

WAYS OF LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE, NAVIGATION, AND IMPACT:

HOW THE FEAR OF JOB LOSS CAN LEAD TO A CHANGED PERSPECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this exploratory study of adult learning was to investigate the lived experience of 15 employees who encountered a significant job loss event (an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment—coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income), and how the resultant fear(s) from that event affected their navigation through unemployment in order to become successfully reemployed.

This study used two theories in the field of adult learning—Transformative Learning (TL) and Learning From Experience (LFE)—with an aim of uncovering how the principles and methods of TL and LFE were relevant to the participants' job loss episode and self-assessed, perceived workplace performance. TL offers adults a path for reframing a job loss episode. LFE can help advance an understanding of how the cumulative set of life events develops and shapes coping capacities (ways of learning) and skills relative to job loss episodes.

This study was conducted using qualitative research methods, predominately exploratory participant interviews. The participants were 15 U.S.-based employees: five Black males, nine White males, and one White female. The participants were largely but not exclusively middle management staff. Through a series of one-on-one interviews, the research process captured the participants' perceptions and learnings with respect to how they experienced their job-dismissed event, navigated unemployment, and applied learnings from their job loss episode. In addition, given the availability of five Black participants, discussions related to how race permeated the study were pursued when surfaced.

Findings from the study indicated that participants experienced manifestations of fear from losing their job; used their intervening period of unemployment in a constructive, action-based manner; and saw themselves differently as a result of their job loss event.

Several conclusions were derived from the study: (a) the job dismissal event is unlike onboarding—employees generally feel kicked out without care or warning; (b) navigation through unemployment requires self-awareness, self-determination, and both social and financial support; and (c) the richness of experience from a job loss episode can offer improvements to perceived workplace performance.

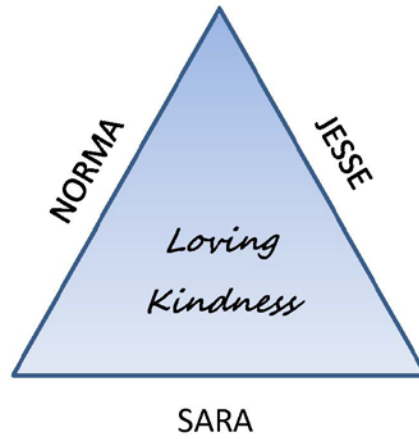
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

Sara R. Walton, Norma A. Vinson, and Jesse L. Vinson,
my teachers of loving kindness



and

Nancy A. Garvey,
my soulmate

and

Joseph A. Murphy, Jr.,
a guiding and supportive force

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First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to the participants who unselfishly offered personal, and in some cases traumatic, life experiences. Without their voices; their stories of pain, reflection and triumph, this research study would have been neither possible nor meaningful. Their contributions are genuinely appreciated.

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The combination of Professors Lyle Yorks and Victoria Marsick completed my advisory dream team. Professor Marsick's fascinating, unassuming skill at dissecting and reframing referential literature was most helpful with discerning the myriad tributaries of Transformative Learning and Learning from Experience. The arduous nature and ultimate objective of this academic journey, while unique for every person, is something Professor Marsick fully grasps. That comprehension is manifested in spirited, pragmatic discussions rooted in literary and real-world contexts.

Professor William Pasmore added a thoughtful and challenging perspective to my study. I am appreciative for his diligence with making my dissertation more succinct.

And then there is my fellow cohort, Dr. Nyasha Browne. Words fall short in expressing the joy in being able to thank Nyasha for her endless collaboration, encouragement, awareness and caring. Nyasha picked me up when I fell down. I am forever grateful for her benevolence.

Without the invaluable assistance from my Editor, Gabriella Oldham, this dissertation would still be a working draft. Dr. Oldham demonstrates a coveted expertise with dissertations. I was fortunate to have been a recipient of her exacting, efficient, manner.

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Lastly, to my dear wife and soulmate, Nancy: witnessing your commitment to stand by me, regardless of the outcome, has taught me deeper levels of compassion.

At a certain moment, this quest was no longer about me; it turned out to be about us. Love has no bounds.

J. A. W.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this exploratory study of adult learning was to investigate the lived experience of 15 employees who encountered a significant job loss event (an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment—coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income), and how the resultant fear(s) from that event affected their navigation through unemployment in order to become successfully reemployed.

Three dimensions of adult learning from which the fear of job loss can be recognized guided this study: experience, navigation, and impact. Accordingly, this investigation was framed by three core questions: (1) How is a fear of job loss experienced? (2) Once experienced, how does one navigate the world of unemployment-related activities? and (3) After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be impacted?

Participant learning in this study was contextual, situated within the confines of having an unplanned, financially impactful job loss event. Learning in this case was aggregated—as a compilation of lived experiences to date, with the implementation of adaptive strategies to improve the participants' current state.

The purpose of this study was also to deepen levels of awareness with respect to how employees perceive workplace performance, given that the prevailing fears accompanying net job loss are an integral characteristic of organizational life. Relatedly, one could state that as long as organizations, regardless of size, are comprised of humans—in some capacity—the collective performance of an organization will be intimately affected by the ways in which its members recognize and contend with manifestations of job loss fear.

This study was performed using qualitative research methods, predominately exploratory participant interviews. The participants were 15 U.S.-based employees: five Black males, nine White males, and one White female. The participants were largely but not exclusively middle management staff. Through a series of one-on-one encounters, the research process captured the participants' perceptions and learnings with respect to how they experienced their job-dismissed event, navigated unemployment, and applied learnings from their job loss episode. In addition, given the availability of five Black participants, discussions related to how race permeated the study were pursued when surfaced.

The phenomenon of how the fear of job loss impacts perceived workplace performance was studied using two theories in the field of adult learning—Transformative Learning (TL) and Learning from Experience (LFE)—with the aim of uncovering how the principles and methods of TL and LFE were relevant to the participants' job loss episode and perceived workplace performance. TL offers adults a

path for reframing a job loss episode. LFE can help advance an understanding of how the cumulative set of life events develops and shapes coping capacities (ways of learning) and skills relative to job loss episodes.

As a core component of TL involves successively deeper levels of reflection, interpretation, and perspective change such that one's actions—subsequent to a transformative event—are significantly different (Mezirow, 1997; Palloff & Pratt, 1999), it is necessary to investigate linkages to perceived workplace performance as a result of impactful events that stem from job dismissal and the fear(s) associated with job loss.

It is assumed that perceived workplace performance is influenced by events outside the workplace, events that can provide necessary support for self-reflection and event processing (Cranton, 1997; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). If this assumption is accurate, then an argument can be made that improvements to perceived workplace performance are also connected to how one processes events and experiences external to the workplace. Processing events while under high levels of stress can result in adverse consequences throughout the body, affecting cognition (Sapolsky, 2015) and, by extension, social relationships.

Correspondingly, this study was predicated on the researcher's conjoined premise that we act in the world as we perceive it to be; our perceptions are both fluid and malleable. Human actions—including the recognition of and response to fear—are inherently shaped by perceptions.

Background and Context

Originally, the recession of 2007-2009 was the timeframe for providing a significant period of unemployment that offers historical context to this study. It was the most recent period where wide-scale employment and the fear of job loss jointly resonated. However, when I analyzed the findings from this study, more than 12 months after completing field work, the United States was faced with three major concurrent crises: (a) a global health pandemic (COVID-19: nearly 200,000 deaths and 6 million cases in the United States as of August 2020); (b) unemployment at 8.4% (August 2020), up from 3.8% (August 2019); and (c) intense, overt racial strife. While the impact of these predicaments is beyond the scope of this study, they are singularly, and when viewed collectively, significant to the contextual nature of job loss. Employees do not live in a vacuum; they are affected by their surroundings.

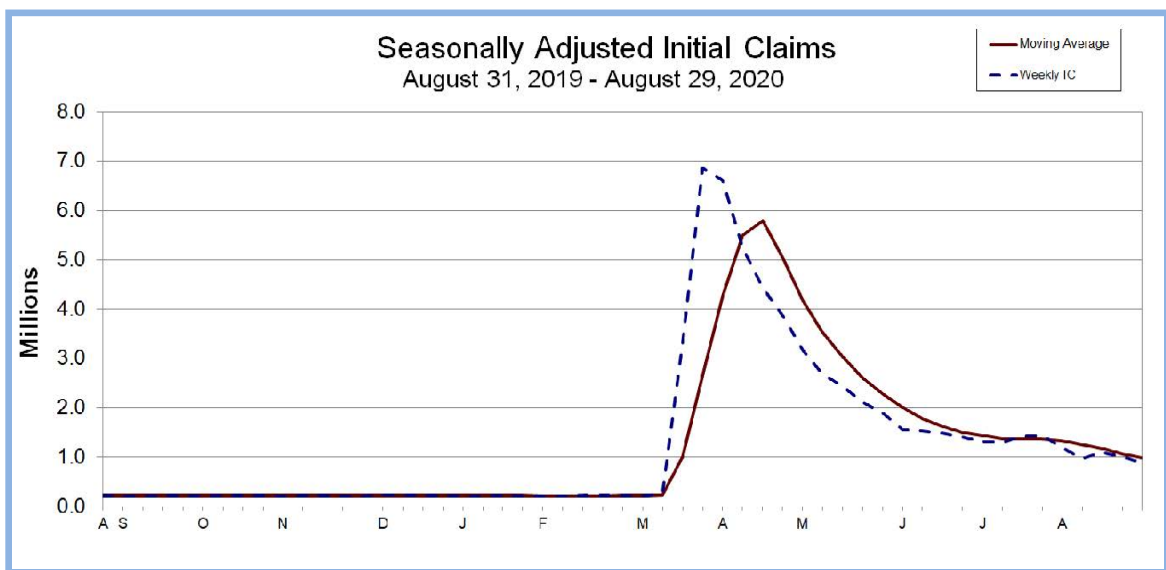
COVID-19 has made a seismic change in households in the United States. The tremendous devastation to many, especially the most vulnerable, is incalculable. Comparisons to the 2007-2009 recessions are, in many ways, purely academic. Until and unless an effective, safe vaccine is widely available, the underlying premise of this study—which assumes that job loss will be followed by job replacement—may unfortunately not be applicable for many individuals.

Nearly 9 million Americans lost their jobs during the recession of February 2008-February 2010. The unemployment rate peaked at 10%. Specifically, from December 2007 until June 2009—an 18-month period—the U.S. unemployment rate doubled from

4.8% to 9.7% (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2014). Contrastingly, from mid-March 2020 to the end of May 2020—a 10-week period—more than 40 million unemployment benefit claims were filed, exceeding unemployment levels during the Great Depression (Despard, Grinstein-Weiss, Chun, & Roll, 2020). The U.S. unemployment rate nearly quadrupled in 4 months, from 3.5% (February 2020) to 11.2% (June 2020), as per the BLS (2020). The official rate dropped to 8.4% as of August 2020.

Figure 1.1

Seasonally Adjusted Initial Claims



For Whites, unemployment rates as of August 2019 and August 2020 were 3.5% and 7.3%; for Blacks, the rates were over 50% higher—5.5% and 13.0%, respectively. Those with the least seemed to suffer the most. As Ta-Nehsi Coates (2017) poignantly stated:

The unemployment rate for young blacks (20.6 percent) in July 2016 was double that of young whites (9.9 percent). And since the late 1970s, William Julius Wilson and other social scientists following in his wake have noted the disproportionate effect that the decline in manufacturing jobs has had on African American communities. If anyone should be angered by the devastation wreaked by the financial sector and a government that declined to prosecute the perpetrators, it is African Americans—the housing crisis was one of the primary drivers in the past 20 years of the wealth gap between black families and the rest of the country. But the cultural condescension toward and economic anxiety of black people is not news. (p. 16)

The fear of becoming unemployed is palpable. Unemployed workers are twice as likely as their employed counterparts to experience psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, low subjective well-being, and poor self-esteem (Paul & Moser, 2009). The stress and depressive symptoms associated with job loss can negatively affect parenting practices and lead to increased levels of punitive and arbitrary punishment towards children (McLoyd, 1998). While not within the scope of this study, the societal and individual effects of underemployment—a kind of disguised unemployment (Dooley, Parause, & Ham-Rowbottom, 2000)—should be considered as well.

This study was also motivated by a personal conviction that all employees, and indeed certain socially identifiable groups (i.e., African Americans), are more directly impacted by real or perceived job loss, even if that loss in employment is temporary or manifested indirectly, vis-à-vis the departure of coworkers; a dramatic and sudden structural organization change; or pervasive, externally oriented, cultural/social developments. Additionally, in recognition of the human tendency to “fill gaps” in our understanding of lived experiences (Demetriou, 2015), employees may seek a way of

making meaning out of fear-triggering events, especially if those events stem from, or are profoundly connected to, the workplace (Kolb, 1984).

Understandings of the nature of fear-related event(s), what was learned from those events and the corresponding actions taken as a way to respond to and self-manage future events, are crucial dimensions and objectives of this study. The term *unemployment* refers to that status of people not working yet wanting to work, including both those actively seeking work as well as those too discouraged to seek employment (Dooley et al., 2004).

Further, job loss can leave a lasting imprint on those who remain employed. Coworkers who are still employed may experience a heavier workload and suffer from the anxiety that they too will soon be unemployed. How laid-off employees are treated is often how surviving employees assume they may be treated (Kivimaki, Vahtera, Elovainio, Pentti, & Virtanen, 2003).

Problem Statement

Today's highly dynamic work environment is fraught with change—change that is often fundamental, rapid, and unrelenting. Even with the best of carefully laid plans, unexpected circumstances occur and can lead to a cycle of revised goals and staff reductions (Crossman, Crossman, & Lovely, 2009). Everyone tangibly connected to an employee's income is impacted by job loss.

In addition, structural change in organizations that has been designed to help firms adapt to the “new economy” can often lead to new forms of employment replete with longer working hours, lower financial guarantees, a lack of bargaining power, and an increased fear of unemployment (Lippmann, 2008). These factors contribute to a high rate of workplace stress (American Psychological Association [APA], 2015).

Especially for those who must work for economic reasons, an actual or a potential job loss could have long-term adverse consequences, not only for the employees but for their family and community as well. Further, for the vast majority of adults, economically goal-centered employment can be the single pre-occupier of waking moments. Not only is employment often accompanied by the loss of employment or underemployment, but as workers live in a borderless, connected world, their lives “on the job” are deeply affected by events that occur outside of the established work environment. This duality of person versus worker can be accompanied by varying degrees and manifestations of fear and/or anxiety.

The researcher contends that more could be known about how employees perform their jobs, given that job loss and the prevailing fears accompanying job uncertainty and impermanence are both common and, as presented, materially significant to families and communities. This study was not intended to break new theoretical ground necessarily. However, if the position is taken that every life experience tells a unique story, then this study will be useful to an audience who is

seeking a deeper understanding of how adult learning intersects with the fear of job loss, such that perceived workplace performance is impacted.

What is insufficiently known is how employees respond to or learn from episodes of job loss as described. While the BLS can offer aggregate statistics on unemployment rates, we do not know enough of the individual stories, the life experiences of those afflicted with the fear of job loss. The richness of those stories can be a valuable source of learning. This study was intended to hear those stories and understand them within a context of perceived workplace performance.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory study of adult learning was to investigate the lived experience of 15 employees who encountered a significant job loss event (an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment—coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income), and how the resultant fear(s) from that event affected their navigation through unemployment in order to become successfully reemployed.

Research on the intersection of fear and perceived workplace performance, along with personal stories from the participants, was intended to offer insight into both employees and employers. All participants in this study experienced an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment, coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income.

As three dimensions of adult learning—experience, navigation, and impact—framed this study, the following questions guided the research:

1. How is a fear of job loss experienced?
2. Once experienced, how does one navigate the world of unemployment-related activities?
3. After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be impacted?

Research Approach

Given the nature of this study, the researcher chose a qualitative methodology. Holloway (1997) described qualitative research as a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of the world in which they live. A primary aim of qualitative research, then, is to understand the social reality of individuals, groups, and cultures. To this end, the researcher used qualitative methods to explore the behaviors, perspectives, and experiences of identified participants in a study (Holloway, 1997). As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) contended, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (p. 86).

In qualitative research, the researcher learns from the participants’ lives, but maintains a position of “empathic neutrality” (Patton, 2002). Relatedly, Stake (2010) cited several special characteristics of qualitative study:

1. Interpretive—it keys on the meanings of human affairs as seen from different views.
2. Experiential—this qualitative study emphasizes observations by participants and is in tune with the view that “reality” is a human construction.
3. Situational—its contexts are described in detail and tend to be oriented to objects and activities.
4. Personalistic—it seeks uniqueness more than commonality and works to understand individual perceptions.

Additional strengths of the qualitative methodology include its value in performing research on informal and unstructured linkages and processes in organizations; research on real as opposed to stated organizational goals; and research on exploring novel, ignored, or often marginalized populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall, 1985).

In qualitative research, the researcher is essentially an instrument, observing action, recording behavior, and recognizing settings and contexts. The researcher might portray a subjective role in the study, i.e., using personal experience in making interpretations (Stake, 2010).

Additionally, the qualitative researcher connects elements of actual lived experience with stated or professed organizational goals, balancing all aspects of events within the confines of an organization with the expansive dimensions of self, family, and

community. Lastly, a qualitative methodology enables the researcher to be situationally immersed and theoretically framed.

The researcher conducted this study, vis-à-vis participant stories and lived experiences, to understand how their responses to fear triggered by real job loss became a basis for learning that impacted perceived workplace performance. Capturing that richness of the participants' lived experience—accurately and compassionately—was crucial if the findings from this study were to offer meaningful, useful value.

The data for this study were collected primarily through participant interviews. The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the participants' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Kvale and Brinkmann's metaphor of the qualitative research interviewer as a miner is applicable to the context and participant demographic constituted in this study. In the "miner" metaphor scenario, the interviewer "digs nuggets" of knowledge out of the participants' experiences without clouding those experiences with leading or suggestive questions. The researcher might understand the knowledge gained from those interviews as objective real data or subjective authentic meanings.

Assumptions of the Study

An underlying assumption of this study was that much of what we fear—
notwithstanding physical brain dysfunction—is predicated on varying degrees of

ignorance, not knowing. In some way, embedded in the fear of job loss is the ignorance of how one's life will be when one either no longer has or might lose a current, seemingly predictable income stream. Fear can become magnified when the fragile sense of certainty associated with steady income becomes uncertain. However, some individuals are able to accept and move on from life's unknowns and the accompanying uncertainty. The researcher assumed that perspective formulation—how one perceives oneself and the outer world—is crucial in responding to a critical job loss event. Further, to the extent that those root causes of ignorance are first realized, and then reduced empirically, compassionately, and realistically, fear can be moderated.

Perspectives of the Researcher

A life-long passion for experiential learning guided the researcher along this path. An observation is that not many in the researcher's age demographic pursue a doctorate degree. Nevertheless, a continuous thirst for learning new and challenging ways of being in the world has provided the researcher with myriad professional experiences and roles in finance, operations, human resources, and organizational development for both publicly and closely held firms.

Further, a treasure trove of deeply rewarding employment opportunities, coupled with the richness of the Black male perspective, has provided the researcher with an intimacy of the power of self-transformation. By the age of 13—when his father passed away, leaving a mother with no insurance, a mortgage, and three children in a

lower middle-class home—the researcher had already worked for 4 years every Friday evening and all-day Saturday as a bootblack in the neighborhood barbershop.

Black barbershops—especially at that time—were known for being extremely rich sources of culture and consciousness. That shop was no different. In an environment that is conducive for growth, one can develop listening and observation skills at an early age. Even though there was no male adult in the researcher's household, a Black male presence was always felt and known. Early on, the researcher learned how hard, honest work, along with the requisite discipline for listening and practicing (education was always promoted at home and at the barbershop), were essential and necessary habits to form. Life was—and still is—just different for Black men. Recognizing and developing African American multiculturalism is requisite for survival. Tanner Colby (2014), when reflecting on shortcomings of the Civil Rights movement, posited:

Perhaps the solution lies in recognizing, as Lerone Bennett did, that the aims of Black Power and integration are not so incompatible as we sometimes imagine. *“Too many people think blackness means withdrawing and tightening the circle,”* Bennett wrote. *“On the contrary, blackness means expanding and widening the circle, absorbing and integrating rather than being absorbed and integrated.”* (p. 17; italics added)

For a lifelong experiential learner; every employment relationship offers insights and perspectives. The researcher has learned how serving the need of others in the workplace calls for a continuous redesign—sometimes radical—of the self.

Rationale and Significance

This study allowed the researcher to test certain assumptions about how adults learn to manage fear and adapt to uncertainty and impermanence. Ultimately, the questions asked *during* this study, and the findings from it, were intended to be useful in lessening fears and apprehensions that impede perceived workplace performance.

Further, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) spoke to the purposeful dimension of qualitative inquiry that this study aimed to fulfill:

Empirical inquiry, of course, is shaped by paradigm commitments and by the recurring questions that any given paradigm or interpretive perspective asks about human experience, social structure, and culture. More deeply, however, the researcher always asks how the practices of qualitative inquiry can be used to help create a free, democratic society. (p. 243)

Definitions of Key Terms

Throughout this study, the researcher used several terms that require initial clarification. Although many are commonly understood, in this study they are considered technical terms and thus must be defined within the context of this research.

Fear: “A highly arousing negative affective state resulting from a present environmental threat (or cues associated with a threat). It produces an immediate alarm reaction that mobilizes an organism to take action (fight/flight)” (Rhudy & Meagher, 2003, p. 244).

Job loss event: An unplanned termination of employment with no immediate replacement of employment, coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income.

Job loss experience: An aggregation of subevents, beginning, in this case, with the tangible, contractual loss of employment, and ending in a somewhat gray area, which may or may not have a specific date, but most likely occur after an onboarding period with a new employer.

Perceived workplace performance: A non-traditional, subjective, self-assessed view of how well one is or has carried out known job functions. In the context of this study, a participant's self-assessment is total and absolute. No workplace performance measurement tools were used by the researcher, nor were assessments by or about the participants' workplace performance corroborated. Moreover, no evidence from other sources was considered. The self-assessment is a combination of how well the participants feel about their workplace and how well they are doing what they believe they should be doing at the workplace.

Successfully reemployed: Within the context of this study, when a previously unemployed person obtains full-time work (e.g., at Company B) and, having been employed at Company B for an indeterminable period of time, self-assesses one's overall workplace performance as favorable.

Unemployment-related activities: Within the context of this study, all professional and personal actions taken by an unemployed person while actively seeking to become reemployed.

Unplanned job loss: When, from the employee's point of view, an employee is unexpectedly and/or surprisingly terminated by its employer. The termination could be for any reason, although, within the context of this study, largely for reorganization or forced resignation. In addition, an unplanned job loss must occur in tandem with severely adverse financial consequences due to that job loss. Both dimensions, job loss and financial loss, compound levels of fear and anxiety.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this exploratory study of adult learning was to investigate the lived experience of 15 employees who encountered a significant job loss event (an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment—coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income), and how the resultant fear(s) from that event affected their ability to navigate unemployment in order to become successfully reemployed. Therefore, this literature review attended to what is known as well as to what is not yet well understood about how employees experience the fear of job loss.

While specific underlying, investigative questions related to the fear of job loss and perceived workplace performance guided this study, ultimately, this review of literature was focused on addressing three core queries:

1. How is a fear of job loss experienced?
2. Once experienced, how does one navigate the world of unemployment-related activities?
3. After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be impacted?

In this literature review, the researcher discusses two theories of adult learning that are relevant to framing the fear of job loss, as previously defined, and its impact on perceived workplace performance: (a) Transformative Learning (TL), and (b) Learning From Experience (LFE). TL theory was utilized as a basis for understanding how workplace relationships were changed (if at all), along with the participants' views of the organization/employee dichotomy and the participants' meaning of being a "performer." LFE theory was considered in order to present a context for understanding the lived experience of the participants, and how their cumulative set of life events developed and shaped coping capacities and skills relative to job loss episodes.

To compile this literature review, the researcher conducted searches from multiple information sources, including dissertations, academic coursework, internet resources, and professional journals. Those sources were assessed through various online sources, including ProQuest, ERIC, EBSCO, JSTOR, Sage Psychology, Springer Link, GOOGLE, and EduCAT. Further, to delimit the timeframe used to conduct this search, except in rare instances, the researcher selected literature from studies published from the years 2005 through 2020.

Literature reviewed for this study centered on two topics: Transformative Learning, largely Nohl's (2015) contribution; and Learning From Experience, specifically Jarvis's (1987, 2006) work. Both topics cover aspects of the human condition wherein obstacles require viewing events or situations differently in order to adapt to "disjuncture" (Jarvis, 1987, 2006). With respect to TL, the researcher had hoped to

address the question: How does transformation align with overcoming a traumatic event like job loss? Jarvis's work was instrumental in seeking answers to the question: How do aggregate life experiences create avenues for learning?

In addition, TL and LFE resonate with the researcher's personal experiences as a Black U.S. citizen. Often, the Black experience is one of acute disjuncture; seeking to thrive with a clear mind by necessity requires an adaptable perspective and consistent practice. A related dimension of this study was discovering if something about the Black experience facilitates deeper reservoirs of survival. On this subtopic, relevant citations are noted where valuable.

The Demonstrative Impact of Job Loss

Job loss is considered an extremely stressful and jarring life event in which paid employment is involuntarily removed from an individual (Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995). Understanding the personal, lived experience of job loss holds considerable significance for unemployed workers. This is a particularly important topic in light of the enormous spike in unemployment rates that occurred during the Great Recession beginning in late 2008, and from March 2020 to present as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic. While the Great Recession was arguably the worst economic recession in the world in almost 100 years (Borbely, 2009), U.S. unemployment levels due to COVID-19 (as illustrated in Chapter I, Figure 1.1) situates the pain from unemployment in unfathomable territory.

COVID-19 is a global health crisis that has shattered employment capacities (over 8% U.S. unemployment—August 2020) and human lives (more than 200,000 U.S. deaths—August 2020) in less than 6 months. While it is safe to assume that the pain felt in the areas of health and employment is severe, the extent of the destruction is still being tallied because the harm has not yet ceased. As of this writing, a pervasive mutilation to countless families and communities, especially communities that are Black or Brown or poor, shows no signs of abating.

Nevertheless, the extensive evidence on the far-reaching negative consequences of job loss remains clear: The loss of a job can lead to losses of income in the short run, permanently lower wages, and a worsening of mental and physical health, culminating in higher mortality rates.

Further, parental job loss hampers children's educational progress and lowers their future earnings (Nichols, Mitchell, & Linder, 2013). The longer Americans are unemployed, the more likely they are to report signs of poor psychological well-being. About one in five Americans who have been unemployed for a year or more say they currently have or are being treated for depression—almost double the rate among those who have been unemployed for 5 weeks or less (Crabtree, 2014).

Claims that changes in personality occur following an extended period of unemployment have been corroborated. Unemployment has one of the strongest impacts on well-being, with the impact often lasting beyond the period of unemployment (Clark, Diener, Georgellis, & Lucas, 2006; Clark, Georgellis, & Sanfey,

2001; Couch, Daly, & Zissimopoulos, 2013), and being comparable with that of becoming disabled or losing a spouse (Boyce & Wood, 2011; Lucas, 2007). Compared with those who have remained in employment, unemployed men and women experienced significant patterns of change in their mean levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness, whereas reemployed individuals experienced limited change (Oswald & Powdthavee, 2008).

Results from Boyce and Wood's (2011) study indicated that unemployment has wider psychological implications than previously thought. In addition, results from the study were consistent with the view that personality can change as a function of contextual and environmental factors (Boyce, Wood, Daly, & Sedikides, 2015). Furthermore, individuals with higher levels of self-esteem and social support were not only more likely to engage in problem-focused coping; they were also connected to a higher likelihood of being reemployed later (Solove, Fisher, & Kraiger, 2014).

Vast numbers of Americans, notwithstanding those who depend on the formerly employed, are implicated when job loss occurs. In addition, income and wealth disparities are powerful and pervasive factors in shaping neighborhood health (O'Campo et al., 1995). For example, Diez-Roux (1997) and colleagues found that living in economically deprived neighborhoods, as measured using U.S. census data, was associated with a higher risk of coronary heart disease in various communities across the country, even when accounting for individual-level risk factors. Economic disadvantage, or the conditions of inequality itself, may directly influence mental health

outcomes by shaping exposure to adversity and stress (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017). Neighborhood income can also influence well-being more indirectly, by determining where residents shop for groceries, whether they smoke, and what their housing conditions are—all of which are strongly linked with health outcomes. Crucially, a study by O’Campo and colleagues (1995) found that women living in urban neighborhoods with higher unemployment rates were more likely to report that they experienced domestic violence when compared to women in the same city with the same income level, but who lived in neighborhoods with lower unemployment rates.

Although this study focused primarily on the experiences of individual participants in the United States, it should also be noted—as connections between the self, family, and community can create a backdrop of consciousness for the individual while at the workplace—that whole communities can be devastated when job loss occurs. Accordingly, the researcher intended through this study to discover how recognition of the potentially grave and injurious ramifications of job loss (an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement, coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income) become triggers for fear, anxiety, and stress.

Fear and Anxiety

The researcher recognized the degree to which the applied meanings of *anxiety* and *fear* overlap. Rhudy and Meagher (2003) described fear as a “highly arousing negative affective state resulting from a present environmental threat (or cues associated with a threat). It produces an immediate alarm reaction that mobilizes an

organism to take action (fight/flight)” (p. 244). Fear tends to be riveting; it induces a reaction—hence the need to fight or flee. Fear is often identified with something external. It is more than semantics—to be afraid *of* something, but anxious *about* something. There is a connection and an overlap; although anxiety may not be clearly defined, it is certainly felt (Susteren, 2017).

While data on the injurious effects of COVID 19 are still being compiled and analyzed, one can point to Hurricane Katrina as a smaller example of the effect of a natural disaster on local communities. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, many survivors struggled with issues such as short-term memory loss and cognitive impairment. This syndrome has been labeled “Katrina Brain,” according to a report by Ken Sakauye (Vestal, 2017). Even though more than half the population of New Orleans had evacuated, psychiatric helpline calls increased 61% in the months after Katrina, compared with the same period before the storm; in addition, death notices increased 25% and the city’s murder rate rose 37% (Vestal, 2017).

Psychiatrist and environmental activist Lisa Van Susteren (Vestal, 2017) has commented on how anxiety became deeply embedded in the persona of those affected by Katrina:

There is a vicarious reaction. When we see people flooded out of their homes, pets lost, belongings rotting in the streets, and people scared out of their wits, we experience an empathic identification with the victims,” she said. “People come in saying they can’t sleep, they’re drinking too much, they’re having trouble with their kids, *their jobs or their marriages are falling apart*. They may not know where the anxiety is coming from, but everyone is affected by the stress.” (p. 5; italics added)

According to Mathewson (2017), “The science is clear: When brain capacity is used up on worries and fears, there simply isn’t as much bandwidth for other things” (p. 1).

The impact of stress on the brain is also well known. Subtle emotions or abstract thoughts can sometimes initiate certain stress responses, with consequences throughout the body. The endocrine transducers of stress can alter cognition, affect, and behavior (Sapolsky, 2015).

As every person is different, so too then is a person’s response to fear. A study published in 2010 found that individuals high in what was labeled the “buffering effect” experienced less health impairment when perceived job insecurity and regional unemployment rates were high (Otto, Hoffman-Biencourt, & Moor, 2010). Researchers in a 1998 study observed that the joint presence of participation and other “threat” variables measuring the level of supervision did have an impact on productivity (Forde, Slater, & Spencer, 2006).

Relatedly, Amy Edmondson’s (1999) work on teams, specifically psychological safety, revealed that workplace teams who feel safe enough to articulate discontent or talk about frustration are the most high-functioning teams. Edmondson’s work demonstrated how learning to cope with certain fears—within the context of work—could help potentially mitigate later fears associated directly with job loss. Sean Laurent, an engineer at Google, revealed one of his key learnings from Google’s Project Aristotle, a 2012 initiative to find out why some teams were successful while others were not:

What Project Aristotle has taught people within Google is that no one wants to put on a “work face” when they get to the office. No one wants to leave part of their personality and inner life at home. But to be fully present at work, to feel “psychologically safe,” we must know that we can be free enough, sometimes, to share the things that scare us without fear of recriminations. (Duhigg, 2016, p. 13)

A useful and concise comparison of anxiety and fear as related to this study is presented by Professor Salman Akhtar (2014). Akhtar suggested that since fear is ubiquitous in the animal kingdom, it is an important part of human survival and functioning. In this capacity, fear serves as a protective device, a warning of imminent danger or external threat (Akhtar, 2014). Akhtar carefully presented a distinction between anxiety and fear. In *Fear: A Dark Shadow Across Our Life Span*, he posited:

Anxiety is an experience-distant theoretical construct. Fear is what our patients feel. It curdles their blood, stops them in their tracks; keeps them awake at night. Or, at least, it is what our patients define as fear. The truth is that the concepts of anxiety and fear have considerable overlap. Both evoke a sense that something bad is about to happen. Both are unpleasant and undesirable experiences. However, in other ways, the two experiences are different. Fear is a response to external danger; anxiety to dangers emanating from the internal world. (p. 6)

See Table 2.1 for the variables related to fear and anxiety, according to Akhtar (2014).

