

# From Vocational Guidance to Portfolio Careers: A Critical Reflection

**12th Annual Lecture**  
University of Derby

**Dr Barrie Hopson**  
10th December 2009

## From Vocational Guidance to Portfolio Careers: A Critical Reflection

Dr Barrie Hopson is a psychologist by training, Barrie was Co-Founder and Co-Chairman of Lifeskills International. Beginning in 1978 as an educational publishing company pioneering the use of open learning in schools and business the company staff developed into being specialists in improving organisational performance through aligning human resource management to business goals. It was perhaps best known for its consultancy services and learning materials for delivering outstanding customer service, employee development programmes, competency based performance management, culture change programmes, learning delivery systems and career management programmes. The company is now part of the VT Group.

Barrie was director of the Vocational Guidance Research Unit at Leeds University and then set up the Counselling and Career Development Unit at Leeds University in 1975 and was its first Director until 1984. He has worked widely as a consultant to business and educational organisations in the UK, USA, Far East and Europe. He is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society and a Fellow of the British Institute of Management. He has written thirty nine books and numerous articles on personal and career development, quality service, transition and change management, generic training skills, marriage and Lifeskills teaching. His best known books are "Build Your Own Rainbow", "12 Steps to Success Through Service", the series of "Lifeskills Teaching Programmes", the textbook on "Lifeskills Teaching" and "The Rainbow Years: The Pluses of Being 50+". He set up Three Albion Place Ltd as a successor to the Leeds Club which combines the functions of a private members club, a conference and events business whilst striving to be a centre for social and cultural communication in Yorkshire. He remains a non-executive director. He is Chairman of Axia Interactive Media, a company which operates from the UK and Canada, who are specialists in web-based solutions to support lifelong learning and professional development. Barrie, with Mike Scally, has developed a web enabled learning programme for learndirect aimed at convincing people of the pluses of being 50 plus. It was launched in January 2008 <http://community.learndirect.co.uk:80/community/community/50forward>. He continues to blog on this topic at [www.theplusesofbeing50plus.blogspot.com](http://www.theplusesofbeing50plus.blogspot.com). He has just completed a book with Katie Ledger: "And What Do You Do? 10 Steps to Creating a Portfolio Career", published in October 2009. He and Katie blog on this topic at [www.portfoliocareers.net](http://www.portfoliocareers.net).

### Acknowledgements

iCeGS was delighted to welcome Barrie Hopson as our guest speaker for the 12th Annual iCeGS Lecture. His presentation on portfolio careers was dynamic, thoughtprovoking, personal, highly visual and interactive. This occasional paper is based on his presentation and reflects the style of his presentation and his broader work.

### Sponsored by



John Lees  
Associates



International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS), University of Derby, Kedleston Road, Derby DE22 1GB  
Tel: 01332 591267  
Fax: 01332 597726  
Email: [icegsenquiry@derby.ac.uk](mailto:icegsenquiry@derby.ac.uk)  
Head of Centre: Tristram Hooley

ISBN 978-0-901437-52-5  
© iCeGS, 2010

### My Personal Journey

Putting this paper together has felt like writing and directing one's own version of 'This is Your Life'. Not exactly memory lane as that suggests a clear direction and a knowledge of where you are going. I have never known that or indeed have had any inkling to want to know it. My first co-author, John Hayes, when we worked together at the Vocational Guidance Research Unit at Leeds University in 1966, always knew the career path he wanted and indeed achieved it and is now a Professor at Leeds University Business School. While I slowly discovered that my idea of hell was to meet a fortune teller who could tell the future. My career style has always been never to plan more than six months ahead and to always allow for spontaneity. In my latest book on Portfolio Careers I quote from Sir Ken Robinson's (2009) inspiring book on creativity:

*"One of the most basic reasons for thinking that it's too late to be who you are truly capable of being is the belief that life is linear. As if we are on a busy one-way street, we think we have no alternative but to keep going forward. If we missed something the first time, we can't double back and take another look because it takes all of our efforts to keep up with the traffic".*

My life has never been linear and much of my work has been devoted to persuading people that they may gain more fulfilment, joy and creativity by not proceeding up a one way street.

At each stage of my life I have worked and researched and explored the life stage that I was experiencing – and usually ended up writing a book about it. In my early 20's and not having any real idea as to what I wanted to do, not surprisingly I became interested in vocational guidance (1968) which then transmuted into careers guidance (1971). When I married for the first time I wrote a book with my wife on marriage (1973).

My father died suddenly when I was 28 and it was so traumatic for me that I became fascinated with how people dealt with bereavement and the wider range of life transitions, so I researched the topic and wrote a book on Transitions – Understanding and Managing Personal Change (1976).

Having children, I became increasingly horrified as to how little schools were doing to equip young people to live and develop in our rapidly changing world. I began to develop exercises that could be done in the classroom that would enable youngsters to develop personal and career skills (1973). In the 1970s they were not even teaching study skills, a crucial skill for being successful in schools. So, with Mike Scally, at the Counselling & Career Development Unit at Leeds University, we began to list what we thought were the fundamental Lifeskills that young people needed to develop. Finding no teaching materials for most of these skills we set about writing and producing them. We could not find a publisher that would publish them in the way that we thought appropriate, so in a fit of anger during a meeting with McGraw Hill, Lifeskills Associates was born (1980-88). We allowed them to publish the background book on Lifeskills Teaching (1981). The teaching programmes needed financing so we began to work in the business world and developed a training and consultancy business. We were learning on the job and quickly realised that most other people do that too, so adapted our teaching materials so that they formed the basis for employee development in organisations. At this point we left the security of our University careers to move full time into our publishing and consultancy business.

We were by now training employees to be trainers in their own companies and teachers to be in-house trainers and there were hardly any resources available to help us do that. So with a colleague in the USA I wrote a book on Producing Seminars, Short Courses and Workshops (1979).

Reaching the age of 40 I had read the research and knew that I had better engage in a mid life review so, again with Mike Scally, wrote Build Your Own Rainbow to enable me to do that. That became the foundation for much of the work that Lifeskills International did with a variety of large companies in the UK, Europe, Asia and North America (1984).

