on, new career worlds and career self-views. They may be able to suggest ways in which individuals can extend their helper constellation and provide access to potentially helpful contacts and networks. It may be equally important to help individuals identify current and potential hinderers and to devise strategies for working with them.

At an organisational level, the frameworks might help with assessment and planning of career management and career guidance provision, and with clarifying the scope and the limitations of provision.

### 7.3.7 Individual career management

By taking a different perspective, the implications for professional practice can be re-configured into suggestions for individuals seeking career help. Help-seekers may wish
to identify people who act or could act as career helpers and to map their current helper constellation. Using the typology (Table 7.1) they may identify any missing helper categories, consider whether they value or would like helpers to fill missing roles, and how they might fill any unwanted gaps. The anatomy of credibility provides a framework for identifying the qualities and characteristics an individual values in her current career context and seeks in individual career helpers. Help-seekers may identify additional qualities which they particularly value.

Individuals may wish to consider the suitability of current helpers for their roles, and the qualities and characteristics which they value in a particular career context. For example, if an individual wants help which involves modifying the influences of structure, it may be important to distinguish between powerful gatekeepers and influential intermediaries. Where mediation is the main requirement, partiality and knowledge may be more important issues. In the latter case it may be particularly helpful to understand the helper’s frame of reference, career world-view and the basis of her knowledge in order to evaluate the help she can offer.

7.4 Limitations and reflections

Throughout the project I reflected on my learning and questioned my choices, and how these might affect my data and my interpretations. I identified some limitations of my study in previous sections of this chapter: below I discuss six further concerns.

First, given the breadth of potentially relevant non-careers literature, the cross-disciplinary nature of career studies and the different dimensions of the topic itself, establishing the parameters of literature search and review was a challenging task, even though the aims of my study were clear. To have a good grasp of career theory and an understanding of recent and current career guidance and career management practice, seemed to require familiarity with a huge body of literature. Beyond the obvious topics I needed some understanding of counselling, mentoring, and of sociological models which might be relevant to the interaction between individuals, and between individuals and structure. Some of the literature helped me to place career guidance and career management in the wider context of the changing world of work, and some I referred to extensively in this project, while other literatures were of limited relevance. I would have preferred to be more confident about discriminating between literature, and more focused
in my reading at an earlier stage. I wondered if I had given too much attention to texts and studies dating from the early 1980s. Although unconvinced that my decisions could have been better given: the exploratory nature of my research; my level of knowledge at the outset; and my status as an apprentice in academic research, I nevertheless continued to feel anxious about having missed or excluded literature which might enhance, or give a different perspective on, my study.

Second, the absence of a readily applicable conceptual framework made it difficult to compare and build on relevant but disparate studies. However, once I had identified and adapted Law’s community-interaction theory, this process was clearer and I was better able to shape the literature review, analysis and discussion.

Third, as is common in research studies, I was hampered by having limited control over the recruitment of participants. My intention was to recruit a diverse group but my initial subgroup comprised five male engineering apprentices and technicians who had similar experiences of work and short post-school careers. My difficulty in convincing the gatekeeper in this company about the importance of my criteria for participation provided useful lessons about practicality and mutuality in research. I applied these lessons in recruiting the remaining participants. On reflection, I could have been more assertive and declined the company’s offer to participate but having experienced difficulty in recruiting organisations, I feared being unable to find any with ‘ideal’ participants. The situation also illustrated one of the practical constraints faced by researchers, and the need for organisations to benefit from participation. In this case, the young engineers were selected on the grounds of convenience - they could be released from work without affecting the company’s productivity - and because the training officer wanted their feedback about the company’s training and career management provision. Despite demographic similarities, I found that the young men in this group differed considerably in some respects - such as the role of their family members as helpers. As the other participants covered a wider age range and were employed in many different occupations, I was reassured that the group as a whole was sufficiently diverse for the purposes of my study. Also, by exploring the role of career helpers and hinderers over the course of participants’ careers, I was able to access a diverse range of career stories and experiences which reinforced my confidence in the significance of common themes and the external validity of the conceptual frameworks I constructed.
Fourth, my experience both of interviewing participants and analysing the interview transcripts highlighted the challenges of qualitative interviewing. In the interviews I: quickly established rapport with most participants; was pleased at the apparent openness of their responses; and grateful for my previous interviewing experience. Nevertheless, I was also aware of the complexity and skill involved in understanding and elucidating another person's frame of reference and sense-making processes in a relatively short encounter. I was interested to notice that this difficulty mirrored the problem faced by professional careers advisers in career guidance interviews (2.3.7.2). I reflected on the possibility that longer interviews (perhaps of two hours’ duration) and/or an earlier and more focused concentration on the theme of helpers might have enabled me to gain a greater depth of understanding. However, such approaches risk premature focusing and straining participants’ goodwill.