Table 2.1

Fear versus Anxiety

Fear versus Anxiety		
Variable	Fear	Anxiety
Source	External	Internal
Risk	Actual	Unknown
Threat	Clear	Vague
Danger	Plausible	Implausible
Avoidance	Helpful	Futile
Prevalence	Universal	Limited

*Salman Akhtar 2014***Concluding Remarks on the Fear of Job Loss**

Fear is biologically innate to the human condition; the limbic system is constantly sending fear and stress messages to the prefrontal cortex which can, in some cases of extreme fear, overload the brain's ability to solve problems, set goals, and complete tasks in the most efficient ways (Babcock, 2014). Babcock's work illuminated the relationship between fear and cognition. Relevant to this study is the applied perspective that all parties tangibly connected to an employee manifesting the fear of job loss would be affected, somehow, by an "overloaded brain."

Two relevant paradigms in the field of adult learning—Transformative Learning and Learning From Experience—were used to approach a deeper understanding of the stories embedded in the participants' relationship to the fear of job loss, what learnings occur as a result of job loss events, and how their myriad perspectives on work performance in particular, and organizations in general, are changed.

Transformative Learning

Transformative Learning (TL) theory is strongly rooted in the human need for making meaning out of our life experience. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) associated change with transformative learning, defining TL as “dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live” (p. 130). Succinctly stated, Kegan and Lahey (2001) considered TL to be about “changing what we know,” and cited three components of TL: (a) Construction of experience, or what the researcher would consider to be the occurrence or recognition of a critical event; (b) Inner meaning—translated to roughly mean the significant lessons learned from said event; and (c) Reflection—a proverbial “time-out” where critical thought is attached to that event and results in a materially different perspective or way of acting in the world, such that future behavior in the near or long term is somehow altered due to the aggregation of items (a) and (b).

The meaning-making aspect of TL is evident in all derivations or perspectives of TL noted by Merriam et al. (2007), specifically in approaches to TL that have an individual locus of learning instead of a sociocultural orientation.

Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow considered discourse and creating an environment supportive of the engagement of rational discourse to be key functions of an educator of TL (Merriam et al., 2007). TL is based on a view of how an adult, defined as “a person old enough to be

responsible for his or her acts” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 24), is able to make sense of his or her life experience. Learning is the process adults use to construe meaning and guide action. “Meaning” is construed by filtering assumptions and expectations (collectively called “frames of references”) that are formed from life events and experiences. On a deeper level, assumptions and expectations are grounded on two levels (Merriam et al., 2007): (a) habits of mind (meaning perspectives)—the moral/ethical, philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic generalized predispositions; and (b) points of view (meaning schemes)—sets of immediate, specific beliefs, attitudes, and value judgments.

Accordingly, TL occurs when there is a sudden and dramatic, or slow and incremental transformation in an adult’s beliefs or attitudes (a meaning scheme), or a transformation of an adult’s entire perspective (habit of mind) (Mezirow, 2000). In addition, individuals’ level of meaning making must be considered as possibly influencing how they experience the transformative learning process (Erickson, 2002).

This process was named perspective transformation because it reflects change within the core or central meaning structures (meaning perspectives) through which we make sense of our day-to-day experiences (Dirkx, 1997, p. 79). Perspectives are made up of sets of beliefs, values, and assumptions that we have acquired through our life experiences. These perspectives serve as a lens through which we come to perceive and understand ourselves. Mezirow also saw two paths of a perspective transformation, one that is epochal and the other that is incremental. According to Mezirow (1997), the epochal path generally involves a major cataclysmic event (disorienting dilemma) in a

person's life that initiates a change in a meaning perspective. The incremental path involves a re-visioning of meaning schemes. Over time, a cumulative revisioning can result in a perspective transformation.

Based on a study of 83 women returning to college in 12 different reentry programs, Mezirow (1997) initially described a process of personal perspective transformation that included 10 phases. Although listed sequentially, the phases can occur iteratively. Mezirow (2000) contended that TL can occur through either objective or subjective reframing. Objective reframing involves "critical reflection on the assumptions of others encountered in a narrative or in a task-oriented problem solving, as in action learning" (p. 23). Subjective reframing involves critical self-reflection of one's own assumptions about the following:

- a narrative,
- a system,
- an organization or workplace, and
- feelings and interpersonal relations.

Table 2.2 at the end of this section is a hypothetical application of Mezirow's 10 phases of TL theory to a major job loss event.

Primarily from the work of Mezirow (2000), four components of transformative learning are surmised:

1. *Construction of an experience*—essentially, the occurrence and recognition of a critical event. Fenwick (2003) stated how experiences are multi-

dimensional, direct-embodied, vicarious, simulated, collaborative, and introspective.

2. *Critical reflection*—a proverbial “time-out” where critical thought is attached to that event and results in a materially different perspective, such that future behavior in the near or long term is somehow altered due to the aggregation of the construction of an experience and the significant lessons learned from an event/experience. Criticos (1993) posited “effective learning does not follow from a positive experience but from effective reflection” (p. 162).
3. *Reflective discourse*—discourse embodies the Habermasian concept of discourse: dialogue—a conscientious, seemingly rational effort to find agreement and to build a new understanding. A discursive process generally has a subtext of power and relationship and, as such, situates TL squarely in a social context. Through discourse, one is able to “find one’s voice” (Mezirow, 2000). According to Kegan (1994), the two greatest yearnings in human experience are: (a) to be included, and (b) to have a sense of agency.

Before leaving this point, the researcher must speak to the impact of context, particularly with respect to power, in fostering a climate conducive to reflective discourse. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, and Tipton’s (1985) “democratic habits of the heart,” Bruner’s (1990) concept of “open mindedness,” and Belenky’s (1986) notion of “Really Talking” all emphasize requisite positive, and rational, conditions for reflective

discourse. Mezirow (2000) concurred with the need for effective participation, rational argument, and emotional intelligence as well, but conceded to the reality of American (U.S.) culture and its impact on purposeful dialogue: “Our culture conspires against collaborative thinking and the development of social competence by conditioning us to think adversarially in terms of winning or losing, or proving ourselves smart, worthy or wise” (p. 11).

4. *Action*—can be immediate, delayed, or reflected in a reasoned reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action. Rhetorically speaking, regardless of when or how action occurs, without corresponding behavior, how can one attest to being transformed? The action ingredient becomes the needed linkage between an individual and its sociocultural dimension. Through action, the ideal conditions for reflective discourse, i.e., empathy and objective argument, are enabled. Action is behavior; social actions are a manifestation of our awareness of, and value for, humanism.

The interaction between learning, transformation, and action is evident in

Mezirow’s description of the TL process as one by which we:

transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 8)

Relatedly, Mezirow’s work offers three descriptors of TL that can be considered action-based:

1. making an action decision based upon resulting insight;
2. gaining greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers; and
3. demanding that we be aware of how we come to our knowledge and as aware as we can about the values that lead us to our perspectives.

The above descriptors are cognitively mindful; there is a continuous creation of new categories, openness to new information, and implicit awareness of more than one perspective (Langer, 1997).

Nohl's Practice-based Model of Transformative Learning

Nohl's (2015) work on TL was grounded in the analysis of several social groups and across fields of learning. As a result, his findings allowed for new insights and a broader perspective, especially with the meanings of disorientation and reflection as Mezirow presented. Rather than requiring an abrupt event to trigger transformative learning, Nohl concluded that TL may begin "incidentally, and sometimes even casually, when a new practice is added to old habits" (p. 45). For several participants in this study, a nondetermining start typifies their movement through phases of a job loss episode.

Concluding Remarks on Transformative Learning

What, then, is the key strength of TL? What makes Mezirow's work and the related work of others relevant to this study? Two words—perspective transformation—capture the universal, timeless relevance and significance of TL. The fear of job loss is real. How individuals respond to that fear—which can be transformative—is, in part, a function of perspectives taken by the protagonists in the job loss event.

As fear is a natural component of the human existence (Akhtar, 2014), managing perceptions of fear is a key factor in mitigating the adversities accompanying fear. TL theory offers adults a path for reframing the fear of job loss. Table 2.2 captures key characteristics of Mezirow's TL theory as presented in this chapter and within the context of this study. TL theory has evolved as its applications have broadened. In an effort to understand better what people are trying to say about the new perspectives, researchers have continued to turn to TL theory as a way to view an individual's paradigm shift as a whole new way of understanding, knowing, and seeing (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2016).

Table 2.2

Mezirow's Perspective of Transformative Learning

MEZIROW'S PERSPECTIVE OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING	
<i>"Transformative learning involves liberating ourselves from reified forms of thought that are no longer dependable." (Mezirow, 2000, p. 27)</i>	
Strengths	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perspective transformation is "the central process of adult development" (Mezirow, 2000). 2. The capacity to be a conscious creative force in the world, i.e., transforming the quality of discourse in a group or learning community (Elias, 1997). 3. Learning how to construct and reconstruct knowledge in light of new experiences (Taylor, 2006). 4. Higher and Adult Education's mission is to assist adults in creating the order of consciousness the modern world demands (Kegan, 1994).
Critiques	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mezirow's theory reflects values of the dominant culture (Clark & Wilson, 1991). 2. "Power" has not been adequately addressed in Mezirow's theory. 3. TL has an overreliance on rational thinking. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. "A more holistic transformative paradigm might be embraced when individuals and groups can be encouraged to uncover the emotional impact of perspectives and meanings, and blend this information into other ways of knowing" (Mulvihill, 2003). 4. There are other ways of knowing: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Emotion and intuition (Blacksher, 2001). b. Soul learning (Dirkx, 1997). c. Stories (Rossiter, 2002). d. The physical body (Amann, 2003).
Application	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individual Development: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. "The power to control and determine our actions in the context of our desires and intentions is a definition of will" (Mezirow, 2000). b. "It is actually through the process of effecting transformations that the human self is created and re-created" (Greene, 1988). c. "Freedom involves not just the will and insight to change but also the power to act to attain one's purpose" (Mezirow, 2009). 2. Cultural Activism: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Social practices, institutions and systems, i.e., Adult Education. b. "Human reality is intersubjective; our life histories and language are bound up with those of others" (Mezirow, 2000).

Learning From Experience

The process of learning happens when, as a response to a social situation that cannot be automatically accommodated or assimilated, some measure of *thinking* (i.e., critical thinking, problem solving learning), *doing* (contemplation, rational thinking, action learning), or *feeling* (emotive responses) occurs (Illeris, 2004; Jarvis, 2006; Kolb, 1984). The learner's ability to accommodate and assimilate is largely contingent on his or her state of body and mind—at that particular point in time—as our senses have a significant impact on the learning process. As a result of the learning, a person is affected in some way such that he or she becomes changed; new meaning and/or perspective is realized.

Jarvis (2007) regarded learning as a continuous process that is both experiential and existential. While concrete, tangible events and interactions certainly create learning situations, learning also occurs from non-cognitive, i.e., cultural experiences. He argued that learning is possible “beyond the bounds of consciousness,” a position predicated on the position that learning is deeply connected to a social context (p. 1).

The key to learning or intelligent adaptation lies in the mutual interaction and balanced tension between two processes: (a) the *accommodation* of concepts or schemas to experience in the world, and (b) the process of *assimilation* of events and experiences from the world into existing concepts and schemas (Kolb, 1984). The process of cognitive growth from concrete to abstract and from active to reflective is based on this continual transaction between assimilation and accommodation,

occurring in successive stages, each of which incorporates what has gone before into a new, higher level of cognitive functioning (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb compared a person's reliance on four phases in the process of learning from experience (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) to what cognitive psychologists call a cognitive strategy (Gagne, 1985). However, while similar to cognitive or learning strategies, Kolb (1984) further suggested that the experiential learning style framework is "an holistic process of adaption to the world" (p. 31)—including affective, perceptual, and behavioral as well as cognitive strategies. Kolb made an important distinction as elements of the affective, perceptual, and behavioral strategies can be found to some degree in all conceptualizations of experiential learning. This core intellection of "whole bodiness" is sound; a human's entire entity is subjected to an experience or event.

Ultimately, it is our ability to transform sensations from our cognitive and existential interactions into something meaningful that can result in learning. However, the sole process of giving meaning to an experience is not a prerequisite for learning for, by definition, if a person is somehow changed, either emotionally or through a change in values or beliefs, then learning is said to occur (Jarvis, 2006). As Jarvis (1987) said, "The inability to cope with the situation unthinkingly (disjuncture or unease), instinctively, is at the heart of all learning" (p. 35).

Within an organization, two of the highest forms of learning suggested by Jarvis (building on Kolb's model)—experiential learning and reflective practice—are what can

enable organizations to sustain, where learning permeates throughout the firm. Harnessing the capabilities of a workforce is predicated on learning from experience. Learning from experience involves adults connecting what they have learned from current experiences to those in the past as well as to possible future situations (Merriam et al., 2007).

Learning From Experience (LFE) can be viewed as both a philosophy and a practice. As a philosophy, advocates have argued that all learning comes, in some sense, from experience. Essentially, LFE is about the aggregation and application of life experiences such that learning is realized and thus able to be “referred to” for future situations. In other words, learning must take account of the learner and all of the learner’s prior experiences as these not only provide the foundation for dispositions, expectations, and motivations, but also establish the base of knowledge and expertise on which new knowledge must build. Therefore, learning must necessarily be experience-based (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993).

Dewey (1938, pp. 8-13) recognized experience as the interaction between an individual and its environment. A central thinker and philosopher in the field, Dewey suggested that all genuine education comes about through experience. For learning to happen through experience, the experience must exhibit two principles:

1. Continuity—learners must connect current and past experiences to consider possible future implications from connecting those life experiences.

2. Interaction—essentially, an “experience” occurs because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his or her environment.

Building on the work of Dewey, Kolb (1984) recognized that adult learning is not limited to a formal educational setting; as an example of adaptation, it could occur in any situation. Further, Kolb described learning as the acquisition of a new value, attitude, behavior, and thinking when processing an experience. Kolb described learning in this respect as a process for apprehending and transforming experience into new knowledge, understanding, and human growth.

A significant body of LFE research has centered on Kolb’s original thinking. Borrowing from the cognitive learning model of Piaget, Jung’s psychological types, Dewey’s LFE assumptions, and Lewin’s action research training model, Kolb (1984) placed the emphasis of learning on the individual. Kolb’s findings posited that everyone has a preferred approach to learning that can be placed in four essential quadrants or modes: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), or active experimentation (AE).

Additionally, Dweck’s (2006) research showed how acquired beliefs, or “self-theories,” play a critical role in how well people function. According to Dweck, some people have a fixed (or “entity”) theory, believing that their qualities, such as their intelligence, are simply fixed traits. Others have a malleable (or incremental) theory, believing that their most basic qualities can be developed through their efforts and

education. Research has shown that people with a malleable theory are more open to learning, willing to confront challenges, able to stick to difficult tasks, and capable of bouncing back from failures (Dweck, 2006). These learned qualities can lead to better performance in the face of challenges such as difficult school transitions (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007), demanding business tasks (e.g., negotiations; Kray & Haselhuhn, 2007), and difficulties in relationships (e.g., dealing with conflict; Kammrath & Dweck, 2006).

Additional research indirectly related to acquired or learned experiences has suggested that reduced self-control after a depleting task or during demanding periods might reflect people's beliefs about the availability of willpower rather than true resource depletion (Dweck, 2006).

Jarvis and Hirji: Transformation of the Person Through Learning

As Nohl's perspective on TL has influenced the researcher, so has Jarvis and Hirji's (2006) work on LFE theory (pp. 87-94). The researcher's central understanding of how participants were able to overcome adversity by (a) associating meaning with events, and (b) pairing action with those events was partly facilitated by the constructive overture from Jarvis and Hirji. The spiritual tenor of their article permeated throughout the connections Jarvis made to the human condition, extracting meaning from, and essentially offering meaning to, life by welcoming all experiences as an entrance for becoming a changed person. Living without disjuncture is living with

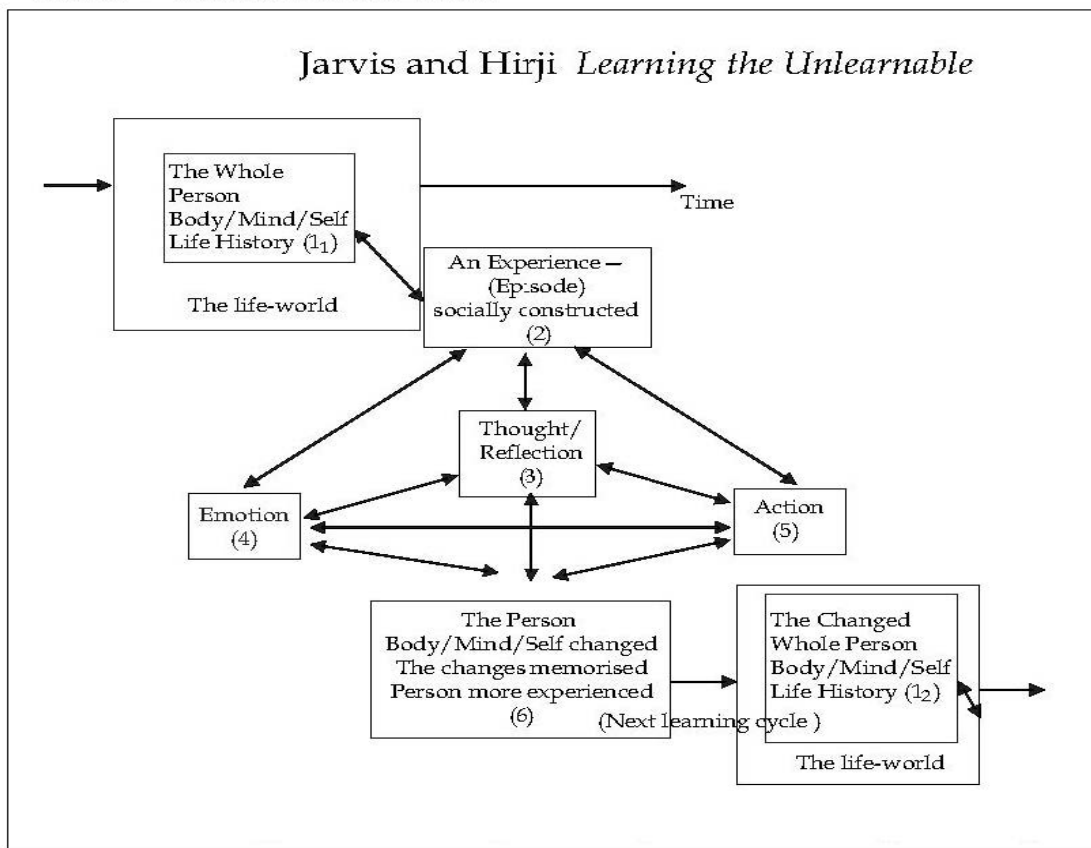
ignorance (Jarvis & Hirji, 2006, p. 91). Figure 2.1 is a diagram representing the Transformation of the Person through Learning.

Concluding Remarks on Learning From Experience

The LFE theory was discussed to present a context for understanding the lived experience of the participants, and how their cumulative set of life events developed and shaped coping (ways of learning) capacities and skills relative to job loss episodes.

Figure 2.1

Learning the Unlearnable

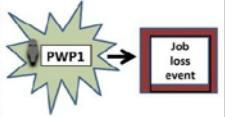
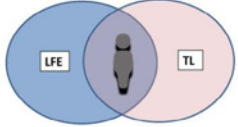



Conceptual Framework

Figure 2.2 is the researcher's conceptual framework. It is largely derived from the work of Nohl as well as Jarvis and Hirji. When a person with a set of perspectives encounters a job loss event, that person then faces a series of additional events (under the umbrella of unemployment), allowing him or her to become changed persons. Upon reemployment, the person enters a different workplace with either new or modified perspectives.

Figure 2.2

Derivation of Conceptual Framework

Derivation of Conceptual Framework			
Research Question →	1) How is the fear of job loss experienced ?	2) Once experienced, how does one navigate the world of unemployment-related activities?	3) After navigating unemployment, how is future, self-assessed workplace performance perceived to be impacted ?
LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE			
Stage of Jarvis and Hirji Diagram: <i>Learning the Unlearnable</i> →	Stages 1 & 2: The Whole Person; An Experience - (Episode) socially constructed	Stages 3; 4; 5: Thought / Reflection; Emotion; Action	Stage 6: The Person Body / Mind / Self Changed The changes memorized Person more experienced
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING			
Phase of Nohl Transformation Process →	Phase 1: Nondetermining start	Phase 2; 3; 4: Experimental & undirected inquiry; Social testing & mirroring; Shifting of relevance	Phase 5: Social consolidation & reinterpretation of biography
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK			
Stage of Conceptual Framework →			
	PWP1 – Self-assessed Perceived Workplace Performance before Job loss Event	LFE – Learning from Experience TL – Transformative Learning	PWP2 – Self-assessed Perceived Workplace Performance after becoming successfully re-employed

Chapter III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this exploratory study of adult learning was to investigate the lived experience of 15 employees who encountered a significant job loss event (an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment—coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income), and how the resultant fear(s) from that event affected their navigation through unemployment in order to become successfully reemployed.

The importance of this study is rooted in the assertion that more could be known about the myriad impacts of the fear of joblessness on workplace performance. This assertion was premised on the researcher's core perspective: The navigation of fear is reflected in our actions and there is no performance without action. Contextually, what follows that perspective is the researcher's position that in order for employees to self-assess their workplace settings as conducive to personal success, two situations must coexist: (a) employees who demonstrate learning from previous job loss episodes by applying new or improved workplace practices; and (b) workplace environments where those practices, and the personal stories embodied in those practices, are insightfully

welcomed. Situation (a) was the basis for this research. Consequently, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How is a fear of job loss experienced?
2. Once experienced, how does one navigate the world of unemployment-related activities?
3. After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be impacted?

Maxwell (2005) framed the way researchers might think about their approach to research design by presenting the following question to researchers: “What will you actually do?” To answer this question and respond to the questions guiding this research, the present researcher decided on a qualitative methodology as the approach to this study’s design. Qualitative research methodology was appropriate for this study, given Berg's (2004) contention that “qualitative techniques examine how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others” (p. 7). Accordingly, the following methodological considerations, which are fundamental to the study, are discussed in this chapter: areas of information needed, overview of research design, discussion of the sample, methods for assuring protection of human subjects, methods for data collection, data analysis and synthesis, literature to support design and data collection methods, validity/reliability challenges and resolutions, and limitations. This structure provided a foundation on which to conduct the actual doctoral dissertation research.

Research Design

This exploratory study of adult learning required an investigation into the lived experiences of those who have encountered a significant job loss event (as defined) and how the resultant fear(s) from that event affected their ability to navigate unemployment in order to become successfully reemployed.

Given the objective of exploring the learnings of unemployed individuals who were later reemployed, the researcher intentionally selected individuals who unintentionally lost employment, and were unemployed for a period of 3 to 84 months before regaining full-time employment.

Moreover, on becoming reemployed, how, if at all, was their self-assessed perceived workplace performance different? An investigation of this type necessitated an inquiry into the nature of the participants' specific lived experiences, specifically an understanding of how meaning is constructed from their experiences (Yin, 2009).

Case study research is undertaken to examine a social situation or interaction, by allowing a researcher to enter the world of others. Entering the world of others enables a researcher to achieve (hopefully) a more balanced understanding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Essentially, a qualitative approach is selected to: (a) explore the meanings of the participants' lived experience; (b) understand the influence of the context within which the participants act; (c) identify unanticipated phenomena and influences; (d) understand the underlying processes in which the events and actions

occur; and (e) be informed of whether a relationship exists between the participants' lived experience and the sequence of events in their lives (Maxwell, 2005).

To meet the larger goal of understanding the ramifications of the fear of job loss on perceived workplace performance, the researcher employed an exploratory study methodology. The research conducted exploratory interviews to acquire a deeper understanding of the internal meaning-making processes of the participants (Yin, 2009). Attempting to understand the individual vis-à-vis a case study resulted in a more comprehensive awareness of the lived experience (Creswell, 2009).

Yin (2009) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (p. 18). In this exploratory study, the individual was the unit of analysis. Creswell (1997, as cited in Yin, 2009) acknowledged that this focus on understanding the individual through the case study approach is especially appropriate in developing rich and comprehensive understandings of people and their life events.

An overriding legitimate concern with qualitative research is its interpretive nature as well as the tendency to generalize and, thus, simplify findings (Merriam, 1998). Relatedly, additional concerns with qualitative research involve researcher bias and the lack of scientific gravitas inherent in the case study process (Yin, 2009). To mitigate those concerns, the researcher used current technologies to record all direct comments and participant actions.

Research Sample

The researcher chose the 15 participants based on the following criteria:

(a) all participants had experienced a period of unintentional joblessness such that both economic hardship and elevated stress/anxiety developed (criterion event); (b) all participants lived with one or more persons; and (c) all participants were reemployed after having at least one criterion event. Demographics such as industry, category, or level work were determined once the initial pool of potential participants had been obtained. Given the small sample size, concerns with generalizability—a measure of how useful the results of a study are for a broader group of people or situations—is recognized. However, the intent of the findings from this study, given the sample size and individualized nature of the findings, is not to extrapolate them to a larger population.

The researcher selected appropriate participants (Table 3.1) from several sources: (a) professional contacts vis-à-vis organizations and associations of which the researcher is a member; (b) social connections from friends who were aware of the researcher's dissertation study; and (c) academic colleagues. Letters to prospective participants (Appendix A), along with the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) and Interview Protocol (Appendix C), were distributed to participants after requisite approvals by the IRB and Office of Doctoral Studies.

Overview of Information Needed

Demographic data for this study included: the participant's age, racial identity, marital status, number of children, and the participant's personal previous and current employers. Pseudonyms were used for all participants.

Perceptual data were gathered from the semi-structured interviews and researcher observations that were held in an open-ended dialogue format. The Data Collection and Analysis Methods presented in Table 3.2 list the overall interview questions posed to each participant, along with the corresponding data objectives for those questions; for example:

1. the participants' understanding of and reaction to the job loss event;
2. accommodation and assimilation constraints given unemployment status and future job prospects;
3. identification of reflective moments; recollection of action-based responses while unemployed; and
4. participants' learnings and workplace practices given their job loss episode.

Methods of Data Collection

Utilizing an exploratory study approach, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. Each of the 15 participants were interviewed for between 60 and 120 minutes. Interviews were an essential source of case study evidence because

of this method's ability to capture rich information about human affairs or behavioral events (Yin, 2009). Additionally, this interview method served to describe complex interactions and facilitate discovery of crucial dynamics at the various workplace settings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

The interviews consisted of a fluid and guided conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), wherein the researcher asked specific questions. Interviews structured in this manner tend to welcome free expression from the participants. According to Yin (2009), this conversational interaction must be done in an unbiased manner that serves the researcher's line of inquiry.

Table 3.1

Participant Employment Data

#	Name* (Age) Race	Dependent children	Pre-job loss event role	Reason for job loss	Layoff in months	Reemployed in new industry?	Post-job loss event role
1	Ben (40) W	Yes (2)	Project Manager	Reorgani- zation	3	Yes	Procurement Director
2	Bill (59) W	Yes (2)	Human Resources Manager	Merger layoff	3	Yes	Human Resources Manager
3	Tony (45) W	Yes (2)	Human Resources Manager	Reorgani- zation	3	Yes	Human Resources Manager
4	Steve (50) W	Yes (1)	Project Supervisor	Reorgani- zation	4	Yes	Project Supervisor
5	Bruce (40) B	Yes (2)	Senior Administrator	Chemistry (forced resignation)	5	Yes	Sr. Mgmt. Coordinator
6	Doug (45) W	Yes (3)	Accounting Supervisor	Downsizing layoff	5	Yes	Accounting Supervisor
7	Matt (42) B	Yes (2)	Recruiter	Reorgani- zation	5	Yes	Procurement Supervisor
8	Fred (50) W	No	General Manager	Chemistry (forced	6	Yes	Financial Analyst

#	Name* (Age) Race	Dependent children	Pre-job loss event role	Reason for job loss	Layoff in months	Reemployed in new industry?	Post-job loss event role
				resignation)			
9	Ron (35) B	No	Sales Manager	Sales performanc e	6	Yes	Accounting Supervisor
10	John (42) W	Yes (1)	Accounting Manager	Downsizing layoff	7	Yes	Accounting Supervisor
11	Michelle (58) W	Yes (2)	Accounting Clerk	Merger layoff	8	No	Accounting Clerk
12	Bob (55) W	Yes (1)	Project Manager	Chemistry (forced resignation)	12	No	Project Coordinator
13	Phil (48) W	Yes (2)	Senior Team Manager	Role elimination	12	Yes	Project Manager
14	Alan (57) B	Yes (2)	Senior Marketing Manager	Reorgani- zation	24	Yes	Stock Clerk
15	Jim (40) B	Yes (1)	Executive Administrator	Chemistry (forced resignation)	84	Yes	Nurse Technician
<i>*Pseudonym</i>							

The researcher conducted the interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol developed to support the study's research questions (see Appendix C for Interview Protocol). All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees (see Appendix B for Consent Form) and transcribed verbatim following the interviews.

In addition, the researcher wrote a reflection to outline the insights gained immediately after each interview. This material contributed to the process of open coding and analysis. Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel were used to summarize important themes and to expand on notes and digital recordings taken during the

interviews. Both software platforms were chosen due to the researcher's comfort and professional expertise, along with the relatively small population sample. The researcher analyzed the data from the interviews to determine the findings for this study.

The following sequence of data collection ensured a useful collection of participant data:

1. participant selection;
2. purposeful sampling of participants;
3. initial semi-structured interview (60-120 minutes); and
4. second Interview, if needed.

Methods for Analysis and Synthesis

The interviews in this study were used to understand and explore the perceptions and learning experiences connected to how the fear of job loss impacts perceived workplace performance. Accordingly, the researcher explored those experiences, events, and resultant actions for themes and patterns, capturing them through a process of data analysis. This process involves managing the large volume of data collected and reducing it in a meaningful way (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Qualitative researchers typically engage in an inductive process which entails working with masses of data and then seeking to narrow the data progressively into

smaller key groups (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This analytic process also includes: organizing the data, generating categories, identifying patterns and themes, and coding the data.

With respect to organizing the data, the researcher used Microsoft Excel worksheets that were sorted by participant, question, and other key characteristics. Researchers are encouraged to conduct data analysis concurrently with gathering data, making interpretations and writing reports (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2009).

The collected information was examined for emerging themes, categories, patterns, relationships, and new constructs. According to Rossman and Rallis (1998), the coding process requires that the information be organized into chunks of text before “bringing” meaning to information.

Building on the research process of others, the researcher developed qualitative codes to organize data into rows and columns (created with Microsoft Excel) with predetermined codes and definitions. The data were organized and coded based on:

- demographic participant data;
- theoretical literature propositions;
- research questions;
- interview questions;
- researcher’s interview comments; and
- emergent themes from the interviews.

Utilizing Microsoft Excel allowed the researcher to have a variety of sortable workbooks for parsing and presenting data. The third-party transcriber returned the final interview tapes in a Microsoft Word file. The researcher then created new Word files for combing and compiling transcriptions. Emergent themes and keywords were discovered in the transcriptions via Microsoft Word. Data were then copied from Word into Excel for coding purposes. In addition, the researcher maintained a binder to keep analytic notes, reflective memos, and observational insights (Creswell, 2009; Van Manen, 1990).

The researcher synthesized the data which, in this study, entailed assembling, in purposeful fashion: (a) how the research questions were answered by the findings; (b) how findings from interviews were supported by the researcher's observations; (c) how findings related to the literature; and (d) how findings related to the researcher's ongoing assumptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). See Table 3.2 for a presentation of the data collection and analysis methods which this researcher employed.

Table 3.2

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data Collection and Analysis Methods	
The researcher coded, analyzed, and synthesized all transcribed interviews.	
Overall Interview Question	Data Objective
1) How do participants describe their job loss event? How did they feel about the event? How and who were affected by the event? Were they surprised by the event? What are the participants' perceptions of why the event occurred?	The participants' understanding of, and reaction to, the job loss event
2) How are/were the participants able to cope with their job environment? How does the intersection of job and personal life manifest, if at all, on job performance? What "fears" do the participants have, and how do they respond to those fears? What tolerances and/or limitations do the participants believe they have such that work performance is impacted?	Accommodation and assimilation constraints given unemployment status and future job prospects
3) In what ways does the fear of job loss become a source of learning? How does one describe navigating future perceived workplace performance?	Identification of reflective moments; recollection of action-based responses while unemployed
4) How did the participants learn those strategies that enable and support their work? What learnings are valuable at mitigating uncertainty and fear as participants seek professional success? How do participants measure the importance of their jobs in the context of their lives?	Participants' learnings and workplace practices given their job loss episode

Issues of Validity and Reliability

In addition to addressing researcher bias, Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) also asserted that a qualitative study must contend with issues of validity (the extent to which something measures what it is purposed to measure) and reliability (the consistency with which it measures it over time). Maxwell (2005) defined validity as the “correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106). Because of the high potential for participant and researcher interactivity with eventual findings, it was critical to employ sound measures of reliability and validity throughout the study. The researcher addressed data quality by using high-quality audio recordings, detailed handwritten notes, and thorough interview transcription by a third-party professional to ensure the accuracy of collected data (Creswell, 2007).

