Exploring the loss of status, power and recognition during retirement: Reflections on a Human Resource executive's experience.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experience of retirement from the perspective of a Human Resource executive who retired from a long career in a large organisation. It uses autoethnography as a methodological approach, employing research narratives and reflexive inquiry. These narratives follow and explore the emotions, relationships, and politics that arise in the process of searching to continue to be recognised and valuable in the professional field after retirement. This thesis offers a social perspective on the process of retirement.

Many organisations in Israel prepare their employees for retirement through workshops based on models that assume individualistic and linear assumptions, in which the transition to retirement is in predictable stages until the individual reaches a new equilibrium as a result of rational decision making and planning of the individual. The current research argues that these models have limitations when applied in practice. If the outcomes arising from those decisions and plans do not meet expectations, there is a probability that this is perceived as a personal failure and a lack of hope. This thesis, drawing on a more social understanding of the self, argues that understanding retirement as paradoxically an individual experience, and at the same time also a social process, offers a different perspective that can be more helpful for retirees in dealing with the transition to retirement, as well as for HR managers, retirement consultants, and policymakers in the field of employment and welfare.

The meaning of the concept of retirement is influenced by the culture and history of the particular society. Thus retirement can be viewed as what Mead (1925, 1934) calls a 'social object': a population-wide tendency to act in similar ways in similar situations that have evolved over time in many interactions which may therefore differ within and between communities. A tendency to act in particular ways in social routines creates habits, which means that the transition to retirement is a change in habits. It takes place in iterated interactions with the community to which one belongs in which the individual change cannot be separated from change in the community they are part of, what is referred to as transformative change (Stacey, 2006). This thesis argues that understanding retirement as a 'social object' opens up more and new possibilities to reflect on what retirement means. This may challenge stereotypical attitudes towards retirees, such as those described in this research.

Key words: conflict, identity, older employees, power, recognition, retirement, retirement workshops, social object, status,

Key authors: S. Brinkman, N. Elias, J. Dewey, A. Honneth, G.H. Mead, C. Mowles, H. Rosa, R.D. Stacey

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1. Introduction

In this thesis, I explore the experience of retirement from the perspective of an executive Human Resource (HR) manager. My research critiques the prevailing understanding in organisations regarding retirement in Israel as a means of reflecting on HR practice in general, as well as my own particular attitude towards employees approaching retirement age over the course of my career. These reflective narratives pay attention to the breakdowns in understanding that occurred during my own retirement. This failed to fulfil my expectations arising from the social attitude towards retirees in a corporate organisation at the time. In my research, I came to understand that the linear and rational individual perspective that guided my management assumptions, and are prevailing assumptions in management can cause retirees to feel stuck and alienated.

This research insights are aimed at senior managers in preparing for their retirement, consultants who conduct retirement workshops and HR managers who need to understand what retirees go through and the effects of organisational conduct on them. The insights may also benefit policymakers (in Israel as well as in other countries such as UK and Canada) who are considering raising the retirement age and ways to bring retirees back to the workforce.

1.1. Occupational Context

I worked in one of the largest Israeli banks for 35 years where I held a variety of senior positions. My last position was in the HR as head of Training and Development (TD). In 2016, I decided to take an offer of an early retirement programme for all employees over the age of 50 aimed at reducing the number of older, more expensive senior employees. I retired before I reached the official retirement age. Although I did not want to return to a large organisation, nevertheless, I still wanted to continue being involved professionally and possibly work part-time. I have since been looking for ways to remain active in the field of HR.

The experience of shifting from a senior manager in an organisation to a retired self-employed consultant created a new dynamic of behavioural patterns that I wanted to better understand. I had worked in an organisation where I experienced, and was part of power struggles, conflicts and rivalries. I thought that such struggles were part of my desire to advance in rank, in influence and income in a large organisation (6000 employees). I assumed that in the world outside the organisation, especially as a retiree, I would be able to contribute without any, or

with minimal involvement in power struggles, conflicts and their emotional effects. It was a bit of a shock to find out that the fear of losing the power that I thought I had, feeling uncertain about my identity and all those questions of status and rivalry also existed in volunteer activity, as well as in a small partnership such as the one in which I became involved. In addition, I found that executives rarely talked about the difficulty of transitioning to retirement. Reflecting on what happened to me, the research question that evolved was: *What is the experience of a Human Resource executive after retirement whilst attempting to remain professionally active*.

1.2. Motivations for this Research

As part of my desire to be professionally relevant, in October 2018, I embarked on the Doctor in Management (DMan) programme at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. This programme is a practice-based doctorate in the field of management and complexity. The programme takes a complexity perspective on management and organisational behaviour and the method adopted is to take one's experience seriously. My themes and the eventual research focus emerged through a process of social iterative inquiry in a way that I could not have fully predicted.

When I joined the programme, my intention was to research a subject related to leadership development, a topic dealt with in my last position in the bank. I thought it was necessary to change the prevailing attitudes (influenced by theories of charismatic leadership prevalent in the Israeli military) which I encountered in my former work and subsequently in the professional community in which I became active. In a conversation with a colleague from the research community in the DMan programme, I was asked what I was now doing. I gave a long list of activities that I was involved in, which made her say that it seemed that I was looking for my identity. Her statement irritated me, and I thought it was amateurish on her part to give such a diagnosis. This bothered me throughout the day, I felt it was a long list of activities and wondered why I am involved in so many things. At the same time, while I kept trying to convince my colleague that I had a core identity, my inner voice began to question the long list of activities I was involved in. This led me to realise that I was confused and looking for direction by holding onto everything possible. I realised that being a retiree puzzled me and affected me more than I cared to admit. This led me to try and understand what the experience of retirement meant for me? As a HR professional, I wondered what organisations do about

managing the process of retirement and whether it is enough. In this way, my research emerged by paying attention to my retirement experience in the local and social interactions both in the DMan programme, and during my attempts to remain professionally relevant and active.

In writing the research I went through a process of change. From one who referred to retirement as a phase, a disturbance of the routine, that through proper planning is possible to reach a new equilibrium. An assumption I discovered was informed by cybernetic systems thinking, as well as theories assuming that human beings are autonomous individuals who can affect change by their rational decisions, to understanding that retirement is a major event of identity change that occurs while interacting with the environment to which I belong.

As a HR executive in a large organisation, I did not seriously address the issue of retirement because I saw it as an issue that was beyond the boundaries of the organisation and not the responsibility of HR. The professional literature that accompanies HR professionals in Israel refers to retirement as an event of separation from the employee as far as financial rights are concerned. Other Israeli authors (Smilansky, 1997; Meshoulam and Harpaz, 2015) describe retirement in the context of separation or redundancy of employees and obligation for financial pension rights. Ulrich (1997) who directs the Human Resource Educational programmes at University of Michigan and whose books were professional resources to me, also mentions retirement mostly in the context of concern for financial rights and service (ibid:60), aside from one case study which included outsourcing some of HR activities, including retirement (ibid:226).

Most large organisations in Israel handle the issue of retirement by outsourcing retirement workshops of one to two days, close to the retirement date (I expand on this in project 4). Senior managers tend not to take part in these group workshops. They receive personal consulting, with the main emphasis on financial planning. In fact, there is little discussion about the retirement experience among senior managers, based on the assumption that it is an individual experience.

Managers are expected to deal with their own transition to retirement by using the management and control tools they acquired as managers: make rational decisions about what they want to do after retirement, prepare an action plan and implement it. In project 1 (p. 27) and project 2 (p. 53), I describe how this way of thinking is informed by systems thinking that

is dominant in the management theories which influenced my practice and reflect a powerful ideology of control, efficiency, progress and improvement (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 203). According to systems theories, organisations are systems which are composed of subsystems that affect each other. They assume that a small group of managers at the top of the management hierarchy are objective observers, who can stand outside the system and choose the level at which to operate and plan the organisation's direction. Agency is located in autonomous individuals, especially among managers, their actions are caused by rational choice and the future can be predicted (Stacey and Mowles, 2016). In this way of thinking, it is presumed that managers can successfully manage the transition to retirement and if there are difficulties, it is considered a failure in their own planning or execution.

The theoretical and methodological perspectives that form the basis of my research are also influenced by the perspective of the complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey and Griffin, 2005: 3; Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 295-301) which presents an alternative sociological approach which differs radically from theories based on a systemic perspective. I will expand on this sociological perspective in the methodology section.

1.3. Retirement in Israel

The official retirement age (from work) in the State of Israel today is 67. Women have the option to retire at age 62. The retirement age was set immediately after the establishment of the State (in 1948) at the age of 65 for men and 60 for women. At that time, life expectancy in Israel was 66.5, and the age gap between the male and female partners in the marriage was five years. The goal was to allow couples to retire at the same time and enjoy a few years together. Today, life expectancy has risen to 83, while for those who reach the age of 67, life expectancy increases to 87, of which for the first ten years after retirement they are usually in good physical and mental health. This means that life expectancy in Israel over the last 73 years has increased by 20 years, while the retirement age has changed by only two years. In addition, it does not matter whether you work or not, women reaching the age of 62 and men 65 receive from the government a 'senior citizen' certificate (gov.il: n.d.) that grants certain benefits. However, I, like many of my friends, felt we received an 'old person' stamp.

Israeli culture values achievement and youth and tries to move away from the image of the helpless old man. This has been intensified in the last two decades due to economic growth and the success of Israel's high-tech sector. In a study of the leisure habits of retirees in Israel,

Nimrod and Dahan (2016:67) explain that a large proportion of retirees do not know how to enjoy leisure during their retirement for the following reasons: the centrality of the family, the absence of models for a successful old age and our constant physical and financial insecurity. In addition, adults in Israel are characterised by a strong work ethic with the motto being 'work is our life'.

In a study conducted in Israel among members of five kibbutzim (Shkolnik et al., 1999) over 80% of kibbutz[1] members aged 65-85 were independent and still working. It was found that most of them refused to retire even though they feel tired, and lacked motivation and interest in their work. The ideological basis of the Kibbutz community was founded on the principles of sharing, equal opportunities, mutual responsibility and free choice. Retirement is not a concept that was taken into account when the young people founded the kibbutz, and it is perceived as antithesis of the principles of the kibbutz way of life. Elderly kibbutz members would prefer not to retire until the matter of retirement becomes an accepted value in the kibbutz ideology. Retirement, in a society that values youth, productivity and achievement, is seen as contrary to all of this and therefore of low value. The prevailing attitude in Israel is that retirement is identified with entering old age and the finality of life.

In recent years, other countries have also experienced a similar increase in life expectancy, with half of the OECD countries taking steps to raise their retirement age. Denmark, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and Slovakia have already made a decision to link it to life expectancy (OECD, 2017). A decision was made in Israel to gradually raise the retirement age for women so that it is the same as that of men. In addition, academic research institutes (Aaron Institute for Economic Policy, The Israel Democracy Institute) have published recommendations for raising the retirement age. This is currently on the government's agenda.

1.4. Structure of this thesis

In order to understand the nature of the research, I feel it is important to present the methodology first and then findings of my research.

1 A kibbutz is a type of settlement which is unique to Israel. A collective community, traditionally agrarian. The residents of the communes shared everything and worked as members of a collective. The kibbutz operates under the premise that all income generated by the kibbutz and its members goes into a common pool. Kibbutz members receive the same budget (according to family size), regardless of their job or position.

In part 2, I will expand on the DMan programme, the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating and the way these influenced how I conducted my research and developed my arguments.

In part 3, I have included the four reflexive projects that I developed during the course of my studies in full, as they were originally written. Henceforth P 1-4 refers to projects 1-4

Part 4 is a synopsis of the key ideas in each project and a further reflexive turn after having written the four projects. Re-reading and analysing the four projects has enabled me to articulate the final arguments of this research, as well as an insight into the evolvement of my thinking.

Part 5 includes a discussion and an account of my main arguments, a summary of my contributions to knowledge and practice, and considers further avenues of research.

2. Methodology

Following the chapter on my motivation for this research that emerged and developed through a social process, I would like to first expand on the methodology of my research.

My thesis has been built up in an emergent way in the framework of the DMan programme, that drew on the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey and Mowles, 2016), as a way of making sense of organisational life, and the method I have used is consistent with these theoretical assumptions.

As I detail in the projects below (P1), the way I was educated (economics and MBA) and my experience in organisational conduct that shaped my professional assumptions were rooted in systems theories, according to which organisations are systems comprised of individuals with minds inside them that represent the world outside. It is believed that managers can lead the organisation, make rational decisions and can plan the future. In my management practice I emphasised decision-making based on data that seemed objective, therefore the decisions should have been rational. This way of thinking favours scientific methods, according to which data and facts are collected and presented, abstracted from people and what they are doing, including the researcher who is understood to be an objective observer (i.e. as opposed to a participant). Research in this tradition assumes that there is an objective reality (positivist approach) and is often based on 'if-then 'propositional statements, which presume a linear causality.

The perspective of complex responsive processes of relating proposes an alternative way to view human behaviour and how it is manifested in organisations. This perspective suggests that population-wide patterns emerge in local interactions, and that one can only understand the global patterns through the local interactions. Elias also claims that "…in order to understand the functioning of human groups one needs to know, as it were, from inside how human beings experience their own and other groups, and one cannot know without active participation and involvement" (Elias, 1956: 237). This research method corresponds with pragmatic philosophy, claiming that there is no objective reality to be studied or understood on its own, but rather that our own experience, as expressed by our habits and activities, is the focus (Brinkmann, 2012). Thus, this approach acknowledges subjectivity and the researcher's influence on research, which are included and subjective assumptions examined.

Engaging with this perspective has had a significant influence on the way I conducted this thesis. The methodology I used is autoethnography and the method I used is reflexive narrative inquiry, which I will expand on below (p. 18-23). Additionally, I became aware of the limitations of a scientific mode of thinking, which focuses on phenomena which can be quantified and measured. Scientific constructs idealise models of the phenomena studied and assumes that the more complex the phenomenon being studied, the greater the need to study it under controlled conditions (Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001: 990-991).

In this section, I will further expand on the social understanding of organisations and human relations according to a complex responsive processes of relating perspective on which the DMan programme draws. I will explain how the DMan programme has informed the research methodology and methods used in this research. I will also address topics related to literature, validity, generalisability, and ethics, and will consider possible challenges to my methodology.

2.1. Complex responsive processes of relating perspective

My research is based on complex responsive processes of relating perspective, which is a perspective of human action. It is an inter-disciplinary perspective combining ideas from the complexity sciences (specifically, complex adaptive systems), pragmatic philosophy (such as George H. Mead and John Dewey), anthropology, process sociology (Norbert Elias) and group analytic psychotherapy (S.H. Foulkes). The themes that arise in my research - power, identity, conflict, recognition and status - as well as the understanding of my conduct, were interpreted in light of the principles of this perspective. In this section, I will introduce the main concepts from complex responsive processes of relating that are relevant to my research.

A fundamental assumption is that people are dependent upon each other from the moment of birth (Elias, 1978, 1991; Mead, 1934), and they are not autonomous. This means our interdependency enables and constrains us at the same time. The individual cannot act in isolation from others. The difference in interdependency: the degree to which someone needs another more, is what constitutes power relations. In addition, individuals communicate with each other in the form of a 'conversation of gestures' as the fundamental social act of gesture-response. Mead (1934: 43-44) argues that when people communicate, one makes a gesture to the other, which evokes a response from the other, which is a gesture

back to the first one, which in turn evokes a further response. It is an endless cycle of gesture and response, where meaning lies in the gesture and response taken together. When gesturing to others simultaneously the gesturer also makes a gesture to himself, which evoking a similar, anticipatory response within him that it is likely to call out in the other. The endless back and forth of gesture-responses constitutes mind, self and society in Mead's terms. Hence, the focus shifts from the idea of a system, prevalent in orthodox accounts of organization, to the responsive manner in which humans interact with each other. Humans are diverse, they interact with each other based on their own local organising principles (self-organising) therefore their conduct is both predictable and unpredictable. We are social through and through and we become the individuals we are because of the groups we belong to, and at the same, time we influence the group. We are forming and being formed by the society that we are part of.

According to this perspective, there is no equilibrium state, the focus of attention is on the forces of dynamic interaction between people where social life is never in equilibrium (Mowles, 2017a: 5). It is always in a state of flux and change over time. Global patterns emerge from a local interactions without a blueprint or pre-designed pattern, so change occurs as a result of many local interactions between interdependent people, rather than a pre-planned programme. It also means that there is no locus of control. In addition, according to this perspective, the reference to time is not linear, where the present separates the past from the future, but rather people perpetually act in the present while interpreting the past in anticipation of the future (Stacey and Griffin, 2005: 15-16; Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 327, 355).

Furthermore, the perspective of complex responsive processes adopts the insight that complex adpative systems display the capacity to change and produce new forms in processes involving a paradoxical dynamic of stability and instability and forming and being formed at the same time. As I state above, we form and are formed by iterating social patterns.

Consonant with the tradition of thinking into which I was inducted as a student, I have paid attention to micro-processes of interaction as a way of forming theories about wider social patterns which inform the local.

2.2.The DMan programme: research theoretical framework

The Doctor of Management (DMan) is a professional management research doctorate programme run by the University of Hertfordshire (UH). It is a part-time programme intended for more experienced practitioners where the subject of their research emerges in focusing on taking their experience seriously. The researchers are invited to conduct a critical exploration of issues that relate to their experiences at work, to make new sense of what they are doing, to bring novel insights and to contribute to the development of their practice (Mowles, 2017a).

The DMan programme draws on the ideas of complex responsive processes of relating, a theory of theories which is a perspective of human action, developed by Ralph Stacey, Doug Griffin and Patricia Shaw and later by Christopher Mowles and faculty colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire. This perspective attempts to explore what people do in organisations when they are working together, and how they make sense of what they are doing (Stacey and Griffin, 2005; Stacey and Mowles, 2016).

According to this perspective organisations are not understood as systems at a different level to the individual, but rather as the ongoing iterated processes of communicative interactions and power relating between people (Stacey and Griffin, 2005: 1) through ordinary everyday processes of cooperation and competition between people locally, including managers and consultants, that "perpetually construct their future together as the present." (Stacey and Griffin, 2005: 3). This means that no one can step outside of their interaction with others and leaders do not set directions or design the future, they are in charge but not in control. However, individuals do make choices between possible actions. From the perspective of complex responsive processes, the appropriate method for understanding, for researching into organisations is in terms of the experience of their members (ibid: 15).

Students of the DMan programme research current events they are involved in, which evolves into narrative by paying attention to themes emerging in the stories of their own experience of participation with others. Interactions of people create the patterns that are the organisation. (Stacey and Griffin, 2005:2).

2.3. Autoethnography

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the phenomenon of the retirement experience. As outlined in the preceding paragraphs, my underlying assumptions are rooted

in complex responses processes of relating perspective, drawing on an interdisciplinary persepctive, including pragmatic philosophy, which posits that there is no objective truth awaiting to be discovered. Rather, truth is constructed through interactions with the realities of the world. Consequently, an interpretivist research approach, employing qualitative methodology, is deemed more appropriate for this inquiry (Levy, 2006: 374-376).

The methodology I used is autoethnography that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graph*y) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experiences (*ethno*) (Ellis et. al., 2011:273). It is a research methodology that combines characteristics of autobiography (author writes retroactively and selectively about past experiences) and ethnography (study of a culture's relational practices) (ibid: 274). In an autobiography, the author writes a text that uses principles of storytelling to give audiences a sense of how being there in the experience feels. In ethnography, the aim is to create a representation of cultural practice in order to make it accessible to an 'outside' audience by the use of thick and vivid description, which offers the readers a sense of being there ((ibid: 275). Autoethnography acknowledges the subjectivity of the researcher and his influence on the research (ibid).

Employing first-person accounts as a primary source of social research inevitably raises questions regarding the researcher's subjectivity: is this simply *my* story? Autoethnography is sometimes perceived as self-centred or self-indulgent (Sparkes, 2000, 2002). For more traditional researchers, there is an expectation within the social sciences to exclude the author's voice from the text, thereby minimising the self to maintain objectivity (Sparkes, 2000: 30). The utilisation of the self as a primary data source "sits at the boundaries of disciplinary practices and raises questions about what constitutes proper research" (Sparkes, 2000: 21). However, individuals do not accumulate their experiences in a social vacuum. As Elias (1978, 1991) argues, individuals are born into an existing society, and the 'self'—which is not initially present at birth—develops through continuous interaction with society. Similarly, Mead (1934) posits that mind, self, and society emerge simultaneously through social processes. Through encounters with others, individuals learn to adopt different perspectives, broadening their understanding. As one grows and is exposed to larger social circles, the range of perspectives one can adopt expands. Thus, writing about individual experience inherently involves writing about social experience, offering insights that may be valuable to others in similar contexts.

Ellis and colleagues (Ellis et al., 2011) highlight the core characteristics that render autoethnography a potentially valid methodology for taking the retirement experience seriously and exploring it as an active participant. Autoethnography provides an account of personal experiences that can capture cultural nuances, thereby filling gaps in existing research—especially those studies that claim to take a more 'objective' stance. For instance, while existing studies may describe the difficulties in the retirement process in general terms, my autoethnographic approach allows for the detailed articulation of how these crises manifest in daily life. Similarly, admitting to age bias in my role as an HR executive or disclosing my doubts about what to write on a name tag provides a particularisation of experiences that might otherwise remain abstract in traditional research (P4, P3). While existing studies acknowledge that retirees may experience an identity crisis (Braithwaite & Gibson, 1987; Tougas et al., 2004), writing from my personal perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of these issues in everyday practice. Ellis and her colleagues claim that "…as authors we can tell our stories in novel ways when compared to how others may be able to tell them" (Ellis et al., 2011: 275).

Autoethnographic writing, when combined with reflective inquiry and engagement with the research community, enables the researcher to disclose their intentions and emotions as part of the narrated events. In my experience, the research process began with denial, and only through the questions and comments of my learning set and subsequent interactions within the research community did I develop reflexivity. This reflexivity helped me to become aware of thoughts and intentions that I was less conscious of initially. Such revelations may not have been possible had I been a subject in someone else's research. By contrast, traditional ethnographic research relies on participant observation or interviews, where individuals may not disclose certain aspects of their experiences. In such cases, researchers have to interpret the intentions of others, which can be obscured. To test whether my insights resonate with other retirees, I initiated a meeting with a group of friends and friends of friends who retired to talk about the retirement experience.

Nevertheless, the challenge remains that the researcher's subjectivity can influence data analysis and conclusions understoos in conventional terms. This raises the question: am I merely reaffirming what I already believe, rather than shifting my perspective to identify new

insights? Thus, any conclusions drawn from exploring my own experience may be limited in their applicability to my own practice.

Anderson (2006) identifies reflexivity as a key feature of analytic autoethnography[2], stating that it "involves an awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants. It entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others" (ibid: 382). Critical and reflexive inquiry in various group settings—such as the learning set and community meetings (expanded in section 2.5, p. 23)—engages the researcher with multiple perspectives and alternative explanations that may not be available to lone autoethnographers.

Offering an account of oneself can illuminate blind spots or generate an awareness of thoughts or behaviours that one may be unwilling or unable to confront. For instance, admitting to denying the post-retirement crisis while striving to present an image of strength, resilience, and control was a profound realisation/tendency for me. Developing critical reflexivity made me aware of my tendency to deny difficulties, as well as the awareness to social influences on my experience. This awareness motivated me to continue discussing retirement openly, ultimately leading to the formation of an active retiree group that embraces opportunities rather than retreating behind defensive walls of denial. Autoethnography holds profound potential for reciprocal transformation (Anderson, 2006: 383).

While autoethnography offers many strengths as a qualitative approach, it also raises concerns about ethical practices, particularly in relation to the representation of others. Autoethnographic writing requires careful consideration of how others are portrayed, as it may inadvertently impact their privacy and autonomy. This concern will be addressed in detail in the section on ethics (section 2.8, p. 30).

One limitation frequently attributed to autoethnography is the absence of clear criteria for evaluating what constitutes rigorous research. Holt (2003) and Sparkes (2000) discuss the responses of reviewers to autoethnographic manuscripts submitted to academic journals,

[2] Anderson (2006 p. 373) "proposes the term analytic autoethnography to refer to research in which the researcher is (1) a full mem ber in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena".

which illustrate that evaluating such research remains problematic. Holt (2003) references Josselson's (1993) questions: "What is a good story? Is just a good story enough? What must be added to a story to make it scholarship? How do we derive concepts from stories and then use these concepts to understand people?" (ibid: xi). Sparkes (2000) suggests that the criteria used to judge autoethnography should not necessarily align with those traditionally employed in evaluating other qualitative research approaches, arguing that "researchers will need to develop new avenues of criticism and praise for such work" (ibid: 38). Richardson (2000) proposes five criteria that merge the scientific and creative arts lenses to create a 'social science form': (a) Substantive contribution—does it enhance understanding of social life? (b) Aesthetic merit—is it engaging and complex? (c) Reflexivity—how has the author's subjectivity both shaped and been shaped by the text? (d) Impactfulness—does it evoke emotional responses, generate new questions, or prompt action? (e) Expression of a reality—does the text embody a vivid sense of lived experience? (ibid: 15-16). Ellis (1995) further argues that a story should be considered valid if it evokes a sense of authenticity, believability, and possibility in the reader.

This methodology enabled me to articulate the complexities of the retirement process, including the loss of power, recognition, and status, as well as the assumption that unfulfilled plans signify personal failure. Sharing my retirement experience and exposing my vulnerability to the peer group prompted some participants to acknowledge their own difficulties, which they had not previously disclosed. Through this methodology, my insights resonate with a wider audience and contribute to creating accessible texts that extend beyond traditional academic settings.

Utilising an autoethnographic methodology inherently relies on narrative inquiry. In the next section I will be concerned with narrative inquiry.

2.4.Reflexive narrative inquiry

Essentially, autoethnography and narrative inquiry are intertwined, as both involve the researcher crafting a narrative of their experiences as foundational data. My study includes narratives detailing my experiences after retirement, which serve as the core data for my research.

Narrative is retrospective meaning making – ordering of past experience into a meaningful whole and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time (Chase, 2008: 64). People mainly organise their experience and memory of human happenings in the form of narrative (Bruner 1991: 4). Andrews and his colleagues believe "that there is a close relationship between the stories we tell and hear and who we are; and that our stories are the cornerstone of our identities" (Andrews et al., 2004: 11). Lieblich claims that the narrative is a medium for creating meaning, for understanding and organizing events. In this sense, the narrative describes reality but also shapes it and structures its meaning (Lieblich, et al. 1998). The narrative is a channel that expresses identity, but also creates and establishes identity.

Narrative inquiry is a method aimed at making sense of social life (Czarniawska, 2004: 11). As an interdisciplinary practice it cuts across the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences as a way of generating knowledge and and allows us to glimpse at the complexities of human lives, selves and endeavours (Andrews et al., 2004).

Narrative inquiry is at the heart of the DMan research methodology, in which written narratives which are the key data source. Tsoukas and Hatch (2001) make the case for the narrative approach as a way of exploring second-order organisational complexity.

The method is that of giving an account, telling the story, of what we think and feel that we are doing in our interaction with each other in particular contexts over particular periods of time. It is the 'raw material 'that serves as the basis for discussion with others in a deepening reflection on the meaning of the narrative. (ibid: 1000-1)

In my narratives, I focus on 'breakdown' events, which occur while I attempt to find my way professionally. "A breakdown is a lack of fit between one's encounter with a tradition and the schema-guided expectations by which one organizes experience" (Agar, 1986: 21). When things do not work out as anticipated, we become more aware and pay deliberate attention to what we do (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). Paying attention to breakdowns that give rise to surprise, astonishment or mystery brings the researcher closer to resolution (Brinkmann, 2012: 44). Taking these situations as a basis for inquiry is an abductive form of research in which I give primacy to my experience and use theories as tools, alternating between theory and empirical facts whereby both are successively reinterpreted in the light of each other (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009: 4). "Abduction is a form of reasoning that we employ in situations of uncertainty; when we need an understanding or explanation of some effect"

(Brinkmann, 2012: 46). Brinkmann, as part of a qualitative research tradition, recommends writing down the researcher's interpretations, to judge their validity in order to "unpack and understand problematic situations… The researcher will often go back and forth between reading, writing and collecting empirical materials" (ibid: 179). In this way, in the narratives I write, I emphasise 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), meaning a rich account of everything that took place. I do so in order to convey to the reader the emotions and embodied feelings, so that they can "experience an experience" (Ellis et al., 2011), find resonance with the situation and pay attention to elements that are woven together.

In addition to the narrative, my projects, also include reflections and reflexivity on my experiences which distinguishes it as a research method from being a literary story. Mowles (2015: 60) differentiates between reflection and reflexivity as separate, yet connected activities. While reflection is the ability to detach ourselves from our involvement, (only involved and detached perspectives together give a more 'balanced picture' (Elias, 1991: 47))[3], reflexivity is our ability to think about how we are thinking about how we are engaged. Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009: 9) define reflexivity as the interpretation of interpretation, an important phase in the process of knowledge development in qualitative research.

By sharing my narratives with the learning set and the research community I test "…if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know" (Ellis et al., 2011: 283).