Fifth, I was concerned that my study was limited by focusing on helpers and giving less attention to the roles of individuals and structure. I had gathered sufficient data to develop these latter themes and regretted setting them aside. However, I concluded that a more detailed and in-depth study of helpers would be both more manageable within the timescale and more valuable in terms of outcome.

Finally, undertaking this project compelled me to confront my anxieties about tolerating ambiguity. The confusion and the sense of insecurity that ambiguity evoked were particularly difficult to handle during the later stages of data analysis and writing. I was often frustrated by awareness of the limitations of my knowledge and understanding, and found it difficult to progress my study in light of those limitations. During the project, I used a diary to express my feelings, and to record ideas about emergent themes and the direction of my research. I wondered if devoting more time to diary-keeping might have enhanced my learning about the research process. What did increasingly strike me was the pervasive nature of ontological and epistemological questions, and the value of models and theorising in the sense-making process.

7.5 Future research

Like other research projects, my study raises questions and suggests areas for further research: some of which are described below. In general terms, my research suggests that there is potential for more research about career helpers, and especially the role of
informal and semi-formal helpers as witnesses. A future study might replicate my narrative approach, perhaps exploring in more detail the role, characteristics and qualities of one individual whom each participant felt had played a particularly significant or valuable part in shaping their career. Participants might be also be invited to identify a key hinderer, if they had encountered such a person.

My literature review showed (2.3.3) a dearth of in-depth analysis of the career help valued by people employed in jobs requiring a low level of skill. I began to address this deficiency by including in my study some such participants, however, more knowledge is needed, especially in light of the Government’s ambitions to raise the skill levels of people who are currently poorly qualified and the recent pilot funding for ‘enhanced’ information, advice and guidance for adults with qualifications below NVQ level 2.

My typology needs to be assessed and developed using data from other participant groups and in the context of different career stories. Participants in a future study might have a wide range of characteristics, or comprise a specific group such as employees of a single organisation. There is potential for further work on the mediating and modifying processes and how they are perceived to impact career self-view, career world-view and career development opportunities.

Importantly, the practical value of the frameworks to helpers and individuals seeking career help needs to be assessed. Individuals might be consulted on whether the frameworks (communicated using more everyday language) make sense and are helpful in understanding and addressing their career issues. Careers advisers and semi-formal helpers such as line managers and HR staff might be invited to compare their practice with the helper roles and characteristics, and to express their views about whether the frameworks make sense in their experience. For example, careers advisers could be invited to analyse a guidance interview in terms of: the helper categories; mediating and modifying roles; the skills and values they use; and any limitations in this respect. These concepts could be compared with clients’ perceptions of the same interview. How clients’ perceive and experience advisers’ personal qualities and skills are key issues for exploration. Of particular interest is clients’ perceptions of advisers’ support and encouragement, and the impact of these attitudes on clients’ motivation.
The value of career self-view as a concept is worth exploration and possibly
development. If career self-view proved to be robust, an enlightening study might focus
specifically on the processes by which individuals perceive their career self-views to be
shaped. Such a study would involve understanding the role of individual helpers and of
the wider social and cultural context on, for example, aspirations, and would contribute to
the development of community-interaction theory. Both continuity and change in career
self-view could be illuminated.