As an increasingly mature consumer who worked in the US a great deal during the 70s and 80s I became very aware of the big differences in customer service skills in the US compared to what we had back home. Landing back on British soil was

always traumatic and a culture shock with the minimalist service standards to be found everywhere. So Mike and I researched customer service, set up a take away gourmet pizza company totally based on our principles of excellent customer service, surveyed many of our leading companies and then wrote a book about the 12 Steps to Success through Service (1989). The differences between our two countries now are much more minimal by the way.

More recently, having turned 60, I became aware of a lack of awareness in society and in the over 50s themselves of the massive demographic changes taking place and the increase in longevity which offered great opportunities for personal reinvention but also for personal trauma. Mike and I worked with learndirect to provide the learning materials for the website, [www.fiftyforward.co.uk](http://www.fiftyforward.co.uk). We then decided to write the book that covered this much more extensively and *The Rainbow Years: The Pluses of Being 50 Plus* was published in 2008.

Around this point I met an ex ITN newsreader, Katie Ledger, who was telling me that she had left to pursue a portfolio career. In discussing this, I suddenly felt like the man in the Molière play who discovered that he had been speaking prose all of his life: I discovered that for most of my adult life I too had pursued a portfolio career. Even when I had a so-called full time job I always had at least one and often more 'things on the side'. I had always been impressed with Charles Handy's (1989) predictions about the future desirability of this career pattern, so Katie and I set about interviewing a wide range of people with portfolio careers, most of whom by the way had never heard the term before. My latest book, written with Katie, *And What Do You Do?: 10 Steps to Creating a Portfolio Career*, was published in October this year.

### **What next?**

A book on how to live and develop successfully in a residential home? Residential Rainbows? Maybe I can write a book on dying but probably would not get the chance to finish it!

## **From Talent Matching to Lifestyle Choice**

The world seems simpler in retrospect when viewing the 1950s and 1960s. Much of our society was still influenced by the 19th century factory model of production. Items were put in at one end of a conveyor belt, were subject to a range of processes and would then emerge in a different form at the other end. Much formal education was still influenced by this paradigm. Unsurprisingly, therefore, vocational guidance was also viewed in this way. Frank Parsons was the main proponent of the talent matching approach as long ago as 1909. Very simply stated, this involved finding out about the skills and interests of an individual and then matching those against known skills and interests for a range of occupations. Closest fit meant that this was the career for you. The individual was measured by templates such as the 7 Point Plan of Alec Rodger or more rarely by psychometric tools. Occupational experts then rated jobs by similar criteria. This was what I called at the time a 'snapshot' approach. It assumed that generally speaking neither the individual nor the job was going to change that much. The paradigm was that experts gave their interpretation to clients who then took their advice. I always thought of this as the 'black box' model. You see what goes in. You see what comes out. What happens in between is something of a mystery.

As the 1970s dawned a greater appreciation began to be expressed about the value of educating people, young people in particular, to understand more about jobs, careers and the world of work. Schools began to design occupational visits, work experience schemes and careers education programmes. The latter were run by teachers who began to get trained as careers teachers. For most adults there was little on offer outside privately paid for guidance.

In the careers guidance book I wrote with John Hayes in 1971 we were already discussing the value of classroom work that helped to develop the self concept, occupational concepts, occupational self concepts and extra-occupational self concepts. This was reflecting a major change of emphasis on how we viewed helping people to choose work that was

suitable for them. The process was further refined when Bill Law and Tony Watts(1977) began to outline their four stage model of career development in the 1970s and 80s. They defined careers education learning outcomes as self awareness, opportunity awareness, decision learning and transition learning. By now the individual was being seen as very much more than a passive vessel waiting to be fuelled up by the vocational guidance mechanic. Individuals were to be taught skills and techniques that would not only make them more employable but increasingly the architects of their own futures.

Organisations were now beginning to see the pluses of helping their employees be more proactive in managing their own careers. In 1985 British Airways employed Lifeskills International to help to change its organisational culture from the state owned risk averse, decisions pushed upwards, paternalistic pattern to one in which individuals took more responsibility, demonstrated greater initiative and creativity and were more entrepreneurial. Inviting all of their staff to a series of company wide career development workshops was their way of making the point that 'we now expect you to come to us with ideas for improving or changing your job and developing your career'. Locus of control for career choice and development was clearly being shifted from the external to the internal. In the early 1990s Charles Handy was writing about his ideas of how careers were going to develop. He distinguished between wage work (what I would call paid work), homework, gift work and study work. He said that increasingly people would develop a portfolio of different kinds of work.

This was well on the way to definitions of work that would make more sense to us today. The latter is well illustrated by a quotation that I use from Nick Williams (2007) in my latest book:

*"I would like to reinvent the idea of a proper job: it has many strands, a portfolio; its hours suit our lifestyle; it allows us to find and utilise the best and most creative parts of us; it incorporates and accommodates us as a whole person; it affords the opportunity to grow, expand and discover more about ourselves; it is based on win-win and co-operation; it allows us to expand into being a whole*

*human being – mind, body, emotions and spirit. That is proper work!"*

As careers experts we can suggest options and routes and help people identify their skills, values and needs but the process has to be driven by the individual.

I believe that we have now reached a point where we can define four major career patterns. For some people one of these will dominate their total paid working lives. For others they move from one to another depending on their work life blend at that time. Instead of the much-publicised work-life balance, Katie Ledger and I prefer 'work-life blend'. Balance suggests work and life are separate. You can do one or the other but not both at the same time. Blend suggests that work and the rest of life are not seen as equal and opposing forces but more of a coming together. A flexible approach where the sachets of jobs and life can be mixed in different amounts and in different ways. Some people will choose a blend with a heavier dose of paid work. Others will opt for more unpaid work. Some will focus on leisure activities and others their family commitments.