2.5. Research community

The DMan programme offers a methodological framework of a research community. All researchers participating in the programme are expected to participate in four four-day residential meetings a year, for three to four years. These are face-to-face meetings (which were converted to Zoom during the pandemic), that are held over a weekend. In these residentials, faculty members present topics which initiate debate and small group discussions, student presentations, community meetings and learning sets.

[3] Elias (1991: 47) claims that only involvement and detachment or as he puts it the view of the 'airman' and of the 'swimmer' together give a more 'balanced picture (in the sense of paradox - both at the same time - not in the sense of equilibrium). Each of these perspectives, when isolated from each other makes us inclined to give a one-side emphasis.

I had the opportunity to present my research at three different stages of its development to assess if my narratives resonate with others and get input from the entire research community that enabled me to progress. For example, questions I was asked by my fellow students brought to my attention the fact that I continued to introduce myself as a former TD Executive. They also pointed out that I seemed troubled by my perceived loss of power. These comments and others helped me see things I had not noticed up until then.

The community of research sits in a 'community meeting' which draws on the Institute of Group Analysis (IGA) tradition of group analytic psychotherapy methods but as an experiential group which is distinguished from the group analytic tradition that runs for the explicit purpose of therapy. In the community meetings, students and faculty members come together for an hour and a half each morning on the three days of the residential weekend, to discuss anything we find relevant and important to ourselves, our research and practice. These sessions do not have a pre-defined agenda. These meetings enable us to reflect on and discuss patterns of interactions, to pay attention to what is going on for us and others, calling into question what we may have taken for granted and making links with organisational life (Mowles, 2017a: 8). The community meetings are a chance to pay particular attention to group dynamics, in which the process and outcome of the discussions cannot be predicted, to identify conversational themes and patterns including those of recognition (Honneth, 1996), inclusion, exclusion and power relations (Elias, 1978). The idea is to link the discussions to what is happening to us in our workplace. "The intention is to help managers become more critical thinkers, critical in the sense of critical management studies, as well as more aware of the psychodynamics of groups." (Mowles, 2017b: 8-9).

In these meetings, the relationship between the 'self' and the group is experienced and explored. In one case, I made a comment to one of the participants with the intention of helping her, but this caused a confrontation between her and another participant. It was discussed in the community and led to further discussions in our learning set about how even well-intended gestures may get taken up in ways that become destructive. This links to my reading of Mead (1934), an American pragmatic philosopher, about conversations of gesture and response. The gesture and response are taken together and meaning arises for both the person gesturing and the one responding, which neither party fully controls. In other words, meaning arises in the back and forth exchange between engaged human bodies, which no one

can control. This helped me understand the outburst of one of the team members I described in my narrative in project 2, in which I relate how I intended to make a compliment but it was interpreted as an insult.

In addition, in an encounter with the group, which is an encounter with others who are different, one's patterns of behaviour can be challenged. Foulkes (2018), a German-British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, terms it 'hall of mirrors' where participants can see themselves and their reactions reflected back at them in the group. In that they may understand themselves better, see the patterns of behaviour they are stuck in and make different meaning of something which has caused them distress (Mowles, 2017a: 510). In P4, I describe how through the community meetings I became aware of the fact that I was denying the difficulties I was experiencing in the retirement process, which held back my progress with my research for a long time.

Another important component of the research community is the small learning set, in which students discuss and critique each other's work and reflect on matters that have arisen during the residential. Each learning set comprises a faculty supervisor and up to four students at different stages of the programme. We share drafts of the projects, and discuss and critique each other's work. This helps me to probe my narratives and to understand if they resonate with others. Through our co-researchers' comments, we help each other broaden our perspectives on our research. The professional diversity of the learning set members also contributed to broadening our perspectives. The initial learning set members were an accountant in a UK business school, an organisational consultant from the Netherlands and an IT project manager from the UK. Later joining were a social worker from the UK, an organisational consultant from Israel and an innovation consultant from Denmark.

Members of my learning set have been essential in my becoming more reflexive about my work, they drew my attention to my ways of thinking, questioning my taken-for-granted assumptions and providing richer and additional perspectives in making sense of my own experiences. When I joined the programme, reading the works of senior students of my learning set helped me better understand the perspective of complex responsive process of relating, as well as the rules of conduct in the community. Later on, when I become one of the seniors it provided the opportunity to refine my knowledge by commenting on their work.

The relationships between the learning set members extend beyond the quarterly residential as we meet online between the residential and build close connections and occasionally share aspects of our personal lives.

2.6. Focus group

In order to examine whether my experience resonates with colleagues who have retired from senior positions, I invited a group of friends and friends of friends to discuss retirement at my house. I used the focus group guidelines.

A focus group is a qualitative research technique that collects data through group interaction. A group of individuals is selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, a topic that is the subject of the research. It can be used to identify potential areas of enquiry or to clarify a subject (Morgan, 1996: 130; Powell and Single, 1996: 499-500).

Focus groups are used by researchers with different theoretical backgrounds in social science. In a chapter that outlines some of the main issues of using focus groups in social research, Smithson (2008) from the University of Exeter, who has expertise in a wide range of qualitative research methods, points out that "…focus groups have been viewed within ethnography as a way of emphasising the collective nature of experience, and the social context of accounts" (ibid: 365).

As part of writing Project 4, when I became aware of the breakdown I went through in the transition to retirement and the insights regarding the feeling of loss of power, recognition and status became clear, I wanted to check if my narrative resonated with other retirees. Since there was only one community member of retirement age in the DMan research community, it was important for me to evaluate whether my experience resonated with other retirees. In addition to conversations with retirees that I had on a number of occasions, I added a peer meeting of retiree colleagues (a summary of the meeting appears in Appendix p. 192).

A focus group is generally understood to be a group of 6–12 participants, however a group of 4-8 participants provides an environment where all participants can take an active part in the discussion (ibid: 358). I invited seven women who were in senior positions and had retired in

the last ten years, to a four-hour meeting at my home. I knew some of them from social and professional settings, and I had no prior acquaintance with the others (they were invited by other participants). Some of the participants knew each other and some did not. It was a homogeneous group in terms of gender, age and socioeconomic status which I belong to. "Within-group homogeneity prompts focus group participants to elaborate stories and themes that help researchers understand how participants structure and organise their social world" (Hughes and DuMont, 1993: 776).

In social research, using a focus group is typically less structured. The moderator can be the researcher who is primarily aiming to facilitate the discussion rather than direct it. Participants are encouraged to talk to each other rather than just respond to the moderator's questions (Smithson, 2008: 359). I facilitated a discussion about the retirement experience. I prepared in advance the topics I wanted to discuss, organised the room to be comfortable and scattered photo cards on the tables. These photos served as a projective tool through which the participants shared their emotions and experiences. I started the meeting by explaining the DMan programme and my research on retirement experience as well as how I got to this subject. I explained to them that I would write down the main themes that emerged in our conversation while I would preserve their anonymity. I asked them to respect each other's confidentiality. The questions that were raised and the responses of the participants are summarised in the Appendix (section 6 p. 192). At the end of each round of questions, I presented my experience and the insights I gained so far in my research. After two hours and a number of rounds of discussions that were relaxed and with active participation of all, I invited them to sit around a table for a light dinner during which a less structured discussion continued. They shared personal experiences from the retirement process, mainly around the expectations of the family to help with the grandchildren.

The issues I presented to them resonated with most of them and they added their own nuances to the same topics such as continuously checking whether there is a problem with the phone, the feeling of restlessness, stories about various attempts to find activities to keep busy and more.

This meeting was a complementary method I used in order to endorse how my personal experience resonated with other retirees, another reflexive turn with a wider peer group, which brings me to a discussion about validity and generalisability.

2.7. Validity and generalisability

Validity traditionally refers to the 'correctness' or 'precision' of research findings and has two primary dimensions: internal validity, which assesses whether the research investigates what it claims to, and external validity, which evaluates the applicability of the findings to other groups or contexts (Lewis et al., 2003: 274). Generalisability concerns the extent to which the results of research can be applied to other situations, contexts, or groups (ibid: 264). According to these definitions, there is an overlap between external validity and generalisability. This underscores the question of how accurately research captures reality.

Generalisability is of particular concern to quantitative, positivist researchers who apply stringent statistical tests to meet this criterion. Moreover, these researchers are expected to provide detailed accounts of their testing processes to ensure replicability of their results. This approach rests on the assumption that an objective external world exists and that knowledge can be derived from empirical investigation by maintaining a certain distance from the subject (Myers, 2000). Another underlying assumption is that society comprises an aggregation of individuals, and that a representative sample is needed to generate insights that can be generalised to a broader population or groups. Furthermore, there is an assumption that human behaviour is predictable, suggesting that similar reactions can be reproduced under identical conditions—an "if… then" assumption.

However, there is ongoing debate regarding the generalisability of qualitative research. Falk and Guenther's (2006) literature review identifies three perspectives on this issue:

1. Generalisation is not the primary purpose of qualitative research. Small qualitative studies are not generalisable in the traditional sense but they possess other valuable qualities that make them significant (Myers, 2000: 2). Terms such as generalisability, are derived from the quantitative paradigm.

2. It is possible to generalise from qualitative research, but caution is needed due to the limited sample sizes (Newman and Benz, 1998; Snowden and Martin, 2011). Some scholars suggest combining qualitative methods with quantitative measures (A review of Falk and Guenther 2006: 4). These suggestions reflecti a partial acceptance of scientific paradigms.

3. The formalisation of the idea that qualitative research can be generalisable, (Stake, 2010: 195, 220 - what Stake refers to as ‘naturalistic generalization’). Mays and Pope (2000: 1) argue that "qualitative research can be assessed according to two broad criteria: validity and relevance".

Drawing on the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, which forms the basis of my thesis (as detailed in section 2.1, p. 15-16), individuals are dependent upon each other from the moment of birth and are social through and through. Individuals and society are paradoxically forming and being formed by each other and the relationship between individuals are built on a 'communication of gestures' (detailed on p 15-16), where responses are both predictable and unpredictable. This perspective aligns with pragmatic philosophy, which argues that there is no objective reality to be studied in isolation, but rather that reality is constructed through interaction with the world.

In this context, the type of generalisability I aim for in my research does not claim that my conclusions will be universally applicable, but rather seeks a different form of generalisability—one that is more literary in nature. I aim for resonance with my readers' experiences, seeking to make my research both interesting and thought-provoking. The goal is to illuminate alternative perspectives, encouraging readers to reflect on similarities and differences with their own experiences. Levy (2006: 375) suggests that interpretivist research aims to understand and explore issues within specific contexts. Cronbach (1975: 124) similarly argues that social phenomena are too context-specific to permit generalisability, advocating for a reversal of qualitative research priorities to ‘appraise a practice or proposition… in context’.

These aims are addressed in several ways throughout my research. My writing adopts what Geertz (1973) referred to as ‘thick description’, which conveys the events described in a manner that enables readers to make sense of the sequence and to imagine how the experience feels. This allows them to judge whether the events resonate with their own experiences and whether the analysis is of interest to others. I also presented my research to the broader research community, including faculty members, on three separate occasions of progress, offering further opportunities for reflection. Furthermore, going through several iterations in which my learning set members read, commented on and asked questions helped

me gain a more detached stance[4] and to assess whether it resonated with them. Since there was only one community member of retirement age in the DMan research community, it was important for me to evaluate whether my experience resonates with other retirees, in addition to conversations with retirees that I had on every occasion, I added a peer group meeting of retiring colleagues (detailed in Focus group section 2.6 p 23, in P4 p 118 and a summary of the meeting appears in Appendix p 192) where the participants shared their retirement experience and referred to themes that emerged in my research. My experience resonated with most of them, they were surprised to find out that this was not solely their personal experience and noted that this was the first time they had talked about the difficulty of retirement. They added nuances from their experience, such as the difficulty of presenting themselves as retirees or stories about negotiating with the family about helping with the grandchildren.

Furthermore, I reflected my experience against a backdrop of theory and organisational literature, so that I aim to reach generalisable and useful insights, where I provide the social relevance of my personal experience and seek to provide a contribution to knowledge that is new and of value to our research community. Mowles (2015: 13), in exploring what works in management, seeks generalisability "which triggers recognition in the reader, and perhaps rich resonances with the reader's own experience, and opens up other lines of enquiry and richer perspectives".

In addition, drawing on Mead (1934: 182), who claims that individuals are socially formed from the moment of birth and Elias (1978, 1991) and that people are dependent upon each other, I therefore argue that subjective accounts represent a range of conscious and unconscious socialising processes of the society I am involved in. This means that my accounts are a reflection of a wider, collective experience.

Furthermore, in response to the criticism of autoethnography as a research method that provides plausible, rather than universal explanations of truth (Méndez, 2013: 282), I draw on the pragmatic tradition's argument against the concept of a universal truth, rather something that is created through action and experience (Brinkmann 2017: 25). A central insight of pragmatism is that "we must start from where we find ourselves—as human beings, laden

[4] Elias (1991: 47) claims that involvement and detachment perspectives together is more helpful.

with beliefs and practices, trying to make sense of ourselves and our world" (Misak, 2013: 370).

In addition, drawing on Dewey's terms, I argue that my research's conclusions are 'warranted assertions', "outcomes of inquiry that are so settled that we are ready to act upon them, yet remain always open to be changed in the future" (Martela, 2015: 540). Thus, my research conclusions, in keeping with the pragmatic thinking approach, are temporary, provisional, never fixed and given (Dewey, 1938: 112) and open for further inquiry in the future.

2.8. Ethics

Writing narratives about my experience is saturated with ethical issues of confidentiality and consent. The modernist theory of ethics assumes that we are autonomous individuals, capable of making rational decisions according to a "fixed realities"/ ethical codes against which our conduct is judged before actions with meaning known in advance (Griffin, 2002: 216). According to the complex responsive processes of relating perspective, drawing on Mead (1908), suggests "ethical interpretation of actions is to be found in the action itself, in the on-going recognition of meaning of actions that could not have been known in advance" (Griffin, 2002: 182).

In a practical approach to autoethnography research, Ellis (2007) from the University of South Florida, known for her contributions to the narrative study of human life, quotes Guillemin and Gillam (2004) who delineate two dimensions of ethics. The first is when procedural ethics committees ensure research procedures adequately deal with informed consent, confidentiality, rights to privacy, deception, and protecting human subjects from harm. The second is ethics in practice, or situational ethics, the kind that deals with the unpredictable, often subtle, yet ethically important moments that come up in the field (ibid:4). Ellis adds a third dimension: *relational ethics,* that recognises and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched with emphasis on research, where the relationships with those appearing in the research are not temporary. In relational ethics, there are no definitive rules or universal principles that can tell you precisely what to do in every situation or relationship you may encounter, other than the vague and generic "do no harm" (ibid:5).

I now see that these dimensions of ethics, and in particular the second and third (the situational and the relational) are closely related, even intertwined.

At the outset of the programme, I reviewed and committed to comply with all ethical guidelines for researchers as provided to students by the University of Hertfordshire. Furthermore, as a consultant, I am aware of and committed to the issues of ethics and confidentiality. As a board director in an Israeli HR association, I took part in the formulation of the ethical code for HR professionals and I am committed to them. These can address the first dimension of ethics, the important procedures that every doctoral researcher follows.

With regard to situational and relational ethics, these are very present in my research. I enquire into my experience as a self-employed consultant (P3), as a board member in a professional association (P2) and as a retiree among other retirees. I focus and reflect on what happens to me and my thinking. The research involves colleagues and other people who appear as characters in the narrative, but they are not subjects of my research. People who do appear in my narratives are completely anonymised and any identifying features of their names, organisations and locations are generalised so that they cannot be identified. However, I shared with my colleagues that in part of my research I write and reflect on narratives concerning situations they were involved in.

Thinking about situational ethics, my research projects have highlighted examples of ethical considerations that could not have been predicted. For example, I asked the CEO of a consulting company that facilitated retirement workshops to send me the theoretical materials on which his work is based, which I then critique. I let him know that I am exploring the retirement experience and that the model he uses did not work for me and I will likely criticise it. He saw it as a challenge that he would like to hear from me when I have completed my work. With a specific focus on relational ethics, I am aware that the relationships with those I write about will probably continue. Furthermore, I have a responsibility towards them: to be careful not to offend them and to write in a way they will recognise themselves.

The narratives and how I interpret them were discussed with my fellow researchers in my learning set, and in the large group of DMan researchers, all of whom are operating under the same ethical principles.

Additionally, I have told the people I work with - my business partners and colleagues - that I am studying for a professional doctorate, that I write narratives about events concerning our work together, how my research is conducted, and that the purpose is finding generalisable patterns of relating . In addition, as part of writing the fourth project about the retirement experience, I wanted to check if my narrative about the retirement experience resonated with other retirees, as explained above. At the outset, I explained to them that it is part of my research and that the things that would be said would appear in the research, however, I promised that they would be anonymized, which I have done. I also emphasised to the participants that it was very important not to attribute anything said by others outside of the meeting. Smithson (2008) points out that "The moderator can guarantee from a personal perspective that the things said in a focus group context will be kept anonymous and confidential, but cannot guarantee that co-participants will not discuss the group, which can be a problem, especially in an institutional setting, such as in a workplace, or health care setting" (ibid: 360). However, the participants in the focus group I conducted were from my different circles of acquaintances - some of the participants knew each other and some had no prior acquaintance, yet the conversation flowed openly (An expansion on the themes raised in the meeting is detailed in P4 p 118. Additionally, a summary of the statements from the meeting is attached as an appendix to the thesis). I suggested that after the research is submitted, we could meet again and I would present my insights.The meeting was conducted as a peer discussion and summarised without the use of direct quotations, ensuring full anonymity of the participants. This approach aligns with ethical standards, safeguarding participants' identities and maintaining confidentiality throughout the research process.

3. Research Projects

I present below the four research projects that make up my research. They are presented in the chronological order in which they were written and analysed in. Project 1 (P1) is a reflective account of my history, studies, professional experience, and other influences that have shaped my way of thinking about my profession and organisational life. Projects 2 to 4 (P2-P4) follow my retirement experience. Each of these projects begins with a detailed account of experiences, articulated as narratives, focusing on issues that puzzled me and drawing on relevant literature to deepen my understanding of my experience.

3.1. Project 1 - Intellectual autobiography

3.1.1. Introduction

An intellectual autobiography is a reflective narrative that outlines a person's intellectual development, academic interests, and the key influences that have shaped their thinking over time. Unlike a traditional autobiography that focuses on personal life events, an intellectual autobiography is more concerned with one's educational journey, the evolution of their ideas, and the intellectual milestones that have defined their academic or professional career. Korshin (1974) reviews the development of intellectual biography in the eighteenth century and summarises it as methodology approach rather than a specific type of biography. Carlton-LaNey (2001: xii), defines intellectual biography "is the life history of an individual preeminently guided by the intellectual as distinguished from experiential or emotional". More, Carlton-LaNey (1990) suggests that “the goal of the intellectual biography is to trace the thinking of a particular historical figure to ascertain major contributions to knowledge” (ibid: 46–47). Bourdieu’s (2007) self-reflective account combines his intellectual development with sociological analysis, providing a rich example of an intellectual autobiography.

Ellen Herman, Professor of History Emeritus from the University of Oregon, in her guidance to researchers she offers suggestions, among other things, wirriting an intellectual biography that " offer insights into 1) the person’s life; 2) the intellectual and creative work of the person; 3) the relationship between life and work; and 4) the significance of the life and work historically" (Herman blog).

This project is a reflection on my managerial experience, as well as my personal background, and how my basic assumptions has evolved through the various positions and fields I have dealt with over the years as a manager in organisations. In this project I also attempt to understand and reflect on how my way of thinking and decision-making have developed, and the influence they have had on the decisions I have made in my professional and personal life. I will explore the assumptions I have made, and how they have been challenged in the light of questions posed both by my peers on the University of Hertfordshire Doctor of Management programme (DMan) and by myself, along with the new reading materials and research on complex responsive processes of relating that I have been exposed to for the first time, and which I will delve into later.

3.1.2. Sorting process into learning set

As I began writing, my thoughts were dominated by a specific memory that occurred in my first residential in October 2018 concerning allocating the participants into groups. In the DMan programme, students come together once every three months for a four-day residential to discuss their research. In addition to teaching sessions with the entire research community, students are divided into smaller groups, called learning sets, in which we discuss and critique each other's work and reflect on matters that have arisen during the residential. Each learning set comprises a faculty supervisor and up to four students at different stages of the programme. As it was my first residential, I had to work with the other students to negotiate my way into a learning set. There were two learning sets with spaces available, and I was one of two new students. During the sorting process, which took place at a meeting attended by all students and faculty members participate, one of the learning sets with a space available wanted to interview the candidates outside the room. Having initially declared that I did not mind which learning set I was in, shortly after, and while the other new student was being interviewed, I announced to all of the participants left in the meeting room that my preference was for the learning set that did not request to interview us, effectively aborting the sorting process. What prompted this change of heart? What made me stop the process? I am aware that this is not the first time, from my perspective, that I took control in order to manage a process. When I become part of an uncertain situation, I can suddenly grab hold of the reigns. As I became increasingly exposed to the subject of complex responsive process of relating, I began to realise that in order to understand how I think, it might be helpful to reflect upon the

society into which I was born, and the environment in which I grew up. As Mowles, the director of the DMan programme, puts it: "We become who we are because we are born into a particular society with a particular social structure which we learn through a process of socialisation to adapt to a 'generalised other'[5]. But our response to the general patterning of social behaviour and structure is unique" (Mowles, 2011: 73).

Therefore, I searched for the roots of a 'you won't decide for me' attitude in my childhood, but did not come up with anything. I do, however, remember using this attitude on a number of occasions as an adult and manager.

I wondered if this was a reaction against my parents, who, in my experience, avoided making every-day small decisions such as choosing a holiday destination or a show, or even deciding what food and drink to order in a restaurant. My siblings and I call this: "make them co-tea" (a combination of coffee and tea). When I think about it, however, my parents were very brave and made very significant decisions in their lives.

Another possibility is the influence my grandmother had on me. Like most Russian families, and until I was seven, we all lived together in the same house: my parents, sister and myself my grandmother, her husband, and their teenage son. My grandmother was a very strong woman, hard-working and decisive, who did not externalise her emotions. She was effectively the head of the family and made all the decisions. She raised me while my parents were busy making a living, and was the most dominant figure in my life. I remember her telling me stories and explaining moral values such as respecting your elders, while I tried to teach her Hebrew.

3.1.3. Acclimatisation

I was born in Lithuania, the first of four children (the other three were born in Israel) to parents who were Holocaust survivors. My father lost his family when he was nine years old and joined a Russian partisan group, somehow managing to survive while living in a forest. My mother escaped from Lithuania with her mother just as the Germans arrived, and they escaped to north east to Siberia.

After a long struggle with the Russian authorities, and one year in Poland in a transit camp, my parents and I (now aged four years old) managed to move to Israel with my grandmother, her

[5] Generalised other is the generalised attitude, the tendency to act, of many people or the group, that the individual takes to himself.

husband and their son. We were sent by the immigration authorities to live in a small village established by twenty new immigrant families on the northern border with Lebanon. It was an isolated village, with only one bus passing by each day. The families in the village mostly came from Eastern Europe and had no knowledge of farm life or other work opportunities. After a year and a half, my parents found jobs: my father in the Air Force and my mother as a nurse, and we moved to a small town near Tel Aviv. Most of the residents in this town came from North Africa, Turkey and Yemen. I had to adjust myself to a new language not spoken at home, and a different culture. I stood out in this environment as I was tall, dressed differently, wore earrings (unfashionable in those days and usually only worn by girls from Romania), had long hair that was always braided in two pigtails with ribbons, and was sent to study in the afternoons in the nearby city conservatorium (music school). On my first day in eighth grade, I refused to go to school unless I removed my earrings and hair braids. My parents were left with no choice and eventually conceded to my demands. For the first time, at the age of 12, I felt that I fitted in.

As there was no high school in the town where we lived, I was sent to a prestigious high school in a nearby city (Petah Tikva). Once again, I had to fit into a new environment of students who came from established and middle-class families. They had abilities that I had not yet acquired: sophisticated learning methods, a rich vocabulary, and worldly knowledge. In my first year, I felt insecure trying to absorb the rules of behaviour in this new environment. With great intent, I tried to be absent while present, hiding in the last row behind my long hair. I hardly spoke up in class all of the first year. Living so far from school also prevented me from fitting in socially. It was only a year later, when we moved to this same city, that I started to integrate socially and establish real friendships with the other young teens, and was surrounded by friends and social activity.

As my family experienced difficulties with the native language, and knew even less about social life in Israel than I did, the support that they were able to give me to help acclimatise was very limited. This made me a very independent individual from an early age, while at the same time, a little introverted; I was not afraid to be alone.

My main focus at high school was mathematics and geography, and I dreamed of studying architecture. At that time, architecture could only be studied in Haifa, which is 80 km north of Tel Aviv. I had to give up this dream because it involved moving away from my parents, and

without their financial support or the possibility of work, I did not think I would be able to manage.

From a young age I learned to be independent, to take responsibility, to make decisions on my own and to adapt to a frequently changing social environment.

3.1.4. Getting started the professional way

After completing my two compulsory years of army service, I applied to Tel Aviv University. As I was unsure exactly what I wanted to study, I chose social sciences, simply because it allowed me to wait an additional year before having to take a direction. I applied to study economics as it was the most desirable degree in social sciences, and I was one of just 30% of first year students who were accepted to the programme. Therefore, with no prior planning, I found myself introduced to the world of economics.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Economics, I started working at an Israeli bank. This bank, as with all banking systems in Israel, and most well-established organisations in Israel, gives their employees tenure until pension age. It is a "life-long career", meaning that in order to advance through the ranks, you can either specialise and become an expert in a particular subject, or you can move between fields. A significant challenge to the bank's management is that some employees, after gaining tenure, stop putting effort into their work. Another significant consideration for such employers is that, rather than bringing in skilled professionals, the bank must train its employees to be proficient in most areas, and must therefore develop a large training system and engage in significant dealings with outside consultants to guide and complete any knowledge gaps. Specifically in this bank, and unlike other banks, the union prevented the recruitment of senior employees from the outside (except for in a small number of professions and senior team managers) and the percentage of employees with an academic education was relatively small.

I worked in the bank for 35 years, starting as an investment advisor and broker dealer on the Stock Exchange. My responsibilities included advising, buying and selling shares, bonds and financial derivatives (not always successfully), and trying to get the best returns for the wealthiest customers. My first managerial experience was as the head of eleven investment

expert branches[6]. In a management lecture, I do not remember which theory it was based on, I heard that it is important to define your 'internal resources' of power as a manager in order to know how to leverage them. I had received no managerial training, but as I was good at calculating bond yields and analysing financial reports, I believed, at that time, that my power as a manager came from my professional expertise in economics and banking. So, my main focus was on guiding the investment advisors professionally, helping them manage relations with the branch and district managers, and customer recruitment. In the field of supervision and control, I acted out of intuition: I managed a control system for customer contact targets and recruitment goals. I remember having doubts concerning how much I should check and supervise the performance of the employees. When I posed this question to my line manager, he advocated a less controlling approach which allowed staff to use their initiative and take delegated responsibility, while my peer managers supported a tightly controlled approach.

My point of view was formed by my economic education and my occupation. This was the classical economic theory about markets that converge to equilibrium, and a free market in which supply meets demand in a price of equilibrium. All decisions are made according to alternative price terms: what should be given up to get an additional product unit in a world of scarcity. This is based on Samuelson (1947), an American macro-economist who won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, whose theory focuses on maximising the behaviour of agents (consumers or firms) and the stability of equilibrium as to economic systems, and on the neoclassical economist Ferguson's (1969) textbook on neoclassical price theory. I remember my thinking at this time, as I envisioned demand and supply curves, and even talked in these terms in many activities, using sentences such as "… if we don't generate demand, the 'price' falls", and " …where is the equilibrium…". In my recent reading of Stacey and Mowles (2016), I have learned that such approaches are informed by cybernetic systems theory (a system of self-control) based on Wiener's (1948) explanation of negative feedback loops. This describes how the outcome of a previous action is compared with a desired outcome and the difference between them is fed back to guide and inform the next action, reducing the gap until it disappears returning the system to state of equilibrium (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 68).

[6] In those days, the bank had established branches of expert investment advisors who provided services to customers with a wealth exceeding a certain amount. This was a distinct service leveraged to recruit customers. The customers belonged to regular branches and received only these investment advising services at the special branches.

My belief in the liberal economy of equilibrium markets has been undermined in the course of my work. I previously saw the importance of intervention and control according to the Keynesian macroeconomic theory (Keynes,1954) that advocates government intervention to promote economic growth. During my role in the field of investments, I experienced three economic crises, as well as stock market crashes. Each of these events undermined my belief that markets are truly free and seeking to stabilise, this experience made me question some of the assumptions that financial markets were a cybernetic system that strive to achieve a state of equilibrium. Instead, these crises and crashes proved that there are many more active, influential and unpredictable forces at play like monetary policy, government spending, money supply etc. Even though I did well in my job and was involved in large investment portfolios, these events undermined my belief that we have any real ability to predict the behaviour of the Stock Market, and I felt that we were gambling to an extent. Additionally, at that time, the Stock Market in Israel was not sufficiently regulated and controlled, and there were many manipulative factors that affected it.