My study focuses on career helpers, but more attention is needed on other aspects of
career world-view, namely individuals' perceptions of their own roles and the role of
structure in shaping careers. Dimensions of career world-view might include levels of:
explication, generalisation (from an individual's experiences to careers within their
employing organisation and to careers in general) and comprehensiveness (whether there
is a strong focus on helpers, agency or structure at the expense of others). Illuminating
the structural aspects of individuals' career world-view would involve exploring their
perceptions of the roles of: the education system, family, culture and social context,
organisational, and occupational structures in shaping careers. By understanding how
individuals perceive their role, relative to the roles of other people and of structure, it
may be possible to construct frameworks to inform a more comprehensive understanding
of individuals' career world-views and offer new guides to career helpers.
GLOSSARY

Key concepts are discussed in detail in the text, and their meaning in the context of this study defined here. Other important terms are also defined in the text and listed here for the convenience of the reader.

Agency

the capacity of individuals to impact on the world and to bring about outcomes.

Career

...a sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person (Arnold, 1997: 16). Conceptualised as inclusive, subjective/objective, temporal and relational.

Career guidance

Formally defined as

...a process of interventions designed to empower individuals to make realistic and well-informed decisions about work and learning which are right for them [...] The process has benefits to both individuals and to society” (ICG, 2002: 1)

May comprise many different activities or be reduced to information, advice and guidance.

Career help

An everyday term to cover encounters and actions which enable individuals to: explore, identify and pursue their career ideas or career direction. May be provided in a range of settings by different informal and formal helpers.

Career issue

Career-related problem or concern.

Career Management

- individual

An individual’s efforts to shape her own career. Also known as career self-management.

- organisational

The efforts of other people, particularly the representatives of an employing organisation, to influence employees’ careers.

Career self-view

A person’s perception of herself in relation to her career at a particular point in time.
Career theory -

- **occupational or career choice**
  Based on a 'point-in-time' perspective; concerned with how people choose a field of work or an occupation.

- **career development**
  Based on a longitudinal perspective; concerned with how career unfolds over a person's lifetime.

- **career guidance/ career counselling**
  Formulated specifically to guide practice.

**Career world-view**
A person’s perception, interpretation and understanding of jobs, occupations and how careers unfold.

**Careers adviser**
Those who are trained, qualified to deliver in-depth career guidance.

**Constructionism**
Predicated on the belief that people actively construct their own 'reality', rather than accepting an imposed, external 'reality'.
Comprises social constructionism and constructivism (see below). Refers to an ontological and an epistemological position.

**Constructivism**
Reality is regarded as an individual construction and the process of construing as individual and subjective.

**Context**

- **diachronic**
  Development (of career) over time.

- **synchronic**
  Current career situation.

**Dualism**
The practice of studying career from one or other of a series of paired, well-defined and opposing perspectives.

**Exosystem**
Structures which impinge on a person's immediate setting, such as the world of work and the mass media (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

**Framework**

- **analytical**
  A diagrammatic representation or model which aids analysis and understanding of data and/or existing knowledge.
- conceptual
  A model which shows how associated concepts are interrelated.

- theoretical
  A diagrammatic representation which explains processes.

Grounded theory analysis
A means of searching for meaning from data by following set procedures.

Guidance worker
A collective term for educational guidance workers and careers advisers.

IAG
Information, advice and guidance on learning, work and career:
A term often used as short-hand for the generic form of career guidance.

Knowledge
'Knowing, what is known'

- structural
  Concerning the content of career worlds (e.g., jobs, occupations, organisations, industries) and the processes which shape career worlds.

- insider
  Grounded in the 'reality' of first-hand experience.

- outsider
  Expertise based on a perspective wider than personal experience.

- person; knowledge of participants
  Participants' sense of being known and understood; having an insight into a person's career self-view and career world-view.

Mediate
Act as a medium or conduit through which ideas, influences and knowledge flow.