Interestingly, Lao Tzu, 2,300 years ago put it rather succinctly:

*"The master of the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play, his labour and his leisure, his mind and his body, his education and his recreation, his love and his religion. He simply pursues his vision of excellence in whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him, he is always doing both."* (Kaizen blog 2009)

### Types of Career Pattern



A single-track career is the one that many of us have been brought up with. It developed with the Industrial Revolution and the notion of specialisation. Production was broken down into specific tasks and people were employed to carry them out. The ladder symbolises this track very well as we were all supposed to be motivated to 'get on', meaning

upwards. We continued until gold watch time and then became a retired teacher, builder, manager, shop worker, etc. If we worked well and were loyal, we were promised a long-term job and that we would be 'looked after'. Careers advisors throughout the 20th century helped young people to work out what they wanted to do for a living. By this they meant finding the job and the career that those young people would want to pursue for the rest of their lives.

**Pluses?** You got security, opportunities to be trained and developed, a predictable income, a feeling of belonging, recognised social status in that everyone knew what you did and where you worked. You had a job title.

**Minuses?** Today, no organisation can offer a career or a job for life. Organisations are born and die or are reinvented, so there's no secure edifice against which you can lean your ladder. People themselves now change more quickly. The different generations want different things from work. Generation Y want personal development, work that reflects their social values and project work with people they respect. They are under no illusion that any position will last for more than a few years. Even the Baby Boomers in a recent survey stated that they weren't sure what they wanted to do when they grew up (Learndirect 2007). Forty-six per cent of them were looking forward to a new career that would be more satisfying than what they had previously had. Sixty-one per cent of them wanted to learn new skills.



**Single-track careers** are still possible but less so than they used to be – and job swapping between organisations is now often the only way of developing that work style.

A **serial career** is symbolized by a chequerboard, which shows that people can move upwards, sideways, maybe downwards, diagonally and so on. People who like periodic change favour this work style. Some individuals, no matter what they're doing or how successful they've been, just need to

change every few years. They get bored and need to move on. They enjoy learning new skills and working in new environments. In the past they might have been characterised as feckless, a dilettante or unreliable. They get very involved in a job or a career but don't see it as something for life.

**Pluses?** You can experiment with a number of different jobs and careers. You choose your paid work according to what interests you, as opposed to what might help get you promotion or more money. You will need to develop what is sometimes referred to as 'flexicurity'.

**Minuses?** Some people may view you as someone who 'never settles down'. You may never achieve seniority in an organisation.



A **lifestyle career** is most apparent at present in Generation X, although it's certainly visible in the other generational groups. Barnaby works three days a week for a local authority and spends two days a week bringing up his two young children. Pam, his

wife, also works three days a week (for an international oil company) and spends the other two days a week with their children. On only one day a week do the children go to a child minder. Barnaby and Pam are both clear that 'you only get one chance to bring up and enjoy your kids and we're not going to miss out on that'. Consequently, any major career progression or job changing will be put on hold until the children are both at school. They will then review where they are and maybe make some career changes at that point. Barnaby is more likely to move on, as at heart he is actually a serial careerist. Pam is more likely to seek advancement in the company, as at heart she is a single-track careerist.

What we're finding is that the work-family dimension is not the only factor promoting this work style. Some people wish to travel, do voluntary work abroad or return to being a student. In later years the work-family dimension may appear again with older relatives who need to be cared for. Apparently women now spend more time caring for

one or both parents than they do bringing up their own children. Other people want an undemanding job that pays for them to pursue a hobby which can't support them financially or that they don't choose to support them. John works in a shop for six hours a day. It doesn't excite him or give him much satisfaction but it demands little from him. When he's home, he devotes most of his time to his garden and his bee keeping. The blend works for him.

**Pluses?** The opportunity to combine a range of paid and unpaid work that's important to you. Paid work doesn't dominate your life. You have a more balanced style of life. You can always shift into a different career pattern if your lifestyle changes.

**Minuses?** Career advancement is likely to suffer. Promotion can be seen as a headache rather than an opportunity. Financially there may be a price to pay, as even today it's not always possible to get a part time job with the level of flexibility that's required.



**A portfolio career.** *"A portfolio career is not the same thing as holding down three bad jobs and wishing you could figure out what to do with yourself. Rather, it is a scheme you pursue purposefully and positively, as a way to achieve financial or*

*personal goals or a mixture of both."* (Penelope Trunk blog)

The simple definition of a portfolio worker is someone who has two or more jobs with different employers. This paper will focus in some detail on this, as it is a relatively new phenomenon.

We've been discovering that thousands and maybe millions of people have been and are developing portfolio careers without being aware that this style of working has a name.

The jobs might be totally unrelated or very similar or somewhere on the continuum. Sometimes the strands of a portfolio career even rotate seasonally. Lisa Milner is an accountant in Yorkshire in the summer and she runs a ski/chalet holiday business in France during the winter months.

So, how many jobs should you have? In our book we've mainly interviewed people with between two and five jobs – but for some people that's not enough. Trish Cowie, for example, has eight jobs (take a deep breath!):

- Age Concern – physical activity co-ordinator (25 hours a week)
- Salisbury District Council – sports and community officer (7.5 hours a week)
- Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service – fitness advisor (about 6 hours a week)
- NHS Wiltshire – cardiac rehabilitation instructor (2 hours a week)
- Bikeability – national standard cycling instructor (about 1.5 hours a week)
- Action for Charity – freelance steward (20 days a year)
- Walking for Health – cascade trainer (6 days a year)
- Salisbury Hospital – bank fitness instructor (when required)
- And in her spare time, she is completing a course to become a lifeguard...

Trish says, 'The nice thing is that I don't get up each morning and think I have to go to work'.

People who opt for this work style like it because it gives them variety. Also, they don't have all of their career 'eggs' in one basket. If one job gets boring, they can focus more on the other ones or indeed even ditch the boring one. If they lose one job, they have other revenue streams to rely on.

A portfolio career gives legitimacy to people who have diverse interests and talents and want to express them. In the past, some people have been suspicious of individuals who have a reputation as 'a jack of all trades'. These comments typically have emanated from people who enjoy pursuing what we call 'single track careers'. Interestingly, Bruce Lynn of Microsoft, (Lynn 2009) in a response to one of my postings on our portfolio careers blog, said, *"I have always advised that portfolio players rather than being 'jack of all trades and master of none' should look to be 'jack of many trades and master of some'"*

These people are now embracing the 'portfolio career' label with relief, finding in it a term which legitimises how they want to live their lives.