Other steps the researcher took to improve the study’s validity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) included: clarifying any personal bias throughout the study and collecting primary and secondary sources of data. Primary sources of data included participant interviews and observations (facial expressions, inflections, and gestures). Secondary sources included research articles, internet or library searches, as well as literature from the AEGIS program. In addition, notwithstanding confidentiality concerns, the researcher solicited probing questions on the study’s findings from peers.

The study utilized extended, in-depth interviews to build trust and observe body language and word choice. The researcher used data compiled from his digital memos and written participant reflections to support findings derived from the participant interviews. The researcher also engaged a recent Ed.D. graduate of the AEGIS program to provide member checks, which added both credibility and critical questioning to the inquiry process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007). The member checks consisted of confirming selected transcriptions with participants and corresponding quotations cited in the manuscript.

As a check and to ensure validity, the researcher incorporated several steps recommended by Polkinghorne (1989) to follow during the interview process. The questions which Polkinghorne suggested, along with the researcher's responses, are listed below:

1. *Did the interviewer influence the contents of the participants' descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the participants' actual experience?* The researcher kept comments from the participants intact, not changing language or intonation. Boldface and italicized fonts were used to capture emotion or emphasis as per the audio recording. Being mindful of his personal experience with the fear of job loss, the researcher was careful to pose open-ended questions, as indicated in Table 3.2, whenever possible. In addition, the researcher used the transcriber's data files as the source for extracting participant quotations.

2. *Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?* Yes. The researcher sourced another party, an administrative assistant, to listen to the audio recordings while reading the transcripts, comparing them to extracted quotations used in the study.
3. *In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives?* In cases where alternative conclusions might exist, the researcher stated so.
4. *Is it possible to go from the general structural descriptions to the transcriptions and to account for specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?* Yes. The worksheet which the researcher devised, and to which transcriptions were copied, included time stamps from the audio files.
5. *Is the structural description situation-specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations?* The structural descriptions conveyed multiple perspectives and encompassed the experiences of all the participants.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an explanation of the methodology that guided the study. As stated, the researcher employed a qualitative, exploratory study approach to

investigate how certain individuals experience the fear of job loss, navigate subsequent unemployment, and self-assess their learnings, practices, and perceptions, largely in a workplace setting.

The researcher reiterates that the study is not about workplace performance wherein traditional, objective measurement tools are referenced. This study is about the aggregate learnings of 15 individuals who experienced an unintended job loss event, navigated subsequent unemployment, and, after becoming successfully reemployed, demonstrated—through new or modified views and behaviors—how that job loss event impacted their self-assessed workplace performance.

The participant sample was comprised of 15 participants who experienced a period of unintentional joblessness such that both economic hardship and elevated stress/anxiety developed. The participants did not live alone and were reemployed after having a criterion event. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews for data collection. He compared all data to the literature for emerging themes and took appropriate measures to ensure the validity, credibility, and dependability of the study.

Chapter IV

DATA FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this exploratory study of adult learning was to investigate the lived experience of 15 employees who encountered a significant job loss event (an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment—coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income), and how the resultant fear(s) from that event affected their navigation through unemployment in order to become successfully reemployed. A further purpose of this study was to deepen levels of awareness with respect to how employees perform their jobs, given that the prevailing fears accompanying net job loss are an integral characteristic of organizational life.

The intent of this chapter is to present, in a dependable and accurate manner, emergent findings obtained from 15 in-depth interviews that were designed to capture the participants' perceptions and learnings, given their personal experiences from having been a direct party to a conjoined episode of unplanned job dismissal, unemployment, and reemployment. The emphasis throughout this chapter is on hearing the participants' voices. Illustrative quotations taken from the interviews depict participants' perspectives and offer the richness of those conversations.

The Research Participants

The participants selected for this study were U.S.-based employees, largely but not exclusively middle management staff, ranging in age from 30 to 58 at the time of their job loss event (see Table 4.1). The positions held by the participants prior to being let go were in the fields of Human Resources, Project Management, Accounting, Sales, Marketing, and Administration. Participants were identified and selected from various professional and academic sources available to the researcher and received no compensation or payment of any kind. All were willing to share their stories.

Prospective participants were, by design, eliminated if job loss did not trigger an acute financial need. Only individuals for whom employment was an economic necessity were considered as potential participants.

All participants met the following criteria: (a) They experienced a period of unintentional joblessness such that both economic hardship and elevated stress/anxiety developed; (b) They did not live alone during the entire job loss episode (job dismissal + unemployment + beginning new employment); and (c) They became reemployed full-time after criterion (b). The rationale behind these criteria was based on the following assumptions:

1. While the loss of a job might be traumatic if the financial impact were negligible, the effect of job loss coupled with financial duress broadens the scope of understanding the fear(s) associated with an unplanned job loss. As

all participants become employed, stories related to navigating through unemployment, given various fear-based trigger points, would be valuable.

2. Moreover, living with others, such as spouse, significant other, or children, possibly enables a dynamic human interconnectedness to occur. The researcher also believed that with progeny present in the household, increased opportunities for self-reflection would be available.
3. Reentry to the workplace offers application of learnings from the job loss episode. How individuals changed, based on their self-assessment of perspective change, would offer insight into new or modified dimensions of practice.

During the in-person interviews along with the on-phone interviews, participants were asked specific questions (see Appendix B) related to losing their job, dealing with unemployment, and reentering the workforce. Responses to those questions formed the basis for the findings in this study. In addition, the researcher compiled biographical data during the interviews, which are presented in Table 3.1 (Chapter III). Pseudonyms were used for each participant. Pertinent biographical data from Table 3.1 in Chapter III revealed that of the 15 participants:

- 14 were male, 1 was female (Michelle);
- 5 self-identified as Black (males), 10 as White;
- 13 had dependent children, 2 did not;
- None lived with parents during the job loss episode;

- 7 were unemployed for 3-5 months;
- 8 were unemployed for more than 5 months;
- 10 (formally) lost jobs due to reorganization-related reasons; 4 due to forced resignation; 1 due to sales performance.

What stood out among the participants was the range of unemployment periods (from 3 to 84 months), along with having a solid representation of Black participants (5) as a percentage of the total sample size. This allowed for racial comparisons and for presenting viewpoints on how race impacts stages of the job loss conundrum for Black participants. In addition, the high percentage (87%) of participants with dependent children offered another layer of the pervasiveness of job loss and how whole families are impacted. For example, in Phil's case, both his teenage daughters obtained employment to assist with their family's finances. Unfortunately, more female participants were not available for this study.

The reader is reminded that three dimensions of adult learning, from which the fear of job loss can be recognized, guided this study: experience, navigation, and impact. Accordingly, this investigation was framed by three core questions:

1. How is the fear of job loss experienced?
2. Once experienced, how is the world of workplace-related activities, including the process of searching for future employment, navigated?

3. While navigating unemployment-related pathways as described in core question 2, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be impacted?

The Findings

Five major findings and 11 sub-findings emerged from the study. The findings are presented in a sequence that is based on the three core research questions of experience, navigation, and impact, as listed in the previous paragraph. The findings are also arrayed in a manner that links directly to the work of Jarvis (2006) in the area of learning from experience, and with Nohl (2015), specifically his research on the phases of transformative learning. The relevance of and connections to the work of Jarvis, Nohl, and others are discussed in more detail in the synthesis of the findings in Chapter V.

The five major findings and 11 sub-findings are:

1. All participants experienced manifestations of fear from losing their job.
 - a. All participants had a conscious, vivid, recollection of their job dismissal.
 - b. A fear of job loss triggered connotations of survival for participants with children.
 - i. Fear was magnified for one participant with a dependent grandchild.
 - c. Three of 5 (60%) Black participants viewed their job dismissal through an additional lens of the Black experience.

2. All participants used their intervening period of unemployment in a constructive, action-based manner.
 - a. Households appeared to get stronger or weaker during the period of unemployment.
 - b. Participants used family and other social connections to append cash flow.
 - c. Even when living with others, unemployment could be a singular, reflective experience.
 - d. Three of 5 (60%) Black participants cited their experience of being Black as a source of strength.
3. All participants used their intervening period of unemployment to assess what was vitally important in their life.
 - a. Seven of 15 (47%) participants revealed elements of perspective change.
 - i. Their job loss event had a profound effect on how they viewed themselves and their place in the world.
4. Fourteen of 15 (93%) participants viewed their job loss event as instrumental to their subsequent self-assessed workplace performance.
 - a. At a minimum, they were more aware of others' circumstances and feelings in their new work environment.
 - b. Several participants cited an increased awareness of others at their new workplace.

5. All participants saw themselves differently as a result of their job loss event.
 - a. All participants mentioned drawing on their job loss event as a reference or contextual reminder.

In all cases, not only were the participants deeply affected by the job loss event, but significant others in their respective micro-world were affected as well. Although former coworkers, family members, or other tangible persons were not interviewed for this study, conversations with the participants revealed the influence of those relationships on the participants' behavior during the entire job loss episode. Comments from Phil were representative of the interconnectedness among affected parties within a household when job loss became tangible:

They [my daughters] were very understanding. They were surprised, but they were very understanding. And I think their initial reaction was, what does this mean to me, as them. Not, what does this mean to mom and dad, but what does this mean to me? And, are we going to have to move? Are we going to have to stop doing the things that we normally do? That sort of thing. But there was very much a conversation of, but how can we help? Are there things we can do? Can we tell other people? What can we say to other people? (Phil)

A discussion of the findings with details that support and explain each finding follows.

Finding #1

All participants experienced manifestations of fear from losing their job.

Thirteen of 15 participants, when given three choices for characterizing their job dismissal, selected either bad or very bad. Negative characterizations were anticipated as for all participants, the job losses were abrupt, unexpected, and financially significant.

Michelle, a single grandmother with a daughter and granddaughter living at home, stated:

It was horrifying because I'm single and I had my one daughter. My daughter and granddaughter were living with me. I had a mortgage. I needed healthcare. I didn't know when I'd find my next job. And that's just very scary.... I was in shock! (Michelle)

Table 4.1 captures various words and phrases participants used to describe the vivid nature of the inception of their job loss event.

Table 4.1

Finding #1: Event Characterization and Predominant Fear

Finding #1: Event Characterization and Predominant Fear					
#	Name	Characterization of the job loss event 1=neutral; 3=bad; 5=very bad		Predominant fear 1=neutral; 3=high; 5=very high	
		Words & Phrases	Rating:	Words & Phrases	Rating:
1	Ben	Anger	5	Financial; social	3
2	Bill	Shock	5	Financial	5
3	Tony	Not too painful,	1	Financial	3
4	Steve	Handled well	1	Financial; child with special needs	5
5	Bruce	I was furious	5	Financial; child with special needs	5
6	Doug	Numb	3	Financial	3
7	Matt	Anxiety; sadness, anger	5	Financial	5
8	Fred	Anger; shame	5	Financial	3
9	Ron	Surprise, but not shock	3	Rent and car payments	3
10	John	Numb	3	Mortgage	3
11	Michelle	Shock; disbelief	5	Mortgage	5
12	Bob	Anger	5	Financial	5
13	Phil	Shock; surprise	5	Financial	5
14	Alan	Relief	1	Financial	3
15	Jim	Anger; depression	5	Financial	5
		Average rating	4	Average rating	4
		Mode	5	Mode	5

Finding #1a. All participants had a conscious, vivid recollection of their job loss event. Surprise and, to an extent, shock at being let go were aptly recalled during

participant interviews. The emotional trauma embedded in memories of being cast out was visible, even years later. Given the vivid recall of job dismissal, the researcher surmised that the event never fully vanished—it was a memory waiting...on deck, to be called up for active duty:

It's like everybody kind of sensed and knew. It was like during your evaluation you almost had to reapply for your job almost every year, in light of the fact that they were looking at things to make the next round of changes.... There was a vibe around. It was an ongoing thing. It seemed as though something was already always going on. You wouldn't know exactly.... It was too after the fact. But you'd hear the rumor mill. They're in this group.... And I'm like, "Just get out of this bubble. People are scared." (Alan)

It was a surprise.... The way it was made known was in a meeting, called us into a meeting and basically just told us, we're reorganizing and your job is going away. And the feelings were shock and disbelief, and generally unappreciated for the value that you brought to the organization. I'd been there thirteen years and saved them millions. Then you go through all the basic stages of grief, I guess. You deal with it and move on. (Ben)

Phil, aged 48, and a former Senior Team Manager, framed his bitterness and shock as a violation of an implicit employee contract. Having been told that his workplace performance was exceptional, and receiving commensurate compensation for meeting company objectives, Phil felt that to be told "We don't have a role for you here going forward, so today is your last day. HR will help you out" was surprising:

It was still a surprise, yes. I mean, I knew there was a risk, but it was still a surprise. More so because I believe I was accomplishing what they hired me to do and what they were asking me to do. And then in was, in my perception, a sudden, and "We don't have a role for you here going forward, so today is your last day. HR will help you out." (Phil)

In saying that he remembered “like it was yesterday,” Bill recalled how he was let go right before Christmas—without severance and after working excessive hours, including weekends, as requested by his employer.

I remember like it was yesterday, said, “Bill, we’re going to have to let you go. We going to have to terminate you.”... And I asked them in the meeting, “Any severance?” This is right before Christmas. “No.” “Oh, no. Okay.”... No severance at all. Going home to try to tell your wife that after doing all the layoffs.... And she knew what I went through. And I would go in on Mondays, Sunday mornings, overnight, lay people off and they just...I did it all.

We were living based upon two incomes. So I remember coming home.... Got my thoughts together. And then I went home and I talked. My daughter had just graduated, so she’s trying to figure a way.... And I went over and I told her. “I lost my job.” She says, “What are you going to do?” I said, “I’ll figure it out.”... And then my daughter said,... “Dad, you’ll be fine. You’ve taught us this.” (Bill)

The personal identification with a place of employment can be magnified when an employee is dismissed. For example, John’s workplace was fraught with the effects of reorganization. Even though a dismissal was in the back of his mind, he was extremely stressed when it did happen: *“I felt like a part of me died”* (John).

We were going through reorganization, and many heads were rolling. I had hoped to be kept for a few more months, but it didn’t turn out that way. Even though it was in the back of my mind and should not have been a total shock, being asked to leave, and hoping you’d be able to pick up quickly, is stressful. I felt like a part of me died. I mean, I got over it, but still...at the time, it’s painful. (John)

Michelle described her frame of mind when dismissed as being in a state of “panic.” Her firm had just completed a merger, and without warning (at least to her), groups of coworkers—including Michelle—were being let go:

So there was no warning. I came back from lunch and someone buzzed me. And I picked up my phone and it was our, what would you call her, like the manager of the admin of that company. And she said, “Can you come back to

my office?” And I was like, “Sure. Is everything okay?” And she said, “Just come back to my office.” ... I was crying. I said, “I have a family. I have a new granddaughter.” I just was like, “Why me, though?” I was in a panic. (Michelle)

Diverging from the other 13 participants were Tony and Steve, who rated their job exits as neutral. Even though Steve received less severance than he wanted, he nevertheless thought the job dismissal process was handled well.

After the merger, they announced layoffs for each department. I had been there for seven years, formed important relationships, and wanted to stay. I like what I do. They actually handled the layoff well, except for the severance. I had expected more, but they countered with an argument about bonuses they had given us, which were good. My boss got choked up...he’s a good man...it wasn’t his fault.... It hurts walking out of that door, knowing that steady check won’t be there.... But with tuition payments and a child with special needs...things got tight after two months. (Steve)

I was an HR manager then and am one now, so I know how it feels to let folks go. It’s never easy.... In this particular case, the problem was that my wife had been laid off two months before, and with only three months’ severance, the overlap in layoffs made it tough for us.... Especially with two kids. Even knowing up front and being able to plan helped only to a point. Her parents helped us out a bit with the kids, and fortunately I got a job in three months, but at less pay. But the actual letting go wasn’t too painful, I knew what to expect. (Tony)

As a whole, participants were stressed from the fear of an unplanned, financially adverse job loss. Being subjected to a critically grim event—job dismissal—in a manner characterized by most of the participants is unforgettable.

Finding #1b. A fear of job loss triggered connotations of survival for participants with children. Even for participants with two incomes, job loss could wreak financial turmoil. For one participant, Bill, job loss brought back painful childhood memories of household tension created by a lack of money for his parents, both of whom worked. In recalling his job loss event, Bill described how, when telling his wife

that he had just lost his job, the pain he felt was numbing; both the past and his future appeared bleak. He felt trapped.

Even though Bill's wife was employed, two incomes were required to meet family-related expenditures. As Bill intimated, his family did not have a luxurious lifestyle. Cash flow was always tight. In fact, during his period of unemployment, Bill took on part-time work and accepted financial support from others to keep his family's head above water.

I didn't have much...I had some money. I've always been in situations where I thought I was a step behind everybody. I have the fear of not having enough money. Because growing up, my father was disabled, my mother worked a part-time job, and we were always scrambling for money. Our first house, the same house we're in now, was a "fix-me-up special." It is what it is. I have this thing that says, okay, these are the cards that you're dealt; you got to figure it out. You got to figure it out. And people were helping by just giving us things; doctors letting us come, helping us out. Fear kept me going. (Bill)

"Survival" was expressed both figuratively and literally by several participants.

For Phil, the father of two teenage daughters, job loss would result in a dramatic change in the social habits of his wife and daughters. Forming new and unwelcomed patterns of behavior created additional stressors, including a potential loss of "social ranking" during formative periods for his children. Phil's initial anxieties at dismissal were later realized when both daughters and his wife were obligated to seek employment in order to help replace a significant loss in income. Survival denoted a dramatic change in lifestyle. Phil was optimistic during his entire job loss event, and for that reason, "survival" was not interpreted to mean a choice between surviving and perishing.

And I kind of get into that survival too, of the husband-wife dynamic survival of...I'm going more on the survival practical sense of, did I move money around enough so that when she does go [to the store] the debit card works, or did I tell her ahead of time, "Hey, use the credit card." So she doesn't have that embarrassing situation of "I'm sorry, your card's been declined." Because then from a husband in survival mode, I don't want to get that phone call and have that conversation.... So I think that's definitely a fear—when you talk about the impact on another person, because from...I would say from her perspective then, does she feel like she is being cared for, and does she feel like she is being taken care of to the level that is warranted? I don't want to say it is expected, but is it really warranted as a partner in the relationship?... So her role is she will go to the grocery store to provide food for the family. My role was to provide the finances. (Phil)

Finding #1b(i). Fear was magnified for the one participant with a dependent grandchild. The job loss experience for Michelle, a single 58-year-old Accounting clerk, embodied survival in the literal sense. Michelle had both her daughter and granddaughter living with her throughout her entire job loss episode, a situation that created additional avenues for fear-based behavior. The financial and emotional stress Michelle felt was severe; her primary concern was "surviving—being able to stay in my house." She recalled being let go—without warning—shortly after a merger. She had been employed at that firm for 3 years prior to the layoff, so certain social patterns and an expected income stream had been established. Then one day, she was called into the office and told it was her final day. Michelle panicked. Although others in her department were also laid off, being let go was a fearful, solitary event. Sobbing, she expressed two sources of motivation: survival for self and, more importantly, the

welfare of deeply cared-for cohabitants that triggered the fear of job loss that all participants described to some degree: *“How am I going to pay my bills, live, survive? How will I take care of my daughter and granddaughter?”* (Michelle)

There’s another part of me too that was difficult to handle. I have depression. And the more stress I’m under, the harder it is for me. So I just have to find the will power to work through it because it wasn’t just for me, it was for my children.... And so that wasn’t a good time then either and I just had to push. Push through it. I just needed to apply for jobs as long as I could that day, and then I would be so down that I would have to go to bed...and find the strength to start the next day. Not the physical strength, the mental...emotional.... And it’s hard to take no when you’re in that negative state of mind.... When you’re using all your strength to just want to breathe, and then on top of it you have these things that happen that you have to get through too, it’s a setback.... I think that because I had my daughter and granddaughter is why I fought through it. I think that if it was only me, I didn’t care enough about me to fight for it. But for them, because they needed me to have a place to live, to have food to eat, to... (Michelle)

Finding #1c. Three of 5 (60%) Black participants viewed their dismissal through an additional lens of the Black experience. Another sub-finding related to recollections of the job loss event centered on the topic of race. For the African American participants, race was a consistent factor. Depending on the context, it was either in the foreground or background. Ron was certain that race played a role in his termination, albeit somewhat indirectly. He admitted to having poor sales performance, but felt that as his assigned sales region was specifically rural White clientele, the chances of being successful were somewhat limited. Ron was the only Black person in the office. He thought that perhaps his hiring was to display a veneer of “diversity.”

I was pissed, but it wasn't like I didn't know what to expect because he had given me a deadline. My situation was different. Here I am, new, and I'm Black. And all the people I'm trying to sell to are White. And they were nice and polite and everything, but a lot of times I could tell as soon as I sat down, they weren't buying anything! At times I thought I was almost there, but couldn't get that sale by the deadline. And my boss was true to his word. He was like, "I'm sorry, we got to let you go."... And I think he realized that I was in the wrong market in that division where we were, trying to sell to conservative White business folks in middle Pennsylvania.

I was new and to have that pressure on me as a new Account Exec when that normally wouldn't be the case, I think that was unfair. But on the other hand, it wasn't all of a sudden. It's like I knew months beforehand what I had to do. I was going to have to sell business systems to White clientele. So maybe that was not a good goal from the start but here I am, there I was. (Ron)

Ron had concerns about how his sales targets would be reached, but felt that transferring to another location or having different clientele would offer solutions. Neither option was possible. Ron's length of employment was short, but very impactful to his learning—firsthand—about race, organizations, power struggles, and prejudice. He mentioned how, in his current capacity as a District Supervisor, he is fortunate to have different races and genders report to him. Those early years were formative in his acquisition of people skills.

In Ron's case, not having children and his age (35) made both the job loss event and ensuing episode less severe. The challenges associated with being Black—in and out of the workplace—were an affirmation of aggregate learning of the self and others. Going into his position as a Sales Manager, Ron knew that race would be a factor, and upon exiting, his feelings about race were confirmed. Ron also shared several learnings from that employment period:

I think I would say what I learned was, try to be in the situation where you're doing something that you know you have the skills for and want to do. Something that you enjoy doing, versus something that you're doing just for the money. Because you're always going to do a better job at something you enjoy doing and something where you think you have the appropriate skills, versus something that you're just doing just for the money. I knew I had an aptitude for numbers and analytical stuff, so I was much more successful and I felt much more comfortable because that's what I like doing.... So what I learned is, to put it simply, everything that glitters isn't gold. And then from there I found out, once you have something where you think you have the skills, then you just keep working on refining your skills and improving and learning more. And then as you do that, it's easier for you to progress and stay successful. (Ron)

Ron had hoped that being assigned a different customer demographic would play to his strengths and thus allow him to achieve higher sales targets, but his manager refused to transfer him, citing the performance of existing sales team members, so Ron was stuck. His dismissal, while surprising and unplanned from Ron's point of view, was not without official justification.

Expectations related to race were also uncovered during the interview with Bruce. Bruce mentioned how shades of skin color are a significant sub-experience of being Black. Bruce is a tall dark-skinned Black man; skin color is an experience with which Bruce is familiar. *"I know how my presence can intimidate White folks. My older brother is lighter than me; for him it's a bit different"* (Bruce). Due to the family connection with his previous employer, Bruce's dismissal could not be framed simply as linking skin color to his firing. Nevertheless, for Bruce, the experience of being dark-skinned became an embedded lens for viewing how one must interact and, in the

context of this study, perform at the workplace. Bruce stated how, because of race in general, and the stereotypes associated with dark-skinned men in particular, he perceives the world in general, and white-dominated workspaces in particular, as settings where proving his capability is a requirement. He believes that privilege for men like him is not an option:

So if there's any fear, it's that I have to make sure that I'm doing enough to get that recognition that I'm still an overachiever and people have that comfort level. So you always think like, well, how is this impacting people? And although they may give a counterpart a pass on that, with them I'm African American. So that's a fear. (Bruce)

Matt also discussed how race and skin color—and the perceptions of race and color—are omnipresent. Similar to Ron, Matt had requested a geographical area more suited to his physical presence and perceived perception by others. His request was denied, and Matt began to feel that his voice was insufficient for influence at the workplace. His expectations were diminished, and those diminished expectations led to anxiety about being in a role where his capacity for workplace performance was intentionally constrained, partly due to racial perceptions. Matt conveyed that identification as a Black man never goes away; there are always reminders of how skin color creates different rules. Moreover, because the rules are different, the outcomes become less flexible, more predictable—in a largely negative way. Thus it was with his job dismissal experience. At times, one is forced to “*set your sights lower*” (Matt):

I kind of had an idea that they were going to let me go. I'd been bounced around by them two times prior to that. I left California and was moved to Florida. I kept asking why I was recruiting in an area that I was so far away from, so far removed from, and they had areas here in Pennsylvania that I wasn't recruiting for, where the potential recruits were a better fit for me. Of course, they wouldn't admit to it, but my gut tells me that race was a factor. Why move me around if I am doing the job well? (Matt)

Interviews with Bruce, Matt, Ron, Alan, and Jim revealed how, for African American males, the meanings of race and skin color manifest in ever-present, multiple dimensions. The self-awareness and consciousness associated with learning—that is, adapting to the navigation of Blackness—is exhibited in the inception stage of a job loss episode and during subsequent phases or stages of unemployment.

For all participants, but especially for the five Black participants, having the capacity to frame and endure the trauma triggered by a job loss event was a crucial common thread in their becoming reemployed. Table 4.2 offers self-reported evidence of how the Black participants transitioned through three phases of a job loss episode.

Table 4.2

Phases of a Job Loss Episode for Black Participants

Phases of a job loss episode for Black Participants		
Phase One: How is a fear of job loss <u>experienced</u> ?	Phase Two: Once experienced, how does one <u>navigate</u> the world of unemployment-related activities?	Phase Three: After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be <u>impacted</u> ?
Finding 1	Findings 2 & 3	Findings 4 & 5
Bruce		
Oh, the day that I was let go I was furious. I understand why I had to leave. But given all that I put into that role, and the contributions I made, I just would not do that to a Brother that you considered to be like family. I expect people that have my back to do better.	You always know that you have to prove yourself more than anybody else to get to the same place. Their stereotype has not changed. I'm at a certain part of my career that I'm not going to trade in my integrity in order to try to go up the ladder.	I have to make other people okay. I work independently a lot, and so I think I need to work more in a team framework. I just have to find a way of making them feel important and maintain those relations. But, yeah, I'm working smarter than before.... The other thing is, because of that racial barrier, you always know that you have to prove yourself more than anybody else to get to the same place.
Matt		
I kind of had an idea that they were going to let me go. I'd been bounced around by them two times prior to that. I left	You persevere. I can look back and say, "I've been in tougher places.... Just looking at the percentage of someone who's similar to	Well, one thing I'm reminded of is that I know I have worth. Life isn't going to always give you good things. It's all

Phases of a job loss episode for Black Participants		
Phase One: How is a fear of job loss <u>experienced</u> ?	Phase Two: Once experienced, how does one <u>navigate</u> the world of unemployment-related activities?	Phase Three: After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be <u>impacted</u> ?
Finding 1	Findings 2 & 3	Findings 4 & 5
California and was moved to Florida. I kept (continued) asking why I was recruiting in an area that I was so far away from, so far removed from, and they had areas here in Pennsylvania that I wasn't recruiting for; where the potential recruits were a better fit for me. Of course, they wouldn't admit to it, but my gut tells me that race was a factor. Why move me around if I am doing the job well?	me was even considered for the position, I have to be (continued) very, very effective, very proficient in what I do, very effective in what I do.... So that carries over. That carries over in my life, period. That the perception of who I am and who I represent, which is a Black male, an African American male, is measured on perceptions.	about balance. So when you're handed that little (continued) chunk that isn't good, you have to find...you have to dig into your character and look back and really see all of the things that didn't happen the way that you wanted, and find strength in recognizing that you persevered. You really have to dig into your own mindset and know that you can persevere. And use that talent, that structure that you used before, to get you over and into a better place.
Ron		
I was pissed but it wasn't like I didn't know what to expect, because he had given me a deadline. My situation was different. Here I am, new, and I'm Black. And all the people I'm trying to sell to are White. And they were	My definition of fear is having apprehension about the unknown. You don't really know what's going to happen, you're not sure what's going to happen, and you don't know how you're going to handle it if it does happen.... I looked at that as,	I wouldn't say I would be a great salesperson, I know that now, but I can get into that mode when I have to, and I can motivate people. I can empathize with people. So I have the people skills.... And I probably

Phases of a job loss episode for Black Participants		
Phase One: How is a fear of job loss <u>experienced</u> ?	Phase Two: Once experienced, how does one <u>navigate</u> the world of unemployment-related activities?	Phase Three: After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be <u>impacted</u> ?
Finding 1	Findings 2 & 3	Findings 4 & 5
nice and polite and everything but a lot of times I could tell as soon as I sat down they (continued) weren't buying anything! At times I thought I was almost there but couldn't get that sale by the deadline. And my boss was true to his word. He was like, "I'm sorry, we got to let you go."... And I think he realized that I was in the wrong market in that division where we were, trying to sell to conservative white business folks in Middle Pennsylvania.	Okay, that's something that happened. I probably shouldn't have been in sales anyway. I'm like, hey, I've (continued) got two college degrees, I got a MBA. Brothers like me will make it. I'm getting another job; it's just a question of when. So for me it was just a question of when, how long it was going to take. My fiancée and I tightened our belts, and my folks helped out a bit.	could go higher since I have people skills but I'm not political, if that makes any sense. I'll get (continued) along with you but I'm not going to kiss your ass, put it like that. So when it came to political stuff I could do better. But I don't really care about that stuff.
Alan		
That was my thought. I'm like: Just get out of this bubble. People are scared. They've just been here for too long.... The uncertainty and the constant, every-year review, apply for your	For a while I worked in real estate, but then the divorce happened and things changed...big time. I had this condo, and moved in when the tenant left.	I don't overexert myself. I work smartly. It's not a career, let's put it like that...because it's the work ethic. It's the way you do it. I'm not on my cellphone. I'm not talking. I'm working. And

Phases of a job loss episode for Black Participants		
Phase One: How is a fear of job loss <u>experienced</u> ?	Phase Two: Once experienced, how does one <u>navigate</u> the world of unemployment-related activities?	Phase Three: After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be <u>impacted</u> ?
Finding 1	Findings 2 & 3	Findings 4 & 5
jobs.... The stress of where am I going to be? Look, I don't want to worry about this. And really, I don't need this anymore. I'm not (continued) comfortable, I don't like it. It's like it was becoming more stressful.		the way that I perceive that work is that it is important to me. I may be, I'm not sure, I might be the oldest person there, which is good and (continued) bad. But I'm respected and I like that. Yeah. I feel good about the way I do the job.
Jim		
The new boss said, "I don't think that this is going to work out." It's his call who he wants on his team. He made it. I didn't see it.... I didn't see it coming.	My family was telling me, "Look, you got to get a job." And I knew in my heart that it wasn't happening. I had a court date downtown. It was a child support court date. I decided not to drive downtown but to catch the subway.... In the subway there's a huge sign there saying, "You can be a nurse. You could get a bachelor's and a master's degree in eighteen months. And I was thinking.... I had been thinking about, okay, I need to just start over. This whole career, this expertise to connections, the folks I know	I am much better at being able to deal with difficult, egotistical people. People have deep things to tell.... The patients here sometimes are a wealth of experience and knowledge, or have a view on something that you've never heard. And I'm all about them telling me what I don't already know, whether it's in a book or in a person. I can have a long, deep conversation with someone who I don't even know or who I do

Phases of a job loss episode for Black Participants		
Phase One: How is a fear of job loss <u>experienced</u> ?	Phase Two: Once experienced, how does one <u>navigate</u> the world of unemployment-related activities?	Phase Three: After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be <u>impacted</u> ?
Finding 1	Findings 2 & 3	Findings 4 & 5
	that helped me whatever, it's no longer there. And come to be real with yourself; it ain't there no more.	know.... It's been transformative personally.