Mesosystem
Structure such as professions and occupations (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Microsystem
Structures such as employing organisations, families and social worlds (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Modify
The way in which influences are filtered and changed by the perceptions and interpretations. Here reference is specifically to modification of an individual's career world-view, career self-view or career-related structure.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positivism</td>
<td>Assumes that reality is external and objective, and that knowledge can be developed by observing people objectively and separately from their environment, and measuring their behaviour in order to discern cause and effect. Implies determinism and limited freewill and choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactivity</td>
<td>The tendency for people to modify their responses, language and body language according to their interpretations of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>The capacity to reflect on the assumptions a person uses to understand and interpret a situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shape</td>
<td>Contribute to the formation of an individual’s career aspirations, direction, action and career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>Useful contacts and networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social constructionism</td>
<td>‘Reality’ is jointly or socially, rather than individually constructed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Social systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Characteristics of the society or organization, including its members, that limit access to or opportunities in the occupational and/or organizational environment</em> (Fitzgerald and Betz, 1994: 107).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxonomy</td>
<td>A classification or categorisation which is not in itself explanatory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typology</td>
<td>A device to distinguish, compare and contrast phenomena. Links theory with empirical analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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321


326


Appendix one: Letter inviting employees to participate in the research

Dear Employee

Careers Guidance Research

I wonder if you can help me with my research? I am a postgraduate student at Loughborough University where I am trying to find out about the sort of help people have had with their careers and any further help they would like. I am looking for 5 or 6 people who are willing to talk to me about this topic.

I would like to hear from you if you:

• are not a manager

• are willing to talk to me about the help you have had with your career and for me to tape-record our discussion

• can be released from your work for about one hour or are willing to talk to me in your own time

• wish to develop your career in some way, perhaps by improving your skills, taking on more responsibilities, doing different types of work or moving into a more senior job

• have discussed your career ideas, decisions or plans with your line manager, a mentor, a careers adviser or human resource staff who specialise in career issues.

All I am looking for are your experiences, ideas and opinions. Our conversation will be informal and, I hope, enjoyable. I will ask you about:

  How you came to be working in your present job.

  The career decisions you have made in the past and what influenced those decisions.

  The help you have had with your career from people at [employing organisation] and others outside of the organisation.

  How you see your career at the moment and how you would like it to develop.

  The sort of careers information, advice and help you would like now.

After I have spoken with all of the research participants at [employing organisation], I will write a short report combining their views and summarising what I have learnt. In case you are concerned about confidentiality, please be reassured that I will write this report in such a way that it will not be possible to link particular comments to individuals. I will send a copy of the report to....and her colleagues, and to you if you would like one.

If you are able to help me, please confirm your interest with [gatekeeper] and s/he will make arrangements for us to meet.

Yours sincerely,

Sara Bosley
Appendix two: Interview guide

Opening
• Thanks
• Recording and note-taking
• Confidentiality
• About one hour.
• Structure. I would like you to tell me about:
  - the job you are doing now
  - how you came to be in your present job. I am particularly interested in hearing your descriptions of the help you have had in making decisions and plans.
  - where you see your career going and the help you would like.
• No right and wrong answers

Demographic data

Name: 
Job title 
Age: 
Length of time in your present job....
Length of time with employer X....

Interview topics

What do you do in your current job? (Subsequently removed)
Prompts - Tell me about your job. How do you see your job? What do you enjoy? Are there any aspects of it that you would like to change?

How did you come to be working in your present job?
Tell me about what you have done since leaving school. Identify - external events and circumstances/influences; decisions made; action taken. What/who, if anything, do you think a) assisted b) restricted the opportunities that were open to you?

What would you say have been the most important decisions in your career so far?
Explore feelings, thoughts and concerns about these decisions

What would you say have been the key events or influences that have affected your career?
Explore feelings, thoughts and concerns about these decisions

Have you experienced any conflicts/dilemmas in your decisions and plans so far? If so, please describe them.

How did you go about making your decisions/plans?
Prompts - What did you do? Who did you speak to? What helped you sort out your ideas? What were the issues? How did you get to know about...?