When asked to comment on the Vodafone Working Nation Report of 2008, David Molian of Cranfield University School of Management stated that

portfolio careers were a rapidly growing development on the working scene:

*“Some people see it as a bad thing, an erosion of the bedrock of loyalty on which British companies were once built. Others see it as a positive thing – a free market that encourages achievement, success and growth. I believe strongly that we will see this trend increasingly in the UK workplace, but most significantly within the entrepreneur community.”*

Some fields of work – such as the arts, academia and consultancy – naturally lend themselves to portfolio careers. But we’ve been discovering people from all backgrounds who are now beginning to explore this option. We’ve even discovered portfolio careers among NHS doctors. Some we found were doing GP work and paid church activities, others were combining it with farming and one wrote magazine articles and novels (non-medical).

### What are the facts?

- **1 million+ have two or more jobs.** There are 1.15 million people with two or more jobs. Of these, 65 per cent say they work in this way out of choice and not necessity (Clinton et al., 2006).
- **4 million are self-employed.** Since 1988, self-employment in the UK has more than doubled to close to 4 million with 30 per cent of those working part time (Office of National Statistics).
- **13 million+ would like part-time work.** 13.7 million people have said they would like to ‘sell their hours’ (Evans et al. 2006) round other life commitments at some point each year in the UK. Any of these, albeit unknowingly, could well be taking their first steps towards a portfolio career.

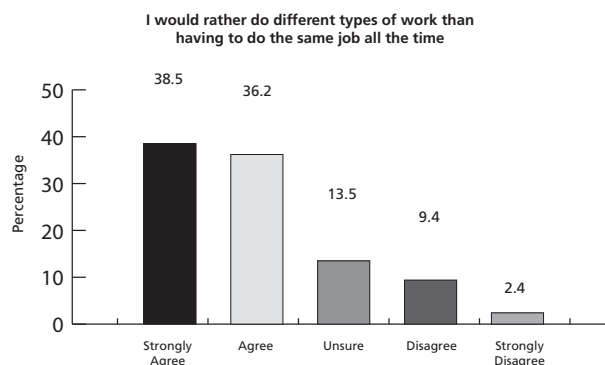
In addition, 60 per cent of new businesses now are started up in the home and home businesses account for more than a quarter of the UK’s employment. As Ian Bushby, head of start-ups at BT Business, has commented, *“One interesting trend picked up by BT’s Home Business Report 2008 found an increase in spare time start-ups, with a third of people running a home business in their free time. This thriving 5pm-9pm economy offers would-be entrepreneurs a low-risk route to starting their own business while still retaining a regular income stream from their full time jobs.”* (Busby)

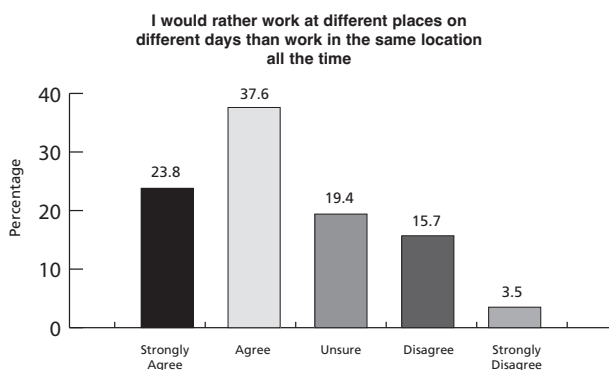
We don’t know for sure how many of these people are pursuing portfolio careers, but many of them will be.

Research from Accenture (2009) shows that almost 50 per cent of business professionals around the world believe they are insufficiently challenged, despite being confident of their skills and capabilities. In a survey of 3,600 professionals from medium to large organisations in 18 countries across Europe, Asia, North America, South America and Africa they found that 46 per cent of women and 49 per cent of men said they’re not being challenged significantly in their current roles, yet more than three-quarters (76 per cent) of all respondents are confident of their skills and capabilities. No wonder people are realising that it’s very difficult to satisfy all of one’s work needs in just one job. A new survey by workplace assessment specialists SHL in 2009 (Portfolio careers 2009) states that more than 1 in 5 UK workers reckon that they rarely or never feel fulfilled by their jobs. This dissatisfaction (which is particularly prevalent among young people) has apparently got even worse as a result of the recession. And although workers are reluctant to act on it for the time being, it supposedly could mean a mass exodus once the job market starts functioning properly again.

Portfolio working can be a combination of traditional employment, contract work, temporary jobs, freelancing and self-employment. It can be a great way of developing a personal and professional ‘brand’ unique to you. Many of our interviewees discovered they can earn more money from three or more part time jobs than from one full time job, although, sadly this is not guaranteed! The following two diagrams are taken from Evans et al., 2006 p.16.

**Table 15: Attitudes to Variation in Work Types among Survey Participants**





People are living and working longer, which gives us all more opportunity to create the paid work style that is right for us. As we age, we demand different things from our work and a single employer often can't provide us with the flexibility that we demand.

Sometimes the 'dailiness' of everyday life paints over the dreams we once had or have yet to come.

Portfolio workers regularly tell us that having more than one job enables them to fulfil more of their dreams.

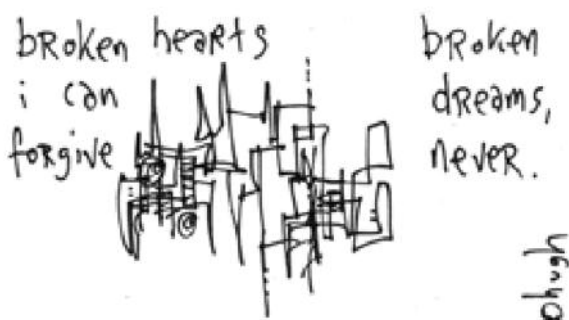


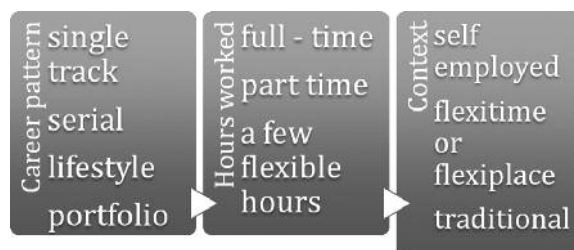
Image by Hugh Macleod

Some commentators argue that it's possible to have a range of work styles and stay in the same organisation (Benko and Weisberg, 2007). So, you could embark on a single track career, start a family and become more lifestyle oriented, then discover some new possibilities in the organisation and become a serial careerist. You could only be a portfolio careerist, however, by having only one of your jobs in that organisation.