Finding #2

All participants used their intervening period of unemployment in a constructive, action-based manner. In short, the shock and anger from an unintentional loss of employment, while momentarily paralyzing, over time gave way to practical concerns of ongoing welfare. The immediacy of knowing that one must work seemed to surpass obstacles to achieving desired or required income. For those participants with dependent children (i.e., Michelle), the role of provider meant doing whatever was necessary to obtain employment:

It was basically panic mode and get a job as fast as you can. So every morning I was up on the computer, redoing my resume, sending it out; not hearing back. That's the worst part. So then I decided, I'm going to go get a paper and I'm going to call places. And I did that. At least then, I could talk to someone and know that I left my number, whatever. But then, I just started going on the

interviews. But it was just like every day until I got a call. And then I would do the interview. And then I would want the call back, and then I wouldn't get the call back. And then you start all over sending them out again. (Michelle)

Yeah. I mean, you have your family and you have your friends. And then, you have your peers and your colleagues. So there's like those three. So you rely on your family to keep your chin up. You rely on your friends to help get the word out there. And your peers to help you identify potential things. So they all have different levels of contribution to that. (Ben)

Even for participants without children (Fred, Ron), financial constraints, significant others, and feelings of self-worth were sufficient motivators for seeking new employment:

My wife was my source of inspiration. We've been through so much together, and I would always remember that look of pain...and the tears when I told her about my forced retirement. I vowed to myself not to see that look from her again, and that every day I would keep my chin up and find another job. I did consulting. (Fred)

So for me, it was just a question of when, how long it was going to take. My fiancée and I tightened our belts, and my folks helped out a bit. (Ron)

Finding #2a. Households appear to get stronger or weaker during the job loss episode. Phil cited the importance of prioritizing material, tangible needs for his family. He also discussed the strength derived from having family members understand and support the family unit during a crisis:

...I think it can go two ways: either strengthen or break apart. I don't know where there's a happy medium there, but yeah, I think whenever there is a major turmoil in a relationship—and most marriages end because of financial turmoil—you either come together as a team or you start blaming and you pull apart. And very rarely have I seen middle. So again, very blessed that in my instance we came together to figure it out. (Phil)

Phil's family used his job loss episode to strip away and relinquish certain habits they acquired during plentiful times. In addition, his wife and teenage daughters obtained employment to meet expenses and contribute to the collective family unit's welfare. Laughing, Phil said: *"I went from being the only person employed in my house to the only person unemployed."* Even with additional income streams, Phil's family did not escape financial duress. For instance, he cited one occasion where, when his wife went grocery shopping, he forgot to check if sufficient funds were available in the checking account.

Steve revealed two sources that strengthened his family during the 4-month layoff: his experience as a Project Supervisor and *"people skills"* (Steve). Tuition payments and finances related to having a child with special needs require planning—something that Steve believes he is good at. Thus, Steve used his people skills and successfully negotiated better credit terms. In the process, he recognized how he relished the opportunity to negotiate with people when necessary:

My broker was able to change the payment frequency of insurance premiums from monthly to semiannually. And it just so happened that as we were in the final stage of refinancing, I quickly got the LC (Line of Credit) on the house increased, it wasn't much, but...just in case. (Steve)

Another sub-finding involved the consideration of marital or spousal status as an indicator of the relative strength or weakness of a household, given a backdrop of job loss. Four of 13 married participants (31%) (Bruce, John, Alan, and Jim) dissolved their marriages during or shortly after being unemployed. Further, when asked if they

considered their household to be stronger or weaker as a result of their job loss, 5 of 15 participants (33%) considered their household to be weaker due to the job loss episode.

Finding #2b. Participants used family and other social connections to append cash flow. Cultivating and drawing on various relationships, whether with those who were impacted, either directly (family, close friends, vendors) or indirectly (neighbors, colleagues, peers), offered the participants needed financial, emotional, and social support.

For example, Steve, who had a daughter with special needs, met with his doctor to discuss several concerns, including advice on how to reduce health care costs. In doing so, he was able to forge a different connection with his doctor, who, in knowing Steve's situation, became someone with whom Steve could speak and share difficult subjects during a challenging time. However, even with the doctor's support, Steve stated that throughout unemployment, his guiding force remained a predominant belief in himself: "*...But at the end of the day, I knew I had to believe in me*" (Steve).

Finding #2c. Even when living with others, unemployment could be a singular, reflective experience. During the unemployment phase, several participants mentioned being supported by drawing on memories of significant persons in their lives. Bill fondly and enthusiastically recalled a friend of his grandparents who guided him through rough periods during his childhood. Reflecting on those specific past events enabled Bill to move onward from difficult episodes during his unemployment period:

...a friend of my grandparents...put some structure in [me]. He made such an impression in my life...." I think of him quite often, off and on. It's just, okay, fine,

I guess, I can hear him behind me. You know? But that is what got me through it. I started feeling better about myself. Understanding that I can only control my own feelings. And I got to understand that when you're getting laid off or downsized, it's not about you.... You didn't do anything wrong. Especially now, companies go through these. (Bill)

Jim cited lessons learned from his father as a source of strength to get through his prolonged period of unemployment and personal turmoil. He tearfully recalled one heartfelt conversation when Jim's father conveyed how the only thing Jim owed his parents was to do for his soon-to-be-born son what Jim's parents did for their son—*"give unconditional love and respect"* (Jim). This conversation occurred during Jim's recovery from addiction and just prior to the passing of Jim's father:

I have to give a lot of credit to my recovery program: the stuff that I learned about myself, the insecurities that were false. The way I feel about it, if you give me an interview, game over. The job's mine. And I walk in there with that feeling but not being cocky. Internally, that's where I am because some of those insecurities were false and I made them up myself, and I know they weren't real. I'm not the greatest in the world, but at the same time, you give me that interview, I got that damn job.... Maybe in a perverse way it was how it was supposed to be.... That you needed to fuck up in order for you to stand up stronger. (Jim)

Finding #2d. Three of 5 (60%) of the Black participants cited their experience as being Black as a source of strength. Lastly, three of the five Black participants noted their self-identification as a Black male to be another source of reflection and strength. In particular, Matt and Bruce discussed how they viewed race as playing a factor in their job loss. They also cited how having an awareness of how Black males are generally viewed is necessary if a Black male seeks to have a successful career. (Please see the

second column of Table 4.3 for additional comments from the Black participants that are relevant to Findings #2 and #3.)

Unlike the notion of expectations mentioned in the discussion of Finding #1—where the expectations are what others might have—examples of certain Black male perspectives refer to expectations of the self. In short, if one recognizes that he has survived vestiges of institutional racism thus far, then he will continue to move onward and upward. For instance, Matt explained how perseverance was essential to his overcoming a jarring job dismissal and period of unemployment. During our conversation, it became clear that self-reflection and a deeply embedded belief in the self are a practice and a perspective one might associate with Matt. He stated always taking time to assess his previous actions in order to measure what progress he has made in his life, and then, when placing those behaviors in the context of being a Black male, recognizing that he will succeed. In short, he must be proficient at whatever challenge he should face:

Yeah. I always, for situations like this, things that you need to overcome in a broad sense, I look at how I've arrived. Basically, how I am, who I am. What represents me. I'm a college-educated African American male, who pretty much has channel-managed how I've done things and how I've arrived.... So college wasn't easy. It wasn't quick. I put myself through it. Added a lot of pieces to it. Got into the military to help me pay for it. Worked a full-time job. Paid my tuition on my own. So it was strength. There are strength-builders that you can look back and say, "That wasn't easy."... I could have given up. It took me twelve years to get my degree. I told myself I wasn't leaving until I had my degree. It's character-building. I know I've been in hard places before. The military, going in that wasn't easy. You persevere. I can look back and say, "I've been in tougher places.... Just looking at the percentage of someone who's similar to me was even considered for the position. (Matt)

Table 4.3 lists the actions participants took during their period of unemployment, along with various sources of support the participants stated were instrumental in helping them to navigate the often turbulent waters of unemployment.

Table 4.3

Finding #2: Actions Taken During Unemployment; Important Sources of Support

Finding #2: Actions Taken During Unemployment; Important Sources of Support					
#	Name	Age	Length of unemployment (Months)	Crucial actions taken during unemployment?	Who did you reach out to for support during unemployment?
1	Ben	40	3	Networking; budgeting	Colleagues; peers
2	Bill	59	3	Volunteer; networking; recruiter; part time work	Family; local church; memories
3	Tony	45	3	Networking; budgeting	Friends
4	Steve	50	4	Arranged different payment stream with vendors	Family; vendors
5	Bruce	40	5	Budgeting; divorce	Family; self-reflection
6	Doug	45	5	Networking; part time work	Colleagues; peers
7	Matt	42	5	Budgeting; part time work;	Family; self-reflection
8	Fred	50	6	Recruiter (job search); consulting	Wife
9	Ron	35	6	Recruiter (job search); friends	Significant other; family
10	John	42	7	Networking; budgeting; part time work	Family
11	Michelle	58	8	Want ads; learning new IT skills; part time work	Family
12	Bob	55	12	Networking; part time work	Family
13	Phil	48	12	Other family members got jobs; budgeting	Family; neighbors, friends; self-reflection
14	Alan	57	24	Downsizing; divorce	Friends
15	Jim	40	84	Rehabilitation; therapy; Nursing degree;	Family; friends; self-reflection

Finding #3

All participants used their intervening period of unemployment to assess what was vitally important in their life. Participants expressed how their period of job searching was accompanied by giving thought and reflection to what was important to them, both short-term and long-term. When asked “During this period, overall, if you

had to decide, once you had a job, what would be more important to you: getting paid well or doing something you like in a workplace setting you enjoy?”, 40% of the participants replied getting paid well and 60% preferred a favorable workplace setting.

Bruce, unemployed for 5 months, spoke on the need to evaluate the tradeoff between family life and career. In his mind, the home environment was more important, especially since he has a child with special needs. Working again to have financial and social stability were topics of concern for Bruce:

I had a tradeoff in terms of what I want to do. What type of environment did I want to have at home in terms of time and space for me and my children—for my wife and my children—as opposed to trying to attain a higher level on the corporate structure? (Bruce)

John, unemployed for 7 months, considered the potential workplace environment as a crucial factor. While the pinch of living on one income was real, his view was long-term with a commitment to staying in the Accounting field. His professional experience had been in Accounting, and John was certain that there would always be work for accounting types. Therefore, given the choice between money or workplace culture, John’s preference was culture, a workplace environment where going in each day was not stressful.

I think deep down inside I wasn’t in a hurry to go back to working full-time. My last job was pretty stressful. The money, considering the time I put in, was good, but I needed to recharge. My wife worked full-time, and I went to a part-time schedule until I felt ready to charge in again. Between the part-time work and heavy budgeting, we got through it. Some contacts from networking became available.... I didn’t think much about another field. I’ll stay in Accounting. It’s like you have to be able to take the hits...and I knew I needed a break.... I’m generally low key, but things got to me at the end where I was before. This job is very different. It’s not as stressful, which is what I wanted, but I still tell myself to

not get overwhelmed. Right now I'm not making as much as before, but I'm not burnt out either. I could be here for a while and be okay. There's enough opportunity to move up.... This time around, I want to be stronger at being able to bounce back from things. That doesn't mean holding things in; it's more like not letting stuff get to you. I tell my staff that too. (John)

In listening to Ben (unemployed for 3 months), it became apparent how, as a project manager, he was able to frame his period of unemployment as a short-term project, which by definition is something with a beginning date and an end date. Project management also assumes a measure of contingency planning, which seemed to be reflected in Ben's characterization of himself as having become somewhat changed, with a heightened need to be more flexible at the workplace (see Table 8).

Ben also mentioned how quality of life tradeoffs were important. In completing the exercise presented in Table 4.4, Ben displayed an inclination to choose personal time over work time and cited becoming more flexible as a result of his job loss episode:

I mean, things tend to happen for a reason, so I think the role that I'm in now is a big growth opportunity and a better opportunity overall. The initial shock can get you out of your comfort zone, but then it forces you to adapt and grow. And you have to look forward. You can't keep looking back, especially if you have a family. You got to talk to your spouse, figure out how you want to message that to your kids, so you don't upset them. And then figure out your plan of action moving forward.... I planned out a plan of attack, how I wanted to utilize my time and my energy to finding a new role.... So to me, quality of life stuff is equally as important. With kids in college, obviously you need to make money, but you also have to balance the quality of life issues too. And what's the growth potential? What will you learn as an individual? Will you cap out? Is the organization big where you can move within it or what? (Ben)

Bob, who was unemployed for 12 months, took time to consider various demographics such as age, perceived skill level, and prospective future work earnings:

...You have to decide what's important. We were sending our son off to college, so having the family time felt good. I took on short-term projects for income; my wife has a pretty good job. I was still angry...getting a job right away didn't feel right, so we made the numbers work until I felt better. I like managing projects—it's where I wanted to be. To answer your question, though...what I considered most was my age, past skill, how much longer I needed to work, tuition payments, you know...stuff like that. The big thing is that I knew that I wanted to have at least three more jobs before I retired. That way I would always have to stay on top of things, keep my skills sharp, and not get too attached. My wife and I took time to plan our finances more; she'll be retiring before me. (Bob)

Steve mentioned that being able to provide for his family was paramount; to that extent, employment is more of a means to an end. He also stated having an interest in the relationship aspect of work. Being in a position to offer support to his subordinates is a quality Steve considered important in a favorable workplace environment:

Knowing that you have to work affects how you look at work. During my time off, I worked hard at getting this new role. I wanted to have a job that paid the bills and allowed for savings and breathing room. I figured I could make the environment work for me. Retirement is still a dream for me. As long as I am able to take care of my family, I'm okay. I've been laid off before, and I know the value of building and maintain relationships. I feel that if I'm able to help those who report to me, I and the company are better for it. I want to be there for my staff. Helping others get through things just makes sense to me.... You know, skill is only one part of the job. To me, it's relationships that really matter. I've learned that by at least hearing people out, listening to their side of things, can make a huge difference when conflicts arise. (Steve)

Finding #3a. Seven of 15 (47%) participants revealed elements of perspective change. Alan's 24 months of unemployment contained introspection and a cathartic letting go: divorce from his wife, downsizing to an efficiency apartment, and becoming employed as a stock clerk—an occupation where having a science degree is of little allied value for workplace performance. Alan wanted to be as far removed from his

previous career as possible and appeared to anchor that seismic shift by moving on from certain personal and professional relationships.

At this point in my life, my job allows me to live the lifestyle that I want to live. I have a job with responsibility, but it's far below what I'm capable of doing. But that's what I want. And I don't have emails. No one calls me. No one bothers me. I go and I do my job and I come home. That's what I want.... I like the hours. I like the fact that I can leave and don't have to bring any work home. I like the convenience of, the proximity of the job to my residence. I like the people. I like the experience of interacting with a totally different type of employee at work than I'm used to. It's a new social experience for me, I guess I should say, which is informative, eye-opening and good for me. I don't want any stress from a job, I just need convenience. And pretty much that's it. It's not so much about the pay, although I want some pay. The people are nice. They like me. I like being around them. They're different. It affords me a social outlet.... It fits. (Alan)

Alan was firmly content with the choices that others made for him—his dismissal—and the choices he made for himself during unemployment. Alan expressed wanting to have a radical departure from corporate life and the trappings associated with it. During unemployment, Alan divorced his wife, left her the house, and moved into an efficiency condominium. He later accepted a position as a stock clerk. Although Alan is extremely overqualified for his current role, he claimed to be much happier with his life. In his current role, Alan finds the limited yet different social interaction and lack of organizational stress somewhat refreshing.

Jim's unique 84 months of unemployment centered on a pivotal point of reflection when he committed himself to profound perspective change. After feeling that he had hit an even lower point in his life, Jim told himself that he needed to "start over." At that point, all the connections in his professional life were neither helpful nor useful. What he did have, however, was a track record of academic success.

Becoming a Nurse Technician, after making the Dean's list, provided Jim with an opportunity to demonstrate genuine care for others; it allowed him to "give back" what he received from those who made a difference in his life:

I had a little bit of savings, and I was under the impression that the people who I helped would help me.... And then at a certain point the money was gone. It's immediate and prolonged. One, I'm married. Two, I got an infant daughter and the need is immediate, and I'm not participating. But at the same time, I could still find some resources to do things that I shouldn't have been doing. My conscience was beating the shit out of me but it was...at the same time, the draw of the addiction was stronger than my conscience.

...I was taking four courses, four credit courses at a time: It took a year.... I started a nursing program.... Everybody was saying, "You're out of your mind. How can you possibly do this?" And I just thought, how can I possibly not? because of what I might be able to see at the end of the road here. And I just took the vow of poverty and dived into it full-time and came out of it on the Dean's list, all of that.... (Jim)

Finding #3a(i). Participants' job loss event had a profound effect on how they viewed themselves and their place in the world. Table 4.4 captures participants' responses to the following scenario taking place before their job loss event and in their new workplace environment:

Several hours before you had planned on leaving for the day, your direct report unexpectedly asks you to stay late to finish up a task that you anticipated finishing the following morning as it will take a few hours. In staying late, you will miss an important event with your family or yourself. The event cannot be rescheduled. Do you stay at work or do you go?

It was up to each participant to decide the nature of the event. This exercise was intended to solicit feedback on whether the period of unemployment influenced how participants ranked personal time.

Table 4.4

Finding #3: Exercise to Assess Relative Importance of Personal Time

Finding #3: Exercise to Assess Relative Importance of Personal Time						
#	Name	Age	Length of unemployment (Months)	Given the discussed scenario where you must stay late at work, do you stay, or do you go?: (1) Stay; (2) Go		Was there a change in perspective, pre versus post job loss?
				<i>In pre job loss role</i>	<i>In post job loss role</i>	
1	Ben	40	3	1	2	Changed View
2	Bill	59	3	2	2	No
3	Tony	45	3	1	1	No
4	Steve	50	4	1	1	No
5	Bruce	40	5	1	2	Changed View
6	Doug	45	5	1	1	No
7	Matt	42	5	1	2	Changed View
8	Fred	50	6	1	1	No
9	Ron	35	6	1	1	No
10	John	42	7	1	1	No
11	Michelle	58	8	2	1	Changed View
12	Bob	55	12	2	2	No
13	Phil	48	12	1	2	Changed View
14	Alan	57	24	1	2	Changed View
15	Jim	40	84	1	2	Changed View
			MODE	1	2	

The data suggested that 47% of the participants had a change in the value of personal time, given their previous role, experiences connected to their job loss episode, and the contextual nature of their new role. The findings discussed in this chapter, albeit presented with evidence, should be viewed directionally—not conclusively. The effect of related dynamics on the participants that were beyond the scope of this study should not be overlooked or underestimated. For example, while Alan offered specifics about his need to divorce, change his lifestyle radically, and get away from the “corporate” world, interpretations of his remarks, mannerisms,

inflection, and so on, along with his verbal and written responses, were the only source of data.

For a while I worked in real estate, but then the divorce happened and things changed.... Big time! I had this condo and moved in when the tenant left. My wife and I divorced during my layoff; fortunately, my kids are grown. So I had to downsize a bit, but the adjustment to my lifestyle works for me. I am happier now with the reduced responsibility on my job and with less stress at home. I feel more productive at work. I tell the young guys at work to keep it all in stride: Don't get caught up in making a lot of money and having misery at home. (Alan)

Nevertheless, the question "Was there a change in perspective?" is materially important in that it offers overall assessment by the participants as to whether they perceived a change in themselves due to their job loss episode.

Finding #4

Fourteen of 15 (93%) participants viewed their job loss event as instrumental to their subsequent perceived workplace performance. Once reemployed, all participants stated recalling, in one form or another, how the awareness of job loss—their job loss—influenced the attention paid to workplace matters and employee relationships. When directly asked if they perceived their workplace performance to be worse, the same, or better when compared to their previous job, all participants indicated "better." The participants interpreted their perceived workplace performance; no definitions were offered to the participants, and no confirmations were asked for at their respective places of employment. The intent of this question was to gauge a sense of learned comfort when encountering new workplace events, given the memories of job loss.

Finding #4a. At a minimum, they were more aware of others' circumstances and feelings in their new work environment. Ben stated how his job loss episode, especially the dismissal, has made him aware of what others might go through if a job dismissal is handled inappropriately. At a minimum, transparency is requisite to dealing with coworkers and subordinates. Having had only three jobs over 30 years, the job dismissal Ben faced was foreign to him. The ensuing difficulties Ben encountered were framed as opportunities for learning:

So initially it's a kick in the gut, but then you have to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and move on.... I think it's a part of life. I think everybody has situations they have to deal with. So that was foreign to me and I'd only been in two other employers in my whole career. I've been employed now thirty years, I've been at three employers. So the average length of stay is about a little over ten years in each one. So I guess it's a learning experience.... I always try to treat people as I would want to be treated myself and be transparent, because you don't want to catch somebody off-guard the way I was caught off-guard. I didn't feel that was appropriate or the right way to handle it. And I wouldn't want that to happen.... Even if you're having difficulty with somebody, you want to be clear, you want to be upfront, and you want to help work through it. And in some cases, you're going to not be able to work through it and you will part ways. (Ben)

Michelle stated that she now works harder than before, with the intent of not losing this job. For instance, she acquired a habit—which lasted about 3 or 4 years—of asking every partner in her office if they needed anything before she left for the day, and she would stay, even if it meant changing her schedule at home. It was imperative for Michelle to prove to others that she wanted the job; if she did, it would not be taken from her. Michelle did not want to take the chance that speaking up, asking if something could wait until morning would be acceptable. She cited this behavior as “security-type fear”:

I work twice as hard. Like I said, I wouldn't leave until I knew that everyone was done for the day, they didn't need me for anything, and they also knew that I was actually going to stay. That's how much I want this job. And I just want to show them, prove to them.... I do know that it took me about three years, maybe, to stop asking if anybody needs anything. Because you know everybody just gets up and leaves when it's 5:30. Nobody else was going and saying, "Do you need anything else? Do you need anything else?" Even the girls would say to me, "You don't have to do that. If you've finished what you have and there's nothing else right on your desk, you can leave at 5:30." I said, "Yeah, but I just want to make sure." I said, "I don't feel secure." It was like a security-type fear, is what it was. (Michelle)

Bill again referred to the fears he felt during his childhood when considering how his job loss episode impacted perceived workplace performance. He practices putting others first and being mindful of the larger picture. Bill said that doing motivational speaking, especially to children, helps to give him an uplifting perspective at the workplace. His job loss allowed him to assess how he needed to give back to the community, so he intentionally struck a balance with hours spent at the office in order to spend time volunteering:

That self-esteem little kid is still in there somewhere. And I need to be more vocal.... If you push it the wrong way, I'll take it, I'll take it, I'll take it, I'll take it, I'll take it, and then I'll say something.... You talked about fear. Part of my motivation with my kids or whatever I do, I don't want anyone to go through what I went through. I don't want anyone to be afraid of not.... Because you get one chance sometimes and if you miss it, you miss it. And I want the kids that I've coached and even the employees that I work with.... You can't.... It's not always about you. It's about the bigger picture. And if you give tenfold, it's going to come back. (Bill)

Finding #4b. Several participants cited an increased awareness of others at their new workplace. Striking a balance between work and family was a consistent theme for all participants. Ben, for example, cited flexibility as a key actionable learning

from his job loss episode. At times now, if someone on his team needs to leave earlier to pick up their children, he is more accommodating than before. He believes that flexibility improves workplace performance. Something always has to give; flexibility can be seen as a practical alternative to a changing workplace.

Bruce considered his job loss to be a reminder that he needed to be attentive to others under his direction, to make sure that they are “okay.” He cited interpersonal relationships as a weak point for him and prefers to demonstrate higher levels of team-based workplace performance.

I think I’m probably going to start honing my skills for playing the game.... I have to make other people okay. I work independently a lot, and so I think I need to work more in a team framework. And although I may dwarf others in their level of institutional knowledge and their analytical skills, I just have to find a way of making them feel important, and maintain those relations. So I’m taking on little pet projects just to keep me fresh and keep my name out there. But, yeah, I’m working smarter than before. (Bruce)

Alan commented that having less stress on the job and at home makes him more productive. He specifically mentioned feeling happier now that he has been able to “*let go*” (Alan). The advice he offers to the younger staff at work is to always consider the potential tradeoffs with making a higher salary and the misery it might lead to at home.

Regardless of the length of unemployment, all participants voiced awareness of the plight of others who might be dismissed. Participants with direct reports mentioned that being able to pause before making a decision on another coworker’s employment was directly due to identifying with their own job loss event. For example, Tony cited

that he is now more aware of how many employees share a common need for money and those considerations are now more important to him if job dismissals are necessary:

You know, one thing is certain...this will not be my last job.... I just don't know how it will happen, but ever since I've been involved in HR, I've seen it.... Getting let go hurts, but you move on. I always say you work hard....and don't take it personally...especially if it is. I'm a strong believer that if you do right by people, it will work out in the end. Being in HR doesn't mean you have a magic wand and can make bad things go away...but you should want to make the environment better if you can. People do need help. Being let go this last time was different because the finance piece was more of an issue.... I now am more aware of how we are all driven to some extent by the need for money, which makes me think about when people have to be let go. (Tony)

Doug connected the topics of organizational and managerial trust and leadership in stating that as a result of his job loss episode, he now pushes himself harder to be transparent, to establish trust with coworkers. In his new role as an Accounting Supervisor, Doug felt that his experience with unemployment gave rise to the possibility of him not taking things for granted, while at the same time allowing trust and honesty to germinate. In addition, at 45 years of age, Doug expressed concern that if he wanted to move up the ladder professionally, a sense of urgency was required because forced job transitions can be detrimental. While being unemployed for 5 months is certainly better financially than for 12 months, Doug's period of unemployment was sufficient to afford him productive moments of reflection:

There were times when I felt like a wounded animal before they let me go...after seeing some of my coworkers forced out; it changes how you think about the company. I mean, it's normally not the employees' fault—they just have to live with decisions others make. You do your part, hoping it won't be you, but in a way, it's better leaving. I network more;...keep the resume up to date, put away more in the bank whenever we can. I'm an upfront person.... I tell those who report to me how it is. Honesty and trust can go a long way. I know

how it feels when the trust isn't there. I push myself harder...not for the company...but for me and my family. (Doug)

Table 4.5 captures participants' responses to two questions: (a) as a result of your job loss episode, is your self-assessed current workplace performance the same, better, or superior to workplace performance in your pre-job loss role? and (b) How has your job loss episode changed your self-assessed workplace performance? Ninety-four percent of all participants responded with better or superior. Interviews revealed that being reemployed appeared to boost perceived performance. The sentiment of improved workplace performance was consistent among all participants, regardless of the length of time a participant had been reemployed.

Table 4.5

Finding #4: Self-assessment of Current Workplace Performance

Finding #4: Self-assessment of Current Workplace Performance					
#	Name	Age	Length of unemployment (Months)	As a result of your job loss episode, is your current workplace performance: (1) the same; (3) better; (5) superior	How has your job loss episode changed your workplace performance?
1	Ben	40	3	3	More flexible
2	Bill	59	3	3	Coach more
3	Tony	45	3	3	I think about others
4	Steve	50	4	3	I'm there for my staff
5	Bruce	40	5	5	Working smarter
6	Doug	45	5	5	I push myself harder
7	Matt	42	5	5	I continue to exceed targets
8	Fred	50	6	3	I am calmer
9	Ron	35	6	3	I know myself better
10	John	42	7	1	I don't get overwhelmed
11	Michelle	58	8	5	Work twice as hard
12	Bob	55	12	5	More politically astute
13	Phil	48	12	5	Create value for others
14	Alan	57	24	3	I work stress-free
15	Jim	40	84	5	I am a new person; I give to others everyday
				6% Same	
				47% Better	
				47% Superior	

Finding #5

All participants saw themselves differently as a result of their job loss event. A

final finding from the study illuminated how the 15 participants framed their job loss event as a reference point for learning. It is important to note, and as will be discussed further in Chapter V, that what has been labeled as a job loss event is actually an aggregation of subevents: beginning, in this case, with the direct, contractual loss of employment, and ending in a somewhat gray area, which may or may not have a specific date, but most likely after an onboarding period with a new employer.

Finding #5a. All participants mentioned drawing on their aggregated job loss event as a reference, or contextual reminder. The significance of Finding #5a is its manifestation of contextual learning. Finding #5a addresses the related questions: How did my job loss episode influence my perceived workplace performance in this new setting? Are there learnings I can draw on as I attempt to become successful at my job? As the post-job loss role for all participants involved interaction with others, all participants' aggregate learnings should be visible—if applied—in their new workplace environment. Working in an environment with tangible interaction should allow for continuous practice of aggregate learnings, including the current job loss episode. Being a direct recipient of a job loss event, given its traumatic nature, makes one more aware, if not sensitive to, the occurrence of job loss events in others.

Ben emphatically stated how reorganizations can be scary, but then added how, for him, having directly experienced unintentional job loss makes him feel sensitive, if not obligated, to what others might be going through. In addition, that awareness of the anxieties that might arise should not be seen as either sympathy or pity. Ideally, that awareness is a form of organizational knowledge used to create a transparent, humane exit process. Ben also stated how his intention for transparency cascades through all of his workplace relationships and interactions. Underlying the goal of transparency for Ben is the lack of transparency he felt in conjunction with his dismissal:

Any time you go through the reorg process, it can be scary and a lot of unknowns. So that knowing, having experienced that and then trying to do whatever we can within our power to minimize that for folks when they're going through an internal reorganization.... You try to be sensitive to the feelings of folks that are going through that process, because you went through it yourself. So you know what anxieties may exist or thoughts that come up, and what information would be valuable to try to minimize those or address those things. So I try to provide that. That's part of that transparency. In my previous organization, issues were handled behind closed doors and I was one that was caught off-guard. In this organization, we're very transparent about aligning roles and skills and people and helping people through that process. So totally different sides of the coin.... I think that having transparent leadership is key.
(Ben)

Michelle learned self-confidence from her job loss episode. Having been in her new role for about 3 years, she has earned increased responsibility and has been recognized as a "go-to" person, someone who does whatever it takes to get the job done. Michelle considers herself to be "*much stronger*" due to the turmoil from her job loss episode. That strength is shown by her willingness to speak up when necessary, and

to take on new tasks proactively to help others at her firm. She sees her strength and confidence as having a positive effect on her daughter and granddaughter as well.

Michelle was firm in realizing that her job loss episode, while painful, has made her a more valuable employee and a better person:

I am stronger now...definitely stronger.... I think that anything that happens to anyone, that sets them back and then they get through it, they become stronger. I mean, I could have just stopped. Like I said, if it was just me, who knows? I might have.... I'm stronger because this position required more strength for less money. I wish I hadn't gone in like that, but I did, saying a lower amount, but they've been good to me. No, I've gotten stronger. Much stronger.... And it's everything combined that's happened to me in past years, not just the new job and the loss of a job. It's my granddaughter who, like I said, was a year old. Things have happened in her life and my daughter's life that affect my life. Getting through all that and...yeah, I need to or want to get that job and do whatever it takes to get that job, or just give up. I couldn't give up. Maybe someone else would have. There are so many different scenarios with different people that sometimes you say, "How could she do that?" And then I realize how some people can do certain things that I wouldn't do, but I know why they did. (Michelle)

In an effort to gauge how participants' aggregate learnings manifested in the new role, they were asked to describe what workplace behaviors best captured their preferred way of practice when at the workplace. The descriptive phrases used or interpreted from the transcripts are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Finding #5: Self-assessment of Current Workplace Practice

Finding #5: Self-assessment of Current Workplace Practice				
#	Name	Age	Length of unemployment (Months)	At the workplace, what do you practice differently since your job loss episode?
1	Ben	40	3	Transparency
2	Bill	59	3	Being dispassionate
3	Tony	45	3	Fitting in
4	Steve	50	4	Listening to both sides
5	Bruce	40	5	Perseverance
6	Doug	45	5	Looking for opportunity
7	Matt	42	5	Reflection
8	Fred	50	6	Self-control
9	Ron	35	6	Negotiation; empathy
10	John	42	7	Resilience
11	Michelle	58	8	Being assertive
12	Bob	55	12	Determination
13	Phil	48	12	Humility
14	Alan	57	24	Responsibility
15	Jim	40	84	Compassion

Summary of Findings

The findings presented in this chapter revealed that the traumatic nature of a sudden, unintentional, financially adverse job loss is a memorable episode from which learning can occur. The contextual learnings from the participants' job loss episodes are demonstrated in subsequent external relationships and workplace interactions as well as in the participants' self-identity and self-awareness.

While individual stories of each participant were different, all participants shared and discussed how their job loss event, while initially traumatic and painful, was instrumental in strengthening their overall resilience.

All participants were able to describe the impact of their job loss event and firmly situate their job loss event as a trigger for contextualizing future experiences related to workplace performance. The association of job loss events with future, contextually-relevant encounters enables purposeful learning to occur. The practice of purposeful learning can be manifested in perceived workplace performance.

A further finding from the field study is the role of perspective change in enabling participants to get through the trauma caused by their job loss event. Perspective change was stated as having an influence on subsequent workplace expectations, interactions, and self-assessed workplace performance. Given the findings, one could surmise that an unintentional, financially adverse job loss would be a trigger for some degree of perspective change. Nearly all participants indicated experiencing either various dimensions of perspective change or, at a minimum, viewing themselves and their workplace settings differently as a result of their job loss event.