I can see now that I had assumed that control was needed, while the degree of control was a question that preoccupied me greatly regarding the financial markets, as well as regarding the management of the team.

3.1.5. Only I can decide

Ten years later I took two years of unpaid leave to join my husband on a two-year assignment in California. At that time, we had a six-year-old son but were experiencing difficulties falling pregnant again. Six years of unsuccessful medical interventions had brought us to consider adoption. Israeli society encourages large families. It is embedded in us, we did not even stop to ask why. Having only one child put us under social pressure, most couples our age already had at least two children. We believed the break from routine and the move to another country would be an opportunity to rethink our approach. Indeed, the detachment from social pressures and occupational stress brought a peace and tranquility which allowed me to fall pregnant naturally. This, of course, brought great excitement and joy. However, in my first trimester, a medical examination revealed a cancerous tumour in my thyroid. I consulted with several experts in California and Israel, and they all recommended immediate surgery to remove the tumour. The Israelis were particularly forceful in pointing out my responsibility to my son and husband and not to risk my life. I was primarily concerned with the risk to the

foetus, as it was estimated that there was a 5% to 15% chance that it would suffer or be lost. Even my husband joined the majority and put pressure on me to undergo the surgery. In that moment, I understood that the only person who could make the decision was me. No one could recommend me not to undergo the surgery immediately; the decision to put my life at risk in order to protect the life of another was one that only I could make. I could not bear the thought of being responsible for the possibility of causing damage to my unborn child, so I decided to postpone the procedure until after the baby was born. The moment I took that decision and removed the responsibility from their shoulders, those around me all became very supportive. I realised the importance of taking full responsibility for what happens to me, an insight that was also to accompany me later in my professional life. Later, and throughout my professional experience, I found myself taking many risks, for which I also took full responsibility. My assumption was, which was also supported by my experience on the Stock Exchange, that there was a link between risk and success: to succeed, you had to take some risk. I have found that I have developed a tendency to take a risk whenever I want to innovate or make any kind of breakthrough.

3.1.6. Length of the rope

Four months after I gave birth, we relocated back to Israel and I returned to a position at the bank as head of the investment advisers department for corporate customers. Five years later, with the financial backing and support of the bank's management I completed my MBA studies at Tel Aviv University. As part of our studies in the Executive MBA programme, at the outset we attended a leadership workshop held by Yael Ziv, a lecturer in the Management Faculty of the Tel Aviv University School of Business Administration who specialises in leadership and the development of teams in organisations. In this workshop, we were asked about our main managerial challenge and what kind of leaders we were. Since I had not undergone management training, I assumed that there were proper management tools that I had yet to learn. I was sure that the MBA studies would provide me with all of the required knowledge. I was ashamed to formulate the challenge of management in general, so I preferred to focus on the problem of control with the question of the balance between supervision and intervention as a manager, or, as I defined it, "the length of rope": whether it is necessary to define precise tasks and demand detailed reporting, or whether it is sufficient to give general guidelines and allow employees to do their best. In practice, I looked for formulas and recipes which

instructed how to manage. My assumptions were that there are rules about how to manage and that the manager's main duty is to enforce these rules and to monitor. I was sure these rules would be taught in an MBA programme. Now that I have been exposed to the reading materials in the DMan programme, I understand that my attitude resembled Taylor's (1911) 'Scientific management' approach, namely that management is an objective science that can be defined by universal laws, rules and principles, and once you know them, you can manage effectively.

According to Ziv's leadership style model[7], at the beginning of the workshop, each of us had to choose a colour and position ourselves in the room accordingly: red for the 'lion' (leaders), the authoritative director driven by power and influence; green for the 'analytic', who, driven by achievements, works to solve problems, plans strategies and acts on them, and is known as a workaholic; blue for the 'creative', who, driven by a need for belonging, is passive, very caring, and seeks recognition and love; and finally, white for the 'spontaneous', who is creative, a person of vision and spirit, and is intuitive, impulsive, tending to take risks and does not always know their limits. Most students (90%) chose 'red', but I found "green" the most characteristic of me. Standing with a very small group, I felt frustrated by the lingering question of whether I was talented enough to manage, I questioned how come most participants felt that they were leaders and I did not feel so. We were told to ask somebody close to us about their perception of us, and to write their words in a report, as well as a self-analysis. I asked a good friend whom I trusted to be direct, and her response was "grey and boring" because the impression she had of me was that I was very organised and unlike her, I wore only black, white and grey clothes. She did not think I would really write this down, and it later became a joke between us. I wrote a report about the dilemma of my managerial abilities and included my friend's exact words. Ziv responded that it required a lot of "red" to write this down. Later on, through the workshop process, the writing and the feedback, it turned out that not all of the "red lions" were really red. In an interview with a business newspaper, Ziv said: "Every person has a dominant style which combines elements from the other styles. Over the years a person's style may change and get different accents but in any case, there is no better or less good style." (Shilo, 1999 January 3) (translation my own). Thinking back, it seems wrong to label managers so simplistically, to put the management into defined templates, even if we accept Ziv's

[7] I could not find written reference except for a newspaper article

explanation that every manager, to a varying extent, demonstrates all of these attributes, or “colours”. Although the colours were used to simplify the model, they ultimately portrayed management as an individual capability detached from both environment and circumstance. Although Ziv's model asks managers to be aware of themselves and what motivates them, it is done in given patterns that do not really allow managers to understand the sources of their thinking and behaviour.

I am now starting to realise how different this is from the perspective of complex responsive process of relating, which is a theory of human action drawing on analogies from nonlinear systems of the complexity sciences, specifically, complex adaptive systems and which does not provide prescriptions, rules or best practice tips, but rather calls us to pay attention to how we as managers are involved and interact with others and to understand peoples' actions. It invites us to develop deep understanding of our own experience. Management is contextual, a dynamic process that emerges through interpersonal processes between people which evolves through local communicative interaction and power relating. Management is not just an individual capability but "… is actually constructed in the recognition of others. It does not matter what leadership attributes one has if no one recognises them" (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, 515).

3.1.7. The potential

Towards the end of my MBA studies, I applied for the position of head of the securities subdivision. I found myself a candidate alongside a colleague of mine. In the end, my colleague was appointed head. I looked for a way out through the private sector, and disclosed my plans to leave during a short chat in the coffee corner with a friend who worked with one of the management team leaders. A few days later, she called to ask if I would like to become the spokesperson for the bank. I had never even heard of such a position, so she asked me to meet with the current spokesperson and learn about the role. I arranged a meeting with the spokesperson and asked her about her work. The work description was very dry: receive a topic for a press release, improve the wording and send it to the reporters, receive questions or clarifications from the reporters about the press release or other issues, find the answer from the right person, and send it to them. After hearing this, I turned down the offer as I did not see myself as a middle person who simply receives messages or documents and passes them on. A day later I met with a friend and mentioned the job offer. She suggested that I

contemplate the possibilities - consider the potential of the role and think about directions I could take it, rather than looking at what the current spokesperson was doing. She introduced me to the possibility of getting to know the organisation from a wider perspective, the connections and opportunities that could be developed, and, most importantly, the ability to influence the image of the bank's image. It was the first time that I had really considered the potential of a role. The opportunity to expand organisational understanding and move to a position that is closely linked to management team leaders fascinated me, and I immediately called to ask for the job. Incidentally, learning to envision the possibilities of a role became a consideration in every position I was offered from then on.

3.1.8. Living with uncertainty

I was the bank spokesperson for eight very troubled years, during which we experienced every possible nightmare. The bank had been nationalised ten years earlier due to a severe stock crisis, and, without owners, the union had become dominant and demanding. Financial results were poor, and the efficiency indices were the worst in the banking system. The new chairman was nominated by the Minister of Finance and was disliked by the journalists because of his aggressive approach in his previous position. His goal was to improve the bank's results quickly by subduing the union, and he was sure he would receive the government's support. The struggle was difficult and included many strikes and much media intervention, including daily interesting and negative publications, leaks and more, as both parties used the media as a tool in the struggle.

In my first few days, I discovered that the chairman was surrounded by six media consultants who attended long daily consultation sessions, briefed journalists off the record and sometimes leaked information. As one of them explained to me, I was expected to be the pretty face, while they did all the thinking. It was too late to withdraw from the new position, so I decided to change the balance of power by connecting with the journalists. I used my knowledge of finance (the other spokespersons came from the communications discipline) and my networking abilities to gain the trust and cooperation of the journalists, thus placing me in a central and influential position. I treated the journalists as clients rather than as enemies, according to the service rules embedded in me through my work with clients. I thought I understood their needs and was aware of the fact that this was their job and we were not paying their salary. I endeavoured to find the balance between everyone's interests. My

mission was to represent the interests of the bank's management team leaders, but at the same time I tried to see things through the journalists' perspective and tried to adapt to their interests. It does not mean that I could control and manage their narrative, but it did facilitate a more constructive dialogue. They continued to report and tell their narrative and I do not know how much influence I had.

After less than a year, we let all but two of the consultants[8] go. One remaining consultant cooperated fully: we thought and planned together and created a neat one-voiced outward message. This approach assumes that the understanding of the message depends on its wording, and we have indeed paid enough attention to its formulation. Today I understand that this is the approach of the sender-receiver model of communication published by Shannon and Weaver (1949) in which the sender formulates the message, and if there is good communication the receiver will understand it in the same way. If there is a failure of communication, the receiver will send a signal indicating the gap and the sender will send messages to close the gap. I assumed that a unified and coordinated message would allow us to better control the media. If we did not succeed, this meant that we were not working correctly: we did not formulate the right message, or we were not clear enough. According to Mead (1934:43-44), writing about what he calls a 'conversation of gestures', as an ongoing process of gesturing and responding between individuals, in which meaning arises and is affected by the situation, history, biological, individual and social of those involved. What is radically different about this theory is that Mead argues that since the gesture/response occur at the same time (rather than sequentially, as in the sender-receiver model), we can only discover the meaning of what we say when we see how others respond to our gesture. I understand that I could control what is written, said or published by me (gestures) but I could not guarantee that others would understand my gesture in the ways I anticipate. By others I mean: journalists, editors or employees of the bank and stake holders. "…people will still be able to respond according to their own local capacity to respond" (Stacey and Mowles, 2016, 385).

The role of the spokesperson brought with it a lot of stress and pressure, and was subject to the high level of sensitivity of the management team leaders as to what was said and written

[8] One of the remaining consultants had a lot of health problems, which is why we had kept him, but his effect was becoming smaller and he died after a short period

in the media. I never knew what the next call would bring: the announcement by the Governor of the Central Bank at a conference that there was a danger that a bank would collapse, and everyone was certain that he was referring to us; the main safe room robbery (the persons responsible have not been discovered to this day); the hacking of ATMs, and many other crises. I learned to 'accept' uncertainty, to always be ready, and to be the first to recover and act quickly. My first thought was always what the next step should be, and never why it had happened (this was discussed at a later stage in order to debrief, understand and improve). I made decisions quickly, I thought it was important to make swift decisions in order to control the situation and I even began to show signs of impatience towards indecision. This takes me back to the sorting process during my first residential. It is possible that this pattern of behaviour is what brought me to bring this process to a halt by declaring my preference before completing the process. When news broke out that the safe room had been robbed, and customers and the media were arriving, and there were a lot of police and great confusion inside, I quickly took the reins. I invited the customers inside the main office to update them on what we knew and take care of them, and at the same time left the media outside behind closed doors in order to minimise the risk of them reporting on the tragic events. This left the media with hardly anything 'colourful' to report on, except for the cold hard facts. I managed to prevent many negative publications, like a headline of the possibility that the bank would collapse was almost printed. I initiated a long face- to- face discussion with the deputy managing editor to convince him that he did not have enough factual evidence to rely on, and that he was taking a risk regarding the consequences of such a headline. For those negative publications I could not prevent, rather than sinking into frustration, I instead examined whether and how to reduce the damage. As part of a risk survey conducted by the insurance company, I was asked what nightmares I have about the bank and their communications. I explained that I sleep well at night as all my nightmares have already been realised.

It was frustrating to always be in a defensive position, so I decided to change these base conditions and our tactics. I initiated daily proactive publications and tried to influence the topics of interest to be discussed by holding many conversations with journalists. I did not question my belief that these activities increased my control of the situation. From my reading of Mead (1934), I now realise that I was not really in control since I could not predict people's responses, which are influenced by their history, culture and experience and can be

spontaneous. I initiated more press conferences on marketing topics and gave these press conferences a unique twist by decorating the room according to the bank's current marketing strategy, for example, a coffee shop or a garden full of flowers. This succeeded in creating a more creative and relaxing atmosphere for the journalists. I found out that there were editors in the back office who had a strong influence on the headline[9], so I persuaded those reporters who were in direct contact with me to hold a meeting with the bank's management team leaders and to invite these editors along with anyone else who had a connection with what they wrote. In fact, through these interactions, and while avoiding undermining the reporters, I felt I had managed to create an affection for the bank. It paid off in positive headlines and media coverage.

Those years taught me a lot about organisational politics, which were manifested not only in power relations but also in disloyalty and lies; journalists who wrote things they were told off the record, leaks from the bank, and competitors who spread false rumours. At the same time, I noted the internal politics and constant struggle for power at the highest levels of the organisation. It was a very important experience for me, but I was well aware that this was not my long-term career goal.

3.1.9. Creative, initiative and leading

As the job was intense and demanding, and I did not have much time for myself, when the new CEO arrived, I announced I would be leaving. I had already received a job offer for a senior position in an insurance company. However, the CEO of the bank offered me the position of Head of Marketing and Advertising at the bank, while keeping my responsibilities in the spokesperson's office and having the assistance of a trainee. I knew nothing about either marketing or advertising. This position offered a significant increase in rank and, given the employment security in the bank, I decided to stay and violate the contract with the insurance company.

Marketing and Advertising was known to be a unit with competing department heads and a bad atmosphere. My line manager, the VP Marketing and Strategy, who himself was new to the job, was busy working on a long-term marketing strategy. He focused mainly on the structure of the bank's branches, their geographical distribution, and the customer experience

[9] Journalists sent articles however, they had little influence on the headline, on selecting an image and shortening or even scrapping articles.

at the branches. His approach was a long-term Customer Experience Strategy, which claims that it is not enough to satisfy the needs of the customers, but rather you need to excite them. This strategy is based on classic marketing theories of Kotler (2003), Professor of International Marketing at Northwestern University, and the Israeli marketing advisor and author of a marketing textbook, Shuv-Ami (2011), who had previously been an advisor to him and to me. I, on the other hand, saw the short-term reality risk of losing clients and the further deterioration of an already depressing atmosphere. Contrary to all logic, at a time of poor financial results and an atmosphere of despair, I initiated, without a theoretical basis, a large-scale and immediate marketing campaign involving customer recruitment, accompanied by massive advertising. The purpose was to create an image of strength, to support existing customers, and to raise the morale of employees within the organisation. I presented a blueprint to my line manager, the VP Marketing and Strategy, and he threw my plan back at me, rejecting my ideas and telling me I was dealing with nonsense. I refused to give up, and instead I presented the plan to the VP responsible for the activities of all the bank's branches. He liked my plan and took it to the CEO for approval. My manager did not like what I had done, but he pulled himself together quickly, and even took a major role in the campaign. Using my knowledge and communication skills, I also engaged the employees; they were enthusiastic and recruited many new customers. I used the media and encouraged them to write about the increase in customer numbers, and we even published a weekly count of new customers. The campaign changed both the atmosphere inside the bank and the way we were treated by other banks, customers and the media. It was a big success, and, thanks to this campaign, our CEO was awarded the title of "Marketing Person of the Year".

I was sure I had formulated a successful marketing plan until, three years later, I tried to run a similar programme and it failed. I thought then that it is not enough to have a good plan, as the outcome is affected by many factors such as atmosphere and other programmes running at the same time. Now, in light of my exposure to the ideas of the complex responsive process of relating, I understand that a plan provided by the senior management is a gesture to which the members of the organisation respond, and it can be unpredictable and cannot be designed. Additionally, human interaction is nonlinear which allows small differences to amplify into population-wide patterns "…which are both expected and unexpected and sometimes unwanted" (Stacey and Mowles, 2016, 517)

Complex responsive processes of relating is a perspective of human action meaning that interdependent individuals interweaving with each other locally in the present with no blueprint or plan, will bring about outcomes which no one predicted. The conversation is a complex, nonlinear, iterative processes of communicative interaction between people of gestures and responses, the result depends on interplay of intentions and choices.

3.1.10. I am in the right place

I remained Head of Marketing and Advertising and Bank Spokesperson for five years (in addition to my three years in the role of Spokesperson only), until, after some changes in management, the new VP preferred somebody else for the role of Marketing and Advertising with whom he had worked with previously, offering me instead the position of Head of Training and Development. I was initially hurt and disappointed that he did not want me. However, I quickly began to see the possibilities in the new position I had been offered, and the directions I could take it. I was tired of the stress and wanted to reduce my level of activity, and I thought that this would allow me to better manage my work-life balance. During this role shift, I requested not to continue as Spokesperson.

Once again, I was managing an unfamiliar area, a new adventure for me. This unit's staff, however, were much more cooperative and expected a manager to take a managerial role. I was caught in an awkward situation; I had to manage a unit whose activities I had thus far avoided, as until then I had never participated in any management courses or internal professional training. I preferred external courses that were connected to academic institutions, as I assumed that they were on a higher level. So I felt that this was an opportunity for me to try to adapt the development processes for managers like myself.

During these years, labour relations with the workers' union remained tense, and the HR VPs were so preoccupied with union relations that they preferred not to interfere with training and development. This left me with an independent operating space to create and initiate programmes.

These were nine years of much creativity and satisfaction, and I felt I had almost complete freedom. The environment was relatively stable compared to the "rollercoaster" I had experienced in my previous position. We chose aims, goals and visions and then planned actions to realise them based on common professional literature including Ulrich (1997), a professor of business at Ross School who, with colleagues, has written over 30 books that have

shaped the HR profession, and Kotter (1996), a professor of leadership in Konosuke Matsushita and Harvard Business School who writes about leadership and change. We created annual work plans using a Gantt chart (a bar chart that illustrates a project schedule) according to a specific project management method (Globerson and Shrub, 1992), and followed up on our progress monthly. For each activity, we prepared a detailed plan that included measures of success and lessons learned. I brought a more economic perspective to the job, as, for each activity, we tried to calculate and maximise the return on investment using the Kirkpatrick (1975) model. According to this model, we tried to evaluate the training on four levels**:** reaction - the degree to which participants find the training favourable, engaging and relevant to their jobs; learning - the degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment based on their participation in the training; behaviour - the degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job; and results - the degree to which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training.

One of my responsibilities was the 'service' unit, a subject very close to my heart. Together with my management team, I formulated the bank's service concept according to our experience, namely:

a) Expertise is a perceived process (I am an expert only if others think so).

b) For the purposes of good service, it is my duty to give the stage to the other.

c) At any given moment, I will examine how I can do better.

d) Responsibility is indivisible (100% my responsibility).

e) It is my responsibility to request 2%[10] for me (ask for feedback on what was not perfect, as there is always something to improve on).

f) In every meeting with a customer, it is my duty to create value for them.

g) It is the customer who creates meaning for me.

h) I will "see" the customer (their needs and point of view).

[10] 2% we defined as an expression that even if everything is perfect, there is always 2% that can be improved

These were high standards of principles of service that were very difficult to implement in the organisation, but I was attached to them because most of them had already been a part of me for many years and I believed they would position the bank as the market leader. In order to implement these service concepts, I participated in numerous management workshops, during which many discussions and arguments were held about the principles. These only prompted me to adopt them more. I was sure that they (other managers) still did not understand these principles and I believed that conflicts are a form of resistance that is part of the process of change. The way to deal with this resistance is by holding conversations and explaining so that 'the light will be revealed to them'. There was also an element of condescension in this belief: that we, senior management, understand what is right and good, we are responsible to choose and design how the whole organisation will be in the future and then implement top-down. It assumes we can control the dynamics of the organisation which is stable and predictable. Now, in the light of what I have learned on the DMan programme, I understand that global patterns emerge from the micro interactions at a local level. Everything we do or do not do may influence what emerges in some way- even if we cannot always predict exactly what it might be and not necessarily because of a predetermined plan made by senior managers.

In the learning set, I was asked why I felt at home in the HR division. Many people would do anything and everything to be a spokesperson or head of marketing and advertising, but I left these positions willingly. I probably prefer frameworks that allow for freedom of action and initiative, as were the circumstances in the HR division, rather than tight management. The professional communities are different, communication and marketing was an environment in which I did not always feel comfortable sharing or consulting with colleagues. In my experience, there was a sense of competition and mistrust in the air, whilst in the professional community of the HR field, I felt more supported and collaborative.

3.1.11. Management development

We delivered development programmes at most management levels but still encountered significant managerial weakness, as revealed by our business results, the managers 'inability to prepare plans, set targets or achieve the desired results, and mainly the inability to cope with employee management problems.

I was most doubtful about our management development but could not find better models.

We trained managers at all levels of the organisation according to a leadership development model based on research by Yukl, (2002) a Professor of Management and Psychology at the University at Albany who writes about leadership, and management development. His model has three main recommendations:

a) Provide a variety of developmental experiences: tasks, developmental relationships and hardship. These could include feedback, training programmes, outdoor workshops, and action-learning (executing a project alongside a senior mentor and receiving coaching).

b) Ensure a high level of learning ability: orientation and centrality of learning in self-experience, proactivity towards problems or opportunities, critical thinking and Emotional Quotient (EQ)[11].

c) Design the organisational context to support development efforts: make a link to business strategy and organisational goals and HR management that supports all processes in leadership development.

The management training for new managers and branch managers was used for assessment purposes, meaning that at the end it was recommended who should be offered a promotion. The employees, all of whom desperately wanted to be considered, tried to please us by participating in the 'game' and talking about how much it meant to them. In practice, the improvement was relatively small, and so we expanded the training to additional managerial levels, believing that if an employee who had undergone training had a manager who had not undergone training, there would be an inevitable regression. This underpinned our assumption that the training and learning process was the difference between a good manager and a weak manager, and that by simply providing more training, we would get better managers. We invested a great deal in this topic and we developed training programmes for all levels, including a Top Talent programme. This aimed to train a group of young talented managers from the intermediate level in order to create a senior executive reserve, since, over the years, most of the managers 'team leaders and all CEOs had come from other banks. I wanted this to

[11] Bar-On (2006) coined the term Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) to describe his approach towards assessing emotionally and socially intelligent behaviour.

change as I felt that it conveyed the message that the managers at the bank were not good enough and that this blocked their capacity for promotion.

3.1.12. Trying to change the internal culture of the organisation

In the eyes of the new CEO from a competing bank, and the new management team - leaders who also mostly came from other banks, and who bore an attitude of superiority (we were still the bank with the worst financial results), everything we had done was bad, at least according to their reactions and comments. The new Head of HR, the only manager nominated internally, who had graduated from our development programme and who was a very good friend of mine before, at least so I thought, came with no knowledge of HR. Since I always initiated and tried to see the 'big picture', I was certain that this was a great opportunity to change the organisational structure of the HR division, to end the hostility that had existed over the years between the two HR subdivisions, and to implement a new HR structure and operational concept. At her request, I submitted detailed plans for the activities and structure of the division, but my proposals were all rejected or placed in a drawer. The new Head of HR later hired a consulting firm that gave her exactly the same ideas, but not without a hefty fee. When I asked her why she did not accept my plans, she claimed that she had to go through a process of generating ideas externally. I could understood her – as being the only one appointed from the bank, she probably felt it was safer to rely on external consultants. Additionally, perhaps with my tendency to run forward and initiate, I had been too hasty.

I felt limited and frustrated. There was no way to break through, so I started looking for new adventures, although there were not many possibilities for my rank and seniority.

The board commissioned a large consulting company to write a strategic plan for the bank that would include around twenty topics for improvement. One of the topics was 'culture change', and I was asked to lead this project. After one-and-a-half years, however, the board decided to abort this project. Although I asked for an explanation, I did not receive one.

I was told to wait for another position, but I felt that I could not continue working with the current Head of HR. I did not, however, want to move to a new field outside of Human Resources. I was also afraid of a long waiting period and the possibility of being excluded, as I had seen this happen to other managers. Instead, once again I took control of events, chose to join an early retirement programme offered to those over the age of 50. This was a frightening step, as it meant leaving the job market after 35 years (the chances of being assigned to a

different organisation at my age were small), but the financial package offered was very tempting. So, encouraged by my family, I decided to use this opportunity to realise some of my dreams.

3.1.13. The move to consulting

Since retirement, besides spending more time with my family, travelling, and attending cultural events that I did not have time to enjoy before, I also joined a not-for-profit organisation that supports other not-for-profits by raising funds for them and training their CEOs on issues of general management, management of social organisations, marketing, fundraising, and more. I also recently joined another consultant and together we offer management development workshops. These workshops are supposed to develop managerial abilities to maintain success in a complex and rapidly changing environment[12]. Included is a self-assessment questionnaire, designed to provide insights into where a group and its individuals stand regarding the competences required. As I write this, I can see now that the model has a number of underpinning assumptions which I had not previously questioned, for example: What is success? Are there universal abilities that are appropriate for everyone in every situation? How does the group and the context affect success? Can we fit people in organisations into grids and scores? Can we change and form them? My business partner leads this activity, along with the main decision-making, and in this case, I am comfortable with the setup - will it continue? Can I try and change the model or the activity in light of my new readings?

In addition, for almost ten years, I have been a board member of the Israeli HR association, a not- for-profit organisation comprising 1000 members working in HR disciplines with the goal of advancing HR professionals and the HR profession as a whole. Lately, along with three other board members, I was asked to lead a professional mentoring programme. In this programme, experienced HR personnel mentor less experienced HR people and support them professionally. Both the decision-making process and the distribution of tasks are done with great tension among the leading team. In the next project I will explore my experience in this framework.

[12] I will expand on this in future projects

3.1.14. Final reflection

During my three residentials on the DMan programme, the questions raised, the discussions that took place around me, and the first project I have been writing, all led me to deep self-introspection and even to discuss myself with former colleagues. As I write my fifth version, and am exposed to additional articles, I also feel a process of self-development, as many of my previous assertions and exclamation marks have become question marks. I have become aware of some basic assumptions that I took for granted and did not challenge throughout the years of my career that, although I was based in one organisation, my career includes experience in a variety of areas of managing people and tasks: financial investments, marcom (marketing and communication), organisational development and training of employees and managers within the Human Resources Unit. My awareness of others, and of what is happening to me and around me, has also increased, for example, as I try to notice the meaning that arises in other people's responses to what I say or do, to try to understand the assumptions which underpin my thinking, or as I attempt to reduce the need to accurately plan out every meeting. This prompted me to return to the beginning of my paper, where I wrote about the process of sorting and allocation to join a learning set. As I reflect on this now, I realise that my perception of control was an illusion. When I thought I was taking control of the process, or as I described before, 'grabbing hold of the reigns', I only considered myself. Now, looking from a new perspective based on my recent reading, I realise that this was not only about my choice, but it required the cooperation of all of the other participants, who could have stopped me from announcing my preference, or indeed not have accepted my choice. I have come to understand that what happened was the result of the interweaving of individual plans and intentions that were "forming and being formed at the same time" (Mowles, 2011, 41). Additionally, there were consequences to my actions: I noticed that the members of the learning set I chose did not respond to me choosing them, and the resulting feeling I experienced stayed with me for a long time. In a later discussion, I realised that they were influenced by members who had left. 'Forcing' myself on the learning set requires me to prove myself and I still wonder how welcome and included I am.

Following my reflection on the variety of activities I am involved in the last two years and the experience of cooperation, power relations, leading and decision-making, along with the question of why I chose to start this project by explaining the experience of the sorting process, have all led to the emergence of my e animating question: How is self-identity formed in

processes of power relating and decision making within a team of independent consultants leading a professional mentoring project in a not-for-profit organisation? In my second project, I would like to enquire into my experience as an independent consultant who retired from a bank and is involved in a voluntary project, with other, recently retired, independent consultants from business organisations. Together we are leading a professional mentoring project in a not-for-profit organisation. I will be focusing on the search for self-identity through power and control relations and decision making among the consultants involved in the project. My working title for my thesis is: An exploration of the search for self-identity through power relations and decision-making processes within a team of independent consultants leading a professional mentoring project in a not-for-profit organisation.