Some people also move into and out of a portfolio career. Helen, a teacher, wanted a different challenge. Leaving her full time teaching job, she took on a number of different jobs. She spent two days a week supporting staff in schools through

coaching and mentoring, one day a week supply teaching, and one day a week supporting students on a PGCE course at Leeds University. She also spent time each month working for her professional association and then did examination marking during the summer. After a couple of years she opted to try out a full time job again but after five weeks in her outdoor education role realised she'd made a mistake, on both a personal and professional level. She was then able to go back to the work with her subject professional body, supply teaching and PGCE work. As I write this, Helen is back in full time employment once more (with an education authority) although interestingly she has 14 schools as her clients and they each have their individual issues. That must be about as close as you can get to pursuing a portfolio career within one organisation.

As well as choosing a preferred style of working – a career pattern, we also choose the context in which we work and how many hours we want to spend in paid work. The table below shows the relationship between these.



So, you choose your preferred career pattern, then decide how much paid work you want to do, whether or not you'd like to do this as a self-employed person, or whether to negotiate flexitime or flexiplace arrangements with your employer. You do, of course, still have the traditional 9 to 5-ish work context as an option.

**Pluses of a portfolio career:**

Our interviewees and the few research studies carried out on this group show that a portfolio career has many advantages.

- You're ultimately your own boss even if you're working for half a dozen different organisations.
- You manage your own career and aren't dependent on organisations doing it for you.

- You enjoy a type of freedom when deciding when not to work.
- You can blend your paid and non-paid work.
- You have relative freedom from corporate agendas and politics.
- It can allow you to implement the unique combination of strengths that only you have. If you have very contrasting work needs, it could be well nigh impossible to find a single job that will enable you to satisfy them all.
- Some psychologists argue that each of us has a number of 'selves' that co-exist, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes in competition. Having more than one job gives us greater opportunities to play and 'try on' the different aspects of ourselves.
- You can follow multiple passions.
- You're driven by the need for personal growth and fulfilment.
- The pace and constant change.
- It's often easier to say 'no' to a request or demand than when you have only one job and one boss.
- The excitement and unpredictability that can accompany this work style.
- There can be more leisure time.
- It can enable you to spread the risk, allowing you, for example, to earn money from one area while building up a new business or activity in another.
- Many portfolio workers have told us that things they have learned or experienced in one of their jobs has spilled over to benefit their contributions to their other jobs.

### The minuses of a portfolio career

There are huge pressures to manage your time to accommodate your different jobs.

- You may well have to invest considerable time and effort in marketing yourself.
- Initially, there are often real financial risks until you've acquired your portfolio. There can be a loss of employment benefits, such as pensions, health care, paid holidays, childcare, etc.
- You may be unwilling ever to turn down work offers.
- You may accept less desirable work because of financial uncertainty. Although the research by Clinton et al., 2006, discovered that around half of their respondents found uncertainty to be an unpleasant experience.
- Sometimes there can be a lack of a regular routine along with feelings of isolation.
- You have to be able to do what some people call multi-tasking, although in fact that means being

able to switch between doing many things in quick succession. John Medina, 2008, claims that in spite of the common use of the term all of the research suggests that we cannot multi-task as such. He says that "the best that you can say is that people who appear to be good at multi-tasking actually have good working memories, capable of paying attention to several inputs one at a time".

- There may be greater pressure on immediate family for support.
- You may well work primarily on your own and not be part of a team.
- You now have to apply for a number of jobs and find employers willing to accept your chosen work style.
- You may have to sacrifice specialising, advancement and/or seniority and may find yourself 'managed' by less competent, less experienced people.
- Sometimes people won't understand what you're doing and will assume the work style you have is less socially valuable than having a single-track career.

### The Changing Context of Work

As always there is a way of getting to the core of a topic:

*"Our work may still largely define who we are, but our employers no longer will. Our sense of stability and our sources of encouragement, learning and growth in our careers will come from communities of practice and our engagements with like-minded peers who we meet and keep in touch with online, and not necessarily our long-term employment relationships. Rather, the people we meet at work join the personal networks we create as we move from organisation to organisation over the life span of our careers."* Quoted in Tapscott and Williams 2007, p.17).

We live in a society (2008 youtube) in which:

- The top 10 jobs that will exist in 2010 did not exist in 2004.
- Today's learners will have had more than 10 jobs by age 38.
- The amount of technical information is doubling every 2 years. By 2012 it is predicted to double every 72 hours. For students starting a 4-year degree course, half of what they learn is outdated by year 3.
- The amount of information generated in 2009 is the equivalent of that generated in the past

5000 years.

- Over 40% of all jobs in 2020 will require a graduate level qualification.
- In the past 10 years there have been 12 jobs created in the knowledge industries for every 1 created elsewhere.
- There are 280 million Google searches every day.
- It took 38 years for the radio to reach a target audience of 50 million, 13 years for TV to reach that, 4 for the Internet, 3 for the iPod and 2 years for Facebook.

### **We now know that every job is temporary.**

*"Within a few years, the very phrase 'going to work' will be meaningless: work will be what we do, not a place we go to."* (CIPD 2007)

Economic security no longer exists unless you create it. Having multiple income streams can be a way of ensuring financial security.

### **Flexicurity**

When you're thinking about jobs, visualise a coin. On one side, it says 'job security'. But on the other, it says 'dependency'. Many people in full time jobs don't realise that the price they pay for so-called job security is dependency.