Viewing workplace settings and/or themselves differently and then affirming a newly held perspective by applying aggregate learning may have been sustained by the opportunity of renewal and the lessening of financial difficulty that are explicit in new, full-time employment. Nevertheless, it is clear that (a) all participants experienced manifestations of fear and/or trauma from their job loss episode, and (b) the job loss episode created learning events from which the participants cascaded into new workplace environments.

Unemployment periods that were greater or equal to 7 months offered deeper opportunities for perspective change, regardless of prior employment, occupation, level of education, race, gender, or marital status. The value placed on personal time was one indicator of how participants viewed themselves as changed.

Being Black added another layer of context to understanding how job loss episodes manifest. For those who discussed their racial identity, the self-awareness embedded in being Black created avenues for coping with the fear of job loss and provided an additional reservoir for applied learnings with new employers.

Chapter V next analyzes, synthesizes, and interprets the data presented in this chapter using the literature presented in Chapter II. Additional literature is presented where beneficial.

Chapter V

ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this exploratory study of adult learning was to investigate the lived experience of 15 employees who encountered a significant job loss event (an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment—coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income), and how the resultant fear(s) from that event affected their navigation through unemployment in order to become successfully reemployed. A primary contention, prior to undertaking this study, was that all employees, and indeed certain socially identifiable groups of employees (i.e., African Americans), are more directly impacted by real or perceived job loss, even if that loss in employment is temporary or manifested indirectly vis-à-vis the departure of coworkers, a dramatic and sudden structural reorganization, or perhaps other pervasive cultural or social factors.

A further suggestion was that a deeper level of concerned awareness with respect to how employees perform their jobs, given that the prevailing fears accompanying job loss are an integral characteristic of organizational life, could lead to manifestations of empathy within structures and entities where the probability of turnover exists.

This study was based on three prevailing questions:

1. How is a fear of job loss experienced?
2. Once experienced, how does one navigate the world of unemployment-related activities?
3. After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be impacted?

For the purpose of this research, the researcher collected qualitative data by conducting in-depth interviews. Participants in the study included 15 adults who met the following criteria: (a) All participants experienced a period of unintentional joblessness such that both economic hardship and elevated stress/anxiety develop (criterion event); (b) All participants did not live alone; and (c) All participants became reemployed after having experienced the joblessness described in criterion (a).

Data from interviews, including conversations and observations, were coded, analyzed, and then organized by categories and subcategories that were guided by the conceptual framework described in Chapter II. Chapter IV presented emergent themes and connecting patterns in the data. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and synthesize the findings from Chapter IV.

Accordingly, in this chapter, the researcher first recaps the five major findings. Next, an analysis of the findings, based on two participant groupings—race and length of unemployment—is discussed. The discussion of participant groupings is followed by a presentation of three analytic categories. Analytic categories offer a synthesis and

interpretation of the findings based on literature on the fear of job loss, learning from experience, and transformative learning. Finally, this chapter concludes with revisiting the assumptions presented in Chapter I, along with a description of how this study contributes to the literature.

Recapping Five Major Findings of the Study

The researcher derived five major findings from this study. The first major finding was that all participants experienced manifestations of fear from losing their job. Every job loss event presented in this study was embedded with the fear from a loss of requisite financial resources, either immediate or in the near future. As a result, the sensory nature of a job dismissal (the job loss event) became significantly greater than if finances were not a concern. That 12 of the 15 (80%) participants in this study described their job dismissal as either bad or very bad was in part an indication of the fear felt from being dismissed from their jobs.

The second major finding was that all participants used their intervening period of unemployment in a constructive manner. In analyzing participant conversations, it became clear that each job loss event was, in fact, a compilation of intertwined stages of perceptual evolution. Reframing the job loss event as a layer-rich iterative episode resulted in a deeper visibility of the intertwined events that triggered learning opportunities for the participants.

The third major finding was that all participants used their intervening period of unemployment to assess what was vitally important in their life. Conversations with all participants offered another dimension of coping with and navigating through a period of unemployment. The disruptions were indicative of turmoil caused by an unintended loss of job: established and somewhat predictable social patterns, a modicum of external control, a sense of contribution, and so on.

The fourth major finding was that 14 of 15 (93%) participants viewed their job loss event as instrumental to their subsequent perceived workplace performance. All participants exhibited or spoke to having a changed self. Having had various sets of events transpire after the job loss event—experiences which were then viewed through a prism of fears related to unemployment, each participant (some apparently more than others) was changed by having integrated different social interactions and experiences, becoming what Jarvis and Hirji (2006) referred to as a “continually changed, more experienced person” (p. 88).

Finally, the fifth major finding was that all participants saw themselves differently as a result of their job loss event vis-à-vis new or modified workplace practices. Conversations with the participants revealed a shared characteristic of offering advice and empathy to their new coworkers. When asked to use words to describe how they felt after becoming reemployed and how they perceived their workplace performance given a job loss episode, all of the respondents used words that were indicative of some measure of job advice or workplace empathy.

An analysis of the preceding findings, based on two participant groupings—race and length of unemployment—follows.

Analysis of Findings Based on Participant Groupings

Participant Groups

During the interview, each of the 15 participants was asked a series of questions that captured participant demographic data (pseudonym, age, marital status, occupational information), along with responses to the three prevailing research questions of unintended job loss listed in the introduction to this chapter. After compiling and organizing data from transcriptions and notes, participants were categorized and placed in two groups for analysis and synthesis based on: (a) racial identity, and (b) length of unemployment. Pertinent group variations are shown in Table 5-1.

Participant subgroup: Race. None of the protocol questions asked participants to discuss or reveal their racial identity. However, all five of the Black participants (males) described their racial identity as a factor in at least one of the three stages of a job loss experience: dismissal, unemployment, and post-unemployment. As the researcher is also a Black male, a sense of comfort, based on remarks by the Black participants, might have contributed to their candid responses when the additional perspective of race was discussed. A sense of shared identity is powerful, especially in the face of pain (Muldoon et al., 2019, p. 1). For the Black participants, race was an

added feature enabling pathways to deeper levels of insight. For example, Matt, when commenting on how he was able to get through the entirety of his job loss episode, expressed the following shared sentiments:

You persevere. I can look back and say, “I’ve been in tougher places.... Just looking at the percentage of people similar to me that were even considered for the position, I know that I have to be very effective...very proficient in what I do, very effective in what I do.... So that [perspective] carries over. That carries over in my life, period. That the perception of who I am and who I represent, which is a Black male, an African American male, is measured on perceptions. (Matt)

Table 5.1

Analysis of Participant Group Variations in Demographic Information

Analysis of Participant Group Variations in Demographic Information				
Characteristic	Race		Length of Unemployment	
	Black Participants (5) %	White Participants (10) %	Participants Unemployed 3-5 months (7) %	Participants Unemployed more than 5 months (8) %
Age				
(35-45)	80	40	71	38
(46-55)	none	20	14	38
(56-59)	20	40	14	25
Dependent Children				
0	none	10	none	25
1	20	30	14	38
2+	60	60	86	38
Reason for Job-loss				
Reorganization	40	30	58	25
Merger	none	20	14	12
Chemistry	40	20	14	38
Performance	20	none	none	12
Downsizing	none	30	14	12

Analysis of Participant Group Variations in Demographic Information				
Characteristic	Race		Length of Unemployment	
	Black Participants (5) %	White Participants (10) %	Participants Unemployed 3-5 months (7) %	Participants Unemployed more than 5 months (8) %
Was New role an Improvement Professionally?				
Yes	80	30	57	37
No	20	70	43	63
Was New role in a New Industry/Occupation?				
Yes	100	20	100	75
No	none	80	none	25

Matt's comments on the utility of self-reflection correspond to the proverbial "time-out" discussed in Kegan's (1994) work on dialectical thinking. For Matt to be successful, several layers of consciousness must co-exist within the context of knowing what the expectations are for each of those layers of identity (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 343).

Elements of Karenga's work (Hopkins, 1989, p. 13) on Black consciousness—wherein the essential ingredients of Blackness are color, culture, and consciousness—were apparent in Matt's dialogue and align with an application of Kegan's work. Each of those three respective aspects of existence manifest differently. For example, one could have color but not consciousness; one could understand and participate in cultural norms and not have the color associated with that culture, and so on. However, a larger interpretation by Hopkins of Karenga's work, within Matt's scope, is that to the extent

color, culture, and consciousness are understood and practiced, Black men have a greater opportunity to succeed.

Additionally, navigating the world of workplace-related activities, including unemployment, for the African American participants happened “while Black.” The quotations signify the distinctions made when seemingly normal activities (e.g., driving a car, a child playing in the park, seeking help after a car injury, going to the store) become life-ending events specifically for Black and Brown persons (Anderson, 2016, p. 158). When one lives in a society where one is constantly reminded of a different and lower status because of being Black or Brown, vestiges of color-based thinking permeate every breathing moment. All of the Black participants were college graduates, two of five with graduate degrees. Their personally lived experiences had offered them the opportunity to understand and adapt to various forms of institutional racism, bigotry, and prejudice. To comprehend racialized thinking means to recognize how institutionalized racism adversely impacts *both* people of color and those who see Whiteness as a norm that must be protected (Metzl, 2019, p. 271).

In contrast, none of the 10 White participants mentioned being “White” as an element in their job loss event. It could be that, given the paucity of Black professionals, a perspective based on “being White” is the norm or standard at the workplace—and in the larger society. A 2019 study found that Black people represented approximately 8% of Black professionals and just over 3% of executive and senior-level officials and managers (Center for Talent Innovation, 2019, p. 2). Racial identity was not avoided

during the interviews; it appeared and was discussed as the participants deemed necessary. Citing Robin DiAngelo (2018), a White antiracist thinker and activist, “As I move through my daily life, my race is unremarkable” (p. 52). What is unremarkable for some is glaring for others.

Participant subgroup: Length of unemployment. A second category evolving from the parsing of interview data was length of unemployment. Seven (46%) participants were unemployed for periods of 3 to 5 months; 8 (54%) of the 15 participants had unemployment periods lasting 6 months or more. One participant, Jim, an outlier of the greater-than-6-months subgroup, was unemployed for 84 months.

Length of unemployment became a distinctive participant grouping because of its diverse mix of the following criteria:

- Age range: 35-58;
- Gender: 7 males, 1 female (the only female of all participants);
- Race: 3 Blacks, 5 Whites; and
- Length of Unemployment: 2 (6 months), 2 (7-8 months), 2 (12 months), 2 (24+ months).

Moreover, prolonged lengths of unemployment appeared to offer participants additional adversity as a source of learning. For example, Phil, who experienced role elimination from his previous employer, described how 12 months of unemployment became challenging:

As time wore on and that nest egg started dwindling, there was definitely a, “What are we going to do now?” I have two teenage daughters. We did include them in the conversation of this is what happened. We’re going to have to make some cutbacks on some things, but we’re still going to have the house. We’re still going to be able to eat tomorrow.... That sort of thing. (Phil)

Analysis of Finding #1—Participant Group Variation: Job Dismissal

The first major finding was that all participants, as evidenced by discussions of their job dismissal, experienced manifestations of fear. Recollections of fear from job dismissal were the same, regardless of race or length of unemployment. Only with the mentioning of race when discussing job dismissal was there a difference between the subgroups; 60% of the Black participants mentioned race when discussing their job loss event, while none of the White participants mentioned race.

Table 5.2 captures the responses to two questions participants were asked: (a) How would you rank the handling of your actual job dismissal? and (b) How would you rank your level of fear upon being told that you have lost your job? Additionally, participants were then asked to discuss their responses. Twelve of the 15 (80%) participants described their job dismissal as either bad or very bad. Three of the 15 (20%) participants, two White and one Black, characterized their job loss event as “neutral.”

Table 5.2

Analysis of Finding #1—Participant Group Variation: Recollection of Job Dismissal

Analysis of Finding #1 Participant Group Variation: Recollection of Job Dismissal				
Characteristic	Race		Length of Unemployment	
	Black Participants (5) %	White Participants (10) %	Participants Unemployed 3-5 months (7) %	Participants Unemployed more than 5 months (8) %
Characterization of the job loss event 1=neutral; 3=bad; 5=very bad				
5	60	60	57	63
3	20	20	14	25
1	20	20	29	12
Predominant fear 1=neutral; 3=high; 5=very high				
5	60	50	57	50
3	40	50	43	50
1	none	none	none	none
Mentioning of race in perception of job dismissal				
	60	none	14	12

Analysis of Finding #1—Subgroup variation by race. Michelle, a White, single, female grandparent with three generations living at home, was terrified as no advance notice was given and only a minimal amount of severance was offered:

How am I going to pay my bills, live, survive? How's my daughter, how's my grandson going to make it? I was very lucky that my oldest daughter had just become a nurse who makes very good money, and I knew I would get unemployment, but I didn't know for how long, all that. I knew I needed a job. And I didn't want to have to take any money from my daughter if I didn't have to. (Michelle)

Both Tony (White male) and Steve (White male) rated their job loss event as “neutral.” Tony mentioned that, having come to his firm with a background in HR, he had an understanding of certain behaviors that a respected HR department should demonstrate. More importantly, during his 4 years of employment as an HR manager with his midsized firm, Tony had the dual benefit of not only understanding and expecting specific behaviors related to HR, but being able to institute policies and structure to reflect those beliefs. For Tony, the expectations of what a job dismissal should look like at his firm were both familiar and largely met:

I was an HR manager then and am one now, so I know how it feels to let folks go. It’s never easy.... In this particular case, the problem was that my wife had been laid off two months before, and with only three months’ severance, the overlap in layoffs made it tough for us...especially with two kids. Even knowing upfront and being able to plan helped only to a point. Her parents helped us out a bit with the kids, and fortunately I got a job in three months, but at less pay. But the actual letting go wasn’t too painful; I knew what to expect. (Tony)

Seemingly ingrained in Tony’s expectations were contextual dimensions of his workplace relationships. How an employee’s values align with a firm’s culture cannot be separated from the impact of a job dismissal. Moreover, while losing a job is still fearful because of its financial impingement, the actual dismissal can be made less traumatic if certain expectations of the dismissal by the employee are met or if the employee feels psychologically safe (Edmondson, 2008, p. 60).

Steve worked with his previous employer as a project supervisor for 7 years. During that time, he formed important relationships and wanted to stay after his company merged:

They actually handled the layoff well, except for the severance. I had expected more, but they countered with an argument about bonuses they had given us, which were good. My boss got choked up.... He's a good man...it wasn't his fault. It hurts walking out of that door, knowing that a steady check won't be there.... Tuition payments and a child with special needs...things got tight after two months. (Steve)

One Black participant, while fearful of the future financial challenges awaiting him and his family, rated his job dismissal experience as neutral. Alan, a Senior Marketing Manager, was actually “relieved” to be dismissed as the workplace environment had become increasingly anxious, stressful, and generally unpleasant. In this particular case at a Fortune 500 company, it became commonplace for department meetings to be held where employees were asked to return to work, wondering how much longer their established patterns of livelihood would remain and how their families might be affected:

I would put it like this. They could make it uncomfortable. I could become so uncomfortable in my job that it would be as if I wasn't qualified for my job anymore. It's like everybody kind of sensed and knew. It was like during your evaluation, you almost had to reapply for your job almost every year, in light of the fact that they were looking at things to make the next round of changes. It was an ongoing thing. It seemed as though something was already always going on. (Alan)

The cumulative stress from not knowing if he would be employed became insurmountable—hence his relief at being let go. Alan had been with his Fortune 500 firm for over 20 years, shortly after graduating from college.

Self-awareness of racial identity shaped the job dismissal experience for three of the five Black participants. That said, Ron's experience as a salesperson offers an example of how skin color was a huge factor in his onboarding, off-boarding, and period

in between. As the only person of color in his office, Ron felt he was hired to present a veneer of diversity:

My situation was different. Here I am, new, and I'm Black. And all the people I'm trying to sell to are White. And they were nice and polite and everything, but a lot of times I could tell as soon as I sat down they weren't buying anything! At times I thought I was almost there, but couldn't get that sale by the deadline. And my boss was true to his word. He was like, "I'm sorry, we got to let you go." ... And I think he realized that I was in the wrong market in that division where we were, trying to sell to conservative White business folks in middle Pennsylvania. (Ron)

When consistent attempts to generate sales to exclusively White clientele were unsuccessful, Ron was let go. What is interesting is that while Ron's manager said he "understood" the problem Ron was having, assigning him to another area was not possible; Ron would have to be dismissed. Armour's (1997) work on Negrophobia illustrated the central fallacy with equating "understanding a problem" and "accepting a problem." Understanding that Ron's clientele would be reluctant to buy from him because of deeply pervasive racial bias does not mean that those behaviors are acceptable—unless they really are.

Ron's self-awareness, in concert with other favorable factors such as education and supportive family and friends, enabled him to move beyond his job loss event as other participants did. In addition, he cited his job experience as a salesperson as being instrumental in shaping his learning of being Black in America: "It never goes away, so you must get stronger somehow." Ron's perspective and understanding were voiced in a similar fashion by two other Black participants, Matt and Bruce.

Matt recalled how his assigned territory as a recruiter was misaligned with his home base and the area best suited to Matt's demographic:

I kind of had an idea that they were going to let me go. I'd been bounced around by them two times prior to that. I left California and was moved to Florida. I kept asking why I was recruiting in an area that I was so far away from, so far removed from, and they had areas here in Pennsylvania that I wasn't recruiting for, where the potential recruits were a better fit for me. Of course, they wouldn't admit to it, but my gut tells me that race was a factor. Why move me around if I am doing the job well? (Matt)

Bruce's forced resignation was from a Black-owned and Black-managed firm. His departure was due to a conflict of personalities. The backdrop of same race in four dimensions—ownership, management, employee, and clientele—offers an uncommon context. Yet, even this setting does not exist in a vacuum; an externally racialized world pervades all Black confines. In fact, a seeming preponderance of "Blackness" might reinforce race-related dynamics. As Bruce cited:

Although I was pissed, I understand why I had to leave. But given all that I put into that role and the contributions I made, I just would not do that to a Brother that you considered to be like family. I expect people that have my back to do better. (Bruce)

Analysis of Finding #1—Subgroup variation by length of unemployment.

Participants who were unemployed for 6 months or more characterized their job dismissal as either bad or very bad at a higher percentage than those who were unemployed for less than 6 months (88% versus 71%). The subgroup's lower percentage was due to Steve's and Tony's views that their dismissal was either "not too painful" (Tony, unemployed 3 months) or "handled well" (Steve, unemployed 4 months). On its surface, that assumption might lend itself to suspecting that as their level of negative

emotion at job dismissal was less than the majority of participants, perhaps they were able to transition more quickly. Recalling Tony’s comments—“I was an HR manager then and am one now, so I know how it feels to let folks go. It’s never easy....”—provides some evidence of his demeanor and ability to handle certain crises. It also reflects empathy.

Another potential factor that influenced how participants characterized their job dismissal could be related to the industry in which participants were employed. Tony, as an HR manager, and Steve, as a project supervisor, were employed in disciplines that are known to be somewhat transferrable across industries. Relevant participant occupational data, based on length of unemployment, is shown in Table 5.2a.

Table 5.2a

Occupation versus Length of Unemployment

Occupation versus Length of Unemployment		
Occupation	Length of Unemployment	
	3-5 months (7)	More than 5 months (8)
Procurement	✓✓	
Human Resources	✓✓	
Project Management	✓	✓✓
Accounting	✓	✓✓✓
Sr. Mgmt. Coordinator	✓	
Financial Analyst		✓
Stock Clerk		✓
Nurse Technician		✓
<i>Note: 13 of 15 participants were reemployed in a new industry</i>		

No material difference existed between either participant subgroup when considering the length of unemployment or the mention of race during discussion of job dismissal.

**Analysis of Finding #2—Participant Group Variation:
Actions Taken During Unemployment**

The second major finding was that all participants used their intervening period of unemployment in a constructive, action-based manner. Regardless of race or length of unemployment, job dismissal became secondary to practical, ongoing concerns of family welfare and obtaining employment, especially for participants with children. Even for participants without children, financial constraints, social pressures, and feelings of self-worth were sufficient motivators for seeking new employment.

Analysis of Finding #2—Subgroup variation by race. In an effort to discover how productive time was used during unemployment, participants were asked to complete a grid indicating actions they took, along with sources of support during unemployment. Their responses were compiled onto a spreadsheet and are summarized in Table 5.3. The percentages are of the total subgroup, i.e., *“Collectively, the Black participants indicated using 14% of their productive time pursuing education as a means for improving their job prospects.”* With a total of only five Black members, activities by each member had a significant impact on the percentage indicated for any specific action.

Table 5.3

Analysis of Finding #2—Participant Group Variation: Actions Taken During Unemployment

Analysis of Finding #2 Participant Group Variation: Actions taken During Unemployment				
Characteristic	Race		Length of Unemployment	
	Black Participants (5) %	White Participants (10) %	Participants Unemployed 3-5 months (7) %	Participants Unemployed more than 5 months (8) %
Primary actions taken:				
Budgeting	29	23	36	13
Part-time work	14	32	21	33
Recruiter	14	14	7	20
Friends	none	5	7	none
Downsizing	14	none	none	7
Rehabilitation	14	none	none	7
Education	14	5	none	13
Networking	none	23	29	7
Sources of support during unemployment:				
Colleagues; peers	none	13	17	none
Family	40	47	33	54
Self-reflection	30	7	25	8
Friends	30	27	17	38
Vendors	none	7	8	none
Mentioning of race as a factor during unemployment				
	80	none	28	25

While the White participants indicated using 23% of their productive time networking to improve their job prospects, the Black participants indicated none. A lack of networking, when viewed in tandem with no listed support from colleagues during unemployment, appears logical, given the changes in occupation for the Black participants. Bruce, Ron, and Matt left private firms to work for the federal government and local city government. In all three cases, information about the availability of their new occupations was obtained through friends from college, who were also Black. On

the other hand, Alan (unemployed for 24 months) went through a divorce, moved, and ultimately left middle management at a Fortune 500 company to become a stock clerk. Lastly, Jim, after enduring a series of protracted personal traumas, graduate-level education, and a personal reinvention over 84 months, became a nurse technician—an opportunity he said “appeared to me while waiting at the subway station.” None of the Black participants’ new job endeavors were facilitated through professional networking or with former colleagues.

Periods of self-reflection loomed large for Jim as he overcame addiction, divorce, and his father’s passing. Alan withdrew from the corporate world, divorced his wife, and moved alone into a small apartment:

My wife and I divorced during my layoff; fortunately, my kids are grown. So I had to downsize a bit, but the adjustment to my lifestyle works for me. I am happier now with the reduced responsibility on my job and with less stress at home. (Alan)

Self-reflection was noted as a high source (30%) of support for the Black participants, versus 7% for the White participants. Overall, responses from the White participants reflected a broader mix of sources for support during unemployment. For example, Steve, a White participant, cited contacting vendors for more favorable terms to improve his finances:

My broker was able to change the payment frequency of insurance premiums from monthly to semiannually. And it just so happened that as we were in the final stage of refinancing, I quickly got the LC (Line of Credit) on the house increased. It wasn’t much, but...just in case. (Steve)

For the White participants, part-time work favored those with backgrounds in Human Resources, Accounting, and Project Management. In Phil's case, his wife and teenage daughters secured part-time jobs to bolster family finances. Phil spoke to the iterative nature of surviving and thriving during his period of unemployment, casting it as a progression. Survival is the initial objective—paying the mortgage, procuring sufficient food, chunking time in weekly allotments. As those fears and anxieties were lessened, his focus shifted to moving forward, professionally and as a family unit. Doing so required what he termed “hard conversations” with his spouse and children. Those conversations led to discussions where his children, who obtained part-time employment to contribute, now had more of a voice in matters. Phil felt that his family grew closer and became more grounded. Practical decisions and the utility of money were easier to make and comprehend. As Phil said:

But there was a time period when I jokingly said to this networking group that “This week I went from the only person employed in my house to the only person **not** employed in my house,” because both my girls got jobs too.... So there was that. I reached out to previous people that I had worked with. I immediately started networking and going to a half work transition support group that met every Monday morning.... Reached out to the parents more from afar, just to let them know here's what's going on. If we need something, we'll ask but don't overreact to this, kind of thing. And really just kind of reached out to very close friends. (Phil)

Michelle, with an adult daughter and granddaughter living at home, utilized networking, part-time work, and education as tools for reinvention. In addition to pursuing job leads relentlessly, she also used her 12 months of unemployment to address an (eventually) successful struggle with depression. In the following quotation,

Michelle reiterated the significance of her family as a source of emotional support and a motivation to be reemployed:

So every morning I was up on the computer, redoing my resume, sending it out, not hearing back. And I found out that they were interested in something at that time that I didn't have any experience in...PowerPoint. My sister was familiar with it, and she taught it to me just in case the next interview I went on I could say, "Yes, I know that." ... So during that period, I tried to reinvent myself with new skills.

I have depression. Since I was about thirty, I was diagnosed with it. I believe I had it since I was about twenty-one and didn't know that's what it was. And mine is stress-related. And the more stress I'm under, the harder it is for me. So I just had to find the will power to work through it because it wasn't just for me, it was for my children.... (Michelle)

During our conversations about either actions taken or sources of support during employment, Alan was the only Black participant who, along with all of the White participants, did not mention race in some capacity.

Analysis of Finding #2—Subgroup variation by length of unemployment. While budgeting, part-time work, and networking accounted for 86% of the time spent for those unemployed for 5 months or less, they amounted to 53% for those unemployed for more than 5 months. Ben (unemployed 3 months) quoted several actions he took to become reemployed:

You got to talk to your spouse, figure out how you want to message that to your kids, so you don't upset them. And then figure out your plan of action moving forward. I planned out a plan of attack, how I wanted to utilize my time and my energy to finding a new role. So you have to be organized, and you have to have short-term goals. And you have to be persistent. I had worked there a long time and you've built up a lot of friendships and work relationships and you want to make sure that you keep those.... (Ben)

Working part-time not only added much needed income; in some cases, part-time work offered participants a vehicle for keeping busy and maintaining a semblance of balance. In Bill's case (unemployed 3 months), not working brought back memories of family dysfunction. Fear was Bill's motivation for becoming reemployed:

Fear kept me going. I have three kids. Somebody had to do something. I was trying to find a job and trying to get into HR, and I just had to do something. I cut lawns. I unloaded trucks. I substitute taught. I've been kicked in the teeth enough times in my life, where I just kick it into gear. This is where it comes from. I came from a dysfunctional home—fighting and screaming and all that stuff.... (Bill)

The subgroup of participants with a shorter period of unemployment appeared to cast a wider net of support during their transition, denoting five sources of support versus three for the longer-term unemployed. The data suggested that short-term unemployed participants were expansively more externally focused in securing their next jobs. Seeking job leads from colleagues is a social endeavor; self-reflection and soliciting input from family members tend to be internal pursuits. John (unemployed 7 months) spoke on how the pain from his job dismissal lingered; support from his family was significant in getting him through the unemployment phase:

Even though it was in the back of my mind and should not have been a total shock, being asked to leave, and hoping you'd be able to pick up quickly, is stressful. I felt like a part of me died. I mean, I got over it, but still...at the time, it's painful. I really believe it was my family that helped me get through it. (John)

For the longer-term unemployed (more than 5 months), family and friends as sources of support were referred to at a significantly higher level (92% versus 50%) than for the short-term unemployed.

The mention of race when discussing job actions taken during unemployment was essentially the same (28% versus 25%) between the two subgroups. The minimal variance was attributed to the fairly even composition of Black participants, where the mention of race did occur, within the short-term unemployed and long-term unemployed subgroups.

Analysis of Finding #3—Participant Group Variation: Perspective on Personal Time

The third major finding was that all participants used their intervening period of unemployment to assess what was vitally important in their life. Conversations with the participants highlighted what could be called a phoenix phase of unemployment—a phase that is characterized by a sense or guiding belief that one is moving or will move up and away from the current state, even in the face of current economic and personal stress. Matt, for example, spoke to his lived experience as a Black man and how that self-identity strengthened him during a crisis. As Matt said:

I always, for situations like this, things that you need to overcome in a broad sense, I look at how I've arrived. Basically, how I am, who I am. What represents me. I'm a college-educated African American male, who pretty much has channel-managed how I've done things and how I've arrived.... So college wasn't easy. It wasn't quick. I put myself through it. Added a lot of pieces to it. Got into the military to help me pay for it. Worked a full-time job. Paid my tuition on my own. So it was strength. There are strength-builders that you can look back and say, "That wasn't easy." ... I could have given up. It took me twelve years to get my degree. I told myself I wasn't leaving until I had my degree. (Matt)

Relatedly, to further understand what was deeply important to participants when considering future employment, i.e., what types of tradeoffs might occur, the researcher used personal time as a proxy for indicating if, as a result of having been

unemployed, participants were more or less likely to stay late in their post-unemployment role, relative to their pre-unemployment role. To illustrate how the racial and length of employment subgroups prioritized work and personal time, the data in Table 5.4 have been recast from Table 4.4 in Chapter IV.

Table 5.4

Analysis of Finding #3—Participant Group Variation: Perspective on Personal Time

Analysis of Finding #3 Participant Group Variation: Perspective on Personal Time				
Characteristic	Race		Length of Unemployment	
	Black Participants (5) %	White Participants (10) %	Participants Unemployed 3-5 months (7) %	Participants Unemployed more than 5 months (8) %
Given a scenario where you must stay late at work, do you stay, or do you go: <i>In pre-job loss role</i>				
Stay	100	70	86	75
Go	None	30	14	25
Given a scenario where you must stay late at work, do you stay, or do you go: <i>In post-job loss role</i>				
Stay	20	60	75	50
Go	80	40	25	50
Was there a change in perspective, pre- versus post-job loss?				
Changed view	80	30	43	50
No change	20	70	57	50
Mentioning of race as a factor in above scenarios or in pre- versus post-job loss perspective	100	none	28	38

Analysis of Finding #3—Subgroup variation by race. Directionally, both the Black (100%) and White (70%) participants agreed that in their previous role(s), should a special need arise, they would have stayed late at work. However, in their new role(s), while the percentage of White participants dropped slightly, from 70% to 60%, the percentage of Black participants who would stay dropped significantly, from 100% to 20%. Alan (Black), for example, stated how his current role affords him the personal time that he preferred:

At this point in my life, my job allows me to live the lifestyle that I want to live. I have a job with responsibility, but it's far below what I'm capable of doing. But that's what I want. And I don't have emails. No one calls me. No one bothers me. I go and I do my job and I come home. That's what I want.... I like the hours. I like the fact that I can leave and don't have to bring any work home. I like the convenience of the proximity of the job to my residence. (Alan)

Bruce's comments captured the tradeoffs he took while considering and selecting his new role and the mention of racial identity as a factor in his changed perspective:

I had a tradeoff in terms of what I want to do. What type of environment did I want to have at home in terms of time and space for me and my children—for my wife and my children—as opposed to trying to attain a higher level on the corporate structure?... And because I'm an African American, I wouldn't be the first one to take time off. I always wanted to show that I was dependable and accountable. And I think you do that sometimes because you feel pressured that if you don't do that, they're going to think you're slacking. So that pressure can have a spillover into your family life. (Bruce)

Ben (White) explained how the decision to “stay at work or go home” is situational and must be looked at in the larger context of family, personal objectives,

and other factors. The selection process for a new employer takes into account both the short-term and long-term needs of the prospective employee:

There are a lot of things that went into my plan. Economic factors, quality of life, your commute versus your time.... The whole lifestyle. I had to weigh all that. So I had a big chart and I weighed out all those factors and tried to weight them.... So to me, quality of life stuff is equally as important. With kids in college, obviously you need to make money, but you also have to balance the quality of life issues too. And what's the growth potential? What will you learn as an individual? Will you cap out? Is the organization big where you can move within it or what? (Ben)

For the Black participants, in line with the major shift in decision on the stay-or-go scenario was parallel change in perspective. Eighty percent of the Black participants said they had a changed perspective on work as a result of their job dismissal and subsequent period of unemployment. When considering that two of the Black participants, Jim and Alan, were unemployed for 84 and 24 months, respectively, combined with severe lifestyle adjustments (divorce, parental death, rehabilitation), it would stand to reason that previously held notions of the importance of work might also change. Ron was the only Black participant who did not feel that his perspective on work had changed. He alluded to a possible reason for this: His new role was/is a much better fit.