What did you hope to come away with when you sought help?
Prompts - help in finding out what you were good at/interested in; choosing a career/life style; how to get into what you wanted to do; how to deal with a new situation/job/role; how to deal with change - anger/disappointment/uncertainty

329
What was helpful to you in making these decisions/career plans?
*Prompts - information, ideas, experiences, discussions, opinions, observation*

What was unhelpful? Looking back, what else do you think you might have done that would have been useful? *What might you have done differently?*
*Prompts - negative feedback lack of support, inadequate information, misleading information.*

Who has helped you with your decisions and plans?
*Prompt - friends, family, colleagues, Job centre, careers adviser, line manager, professional body, college tutors/teachers?*

Why did you choose to seek help from that particular person(s) rather than others?
*Prompt - knowledge, personal characteristics, previously helpful, objectivity, trusted, on the same wave length?*

How did these people help you?
*Prompts - learnt more about own skills and interests; decided what to do; got a job/course/new responsibilities; began to see things differently; provided information about jobs. Opinions, feedback, “hard information”?*

What help have you had with your decisions and plans since you have been here?
*Prompts - performance review, work shadowing, talking to other person about their work, taking on different responsibilities.*

Who has helped you?
*Prompts - line manager, other workers, friends, family, careers adviser, general manager, personnel staff, professional body?*

What did you do as result of speaking to this person/these people?

How did they help? What made it helpful?
*Prompts - suggested range of options, feedback on skills, opportunities to explore, provided training/development opportunities, funded course, provided work shadowing opportunities.*

Was it *unhelpful* in any way? What else would you have liked?

What help you would like/do you expect now in developing your career from people at X?

What would you do if you were wanted to change something about the type of work you are doing?

How do you see your career now?
*Prompts - what are your thoughts/ideas/feelings about the direction of your career at the moment? What are conflicts and dilemmas? How would you like to see your career developing? Are there jobs you would like to do; skills to learn; different work patterns or different location you would like?*
How will you go about addressing these issues? What help would you like to do this?

Close
- Summarise.
- Thanks.
- Transcription.
- Copy of report

Note: Focus on specific examples and instances of guidance, seeking as much detailed description as possible.
Appendix three: example of the letter to gatekeepers inviting participation in the study

Dear [Human Resource Specialist/Training Manager]

Career guidance in the workplace

I am a PhD student in the Business School at Loughborough University where I am conducting research into career guidance in the workplace. I am contacting you on the recommendation of [contact name] who commended your organisation’s career management practices.

My key research aims are:

• to explore employees’ views of the workplace help they receive with their careers;
• to identify the type of career guidance which they find useful in managing their careers;
• to provide employers with guidelines on how they can help employees to take responsibility for managing their careers more effectively.

You will benefit from involvement in two ways. First, you will gain feedback from a small number of your employees regarding their views of your career management provision which will raise issues for exploration if you are interested in conducting a more comprehensive evaluation of provision. Second, you will have access to my findings from other organisations regarding their approaches to career management and how these are perceived by employees. From this information you may derive ideas for developing your career management provision.

I am seeking to involve organisations which provide their employees with some form of career management. By career management, I mean activities such as performance review and development, personal development plans, employee development schemes, career workshops, career resource centres, career workbooks, internal vacancy and career pathway information, and mentoring.

My approach will be to discuss with 5 of your non-managerial employees the help they would like with their careers and the benefits they derive from the career management activities which your organisation provides. Potential interviewees need to:

• be non-managerial staff ie employees who do not contribute directly to, or have a role in, policy or strategic decision-making, and do not regard themselves as managers;
• be willing volunteers;
• be interested in career issues and wishing to develop their careers in some way;
• be willing to be interviewed, and for the interview to be taped and used in research;
• gain release from their work for up to one hour and a half hours, or be willing to participate in the interview in their own time.
• have opportunities for career development through promotions, sideways moves or temporary postings, such as covering for the absence of a colleague who has more or different responsibilities.
As I would like to include people from a wide range of occupations, it would be helpful if you could encourage participation by individuals who have different jobs and work in departments.

I will telephone in a few days to gauge your interest. If you would like to contact me in the meantime, please do so using my home address: [address], Leicester; email sara@[address].com or telephone 0116 [number].

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Sara Bosley (MA, DipCG)