The Sliversoftime movement:

"This is where security is not resting on a relationship with one organisation but on the sheer depth of experience and resourcefulness an individual has acquired by engaging with a much wider universe. As organisations increasingly face change, they may even prefer recruiting these multi-faceted individuals to promoting one more Company Man".

### **Web 2.0**

The web has changed everything and it's still only 5,000 days old! Large parts of the world can now communicate with each other virtually, free of charge, by using e-mail, blogs, Skype, Twitter, Instant Messaging, via text and video. We have instant access to the world's libraries. We can search for information on any product, service, company or individual in fractions of a second.

And it's not just about the technology. Yes, it's there in the background as an enabler, but its powerful effect can be life changing. It revolutionises the way we earn, learn and turn round our careers. It's a whole new way of interacting and communicating.

### **The demographic time bomb**

- Of all the people in the history of the world who ever reached 65 years of age, one half of them are alive today (Institute of Ageing and Health).
- For every day that we live we add an extra 5 hours to our lives. Scientists now agree that we have to drop the notion of a predetermined lifespan for our species (Institute of Ageing and Health).
- Changes in longevity are challenging the way we view paid work. For much of the 20th century people worked long hours for most of their lives. Retirement was often short lived. Over the last decade or so many people have been retiring earlier and living longer, thereby considerably extending their 'retirement' time. This century is likely to curtail that in that people will need to be in paid work for much longer, though not necessarily 'full time' in the old sense of the word. They may still have relatively short 'retirements' in the old sense of freedom from paid work.
- The over 50's not only live longer, are healthier and wealthier, they also have more life and career options than any previous generation. On reaching 50 today, people could well have at least another 30 - 50 years to work, live, plan for and enjoy. They are the 'Regeneration generation', with opportunities for reinventing themselves in ways never possible before in our history.
- Pensions, and the certainty of them, are not what they used to be. More people will have to work longer and the Government of the day will have difficulty in selling this if it simply means that people will have to do more of the same. People may be more motivated to continue with paid work if it is within the context of a portfolio life, of which it is one part, and maybe not even the most important part, of their lives. To live a portfolio life we need to think beyond simply having or not having a job. We need to combine a range of aspects of our lives, make flexibility our credo and develop a portfolio of skills and activities, some for sale and some to be used for other purposes.
- Age discrimination legislation means older people now in theory have equal opportunities to go on using the skills and experience that they have developed and have opportunities to develop new ones.
- Previous models of family, defined gender roles,

life-long relationships and careers for life are giving way to new models of family and relationships and "portfolio" lives and careers. The needs for income, structure, recognition, status, purpose, contacts, etc. which once were all met by having "a job", can now be met from a range of sources.

- "Permanence" in many areas of life has been replaced by continual change, bringing a need for self-management, reinvention, and knowing how to manage life transitions. People wedded to the notion of 'job monogamy' will be increasingly disappointed.
- The previous concept of "life-stages" (a time for doing what is expected of one) has given way to the notion of writing one's own life script. We do not have to be restricted by the life-patterns of our parent's and grandparent's lives.
- Living longer, for many, means being sandwiched between ageing parents and offspring who are likely to stay dependent longer, and possibly will never be as well off as their parents.
- Happiness or life-satisfaction is an outcome of successfully balancing many features of our unique lives and designing our future amidst a multitude of possibilities, in a life so complex as to be unrecognisable by our own parents and grandparents.
- Consequently, the over 50's probably have greater opportunity to take charge of their lives and make them more like we want them to be than any previous generation in history.

### Everyone needs to network

In the 20th century people rarely thought about a new job unless they were unhappy with the existing one or they had lost it. Today, the rate of change is such that the recruitment companies are telling us that we should all be continually networking. In this way new opportunities arise and if we do suddenly have a job crisis we are not starting our job search from scratch. This is not something that comes naturally to some people but then neither did sitting at a desk for eight hours a day.

More than 25 per cent of people who find jobs through networking receive the referral from someone they meet once a year or less (University of Dublin Careers Service).

Emotional support comes from someone who:

- you can talk problems through with – a confidante.
- you can call on in a crisis – a crisis manager.

- makes you feel competent and valued. Someone who you can comfortably share good news with – a validator.
- you can take a break with, have a drink or a meal with to 'get away from it all', someone you can have a really good laugh with – an escapist.

### Developmental support comes from someone who:

- is interested in you, what you want to achieve and wants to help you navigate your own journey of discovery – a mentor.
- challenges you to sit up and take a good look at yourself. Someone who'll give truthful negative feedback that you need to hear – a challenger.
- knows how to get things done, who's practical and experienced – a fixer.
- is a specialist in your areas of interest – an expert.

### Promotional support comes from someone who:

- introduces you to new ideas, new interests and new people – a connector.
- knows you well enough to bring you together with a possible employer or contractor. They are looking for a win-win outcome – a matchmaker.
- helps to promote you and sell your skills – a marketer.

### Material support comes from someone who:

- will help you out with practical support, e.g. use of equipment, premises, child minding, caring for relatives, etc. – people.
- will help you with banks, agencies, investors, individuals, business angels, etc. – finance.

### Using our motivated skills

We all have things we love to do: making things, drawing them, designing them, inventing them, solving problems, writing, persuading, helping people, teaching, mentoring, networking...you get the idea.

We feel most alive when we do what we love to do and conversely we feel pretty miserable when we don't. Those 'things' are actually the skills that we were born to use – that we're 'motivated' to use. A motivated skill is unlearned, genetic; it's linked to our temperament and is something we're born with. It dictates how we prefer to behave.

Bernard Haldane (1960) was the first career development specialist to suggest we learn best from our successes and not our failures. He developed the concept of 'motivated skills' after moving to the US from England following the Second World War. Haldane worked with thousands of returning US service people and developed his approach from this experience. He was appalled at just how few people had any idea of what skills they had and what skills they wanted to use.

And he discovered that it was possible to identify at an early age what he was, by then, calling 'motivated skills'.