I really knew that sales probably wasn't my thing. I didn't see myself as a salesperson. I always saw myself more as an analytical numbers person. So, in terms of what I do now, auditing and accounting stuff, you've got to be analytical. You got to have analytical skills. So that is one thing.... The other thing is personal skills. I get along well with people and am easy to talk to, and I'm able to talk to people and find out what's wrong. (Ron)

Three White participants—Michelle, Ben, and Phil—cited having a changed perspective on work as a result of their job dismissal and period of unemployment. Ben stated how the initial shock and turmoil from losing a job created learning opportunities for him, vis-à-vis the discovery of adapting strategies:

I mean, things tend to happen for a reason. The initial shock can get you out of your comfort zone, but then it forces you to adapt and grow. And you have to look forward. You can't keep looking back, especially if you have a family. And then figure out your plan of action moving forward. (Ben)

Michelle recalled how her job dismissal and unemployment, in the context of having her daughter and granddaughter living with her, eventually strengthened her. She successfully survived inordinate stress and was able to grow from it, changing how she now viewed her interaction at the workplace:

I am stronger now...definitely stronger.... I think that anything that happens to anyone, that sets them back and then they get through it, they become stronger. I mean, I could have just stopped. Like I said, if it was just me, who knows? I might have.... I'm stronger because this position required more strength for less money. I wish I hadn't gone in like that, but I did, saying a lower amount, but they've been good to me. No, I've gotten stronger. Much stronger.... And it's everything combined that's happened to me in past years, not just the new job and the loss of a job. (Michelle)

All of the Black participants mentioned race when discussing the stay-or-go scenario, either in the pre- or post-job role, or when citing some measure of perspective change on work as a result of their aggregate job dismissal experience. Jim stated his sensitivity to patients—especially patients of color—arriving at the hospital with a preoccupation with pain avoidance. *“I see how that can get out of control, and I tell them that upfront. In the past I would have cared, but I now I know.... I just know.”* Alan

joyfully recalled how as the oldest person on his shift, the younger “*Brothers*” looked up to him for guidance. “*I tell the young guys at work to keep it all in stride: Don’t get caught up in making a lot of money and having misery at home*” (Alan). Previously, that was not the case, and he now feels a sense of obligation he did not feel before. For Bruce, realizing how coworkers and management viewed him was a critical turning point in forming an underlying workplace perspective:

I’m always going to aspire to prove people wrong. But I found out that it had nothing to do with me in terms of my work product and my management style. It has something to do with me feeling that somebody is, in a way, attacking me... So, for example, in my current job, I had to prove myself. I was an unproven commodity, so I had to prove my worth to the new agency that I was working with, and then to the department. And I did a really good job in doing so. The other thing is, because of that racial barrier, you always know that you have to prove yourself more than anybody else to get to the same place. (Bruce)

Analysis of Finding #3—Subgroup variation by length of unemployment. The percentage of short-term unemployed who stated they would stay late remained about the same (86% versus 75%) in both pre- and post-role scenarios. The long-term unemployed reported an increase (from 25% to 50%) in respondents who stated they would not stay late at work in their post-job role scenario. Finally, with respect to perspective change, both subgroups (short- and long-term unemployed) were fairly split (43% versus 50%) in assessing whether a change in their perspective on the value of personal time occurred.

Analysis of Finding #4—Participant Group Variation: Post-Unemployment Assessment

The fourth major finding was that 14 of 15 (93%) participants viewed their job loss episode as instrumental to their subsequent perceived workplace performance. Once reemployed, those participants stated recalling, in one form or another, how their job loss episode led to increased attention to workplace matters and employee relationships.

When asked if their post-job loss perceived workplace performance was the same or better when compared to pre-job loss perceived workplace performance, all participants but one, John, indicated “better.” Although John noted feeling more resilient as a result of his job loss episode, he considered his perceived workplace performance to be essentially the same:

I feel more resilient now. Yeah, in part it was that layoff, what my family went through, but more than that, I feel better because I survived it. I look at my relationships differently. My wife says that I’m holding back—not with her, we’re okay, but on the job. She’s right...but the less I expose myself, the less I can be hurt, right? So far we have not had layoffs, so it’s different from where I was. I don’t want to feel like I felt before. All in all, just like before, I do the work and try not to get overwhelmed. (John)

The researcher left it up to the participants to interpret their pre- and post-perceived workplace performance; no definitions were offered to the participants and no confirmations of workplace performance were sought at their respective places of employment. The intent of this question was to characterize how participants described their change in perspective(s) of perceived workplace performance—if a change occurred—as a result of a job loss episode. Included in characterizations of perspective change are external work/job matters: relationships, personal time versus company

time, and so on. Table 5.5 includes some of the descriptions participants used to describe how they saw themselves as changed from their job loss episode when applied in a new workplace setting. Other than for John, there was no distinctive variance in the subgroup populations of race and length of unemployment.

Table 5.5

Analysis of Finding #4—Participant Group Variation: Post Unemployment Assessment

Analysis of Finding #4 Participant Group Variation: Post-Unemployment Assessment				
Characteristic	Race		Length of Unemployment	
	Black Participants (5) %	White Participants (10) %	Participants Unemployed 3-5 months (7) %	Participants Unemployed more than 5 months (8) %
As a result of your job loss episode, is your current perceived workplace performance:				
the same	none	10	none	12
better	100	90	100	88
How has your job loss episode changed your perceived workplace performance?				
“More flexible” (Ben)		✓	✓	
“I coach more” (Bill)		✓	✓	
“I think about others” (Tony)		✓	✓	
“I'm there for my staff” (Steve)		✓	✓	
“Working smarter” (Bruce)	✓		✓	
“I push myself harder” (Doug)		✓	✓	
“I continue to exceed targets” (Matt)	✓		✓	
“I am calmer” (Fred)		✓		✓
“I know myself better” (Ron)	✓			✓
“I don't get overwhelmed” (John)		✓		✓
“Work twice as hard” (Michelle)		✓		✓
“More politically astute” (Bob)		✓		✓
“Create value for others” (Phil)		✓		✓
“I work stress-free” (Alan)	✓			✓
“Listening to others” (Jim)	✓			✓

Analysis of Finding #5—Participant Group Variation: Self-assessment of Current Workplace Practice

The fifth and final major finding was that all participants saw themselves and their workplace settings differently as a result of their job loss event. The fifth finding was in response to a series of questions: At the workplace, what do you practice since your job loss episode? Are there characteristics about yourself that indicate how, if at all, you are different as a result of your experience with job loss? Inherent in the questions is an underlying aspect of transformation process where participants establish and practice social relationships—including workplace relations—through a new outlook (Nohl, 2015, p. 44). The descriptions listed in Table 5.6 are quotations from participant conversations.

Analysis of Finding #5—Subgroup variation by race. Only one Black participant, Bruce, mentioned race when discussing how he saw himself as changed given his job loss experience, and how his increased self-awareness and, to an extent, awareness of others impacted his behavior at the workplace:

I hit the ground running, and I don't require management or things of that sort. I'm a visionary, and I bring those skill sets to the table. And a lot of times it somewhat overwhelms people—particularly since I'm an African American male, and a dark-skinned African American male. I've learned to temper that a little bit. I'm more aware of how others are affected...the significance of race is that you become a threat. And when working in an environment where White men wholly are at the top of the economic chain and the command structure, they get intimidated if they see somebody up and rising that they think may be more intelligent than they are. And for some reason, because of my size and my complexion, I think that doesn't work for me. And it's not just me, other African Americans that I work with kind of fall in the same lane. (Bruce)

Table 5.6

Analysis of Finding #5—Participant Group Variation: Self-assessment of Current Workplace Practice

Analysis of Finding #5 Participant Group Variation: Self-Assessment of Current Workplace Practice				
Characteristic	Race		Length of Unemployment	
	Black Participants (5) %	White Participants (10) %	Participants Unemployed 3-5 months (7) %	Participants Unemployed more than 5 months (8) %
At the workplace, what do you practice differently since your job loss episode?				
“Transparency” (Ben)		✓	✓	
“Being dispassionate” (Bill)		✓	✓	
“Fitting in” (Tony)		✓	✓	
“Listening to both sides” (Steve)		✓	✓	
“Self-Awareness” (Bruce)	✓		✓	
“Looking for opportunity” (Doug)		✓	✓	
“Perseverance” (Matt)	✓		✓	
“Self-control” (Fred)		✓		✓
“Negotiation; empathy” (Ron)	✓			✓
“Resilience” (John)		✓		✓
“Showing confidence” (Michelle)		✓		✓
“Determination” (Bob)		✓		✓
“Humility” (Phil)		✓		✓
“Responsibility” (Alan)	✓			✓
“Listening” (Jim)	✓			✓
Mentioning of race as a factor	20	none	14	none

Matt cited perseverance as a common denominator for his ability to succeed:

Well, one thing I'm reminded of is that I know I have worth. I've gone through college. That wasn't easy, in and of itself.... You have to persevere. Life isn't going to always give you good things. It's all about balance. So when you're handed that little chunk that isn't good, you have to find...you have to dig into your character and look back and really see all of the things that didn't happen the way that you wanted, and find strength in recognizing that you persevered. You really have to dig into your own mindset and know that you can persevere. And use that talent, that structure that you used before, to get you over and into a better place. (Matt)

Jim (unemployed 84 months) considered himself transformed as a result of the collective experiences over that 7-year period. The practice of truly listening—hearing and feeling what others have to say to you—is understandable, given his occupation as a nurse; when placed within the context of Jim's personal struggles and requisite introspection, this offers insight into what Jim means as being transformed:

I am much better at being able to deal with difficult, egotistical people. But also...well, if your eyes are open.... Sometimes if your ears are open and your mouth is shut, you learn things from people. People have deep things to tell.... The patients here sometimes are a wealth of experience and knowledge, or have a view on something that you've never heard. And I'm all about them telling me what I don't already know, whether it's in a book or in a person. I can have a long, deep conversation with someone who I don't even know or who I do know.... It's been transformative personally. (Jim)

A synthesis and interpretation of the findings, using three analytic categories to combine literature with the aforementioned five discoveries, follow.

Synthesis and Interpretation of the Findings

Development of Analytic Categories

Upon a deeper review of the findings, three major themes emerged as analytic categories: (a) the job dismissal event; (b) actions during unemployment: perspective change; and (c) application of job loss episode when reemployed. Analytic categories are aligned with this study's research questions and used to illuminate emergent themes and patterns from the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, loc. 5102). Analytic categories are necessary to support an understanding of how individuals who experience an involuntary, financially adverse job loss episode are able to learn from it, such that subsequent perceived workplace performance is impacted.

Analytic Category #1: The Job Dismissal Event

Analytic Category 1: "The job dismissal event" addresses Finding #1: the organizationally directed, yet personally received nature of job dismissal. Finding #1 also signifies the nondetermining start of a transformation process, when "novelty, neither anticipated nor planned, breaks into life" (Nohl, 2015, p. 39).

An overriding finding in this study revealed that an involuntary, financially adverse job loss episode (job dismissal + unemployment + acceptance of new employment), while potentially short-term (3 months for Ben, Bill, and Tony), was nevertheless lasting, indelible, and tangible to both the person dismissed and those

connected to the dismissed employee (Clark et al., 2001; Clark et al., 2008; Couch et al., 2013). In this respect, Finding #1 captures both the whole person significance of the job loss event and places that event in a socially constructed context (Jarvis & Hirji, 2006, p. 93).

The handling of a job dismissal can have a marked influence on a recently dismissed employee's behavior during subsequent unemployment as well as on future perceived workplace performance. Additionally, as none of the participants in this study lived alone, other cohabitants and, indirectly, extended others were also affected. For example, Phil cited how his joblessness impacted both his daughters and wife:

They took it very well. They were surprised, but they were very understanding. And I think their initial reaction was not what does this mean to mom and dad, but what does this mean to me? And are we going to have to move? Are we going to have to stop doing the things that we normally do? But there was very much a conversation of, but how can we help? Are there things we can do? Can we tell other people? What can we say to other people? (Phil)

The thought of having insufficient financial resources has the potential to create a primal response triggered by fear (Rhudy & Meagher, 2003, p. 244). The arousing state triggered by an environmental threat that a sudden loss of income portends can cause a fight/flight response (Akhtar, 2014, p. 3). Michelle, a single grandparent with three generations living at home, was terrified as no advance notice was given and only a minimal amount of severance was offered.

Relatedly, research has indicated that the financial stress for a single parent can be devastating. It costs more than \$88,000 for a suburban family of four to live (Lubrano, 2020, p. 1). According to the Self-Sufficiency Standard report issued by the University of Washington-Seattle, 79% of Pennsylvania households whose incomes fall below the Self-Sufficiency Standard have at least one person working.

Remembering the job loss event—recalling the content and context of its occurrence—signifies an embedding of that event. For all participants, the loss of employment was traumatic due to the cascading effect of financial duress. The bitterness expressed by Alan, and the pronounced inner turmoil experienced by Jim, were extreme, relative to the sample population. However, all participants, given the vividness of recalling their being let go, displayed what Fenwick (2003) described as a direct embodied experience: “an immediate encounter with the here-and-now, planned, involving us physically, emotionally, sensually, mentally, and perhaps spiritually” (p. 13).

Being in a position to implement policies that are seen as beneficial to others (Tony), and then having those known policies applied to oneself, can help mitigate fear with job dismissal. For Tony, the expectations of what a job dismissal should look like at his firm were both familiar and largely met. Fear from an external action is lessened when those external actions are already known and not viewed as threats (Akhtar, 2014, loc. 154). Moreover, while losing a job is still a fearful experience because of its financial

impingement, the actual dismissal can be made less traumatic if certain expectations of the dismissal by the employee are met and if the employee feels psychologically safe (Edmondson, 2008, p. 60).

Central to a contextual view of fear is the distinct, tangible, and unique personally lived experience reflected in the job loss events that are illustrated in this study. One must go through the circumstances depicted in the participants' stories to *fully* know the intimacy of an unintentional, financially adverse job loss. While compiling data and reviewing transcripts from the interviews, the researcher found a timely quote from Charles Blow (2017), which became firmly implanted within the context of these findings: "A personally lived experience is a far cry from a passively learned experience" (p. 1). Once one has gone through a deeply riveting experience, the memories and sources for learning never leave.

While layoffs and terminations are not uncommon at organizations, seeing that only two participants, Tony and Steve, characterized their job loss event as either handled well or not too painful offers evidence of how employees can be treated as commodities (Byrne, 2001, pp. 46-49). Table 5.7 offers additional evidence of participant recollections of the job dismissal event.

Table 5.7

Analytic Category #1: The Job Dismissal Event

Name, (Race), Event Characterization	Evidence
Bruce (B) very bad	Oh, the day that I was let go I was furious. I had put a lot of investment in order to make the whole situation come to fruition (for that individual). And I just felt that I just got blown away with no regard, and no information was forthcoming.... I had to actually relocate to another state to find employment, which was another unknown. I left my comfort base.... At that juncture I was paying child support for two children. I had a home because I had just recently got divorced. So I had that financial obligation hanging on my head. My ex-wife had vacated the premises.
Matt (B) very bad	I received an email from my director. And it basically said that my services would no longer be needed. I was very, very anxious to a large sense. I was angry as well too because I couldn't understand why. Personally, I think that if I had been hired in a region that was accessible to me, I would have had a far better outcome.... You start thinking of whether or not you need to relocate; you start questioning your strategy, basically, which can put you in a tailspin.
Ron (B) bad	I was pissed, but it wasn't like I didn't know what to expect because he had given me a deadline.... I had shame and just frustration. I felt like I was letting my family down. So I was concerned about that. They didn't know for like two months because I was getting up, getting dressed like I was going to work. And then I'd go to the library and research jobs or.... But I finally had to let them know because I couldn't keep making the payments on my car.... A big fear was being able to make the car payments and insurance and all that.
Alan (B) neutral	That was my thought. I'm like: Just get out of this bubble. People are scared. They've just been here for too long.... The uncertainty and the constant, every-year review, apply for your jobs.... The stress of where am I going to be? Look, I don't want to worry about this. And really, I don't need this anymore. I'm not comfortable, I don't like it. It's like it was becoming more stressful.
Jim (B) very bad	The new Boss said, " <i>I don't think that this is going to work out.</i> " It's his call who he wants on his team. He made it. I didn't see it.... I didn't see it coming.

Name, (Race), Event Characterization	Evidence
Ben (W) very bad	It was a surprise.... The way it was made known was in a meeting, called us into a meeting and basically just told us, we're reorganizing and your job is going away. And the feelings were shock and disbelief, and generally unappreciated for the value that you brought to the organization. I'd been there thirteen years and saved them millions. Then you go through all the basic stages of grief, I guess. You deal with it and move on. I wanted it to really be done. I was angry as well too.
Bill (W) very bad	I remember like it was yesterday.... "Bill, we're going to have to let you go. We are going to have to terminate you. And I asked them in the meeting, "Any severance?" This is right before Christmas. "No." "Oh, no?! Okay." No severance at all. Going home to try to tell your wife that! I was shocked. I didn't expect it coming. So they left and about fifteen-twenty minutes later, the HR director from Canada came back and said, "Just leave your phone and keys on the desk."
Tony (W) neutral	I know how it feels to let folks go. It's never easy.... In this particular case, the problem was that my wife had been laid off two months before, and with only three months' severance, the overlap in layoffs made it tough for us.... Especially with two kids. Even knowing upfront and being able to plan helped only to a point. Her parents helped us out a bit with the kids, and fortunately I got a job in three months, but at less pay. But the actual letting go wasn't too painful; I knew what to expect.
Steve (W) neutral	They actually handled the layoff well, except for the severance. I had expected more, but they countered with an argument about bonuses they had given us, which were good. My boss got choked up...he's a good man...it wasn't his fault. It hurts walking out of that door, knowing that a steady check won't be there.... Tuition payments, and a child with special needs.... Things got tight after two months.
Doug (W) bad	It should have been better. There were times when I felt like a wounded animal before they let me go...after seeing some of my co-workers forced out; it changes how you think about the company. I mean, it's normally not the employees' fault—they just have to live with decisions others make. You do your part, hoping it won't be you, but in a way, it's better leaving.
Fred (W) very bad	The owner had given me tremendous responsibility and opportunity. I recognized it was difficult for him as well—he had pride—and his paramount view was not to have his ego bruised. I was also angry with myself for not demonstrating self-control.

Name, (Race), Event Characterization	Evidence
John (W) bad	We were going through a reorg...many heads were rolling. I had hoped to be kept for a few more months, but it didn't turn out that way. Even though it was in the back of my mind and should not have been a total shock, being asked to leave, and hoping you'd be able to pick up quickly, is stressful. I felt like a part of me died. I mean, I got over it, but still...at the time, it's painful.
Michelle (W) very bad	There was no warning. Other people being let go at the same time. I was crying. I said, "I have a family. I have a new grandson." I just was like, "Why me, though?" I was in a panic.
Bob (W) very bad	I remember telling my wife, when this guy arrived, that they were probably going to let me go. It happened right after I had finished completing a major project. Got called into a meeting room, and with the HR manager present, he said, "Bob, we are going in a different direction." The words cut like a knife, not so much because I was being let go, but because he really did not seem to care about all of my work up to that point. It was all about him and his need for power. What a prick.... It still gets to me.
Phil (W) very bad	I remember it. It's very vivid. There was absolutely a sense of, what do I do now, where do I go, and what's this going to mean to me and to my family? It was a surprise, a sudden, "We don't have a role for you here going forward, so today is your last day. HR will help you out."

Summary of Analytic Category #1. A sudden, unexpected job loss creates disjuncture, the potential for learning “but only after resolution to the juncture takes place” (Jarvis, 2012, pp. 1-2). For all participants, manifestations of perseverance were central to coming to terms with what Fenwick (2003) described as a critical event. But seemingly, in order to persevere, to overcome the fears and stressors created by the job loss described in this study, a deeper belief in the self must be held—one that views light at the end of the tunnel.

Analytic Category #2: Actions During Unemployment; Perspective Change

Analytic Category #2, “actions during unemployment,” addresses Findings #2 and #3, which focused on the participants’ period of unemployment. How one navigates the turbulent waters of unemployment is contextual and person-specific; every case is different (Oswald & Powdthavee, 2008). Race and length of unemployment are but two considerations. Relationships, wherewithal, and internal fortitude are other influential factors (Boyce et al., 2015).

Analytic Category #2 also illustrates perspective change, as described by Nohl (2015, pp. 35-49), where the process of change that occurs may be incidental and casual in orientation and driven by practical concerns. This is different from a more formal definition of disorientation and reflection, as cited by Mezirow and other scholars of transformative learning (Nohl, 2015, p. 36). Reflection during the unemployment phase might manifest as critical reflection, where critical thought occurs, such that future behavior is altered due to the aggregation of the construction of an experience and the significant lessons learned from that event or experience. Indeed, effective learning follows effective reflection (Criticos, 1993, p. 162).

In analyzing participant conversations, it became clear that the job loss episode was, in fact, a compilation of intertwined stages of perceptual evolution. Reframing the job loss episode as a layer-rich iterative period of reflection, emotion, and action (Jarvis & Hirji, 2006, p. 92) resulted in a deeper visibility of connected events that triggered learning opportunities for the participants.

Actions during unemployment occurred over periods from 3 to 84 months, ranging in scope, intensity, and stress. Periods of acute or major stress in adults can trigger neuropsychiatric disorders, including depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and various addictive behaviors (Hollon, Burgeno, & Phillips, 2015, p. 1405; Sapolsky, 2015, p. 1345). Jim, for example, recalled when things were spiraling downward and his substance abuse increased dramatically. During this period, Jim continued to search for work and realized that previous contacts were not returning calls. Heightened and possibly chronic stress, triggered by rejection, depletion of severance funds, marital discord, and the loss of a parent, added to Jim's despair, making things worse:

I had a little bit of savings, and I was under the impression that the people who I helped would help me.... And then at a certain point the money was gone. It's immediate and prolonged. One, at the time I was married. Two, I got an infant son and the need is immediate, and I'm not participating. But at the same time, I could still find some resources to do things that I shouldn't have been doing. My conscience was beating the shit out of me but it was...at the same time the draw of the addiction was stronger than my conscience. (Jim)

Jim's length of unemployment was 84 months. Major factors in Jim's duration of unemployment were addiction and the passing of his father. Evidence of a close bond between Jim and his father, and the significance of that bond as a resource for Jim to move beyond addiction, were visible during our in-person conversation. It was during this job loss episode that memories of Jim's father played a pivotal role in creating "rich resources for learning" (Knowles, 1980, p. 44). Jim was able to associate prior events with his father to actions Jim needed to take. He tearfully reflected on a life-changing conversation with his father prior to Jim's successful recovery from addiction and then

completing a graduate degree in the nursing field. *“My strength to get through the addiction came from my father. Your parents never leave you. I knew I had a debt to pay”* (Jim).

Relatedly, research has suggested that the limbic system of persons living in poverty is “constantly sending fear and stress messages to the prefrontal cortex, which overloads its ability to solve problems, set goals, and complete tasks in the most efficient ways” (Mathewson, 2017, p. 3). None of the participants in this study lived in poverty; however, 6 of the 15 participants (40%) did have unemployment periods lasting 7 months or more. Additionally, 5 of these 6 participants cited having severe financial hardship, overall stress, and pronounced challenges with their marriages. For Alan and Jim, stress related to job loss was cited as a reason for the separation and dissolution of their marriages. In Michelle’s case, job loss was akin to not being able to make mortgage payments, which meant that her granddaughter and daughter would also become homeless. The thought of not being able to protect her granddaughter was terrifying to Michelle:

It was horrifying because I’m single and I had my one daughter.... My daughter and granddaughter were living with me. I had a mortgage. I needed health care. I didn’t know when I’d find my next job. And that’s just very scary.... I was in shock. I had to sign papers.... Why me? Because I know that I’m a hard worker, a good worker. (Michelle)

It appeared that for Michelle, navigating through this dimension of workplace-related activity—looking for work—held a constant reminder that being employed was not about her; it was for largely for her granddaughter. The determination and

challenges of doing “it” for certain loved ones, along with the resultant emotional weight of feeling responsible for their welfare, offered direct learning opportunities (learning new software, interviewing skills) as well as indirect learning (changes in Michelle’s behavior from observing and communicating with her granddaughter and daughter) (Levy, 2012, p. 3).

During our conversation, Michelle explained how it was not until late in her life that she realized how long she had been in pain from depression. Actions that allowed her to do for others, i.e., her granddaughter—purposeful actions—were a source of strength, resolve, and, to an extent, self-actualization (Levy, 2012, p. 3; Maslow, 1943, pp. 370-396). In adapting to unemployment, Michelle sought counseling and began taking medication. She exclaimed how never losing hope became her way of seeing her life. Practicing self-determination and sacrifice enabled Michelle to discover new ways of thinking. Emotional and financial support from her daughter was helpful; her nuclear family of three was able to navigate stress by being motivated for the welfare of their progeny.

While 87% (13 out of 15) of the participants had children, Michelle’s case (unemployed for 8 months) was distinctive in that she was the only grandparent with both an adult daughter and a granddaughter living at home. Michelle referred to her granddaughter as a source of inspiration and motivation for becoming reemployed. Her path was bounded by love for her grandchild.

For reflective learning to occur and, more deeply, for reflective practice to evolve, as described by Jarvis (1995), there must be the recognized occurrence of a significant event. Fear that is triggered from realizing what job loss portends—for all participants—and certainly for those where the loss of suitable employment was more than 6 months, constitutes far more than a significant event; it creates a major episode.

The occurrence of a job loss event as experienced by the participants in this study appears to have resulted in a changed perspective, thus revealing evidence of learning. In citing the work of Jarvis and Watts (2012) on the connection between the experiences one has and learning from those experiences:

Human learning, then, is more than just transforming the bodily sensations into meaning, it is the process of transforming the whole of our experience through thought, action and emotion and, thereby transforming ourselves as we continue to build perceptions of external reality into our biography. (p. 92)

It is often through the interaction of others that life experiences are created or formed. Again, citing Jarvis and Watts (2012):

No theory of learning can omit the life-world or the wider social world within which we live since learning is a process of transforming the experiences that we have and these always occur at the intersection of the individual and the wider society. Neither can it omit our experience of the natural world. (p. 138)

This aggregation of life events is predicated on our connection with others—a connection that is fluid, a connection that helps to shape our beliefs.

Further to this point of aggregate learning, Merriam et al. (2007) described Learning From Experience (LFE) as a process that involves “connecting adults with what they have learned from current experiences to those in the past as well as to possible

future situations” (p. 162). To reiterate, LFE involves both aggregation and application of life experiences such that learning is realized and thus able to be “referred to” or called up for active duty as situations or potential learning opportunities occur. Specifically for Jim and Michelle, the embodiment of life experiences—even in the form of memories as they were for Jim—served as reference points or guideposts for a sometimes dramatic change in behavior.

Participant conversations from this study reinforced a perspective of fluidity with respect to the fear of the job loss conundrum which, prior to this study, was not overtly expressed when framing the three core conceptual questions of experience, navigation, and impact. Not until digesting and reflecting on the series of participant encounters did the fluidity characterized by the overlapping stages of a job loss episode become discernible. There might appear to be a sequential progression through episodic states of job loss-related fear, but actually an iterative dynamic exists. For example, the potential rejection associated with searching for new employment, interfacing with family, friends, and others, while adjusting to a new and profoundly different awake-time schedule resulted in pivotal shifts in several participants’ states of mind.

For example, Phil offered a tangible example of how fear and survival connected during his period of unemployment:

I would say the fear part was that this job loss is going to have a negative impact on me and my family. I think another piece of fear was, or for me anyway was, wondering when you go to the grocery store if our credit card is going to work. There was definitely a fear during that time period—probably that ten-

month timeframe—of, did I do what I needed to do from a finance perspective moving the accounts around and all that stuff. Did I do enough so that when my wife does say she's going to the store to get [groceries] that her card does work? So she doesn't have that embarrassing situation of "I'm sorry, your card's been declined." Because then from a husband survival mode, I don't want to get that phone call and have that conversation.... So I think that was definitely a fear. (Phil)

Survival is the initial objective—paying the mortgage, procuring sufficient food, chunking time in weekly allotments, dealing with the items that arouse high levels of fear, the type of fear that is tangibly felt (Susteren, 2017). As those fears and anxieties are lessened, Jim's focus shifted to moving forward, professionally and as a family unit. Doing so required what he termed "hard conversations" with his spouse and children. Those conversations led to discussions where his children, who obtained part-time employment to contribute, now had more of a voice in matters. Phil felt that his family grew closer and became more grounded. Practical decisions and the utility of money were easier to make and comprehend. *"Getting back to basics worked for us"* (Phil).

Jim, whose period of unemployment lasted 84 months, offered a salient example of intertwined, episodic change. His pivotal inflection point and moment of clarity were striking. Jim stated that he was compensating for various fears with substances. One day, while at the subway station on the way to a court hearing, he noticed an advertisement from a known, established university for obtaining a nursing degree. For the first time in a very long, Jim realized that the world had changed and he needed to change with it:

Because I knew that I had fucked up. It's nobody's fault but mine of this situation, and I'm not ready to check out on life. There's got to be an answer to this. It's got to work out. And it turned out to be that billboard in the subway station.... And it was...this gets emotional but, before my father died and we had the conversation I was going to name my son after him, I said, "How much I owe you." Because I never had a penny of financial aid at college. My parents wrote checks. And we had a conversation like, "I owe you so much." He said, "No, you don't." He said, "You just have to do for your son what we have done for you." And that's where it came from. Your parents never leave you. So that's how I knew. I had a debt to pay. (Jim)

While Jim's story is certainly an outlier in terms of the length of unemployment (84 months), circumstances during his unemployment (substance abuse, divorce, loss of parent), and an eventual career transition (from a consultant to certified nurse technician after obtaining a second full-time university degree), his situation did exemplify, among other things, adaptive learning with respect to unintentional, financially adverse job loss (Levy, 2012, p. 3). The events Jim faced certainly offered him opportunities to interpret the meaning of those incidents in a way to guide future action that was radically different (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 162).

After the initial shock and digestion of being let go—of experiencing a traumatic event, participants voiced their approach to subsequent circumstances as pragmatic and functional: one of money management and a constant, ceaseless search for new employment. To navigate through this period, one must know the difference, as Phil stated, between "surviving and thriving." Embarking on a journey to achieve reemployment forced some participants to dig more deeply, to have the proverbial conversation in the mirror on the subject of never giving up. Steve mentioned the need to believe in oneself:

I always had to believe in myself. My wife and I have been through a lot with my daughter...but in a way it keeps us together...she's a trooper.... My wife, I mean...but hey, she's human too...things get to her too. Anyway, I figure you can get through things especially when you don't have a choice. I guess having a child with special needs can make others sympathetic to struggles you gotta deal with. We were able to work some payments things out with her doctors, and that helped us a bit. But at the end of the day, I knew I had to believe in me....
(Steve)

One of the revealing differences in how participants emerged from their job loss event centered again on the length of unemployment. Manifestations of hope—as expressed in the comments mentioned earlier by Michelle—were typical, particularly for participants (33%) with unemployment periods greater than or equal to 7 months. It stands to reason that a longer period of unemployment would result in the opportunity for protracted periods of turmoil. Protracted periods of unemployment also allowed for deeper opportunities for self-reflection, asking pertinent questions of what is really important to the participant...and why. It appeared that longer periods of unemployment offered a broader canvas on which to paint, and a wider color spectrum from which to choose. Jarvis (2009), in citing Charles Taylor, spoke to how it is the “significances in our lives” (i.e., desires, aspirations, aversions, and emotions) that make our purpose meaningful (p. 207).

Phil was unemployed for over 10 months. During this period, he went from feeling at the top of his game to periods when he hoped there would be enough in the checking account to pay for groceries, that the credit card would not bounce, that

friends would lend a needed helping hand. He began to learn, in a personally lived manner (Blow, 2019, p. 1), empathy, humility, and wisdom.

Before that period, I was secure. I knew what I was doing. I had that edge—for lack of a better term—and “Here’s what we need to do, everyone else get on board, this is where we’re going.” You get comfortable, and you get lazy, and you get prideful. Well, I got knocked down a couple of rungs. So in all honesty, the ego got a little bit of a kick. When you suddenly have to worry about things at a different level, then, yeah, you start doing a lot more reading, a lot more reflection, a lot more thinking, as opposed to just reacting. And I think with that comes wisdom. Hard times create wisdom. Now it’s more of a reflection of, put myself in the other person’s shoes. What’s in it for them, and how can I understand what they’re looking for and how they tick, so that I can better help myself help them and all of us move forward. (Jim)

Realizing that one has been “knocked down a few rungs” and then seeking ways to overcome the perceived transgression attributed to that fall from grace are akin to interpreting the events that have transpired in one’s life in order to use them as guides for future action (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 132). For several participants (Jim, Alan, Phil, Michelle, Ben, Ed), applying mindful learning to their job dismissal, albeit over a protracted period, allowed for new ways of thinking and doing to occur. Exhibiting an awareness of and openness to new practices (Langer, 1997, pp. 4, 113) are paramount to demonstrating perspective change.

Table 5.8 offers evidence of the actions taken by several participants during unemployment.