3.2. Project 2 - Power relations and the search for self-identity

3.2.1. Introduction

In my first project, I reviewed my personal and career history and the transitions I underwent as I explored different professional disciplines until eventually finding myself in Human Resources (HR). I felt that this field allowed me to combine all of my previous experiences, including my background in economics, which was also the subject of my studies, along with my media experience and knowledge of marketing and advertising. These diverse positions provided me with fascinating insights, and yet I was still unable to define my profession. I convinced myself that what matters is the managerial perspective, the ability to manage people, and that the task is more important than having the professional knowhow. Therefore, over the years, I became preoccupied with my role as a manager, and looked for rules and recipes to help guide me through my MBA studies. In project 1, I started to question my assumptions about what it means to be a good manager, and whether it can even be defined. By participating in the DMan programme and being exposed to some of its ideas, along with writing my first project, which focused on the assumptions and ways of thinking that have informed my work as a manager, I have started to change my thinking. I have been prompted to re-examine my assumptions, making sense of what is going on in situations in which I find myself, and have been encouraged to question concepts that I had previously considered as the foundations of how I lead my activities. Many of my previous assertions and exclamation

marks have become question marks. In my second project, I will describe and reflect upon events that have taken place as part of my professional activities, and that have raised questions about power relations and identity. These are themes that I came to identify through reviewing my first project. I will dive deeper into these themes and try to understand them in light of the way of thinking I am exposed to in the DMan programme.

3.2.2. My current activities

After accepting an early retirement plan from the bank where I had worked for 35 years, I started looking for something meaningful to do. For me, this meant working with people and having a positive impact on them, and in turn making me feel good about myself. As I was already quite close to retirement age, looking for a new job within an organisational framework was irrelevant for me. From my experience, I assumed that organisations are less inclined to employ people who are within a decade of retirement age and the financial compensation is low. Therefore, I was seeking an opportunity that would offer me both independence and flexibility. Based on these criteria, I began to volunteer as a mentor for CEOs of not-for-profit organisations. To date, I have worked with several organisations in various fields, including a student organisation which promotes an environmental protection agenda, an organisation providing free advice on health insurance, and community employment for the elderly in need.[13]

I also partnered with another consultant and together we offer management development programmes based on a model and assessment developed by my business partner. Simultaneously, I started the DMan programme.

All of these activities are in addition to my ongoing activity at a HR association. I joined this association 11 years ago while serving as head of the TD at the bank. Since being exposed to HR, which I previously mentioned is the field in which I decided to stay and develop, I became very active in the professional community, participating in conferences and leading panels and professional committees. Not long after joining the association, I was elected to the board of

[13] A not-for-profit organisation that creates a space where the elderly can remain active, contributing members of society. They provide stimulating work opportunities relating to handicraft products which are sold in-store and online, a warm community environment, and invaluable support services to hundreds of needy elderly people.

directors. While setting out on my new path, it was important for me to retain my position in this association as I was recognised as a senior and professional manager in the field of HR.

In this project, I will use a narrative from my activity within the association. I will begin by giving some background on the association.

3.2.3. Background: The association

The association is a not-for-profit association comprising about 1000 members working in HR disciplines. It has the goal of advancing HR professionals and the profession as a whole. Its activities include formulating and defining the knowledge required by those working in the HR field, organising professional conferences on HR issues, managing training courses, and holding an annual excellence competition in which organisations participate by presenting innovative and ground-breaking activities.

The association employs four salaried managers: Sara, the CEO, two female HR professionals, and an administrative manager. In addition, the association has a board of 12 volunteer directors, of which I am one, and 80 active volunteers.

One of the association's unique services is mentoring. This is a partnership aimed at the personal and/or professional development of mentees using the experience and knowledge provided by a mentor. A less experienced professional (the mentee) consults with a more experienced professional (the mentor) about issues of their choice. Members of the association are eligible to receive five mentoring meetings with an experienced HR professional who offers this service voluntarily. I was asked to lead a project to expand the activities of the association's mentoring services. The narrative below describes and analyses the relationship formed with the project team, which included two volunteer board members, in addition to the association manager and myself.

3.2.4. The narrative – Part one

3.2.4.1. Setting up a mentoring team project

One day before a board meeting which I was unable to attend, Sara, the CEO, texted me to ask if it would be okay for her to recommend to the board at the upcoming meeting that I lead a project.

Sara repeatedly emphasised how happy she was that my retirement would allow me to be more active in the association's team. I was flattered, but at the same time, as I had seen her

taking care of HR managers during inter-job periods, I sometimes felt that she was trying to keep me busy, rather than really needing my help. It may have been her way of repaying me for all of the help she had received from me over the years, or it may have simply been a means to recruit another volunteer into her workforce to help her expand into more projects. Either way, I did not delve too deeply into this because it suited me. For me, being a part of this association was an opportunity to remain in the professional community without having to make any commitment, and since I had the time, I thought the more I was involved in its activities, the more I would be exposed to opportunities.

I first met Sara at the beginning of my role as TD manager at the bank, when she had just started running the association. We developed a close relationship, and I appreciated her for her initiative and achievements in positioning the association. As such, I endeavoured to help her. I even used my contacts gained as a media spokesperson from my previous position to convince a journalist from a reputable business newspaper to publish a long article about the association's activities, including an interview with Sara.

After the board meeting, Sara informed me that the project I was being asked to lead related to professional mentoring. This activity is about finding the right lid for the pot: to connect an HR mentor, an experienced HR executive, and an HR mentee for five counselling sessions.

The project I was asked to lead involved working in a team. Shelly, a volunteer board member, was to join me on the project, and Miriam, a paid manager of the association, was the team sponsor. There was no real definition of the role of the sponsor and I understood that she was to be responsible for the project on behalf of the association. Shelly was a new board member whom I had not known previously, and I did not have much information about her professional background. To me, she seemed small, thin and fragile, like a very delicate china doll. She also looked much younger than her age (44, according to my calculations from her LinkedIn page). She had a thin voice and a rather childish way of speaking. Later, I learned that that she had worked as an HR business partner in high-tech organisations and is now self-employed as a group facilitator and coach. Miriam joined the association several years ago after leaving a HR vice-president position in a start-up company. She started as a volunteer and was very successful in connecting the association with IT and start-up organisations. Later, she became a salaried manager. Miriam ran the mentoring activity alongside her other activities in the association.

Two weeks later, and before Shelly, Miriam and I had had a chance to do anything significant, Sara, the CEO requested my permission to add Hanna to the team. Hanna had just retired from a commercial company where she was an HR vice-president. Sara explained that it was very important for her to help Hanna return to being active in the professional community, and that she was sure that I would be the right person to warmly welcome and help her. It seemed to me completely natural to help a colleague integrate into the professional community (after all, one of the goals of the association is to produce a 'supportive professional community'), and I was flattered that she considered me someone who could help. I had met Hanna, a member of the board of directors when I joined the association, but she had left following an illness of a family member and broke off most of her professional connections apart from with Sara. Hanna had recently asked to return, and I was pleased to renew contact with her.

3.2.4.2. Mentoring project teamwork

In our first early morning team conference call attended by all four of us (Miriam, Shelly, Hanna and I), the conversation began with a welcome to Hanna and enthusiasm for how excited we were to be working together. Miriam described to us in detail her process of matching a mentor to a mentee, emphasising the personal touch she gave each one. It was very difficult to keep one organised discussion going, as each interjection contained many different suggestions and ideas. I suggested that we put the process: from applying, things that need to be checked to the matching with a mentor, into writing and examine what could be improved immediately and what we would need to change later. Miriam and Hanna agreed, and I took it upon myself to prepare the process diagram. I chose this role for myself because I believed I was good at process planning, having been involved in meticulous planning of processes in previous roles. I also considered it a good way to gain a deeper understanding of the process before we considered changing it. We also agreed that since we were now four, it was important to have a joint online worksheet with details of all mentors and mentees, ensuring that each of us would be kept updated and would therefore be able to take part in the process. Hanna, with much vigour and a cheerful voice, which sometimes made me wonder if it was genuine or a cover-up for the sadness I thought I saw in her eyes, took upon herself the task of drafting all the correspondence involved in the process. Shelly, who after greeting Hanna had been quiet throughout the conversation, finally joined in with the lively conversation. She suggested that we advertise the mentoring activity, and recommended that the association

hold a learning session for all its members on the topic of mentoring, as well as making a video of a mentor and mentee talking about how significant the mentorship process was to them and share it on social media. Her suggestion was met with an uncomfortable silence. I debated with myself as to how to react. On the one hand, her proposal was dislocated from the conversation we were having about the organising phase, and yet on the other hand, she was finally taking part in the conversation and I thought that rejecting her idea may discourage her from continuing to participate. I did believe it to be an offer worthy of consideration, but only at a later stage, when we would already have a more solid proposal. I broke the silence and said that it could be a good idea, but suggested that we first organise and stabilise the process, and only then turn to advertising, on the grounds that we needed to be prepared and familiar with the process before going public. Shelly ignored my explanation, insisting that it was very important that we do something on social media and she was even ready to make a clip. Hanna and Miriam remained silent, so I proceeded by summarising the tasks we had agreed on. Hanna agreed with all her assignments. Miriam had not been assigned any tasks but emphasised that she would love to contribute her experience if needed. Shelly had also not undertaken any tasks, and at the end of the conversation, as she fell quiet again, I asked her if she was familiar with Excel sheets, and asked if she could produce a follow-up sheet. She replied in a cynical tone: "Is this what matters at this stage?" and ignored my question about when the sheet would be ready. I was surprised and angry by her reaction, but kept calm and told her that everything was essential.

3.2.4.3. Leading the project

I took on the role of leading the mentoring project with enthusiasm, envisioning the mentoring service to be one of the key activities of the association. As Miriam was the association representative for the budget and the association's social network, I checked each of my ideas with her. However, every time I did so, I received a long explanation of why it was not a good idea or was not going to work, as she cited reasons such as "it's still early….", "the process should be scalable", and "since it does not generate direct revenue so it is impossible to generate expenses". I felt frustrated and tried to understand if I was missing something. Were my proposals not good enough? I was reminded of my experience in my previous role in the bank where I had flooded my line manager with plans which she had rejected and then

implemented when similar proposals were submitted by an external consultant. It felt like a repeat of that experience; of me running forward and the manager stopping me. I was afraid this was a recurring pattern, and considered that the problem was perhaps with me and that I needed to adjust my approach. I thought that it would be better, for the time being at least, to work within the framework of what was expected and keep my ideas for later so as to maintain a good atmosphere rather than create conflict.

Two weeks later, while on my way to dinner with friends, Sara called me in response to a text message I had sent her two days before on another subject. After a short conversation, she asked me about the progress of the mentoring project. Enthusiastically, I told her briefly about what we had done so far, and she asked if I was sure that I wanted to continue with the project in light of the studies I had just started. My feeling was that she had not listened to what I had described and it had just been a way to prepare an opening for this question. I wondered if she was not pleased with our progress. I replied carefully that I was doing well. She then added that each project has a sponsor who is responsible for the project. In our case, this was Miriam. Sara's comment initially came across as genuine concern for me so I could focus on my studies. At the same time, however, it sounded to me like an elegant way of asking me to give up my role. It crossed my mind that this may be because Miriam had complained about me or because she wanted to offer Hanna the job in order to help her become more active in the professional community. I had, after all, seemed to have found my own way as I had joined a management development company and started my studies. I have noticed, over the years, Sara's tendency to 'mother' those who have experienced difficulties in the workplace or who are in between jobs. I therefore assumed that she had simply found someone else who was more in need of being 'mothered'. On top of this, Sara had responded coldly when two weeks prior I had informed her I was forming a business with Adele. Adele was a previous contact of Sara's, and the relationship between the two had gone sour. I was ready to clarify Sara's motivation, and was prepared for an honest conversation with her. I therefore asked her whether there was any reason for her to emphasise this point. She backed down and claimed that it was just a general statement, leaving me feeling angry at what I considered to be Sara's insincerity, and also questioning what was really going on here.

3.2.5. My initial reflection

With hindsight, when I started the mentoring project the way I envisaged it was probably very naïve. I saw us as a team of adult female HR professionals who did not need to impress anyone (most of our careers were already over), and who could cooperate to produce the perfect professional and successful project that would make the mentoring service the key and major activity of the association. I assumed that tensions, power struggles and politics are part of organisational life only when people want to maintain their source of income and advance in rank and income. As volunteering does not involve salary and promotion, I assumed that people were acting purely out of good intentions. As the activity progressed, I began to realise that the reality was far more complex.

My first feeling when Shelly expressed what I considered to be a cynical reaction to my request to prepare the follow-up sheet, was to presume that it was her way of showing her opposition to the fact that I had taken control of the project and had made a decision that did not include her suggestions. Was it a reaction to my not accepting her ideas? Apparently, the assumption I had about the 'utopian team project' behaviour was that disagreements would be resolved by a decision taken by the manager and this would not provoke intense feelings. I wondered if the role Sara asked me to take as the project manager authorised me to do this. Was Shelly offended by my request for her to do an administrative and technical task? Hanna and I also took on administrative tasks and Shelly was part of the team, and not just there to present ideas while the others did the work.

Likewise, I was appointed as project manager and Miriam as sponsor. Initially, when I was informed about the project, I did not consider the role definitions important, as I assumed that the project would be an example of teamwork and collaboration. I thought the role of 'Sponsor 'was a honourary title that allowed Miriam to be part of the team. I learned later that the definition of 'sponsor' means taking responsibility for the management of the team. Hence Miriam did not allow any decision to be made or any meeting to take place without her. I was confused as to who actually had authority: the sponsor or I? According to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (2017), a project sponsor is "a person or group who provides resources and support for the project, program or portfolio and is accountable for enabling success" (PMBOK, 2017: p.723), while the project manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the project. I am now beginning to realise that some of my feelings stemmed

from my misconception about the roles. My assumption was that the title 'manager' meant leading the project and bringing our proposal to the association's representative for approval.

Since encountering problematic relationship dynamics between the members of the team running the mentorship project, I wanted to use my research to better understand why this was the case. To help answer that question, I will now begin to delve into the theme of power relations, as it was the first thing that came to mind.

3.2.6. Power

3.2.6.1. Power belongs to individuals

Reflecting on Shelly and Miriam's behaviour made me think that it was related to power struggles. Despite my original thinking, I began to understand that there are power struggles even within a voluntary framework. It seemed that each of us was trying to gain power or be powerful and to control the project and the other team members. I am beginning to realise that this was no different than from what I experienced as a member of a large organisation. Throughout my years as a manager in a hierarchical organisation, and especially in senior positions, I treated power as inevitable, something I experienced as overbearing behaviour and managers' aspirations to gain more power. I saw power as a product that people, especially managers, wanted to accumulate. From my experience, I considered organisational life a survival game in which either you fight for power and preserve it or you become irrelevant, meaning that areas of influence and management are gradually taken away from you until you eventually find yourself at the fringes of the organisation. Although I considered myself an effective manager, I hated the ongoing struggles and believed they severely hindered the efficient running of the organisation. I would have preferred to work in an environment without power struggles. Indeed, my negative connotation to the word 'power' prompted me to identify with John Gardner (1990), a USA Republican Party politician, who said: "power has such a bad name that many good people persuade themselves they want nothing to do with it" (Gardner, 1990: p.55). This is one of many similar quotations I have come across in the numerous leadership books I have collected on my bookshelf during my role as a TD manager. Even today, while providing consultations for managers, I come across this approach. Many managers say they want nothing to do with power.

As I reflected on the power struggles in my new voluntary role, I turned to a friend Yehezkeally (2019), who is a contemporary researcher of complex systems, who writes mostly about

military and police systems. In recent years, I have had several conversations with him on the subject of organisational behaviour and complex systems. Yehezkeally sees complex systems as a multi-participant system, each part of which interacts with the others and the external environment, in order to achieve a defined goal. I told him briefly about the relationships I was involved with at the association. He confirmed that of course it was a power struggle, as "power is the name of the game everywhere", and he sent me chapters from the book that he was in the final stages of writing, to explain this further.

His definition of power is "the ability to cause elements in the system to do what I want, even if the act is contrary to their wishes and / or to their own interests" (Yehezkeally, 2019: 60), which is a similar definition to that proposed by the German sociologist, philosopher and political economist, Max Weber (1947), as described below.

Yehezkeally argues that power is the force that drives organisations, and the way that power is distributed in an organisation is the key to organisational productivity. For example, he argues that if in a sales organisation the main source of power is found in the sales department (the best employees and highest budgets, etc.), the organisation is likely to succeed in achieving its sales targets. However, if the source of power is in the back-office units, it is likely that the organisation will focus more on bureaucracy and less on the sales goals of the organisation, and therefore its success will be limited. He asserts that there are constant changes in power and that power can shift and become concentrated in people due to power struggles, the tendency of people to be attracted to power, and through alliances. Ultimately, power will always be held by a handful of individuals according to the 'power law distribution'[14] (Barabási and Albert, 1999). Yehezkeally claims that one of the characteristics of a complex system is constant power struggles which are visible and/or latent among its components (people or units). An increase in the power of one component in the task environment, and/or a decrease in the power of another, will immediately put pressure on the need to change some or all of the respective assets or territories. As soon as someone has power, alliances are formed against them. According to Yehezkeally, power is something that an individual either has or does not have, and the goal is to constantly pursue power in order to achieve one's goals through expanding social connections and alliances. He advised me to join forces with

[14] The power of a complex system is concentrated by a very small number of factors, and most of those who follow will very likely connect with the greatest power.

Miriam in order to create a powerful coalition. His suggestion raised a number of questions for me: If power belongs to a person, what makes them powerful? Is it something that comes from within? If this is the case, all four of us are powerful women who come from powerful positions who were now working together on the mentoring project. How could we know who was more powerful? If what makes us powerful is based on the hierarchy of the project members, then is it Miriam or I who is more powerful? From my experience, I cannot say that Shelly and Hanna were powerless. Is it obvious that I should be in alliance with the powerful one? How do we know who to ally with? According to Yehezkeally's approach, in any organisation, no matter what type, there are those who are more powerful than others, and each of us has a different level of power which we strive to increase in various ways. Yet, if what guides our behaviour is power accumulation, how does this stand in relation to the project goals? My understanding was that the four of us shared a goal, first and foremost, to promote the project. These are questions that made it difficult for me to agree with Yehezkeally's approach, which he claims is based on Weber's theory.

Weber's definition of power, which informed much of the academic literature I studied in my career, is "the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber, 1947: 53). This refers to the power that an individual has over others that allows them to realise their will, despite resistance, as a function of their position (formal position) or personality (charisma). In Weber's view, the power belongs to a person, as something that they either have or do not have. Following this way of thinking, I as project manager, was able to force Shelly to produce the follow-up sheet. From my experience in hierarchical organisations, a formal position gives a certain degree of power, and the higher you rise, the more power you get, and the greater your ability to influence other people. As the head of TD in the bank[15], I formulated the bank's concept of customer service, which set a list of high standards as principles of service, and all 6000 employees had to observe them, whether they liked it or not. In practice, most subordinates did what they were asked to do, but there were situations in which being in a more senior position was not necessarily sufficient to impose a person's will, for example, when my line manager cancelled my plan and I approved it through another manager, as I presented in project 1. Despite the high position of my line manager, he was

[15] See project 1

unable to impose his will on me. Thus, a formal position does not necessarily guarantee the fulfilment of your will over others.

Dahl, an American political theorist, also sees power as an individual possession. He criticises the above approach which states that power is found within people who are in pivotal positions or who have the relevant personality (charisma). Dahl develops the above theories of power by taking an interest on how it is exercised in practice, unlike Weber who talks about the probability of an individual being in a position to carry out their will. Dahl describes his idea of power as "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (Dahl, 1957: 202-203). Dahl analysed actual power and decision-making in New Haven in the 1950s, and found that individuals whose proposals are adopted in situations of actual conflict between interests are the most powerful. That means, identifying power with its actual exercise and not with being in a position to do so. Power chance is distributed pluralistically, what matters is not the position or the personality, but actual performance.

This raised questions for me regarding how we know who is powerful? Do I have to count and compare the number of suggestions that were accepted? If I analyse the decision-making processes in our project group according to Dahl's approach, then Shelly should have felt powerless in the light of her failure to get her proposals accepted. I, on the other hand, was able to approve all the suggestions that were important to me in the first conference call, but later on with Miriam I failed to do so. Miriam prevented me from making moves that were important to me, but not through open conflict, but rather in a private conversation which was not exposed to others. In that situation, I felt she was more powerful than me without having a public conflict.

Bachrach and Baratz (1962) are two American political scientists who claim that power has two faces. The first is the individualistic and behavioural view that Dahl presents, which they argue is restrictive and therefore does not give a full picture of power. The second face further expands the definition of power to include situations in which decisions are prevented from being taken. In their approach, a person or group of people also has power if they are able to block policy conflicts, overtly or covertly, or to confine the scope of decision-making to 'safe' issues. This means that power is not just exercised in decision-making, it can also be exercised in non-decision-making, for example, by blocking topics from coming up for discussion. This can be done by coercion, influence, authority, force or manipulation. This is what I felt when

Miriam blocked discussion about my ideas for expanding the mentoring activity, so I felt Bachrach and Baratz's insight was valid. This made me think about other aspects of power which might not be fully explained by the above-mentioned theories.

Lukes, a British political and social theorist, expands the definition of power even further. In his book *Power: A Radical View* (2005), Lukes reviews three conceptual views of power: The 'one-dimensional view' is the view of the pluralists (no powerful ruling class) as presented by Dahl and others which focuses on behaviour in decision-making on key issues where there is an observable conflict between interests in the political arena by political actors (Lukes, 2005: 5). The 'two-dimensional view' is presented by Bachrach and Baratz, as described above. Lukes argues that although the latter is more advanced than the 'one-dimensional view' (Dahl), it is still inadequate based on three key points: Firstly, it is still based on overt behaviour. Secondly, it refers to actual observable conflicts, while Lukes claims that "…the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place" (ibid: 27). Thirdly, he criticises the assumption that harm to interests is reflected in grievances. He claims that by exercising power you can shape people's "…perception, cognition and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things…" (ibid: 28). The 'three-dimensional view' adds focus over the 'two-dimensional view' in terms of ways to keep potential issues out of the discourse and control over political agenda. He also includes latent conflict, which is a contradiction between the interest of the power operators and the interest of others who are not yet aware of them. Lukes argues that "power is a capacity not the exercise of that capacity…and you can be powerful by satisfying and advancing others' interests" (ibid: 12). According to Weber, Dahl, and Bachrach and Baratz's definitions of power, Shelly and Hanna would be perceived as powerless. They did not have the position (manager or sponsor), they did not influence decision-making, at least not in the first few meetings. Yet I felt that Shelly was powerful in her resistance to my request and in that she kept insisting on her suggestions, even though they were initially not accepted. According to Lukes, she would not be perceived as powerful because in practice her proposals were not accepted and she did not control the agenda. According to Lukes, Hanna could also not be considered powerful as she avoided any overt or covert conflict or expression of opinion, yet her kindness to everyone made me think she was not powerless. Although Lukes's definition is broader than the 'two-dimensional view', it still cannot explain the power relationship we had in the team project, in

which I felt that each of us worked in a different way to realise her own power and demonstrated power in various situations. Since the power was shifting, I could not indicate a constant state of power relations and could not detect a situation in which someone was powerless.

3.2.6.2. Power in management

The approaches towards power that I have reviewed so far have been about power as explained by scholars from the political sphere. As I come from the corporate world, I want to examine the concept of power in the field of management. Throughout my career, the management literature and management courses that I was exposed to supported the perception that power is one of the key characteristics of leadership. This is also the perception that underlined my assumptions as a manager. The social psychologists French and Raven[16] (1959) examined the concept of power in the context of leadership and developed a scheme of five sources of power. Their main purpose was to identify the major, common and important types of power and to define them systematically so that they could compare them according to the changes which they produce and the other effects which accompany the use of power (French and Raven 1959: 259). According to their perception, power is measured by the maximum possible influence that one has over others, though people may often choose not to exert the full extent of their power. They define five bases of one's power which seem especially common and important. In the relationship between A (can be a role, a norm, a group or a part of a group) and B, what is A's source of that power: (1) reward power, based on B's perception that A has the ability to mediate rewards for him; (2) coercive power, based on B's perception that A has the ability to mediate punishments for him; (3) legitimate power, based on the perception by B that A has a legitimate right to prescribe behaviour for him; (4) referent power, based on B's identification with A; (5) expert power, based on the perception that A has some special knowledge or expertise. In Project 1, I described that as a manager, I was exposed to these definitions and I defined my sources of strength for myself as legitimate power, in addition to expert power and referent power. Regarding the above narrative, I assumed at the time that I had legitimate power, without understanding the difference between the roles of the project manager and the sponsor. This misunderstanding could

[16] I was exposed to the analysis of French & Raven and influenced by them as a manager. In Project 1, I mentioned it but didn't remember the source

explain some of the tension between Miriam and myself but, I think this is not the full picture. When reflecting on what kind of power I attributed to others, there is a possibility that beyond the power I attributed to Miriam for her expertise in managing the mentoring so far, I did not attribute power to the others (Shelly and Hanna), which turned out to be a mistake, and which caused me to misunderstand the situation. In other words, I came to the project team with a self-centred outlook stemming from my managerial habits, and an attitude that did not match my naïve assumptions about equality - that we, four women, could cooperate without tension. I attributed power to myself based on what I considered to be legitimate and expert knowledge which stemmed from my previous organisational and perceptual habits and expected others to fit in.

Up until this point, I have perceived power from a traditional perspective, associating it with a person or group as a function of the status or capabilities that exist in them or that others contribute to them. Such power is expressed directly or indirectly, overtly or in covert conflict. However, my enquiry raised a number of questions which such theories failed to satisfactorily answer. I therefore sought to explore other, more social, views of power.

3.2.6.3. Power as part of every relationship

Elias (1978) sees power as an inseparable part of every relationship, "as a structural characteristic of relationships, all-pervading and, as a structural characteristic, neither good nor bad" (Elias, 1978: 93). According to Elias, power is not something that belongs to the individual, but rather, a structural characteristic of relationships. He claims that human beings are interdependent, that they need each other (to varying degrees) for different reasons. The difference in the degree to which who needs whom more is what constitutes power relations. Elias argues that no one is completely independent of others. He demonstrates this even in the interdependence between a mother and her baby. From the moment of birth, the baby has power over the mother by crying, assuming that the baby is important to her (Elias 1978: 74). Even in a situation in which power is distributed equally, "…in this case one is inclined to personify or reify interdependence" (ibid:94). Elias notes that people have always believed that power exists, therefore it has to belong to someone. So they created, linguistically, an entity who has power over them and who is responsible for the constraints they feel. (ibid: 94)

Elias argues that the distribution of power between people can vary. Depending on their relative perceived need for each other (ibid: 93) - who needs whom more, relationships are

not static but rather, just like power relations, they are processes that are continually shifting. Elias further argues that interdependence between people is both enabling and constraining at the same time, as a person cannot do whatever they want without considering the consequences. Power differences create what Elias calls 'figurations' (groupings formed by interdependent human beings that connect them) in which people are included or excluded. Since people are social and interdependent, they want to remain included in the group, which Elias argues occurs through processes of cooperation and competition, and enabling and constraining each other. He notes that this can be expressed consciously or unconsciously, through actions such as gossip defining the difference between 'we' and 'they' and evoking feelings such as shame and anxiety.

At first, during the events explained in my narrative, I assumed that power belonged to the individual and the position. I was anxious not to lose my power, and judged the behaviour of the others through this lens. Reading Elias helped me see that power is part of a relationship, an emergent property arising between people which ebbs and flows over time, as Elias puts it "is a fluctuating tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and fro" (Elias, 1978:131). In light of Elias's insights, as I now review the relationship between the four of us, Miriam, Hanna, Shelly and myself, I am starting to understand power in a completely different way. I wonder who needs whom, what causes our interdependence, and what our power relations are. Miriam may need us (Hanna, Shelly and I) in order to advance the topic of mentoring, as she had not managed to expand this topic or create significant activity around it in parallel to her main role in the association. Success would be accredited to her, and this would strengthen her position as the one to replace Sara. I probably needed Miriam as a liaison with the association and especially to preserve my relationship with Sara, as this was important to me. Hanna, who had been disconnected from the professional community for many years, had taken upon herself the main activity of matching mentors and mentees, and probably needed our (Sara, Miriam and I) familiarity with the community members, and so on. We are all interdependent, which both enables and constrains us. It enables us to take part in the association's activity and constrains us when it comes to accepting tasks or decisions we do not like.

Having now come to the conclusion that power is part of any relationship, and not a negative trait that can be avoided, I would like to continue with the narrative that describes the project

team's relationship, and through this to examine the identity issue that emerged in light of the change in my employment status.

3.2.7. The narrative – Part two

3.2.7.1. Planning the mentors' community meeting

One of the team members, I cannot remember for sure who it was, possibly Shelly, raised an idea to create a framework for periodic meetings in which mentors could share knowledge and dilemmas, and conduct peer-to-peer discussions.