A four year old who enjoys performing will enjoy it at 15 or 20 or 80 – unless discouraged from doing so. A seven year old who's sensitive and likes to help people is also likely to want to do that throughout his or her life. Conversely, those who show no talent for constructing or building things early on are unlikely ever to love that activity, no matter how much training they receive. Someone who hates working with figures may laboriously acquire the skills to do so – but will never love it and won't look for opportunities to exercise that skill.

Dr Paul Samuelson, the first American to win the Nobel Prize in economics, put it succinctly (2003): *"Never underestimate the vital importance of finding early in life the work that for you is play. This turns possible underachievers into happy warrior"*.

Although there are a finite number of motivated skills, only once will they come together in such a way that defines your uniqueness. Other writers use different words to describe this trait – strengths, signature strengths, dependable strengths, drivers, talents, etc. – I prefer to stay with 'motivated skills' as it was the phrase Bernard Haldane used when I worked with him in the 1980s.

There's a major publishing and consulting 'industry' that's developed over the past 10 years around helping people to develop their motivated skills or strengths. The writers, researchers and consultants may not agree on what to call them but the one thing they all agree on is that people are wasting their time focusing on weaknesses and trying to fix them. How much easier and more logical to focus on motivated skills and get people to become even

better at doing the things they love.

But sometimes we're actively discouraged from recognising our own skills as we 'might get above ourselves'. This is not just a peculiarity of the British but certainly there have been cultural pressures not to 'show off'. And there's certainly been strong cultural pressure to spend a great deal of time and effort in improving in the areas in which we are weak.

To quote Peter Drucker (2007 p.167 ) again, *"It takes far more energy and work to improve from incompetence to mediocrity than it takes to improve from first-rate performance to excellence."*

### **Less analysis and more paid and unpaid work experience**

This is something that, initially, I found difficult to accept, as someone who has had a successful career in producing diagnostics to invite self-analysis. I am not saying that this has no role now, on the contrary, but just as important is experimentation and testing out new experiences.

Herminia Ibarra (2004), admittedly working primarily with professional groups, emphasises the importance of devoting more time to action than to reflection, to doing rather than planning. We see this in the approach of Generation Y's. They prefer to learn by testing things out in actuality. If it doesn't work out then it hasn't worked out. Nothing more complicated than that and certainly not classified as a failure.

### **Career and work as continuous reinvention**

We have gone on a journey from talent matching to choosing a lifestyle. From finding the right job for life to exploring many paid and unpaid work options. We now know that we can reinvent ourselves at any time of our lives, be that 20, 40, 60 or 80. Increasingly we are attracted to working for ourselves and with people who we relate to but knowing that we will almost certainly move on to other things. We develop loyalty to ourselves and our skills and values and to others that we work with – not organisations for a lifetime. They will only

have limited lifetimes and themselves will be subject to continuous change. The attraction of portfolio careers for many reflect this.

### Implications for Guidance Workers

In this complex, fast moving world where today is tomorrow's history lesson, where growing diversity sits alongside creeping global uniformity where does it leave guidance workers who of course are also subject to all of these processes and influences. I highlight some imperatives that occurred to me. It will be fascinating to get your contributions to this debate.

- Get people to think about the **Four different kinds of career pattern**.
- Help people to define their achievements and from those identify their **motivated skills**.
- Always get people to focus on what they do well and what ignites them rather than what they do less well.
- They need to know what is really important to them in their lives – their **values**.
- They need to understand what **interests** them.
- Encourage people to develop their **networks**. They will need these no matter what they decide to do.
- Encourage **experimentation**. There are no 'failures' just decisions that may not have worked out and there is always learning from these.
- It is unlikely that you will be as digitally intelligent as your younger clients but you should at least possess sufficient know-how to have digital conversations. You also need to know how to get older clients to fully utilize the digital options available to them to enable them to network, market and job search.
- Make sure they understand flexicurity. Be aware that people of all generations are now searching for and sometimes demanding flexible working arrangements. And that more and more employers are now open to that option.
- Be aware of the differences between the generations but don't generalise. Not all 60 year olds are SKIPS (spending the kids inheritance), not all 20 year olds want to rush off around the world.
- Teach people how to **market themselves** in this digital age.
- Ask yourselves just what kind of support you can offer your clients. Help them to analyse and develop their **support networks**.

- Ken Robinson (2009) says, "a degree was once a passport to a good job. Now at best it's a visa. It only gives you provisional residence in the job market"

Perhaps most important in this travelogue to the worlds of vocational, career and lifestyle guidance is that it is always possible to reinvent yourself at any age or stage. My plea to you for yourselves and your clients is that whatever you choose to do let your passions fuel it and your values drive it. And, even more importantly, remember to enjoy the journey.

Dr Barrie Hopson 10th December 2009

### Points Raised in the Q&A Session After the Lecture.

#### ***Is a portfolio career mainly for the middle classes and higher educated?***

The truth is that we just don't know. I would make the point that the single track career could also have been designated as primarily for the middle classes and higher educated. Certainly not all of the people that we interviewed fell into these categories but having said that the majority of them did. In traditional working class culture it was not uncommon for people to have more than one job but this was usually dictated by financial necessity. Very little research has been done yet on this career pattern and I would invite people to investigate this whilst it is still a fairly new phenomenon.

#### ***Are women more attracted to portfolio careers than men?***

This has been a central debate between Katie Ledger and myself and our agent and publisher (all women!). We interviewed slightly more women than men. The book design certainly assumes that there are likely to be more female than male buyers. I have a feeling that women would adapt more easily to this career pattern in that they tend to be more used to juggling different roles than men. The evidence suggests that they are more adept at multi-tasking than men. But then again we have no quantitative research on this subject.

***How do people get trained if they follow portfolio careers?***

As far as an employer is concerned there is no difference between a part time worker and one pursuing a portfolio career. As such employers need to train their staff. Portfolio workers who are self employed tend to spend their own money on personal and professional development like anyone else who is self employed. Many portfolio workers talk about the pluses of learning new skills in one job which are then transferable to other jobs. As employers get used to employing a larger temporary and project based workforce so they will have to realise that they must provide training to make this work.