Table 5.8

Analytic Category #2: Actions During Unemployment

Analytic Category #2: Actions During Unemployment		
Action	Name, (Race), (Months Out of Work)	Evidence
Volunteer; networking; recruiter; part time work	Bill (W) (3)	“I tell this to people that I’ve coached through this, I’ve done some workshops—you got to compartmentalize that stuff, put it over here. Because if you don’t, you’re going to have a pity party forever and a day and waste all that time. So you use all the money in the 401(k). My wife was working part-time. And people were just giving us things, doctors letting us come, helping us out and.... A friend of my grandparents...put some structure in [me]. He made such an impression in my life.... “I think of him quite often, off and on. It’s just, okay, fine, I guess, I can hear him behind me. You know? But that is what got me through it. I started feeling better about myself. Understanding that I can only control my own feelings. And I got to understand that when you’re getting laid off or downsized, it’s not about you.... You didn’t do anything wrong. Especially now, companies go through these.”
Networking; budgeting	Ben (W) (3)	“So you have to be organized, and you have to have short-term goals. And you have to be persistent Well, naturally you’re somewhat feeling like you’re inadequate or withdrawn. And so you feel people may judge you if they hear about it. So you want to try to just deal with that. But socially, I think it really just comes down to focusing your efforts on things you can control and realizing there are things you can’t control. So you have to focus your effort on moving forward and finding another opportunity.”
Budgeting; part time work;	Matt (B) (5)	“I call it my ‘A’ game. You can’t go shabbily. You definitely have to do everything at its greatest point and at its greatest expectation. So you make sure that your shoes are shined and you have a suit. And you articulate well and you know your subject matter well. You’re able to explain yourself well. That you do all the things that you need to do when you’re interviewing, when you’re selling yourself. You have to be conscientious of not making a mistake, if there is a way to do it.... And you question yourself. And you guarantee that you are a rightful candidate somewhere and that you have the proper tools, the adequate tools to work. And so you just need to get away from it, start back over again, and push.”

Analytic Category #2: Actions During Unemployment		
Action	Name, (Race), (Months Out of Work)	Evidence
Recruiter (job search); consulting	Fred (W) (6)	<p>“My wife was my source of inspiration. We’ve been through so much together, and I would always remember that look of pain....and the tears when I told her about my forced retirement. I vowed to myself not to see that look from her again, and that every day I would keep my chin up and find another job. I did consulting. Actually, it was through the consulting connection that I found a good Recruiter. Sometimes you just don’t have the luxury of anger...thinking about those you really care about can get you through things. In my position I’ve hired and fired, so I know the drill with planning for being let go. But plans always miss out on the details that can trip you up. I just told myself that we would get through this. My brother and I spoke more...he was there for me too. I guess my wife and I are lucky that we don’t have children, but it was still tough. Even though it took me just five months to land another job, it seemed longer than that.”</p>
Recruiter (job search); friends	Ron (B) (6)	<p>“My definition of fear is having apprehension about the unknown. You don’t really know what’s going to happen, you’re not sure what’s going to happen, and you don’t know how you’re going to handle it if it does happen.... I looked at that as, Okay, that’s something that happened. I probably shouldn’t have been in sales anyway. I’m like, hey, I’ve got two college degrees, I got a MBA. Brothers like me will make it. I’m getting another job; it’s just a question of when. So for me it was just a question of when, how long it was going to take. My fiancée and I tightened our belts, and my folks helped out a bit.”</p>
Networking; part-time work	Bob (W) (12)	<p>“This was the first time I been ‘fired’ from a job.... It took months for me to deal with that anger. I worked part-time, and still gained weight...it was tough on my wife and daughter. They said they wanted the old me back. But I knew I couldn’t go back. There’s never going back. It was my older brother, who had gone through his own employment issues, who told me: <i>You are the Captain of your ship. Success is the best revenge.</i>”</p>
Downsizing; divorce	Alan (B) (24)	<p>For a while I worked in real estate, but then the divorce happened and things changed.... Big time. I had this condo, and moved in when the tenant left.</p>

Summary of Analytic Category #2. There is a rich uniqueness to each lived experience. The implication from analyzing Finding #2 within the context of addressing Research Question #2 is this: Navigating the world of workplace-related activities, including unemployment, is contextual and specific to each person.

Aspiring to become reemployed after having been jobless, as experienced by the 15 participants, requires, at a minimum, some measure of perspective change: having a sense of hope, knowing that one will get beyond current circumstances works in tandem with assessing priorities, recognizing that situations can be viewed differently. Perspective does matter.

The manifestations of hope framed by Michelle, Jim, Phil, Alan, and others and their end-state visualizations of how things “will be” could only be realized if they (a) believed it would happen and (b) took steps to make it happen. Determination follows aspiration; it is closely aligned with the application dimension of Transformative Learning. According to Mezirow (2000), “the power to control and determine our actions in the context of our desires and intentions is a definition of will” (pp. 253-281).

Additionally, all participants, regardless of their length of unemployment, expressed some measure of perspective change as a result of being dismissed. Brian, unemployed for 3 months, had been with his previous employer for “13 years and saved them millions.” At the time, he felt “generally unappreciated” for what he brought to the organization. Brian recalled learning from his job loss episode how critically important transparency is. He stated now having a goal of being upfront, honest, and

sensitive with others. His job dismissal and ensuing unemployment made him more empathetic.

For some participants, their 3-5 months of unemployment were difficult but not earth-shattering. For others, especially for those who did not work for 7 months or more, unemployment appeared to be transformational. There is a very strong relationship between unemployment and well-being as well as mental and physical health (Payne, 2020, p. 1).

Analytic Category #3: Application of Learnings From the Job Loss Episode When Reemployed

Analytic Category 3: “Application of learnings from the job loss episode when reemployed” speaks to whether experiences related to the job loss episode are useful sources of learning such that perceived workplace performance is impacted. New employment allowed participants to practice new or modified learnings at workplace environments (Nohl, 2015, p. 44). Arriving at a new environment is but one aspect; practicing new or modified habits, given the experiences connected to recent job dismissal and unemployment, indicates that the participant has changed (Jarvis & Hirji, 2006, p. 7).

Participants reenter the workplace with aggregate experiences, including an unplanned dismissal from the previous employer, a period of unemployment, and lastly, being welcomed (hopefully) into new surroundings. None of these events takes place in a vacuum; the person is changed and learning has occurred (Merriam et al., 2007,

p. 162). To what extent aggregate learning impacts perceived workplace performance is contingent on what organizational setting(s) exist for learning to be applied. What is clear from Findings #4 and #5 is that the participants proactively sought to understand the needs of their co-workers, especially team members and subordinates. An amalgamation of job dismissal and subsequent unemployment resulted in a deeper set of lived experiences (Boud et al., 1993; Jarvis & Hirji, 2006).

Conversations with all participants offered another dimension of coping with, and navigating through, a period of unemployment. The disruptions were indicative of turmoil caused by an unintended loss of job: established and somewhat predictable social patterns; a modicum of external control; sense of contribution, and so on, all of which can carry a tremendous psychological burden (Crabtree, 2014; Clark et al., 2008).

For instance, the inflection in Bob's (unemployed 12 months) voice changed when he recalled a certain period during his unemployment after having been "fired" from a job. He gained weight, was curt with his wife and daughter, and needed months to deal sufficiently with anger. But he knew there was no going back to how things were, only moving forward:

This was the first time I been "fired" from a job.... It took months for me to deal with that anger. I gained weight...it was tough on my wife and daughter. They said they wanted the old me back. But I knew I couldn't go back. There's never going back. It was my older brother, who had gone through his own employment issues, who told me I was "the Captain of my ship. Success is the best revenge." (Bob)

For Bob, and certainly for the 40% of participants who were unemployed for at least 7 months, perspective change was crucial to their becoming reemployed, or at

least getting through unemployment. For Bob, it was learning to become at peace with anger in order to let go of that anger, while expecting less from others and more from him. The in-person conversation with Bob captured the difficulty he had in changing established and learned points of view. Unlearning is a difficult endeavor. According to Greene (1988): “It is actually through the process of effecting transformations that the human self is created and recreated” (p. 94).

Effecting transformations for the aforementioned 40% of participants appeared more substantive than for the remaining 60%. What stands out is how, even though all participants went through varying degrees of hardship while unemployed, they emerged from unemployment with a different view of themselves. Those unemployed longer than 7 months conveyed a more pronounced sense of perspective change. Perspective change for the longer-term unemployed seemed to come from a deeper reserve; their will to overcome was substantive.

Will power is a notable element for those who were unemployed for more than 7 months. Each participant in that group described feeling mentally stronger, having been successful in dealing with the trauma of unintentional job loss. Even Alan, who seemed to vacillate between bitterness and neutral acceptance from having to leave an employment opportunity that served him and his family well financially, appeared to be in a better place, able to move on without anger:

I just work. Performance at my job is just easily achieved, you just do your job and just work hard and do your job and you go home. It's less challenging. It's not technical. I'm a technical person. The skill level is far beneath what I'm used to and capable of. So there's no real challenge there in terms of doing the job.

It's pretty basic. It's what I want and it works for me. My wife and I divorced during my layoff; fortunately my kids are grown. So I had to downsize a bit, but the adjustment to my lifestyle works for me. I am happier now with the reduced responsibility on my job, and with less stress at home, I feel more productive at work. I tell the young guys at work to keep it all in stride: Don't get caught up in making a lot of money and having misery at home. (Alan)

Alan's decision to accept employment where he would be forced to give up substantial material trappings in exchange for peace of mind exhibited self-realization. During our conversation, Alan touted his job loss episode as a learning experience that he still referred to in his current role. Citing an example of his "teachable moment," Alan recalled using the disparity in ages at his current workplace (he is substantially older) to reiterate to the "youngsters" not to get "caught up" in material trappings versus peace of mind. Alan's teachable moment is a prime example of the opportunities he now has to participate in informal learning sessions (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Merriam & Grace, 2011, p. 221). His propensity for offering advice based on his previous workplace experiences is a distinguishing characteristic of which he is proud. Alan indicated that he is fond of having conversations with his coworkers—when asked—and apparently those coworkers respect his life experiences. Alan's current role and station in life seem to fit him well. At last, he is where he wants to be.

Alan's actions offer an embodiment of the connection between event, perspective, and action, where trauma and hardship from the job loss event became a source of improved workplace performance as Alan perceived it. According to Mezirow (2000), "Freedom involves not just the will and insight to change but also the power to act to attain one's purpose" (p. 24). While the need to change perspective involves

determination, determination requires a commitment to practice. There is a physical dimension to practice. Shooting free-throws in basketball is a perfect example of practice where immediate feedback and active reflection occur, albeit compressed in terms of time, contextually simple in scope, and without any socially interactive component. In a scenario of shooting basketballs from the foul line, a shooter who seeks to practice *making* shots instead of just *taking* shots might ask:

- Is the shot going in?
- Do I know why?
- What must I change?
- Am I making the change?
- How is my shot after making the change?

An important and relevant distinction between shooting basketballs and perceived workplace performance is the social value to be derived. Learning, for the participants in this study, is best exemplified when exhibited so that some measure of value, either organizationally or personally to the welfare of coworkers, is achieved. Moreover, for that value to be transferred, the participants must be aware of what is valuable and be willing to assist in obtaining, offering, or sharing that value.

For several participants, memories of the job loss episode appeared to take on a different meaning once they became substantially reemployed. New ways of contending with workplace events transpired. Different situations call for subtle differences in what we bring to them (Langer, 1997, p. 113). Michelle's post-newly reemployed workplace

habit of asking others if she could assist them offered another example of how practice manifests. First, Michelle recognized the need to surpass what she considered to be previously acceptable levels of workplace performance. Then, every evening before leaving, she would ask each person to whom she reported if there was anything else they needed. Although that was not part of her job description, Michelle felt that by establishing herself as someone who would take on additional responsibility, and by creating a direct rapport with those to whom she reported, her job security would increase:

Like I said, I wouldn't leave until I knew that everyone was done for the day, they didn't need me for anything, and they also knew that I was actually going to stay. That's how much I want this job. And I just want to show them, prove to them.... I do know that it took me about three years, maybe, to stop asking if anybody needs anything. Because you know everybody just gets up and leave when it's 5:30. Nobody else was going and saying, "Do you need anything else? Do you need anything else?" Even the girls would say to me, "You don't have to do that. If you've finished what you have and there's nothing else right on your desk, you can leave at 5:30." I said, "Yeah, but I just want to make sure." I said, "I don't feel secure." It was like a security-type fear, is what it was. And after a few years some people would say to me, "Why don't you say to them, 'Can it wait till the morning?'" And I said, "I can't. I can't now. I can't take that chance." But after about three, four years, I did. I had the voice to be able to speak up and say, "Can I do this in the morning or do you need it now?" (Michelle)

Fears associated with 8 months of financial and social hardship instilled in Michelle a necessity of affirmation. Taking the initiative and pushing to exceed objectives was new for Michelle. In her pre-job loss role, Michelle considered herself one who did what was asked and was told that her work performance was good. However, a confluence of factors including job loss, financial constraints, granddaughter

at home, and, importantly, recognizing and responding to depression resulted in a gradual paradigmatic shift, a process of recreating the self (Greene, 1988).

All participants exhibited or spoke to having elements of a changed self. Having had various sets of events transpire after the job loss event—experiences which were then viewed through a prism of fears related to unemployment, each participant (some apparently more than others) transformed cognitively and integrated social interactions and experiences, resulting in becoming what Jarvis and Hirji (2006) referred to as a “continually changed, more experienced person” (p. 88). Even for the three participants with the shortest periods of unemployment (3 months), their job loss episode presented opportunities for heightened self-awareness, transactional learning—the application of skills in a new environment—as well as transformational learning: seeing workplace relationships and their perception of organizations in a profoundly different way.

Research from Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985, pp. 27-31) has led to the identification of “three stages of learning developed through reflection on the experience” that a learner has given: “past histories, learning strategies and emotion”: (a) returning to and replaying the experience, (b) attending to the feelings that the experience provoked, and (c) reevaluating the experience. The reevaluation of experiences that occurs in the third stage, providing they are not blocked somehow by negative feelings, prepares the learner to receive new learnings.

Further, four associated processes reiterate the impact that feelings and emotion have on learning: (a) association (the relating of new data to known data);

(b) integration (seeking relationships among the data); (c) validation (determining the authenticity of the resulting ideas and feelings); and (d) appropriation (making knowledge one's own) (Boud et al., 1985, pp. 31-32).

Additionally, it is also relevant to understand how participants continually evolve and apply learned experiences. First, as thought and reflection form the rational glue of our being, they comprise a balancing and intervening force between emotion and action. Reflection is the gateway for facilitating and acknowledging transformation. Second, disjuncture is crucial to experiential learning. Jarvis (2009, pp. 1-2) in paraphrasing Schutz and Luckmann (1974, p. 6) described how much of our life is spent not really learning, at least in a transformative way, because we seek to take much for granted—trying to keep things as they were, attempting to avoid the unknown.

Attempting to keep things as they are precludes empathic behavior. Experiencing disjuncture created opportunities for the participants to place empathy in the context of their personally lived experience. "Walking in someone's shoes" is not possible unless a person becomes that someone. Often, the best another human being can do is to demonstrate a strong dose of secular humanism (Kurtz, 2007). In terms of perceived workplace performance, recalling their job loss episode allowed participants to be more mindful of what their coworkers might be going through with respect to job performance-related concerns. As workplaces are largely social environments, an honest concern about how coworkers are doing would manifest in positive ways.

Conversations with the participants also revealed a shared characteristic of offering advice and empathy to coworkers. When asked to use words to describe how they felt after becoming reemployed and how they perceived their workplace performance given a job loss episode, all of the respondents used words that were indicative of some measure of social connection. A common thread reflected a sense of sensitivity to others and an intention to help—having a broader context, a deeper perspective on how co-workers are, in fact, people.

Recognizing and acting from a view of increased awareness of and sensitivity to others dovetail a dimension of situational learning theory, developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Although situational learning is generally applied in Communities of Practice, it has utility in this study because of the contextual nature of learning that the participants applied. Through the Situative lens, one views experiential learning as being rooted in the situation in which a person participates, not as an intellectual concept produced by reflection. An individual's experience is shaped by context (Fenwick, 2000, p. 245).

Finally, the situational learning theory essentially enables the learner to demonstrate action confidently (Fenwick, 2003). Accordingly, in this respect, an organization setting becomes a community of practice where aggregate experiences from the participants in this study become settings for learning. The learning process and situation in which learning is presented are deeply intertwined. Learning for

everyday living happens only when people interact with the community, applying various “tools at hand” and the activity at hand (Fenwick, 2000, p. 253).

For the participants in this study, overcoming adversity appeared to bridge a deeper connection with humanity. Expressions of humanity were exhibited in the willful practicing of an awareness of others, given the participants’ vivid recollection of joblessness, and in reflecting on how the participants’ actions might be beneficial to those they either reported to or collaborated with at the workplace.

Summary of Analytic Category #3. The implication from analyzing Finding #3, within the context of addressing Research Question #3, is this: While navigating workplace-related pathways, subsequent workplace performance is perceived to be impacted by establishing behaviors that openly accept the trauma of job loss as a potential source of improved workplace performance.

Having succeeded in obtaining full-time employment, participants reenter new environments with a sense of determination and perspective. It is at this stage when aggregate learning meets application; where past experiences, especially the previous job dismissal and ensuing period of unemployment, are fresh; where contrasts and comparisons are made.

Applying what one has learned is akin to practice. In having the opportunity or context to display new perspectives, the participants were demonstrating how learning must be experienced based (Boud et al., 1993), for it is that reservoir of knowledge and expertise on which new knowledge is formed. Making sense of the day-to-day events

with different core meaning structures (meaning perspectives) illustrates perspective transformation (Dirkx, 1997).

Additionally, conversations with several participants exposed varying degrees of critical reflection, especially when dramatically future behaviors (i.e., Jim's successful challenge with addiction and Alan's achievement of social minimalism) completely and willingly changed the participants so that significant lessons were learned (Criticos, 1993, p. 162).

Table 5.9 presents evidence of the new or improved-upon actions several participants took when reemployed. These actions can be viewed as indicators of a shift-perceived performance at the workplace.

Table 5.9

Analytic Category #3: Perceived Workplace Performance When Reemployed

Analytic Category #3: Perceived Workplace Performance When Reemployed		
New or Improved Action	Name, (Race), (Months Out of Work)	Evidence
Thinking about others	Tony (W) (3)	"I'm a strong believer that if you do right by people, it will work out in the end. Being in HR doesn't mean you have a magic wand and can make bad things go away...but you should want to make the environment better if you can. People do need help. Being let go this last time was different because the finance piece was more of an issue.... I now am more aware of how we are all driven to some extent by the need for money, which makes me think about when people have to be let go."

Analytic Category #3: Perceived Workplace Performance When Reemployed		
New or Improved Action	Name, (Race), (Months Out of Work)	Evidence
Supporting staff members	Steve (W) (4)	"I try to be there for my staff.... I know how it was for me and it's just hard sometimes...but you gotta do the work. Our job is heavy on time commitments, so I try to pick up the slack when necessary. I'm still in contact with my old boss; we talk about things. I guess he's still coaching me [laughs]. The other thing is that since I'm new, I need to make sure that I'm on top of things, so I try to give a little extra time in the office, and I probably take on more than I need to...but I think they'll reward me. I could be wrong, but most of the people I've had working for me have been honest and try to do what's right. I try to meet them halfway."
Working smarter	Bruce (B) (5)	"I think I'm probably going to start honing my skills for playing the game.... I have to make other people okay. I work independently a lot, and so I think I need to work more in a team framework. I just have to find a way of making them feel important, and maintain those relations. So I'm taking on little pet projects just to keep me fresh and keep my name out there. But, yeah, I'm working smarter than before."
Pushing oneself harder	Doug (W) (5)	"There were times when I felt like a wounded animal before they let me go. After seeing some of your co-workers forced out, it changes how you think about the company. I mean, it's normally not the employees' fault—they just have lived with decisions others make. You do your part, hoping it won't be you, but in a way, it's better leaving. I network more, keep the resume up to date, and put away more in the bank whenever we can. I'm an upfront person.... I tell those who report to me how it is. I push myself harder...not for the company...but for me and my family."

Analytic Category #3: Perceived Workplace Performance When Reemployed		
New or Improved Action	Name, (Race), (Months Out of Work)	Evidence
Not getting overwhelmed	John (W) (7)	"I feel more resilient now. Yeah, in part it was that layoff, what my family went through, but more than that, I feel better because I survived it. I look at my relationships differently. My wife says that I'm holding back -not with her, we're okay, but on the job. She's right...but the less I expose myself, the less I can be hurt, right? So far, we have not had layoffs, so it's different from where I was. I don't want to feel like I felt before. All in all, just like before, I do the work, but now I don't get overwhelmed."
Work twice as hard	Michelle (W) (8)	"I now work twice as hard. That's how much I want this job. And I just want to show them, prove to them.... Even the girls would say to me, "You don't have to do that. If you've finished what you have and there's nothing else right on your desk, you can leave at 5:30. And I said, 'I can't. I can't now. I can't take that chance.'
Create value for others	Phil (W) (12)	"I now have a different hunger. So the hunger before I think was more of a: what can I do to continue to grow and prove my point here, make more money? Really, at the end of the day what can I do to make more money? The hunger now is more of a, how can I create value for other people so that I'm valued by other people?"
Listening to others	Jim (B) (84)	"I am much better at being able to deal with difficult, egotistical people. People have deep things to tell.... The patients here sometimes are a wealth of experience and knowledge, or have a view on something that you've never heard. And I'm all about them telling me what I don't already know, whether it's in a book or in a person. I can have a long, deep conversation with someone who I don't even know or who I do know.... It's been transformative personally."

Summary of Analysis, Synthesis, and Interpretation

This chapter focused on an analysis of episodic job loss for 15 participants. The discussion in this chapter illustrated stages and phases individuals might go through as a result of an unplanned, financially impacted job dismissal. The discussion included presentations of the analyses that were performed to highlight the variances within two subgroups of participants based on racial identity and length of unemployment.

Five major findings were synthesized to form three analytical categories. The synthesis used literature largely predicated on two core theories: Transformative Learning (TL; Nohl, 2015, pp. 35-49), and Learning From Experience (LFE; Jarvis & Hirji, 2006, pp. 87-94). The synthesis focused on three areas: (a) the job dismissal event, (b) actions taken and perspectives formed during unemployment, and (c) application of learnings from the job loss episode when reemployed.

Interpretations of the findings revealed that participants were able to overcome the initial fear from an unplanned, financially impactful job loss by using their intervening period of unemployment in a constructive manner, including forms of social and financial support, as well as by drawing on periods of self-reflection. Most of the participants felt strengthened to various degrees as a result of their job loss episode, and upon becoming reemployed, drew on experiences from their job loss episode to frame or reframe new workplace encounters.

The aggregation of experiences from job dismissal to becoming reemployed, coupled with actions based on those previous experiences, suggested that learning has occurred. Explicitly, this study depicted the job loss episodes of five Black male professionals, illustrating how the “peculiar sensation of double consciousness” (DuBois, 1903, p. 2) offers a source of strength for those who cognitively identify as Black.

Figure 5.1 is an illustration of this study’s connective tissue: the underlying research questions; literature, specifically but not exclusively Jarvis and Hirji (2005) and Nohl (2015), referenced to conceptualize and interpret the research; and findings that emanated from the study.

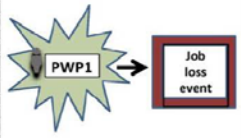


LFE was evident in the analysis as all participants encountered a socially constructed episode (stages 1 and 2, job dismissal event) that resulted in disjuncture (Jarvis & Hirji, 2005, p. 92). The job loss event was followed by a series of stages (3 through 5) wherein thought, reflection, and action by the participants occurred. Finally, when the participants began full-time employment, a final stage (stage 6) was entered: The participants arrived at their new workplace surroundings as changed persons—more experienced, by virtue of various experiences (social and otherwise) during the preceding stages of job loss event and unemployment. In addition, participants joined their new surroundings with concomitant learnings, workplace practices, and perspectives that evolved from the job loss episode.

TL was similarly evident in the analysis through the lens of Nohl's (2015) Phases of Transformation process. The Nondetermining start (Phase 1) refers to the abrupt, non-anticipated (p. 39) job loss event and manifestations of fear that all participants felt. During Phases 2 through 4, the financial implications of job loss impacted household income, which, in turn, disrupted the household social structure.

Unemployment caused participants to seek various methods, social and introspective, to adapt to and improve their current state. The unemployment period also included considerations for what an improved state would entail, including how family members might be affected and the personal sacrifices participants might need to make in terms of time and income. Finally, Phase 5 enabled a "reinterpretation of biography" (p. 44) where the participants applied new perspectives and workplace practices.

Figure 5.1

Research Summary

CONTEXTUAL ADULT LEARNING: HOW THE FEAR OF JOB LOSS IMPACTS PERCEIVED WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE					
Research Summary Table					
Research Question →	1) How is a fear of job loss <u>experienced</u> ?	2) Once experienced, how does one <u>navigate</u> the world of unemployment-related activities?	3) After navigating unemployment, how are future workplace interactions, including self-assessed job performance, perceived to be <u>impacted</u> ?		
LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE					
Stage of Jarvis and Hirji's Diagram: <i>Learning the Unlearnable</i> →	Stages 1 & 2: The Whole Person; An Experience - (Episode) socially constructed	Stages 3; 4; 5: Thought / Reflection; Emotion; Action	Stage 6: The Person Body / Mind / Self Changed The changes memorized Person more experienced		
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING					
Phase of Nohl's Transformation Process →	Phase 1: Nondetermining start	Phase 2; 3; 4: Experimental & undirected inquiry; Social testing & mirroring; Shifting of relevance	Phase 5: Social consolidation & reinterpretation of biography		
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK					
Stage of Conceptual Framework →					
	PWP1 – Perceived Workplace Performance <u>before</u> job loss event	LFE – Learning from Experience TL – Transformative Learning	PWP2 – Self-assessed Perceived Workplace Performance <u>after</u> becoming successfully re-employed		
Findings Statement →	Finding 1: All participants experienced manifestations of fear from losing their job.	Finding 2: All participants used their intervening period of unemployment in a constructive manner.	Finding 3: All participants used their intervening period of unemployment to assess what was vitally important in their life.	Finding 4: Fourteen of 15 (93%) participants viewed their job loss event as instrumental to their subsequent perceived workplace performance.	Finding 5: All participants saw themselves differently as a result of their job loss event.

Reexamining the Assumptions From Chapter I

As discussed in Chapter I, the researcher held two assumptions related to this study. This section presents a discussion of each of these assumptions in light of the findings that were presented in Chapter IV and the analysis presented in this chapter.

The first assumption was that the participants' fear of job loss would be predicated on their "not knowing" what would happen; that uncertainty triggered the fear. While the findings still give credence to that assumption, conversations with the participants revealed that in many cases, they felt certain at the time of their job dismissal of what would happen. There were no shades of gray; if there was substantially less income, things would not be good.

The second assumption was that perspective transformation would be crucial to how the participants would move on from their job loss episode. On this point, the findings appeared to indicate some measure of perspective change occurring for all participants. In some cases, aggregate events during the job loss episode led to transactional change; in other cases, the perspective change seemed to be transformational (i.e., Michelle, Alan, Jim, and Phil). Nohl's (2015) research on transformative learning best captures the framework and tenor of TL used in this study: less emphasis on disorientation-driven TL and a view of perspective change as evolving "bit by bit" (pp. 46, 47).

Contributions to the Literature

As the researcher asserted in Chapter I, this exploratory study was not intended to break new theoretical ground. However, if the position is taken that every life experience tells a unique story, then this study will be useful to an audience that is seeking a further understanding of how adult learning intersects with the fear of job loss, such that when prior job loss experiences are both welcomed and built upon, tangible perspectives offering value arise.

This research study contributes to the existing literature by suggesting a wider perspective of the inherent non-calculable value that humans offer firms—when those firms are genuinely committed to making the lives of workers better. This is a tall order. In some ways, this study has affirmed existing knowledge of the boundless human capability to form perspectives as a practice for overcoming workplace-induced trauma and as a reservoir for personal growth.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this exploratory study of adult learning was to investigate the lived experience of 15 employees who encountered a significant job loss event (an unplanned loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment—coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income), and how the resultant fear(s) from that event affected their navigation through unemployment in order to become successfully reemployed. The conclusions from this study extend from the three research questions and five major findings discussed in Chapters IV and V.

Conclusions

The conclusions address three areas: (a) learning to live with an unintended job dismissal event; (b) practicing active self-reflection in response to unintended job dismissal and subsequent unemployment; and (c) listening and responding to the needs of co-workers after having experienced unintended job dismissal and subsequent unemployment. A discussion of the major findings and conclusions drawn from this research follows. This chapter closes with recommendations and a final reflection on this study.

Based on the findings of this exploratory study, the researcher has concluded that:

1. The job dismissal event is unlike onboarding; employees generally feel kicked out without care or warning.
2. A successful navigation through unemployment requires self-awareness, self-determination, and both social and financial support.
3. The richness of experience from a job loss episode can offer improvements to perceived workplace performance.

The following section explores each of the aforementioned conclusions.

Conclusion 1: The job dismissal event is unlike onboarding; employees generally feel kicked out without care or warning.

The initial major finding of this study illuminated the pervasive and lasting impact of a job dismissal event. A harsh combination of financial and emotional stressors results from unintended job loss. Participants in this study cited how their trust in organizations and the executives who lead them diminished substantially due to a sense of implicit contract violation from being let go. Even when the justifications for reducing personnel are strategically rational and understood, the process of terminating employees as a result of those justifications can reflect, from the ex-employee's perspective, a severe departure from explicitly professed norms. Although a job loss event happens frequently, it is not necessarily accepted easily. The wounds from being

let go can form indelible scars; they can impact individuals, their families, and, by extension, whole communities.

Related to this first finding is the scope of interconnectedness when job dismissal occurs. All household members were somehow affected when the ramifications from a loss of income were realized. In turn, like with a contagion, those indirectly connected to direct household members (i.e., classmates of children and spousal co-workers) were also affected. Recognition of the financial loss and curtailment of the social interaction from losing employment were additional stressors that the recently unemployed must endure. Whole family units absorb the loss.

In addition, the adversity of job loss is compounded if underlying issues related to the dismissal event, such as interpersonal relationships or perceived discrimination related to age, race, or gender, are unresolved. In certain cases, participants perceived anger from unresolved events to be connected to increased stress on, if not deterioration in, their marriage.

Conclusion 2: A successful navigation through unemployment requires self-awareness, self-determination, and both social and financial support.

The second and third major findings of this study highlighted the significance of individual and collective efforts during unemployment. Each participant drew from a variety of sources to overcome its job loss event. At some point, each participant reflected on, and wrestled with, potential decisions that might occur while unemployed: part-time work for other family members, separation in relationships, requesting

financial support from extended family members, heightened social support, and so on. The decisions, as well as the underlying circumstances which form those decisions, are unique to each participant. However, what appeared to be a common trait within every participant's story was fortitude: an unyielding determination to "move on."

The fortitude to continue pursuing employment is harnessed through internal and external relationships. For some, moments of reflection on self-identity and perception of their role in life or among others is a source of strength. One can visualize participants asking: *How do I navigate this period of turmoil with my spouse and/or children or family? What guiding voice(s) will help to keep me on track? What are the important tasks that I must attend to? What new form of employment best fits with my preferred end-state?* The requisite humility that develops from situations where one recognizes one's status as comparatively "less than" can feel new.

Conclusion 3: The richness of experience from a job loss episode can offer improvements to perceived workplace performance.

The fourth and fifth major findings of this study illuminated the pervasive and lasting impact of a job dismissal episode. A conclusion drawn from the fourth and fifth findings is that the participants in this study were changed as a result of their job loss episode, which included the totality of being let go and subsequent unemployment. What was recalled as initial fear, anger, and a substantial disorienting dilemma transitioned over time to an evolving future state, where those low points were not forgotten but embedded as reference points for future behavior.

In this application phase of post-unemployment, employers have the greatest opportunity for impact. The question generally posed during hiring, from the researcher's experience, is: What have you done that will help us, rather than what have you gone through that might help others? Welcoming the applicant's prior, potentially painful employment experience(s) could lead to learning opportunities for both the applicant and the firm. Recognizing the trauma from unintended job loss can be an asset in framing future off-boarding events. As participant Doug cited, "I know what I went through; I would not want someone else to go through it." That experience, including related sub-events to the extent that unemployed individuals have access to and are able to draw upon requisite support—financial, emotional, and social as well as navigation to future employment—is potentially less stressful and shorter in duration.

Transformative Learning (TL) offers adults a path for reframing the fear of job loss. The Learning From Experience (LFE) theory can help advance an understanding of how the cumulative set of life events develops and shapes coping (ways of learning) capacities and skills relative to job loss episodes.

The practice-based model of TL (Nohl, 2015, p. 45) is where stages of interpretation and perspective change occur such that the participants' actions—subsequent to the job dismissal event—are self-assessed as favorably different and useful for determining if learning from the job loss episode has occurred. By evidence of obtaining future employment, all participants can be considered successful. All

participants assessed themselves as “different,” given the application of contextually new habits or perspectives or practices in future workplace settings.