Most of the planning between Miriam, Hanna, Shelly and I took place by remote conference calls, in which Shelly was the least active participant. I felt that she was avoiding being heard in the conversation, as it is possible that the three of us dominated the discussions, leaving no room for her. During the conversations, I asked her what she thought about things that were being said, and if she had anything to contribute, to make sure she was in the conversation with us. I suggested that planning the meeting should be done in a face-to-face session, rather than in a conference call. I thought this would be an opportunity to get to know each other better, improve our collaboration, and create a more sociable atmosphere. I invited the others to a meeting at my house, rather than following the usual protocol of holding it in a coffee shop, since the association has no offices. We arranged a three-hour meeting for the early morning. Hanna arrived first, expressing excitement about the house and commenting on its warm atmosphere. She followed me into the kitchen, explaining how she also had designed her kitchen in light colours with red items. Miriam lives in the same city as me and had previously attended a meeting at my house. She arrived on time and joined the chatter in the kitchen while I prepared coffee for us. We took our drinks to the big table in the dining room, which was laid out with warm muffins which I had managed to buy earlier that morning, fruit, and a date cake I had baked the day before. Fifteen minutes later, Shelly arrived in a short red dress with colourful shoes and a wide straw hat (it was one of the nicer winter days). She turned down my offer for coffee, instead preferring warm water. I sat next to Shelly, while Miriam and Hanna sat opposite us. Hanna was very enthusiastic about Shelly's clothes, which turned out to be from a second-hand shops. We focused on planning the mentors' community meeting and I volunteered to summarise our decisions. Various ideas were proposed in a lively conversation in which we all actively participated. We agreed the agenda of a mentoring community meeting, which would include Miriam presenting the activities of the association,

me presenting the activities and goals of the mentoring team, and Hanna adding details about the mentoring processes that were taking place. In order to ensure a role for Shelly, I suggested that she would guide the discussion of the dilemmas. She was happy to contribute but asked for support from Dana, a well-known consultant who is a member of the mentors' group. I sent a written summary to the three participants and we agreed to hold another coordination conversation call that would include Dana a few days before the meeting.

A couple of days before the meeting, on a rainy day, and while I sat in my car in a parking lot before an important meeting with a client, we held the conference call. I started to explain the purpose of the discussion of the dilemmas, as written in the summary. Shelly stopped me and said that this information was incorrect, instead providing other highlights. I was surprised and shocked that she had undermined my understanding in front of the others, especially Dana, whom I did not know yet. While Dana took a short break from the call to answer another call, I shouted to the remaining three participants that if they disagreed with my summary, they should have sent their corrections, rather than raising their objections in this discussion. There was silence, as no one responded.

3.2.7.2. The mentors' community meeting

Excitement was high as 19 HR women were participating in the meeting (this was the first meeting where only women were present). Since most of the women already knew each other, their arrival was accompanied by cries of excitement, hugs, and catch-ups. We were hosted in one of the meeting rooms of a well-known and leading high-tech company in offices which were on the 35th floor of a new office tower overlooking Tel Aviv and its busy main traffic arteries, designed innovatively with a kitchen offering all types of drinks and snacks. Young workers gathered in colourful and creative seating areas and discussed various challenges or just chatted. Our group stood out as, from the snippets of conversation I overheard, the casually dressed young employees seemed relaxed and concentrated on solving problems. Hanna and Miriam had already arrived. The meeting room was scattered with chairs, and in front of each chair was a small triangular table on wheels that could be connected together to create a large conference table. As Shelly was to guide the discussion of the dilemmas, when she arrived, I asked her if it would be better to sit in a circle without tables. She hesitated and asked to consult with Dana. Dana agreed it was better without tables, and so we moved them to one corner of the room. We sat in a circle, with me between Hanna and Shelly, and Miriam

sitting opposite us. Miriam stood up to speak about the association and its abundant activities (not all mentors are association members). Remaining seated, I described the process of the mentoring and conditions. I wanted to compliment Miriam and so I said: "Miriam has been running the programme for two years, alongside her impressive business development activities, and it's taken three HR women to replace her work ..." At this point, Miriam burst out with, "You're not replacing me". Based on the tone she used, she was not joking, but rather asserting herself, which was not typical of Miriam. Feeling embarrassed, I avoided looking around and examining the reactions of the others. I kept looking directly at her and with a smile, I said, "Of course not, Miriam continues to run the process as a sponsor. We are just helping her". I turned to Hanna for her to add some data about the mentoring processes that were taking place. Hanna began a long speech that included a description and explanation of the process, already explained by me, along with plans for the future. I only heard Hanna as a distant voice as I was so busy with my own thoughts and trying to work out what happened to Miriam, and what had caused her to respond in such a way. I gradually became aware that Hanna was extending her speech and going far beyond what we had decided she would speak about. I initially felt anger - what is going on here? Why did she go beyond what she said she was going to say? I've already said that! What is she trying to achieve? In the next moment, I felt confused, as I considered that I had perhaps not presented things clearly enough and so she had to repeat them.

Shelly, meanwhile, had brought cards with her as a trigger for discussion, and she continuously debated quietly with me whether or not to use them. 'Why don't you just ask Dana? 'I snapped impatiently, and, in hindsight, perhaps too abruptly since I was still thinking about Miriam's outburst and Hanna's long speech. In the end she did not use the cards, and, after a few sentences, she quickly transferred control of the discussion to Dana, who conducted a productive and engaging conversation that emerged spontaneously about the perception of the HR role in the organisation, and the participants went on to share dilemmas experienced by mentors. I now think I perhaps misjudged Shelly's ability to conduct the discussion and how anxious she was.

3.2.8. My initial reflection on part two

In order to help me better understand the emerging power relationships among the project team members, my supervisor and learning set colleagues took the above scene from my

narrative and acted it out, using the method of improvisation theatre, a reflexive technique developed by Larsen, et al (2018). Larsen describes an interactive style of role-play, in which actors or participants who are not actors (in my case, my supervisor and learning set), portray social relationship situations directed by the narrator who had participated in these relationships (me). This allowed me to see the situation I was involved in from a more detached perspective. I sat down and watched them play out the situation. I saw myself presenting the mentoring activity without presenting or acknowledging Miriam's role. In fact, the way I presented things could imply that Miriam was no longer part of the activity. When Sara asked me to lead the project, I had not understood that Miriam was really in charge, and my public comment about 'replacing 'her would have been destabilising and may have led to Miriam's outburst. I saw that I had not really presented Shelly and Hanna respectfully enough as equal partners, and that I was impatient towards Shelly when she needed me to help her decide whether to use the cards. I was struck by the experience, as I began to understand that I had not seen the situation from the others' perspective, nor had I understood what they were experiencing. As I identified my contribution to the emerging relations, I sat with my head in my hands, feeling stricken by the self-centred way in which I had interpreted their behaviour, and my own lack of reflexivity. I had failed to acknowledge Miriam in my speech at the mentors' community meeting, and I had shaken off Shelly when she needed to consult with me about the cards.

Elias (2001: p.47) uses the metaphor of the airman and the swimmer, in which the airman's perspective allows for some detachment "by setting aside immediate wishes and personal sympathies" (ibid, 47) when viewing others, whereas the swimmer is presently involved in the events themselves. Together, the airman and the swimmer's perspectives can give a more balanced picture (ibid, 47). The improvisational theatre helped me to gain some detachment from the situation I was involved in. I wanted to understand better and reflect more deeply on what was going on for me and my colleagues, and then to understand it in a different way. I had initially thought that my intentions, decision making and the activities I was involved in, were for the greater good, whereas Miriam and Hanna had behaved improperly, as Miriam had angrily interrupted me and Hanna had presented more than was agreed. The improvisation allowed me to see that things happen without us planning them, as they emerge in the interplay of our intentions and communication. In the communication process, meaning

emerges in the gesture and response together (Mead, 1934) (as I referred to in my first project). I saw that despite my good intentions, some of my words, and probably some of my decisions or actions, contributed to the situation that emerged.

I was still wondering what made me so sensitive to the relationships within the project team. During one of the coffee breaks at the residential weekend of the DMan programme, one of the participants, Jane, asked about what I was doing in my professional life. As I began to describe the range of professional activities I participate in (I felt it was a long list), she remarked that it seemed to her that I was searching for identity. My initial thought was that it was dime-store psychology and that I know who I am! However, her comment remained in my thoughts throughout the learning session until very slowly I began to realise that there may be some truth in her words. In the next coffee break, I told Jane that she was probably right but I insisted I still have an existing and stable core identity. I considered my 'core identity' to be a former senior manager in the banking system, known in the professional community, part of a large family, with many friends, with the only change being that I had retired. Jane replied that there is no such thing as a 'core identity'. I did not get the chance to continue the conversation with her before we were called back from the break. I realised that I probably did not understand what she was saying about identity. My fundamental belief was that identity is like a stalagmite that is created inside of me layer upon layer over the years. It struck me to realise that I had not dared to ask myself until that moment the question 'who am I?'

After working for many years in one organisation, of which 14 years were as a senior manager, without many changes in my personal or social life, the organisational title had become part of who I thought I was. Now that I have retired, I have suddenly found myself alone without the strong image of this organisation backing me. My social relationships in the professional field have also changed significantly, as the number of calls I receive has drastically reduced. My life has become very quiet, which on the one hand is pleasant and calm, but on the other hand is disturbing as I feel I have lost a great part of my sense of identity - who am I now? At professional meetings, especially within the association, I find myself introducing myself as a 'former manager of …' even when introducing myself as self-employed, or just by my name. Sara, the association's CEO, always mentions my previous role. I seem to be looking to define my identity, or maybe to seek activities that would return me to my original position and sense of meaning, along with a title and definition I can introduce myself with without stuttering or

apologising. In fact, there is a possibility that Hanna and Shelly are in the same situation, also looking for new ventures, identity or positioning. When Hanna, who is my age, left the organisation where she was employed at for 30 years, just six months after leaving she announced on social media that she was establishing a consulting HR strategy firm (for the meantime the firm includes only her). Shelly has worked in a number of start-ups and now introduces herself as a managerial consultant and coach. The association's mentoring programme brought together three HR women who had left organisational jobs over the past year and were looking for their next step in the field of HR, and this probably had an impact upon our relationship.

Since I have now raised the topic of identity and the question "who am I?", in the next section I will try to delve into this in more detail.

3.2.9. Identity

3.2.9.1. Self-located inside the individual

Burkitt, a professor of sociology and social psychology, approaches the question of "who am I?" in his book *"Social Selves"* (2008). He outlines the Western concept of 'self' throughout history, starting with the idea that the self is "located inside the individual, either in thought or in inner nature" (Burkitt, 2008:10). This is claimed by Descartes, who identifies the 'I' with the mind as a fixed metaphysical substance, by Rousseau, who claims that the 'I' comes from self-expression that leans on the inner voice, and by Kant, who claims that there are three 'I's: the transcendental 'I' which is capable of rational thought, the embodied 'I' which brings the rationality into action, and the moral 'I' which guides the individual's desires (ibid:7-9). My fundamental belief was that identity is something deep inside a person, like the stalagmite or 'core identity' I was talking about with my colleague Jane from the DMan programme. At the same time, I did not consider myself detached from the others. It was important to me how others perceived me: the way I presented myself, my role, or when I felt uncomfortable with Miriam's outburst in front of the others.

3.2.9.2. Self as socially constructed

The view of 'self 'as located inside the individual was challenged by the claim that 'self 'is a socially constructed phenomenon. Adam Smith, a Scottish economist and philosopher who is often associated with radical economic individualism, laid the foundations for the 'self 'as a social construction. He argues that the 'self' is shaped by the 'I' that judges our desires and the

'I' that is reflected in the attitudes of others. Along the same lines, Hegel, an early 19th century German philosopher, understands humans as social beings whose selves emerge and evolve through social relations.

The pragmatists, a philosophical movement which emerged in the USA after the Civil War, considered practical, every day, social activity to be the key to understanding the 'self. 'William James, an American psychologist, and one of the early pragmatists, claims the self is "..a duplex composed of the 'I' which thinks -.....- and the object it thinks about, called the 'me' " (Burkitt 2008:34). He argues that there are three aspects to the 'me' that 'I' reflects upon: the 'material me', which is body, face, belongings and family, the 'social me', which is the recognition we get from others and can differ over time and contexts, and the 'spiritual me', which is the entire stream of consciousness about the self, up until now. He claims that the 'self 'changes constantly as the past reflects upon the present and projects into the future in the form of plans, hopes and dreams. James believes that we have different selves when in different groups, and that people we know may perceive us differently or see different aspects of us (ibid:35). This made me think about how I act and present myself differently when I am with people from the association (head of…in the past or self-employed these days) and when I am with family or friends. I can even identify that I have different ways of behaving when I am in different friendship groups, and I even dress differently. Can these different selves be completely distinct from each other? I am one person who can adapt my behaviour according to the social environment I am in. In addition, our social environments are not disconnected either. My relationship with Sara, as I described in the first project, also included personal friendship relationships, and lately some of my friends have become clients. Furthermore, what happens when there is a major change in one of the social groups, for example, the professional environment, and how does this influence the other environments? In the narrative above, my retirement influenced my professional identity, yet what happened in other areas? According to James, I should expect no change because these are different 'selves'. In practice I could not make a distinction between my environments, and the change in the professional field affected other fields.

Mead (1934) took James 'idea further to advance the understanding of the 'self 'to be more of a social construct, arguing that an individual has to adapt to the environment, and to all of the other individuals in the social groups they are involved in (Burkitt, 2008: 36). Mead claims that

mind, self and society all arise simultaneously in the social communicative interaction (Stacey and Mowles, 2016:343). We can experience ourselves only indirectly from the way in which others in the social group we belong to respond to ourselves (i.e. what. Mead calls a social object to other people). Communication provides a form of behaviour in which we become an object to our 'self 'by taking the attitudes of others towards our 'self '(Mead, 1934:138). According to Mead, communication between individuals takes the form of an ongoing process of gesture and response conversation, where a person makes a gesture that evokes a response in the other in one act (Stacey and Mowles, 2016:341-342) - a gesture and response together create a social activity in which meaning arises for both the one gesturing and the other responding. Meaning is neither in the gesture nor in the response alone, but arises in the interaction between the two at the same time, as they can only be understood together (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 341-344). From experiencing this ongoing conversation of gesture/response, the individual is able to imagine what the response of the other will be to their gesture. In other words, the individual is able to adapt to the attitude of the other. As the individual experiences more and more communications of gestures, they encounter a wider range of responses, and are increasingly able to precede the other's attitude, what Mead calls the 'generalized other'. In this ongoing social process of conversations, the individual adopts the attitude of others not only towards the gestures but also towards their own self, that is the 'Me'. The 'I' is "…what you were a second ago…The 'I' is in a certain sense that with which we do identify ourselves" (Mead, 1934: 174). Mead argues that the individual's 'self' is shaped by an ongoing social process of conversations, where the 'I', who can be spontaneous and is influenced by history and experience, is responding to 'Me', which is a product of taking the attitude of the 'generalized other' of the society in which we operate. Mead further argues that it is impossible to separate the 'I' and the 'Me' – they are part of one action. The 'self' is temporary as it always changes and "…arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process" (Mead, 1934:135), and means that we become a 'self 'because there are other selves.

Reading Mead helps me understand that the 'self' is social and is constantly being formed in an ongoing social interaction process rather than an isolated identity-building event as a result of a life changing experience. As the 'self 'is an ongoing relationship between the 'I' and the

'Me', it continues to evolve throughout life and social interactions. Every interaction with others on the project team (as well as others outside of this activity) affects the process of 'self'. When Shelly responded negatively to my request to prepare a follow-up sheet, I felt that her response indicated that she did not see me as the leading manager. It was the same when Sara asked if I wanted to continue in the role, as I interpreted this as a challenge to my ability to lead the project. On the other hand, my success in promoting the mentoring activity had positively affected the way I thought I was seen by others. In each event, the 'I' (the spontaneous response) provoked an inner conversation, which was affected by the way I thought the others saw me as an object. Mead argues that it is in this ongoing process that the 'self 'is constantly emerging.

Elias also claims that the 'self 'is social, that the individual is born into an existing network of people, and through an ongoing interaction with them the 'self' and identity are co-created. Elias argues that the individual is the singular of the society, which is the plural (Elias, 1991: ix). As "one's sense of personal identity is closely connected with the 'we' and 'they' relationships of one's group, and with one's position within those units of which one speaks as 'we' and 'they'" (Elias, 1978: 128). When we refer to ourself as 'I', it is always in relation to others: 'we' 'you' or 'they'. If there were no others, then the word 'I' would be meaningless. 'I' only becomes meaningful when there are others, or, as Elias puts it, "There is no I-identity without we-identity." (Elias, 1991: 184). Our identity continues to evolve through the social network in an ongoing process. Our project team is one of the groups I belong to, which defines my identity. Each of us is formed by what is happening in the team, whilst at the same time each of us is forming the team relations and the others. The improvisation theatre with my learning group allowed me to see how my actions and intentions probably affected others, and not just how their actions impacted me.

Since the 'self' changes in an ongoing process of the social activities we are involved in, I would like to explore the extent of the impact of work upon 'self'.

3.2.9.3. Work as part of Identity

In his book, "*Social Selves*" Burkitt (2008) explains that the most common question asked when people meet for the first time is "what do you do?" (ibid: 138). This question can reveal important details about a person's identity such as their main activities, their skills, their areas of interest, their socioeconomic status, and their lifestyle (ibid: 138). He presents Marx's

concept that "what people are capable of doing and how they realise their own identity will depend to a large degree on their labour activity and the role they perform in the division of labour" (ibid: 139). Sève, a French Marxist philosopher and psychologist who played a major role in the process of developing a Marxist theory of human individuality, claims that in a capitalist society "most of us have to work to earn money and spend most of our time at work" (ibid: 141), meaning that most of our time is devoted to work activities that determine our identity. James includes the workplace as part of the 'material me', one of the three aspects of the 'Me' that the 'I' reflects upon (see above). From these scholars, and from my own experience, I have learned that work has a very significant place in shaping one's identity, and so retirement or a change in the workplace will probably have a significant impact on our identity. For a time, I introduced myself as ex… (my former role), because I had no other impressive occupation or status definition, and without such a definition I felt I had lost a part of myself. Although I initially thought that other parts of my life had not undergone change, my retirement actually created significant changes towards me, more so than I had expected. My family's attitude changed, as there was an expectation that I would spend more time engaged in family activities with my mother and my grandchild. My friends were no longer in awe of my free time and I even had the feeling that Sarah was 'mothering' me rather than dependent on my support. I assume that Hanna and Shelly had also gone through this and it had thus affected our behaviour and sensitivity.

Hanna, Miriam and I have a lot in common, alongside many differences. What affects our uniqueness?

3.2.9.4. The uniqueness

Verhaeghe, a Belgian psychologist and psychoanalyst (2014) also argues that identity is a process shaped by the environment from the moment of our birth. He claims that our identity is a structure shaped by two basic urges: our need to merge with the other, and our simultaneous desire for autonomy, which causes us to distance ourselves from the other. Both need to be kept in balance. Therefore, we internalise messages from the comments and stories of others. We "assimilate the messages of the other, both the positive ('You're so patient!') and the negative ('You're so slow!') from the environment and so they become part of our identity" (ibid:11). At the same time, we oppose others out of fear that they will dominate us, thus allowing for the development of our own individual personality. What makes our

uniqueness is the choices we make within a social environment (ibid: 18). According to Verhaeghe, uniqueness is a product of the choices we make and resist. It resonates with me that we are different and sometimes feel the need to emphasise this uniqueness: Shelly's dressing up in vintage clothing and posting on social media about the mentoring community meeting soon after it had taken place, and me inviting the staff to my house rather than to a coffee house, or my attempts to lead a change in the mentoring activities, are examples of this. Does our uniqueness result from choice? This would mean that we can control the social conversation interaction. Can the baby choose who he opposes? This contradicts the social approach. Mead, although not denying uniqueness, explains it as part of the interaction process that is not controlled or planned. Elias also attributes individuality to the position in the social fabric of relationships (Stacy and Mowels, 2016: 347).

Verhaeghe goes on to argue: "After we reach maturity, changes to our identity are rarely spectacular: they become a matter of nuance, of slight shifts and modifications" (Verhaeghe 2014: 31). He agrees that there is a change over the years, as we are not the same people in our twenties as we are when we reach our sixties. In the case of significant events such as trauma or illness (ibid: 31), he argues that these can cause a radical change in the identity of a person. He further argues that "After we reach maturity, changes to our identity are rarely spectacular: they become a matter of nuance" (ibid: 31). It is not clear to me if there is a certain age at which change is minor. Am I at a stage where my identity is already stable? According to this approach, retirement would be considered a 'radical change' that could cause me to no longer be 'myself 'afterwards. This description, however, does not resonate with what I feel. Retirement is a significant event for me, as I believe it is for most people, but it is difficult for me to say, 'I am no longer myself'. This is probably what I meant when I argued with Jane in the coffee break that I still have my 'core identity'.

3.2.10. Conclusions

When I started writing the above narrative, I wanted to understand the relationship and tensions that formed within a project team consisting of women who had just retired from large organisations. I naively thought that such a team would be free from power struggles, as these are a by-product of organisational conduct. I perceived power as part of an individual's assets: some people are powerful as a result of certain abilities or through their control over certain assets. In my organisational experience, although I did not like it, I participated in power

struggles with the goal of either empowering myself or preventing others from taking over. I felt that what I gained over time became an integral part of who I am. I was disappointed to come across power struggles in the volunteering activities, as I was sure that we could run a voluntary project without any power relations at all. My research about power and an in-depth examination of the different approaches towards it, from power belonging to the individual as a function of position, to being a result of influencing decisions, directly or indirectly, to control or influence an agenda, to power being part of social relations, made me realise that power is not a property held by an individual looking for ways to retain and protect it. I have come to challenge my belief that power is a negative or positive component of organisational life that can be avoided, but rather part and parcel of every relationship, depending on situation, position and figuration (Elias, 1978). Since people are interdependent, the gap between dependencies – who needs whom more - creates power relations. I now acknowledge the interdependence between Miriam, Hanna, Shelly and myself, as none of us is powerless or powerful all of the time. Relationships between individuals are processes that are continually shifting, and power relations emerge and shift in the interplay of our intentions and communication.

I started to realise that my interest in power probably stemmed from my feeling of losing the power I felt I had before my retirement. Leaving a senior position and looking to be significant in other activities probably made me sensitive to how people see me, and how I am perceived by the society I belong to. Who am I now? How do I present myself? I was sure that I had a core identity that had been created over the years. I was surprised to find this belief shaken by my feeling destabilised in my new role, and by Jane (my fellow student) drawing attention to other theoretical beliefs about what the 'self 'is and other ways of understanding how it may be formed. My research thus far, and my in-depth reading related to the exploration of the themes of power and identity, helped me consider that identity may be an ongoing process in which identity is constantly being constructed in social processes. I started to understand that a change in work creates a fundamental change in how people identify themselves in their activities, since work occupies a great deal of our lives. This may help explain my sensitivity and the sensitivity of the other project team members as they were also in a transitional phase of their careers where they are questioning who they now are in this changing stage of their lives.

By gaining some detachment from the situation I was involved in, by the improvisation acting and the many collaborative/conflictual conversations with my learning set (a social process), I gained a wider perspective that allowed me to see what others felt in situations that I had previously understood from my own point of view only, and therefore had attributed to other project members (Miriam Hanna and Shelly) inappropriate behaviour. I realised the interdependence and the mutual influence we have on each other in which we form and are being formed.

In hindsight, the theme of identity appeared in my first project, as I described growing up in a family of immigrants who struggled with the identity of being 'Israeli'. I can identify the issue of identity through my role changes and how they caused me to ask who I am professionally, these diverse positions throughout my career that made me unable to define my profession. I convinced myself that what matters is the managerial capabilities and so I looked for the rules and recipes to manage, and questioned my assumption about what it means to be a good manager.

The mentoring project continues to operate, as do the four of us (Miriam, Shelly, Hanna and I) as the project team. I can identify a change in my behaviour in light of my research so far: I understand that I may be in charge but I am not in control, as things emerge in our activity and we act into each other's intentions. I am trying my best to see things from the point of view of others and to be less self-centered. As we are interdependent beings tied to each other, I can recognise that the shift in my behaviour has changed the texture of the relationship between the four of us, since meaning emerges in the ongoing process of simultaneous gestures and responses.

In the next project, I intend to continue to inquire into the concept of identity, recognition and positioning through C. Taylor: *Sources of self* and A. Honneth: *The Struggle for Recognition*, and others. I intend to look at the underpinning assumptions when we talk about retirement.

3.3. Project 3 - Power relations, conflict and recognition in a partnership

3.3.1. Introduction

In my second project, I explored the relationships and tensions that developed within a volunteer project team. This was in the framework of an association that works to promote Human Resources (HR) professionals, and the HR profession as a whole, and in which I served as a board member. The project team consisted of women who had recently retired from HR positions in large organisations. Themes of power and identity emerged from this project. A review of these themes led me to the realisation that power relations are part of every relationship between interdependent individuals, who need each other (to varying degrees) for different reasons. The difference in the degree to which who needs whom more is what constitutes power relations, and these relations may shift. This realisation contradicted my initial assumptions that power is a property held by an individual, and that it is possible to work together as a team without power relations. Exploring the theme of power relations led me to realise that my interest in power probably stemmed from my perception that after my retirement, I felt I had lost the power I had previously held, and this undermined my sense of identity. My initial belief was that identity is something deep inside a person, an approach that was presented by Descartes, Rousseau (inner voice) and Kant (Burkitt, 2008: 7-10). Reading Burkitt (2008), Mead (1934) and Elias (1978, 1991), I started to consider that identity, like power, emerges from the social relationships that we are involved in, and is an ongoing process, in which our sense of self evolves. I started to understand that a change in a person's work circumstances is likely to create a fundamental change in how people identify themselves in their activities, since work occupies a great deal of our lives (Burkitt, 2008: 139).

After taking early retirement, I looked for an activity that would generate income, be interesting and enable me to reposition myself in the HR community. I became an active partner in a consultancy that had previously provided a service to the bank I worked for. In the narrative below, I describe the relationship that emerged within this partnership and how it impacted my sense of identity.

3.3.2. The narrative part one – power relations in the partnership

3.3.2.1. Beginning a partnership

A year after my retirement, Sara, the CEO of the HR association[17], and I arranged to meet to share ideas for the association's future development. Sara suggested that I arrive early for the meeting, as this would give me the opportunity to meet with, in her words, 'a very interesting consultant'. I arrived ten minutes early and found that Sara was meeting Adele, a consultant, who I knew from my days at the bank. She had provided Emotional Quotient [18] (EQ) assessments (which I will elaborate on later), which we had used as part of our leadership development programme.

I felt slightly embarrassed, as Adele had tried to set up a meeting with me several times after my retirement, saying that we needed to meet as we could do interesting things together. I had avoided her with promises of calling back, but never actually doing so. From my experience of meetings that I had held with other former service suppliers I worked with, they generally wanted to know if I could help them to expand their activities and to gossip. I felt this was inappropriate behaviour on my part. In addition, I could not imagine any cooperation between us, as I assumed that working with managers through EQ assessment to be a narrow niche that requires a background in psychology or counselling, neither of which I possessed. I was more interested in finding or developing a leadership development model, and was checking the possibility of working with Pinhas Yehezkeally's[19] model about Organizational Network Analysis – (ONA)[20], a model that identifies and illustrates the organisational relationship network and assumes that a manager can plan, by moulding and influencing relationships.

I dealt with my embarrassment by accepting Adele's earlier invitation and we made an appointment. We met in a busy cafe at a shopping center close to the train station, as she usually comes to Tel Aviv by train. After a brief update, she introduced me to a new model that she had developed for leadership development which was based on EQ assessments. It was

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[17] I introduced her and my involvement with the association in Project 2

[18] Emotional quotient (EQ) –Bar-On (2006) an American and Israeli clinical and organisational psychologist coined the term EQ for emotional intelligence (as an analogy to Intelligence Quotient -IQ) and developed an assessment to analyse it.

[19] I introduced Yehezkeally's work in project 2

[20] Visualising and analysing formal and informal relationships in organisation. Yeheskeally created a model that he claimed can improve organisational effectiveness and functionality, measuring leadership and illustrating power relations.

much broader than the EQ test used in the bank. The new model purports to include all the capabilities that are important for success in a world of rapid change, and is presented as a metaphorical journey that the individual needs to go through in order to cultivate capabilities. It includes the importance of a 'growth mindset' – the belief that everyone can and needs to change and evolve throughout life[21]. The model also stresses the importance of acknowledging the dominant thinking styles that shape our approach to problem solving - the creative and metaphorical approach associated with the right hemisphere of the brain, or the analytical and rational approach associated with the left hemisphere. The journey continues through the components of EQ, and is described as the capability of individuals to recognise their own emotions and those of others, discern between different feelings and label them appropriately, use emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour, and manage and/or adjust emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goal. The sequel category focuses on the ability to find purpose, be optimistic, take full ownership of our career, maintain a wide network of relationships and take care of our well-being. At the end of the journey the individual is required to define where he sees his career going. The model also allows group development, based on a profile that aggregates the data of individuals within the group. Based on this profile, the group should conduct a discussion on whether this is the desired profile. If not, what should be changed? Is the change is on an individual basis? The assumptions underpinning the model are that all the components can be developed when the individual becomes aware of the gaps between their abilities and those that are desired. This perspective is based on Humanistic psychology according to which "each individual has an inner urge to self-actualize" (Stacey 2006: 191). Change will happen when the individual is aware of the gaps and gets guidance on what to focus on. The group is understood as a collective of individuals that helps the individual to realise them self.