***What are the differences between portfolio workers and the self-employed?***

Self employment is a context for working and as such some portfolio workers will be self employed but many will not. The sample that we interviewed was split about 50/50. We also have found some people who were self employed, then took a number of part time jobs for a while and then became self employed again. We must not confuse a career pattern with the contexts in which we choose to work.

## References

- Accenture (2009) *Woman's Research, Untapped Potential: Stretching Towards the Future*. London: Accenture
- Adams, J., Hopson, B. & Hayes, J. (1976) *Transition: Understanding & Managing Personal Change*. London: Martin Robertson
- Benko, C. and Weisberg, A. (2007) *Mass Career Customisation: Aligning the Workplace With Today's Non-Traditional Workforce*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press
- Busby, I. (2009) Working five-to-nine. <http://www.startups.co.uk/6678842911504203557/working-five-to-nine.html> [Accessed 4th February 2010]
- Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) (2007) '*Exploring the Future Workplace 2015+ and Tomorrow's People*', CIPD Conference, 2007. Harrogate (UK)
- Clinton, M., Totterdell, P. & Wood, S. (2006) A grounded theory of the portfolio working: Experiencing the smallest of small businesses, *International Small Business Journal*, 24(2) pp. 179-202
- Drucker, P. (2007) *The Essential Drucker*. Oxford: Butterworth and Heinemann
- Evans, M., Farenden-Smith, L. & Nantogmah, D. (2006) *Research into the Potential Take up of Sliversoftime Working*. London: Middlesex University
- Haldane, B. (1960) *How to Make a Habit of Success*. Washington: Acropolis Books
- Handy, C. (1989) *The Age of Unreason*. London: Hutchinson
- Hayes, J. & Hopson, B. (1971) *Careers Guidance: The Role of the School In Vocational Development*. London: Heinemann Educational
- Hopson, B. (2009) The Pluses of Being 50 Plus. Available from: <http://www.theplusesofbeing50plus.blogspot.com/> [Accessed 4th February 2010]
- Hopson, B. & Hayes, J. (1968) *The Theory and Practice of Vocational Guidance*. Oxford: Pergamon
- Hopson, B. & Hopson, C. (1973) *Twosome Plus: A Guide to Co-Habitation*. London: Blond & Brigg
- Hopson, B. & Hough, P. (1973) *Exercises in Personal and Career Development*. London: Hobsons Press
- Hopson, B. & Scally, M. (1980-1988) *Lifeskills Teaching Programmes, No's 1 – 4*. Leeds: Lifeskills International
- Hopson, B. & Scally, M. (1981) *Lifeskills Teaching*. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill
- Hopson, B. & Scally, M. (1984) *Build Your Own Rainbow: A Workbook for Career and Life Management*. Leeds: Lifeskills International
- Hopson, B. & Scally, M. (1989) *12 Steps to Success Through Service*. Leeds: Lifeskills International
- Hopson, B. & Scally, M. (2008) *The Rainbow Years: The Pluses of Being 50+*. London: Middlesex University
- Ibarra, H. (2004) *Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing your Career*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press
- Institute for Ageing and Health. Newcastle University <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/iah>
- Kaizen Institute (2009) [blog.kaizen.com](http://blog.kaizen.com) – KAIZEN Institute [Accessed 4th February 2010]
- Law, B. and Watts, A.G. (1977) *Schools, Careers and Community*. London: Church Information Office
- Learndirect (2007) Working Life Begins at 50. <http://hlas.careers-advice.org/Careers%20Advice/careersadvice.direct.gov.uk/features/news/lifebeginsat50/fiftyplusfullreport/index.html> [Accessed 4th February 2010]
- Medina, J., (2008) *Brain Rules*. Seattle: Pear Press
- Molian, D., [http://www.vodafone.com/working\\_nation/nature\\_of\\_work/concluding\\_remarks.html](http://www.vodafone.com/working_nation/nature_of_work/concluding_remarks.html) [Accessed 4th February 2010]

## From Vocational Guidance to Portfolio Careers: A Critical Reflection

Office for National Statistics (2009) Self-employment Data. Available from:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/SearchRes.asp?term=self-employment+&x=11&y=10> [Accessed 4th February 2010]

Parsons, F. (1909) *Choosing a Vocation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Portfolio Careers (2009) <http://portfoliocareers.net/2009/09/24/more-people-really-are-getting-fed-up-with-their-jobs> [Accessed 4th February 2010]

Robinson, K. (2009) *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*. London: Penguin

<http://pissartistsway.blogspot.com/2009/07/element.html>

Rodger, A. (1952) *The Seven Point Plan*. London: NIIP

Slivertone [www.sliversoftime.com](http://www.sliversoftime.com)

Samuelson, P.A. (2003) *How I Became an Economist*. Available from:

[www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/economics/articles/samuelson-2/index.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/articles/samuelson-2/index.html) [Accessed 1st December 2009]

Tapscott, D. and Williams, A. (2007) *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. New York:

Penguin [http://www.socialtext.com/files/Wikinomics\\_Chapter9.pdf](http://www.socialtext.com/files/Wikinomics_Chapter9.pdf)

Trunk, P. (2009) [www.blog.penelopetrunk.com](http://www.blog.penelopetrunk.com)

Trunk, P. (2007) *The Brazen Careerist, Business Plus*

*University of Dublin, Trinity College, Careers Advisory Service*

Vodafone (2008) *Working Nation Report: The Nature of Work*. London: Vodafone. Available from:

[http://www.vodafone.com/working\\_nation/nature\\_of\\_work/concluding\\_remarks.html](http://www.vodafone.com/working_nation/nature_of_work/concluding_remarks.html) [Accessed 21 January 2010]

Williams, N. (2007) *The Work We Were Born To Do*. Element Books

Youtube (2008) Did You Know 3.0 - From Meeting in Rome this Year. Available from:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpEnFwiqdx8> [Accessed 21 January 2010]



**80% recycled**  
This booklet is printed  
on 80% recycled paper



International Centre for  
Guidance Studies (iCeGS)

[www.derby.ac.uk/icegs](http://www.derby.ac.uk/icegs)

University of Derby, Kedleston Road, Derby, DE22 1GB  
Tel: 01332 591267 Fax: 01332 597726