Recommendations

The researcher offers three recommendations based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions for this study. The recommendations that follow are for: (a) individuals who have recently and unexpectedly lost financially critical employment; (b) firms that seek to become compassionate organizations; and (c) opportunities for further research.

First are recommendations for individuals who have recently and unexpectedly lost financially critical employment.

1. Every life story is different. Recognize that navigating through unemployment is contextual and specific to each person.

The common variable in each participant’s story was one of temporary struggle, awareness, support, and victory. Their stories are not linear; only with intervening ups and downs (opportunities for learning) were they able to become reemployed. Thus, if there is one takeaway to share among those who are going through a period of trauma as these participants did, exhausting all possibilities is part of adapting and learning to survive.

In addition, upon becoming reemployed, always consider that job loss will occur...again. One should plan for it, even welcome knowing that it will happen. Each

person's story of navigating episodic job loss is a unique story to write. Participant Phil shared his advice on this:

One, stay positive. Two would be to, if it's been ten months, if it's been that long a time period, what, if anything, have you changed over the time period to maybe refocus? Because the definition of insanity is keep doing the same thing over and expecting a different result. It's been ten months and you haven't gotten the result you're looking for, so what's changed? So that'd be one. And I guess a third piece would be: What avenues are you leveraging? Are you just doing Monster and Glassdoor and all that kind of stuff? Are you networking in the right areas with the right people? Are you leveraging LinkedIn to its fullest capability? But then, what else are you doing to keep yourself engaged, even from a volunteer perspective? Because volunteering helps you meet other people and at least gives you a sense of purpose or somewhere to go, so that you can still feel engaged and fulfilled, but at the same time when you do start talking to a potential employer, you can say, "Here's what I've been doing to keep engaged and to stay on top of my game," and opposed to "I've just been looking for jobs." So I would challenge, what are you doing? Let's not focus on the job thing right now, but what are you doing? (Phil)

2. For those who joyfully identify as Black:

It is important to internalize actionable knowledge so that the practicing of humane behavior becomes not a thought, but a breath. The history of Blackness is one of overcoming obstacles; by relaxing (calmness—centering oneself) with a mindful awareness of double consciousness (DuBois, 1907)—that is, knowing how others see a person and how that person sees dimensions of himself or herself—then one can and will progress onward. Moreover, the beauty of Blackness is its inherent adaptability and sense to welcome others. It is vital to expand, not constrict, the circle. It is imperative to know history and trust science.

Next are recommendations for firms that seek to become compassionate organizations. The researcher views seeking to become a compassionate organization

as an expression of radicalism: a genuine willingness to feel what others have experienced; to transform how one thinks to engage successfully in diverse, creative discussions, followed by seemingly radical actions that are derived from those conversations.

First and foremost, a compassionate organization would manifest empathic onboarding and off-boarding. Crucial to practicing empathy in general, and specifically in the context of onboarding and off-boarding, are an active acceptance and recognition of employees as humans—not as property. An active acceptance and recognition would embody a commitment to engage in dialogue: constructive and mutually beneficial verbal interaction. In organizational settings, having honest discussions about uncertainty, especially business uncertainty, during the onboarding process might help to mitigate the social and financial fear(s) associated with unplanned layoffs. Accepting employee turnover as a facet of organizational life and treating the movement of employees as a responsible and committed caretaker frame employee departures very differently from the experiences cited in this study. However, to have the mindset to treat employees in a humane manner, the members of a firm, collectively, must be radically creative with how human intellectual capital is nourished and maximized. Radicalism is a vital descriptor; a willful performance of a vastly different process rarely arises from the status quo. New mental models, contingent on and unique to a specific context, are compulsory. For example, imagine how the dismissals of the 15 participants cited in this study might have occurred if they were in a position to know—in advance—

what their departure(s) might entail, so that the financial shock would be lessened.

Citing Adrian Gore (2020): “Leading a modern organization requires boldness not incrementalism; doing the big things really well; and simultaneously pursuing prudence and innovation” (p. 1).

Radicalism is evident in the second recommendation: establish policies and actionable habits that welcome the trauma of job loss as a potential source of improving workplace performance. Active listening can be a precursor to humanism, which will lead to more productive environments. It begins with sincerely caring to hear the stories of the newly employed, connecting how their story fits within the firm. How do the dots connect? Build on the premise that the whole person comes to the job and is always present.

The need for a radical view also becomes apparent when considering current workplace trends, such as shorter terms of employment per employer and with the gig economy, where job benefits are less, and employer/employee commitment levels are often tenuous. Must establishing new employment structures and protocols result in higher and perhaps short-term profits for a few, relative to disadvantageous wages and growing income inequality for many? For those who are concerned with developing economic opportunities or workforce development, the small yet representative sample size of this study indicated that opportunity and development should be considered in tandem, perhaps much like how workplace onboarding and off-boarding can be

viewed—not as competing ends or opposites of a spectrum, but as part of a continuum for the development of humans.

Third, pursue becoming a learning organization. While not discussed in this study, learning organizations—entities that promote “a culture of learning, a community of learners, and [ensure] that individual learning enriches and enhances the organization as a whole” (Kerka, 1995, p. 1)—are essential as conduits for personal transformation and the manifestation of aggregate learning. One might argue that it is within the confines of a critiqued yet embraced collective that shared learning is cultivated and applied. Creating such an environment entails an acceptance of the whole person’s experience, including potential fears and unmet aspirations related to one’s previous job history. Devising improved methodologies or processes for connecting individual experience with a collective, collaborative constructive whole is ongoing; one never completely learns.

Fourth, recognize that terminations (unplanned, abrupt layoffs from the employee’s perspective) can be viewed as acts of violence, especially for the newly terminated. Employee ejections have financial, social, and psychological consequences for individuals, their families, and—depending on the scope of those dismissals—whole communities. Even though the job dismissal event may not be violent in a traditional, physical sense, the impact of a “forced” insufficiency of financial resources can lead to permanent scarring. It is difficult to assess the potential psychological damage done to individuals, as well as to those who depend on or are intimately connected to the

recently unemployed. However, at a minimum, many of the participant interviews in this study depicted personal and familial duress and pain. A possible, endemic link between violence and forced layoff is revealed when one understands how power dynamics at the workplace (specifically in the United States) have manifested historically and culturally. Jamelle Bouie (2020) described systemic power dynamics between employees (labor) and management (capital), illustrating the connection between an underlying social structure that assumes, and therefore anticipates or views, employees as adversarial, disposable commodities: “Workers are kept on edge—and willing to accept whatever wage is on offer—by the threat of immiseration. This, for politicians who back both big business and existing social relations, is a feature and not a bug of our economic system, since insecurity and desperation keep power in the hands of capital and its allies” (p. 1).

Finally, there are two important recommendations for further research:

1. The researcher recommends that further studies be conducted to obtain a larger, more diverse set of data. Every person responds to unintended job loss differently. Additional studies will further the understanding of how coping mechanisms related to unintended job loss evolve, the affected parties to job loss, and potentially how fears related to job loss might be ameliorated.
2. Moreover, further research should be conducted based on demographic information:

a) Studies on the fear of unintended job loss should be conducted that include a broader, more representative sample of employees. Are there specific trends or commonalities based on age, identified gender, income, political affiliation, skin color, religious affiliation, education level, or marital status? Exploring the cross-sectional data of diverse participant groupings will result in a greater relevance of and identification with the findings. For example, given how roles have changed in society, how does the loss of employment affect men and their children? Does the way in which a person is laid off (individual performance versus mass reduction in force) affect the impact of the loss of employment on the person?

Lastly, in terms of recommendations for general research, further studies can also be conducted as described below:

1. A study could be done where household members, along with the recently dismissed worker, are interviewed. Understanding how the fears, if any, of those tangibly connected to and affected by the welfare of a dismissed worker offers insightful perspectives on how others learn from certain impactful experiences.
2. A longitudinal study, in which the impact of two or more job loss events on a participant is explored, would potentially uncover additional dimensions of learning.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the learning experiences of 15 employees on a specific phenomenon: how the fear of job loss (an unplanned or involuntary loss of employment with no immediate replacement of employment—coupled with an unintentional and tangibly significant reduction in income) impacts perceived workplace performance. More specifically, this study examined how individuals overcome unintentional job loss such that they become reemployed and, once reentering the workplace, if and how they consider themselves different vis-à-vis perspective change. The differences cited by the participants via self-assessed perspective change were akin to learning; in this study, learning and adapting were synonymous. However, this study had several limitations.

First, the participant population was comprised of 14 males and one female. The lack of female experiences prevented valuable life experiences from being heard. Michelle's story offered tremendous insight into concerns faced by a specific and large segment of the workplace, but more of those voices were needed.

Second, although the participants offered informative feedback on their new roles, more data on how those were directly affected by the job loss (i.e., significant others, children, other family members) after becoming reemployed would have added another dimension to the study. Other sources of data, although relevant and useful, were beyond the scope of this study.

Third, a larger participant sample would have allowed for additional subcategorical analysis. While race and length of unemployment offered beneficial insights, a larger, more diverse pool would have created additional subcategories for comparative analysis.

Lastly, the design of this study was demarcated. All of the participants—by definition—became reemployed. While the job loss experiences as described by the participants offer evidence of a progressive intersection of an event and learning from said event, their stories and eventual navigation from a traumatic job loss event should not be extrapolated across a larger population of unemployed individuals.

Researcher's Final Reflections

The personal journey underlying this study has been rare, unique, and wonderful. The researcher is indebted to the 15 intriguing humans who were willing to share their stories. This arduous project has reminded the researcher of his good fortune. Through willingness to recognize and receive sharing from others, questions about life can make one stop enough so that a thought, a feeling, an action opens up. This study in many ways was/is more about what this nascent researcher can do with the learnings offered by the 15 participants. Good luck is something that one has; good fortune is something that one shares.

This final quote from Jarvis and Hirji (2006) captured the researcher's sentiments in recognizing that all individuals are works in progress. The answers everyone seeks are often found in simply accepting and appreciating the wholeness of others:

Over the past 20 years I have been studying human learning and I now believe it to be a combination of processes whereby the whole person—body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses)—experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically for through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person. (p. 88)

Be well.

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Appendix A

Letter to Prospective Participants
Teachers College, Columbia University
Department of Organization and Leadership

Dear Prospective Research Participant:

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a proposed research study. The primary purpose of this dissertation research is to explore the fear of job loss and its impact upon perceived workplace performance.

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, your commitment will consist of participating in a face-to-face interview in which you will be asked to describe your experiences with job loss, its impact on your family, and in your community. There may also be one follow-up interview by phone for the purposes of clarification and understanding of your responses. Your total participation will thus be approximately two hours during the course of a two-month data collection period. The interview will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon location; either a public meeting space or office.

Both the probability and magnitude of harm from the interview are considered to be minimal, with no more risk than commonly experienced when discussing job loss.

In order to take part in this study, participants should match the following criteria:

1. Participants must have experienced a period of unintentional joblessness such that both economic hardship and elevated stress/anxiety develop (criterion event).
2. Participants must not live alone.
3. Participants must have been reemployed after having a criterion event.

Any and all information collected will be held in the strictest confidence. Individual identities will NOT be disclosed in the dissertation narrative or in academic or professional discussions or publication. All research information will be kept in a locked or password secured location accessible only to the researcher.

I can be reached directly via phone at (215) 589.5682, by mail at 244 Bobwhite Road, New Hope, PA., 18938 or by e-mail at jaw2205@tc.columbia.edu

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jerrold (Jerry) Walton
Doctoral Candidate & Principal Investigator
Adult Learning & Leadership
Department of Organization and Leadership

Appendix B

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: Contextual Adult Learning: How the Fear of Job Loss Impacts Perceived Workplace Performance

Principal Investigator: Jerrold A. Walton, Doctoral Candidate, Teachers College,
Department of Organization and Leadership (AEGIS)
215.589.5682, jaw2205@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Contextual Adult Learning: How the Fear of Job Loss Impacts Perceived Workplace Performance.” You may qualify to take part in this research study if your employment history includes the following criteria set for this study:

1. Participants must have experienced a period of unintentional joblessness such that both economic hardship and elevated stress/anxiety develop (criterion event).
2. Participants must not live alone.
3. Participants must have been reemployed after having a criterion one event.

Approximately fifteen people will participate in this study. Participation will require two, 1 hour sessions of your time, over separate days, to complete. For example, the face-to-face interview (60 minutes) will occur on day one, and then approximately one week later a follow-up phone call meeting will be arranged (another 60 minutes) - to verify what was said in the first interview. Your total participation will thus be approximately two hours.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine how employees perform their jobs given that the prevailing fears accompanying net job loss are an integral characteristic of organizational life. Ultimately, the findings from this study are intended to be useful in lessening fears and apprehensions that impede workplace performance.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview (about 60 minutes), and one follow-up phone call meeting (another 60

minutes) - to verify what was said in the first interview - in which you will answer questions and be asked to describe your experiences with job loss, its impact on your family, and in your community. The face-to-face interview will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon location. Your total participation will thus be approximately two hours.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss certain challenges faced during your professional career. **However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don't want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.**

The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of Adult Learning and Organizational Leadership

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate; however, your direct transportation costs, up to \$20, will be covered. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven't finished. You will still be paid for your transportation costs.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written

down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will still be able to participate in this research study.

_____ I give my consent to be recorded

Signature

_____ I **do not** consent to be recorded

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___ I consent to allow written and audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College

Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow written and audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University

Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Jerrold A. Walton, at 215-589-5682 or at jaw2205@tc.columbia.edu You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Lyle Yorks at 212-678-3820 .

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at its professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Signature:

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Protocol Welcome Script

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As you know, I am exploring the fear of job loss and its impact upon perceived workplace performance. During the interview, I will limit my comments as I want to hear from you. I will use this interview protocol as a guide. In order to be respectful of your time, I will move along with the questions I have prepared. However, if at any point you want more information or clarification on any point, please do not hesitate to ask or interrupt me.

With your permission, I will digitally record this interview. The purpose of the recording is two-fold: first, so that I can accurately capture what you share; and second, so that I do not have to write extensive notes, which will allow me to fully listen to what you are telling me. I may also jot some notes down as reminders to myself for later reflection. Please be assured that the recording will remain confidential. I am the only person who will have access to the recording. After the interview is over, I will transcribe the recording and will forward it to you so that you can review it for accuracy.

As I continue further with the interviews and throughout the analysis of data, I would like to ask your permission to contact you for clarification and /or to ask additional questions that may arise later on.

- Do you have any questions before we begin?
- Do you need clarification on anything that has been said?
- If you have any questions at any time please ask me. Shall we begin?
- Who is the person to contact if the interview creates discomfort for you?

Protocol Context Questions

1. What name would you like to use for the purpose of this interview?
2. In what industry are you employed?
3. Is this a new industry for you?
4. What is your current role in your firm?
5. How many individuals report directly to you?
6. How long have you been employed by your current employer?
7. How many employees would you estimate are employed at your location?
8. How many times have you been laid off/let go in the last 5 years?
 - a. Within those 60 months, what was your longest period of unemployment?

A) ASSESSMENT OF THE JOB DISMISSAL (4-1); (4-2) [EXPERIENCE]

1. What was your understanding of why you were let go?
2. Was the thought of being laid off was a surprise?
3. How would you characterize your feelings when dismissed?
4. Using a scale of 1=neutral; 3=bad; 5=very bad, how do you rate your dismissal?
5. At the time of your dismissal, what, was your primary concern?

B) ACTIONS TAKEN DURING UNEMPLOYMENT (4-2); (4-3); (4-4) [NAVIGATION]

1. How did you manage and/or navigate unemployment? How did you frame your life; or where did you go for areas of support? How did you survive
2. What [thoughts did you have during the subsequent days?] was the critical thing that came to your mind the following day? Were there specific action steps taken during the ensuing weeks?
3. How do you respond then to those fears – those thoughts, voices in the head?
4. Scenario exercise. Given the following scenario where you must decide whether to stay late at work, do you: 1) Stay, or (2) Go?

Your supervisor approaches you at 15 minutes before your planned departure to ask if you can work late on a new project. Doing so would cause you to miss a previously scheduled and rare event with a family/spouse/significant other living companion that you are looking forward to.

C) REENTERING THE WORKPLACE (4-2); (4-5); (4-6) [IMPACT]

1. How has becoming reemployed changed you? What do you see differently?
2. How does the intersection of job and your personal life manifest, if at all, with respect to perceived workplace performance?
3. What can you tell someone who's going through a period of unemployment in their 10th month?" What do you want them to really focus on? What advice would you give them? How does that memory shape your attitude towards work now?
4. What tolerances and/or limitations do you believe you have such that your perceived workplace performance is impacted?
5. What do you see at the workplace now that is important to you?
6. What do you like and dislike about your job?
7. How does the intersection of job and your personal life manifest, if at all, on job performance? How does the mix between job and personal life impact your job performance?.....Is it any different now than it was before? ...Were there any lessons learned from your previous employer over your period of unemployment that went into consideration with where you are now, for making that decision?

Appendix D

Coding Scheme

1. Assessment of the job dismissal	2. Actions taken during unemployment	3. Reentering the workplace
1a. Fear	2a. Determination	3a. Perspective
1b. Anger	2b. Assessment	3b. Awareness
1c. Finances	2c. Education	3c. Helping
1d. Responsibility	2d. Reflection	3d. Politics
1e. Family	2e. Humility	3e. Balance
1f. Leadership	2f. Strength	3f. Flexibility
1g. Loss	2g. Love	3g. Value creation
1h. Caring	2h. Focus	3h. Understanding
1i. Depression	2i. Obligation	3i. Compassion
1j. Relief	2j. Prioritization	3j. Discipline
1k. Faith	2k. Friends	3k. Leadership

Appendix E

Distribution Worksheet Protocol Themes

	Knowing that you have to work affects how you look at work. During my time off I worked hard at getting this new role. I wanted to have a job that paid the bills and allowed for savings and breathing room. I figured I could make the environment		
1-21	<p>Questions</p> <p>How would you have liked that [the termination] to occur, if it was possible to do it? Do you think, in retrospect, their actions of letting you go were correct?</p> <p>[ACTIVE REFLECTION]</p>	<p>Tim/Matt</p> <p>Absolutely not. I think it was very unprofessional. I think that it could have been done sooner. I truly believe that what they were doing was... if they were trying to... They didn't have an idea of how to recruit nurses. Everyone in the industry, everybody - hospitals, other nursing homes, were fighting for the same pool. But they didn't know what would be effective. So they were basically just throwing things together and seeing what was going on... personally think that they should have, from the candidates that they hired, should have listened a little bit more closely. Because I was not the only one who was hired outside of where I was living to areas that were far away. And those persons, basically, were saying the same thing I was, "How come I can't be hired in my area?" [00:26:06]P8</p>	<p>Brian/Ben</p> <p>Wholeheartedly no, because I had exemplary performance reviews right up until two months before that. And that was basically, in hindsight, political. We had a new management group in and anyone brought in under the old one was targeted.</p>
22	<p>During that period after you were let go, how did they express - if they did - the environment or their feelings about it or anything?</p>		
23	<p>If you had to select several words to describe your key learning from that experience of being let go, what would you say [PRACTICE]</p>		<p>I think you have to have... You can't doubt yourself. You have to have confidence in yourself to move forward. And that whole process would certainly instill a level of self doubt because you're feeling inadequate or unworthy or whatever. But you have to realize that you are who you are. You have skills and you have things that can add value to an organization and move forward. But you have to believe in yourself. So initially it's a kick in the gut, but then you have to pick yourself up, dust yourself off and move on. [00:30:24]P3... I think it's part of life. I think everybody has situations they have to deal with. So that was foreign to me and I'd only been in two other employers in my whole career. I've been employed now 30 years, I've been at three employers. So the average length of stay is about a little over 10 years in each one. So I guess it's a learning experience. P3... I always try to treat people as I would want to be treated myself and be transparent, because you don't want to catch somebody off guard the way I was caught off guard. I didn't feel that was appropriate or the right way to handle it. And I wouldn't want that to happen... Even if you're having difficulty with somebody, you want to be clear, you want to be upfront and you want to help work through it. And in some cases you're going to not be able to work through it and you will part ways. P4</p>
24	<p>What are you feeling at that point? Did you ever feel,</p>	<p>When you're put in... Yeah, there's bits and pieces of times. When you're going Monday</p>	<p>It's a hard process to go through. You can beat yourself up. You can get depressed or</p>

Participant worksheet 2 - Microsoft Excel

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AH39 Knowing that you have to work affects how you look at work. During my time off I worked hard at getting this new role. I wanted to have a job that paid the bills and allowed for savings and breathing room. I figured I could make the environment

	R	U	V	
1-1	<p>Questions</p> <p>What was your understanding why you were let go? [EXPERIENCE]</p>	<p>ED/Bill</p> <p>HR is a customer service role internally and you got to go meet the folks. You got to meet the folks. And I did that. [00:04:01] ...They went Chapter 11 in March 8th and came out in August, 2008, and all the senior staff from the corporate company left. They needed someone with workers' comp experience in New Jersey, and I did. And they promoted me to be the director of HR. And soon as I got there in October of 2008, I started laying people off. So we went from a thousand workers in four plants and I laid off 600 of them and closed two plants. p2...One day I laid off 152 by myself p2</p>	<p>Wayne/Ron</p> <p>[Sales Performance] "Except my situation was a little bit different. Here I am, new, and I'm black. And all the people I'm trying to sell to are white. And they were nice and polite and everything but a lot of times I could tell as soon as I sat down they weren't buying shit." p1...I thought were almost there but couldn't get that sale by the deadline. And my boss was true to his word. He was like, "I'm sorry, we got to let you go." p1...And I think he realized that I was in the wrong market in that division where we were, trying to sell to conservative white business folks in Middle Pennsylvania.p1</p>	<p>Mike /Jim</p> <p>So that CEO took a o was very well-conne here.p3 But at any r nine months to a year out=[00:10:05].p3 S reasons</p>
14	<p>Was the firm going through restructuring when you arrived?</p>	yes	no	No
15	<p>So the thought of potentially being laid off was a surprise?</p>	<p>I was shocked. I didn't expect it coming. So they left and about 15/20 minutes later, the HR director from Canada came back and said, "Just leave your phone and keys on the desk and we'll take." And I said to him this, his name, I said, "I know the drill. I've laid off 600 people. I know what I'm doing. I've been there." And then the operations manager came back to apologize, "Can I help you with anything, Ed?" "No, no, no. You can't help me." And then I said, "Well, you can help me with one thing. Keep the other guy away from me because the next time</p>	<p>[No] So I [was] get under the gun like everybody else.</p>	<p>[No] In retrospect I v wanted to move for</p>

sorted by question Clip 4 tables Clip 5 tab race (Fmt1-5) Clip 5 tab unem (Find 1-5) Chapter 5 Table mark ups

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Appendix F

Distribution Worksheet Participant Findings

Participant worksheet 2 - Microsoft Excel

	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	AC	AD
2							Finding One - Table 2			Finding Two - Table 3			Finding Three - Table 4		Finding Four		
3	Name	Gender	Race	Age at event	Dependent Children?	Distinctive Transformational factor	Characterization of the event (scale of 1, 3, 5)	Predominant fear (scale of 1, 3, 5)	What actions taken? (scale of 1, 3, 5)	Who did you reach out to for support?	getting paid well? or Favorable workplace setting (W)?	Given the discussed scenario where you must stay late at work, do you stay, or do you go? (1) Stay; (2) Go [pre job loss]	Given the discussed scenario where you must stay late at work, do you stay, or do you go? (1) Stay; (2) Go [post job loss]	Was there a change in perspective, pre versus post job loss?	As a result of your job loss episode, is your workplace performance: (1) the same (2); better (3) superior		
4	Ben	M	White	40	Yes (2)		Anger	5	Financial; social	3	Networking; Budgeting; Volunteer; networking; recruiter; part time work	Colleagues; peers	W	1	2	Changed View	3
5	Bill	M	White	59	Yes (2)		Shock	5	Financial	5		Family; local church; memories	W	2	2	No	3
6	Tony	M	White	45	Yes (2)		Not too painful,	1	Financial	3	Networking; budgeting	Friends	W	1	1	No	3
7	Steve	M	White	50	Yes (1)		Handled well	1	Financial; child with special needs	5	Arranged different payment stream with vendors	Family; vendors	P	1	1	No	3
8	Bruce	M	Black	40	Yes (2)	Perseverance	I was furious	5	Financial; child with special needs	5	Budgeting; divorce	Family; self reflection	P	1	2	Changed View	5
9	Doug	M	White	45	Yes (3)		Numb	3	Financial	3	Networking; part time work	Colleagues; peers	P	1	1	No	5
10	Matt	M	Black	42	Yes (2)		Anxiety; sadness; anger	5	Financial	5	Budgeting; part time work; recruiter (job search); consulting	Family; self-reflection	W	1	2	Changed View	5
11	Fred	M	White	50	No		Anger; shame	5	Financial	3	Recruiter (job search); friends	Wife	P	1	1	No	3
12	Ron	M	Black	35	No	Pride	Surprise, but not shock	3	Rent and car payments	3	Recruiter (job search); friends	Significant other; family	P	1	1	No	3
13	John	M	White	42	Yes (1)	Resilience	Numb	3	Mortgage	3	Networking; budgeting; part time work	Family	W	1	1	No	1
14	Michelle	F	White	58	Yes (2)	Grandchild at home	Shock; disbelief	5	Mortgage	5	Networking; budgeting; part time work	Family	P	2	1	Changed View	5
15	Bob	M	White	55	Yes (1) 14 - daughter	Determination	Anger	5	Financial	5	Networking; part time work	Family	W	2	2	No	5

Participant worksheet 2 - Microsoft Excel

	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	AC	AD
	Name	Gender	Race	Age at event	Dependent Children?	Distinctive Transformational factor	Characterization of the event (scale of 1, 3, 5)	Predominant fear (scale of 1, 3, 5)	What actions taken? (scale of 1, 3, 5)	Who did you reach out to for support?	getting paid well? or favorable workplace setting (W)?	Given the discussed scenario where you must stay late at work, do you stay, or do you go? (1) Stay; (2) Go [are job loss]	Given the discussed scenario where you must stay late at work, do you stay, or do you go? (1) Stay; (2) Go [post job loss]	Was there a change in perspective, pre versus post job loss?	As a result of your job loss episode, is your workplace performance: (1) the same (3) better (5) superior		
4	Ben	M	White	40	Yes (2)		Anger	5	Financial; social	3	Networking; Budgeting	Colleagues; peers	W	1	2	Changed View	3
5	Bill	M	White	59	Yes (2)		Shock	5	Financial	5	Volunteer; networking; recruiter; part time work	Family; local church; memories	W	2	2	No	3
6	Tony	M	White	45	Yes (2)		Not too painful	1	Financial	3	Networking; budgeting	Friends	W	1	1	No	3
7	Steve	M	White	50	Yes (1)		Handled well	1	Financial; child with special needs	5	Arranged different payment stream with vendors	Family; vendors	P	1	1	No	3
8	Bruce	M	Black	40	Yes (2)	Perseverance	I was furious	5	Financial; child with special needs	5	Budgeting; divorce	Family; self reflection	P	1	2	Changed View	5
9	Doug	M	White	45	Yes (3)		Numb	3	Financial	3	Networking; part time work	Colleagues; peers	P	1	1	No	5
10	Matt	M	Black	42	Yes (2)		Anxiety; sadness, anger	5	Financial	5	Budgeting; part time work	Family; self-reflection	W	1	2	Changed View	5
11	Fred	M	White	50	No		Anger; shame	5	Financial	3	Recruiter (job search); consulting	Wife	P	1	1	No	3
12	Ron	M	Black	35	No	Pride	Surprise, but not shock	3	Rent and car payments	3	Recruiter (job search); friends	Significant other; family	P	1	1	No	3
13	John	M	White	42	Yes (1)	Resilience	Numb	3	Mortgage	3	Networking; budgeting; part time work	Family	W	1	1	No	1
14	Michelle	F	White	58	Yes (2)	Grandchild at home	Shock; disbelief	5	Mortgage	5	Want ads; learning new IT skills; part time work	Family	P	2	1	Changed View	5
15	Bob	M	White	55	Yes (1) 14 daughter	Determination	Anger	5	Financial	5	Networking; part time work	Family	W	2	2	No	5

Appendix G

Distribution Worksheet Analytic Categories

Participant worksheet 7 - Microsoft Excel

Finding One Variation- Table 5-2 (Race)		Finding Two Variation-Table 5-3 (Race)														Actions taken during unemployment							
is new role an improvement professional?	Name	Gender	Race	Age at event	Dependent Children?	Distinctive Transformational factor	Characterization of the event (scale of 1-5)	Prevalent fear (scale of 1, 3, 5)	race mentions d as a factor?	What actions taken? (scale of 1, 3, 5)	budgeting	parttime work	recruiter	friends	down on rehab	education	networking	total	Who did you reach out to for support?	Colleague's peers	family	self	
yes	Ben	M	White	40	Yes (2)		Anger	5	Financial, social	3								1	2	colleagues, peers	1		
yes	Bill	M	White	59	Yes (2)		Shock	5	Financial	5			1	1	1			1	4	Family, local church, memories		1	
No	Tony	M	White	45	Yes (2)		Not too painful,	1	Financial	3								1	2	Friends			
No	Steve	M	White	50	Yes (1)		Handled well	1	Financial, child with special needs	5								1		Family, vendors		1	
yes	Bruce	M	Black	40	Yes (2)	Perseverance	I was furious	5	Financial, child with special	5	N							1		Family, self reflection		1	
yes	Matt	M	Black	42	Yes (2)		Anxiety, sadness, anger	5	Financial	5	Y							2		Family, self-reflection		1	
No	Doug	M	White	45	Yes (3)		Numb	3	Financial	3								1	2	Colleagues, peers	1		
yes	Ron	M	Black	35	No	Pride	Surprise, but not shock	3	went and car payments	3	Y			1				1		significant other, family		1	
No	Prad	M	White	50	No		Anger, shame	5	Financial	3				1	1			2		Wife		1	
No	John	M	White	42	Yes (1)	Resilience	Numb	3	Mortgage	3								1	3	Family		1	
No	Michelle	F	White	58	Yes (2)	Grandchild at home	Shock, disbelief	5	Mortgage	5				1	1		1	3		Family		1	
yes	Bob	M	White	55	Yes (1) 14+ daughter	Determination	Anger	5	Financial	5								1		Family		1	
No	Phil	M	White	48	Yes (1)	Humility	Shock, surprise	5	Financial	5								1	1	Family, neighbors, friends		1	

Participant worksheet 2 - Microsoft Excel

OS	AG	AI	AI	AI	AK	AL	AM	AN	AO	AP	AQ	AR	AS	AT	AU	AV	AW	AX	AY	AZ	
1	0%	5%	23%	100%	white		13%	47%	7%	27%	7%	100%									
2	0	1	5	22	white		2	7	1	4	1	15									
3		14%	14%	0%	100%	black	0%	40%	50%	50%	0%	100%									
4	1	1	0	7	black		0	4	3	3	0	10									
5	Finding Two Variation- Table 5-3 (Race)										Actions taken during unemployment					Finding Three Variation- Table 5-4 (Race) and Assessments during unemployment				Reflections	Finding F Post
6	Pre-job loss event role	rehabilitation	education	networks	total	Who did you reach out to for support?	Colleagues, peers	family	self	Friends	vendors	total	getting paid well? or favorable workplace setting (W)?	race mentioned as a factor?	Given the discussed scenario where you must stay late at work, do you stay, or do you go? (1) Stay, (2) Go (late job loss)	Given the discussed scenario where you must stay late at work, do you stay, or do you go? (1) Stay, (2) Go (good job loss)	Was there a change in perspective, pre versus post job loss?	race mentioned as a factor?	As a result of your job loss episode, (your workplace performance (1) if same (2), better (3) superior		
7	Senior Administrator			1		Family, self reflection		1	1			2	P	Y	1	2	Changed view	Y	5		
8	Recruiter			1		Family, self reflection		1	1			2	W	Y	1	2	Changed view	Y	5		
9	Sales Manager			2		Significant other, family		1		1		2	P	Y	1	1	No	Y	3		
10	Senior Marketing Manager			1		Friends				1		1	W		1	2	changed view	Y	5		
11	Executive Administrator	1	1		2	Family, friends, self reflection		1	1	1		3	W	Y	1	2	Changed view	Y	5		
12	Project Manager			1	2	Colleagues, peers	1					1	W		1	2	Changed View		3		
13	Human Resources Manager			1	4	Family, local church, memories		1	1	1		3	W		2	2	No		3		
14	Human Resources Manager			1	2	Friends				1		1	W		1	1	No		5		
15	Project Supervisor			1		Family, vendors		1			1	2	P		1	1	No		3		
16	Accounting Supervisor			1	2	Colleagues, peers	1					1	P		1	1	No		5		
17	General Manager			2		Wife		1				1	P		1	1	No		3		
18	Accounting Manager			1	3	Family		1				1	W		1	1	No		1		
19	Accounting Clerk	1		3		Family		1				1	P		2	1	Changed View		5		