During Adele's explanation, I tried to figure out what the purpose of the meeting was. I imagined requests for help opening doors in other organisations. I had already helped her in the past to start working with two other banks. Maybe she was expecting comments on the new model. Suddenly, she said that she wanted me to join her as a partner (although not with equal percentages). With this new model, and my connections, she envisioned opportunities

[21] Based on the theory and book of the American psychologist Carol Dweck, (2007) Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. In her book, Dweck describes two different types of mindsets: a growth mindset and a fixed mindset.

for significant growth. By no means had I expected a partnership offer. The initial sense of surprise, which I hoped she did not sense, was replaced with mixed feelings of being flattered and apprehensive. Complimented by the fact that I was valued, but not wanting to engage in 'sales' activity only, I put forward the condition that entering the partnership would depend on my being fully involved in workshops and giving feedback, not just in marketing.

After a week of reflection, I decided to join Adele, having been infected by her enthusiasm. I was impressed by the extensive body of literature she used to build this model, as well as my recollection of how sensitive she had been when she gave me feedback on the EQ assessment I had taken ten years prior. My assessment was that her model seemed more implementable than the ONA model I had considered, and that it could be 'sold' to HR professionals. I saw this as an opportunity for part-time employment which I believed would keep me busy two days a week, and would fit in well with my other pursuits.

3.3.2.2. Working with the model

The way Adele and I work with the model is that the participants fill out the assessment a few days before they are scheduled to attend the workshop. In an experiential workshop, they are divided into small groups and each group needs to discover the features of a category of abilities and present the findings to the other groups in an entertaining manner. The participants learn about the model and the meaning of its components using the group inquiry format. Following the workshop, each participant has a one-hour meeting with Adele or myself to receive our feedback about their personality as reflected from the assessment they filled out (which they don't receive in advance of the meeting). From what I experienced, these can be very emotional encounters in which people talk about themselves, challenges, difficulties and on many occasions, painful stories come to light.

Until recently, Adele ran the workshops and I focused on the personal feedback sessions which was a formative experience for me. It changed my perception of my own self-image. I used to think of myself as a business manager focused on task management, who wrote concisely in bullet points and spoke in the same manner. Now I have discovered a new field of long, personal conversations that can be emotional in which it is legitimate for the participant to be vulnerable. I found that I really enjoyed these meetings.

In most cases, people were very surprised at how well the model reflected them. When I presented them with the capabilities that needed to be improved, it allowed them to talk about

personal struggles. For example, when I told a manager that he seemed lacking ambition at work, he started to cry, telling me he was dealing with a serious illness. The emphasis in the conversations was on the significance of their strengths and of the abilities that need improving, on their managerial functioning and what should be done to increase the chances of their being more successful at work. In these conversations, I had the opportunity to share my managerial experience with them. Giving examples from the way I worked as a manager, illuminating additional perspectives of how their conduct could be perceived by colleagues or subordinates, and by presenting them with a more senior perspective. Sometimes, I even gave them small tips. I found these discourses on managerial practice were the most interesting part of the personal feedback session.

3.3.2.3. Adding a consultant

Adele and I were swept up in a wave of sessions to learn the model, in which she practiced with me dozens of examples of how to give feedback on the assessments. We rushed from one meeting to the next with HR executives I knew and held long discussions, negotiating collaborations with different organisations. I found that selling our product to organisations was not an easy and fast process, and assumed that this was just part of the market penetration process.

After six months of activity, which had not yet yielded sufficient results, Adele told me that she was going to meet Ruth, a consultant who had worked as head of LD at another bank, and who had resigned several months earlier. I hardly knew her, as my working relationship had been with Ruth's line manager, who was my counterpart. After the meeting, Adele informed me that Ruth wanted to join us as a partner. I was hurt that she wanted to add another partner, and asked myself whether this meant that Adele was disappointed that I had not delivered as expected. Had I not brought in enough work contracts? Was she bothered that we had gone to appointments, which had not led to the signing of contracts? After all, she was with me at all the meetings and she was part of the process. I was bothered that Adele might not have as much staying power as I thought she had, and needed to have, at this stage. There had been a few instances in which Adele had been impatient about processes that took time, as she was expecting an immediate signing of contracts. I also felt uncomfortable that Ruth's professional status was lower than mine. If we were to become partners in the business, what message would this signal to the community about my positioning and the positioning of our firm? I

also had a feeling that there would now be an element of competition about who brings more contracts, a competition I felt uncomfortable with. I had already retired and sought to escape all the characteristics of organisational conduct: competition, power relations and power struggles.

I told Adele that I did not understand why another partner was needed, although I was unable to admit to her issues of status and competition also bothered me, because I thought it would indicate weakness on my part. She tried very hard to convince me that adding a consultant would increase our opportunities, arguing that Ruth was very enthusiastic and would be able to contribute her training development capabilities to the team, a strength that was currently less evident. Finally, she promised me that if after a joint work meeting with Ruth, I still objected, then she would not join us. To continue to resist, I thought, would be to take all the responsibility for the consequences of the decision.

I met with Ruth and was very impressed by her professionalism. In a private conversation with myself, I convinced myself to give up my resistance by reminding myself that I was no longer in a corporate environment and should give the extended partnership a chance. And so Ruth joined the firm. She brought a lot of positive energy and the three of us shared meetings and conversations and even planned an ambitious income target which, if reached, we would celebrate with a trip to Greece, just the three of us.

3.3.3. Power relations

While writing the above narrative, the theme of power relations that I referred to in Project 2 was raised once again. As I mentioned in the introduction, in Project 2 I delved into the theme of power. I have come to understand, based on Elias's (1978) social approach, that power relations are an inseparable part of every relationship. Elias, a German sociologist, claims that human beings are interdependent, and that they need each other (to varying degrees) for different reasons. It is the difference in the degree of who needs whom more that constitutes power relations, and, indeed, power relations are processes that are continually shifting (Elias, 1978: p.93).

By creating a partnership with Adele, a change in our power relations occurred, or more specifically, I felt as if it turned things upside down. I was no longer contracting services from her, and she was no longer supplying them. In our new relationship, she owned the company and I worked for her, even if we did call it a partnership. When Adele asked me to join her I

was flattered, I felt I had been recognised for all my accomplishments throughout the years in the bank. At the same time, the change in this power relation was another phase in feeling a loss of power. Now, I needed her more than she needed me. Before every assessment feedback session with a client, I needed to get the output from her and practice the analysis with her. However, I was not powerless, since I had the connections in the HR community. Consequently, I felt that the power relations were in her favour and she had more control over our conduct. Nonetheless she managed to persuade me to add Ruth to our team, by presenting the facts in a pleasant way, even though I was not enthusiastic.

When Ruth joined, there was another change in the figuration of our power relations, and it increased the number of possible constellations in the balance of the three participants. I was afraid that I might continue to lose power. I thought that the chances that Ruth and I would form an alliance were slim, it was more likely that Ruth would align with Adele, after all Adele was the one who had brought her in. So there was a high probability that my relative strength would further decrease and I would lose my ability to influence the conduct of the partnership.

When I joined Adele, I thought that unlike the large network of relationships in the bank I worked for in which my ability to control conduct was low, in this new partnership with Adele, my perception about relationships was that they consisted of only Adele and myself in the first phase (before Ruth joined), and in the second phase it was a figuration of three participants. I thought that a figuration of two would allow me more involvement and control over our conduct. Reading Elias's (1978) game models, "a metaphor[22] for people forming society together" (ibid: 92), I realise that even in a partnership of two or three my ability to control the conduct is low. According to Elias's relatively simple game model with two players only, with known rules and unequal power relations, the relatively higher-power player is likely to have control both over the other player and over the course of the game. In the case of three players, the chances of one player controlling the others during the course of the game depends on the degree of tension between the other two players: "the greater the tension the greater the chances of A to control the moves of B, C, D and their allies, as well as the general course of the game" (Elias, 1978: 83). Moreover, Elias (1991) claims that the individual grows

[22] A Metaphor is taking the "attributes of phenomena in one domain to another domain without taking the nature of relationship" While an analogy is taking "relationship, without any attributes, from one domain and argue that these relationships apply in some other domain"(Stacey & Mowles, 2016: 318).

in a specific way from a "network of people existing before him into a network that he helps to form" (ibid: 32). The individual is tied in a dependency relation of a long and strong chain with others. Thus each of us brings to the relationship the chain to which she is connected. Adele brings her husband who maintains the computer system, the other consultants who work with the model, and clients she has worked with. I bring to the relationship, among other things, my professional network, which is important to how they perceive me, and colleagues and employees from the bank I worked for. The way in which Ruth perceives me is also important for me as I wanted to maintain the image of myself as a senior manager in her eyes. Mead (1934) also introduces the idea of a wide network of relationships through the idea of the 'generalised other' who takes the attitude of others toward himself. "These social or group attitudes are brought within the individual's field of direct experience, and are included as elements in the structure or constitution of his self" (ibid: 158). In real life, Elias 'metaphor of a limited game does not work, because of the vast web of interdependencies which each of us finds ourselves participating in. It is more similar to what he calls a multi-person game, and therefore the ability of one individual to plan and control the conduct and results is low. Moreover, Elias claims that in "developmental dynamics of figurations, which are composed of people" (Elias 1978: 165-6), what emerges does so not because of the deliberate plans and intentions of any of the participants or even by all of them together. What emerges does so because of what we are all doing or not doing.

I came to realise the fluidity of the power relations, the long chain of interdependence with others who are involved in every relationship, all of which affect the predictable and unpredictable of the relationship, outcome and the ability to control the conduct of the relations within a figuration.

3.3.4. The narrative part two – Conflict in the partnership

Late one evening, after a busy day, I read an email from Adele with a proposal for a prospective client. This was a significant change to the proposal I had originally written. Adele's proposal was a revised offer, prepared after I had already held several meetings with the client, for a meeting with the staff of the organisation, which was scheduled for the following afternoon.

I had made the connection with this organisation, which bore similarities to the organisation I had worked in, through my acquaintance with the HR executive, Paula, a valued professional

in the HR community. We had held several meetings in which Paula was very enthusiastic about the model and she wanted to implement it throughout the organisation.

We had to deal with the challenge that Paula was planning to retire within nine months, and the organisation was committed to put out an official tender for an expense above a certain sum. The decision we made was to submit a first stage proposal for a sum that did not necessitate a tender, and at the same time, to prepare for a bigger project which would require a tender and which would be a long process. I drew up a plan for the first stage (no tender needed) of implementation among a group of about 25 thought leaders (people who are considered to be able to help promote ideas). Based on the results of first stage, we would prepare a plan for the entire organisation and submit a tender.

Adele's revised proposal included using an app that, at the time was still in the development phase, and therefore was not yet tested. She appeared certain that the app would be ready on time. The proposal involved all 800 employees of the organisation (working in groups of 100) filling out the questionnaire on the app and receiving immediate, electronic feedback. The cost of this proposal was the maximum amount not requiring a tender.

I was very angry when I read Adele's proposal. She had significantly altered what Paula and I had agreed upon, and I felt that the proposal was unprofessional (as the process seemed superficial). I felt responsible for this client, Paula who trusted my professionalism and I believed that Adele and I could not take a risk with her. I suspected that the considerations that guided Adele's proposal were misguided (for marketing purposes) so that she could say that the entire organisation went through the process. In addition, her proposal to use the app bothered me. Originally the app was developed in collaboration with a college that trains engineers in order to build a profile of those working in the profession and adjust the study curriculum accordingly. Adele had started talking about using the app on an ongoing basis. It seemed to me that giving electronic feedback meant a loss of the intimacy and that in my experience, the personal feedback encounters were significant to the people I met. I had previously expressed my concerns, and added that I thought it could even be potentially harmful. She proposed a solution that used statistical adjustments so that an individual would get less negative feedback. I felt this was cutting corners and that it was dishonest to manipulate the data in this way. Adele was convinced that the app would work well. I continued to insist that we should first try out the app on some groups we already knew, with us being

present in the session, to see how people respond to it and whether any support was needed. I believed that the organisation Paula works for was not suitable for such an experiment. Based on my experience, in terms of an assimilation processes, I thought that a swift roll-out involving all employees of the organisation may cause resistance. The risks were greater than any likelihood that the organisation's leaders would co-publish an article with Adele announcing a 'revolution in the organisation', as she envisioned.

I re-read the email, and despite it being 10 pm and knowing Adele would be in bed, my anger compelled me to reply. I wrote numerous drafts while trying to avoid accusing her of unprofessionalism. I finally wrote her a short email saying that "If I were the client, I would not approve this proposal".

At 7 am, while I was drinking my morning coffee with my husband, Adele rang. I was surprised, as although I was used to her starting the day early, she usually texted me first to check whether I was awake and available. The conversation started with her greeting me briefly in a very low voice, and then she started yelling: "You cannot do this to me. You cannot write such things, it drains all my energy". I had to ask her a few questions to clarify what she was talking about. I could not imagine that such yelling was a result of my email. I took a deep breath and decided to try to stay calm and not be drawn in by her tone of voice. I discarded my coffee, left the house to sit on a bench in the garden, and continued the conversation. I explained to her that I did not think that the proposal was good or responsible, and that I had chosen the shortest and simplest way to express this. She asked me if I was implying that she was a charlatan and was willing to hurt the client in order to make quick money. I did not want to be dragged into labelling her, and so continued in a calm voice that I did not think that she was intentionally being unethical, but that I did think she was wrong about this proposal.

I told her that I felt that her financial considerations and desire to gain publicity outweighed other considerations. She probably saw the opportunity to complete a speedy development process for this entire prominent organisation, which would later provide her with a chance to publish an article and penetrate global organisations. In addition to all of the above, the app was not even ready yet.

She admitted that she saw it as an opportunity to experiment with an entire 'organisation undergoing a process of 'upgrading'[23], but did not agree that it could hurt the client or that it was unethical. Throughout the conversation, I wondered whether my email response had been too blunt, and whether I should have written it more delicately. It was important for me to maintain the conversation and not ruin our relationship. Together with my anger and criticism, I still could also see the potential of our work, as well as Adele's good qualities. I reminded myself that she had no experience working in a large organisation. On the one hand, I would not define her as unethical. Yet, on the other hand, due to the similarities between the organisation in question and the organisation I had worked for, I felt that I had the right to make my voice heard and be recognised for my experience and knowledge. In short, I felt that if such a proposal had come to me in my previous position, I would not have approved it.

At the end of the call, Adele informed me that 'if this is your approach, I ask you not to join the meeting today'. I responded firmly, saying that this was my client and she could not stop me from attending. I informed her that I would attend the meeting and that we would not send the proposal in advance. Instead, we would discuss the options and let the client decide. After the meeting, we would sit and clarify things between us. At that point, my doubts about the style and tone of what I had written in my email to her increased and I said I was sorry if she was hurt, and that was not my intention, and that I was not trying to question her ethics. She calmed down immediately, and said she was hurt because our relationship was important to her. We agreed to continue the discussion after the meeting. After hanging up, I remained sitting on the bench for a while with an inner turmoil: feeling bad that I had hurt Adele, while at the same time, I could not get over my anger at what was written in her proposal.

When I arrived at the meeting, Adele was already there with Paula. I assumed there had been no prior conversation between them, as Adele knew that I had a good relationship with Paula. I was relieved to hear that they had decided to conduct the meeting without any other staff present. The three of us sat around a small conference table in Paula's room. Unlike previous meetings, Adele and I now sat on either side of Paula. I tried to continue as usual and not disclose any tension. I noticed that Adele did the same. However, we did refrain from making

[23] According to the model, when an individual goes through the process, he improves his capabilities and when the majority of the employees in the organisation go through the process, the organisation is upgraded and its chances of success increases. This is based on the assumption that the plural/ the whole is the sum of individuals.

eye contact with each other. I began by presenting the latest plan we had discussed, and then Adele introduced her suggestion as an alternative, saying, 'we thought this might be worth considering'. Paula determined without hesitation that we continue with the programme that we had previously discussed. I held back a smile of victory and continued with a practical discussion. Adele remained silent throughout the rest of the discussion, which focused on the procedural details of dates, number of employees, preparation sessions, etc.

Usually after meetings we are energetic and talkative. However, this time Adele and I went out onto the street and walked quietly. We found a quiet corner in the first coffee shop we saw and sat down. The conversation was more relaxed, and Adele, looking defeated and sad, explained that she felt I had doubted her professional integrity. I said again that I did not intend to hurt her, it was professional criticism and that we needed to put the clients 'needs first. She asked that if I ever again felt the need to criticise her, that I should do it in a more delicate manner.

We hugged each other and said goodbye, leaving the coffee we had ordered untouched. I felt the mutual trust had been broken and it would take time for this to be rebuilt.

3.3.5. Conflict

The conflict that occurred in the above narrative between Adele and myself, caused me much distress over a long period of time, and at the time, I thought of the partnership as a failure, perhaps even a personal failure. In my perception as an HR executive, I believed that success and effective conduct should be harmonious, and all the more so in a new partnership of two or three. I would therefore like to examine theories of conflict in more depth to try to understand how the conflict impacted our relationship.

3.3.5.1. Conflict as a disruption

The professional literature that I relied on during my last years as head of TD refers to conflict as a disorder that leaders need to handle. The 'Adaptive Leadership' model, which was one of the models that guided my way of thinking, was developed by Heifetz et al (2009), the cofounders and managing directors of Cambridge Leadership Associates. According to this model, conflicts are part of 'some rough patches' or 'moments people are not working well' (ibid: 149). They borrowed the term 'Orchestrate Conflict' from the field of music "because of the way the composers approach the uses of dissonance and consonance in the creation of harmony" (ibid: 151). Similarly, the leader should carefully manage the conflict toward

resolution – to harmonise. This was one of the leading models in LD in Israeli organisations during the first decade of this century. In my experience, in the bank I worked for, conflicts were perceived as something that disrupts organisational efficiency and they need to be resolved. As Head of TD, I was responsible, among other things, for a team of internal organisational consultants whom I would refer to resolve conflicts in various units in the bank.

To delve further into the concept of conflict, I began to read the work of Rahim (2001) from Western Kentucky University who specialises in the management of organisational conflict, emotional intelligence, and organisational learning. In his book *Managing Conflict in Organisations*, Rahim provides an extensive review of the literature on conflict, and traces the history of the concept in the fields of philosophy, sociology and organisational theory.

Rahim states at the outset of his book that "conflict is inevitable among humans". (ibid: 1). He reviews the contribution of philosophy to the theory of social conflict beginning from Plato and Aristotle, through the 17th century philosophers Hobbes and Locke and suggests that the role of leaders or government is to establish order in social relations in order to minimise conflict. In the 19th century, a shift of views on conflict occurred: Marx argued that the roots of conflict are in economics and that conflict between classes is a mechanism for change and development. The new society that will evolve would be without conflicts (Rahim 2001:4).

Rahim notes that scholars in organisational theory have only become interested in studying conflict in recent years (Rahim, 2001: 2). He classifies scholars who wrote about organisational conflict into classical approaches, neo-classical approaches and modern views of organisational conflict (ibid: 7 -14). A number of classical scholars (Frederick Taylor, Fayol, and Weber), who regarded conflict as negative, proposed organisational structures "so that organisation members would be unlikely to engage in conflict" (ibid: 7). The neo-classical scholars also considered conflict a negative factor, but they tried to eliminate it by improving the social system of the organisation (Elton Mayo, Kurt Lewin and Rensis Likert). This was my approach. I thought it was my job, as the HR executive, to provide tools, training or external consulting that would help to eliminate conflicts. The modern view of conflict (Clark Kerr, Robert H Miles) is that it is not necessarily bad, and some degree of conflict, understandably managed, is essential to maintaining the level of organisational effectiveness (ibid: 7-15). I remember how confused I felt when a new CEO, who came from another bank, claimed that he did not like the atmosphere of the lack of tension, conflicts and rivalry.

3.3.5.2. To manage conflict

Rahim defines conflict as "an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individual, group, organisation, etc.)" (ibid: 8). He classifies ten categories of conflict, based on their sources: affective conflict, substantive conflict, conflict of interest, conflict of values, goal conflict, realistic versus non-realistic conflict, institutionalised versus noninstitutionalised conflict, retributive conflict, misattributed conflict and displaced conflict. He proposes five styles of dealing with them: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Rahim suggests that "a moderate amount of conflict, handled in a constructive manner, is essential for attaining and maintaining an optimum level of organizational effectiveness" (ibid: 12). He claims that management of organisational conflict involves diagnosis of the type of conflict according to his ten categories, and then using of one of the five styles of dealing with conflicts that he suggests. Affective conflicts, interpersonal clashes characterised by negative feelings, should be eliminated (ibid: 7-15) because if they are not, they will reappear later.

In her review of the existing perspective about organisational conflict, Contu (2019), from the University of Massachusetts, Boston Management department, associates Rahim's perspective with the 'interactionist'[24] approach. According to this perspective "Conflict is the engine of organizational innovation, and helps generate and develop the best ideas" (ibid: 1448). Contu criticises this perspective for it suggests that there is an optimum level of conflict, whereas there is no consensus of the correct degree of conflict. In addition, it assumes that the conflict arises only due to internal differentiation, and it assumes managerial control in order to keep conflict at the 'right 'level (ibid: 1448-9).

The underpinning assumptions in Rahim's suggestions on how to deal with conflict are that a manager can step aside and become a detached observer, plan a linear and sequential behaviour, direct and control the interplay among individuals so that he can control the determined outcome. I find it difficult to see how a manager can maintain a moderate amount of conflict as Rahim suggests. It makes me wonder what is the 'right' amount of conflict? It sounds like a rational approach, however based on my experience in organisational conduct, most conflicts are unplanned. Drawing on Stacey (2012: 127), I argue that human behaviour is

[24] The other two that she identifies are the 'traditional' and the 'human relations' (HR).

both predictable and unpredictable, and on Mead (1934) who claims that the individual develops the capacity to take the attitude of a generalised other[25], which informs our judgement about how to act in a particular circumstance "how to make the generalisation particular in each present time period and situation" (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 367). Even if a conflict is expected, they argue that only the first stage can be envisioned and from then on, no one can control what comes next. How am I supposed to know what is the right amount? Could I have had a different level of conflict with Adele? When I sent Adele the email, I knew I could expect a conflict, I imagined that we might argue about using an untested app and even argue about the willingness to experiment with this client, but I did not imagine such a response. In my experience at the bank, announcing that 'I would not have approved it ' is an invitation to discuss our differences in approach. In actual fact, I had generalised the tendencies to act across many similar situations in my experience, what Mead (1934: 7) calls a *social object*, which is one phase of the imaginative 'whole' that has never existed and never will. People are creating an imaginative 'whole' which means "constructing in our interaction perception of unity in the patterning of our interaction" (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 376). The other phase is the particularising in the specific situation that is inseparable from the generalisation, which can be spontaneous and can involve conflict. The social object which is "a general gesture taken together with many tendencies to respond in particular ways" (ibid: 373) can also be understood as habits, regularities and stable aspects of life. At the same time, social life can be unstable, spontaneous and unpredictable "because of the unique and anticipative/responsive characteristics of human beings" (Mowles, 2015: 107). When things do not work out as anticipated, we become more aware of and pay deliberate attention to what we do (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011).

Rahim's assumption about the ability to define, manage and control the right level of a conflict, differs from another way of understanding conflict, as outlined in the perspective of complex responsive process of relating, which combines ideas from complexity sciences, pragmatic philosophy (such as George H. Mead and John Dewey), anthropology, process sociology (Norbert Elias), group analytic psychotherapy (Foulkes) and paradoxical relationships (Mowles,

[25] The generalised other: from experiencing many conversations of gestures and responses, the individual is able to imagine what the response of the other will be to their gesture; the individual is able to adapt the attitude of the other. As the individual experiences more and more communications of gestures and responses, they encounter a wider range of responses, and are increasingly able to precede the other's attitude.

2015). This perspective proposes that behaviour is not directed by a detached outsider. The focus is on what is happening when people respond to each other, with an emphasis on people being interdependent, suggesting that interactions among diverse humans are always complex and uncertain. Patterns emerge from a local interaction without a blueprint or pre-designed pattern, so change occurs as a result of many local interactions between people, rather than a pre-planned programme.

The conflict that erupted between Adele and myself began with a phone call, and at least on my part, it was unintentional. Almost every argument I made in the conversation was understood by Adele, according to her reaction, in a different way than I had intended. This is a phenomenon that I can now make better sense of by drawing on Mead's (1934) explanation that, in a conversation of gesture and response, the meaning arises in the responsive interaction of the social act together. For example, when I said I thought her judgment was wrong she responded that "you say I am charlatan", or when I said that I think it is not the recommended way for this client, she understood that I was accusing her of harming the client, which made me feel like I was demonising her. The conversation was very emotional. In this situation, despite all my years of managerial experience, I could not analyse the type of conflict, choose the right way to deal with it, and control the intensity of the flames, as Rahim suggests. Even in my organisational experience (working in the bank), although conflicts were perceived as disruptive, they were a significant part of managers and employees 'everyday conduct. I do not see a situation in which managers handle conflict in a linear process of identifying, deciding on the right course of action and bringing the conflict to a certain level. In addition, not every conflict can be solved. One way of understanding social life is that it involves paradoxes, like predictability and unpredictability, or conflict and cooperation at the same time (in addition to the other paradoxes such as forming and being formed, involvement and detachment, inclusion and exclusion), as the corpus of thinking complex responsive processes suggests. A paradox is "a particular form of contradiction where to think one thing is automatically to call out its polar opposite, both at the same time" (Mowles, 2015: 5). The inability to predict the outcome of interdependent people interacting and to control a pre-planned outcome was also exemplified by Elias's game metaphor that I addressed in the section on power.

Mowles (2015: 128), a specialist in complexity and management, argues that conflict is inevitable when people are trying to get things done together. Mowles disagrees with Rahim

and with other scholars writing in the same tradition (such as Runde and Flanagan, 2013; Constantino and Merchant, 1996), that conflict, kept within certain boundaries, is essential for organisational regeneration. Mowles criticises a number of issues in orthodox theories (among them, Rahim) which do not meet the managerial reality of organisational politics. Mowles, drawing on the pragmatists, suggests that practice precedes theory "the hand often precedes the brain" (Mowles, 2015: 127). He critiques the assumption underpinning these orthodox theories, which, in his opinion, precede practice, that managers can stand aside and control the actualisation of a planned outcome, and that managers are assumed to be objective and dispassionate. Mowles claims that there is no way of avoiding conflict in organisations. Moreover, " …conflict is both ubiquitous and a necessary consequence of living amidst thoroughly social individuals who are negotiating their power differences. Without it there could be no social evolution" (ibid: 28). Difference is also a requirement in complex adaptive system models, in which self-organised agents interact locally according to their own principles, form population wide-patterns which no one planned (Stacey and Mowles 2016:247-9).

3.3.5.3. Conflict is ever-present

The concept that conflict is part of the development of the individual and society is also found in Mead's and Elias's approaches. For Elias (1978), conflict is a central aspect of all social relations. He claims that tension and conflict, which cannot be controlled by those entangled in them, form an integral part of the developmental social processes (ibid: 163). According to him, wider social figurations have a strong tendency to form larger units that are relatively more complex and integrated than the preceding figurations. In this way, less centralised and differentiated social units such as tribes developed into relatively highly centralised state-societies and small economic units competing with each other moved towards a monopolistic figuration. On the other hand, in the final stages of the Roman Empire, he notes that despite counter movements and efforts at re-integration, the tendency towards disintegration gained impetus which made it irreversible. However, integration and complexity do not fully explain conflict.

Mead (1934) presents a similar idea, but also addresses conflict within the self. He argues that in every activity, whether it be social, a game, or economic "all kinds of competition and disorganisation are possible, since there is an 'I' as well as a 'me' in every case" (Mead 1934:

303). According to Mead, the self is being both the 'I' which is the impulse and spontaneous aspect of character, and the 'me' which is our ability to take the attitudes of others into the self. Mead writes about integration and conflict (as disintegration) as two tendencies which are common to all human individuals: These are tendencies which lead to social co-operation and lead individuals to enter or form organised social communities. At the same time, these are tendencies which lead to social antagonism and hostile attitudes. Mead uses the term "social" for the former tendencies, and "anti-social" for the latter, hostile tendencies (ibid: 303-304). Mowles call them 'asocial' and 'pro-social' (Mowles 2015: 129). However, both are social in the broad sense of the word as they are both formed socially. Mead argues that these two tendencies lead humans to cooperate, and at the same time, to compete in "anti-social" tendencies such as superiority over others. This conflict arises within the same individual, as well as in interactions between individuals. The internal conversation, which constitutes mind and thinking, allows us to make adjustments to the environment and to the self (Mead 1934: 308). When a conflict is settled through reconstructing the particular social situation, our sense of self also changes (ibid: 304-309). Moreover, individuals become more easily aware of themselves in terms of social attitudes connected to hostile impulses than they do in terms of any other social attitudes. According to Mead, this internal conflict is part of the development and adjustment of the self to the situation.

This led me to wonder what the internal conversation was that caused me to send the email. I very much wanted to succeed with this client (the organisation Paula works in). I thought it would lead to a professional breakthrough and would increase my personal standing and recognition in the professional community. In order to achieve this, I needed Adele and her model, so I needed to cooperate with her. This situation put me in a state of internal conflict: cooperation and rivalry which paradoxically constrained and enabled me at the same time; or wanting to be included and at the same time, not wanting to give up my individuality. I wanted to express my views and make it clear that this is my client, and I am the one who determines and leads the activity.

In hindsight, I now realise that we did not talk about the conflict again, we continued on as if there were no conflict. But the feeling of distress continued to accompany me for a long time. I kept feeling I was right and the fact that the app was not ready while we carried out the project in Paula's organisation strengthened this feeling. At the same time, I was still bothered

that I had hurt Adele and that maybe I should have reacted differently that night when I sent the email. I did not feel good about the way I recognised myself in Adele's eyes, insensitive to others and combative. I will expand on the subject of recognition at a later stage.

3.3.5.4. An affective conflict

Rahim distinguishes between substantive and affective conflicts. He recommends that an affective or emotional conflict - interpersonal clashes characterised by negative feelings - should be minimised, as it impedes performance and diminishes group loyalty. My conflict with Adele was on a substantive issue - the proposal to the client - but it also included a lot of emotions. Adele was offended and by shouting down the phone, she indicated the emotional storm she found herself in. I too was very emotionally agitated, in spite of the external calm I was trying to show. I felt angry with Adele, as well as anxiety about our relationship in light of the feeling that I had hurt Adele. However, I also had doubts about whether I was right. Maybe Adele was right, and it is correct to dare and try something new. How can I categorise this conflict? Was it a substantive conflict or an affective one? I doubt whether it is possible to separate the two. If there were no emotions, I think that no conflict would have arisen. I believe that emotions are probably an inevitable part of conflict. Drawing on Simmel (1904) and Coser (1998), two German sociologists from the beginning of the 20th century, Mowles states that "it is no more possible to avoid emotion in conflictual situations than it is to sidestep being human" (Mowles 2015: 132).

Mowles's claims concerning the necessary presence of emotions in conflicts and the inability to manage conflict to the "right degree" resonate well with me. I am beginning to realise that conflict is part of every relationship, and it is not a sign of failure or of a non-fixable relationship, as I had previously thought. Conflict is unavoidable, and even essential for development and renewal. I am starting to realise that a conflict would probably break out anyway. Mowles, drawing on Coser, (ibid), claims that "affect if it is denied or covered over it will simply resurface in renewed and more intense form" (ibid: 131). Von Sommaruga Howard (2007), a member of the Institute of Group Analysis[26], who is an expert mediator claims that "conflict often arises after a period when what feels most important cannot be expressed (ibid: 3). Similarly, James Scott, an American political scientist and anthropologist, in his book *Domination and the Arts*

[26] The Institute of Group Analysis (IGA) - a National Institute that provides clinical training in group psychotherapy. It was established in 1971 by SH Foulkes and a group of colleagues.

of Resistance: hidden transcripts (1990)writes about a relationship of domination which produces a split between the 'public transcript'- the openly expressed interpretation and the 'hidden transcript' – the offstage discourse that presents the veiled critiques of the domination, which are only spoken in private. Scott warns against suppressing feelings, "the hidden transcript is continually pressing against the limits of what is permitted on stage much as a body of water might press against a dam" (ibid: 196). I understand from Simmel, Coser, Mowles and Scott that emotions are an integral part of conflict.

Now I want to understand the nature of the dependency relationship between Adele and myself that caused the conflict - beyond our different opinion about the use of the app.

3.3.5.5. Negotiating our differences

The conflict broke out after I sent the short email stating that I did not approve of the proposal. However, my intention was to open a dialogue of negotiation. According to Mead's theory of the conversation of gesture and response (as I mentioned previously), Adele's response, her outburst and the tone she used, made it clear that she understood that I meant that 'the proposal is a charlatan one' and that she is unethical. I started to wonder whether it was really the criticism that had caused the conflict, an 'if – then causality' or whether this was just an expression of something more complex. Continuing with Elias's game models metaphor to help make sense of this, I draw on his idea that as the game continues and new members are added, the ability of any individual player to control the course of the game decreases, and the actions of the players should be understood within the framework of the game. Elias claims that to interpret events as an unilinear chain of cause and effect is inadequate (like my assumption that my criticism of Adele was the cause). Rather he claims that "Only the progressive interweaving of moves during the game process and its result…can be of service in explaining the twelfth move" (Elias 1978: 97). What I understand from Elias is that associating my criticism with our conflict is an example of unilinear thinking of cause and effect. However, the conflict needs to be understood by taking into account all the intertwined moves, as well as the interdependency between the wide network of relationships, and not just the three of us.

Tamdgidi (2002), an Iranian-American sociologist, specialising in the sociology of self-knowledge, claims that the interaction between individuals is a conversation of gestures and responses that cannot be understood in the framework of the moment. It is a moment within a long chain of processes of "self-knowledge and our knowledge of the world-historical

structures which have for millennia constituted the social existence of our lives" (ibid: 137), something that existed before and is much deeper and more meaningful. The origin of the conflict is deeper and more substantial, which needs to be understood in the framework of what really lay beneath the relationship between Adele and I.

There is a fundamental difference between how Adele and I perceive the model. As the person who designed it, Adele talks about it as a perfect 'whole entity', the model that will make the difference between an organisation that will be able to face the world of rapid changes, with people who will continue to be 'relevant' in the employment market, and an organisation that is in danger of disappearing. The model includes a pre-defined state of the capabilities of the organisation's employees, with an emphasis on managers, a 'gap analysis' to measure whether there is a 'gap', reflecting the gaps to the individuals, and taking a series of defined steps to reach the desirable state. The assumption is that an organisation is an aggregation of its employees and each one will minimise his or her gaps (systems dynamics thinking – identifying the gap between the imperfect present and the emerging whole of the future). Change depends on the desire and belief of the individual, which will arise as soon as they become aware of the gap. The model stems from the expressivist perspective, according to which the individual has an inner urge to self- actualise, and this will cause change, which is one of the three categories of theories of personal change that Stacey reviews (Stacey, 2006: 191). According to Adele's model, people as part of a group need to agree on which capabilities are the most important to them, and these individuals will then focus on improving these capabilities. Another assumption is that the model is suitable for all types of organisations, and the difference lies in the terminology that is used. There is also a difference in the emphasis on what different departments will focus on to close the gaps (for example, marketing employees will focus more on creativity and on activating thinking patterns of the left hemisphere of the brain), which now I understand as individualised and essentialist thinking.

Based on my experience as Head of TD, I perceived the model as one that can be part of a variety of tools that organisations use to develop their leaders, and that models could be replaced once in a while. In my experience, part of leadership development is done through periodic refresher courses by one of the trendy models that stress the discourse on leadership. I thought that it is important to pay attention to and develop the individual, to see the individual which would be followed by the next phase - group development. Adele claimed to

have a group development process, but in practice did not present anything cohesive. Now I realise that I viewed the individual and society as two separate entities, as opposed to the social approach that sees the development of the individual within society: forming and being formed by each other at the same time. In addition, my way of thinking was of *rational causality*, like in natural sciences, in which an individual's action is believed to be caused by their chosen goals (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 307) and my aim, as a consultant, is to guide them to the 'right' goals. Adele's view regarding the individual was similar. The difference between us was that I focused on the change that the individual needs to undergo, and the organisation was the next phase. Adele saw the individuals as a mere entry point and aimed to focus on the organisation as a system that should strive to reach the 'right' goals. Adele's view is similar to billiard ball in which lots of discreet or autonomous entities that are bouncing within each other and are unchanged by it (Mowles, 2021: 46). What happens in an organisation is an aggregate result of all these movements.

I also identify a difference in how Adele and I related to the feedback sessions. Adele, with her experience of thousands of feedback meetings, made sure people would feel encouraged after the feedback session, no matter what they were told. In her view, the feedback sessions were a means to engage in activities with the organisation's top team about devising a strategic plan and defining a vision. Probably that is why she saw the app as a good and quick mediator. However, I attached greater importance to personal discourse and the possibility of influencing the individual's development, based on the personlised feedback. I saw the model as a tool that supports the evolving process of identity for the participant. The individual is recognised, although in an automated way, by completing a self-assessment tool. They then receive feedback on their evaluative qualities, along with the qualities that need to be improved. The underpinning assumption is that the feedback session will encourage the individual to articulate their needs and desires and will encourage them to take responsibility for their career and positioning. Receiving electronic feedback, which has been adjusted in extreme cases, was a contradiction to what I found valuable about the feedback sessions. Thus, I saw the feedback meeting as an aim, to develop the individual, whereas Adele saw it as a means to change the entire organisation.

When Adele first presented the model to me, I was captured by the idealisation of the 'whole': a model that develops the individual and thus creates a change in the organisation; a Win-Win

model. She described the model as a 'magic solution' to all the challenges an organisation faces. With me joining here, she envisionedan opportunity for a breakthrough. Finally, the model would be discovered and become recognised as the ultimate tool. However, as soon as I started using the model in real-life interactions, I realised its limitations as the perfect solution, but I learned to appreciate the added value to the participants in having feedback conversations. I wanted to continue with the face-to- face conversations, that Adele had apparently become bored with, after having conducted thousands of these, according to her. She aspired to work with large organisations. We were thus negotiating our differences, as well as seeking to gain mutual recognition. In this conflict, I wanted to be recognised for my experience in organisational conduct and I was worried about my professional reputation that could be damaged in the client's eyes. She felt I was unfairly accusing her of immoral conduct, which she did not recognise in herself.

3.3.6. Recognition

When I said that I wanted to be recognised, I meant that I expected Adele would consult with me, or at least engage in a dialogue in which she would express her goals and together we would try to find a solution. As a result of the significant change she made to the proposal which she detailed in the email to me, I understood that she was saying to me: 'your plan is not good and mine is the right plan'. I worried about what Paula would think because what I had agreed with her had been changed, as well as how I would be perceived by Ruth if my proposal would not receive recognition. Sending the short and sharp mail was a response expressing my resistance to what I saw as Adele's domination and the lack of recognition I felt she was showing towards me, in which my sense of identity had been damaged. I asked myself: 'What am I doing here? What is my role? Am I just an extra?'

In my research on themes of power and conflict that I reviewed in this project, I came to realise that the social understanding of an organisation resonated with me. Therefore, I went on examine the theme of recognition through the social approach and turned to Hegel, a German philosopher from the early 19th century who influenced many scholars such as Mead, Elias, Taylor and Honneth. The perspective of complex responsive processes is based on their works. Hegel was influenced by Fichte, a German philosopher from the late 18th century who claimed that we can gain self-consciousness as autonomous agents by interacting with other autonomous subjects. Assuming that we can only become selves because there are other

selves, Hegel lays the foundations for three different modes of recognition: love, law, and ethical life, which "correspond to different concepts of the person in such a way that a sequence emerges of ever more demanding media of recognition" (Honneth, 1996: 25).

Honneth (1996), a German philosopher who writes in the tradition of Hegel, and was also influenced by Mead, continues Hegel's line of thought. He writes about recognition and stresses the importance of social relationships for the development and maintenance of a person's identity. Honneth defines recognition to be "the genus comprised of three forms of practical attitudes, each reflecting the primary aim of a certain affirmation of the other" (Honneth, 2002: 506). According to Honneth, an individual's identity depends on the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, which can be acquired sequentially through reciprocal social processes. These are developmental processes leading to the emergence of an adult. Self-confidence refers to the basic ability to express needs and desires, self-respect refers to the legitimate opportunity and moral responsibility to make claims, and self-esteem refers to the way in which a person is recognised for their unique value and achievements.

My relationship with Adele went through several stages that could be explained by Honneth's approach. Initially when Adele invited me to join her, I felt that it was an opportunity to fulfil my wish for a meaningful professional activity, to be in a place that allows me to fulfil my professional needs. I was not sufficiently familiar with her model and all its nuances and complexities. In practicing giving feedback, I was able to study the model and the assessment tool in-depth, which allowed me the feeling that I had the moral right to feel like a partner, as well as the right to express my opinion and to stand up for it. Having facilitated the sale of the model to Paula, I felt the need to demand that this partnership be expressed in recognition of the added value I bring.

Honneth (2001), wrote an article *Invisibility: On the Epistemology of Recognition*, which is centred on a story by Ralph Allison, an American novelist, published in 1952 that addresses social problems facing African Americans in the United States in the early 1900s. He contends that "recognition is due to an adding together of two elements: cognitive identification and expression" (ibid: 116). Recognition is not just being aware of one's existence, but it refers to the expressive act through which this awareness is conferred, with the positive meaning of an affirmation of the worth that should be expressed by media such as: saying, smiling, and other

expressive gestures. Moreover, recognition demonstrates a motivational readiness to be guided in our actions by the moral authority of the other person (ibid: 126).

Honneth's theory of recognition, as expressed in the book *The Struggle for Recognition* (1996) and the article *Invisibility: On the Epistemology of Recognition* (2001), refers to two states of recognition: recognising the good qualities or misrecognition. Misrecognition is the lack of an act of 'cognitive identification and expression'. Although misrecognition can be also a kind of recognition, when Adele changed my proposal to the client, I felt misrecognised, or that I was recognised, but not in how I sense myself. In addition, the assumption underpinning Honneth's theory is that all the individuals involved have the same understanding of gestures: like smiling or a nod of the head is a gesture of affirmation. But there are actions or statements that people can understand differently, or the same person can interpret them differently in different situations. Maybe Adele came up with a new idea, changed the proposal to the client and had intended to discuss it the next morning before our meeting with Paula, an act that I hastened to interpret as misrecognition. According to Mead's (1934) conversation of gesture and response, the meaning arises in the responsive interaction of the social act together.

After studying criticism from various scholars, Honneth (2002) admits that his concrete definition of recognition was vague (ibid: 499). Honneth refers to various criticisms of his theory of recognition as presented in his book *The Struggle for Recognition*. Among them he refers to Heikki Ika¨heimo and Arto Laitinen, two Finnish social philosophers, who challenged him as to what is actually an act of recognition. The lack of clarity also stems from the differences in the meaning of the word "recognition" in different languages. They both agree with Honneth and add analytical clarity to some points: that recognition is defined as affirming the positive qualities of human recognition as a certain attitude, while words or symbolic expressions are not enough - recognition should be expressed in corresponding behaviour. In addition, recognition is not a side-effect, but rather the expression of a free-standing intention and recognition and is comprised of three forms of practical attitudes of love, legal respect, and esteem. Ika¨heimo and Laitinen disagree whether recognition should be understood as a matter of attribution or of receptivity – enabling the other to acquire a new positive property, or an already-present property that is strengthened or publicly manifested (ibid: 505-507). Honneth still works with the three distinct modes of recognition, but in a modified form (ibid: 501). He refines the original definition of recognition and now states that it is a "behavioural

reaction in which we respond rationally to evaluative qualities that we have learned to perceive, to the extent to which we are integrated into the second nature of our lifeworld" (Honneth, 2002: 513). This definition is more practical and designates the actions of recognition, but it still refers to positive 'evaluative qualities'.

Taylor, a Canadian philosopher, also emphasises the social nature of identity. He refers to the thesis that "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence" (Taylor 1997: 25). In order to understand how the modern self has developed, he reviews the evolvement of human identity from its origins in the eighteenth century. He claims that dialogue is a crucial feature in defining our identity, which is made possible through the language (in a broad sense) acquired in social interactions, similar to Mead's 'significant other'. He argues that our identity is created in "dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us" (Taylor, 1997: 33). Thus, Taylor refers to the situation in which we also do not like what others recognise in us.

Both Honneth and Taylor make a strong connection between identity, which evolves in intersubjective relations, and recognition. Taylor claims that "recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Taylor, 1997: 26). Ricoeur (2005), a French philosopher also understands that our sense of ourselves is informed by social relationships and "to receive the full assurance of his or her identity, thanks to recognition by others of each person's range of capacities (ibid: 250).

Taylor, Honneth, Ricoeur, and Ikäheimo and Laitinen all emphasise the importance of social interaction and genuine intentions in recognition, and they all emphasise behavioural reaction. However, it can be understood from the above review that recognition is about positive affirmation of capabilities. From my experience of several dozen feedback sessions that I carried out and seeing their reactions, most people felt recognised, even when we were discussing their weaknesses or capabilities that we recommended needed to be changed. The very fact that they were given time to talk about themselves and they felt that there was an investment of thought in the meaning of their data made them feel recognised. In my relationship with Adele, I felt recognised when she made me an offer to join her, but it was important for me to be recognised in the ongoing work. I believe that recognition is not a one-time action, but a reciprocal process of social interaction of gesture and response together, through which meaning, recognition and identity emerge.

Drawing on the Hegelian tradition, Mead and Honneth place a strong emphasis on the social process of the reciprocity of recognition. Hegel claims that self-confidence occurs through an infant's mutual recognition of his caregivers. Hegel's theory assumes the recognition of 'love', 'law 'and 'ethical life '(his three different modes of recognition) is "a sequence of recognition relations, in the context of which individuals reciprocally confirm each other to an increasing degree as autonomous and individuated persons" (Honneth, 1996: 69). Following Hegel and Mead, Honneth also asserts that a person's sense of themselves stems from how they perceive themselves in the eyes of others and, in recognising the other, is taking in the other which can lead to a change in our identity.

Returning to the narrative and the role of the questionnaire on the app, the face-to-face feedback meetings were social interactions in which the participants received a detailed report of their capabilities (according to the model), including their weak points and what it means to their conduct in the workplace (as well in their social life). I thought that using completely automated feedback given by an app, we would lose the social relationship that enables the act of recognition and its influence on identity. In fact, in these face-to-face meetings, I also gained recognition. As far as the participants were concerned, I was a source of knowledge that they valued, and I felt they eagerly wanted to learn from my managerial experience. I felt I influenced them. Their reactions at the end of the sessions and the comments given by HR managers after the sessions complimented me very much and made me feel influential and important again. I felt recognised by their recognition. I am now beginning to understand that my opposition to the app may have stemmed from my fear of losing a source of recognition and a sense of identity.

Sarra (2019), a consultant psychotherapist, stresses reciprocation, the social act of "attuned cycles of gesture and response through which meaning and identity emerge… Reciprocation entails recognition and responsiveness" (ibid: 264). Sarra expands that recognition can be experienced through conflict and difference: "Recognition can be expressed through deepening understanding, but this may be experienced as confrontational or conflictual, and indeed much therapeutic work operates in this area. Processes of reciprocation are complex and imbued with negotiations of difference" (ibid: 264).

Over and above being a negotiation about the differences in perceptions, the conflict between Adele and I was also part of our need for the re-approval of our mutual recognition.

3.3.7. Conclusions

Writing this project on my experience about joining a small consulting firm, after retiring from a large organisation in which I held a senior position, created changes in my way of thinking regarding themes of power relations and control, about conflict and about the struggle for recognition.

I joined a consultant, who had developed a model for leadership development and who had been a service provider to the organisation in which I had been the Head of TD. In the new figuration, the power relations were reversed, now I felt that I needed her more. She approached me with an offer to join her, even though I was no longer in a position to employ her services, at a time when I was questioning my identity after retirement. In addition, she had the expertise of the model with which we worked in our partnership. The shift in power relations made me feel as if I were losing power. Furthermore, I realised my inability to control the conduct of the partnership. I thought that in the figuration of the two of us (Adele and I), I could have an influence on what we do. Through Elias's (1978) game models metaphor, his idea about being tied in a long chain of interdependent people and Mead's idea of the 'generalised other', I now understand that a vast web of interdependencies in which each of us found ourselves participating, was involved in this situation – as with in all interactions between individuals. I came to see that the ability of one of us to plan and control the conduct and results was low, even without adding another consultant.

In the narrative, I give a detailed description of a conflict I had with my business partner, Adele. From my experience of working in a large hierarchical organisation, conflict was a sign of poor conduct and therefore a manager's role was to resolve conflicts. Drawing on Mowles (2015), I have come to realise that conflict is not necessarily bad, it is inevitable when doing things together and is not necessarily the result of a single event. Along with the collaboration, the conflict between my business partner and I probably stemmed from longstanding differences in the way each of us perceived the model we used and was part of negotiating and adjusting to each other. In addition, the conflict may have been part of our negotiation for recognition.

I have come to understand that recognition is an essential component through which our sense of identity evolves. Drawing on Taylor, Honneth, Ricoeur and Ikäheimo and Laitinen, who emphasise the importance of social interaction, genuine intentions, behavioural reaction and the importance of mutuality in recognition, I understand that I become recognised by my

recognising the other. Sarra expanded that recognition can be experienced through conflict and difference. I wanted to be recognised by Adele for my experience in large organisational conduct and as an experienced manager. I also wanted to be recognised by an influential HR manager (Paula), as well as getting recognition from the wide network of relationships I was part of. When Adele made changes in my proposal to the client, I felt misrecognised by her, which endangered the way others may recognise me and might even endanger my sense of self.

After retirement, in addition to the sense of losing influence, I felt uncertain about my identity (a theme I addressed in my second project). In this social context, personal feedback meetings were important for my sense of identity. In these sessions I felt recognised by the participants, who in-turn felt recognised in the feedback they received from me. That probably also made me resist Adele's attempt to create a breakthrough by using an app instead of face-to-face meetings. For these reasons, I found myself in a conflict which was also a struggle for recognition and sense of self.

In my next project I would like to examine how Israeli society relates to retirement (Lanir, 2019), in order to understand the social dynamic that influences my behaviour and sense of identity. In addition, I will continue to examine aspects of belonging, inclusion and exclusion drawing on researchers such as Elias and Scotson (1994). I assume that belonging takes on added weight and sensitivity in times of change.

3.4. Project 4 - The process of retirement. Why it is so hard?

3.4.1. Introduction

In my previous projects, I explored my experience as a retired senior manager in the Human Resource (HR) field who is trying to remain professionally active. In project 2, I described my experience as a volunteer in a professional HR association. In this project, I came to realise that although I do not possess power, power relations are nevertheless part of every relationship, even in the framework of volunteers. These relations are fluid, depending on who needs whom more. In leaving a senior position, I had lost my influence and begun to ask myself who am I after retirement. In project 3, I explored my experience as an active partner with a consultant

who had previously provided a service to the bank I worked for. Through this project, I came to understand that even in a partnership of two, I cannot control the conduct and that conflict is not necessarily a bad thing, nor is it always a sign of poor conduct and it is not necessarily the result of a single event. Conflict is inevitable and necessary when people do things together. Conflict is an expression of differences in perceptions, beliefs or values and is part of our negotiation for recognition. I came to understand that mutual recognition is an essential component through which our sense of identity evolves, and recognition can be experienced through conflict and differences.

In project 4, I touch on my experience of retirement, initially through my association with another female HR colleague who had recently retired and then through my reflections on my retirement experience.

3.4.2. Narrative – my retirement experience

3.4.2.1. I am not alone

A Facebook post with Paula's picture caught my attention: "the beautiful woman in the picture is my mother. My mother built a wonderful career over the years and broke a different glass ceiling each time. For the past twenty years, she has also been the VP of Human Resources at …. But most of all, I was amazed at how she always knew how to keep up, create revolutions and introduce innovation. Now, after many decades of hard work, she has retired. But she is unable to sit at home. So, she still shares her knowledge and talent with the world, only in fewer hours :) and independently. If you need organisational advice from someone who has many years of hands-on experience, you are welcome to arrange some of it for yourself" (personal Facebook page).

Paula was a senior HR executive in an organisation in which my business partner and I had implemented the project I wrote about in project 3. She was a highly respected executive in the Israeli professional HR community, someone known for leading innovative programmes in the field of HR and was a sought-after lecturer at professional conferences.

It was a surprising post, it was not the Paula I know. In the photo that accompanied the post, Paula was seen in a coffee shop enjoying an ice cream, certainly not the picture of a businesswoman that Paula usually uploaded. The post seemed to me to be a desperate call. From a professional woman who everyone seeks to be close to, she was now a display of

vulnerability and weakness who longs to be employed, a situation I could not imagine being in. I have learned over the years in the business world that exposing weakness is potentially dangerous and can open oneself up to exploitation. I felt that she had lost her image. It made me wonder whether Paula had consented to this, or whether it was her daughter's initiative. If my daughter had written such a post, I would have been very embarrassed to present myself as desperate, vulnerable and above all to publicly admit that I am in a bad place after retirement. I would have demanded that she delete it immediately.

It brought me to contact Paula and ask how she was. I knew her as an energetic woman, she was sixty years old when she was appointed to her position at the last organisation she worked at. This is an extraordinary appointment for someone so close to retirement age[27]. She had now retired, after having been asked to stay on beyond retirement age. Now, in our phone conversation, she suddenly sounded sad and confused. She admitted that she was going through a difficult time. She spoke with painful frankness about her feelings of loneliness, that she did not know what to do with her free time, that the sharp transition from intensive work to inaction was difficult for her. I told her that I was familiar with these feelings, and I could share with her what I had written in my studies about retirement. She was surprised that I was researching the subject and asked to hear more.

We arranged to meet the next morning, despite the lockdown restrictions, in a quiet residential neighbourhood near her house. Casually dressed, Paula seemed fragile and insecure without the high heels and suit I was used to seeing her dressed in. I was dressed in a similar style and she commented that it was nice to see me so casual, which made me smile and respond that retirement also has its benefits. We collected coffee and pastries from a cafe and found a bench in a nearby public garden to sit and chat. Very quickly, we fell into a long conversation, ignoring the people jogging by and mothers with children who were all around us in the garden.

Paula talked about her feeling lonely in the three months since she had retired: the calendar is empty and no one calls, which she described as "embarking on a journey without a business card, something that raises the question of who am I". She talked about the search for a framework to belong to after having belonged to various organisations for many years. She told me about all of her attempts to find meaningful activities, for instance a job or

[27] In Israel, the retirement age is 67, while women have the choice to retire from the age 62

volunteering, and how much the issue of age was proving to be an obstacle - even though it is forbidden to explicitly mention age, it is nevertheless implied. She shared how difficult it was for her not to have an orderly agenda, that no one takes care of her computer and the feeling that she receives no credit for all her experience when trying to apply for various activities. Paula recounted meetings in which she was asked questions that made her angry and frustrated "I have to explain to those who have not yet experienced what I have already forgotten who I am and what my abilities are?" She spoke about how disappointed she was with her replacement and about the way she was changing things, and that her former employees were ignoring her requests, especially concerning computer issues. It surprised me that she still expected to receive support, I thought to myself: 'doesn't she know anything about power relations that when you leave you are no longer relevant?' How right I was that I did not contact employees after I left unless they initiated the contact. She told me she had heard gossip about executives she knew who had also experienced a crisis after retirement. One of them 'had a hard time getting out of bed for a whole year' as she recounted, but when she met him - he focused on giving her advice and did not admit to experiencing any crisis. Although Paula had mentioned on the phone that she was going through a difficult time, it still surprised me how genuinely she spoke about the crises she felt. She spoke quietly and slowly, which made me feel she was really hurting, and I mostly listened. I felt that her reaction was a bit extreme and dramatic, especially as she retired after the official retirement age. I thought 'how long did she expect to continue working'. Although some of her experiences resonated with me, I could not relate to the intensity of her pain and I did not feel that I had gone through a crisis. However, it was the first time anyone had openly spoken about what I was beginning to feel and explore in my writing. I was relieved to hear from Paula that even though she was more senior than me, and had not taken early retirement, nevertheless we shared the same feelings of confusion, uncertainty and frustration. My thought was 'so it is not only I who experienced difficulties, it is not because of early retirement, and it happens to other senior managers also'.

I shared my own experience of retirement with her: the silent phone, the lack of meetings, the sense of losing power and questioning my identity and my experience in searching for something to keep me busy and active. I told her about my experience with the HR association, people whom she knows, and about Adele, who I had introduced her to (project 3). I admitted

that even today it is still difficult for me to use the word 'retirement'. I actually used her to practice my arguments ahead of my progression viva which was scheduled for the following week. I shared with her the insights I had gained through my research up to that point, mainly about identity and power.

Paula was surprised that these were topics I was researching. I felt very flattered because I could give an academic explanation to every experience she shared, for example that power does not belong to us and that identity is a product of the social relationships. From the way she looked at me, it seemed that she did not really understand my new way of making sense of the situation. However, it felt good to have knowledge and to feel needed.

We wondered whether preparing for retirement could have prevented the difficulties we experienced. In the organisations in which Paula and I worked, retirement is addressed through retirement workshops. I shared with her that I did not attend the retirement workshops even though I organised them, on the grounds that I did not need explanations about financial issues (in the past I had worked as an investment advisor), nor did I need suggestions about what to do in my newly acquired leisure time. I did not admit that the main reason was that executives do not usually attend these workshops. Paula responded with contempt. Due to her seniority, she was given personal counselling by the CEO of the consulting firm that ran the retirement workshops, and yet she felt that it did not help her 'he mostly brought me suggestions for enrichment studies and questionnaires to examine where I am emotionally', she dismissed it with a wave of the hand. I said to myself ‘thank goodness I did not waste my time’.

After a long discussion about ours’ and others’ difficulties we had heard about, Paula suggested that "if there are difficulties after retirement, it may be a good idea to join forces and try to find a more appropriate way for organisations to address the issue of retirement". I was silent for a moment, thinking whether I was ready for another adventure that had just popped up. Yet, this is exactly what I am researching, and it might add further insights. In addition, it could be interesting to work with someone who is known and accepted in the HR community, as opposed to my previous experience with Adele, and maybe this is the opportunity to fulfil what I desired when I decided to leave the job at the bank. I was carried away with enthusiasm. In fact, we had no clear direction, but rather a desire to try to do something together and to develop something new in this field.

Later that evening, Paula called to tell me that it was the first day since she had retired that she felt a sense of optimism. She was relieved that she could share her feelings and discover that she was not the only one who felt this way. I was greatly flattered by Paula's call, I felt I was needed and valuable in addition to the relief I also felt that it is not just my experience of frustration and difficulties after retirement. In addition, I had found a companion to talk to about retirement without having to pretend that nothing has changed or to look for circumventing words. She gave me a sense of legitimacy about my experience. Mostly when I was asked 'how is life after retirement?' I would describe how wonderful everything is, there is no stress, I do what I love, enjoy the tranquillity, etc.

From that day on, Paula and I have immersed ourselves in conversations on an almost daily basis. We have been trying to take advantage of our significant work experience in the HR field, and of our personal experience of retirement to see what HR executives can do more effectively so that the retirement experience feels less like a crisis as a result of a 'flash-cut' between work and retirement (one day you are working and the next you are retired), leading to many changes that need to be addressed.

3.4.2.2. Early preparation for retirement

In the coming months, we explored some of the work that was being done with retired employees in organisations. We met with CEOs of consulting companies that facilitated retirement workshops, reviewed models and materials and tried to assess what is available. The understanding Paula and I reached after our enquiries about retirement workshops and prolonged life expectancy was that planning and preparing for the official retirement age, with an emphasis on those who are interested in remaining employed, should start much earlier. The planning and preparation can be seen as part of career management or talent management in the organisation and should continue for a longer period after retirement age. We thought that early dialogue and planning (five to ten years earlier) would be helpful, although in conditions of complexity it is impossible to assume with certainty that what is planned is what will indeed happen. Yet, it can help to think and to prepare, so retirement does not become an ‘out of the blue' event. This gives employees sufficient time to learn new skills or upgrade their current professional skills to support future employability.

We presented our ideas to various executives we knew, who helped us sharpen and improve our concept.

We contacted HR managers in a number of organisations to hear from them directly how they would react to our approach to retirement. We reached out to organisations that had received high scores on the diversity index for being climate-friendly for older workers, assuming that with them, it would be easier to cross the barrier of resistance to talk about older employees. We spoke to an HR executive of an organisation that prides itself on continuing to employ workers even after retirement age. She told us, she had no choice but to continue hiring older employees, due to their unique capabilities that are in short supply and that there is no substitute for them. Despite our disappointment in finding out that employing older people was out of necessity rather than out of choice, which felt like the prejudice against older employees had not changed, we proposed to contact employees aged 55 and over to start a career and retirement discourse. The HR executive reacted spontaneously: "It is out of the question, I am 55 years old, and I cannot even imagine retiring, no way" and immediately looked at us with some embarrassment. Silence reigned in the room for a few seconds. Her reaction sounded to me like the fear of facing a painful unspoken issue and whoever reaches this abyss disappears off the edge of the cliff, as if retirement is a professional death. If no one wants to deal with the issue of retirement, what does it imply about us? That we are no longer relevant? That we are professionally excluded? Is the peak of our career behind us and we are on a declining professional slope? It made me feel that at once we are being stripped of the knowledge and experience accumulated over so many years. On the other hand, I was in the same position and probably would have reacted in the same way. I wondered if only those who are going through the retirement experience can understand us. I mustered some energy and replied: "True it's scary but that's exactly the reason to take care of it". Paula immediately joined in and started explaining the principles and importance of our proposal, but I felt my enthusiasm evaporate. I felt the HR manager was not really listening, while we were fighting for recognition of our personal image and status. We ended the session with a sense of rejection, exclusion and alienation.

Realising that 'retirement' is a word that provokes antagonism, we decided to disguise it and instead use terms such as 'late career' and 're-employability' and not to mention the word 'retirement' in the initial stages.

3.4.2.3. The breakdown

While preparing for the January residential at Parkview, the institution under whose auspices the DMan programme studies take place, I was asked to fill out a form (a new procedure) in which we had to give personal details including the name of the organisation and a job title. Usually, when I need to fill out these fields for professional conferences or other forms, I write 'self-employed' or 'consultant'. Sometimes I even write 'C Consultancy' for the name of the organisation so that the name on the badge will look impressive. This time it made me stop and think. On the one hand, we do not wear tags so I can write whatever I want, yet on the other hand Parkview is the place I want to be exactly who I am, without any airs of pretense. I do not belong to an organisation, I do not have a job title and I even write about questioning my identity in my project. Here, I do not want to use impressive words and a title I do not really feel represents me. So, what should I write? It is so ironic that this is exactly the problem I am facing in my research. I tried to avoid the question, but it was a compulsory field on the form, so I had no choice and I wrote 'self-employed'.

On our second day, during the discussions with the research community, one of the topics on the agenda at the residential was about violence and I was asked about my feelings regarding retirement such as: Did I mourn? Did I feel any kind of violence or what did I feel when I retired? I felt irritated that they associate such negative feelings with retirement. I pushed back with rational explanations: I had no reason for mourning, I did not feel any violence, I had mixed feelings of loss of influence and status on the one hand and an opportunity to do new things on the other. My underlying assumption was that a positive attitude is a key to finding my way. This is a continuation of my need to be as solid as a rock, someone who is always in control and knows what she wants. Later on at the learning set[28] meeting, it was mentioned that I had burst out crying in one of my early residentials when we discussed vulnerability and my need to be like a solid rock. Reflecting back on that experience with my learning set brought a tear to my eye.

On the next day, early in the morning I received a text message from my supervisor suggesting that we meet in the dining room before the start of the residential programme to discuss my project. I had been stuck with my project, failing to progress with it despite the support I had

[28] A small group of the research community members in which students discuss and critique each other's work and reflect on matters that have arisen during the residential. Each learning set comprises a faculty supervisor and up to four students at different stages of the programme.

been receiving. I was already on my eighth version and still most of the comments I was getting related to the feeling that things were not falling into place. I felt very tense, I thought it was not going to be an easy conversation and maybe I should give up. At the same time, the combative part of me spurred me on. I came early and sat at a small table next to the wall. In the conversation over coffee and a light breakfast, my supervisor asked how I feel about retirement since I hardly referred to my own feelings in the narrative I wrote; referring to it instead through others. My first thought was that although Paula and many others like her had experienced a post-retirement breakdown, something I had heard from consultants who accompany retirees, I do not necessarily have to have the same experience. I am a survivor and repeated to myself the mantra that retirement should be an opportunity. I can even help others avoid the mourning phase. At the same time, I recalled the previous outburst of crying, then I had told them that my excuse was family matters. For a moment I was angry with her. Why did she have to confront me with what I did not want to see? I was very comfortable with my belief that hard work, perseverance and a positive attitude would yield results. Actually, I felt then as I do now - vulnerable. I feel like I am moving without a clear goal, lacking direction and feeling lost, wondering how I got into this situation. I have not talked about these feelings with others. I feel that I am expected to be strong, in control and to know exactly what I want, but I do not feel that way at all. I could finally admit to myself that retirement is a severe crisis for me. Together with the painful realisation and admitting out loud how I felt, came the tears and frustration of how to stop them, because I felt that I could not let others see me like this. I held back the tears thinking 'in few minutes a community meeting[29] begins, I must 'return the bricks to the cracked wall' explaining to my supervisor that I am aware I am surround myself with a protective wall. In response she quoted from Leonard Cohen's poem *Anthem*: "There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in" (Cohen, 1992). She suggested that I share with the community what I was struggling with and maybe they could help. Shaking and crying, I answered that I could not share. I am not going to talk about it in front of the large community, maybe later with the small learning set. As a senior member of the research

[29] Students and faculty members come together for an hour and a half each morning on the three days of the residential weekend, to discuss anything we find relevant and important to ourselves, our research and practice. These meetings enable us to reflect and discuss patterns of interactions, to pay attention to what is going on for us and others, calling into question what we may have taken for granted and making links with organisational life (Mowles 2017: 8)

community, I should be in a much more certain place. How do I explain now that I am stuck? How embarrassing?

I quickly washed my face, while telling myself 'just do not cry, you must overcome'. Then I grabbed a cup of coffee, grateful to have something to focus on, anything not to have to look at others, and I joined the meeting. After a few minutes of silence, what I had prayed would not happen, did in fact happen. A colleague turned to me and said "it looks like you're struggling, can you share what is going on with you?" This caused the dam of tears to open up. I wanted to disappear, I wanted to say I do not want to share, but I also realised that this is an opportunity to try to change my habits of pushing back and denying. Deciding to do what I am not comfortable doing, I heard myself saying "I will share but I need time".

After a few failed attempts to overcome the tears, gasping for air and crying, I shared with the community that the title of this project is 'Retirement: denial and avoidance' and in the narrative I wrote, I described Paula's breakdown and discussed other people who are not interested in talking about retirement. However, today it hit me with great intensity that I am the one who denied the breakdown after retirement. It was I who blocked the feelings of loss and dismay that being retired stirred within me. I wanted to continue holding the image of the entrepreneur and innovator in my professional community.

My outburst expressed my difficulty to think or talk about retirement. It was difficult for me to articulate the feelings, to find words to convey what I was feeling. I have lost my position as a senior executive with the ability and conditions to promote significant changes that had an influence on many people, and it will never return. I have lost my status in the professional community as someone who is a role model, and I am no longer seen as innovating and setting precedents – these are reasons for grieving. Yet, I denied this because I felt that admitting a breakdown is to demonstrate weakness, vulnerability and evidence of failure in career planning - everything that is counter to my expectations of myself and my self-image. I fell back on my familiar habit of looking for practical solutions, as a defence mechanism. I increased my activity by jumping at every opportunity that presented itself (P2 and P3), thinking that maybe something will work out. I initiated a new retirement/career model (Paula and my proposal) and looked for academic explanations to justify my actions (the initial versions of P4).

Recognising that retirement was a breakdown event for me and taking it more seriously,

I called and met individually various retired colleagues who had worked with me at the bank or in senior positions in other organisations, asked them if they introduce themselves as a retiree. Most of them avoided the use of the word retiree, explaining that it raises connotations of old age, the finitude of life and the expectation of doing nothing significant. They noted that for them, the image of a retiree is that of their parents who retired, did nothing and faded away, while they still felt healthy and full of energy.

I realised that conversations about retirement could help me reflect my feelings. I invited a group of seven peers, to a peer meeting, women who also retired from senior positions from an assortment of professions, to a conversation on the retirement experience. Most of them had no previous close personal acquaintance. At the opening, I asked them to introduce themselves in few sentences, any way they wish. They all chose to start by presenting their extensive past achievements, the senior positions they held and their professional achievements.

This was followed by what they are doing today. Except for one who emphasised her leisure activities in the present: painting and physical fitness, the rest of the participants only mentioned their leisure hobbies as an aside, as if it were not respectable enough to be on their business card; to be identified with this kind of activity. I noticed that I also chose not to share my enjoyment about creating my own handicrafts soon after retirement.

Retirement was mentioned as a transitional phase. They went on to describe their professional pursuits today. The common message was: although we have retired, we are still relevant and can bring value: as board members in organisations, volunteers or trying to establish new ventures.

The descriptions of their past, as well as current activities, were embellished with successes and achievements.

While they were introducing themselves, I was having an internal conversation: aware of their expanding on the past and not explicitly presenting themselves as retirees, a phase I also went through and am now aware of, I reminded myself "you are a retiree", "break away from your previous identity". However, when it was my turn, I started by declaring that I am a retiree but immediately fell back to the template that was in the room and I described in detail my past career, while trying to understand "why are you doing it?"

After this round, I asked them to reflect on what they think they heard. They talked about 'the desperate need to hold onto the past because society evaluates us in terms of professional success', the fear of being labeled as a retiree, 'we retired, but…', the frustration when filling out forms that require a title, they talked about their passion to work and wanting to influence. I felt that it was difficult for them to use the word retirement. Mary, the only one who did not mention having a hobby said that she feels that to have a hobby is to accept retirement and she refuses to 'succumb'.

When the retirement experience was brought up, some of them shared the experiences of the silent phone, the empty e-mail box and a sense of void and loss. Lila, who tried to see the opportunity in retirement, claimed that she wanted to get out of her comfort zone and try new fields of activity, but in practice she failed. She also told the group how flattered she was that her replacement continued to consult with her long after retirement, so she felt she was needed. In response to the question about the relationship with the family after retirement, they mostly referred to the issue of time, the necessity to protect their time so that it is not taken over by family members.

I asked them to choose one or two pictures I had scattered in advance around the room that represent their current situation. Two chose one picture, while the rest chose two pictures, but when they all came to explain, they talked about duality, trying to hold both poles at the same time: the fear that 'the fire will go out and at the same time wanting to spread their wings and fly', a desire to be relevant and to be daring, an internal conflict between stability and concerns and a longing to discover new things. I chose a colourful picture as I felt that I was already at a stage where I was more focused on the desire for experiences of discovery than concerns.

The next day it was very exciting to receive text messages and calls from them thanking me and stating that it was a challenging, interesting evening and Mary shared that she "got a lot of insights". I felt that I facilitated the opportunity to discover and acknowledge that they are not alone in the experience of difficulty. From this meeting, I learned how difficult it is to talk about the experience of crisis after retirement. For most of the participants, it was the first time they could share the feelings of loss, frustration and difficulty. For me it was not easy but I felt that I could talk about how hard it is; reveal my vulnerability without fear, something that I could not do in an organisational discourse and it may be the same for them. I felt the change

from denial to acknowledgment and the ability to inviting others to talk about retirement. I came to see how hard it is to say goodbye to the previous strong and successful image we all had and at the same time the constant search for an activity that will give us a sense of meaning. Although I presented myself in my previous status, I can recognise myself as a retiree and my perception of retirement has changed and still is in the process of changing.

3.4.3. Retirement in the eyes of a HR senior manager

I remember from a young age my father repeatedly telling me “You will sleep in a bed the way you made it", an individualistic approach that since only I am responsible for my life, I should be in control and independent, while leisure consumption is only a short pleasure. For me, being successful at work provided me with a sense of meaning, status and independence without needing to be reliant on others, not even on my family.

As head of TD, I refrained from offering desired and expensive courses to older employees on the assumption that the bank would not recoup the investment in the time they had left until retirement. The issue of age received an important place in HR decisions regarding employees. The discourse between senior management in the organisation I worked in was about the need to 'rejuvenate the organisation', as if young employees were the key to organisational success. Middle age employees were treated as if they were a burden. In each presentation, the head of HR of the bank presented a graph of the number of employees about to retire as a solution to the bank's problems. A new CEO, who was appointed two years before I left, placed the issue of 'rejuvenating the organisation' as a strategic goal and declared that he wants to be the oldest employee in the organisation (he was 45 years old). As a manager in the organisation, I waited for older employees to retire, then promotion opportunities opened up that created movement. Retirement was a subject HR managers including myself, did not talk about and did not deal with. All the care of retirees, financial issues and retirement workshops were outsourced. The only few times I dealt with retirees was when I paid a brief visit to retirement workshops to congratulate the retirees as the HR team representative. I could not imagine myself retiring, just like the 55 year old HR executive Paula and I met, and could not take the retiree attitude.

In Israeli culture, retirement is linked to old age, which has a lower value due to it being a culture that values youth and action and tries to move away from the image of the helpless old person.

Manor (2017), an Israeli sociologist, conducted research among 39 retirees in semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the aim of understanding the subjective meaning accorded to the experience of retirement and old age. She claims that "retirement is not identical with old age, and old age does not appear the moment a person retires from the labour market, and yet about 75 per cent of the interviewees tended to draw parallels between them and emphasise the linkage between retirement and old age" (ibid: 995). The retirees forge an affinity between retirement and old age, but at the same time show strong opposition to the link they themselves have created. Spector-Mersel (2006) identifies three main content worlds that give meaning to the concept of 'Israeli ageing': first is the Zionist culture - the revolutionaries who established the state created the 'New Hebrew' figure who is the opposite of the Diaspora Jew. The New Hebrew person is identified with youthful courage and performance, as opposed to the image of the humiliated old man, which they wanted to erase. Second is the military culture - compulsory military service of three years, an accepted principle that links military professionalism with a young age (the retiring age from the permanent army is 45), and the continuous threat of a state of war. All these have blurred the boundaries between the civilian and military sectors. Thus, the young person model at the heart of military culture has become a national value. Third is the influence of Western capitalist culture that encourages ageing-inhibiting industries, such as anti-aging cosmetics, vitamins and exercise facilities that will ensure that we maintain our younger appearance. These give validity to the value of youth and strengthen the 'old' stereotype as an anti-ideal. Moreover, Israel's significant growth engine since the 1980s has been the technology industry, an industry that is based on young workers (despite the increase in the average age in the last decade) and a higher average salary, all of which contribute to the high positioning of youth.

Furthermore, Israel is a country of immigrants who were looking for a better future, thus there is a strong push for achievements and success which creates a competitive and achievement orientated society. Achievement is measured by success in studies, work and status which are also driven by economic success. As the daughter of Holocaust survivors, the internalised message was 'survival' - being able to be independent and responsible for my life. I tried to prove to my father that I was able to manage my life and 'sleep well in the bed I made' in the best way. It was important for me to succeed at school, to achieve what my parents did not have the opportunity to achieve and to see their pride when I succeeded at work (even though

they didn't really understand what I did). The principles of independence and being productive are principles that are contrary to the way I perceive retirement, i.e., slowing down and focusing on leisure, consumption and not worrying about future plans. Additionally, I am part of a generation for whom the retirement experience is new. The previous generation retired, exhausted from the mere struggles to exist[30]. My parents, when they retired just wanted to rest, for them work meant to ensure the existence of the family. For me and probably many of my generation who have reached senior positions, work also has the meaning of self-fulfillment. Rosa (2013, 2019, 2020) a German sociologist and philosopher influenced by the Hegelian tradition, claims that work is understood as a pursuit of resources and 'life' is postponed till after retirement. Rosa draws on Max Weber who finds it highly irrational that human beings do not work in order to live, but live in order to work and accumulate (Rosa 2020:23). Rosa explains that modern societies (since the 18th century) are characterised by a speeding up of the world; setting the world in a motion that he calls 'social acceleration' that is "growth in quantity per unit of time" (Rosa 2019: 1). It means that modern society can only maintain itself through growth, speeding up and innovation. Rosa calls this 'dynamic stabilization'. The consequences are that modern society is driven by the desire to expand the horizons of the available, attainable and accessible and to control the world. Humans are driven by fear and anxiety of being left behind; that if we stop, we will lose the competition against the dynamics of the world, by the promise to increase control in the world, and by accumulation of resources, and all of this will guarantee the good life.

I grew up with my parents' messages of being productive, independent and in control of my life. I worked all my career in a bank where older employees were treated as a burden, which corresponded with the Israeli culture that values achievement and youth. Retirement was a topic that was not discussed in organisational discourse or in other social figurations I was involved in, something distant that belongs to the world of the elderly. For me, throughout my career, retirement was seen as the end of the professional career. Retirees were, in my eyes, old people who have given up the pursuit of success and achievements in work, have plenty of time, spend the rest of their lives trying to rest and enjoy hobbies and leisure activities as much

[30] I reviewed the literature and could not find anything to confirm this claim. I had a conversation with an Israeli researcher in the field to confirm. She recommended examining this theme in a study.

as their physical condition allows. Before I retired, I was detached from the issue of retirement, I could not take their attitude. I took this perception for granted and it guided my activity.

I decided to accept an early retirement offer that was offered to all employees over the age of 50 when the strategic project of culture change that I was leading was canceled and I was asked to wait for a new role to be found for me. I started to feel the loss of power and status. I realised that I may have reached the glass ceiling and I am not interested in moving horizontally in the organisation. I felt afear of becoming irrelevant while waiting for a new position, the one who HR leaders are waiting for her to go.

3.4.4. The acceptable way to cope with retirement

I was offered retirement workshops, which are a central tool for coping with transitioning from employment to retirement in organisations in Israel. I did not attend, in view of how I perceived retirement and since I did not see myself as a retiree. I felt full of energy and able to contribute. Retirement was for me a name for a financial plan that caused a temporary disruption to my professional career. I thought that careful planning would lead to continued professional activity on my terms. In addition, there were also considerations of status: I did not want to attend a workshop together with lower ranking employees.

Most of the retirement workshops that I reviewed with Paula[31] were based, wholly or partly, on two leading models: the Phases of Retirement model developed by Atchley (1976), an American gerontologist and sociologist, and Kübler-Ross (1972) model on loss and mourning.

According to Atchley's (1976) model, the transition to retirement occurs in a series of phases: the pre-retirement phase when retirement is still a distant event; as the retirement date approaches and becomes more concrete; the retirement date; the honeymoon period

[31] We had meetings with consulting firms that conduct these workshops. We found that many of the large organisations in Israel, including the organisations Paula and I worked for, conduct more or less similar retirement workshops which are run by external consultants. The two dominant consulting firms use the same model (a combination of Atchley and Kübler-Ross) as detailed above. The rest of the organisations are assisted by independent consultants or small consulting firms that do not have a descriptive model.

Since we did not participate in a retirement workshop, we asked and received the content of the workshops that took place in 2020.

immediately after retirement; the disillusionment phase that is characterised by a decrease in mood and sometimes a feeling of emptiness is added; the reorganisation phase when the retirees develop a more realistic view of the overall situation and build a new routine and identity; and the stability phase, the existence of a stable life framework. According to the Atchley model, the phases are sequential but not all must exist, it is possible to skip phases. The assumption of the consultants who use this model is that knowing the phases will make it possible to skip some of them or moderate them so that reaching stability will be easier.

The Kübler-Ross model (1972), developed by a Swiss-American psychiatrist. Originally the model was developed to describe the stages patients with terminal illness go through, which was later applied to other events of loss (like death of a loved one, severe loss, divorce, dismissal and more). Those experiencing grief go through five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. She claims that the stages are not linear; they do not have to be sequential, nor do all the stages have to take place, and various stages can exist side by side, but at least two of the stages take place in each crisis situation. The model is also used by business leaders, including myself, as a linear curve that describes how people adapt to changes in organisations. In organisations, the model is used assuming that the group is an aggregation of individuals who go through the progression described by the curve: denial → anger → bargaining → depression → acceptance. Consultants who base retirement workshops on Kübler-Ross's change curve assume an inevitable experience the individual goes through, and their role is to help them pass the depression stage and get to the acceptance stage quickly. Appling this model to retirement is to refer to retirement as an event of loss and death.

In both models, the goal is to move from point A to B, to reach a new equilibrium of acceptance and stability in retirement which has a cybernetic notion: self-regulating goal-directed, adapting to the environment, which is a common approach in the management (as explained in Project 2 p 54) of systems thinking (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 58). The two models consist of different stages that the retirees go through which gives a sense of a process: a series of actions in order to achieve a result. Yet, at the same time, their authors claim they are not linear as they do not have to be sequential, not all stages have to take place and there is no reference to the time it takes. I found that some of the steps described in the models underpinning retirement workshops resonated with me. I experienced some of them in my own retirement. It was helpful to discover that some of the experiences I went through are

documented and are part of a model, and I am not the only one to feel this way. I remember that I dived into leisure activities immediately after retirement (as I mentioned in Project 1) that can be associated with the Honeymoon Phase and following this dealing with the question of 'who I am now?' (the title of my progression report) which can be associated with the Disenchantment Phase – both described in Atchley's model. Most significantly, I experienced avoidance (which I will refer to later) which appears as one of the stages in Kübler-Ross's model, and less explicitly in Atchley's model, in the Preretirement Phase. I did not experience the other stages. Even today, more than five years after I have retired and after the change in self-recognition as a retiree, I cannot identify a state that can be defined as stability or acceptance, and I wonder whether this is at all possible. This makes me consider how helpful the models are and causes me to think about retirement now more as some kind of non-linear, more iterative process.

Among other activities in retirement workshops, the retirees are asked to write down their personal strengths and weaknesses, their personal new vision and plan how to get there. In the same line of thought, after retiring, driven by rational thinking, I insisted on explaining that retirement is an opportunity and immersed myself in finding the right way to plan and carry out my plans.

The underpinning theoretical assumptions of the workshops and my conduct are therefore in the individualistic tradition, choosing goals rationally and designing a way to achieve them. In Stacey's article *Theories of Change in Therapeutic Work* (2006), he describes three theories of personal change and "how they differ from each other according to the assumptions made about the nature of the individual, the relationship between the person and the social, and the nature of causality" (ibid: 191). According to theories of rational causality, the cause of any personal change is believed to be the rational effort of the individual "This means that change takes the form of continuity of identity, with only context-dependent variations in its manifestation" (Stacey et. al 2000: 38). This was my perception after retirement and the assumption underlying the model Paula and I proposed in which early planning is the key to a 'successful' retirement.

Any reference to society are made in the context of something that the individual has to deal with. In the workshops, they offer a session on 'the implications of retirement on family life: meeting personal needs without harming others, readjustment of the marital equilibrium,

ways of improving communication and tips for a good relationship'. That is, the retiree must learn to deal with his social environment. In accordance with my perception that retirement is a temporary disruption, I negotiated the particularisation with family and friends. I saw in their suggestions to hang out at a coffee shops or requests for grandparenting as a misinterpretation of how I saw my position, which I felt I needed to protect.

According to theories of formative causality, the second theory of change that Stacey reviews, it is believed that the expressivist individual realises his inner self in communication with others, unfolding of enfolded mature form. Retirement workshops that I reviewed also incorporated such assumptions in the attempt to discover and realise the hidden potential of the retirees. Initially, I also saw retirement as an opportunity to realise my potential. In practice, the decision of what to do, like joining the activities of the HR association (P2) or joining Adele (P3), were made rationally and were chosen according to the situation in the living present. Most of the participants in the peer/focus group realised that reality prevailed over the plans they had. One of them managed to realise her drawing talent and told us how much she enjoys it.

The third theory of change that Stacey describes is the transformative causality which I explain later on in section 8 (p131).

Those running the retirement workshops we reviewed assume that retirement is a significant event of change that through a rational decision the individual will change and adapt himself to a new life - the autonomous individual. It is also assumed that this is an opportunity to self-actualize - the expressivist view.

There are benefits in participating in retirement workshops: retirees are provided with important financial information, which I thought was unnecessary for me due to my financial background. In these workshops, social groups are sometimes formed that continue leisure and social activities together, which can help dealing with retirement. The workshops are also part of the farewell rituals from an organisation or a kind of rite of passage. On the occasions I visited out of duty, I felt an atmosphere of excitement. However now I doubt whether prior knowledge, even five to ten years earlier (Paula and my proposal) could prevent or shorten experiencing difficulty later.

3.4.5. Retirement can be managed

Within a month of the decision to take the early retirement programme I left the bank and the concept of retirement became real. I particularised it as an external disruption which required adjustments to continue my professional career. Throughout my career I have undergone changes in fields I worked in (although all changes were within one organisation): moved from the financial field to the communications field, then to marketing and to HR. I thought retirement is another change in the same line, that I had accumulated assets of experience, knowledge, and reputation that would guarantee many opportunities, I just had to choose.

I thought I have power and capabilities to choose a professional activity on my own terms: without constraints, organisational politics and without daily managing many employees, as I was not ready to work in another organisation or to work full time. I considered consulting or project management. My choice caused me to examine a variety of activities, not all of which were successful. In P2, I write about increasing my activity with the HR association and in P3, about joining another consultant. I was sure that the restlessness and frustration I experienced after retirement was my idiosyncrasy. I searched for reasons within myself. I felt confused, desired professional status and recognition. I blamed myself, thinking that maybe I had not managed retirement properly, or that I should have postponed it until I had another alternative. I thought perhaps my diverse career turned out to be a disadvantage that made it difficult for me to define where and what I aspired to be. I felt insecure, which I attributed to the fact that I wanted to pursue the HR field that was not a field I had studied, meaning that I was not professional enough. Now I understand this way of thinking characterises individualistic assumptions, - namely that each individual is responsible for themselves, and their experience is their own, regardless of others; self-centered. Burkitt, in his book *Social Selves* (2008) quotes the political thinker Macpherson who notes how we are "characterized by the type of individualism that arises in Western capitalist societies as 'possessive individualism', which means each individual is thought to be the possessor of their own skills and capacities, owing nothing to society for the development of these" (ibid: 2).

In retrospect, I understand that in all these experiences of professional activity I tried after retirement, I continued to use management tools such as spending hours making plans, setting goals, building scenarios, monitoring and adjusting plans that gave me the illusion of control. My tendency to be in control was also reflected in the decision to take an early retirement

offer and not to wait for others to decide. In hindsight, I realised that this also happened in the sorting process (detailed in P1) when my need to be in control, ‘no one else will decide for me’, made me stop the sorting process. When my plans did not succeed, I put the blame on bad planning, became more frustrated and increased the search for the 'right' activity. In the interactions with the others (retirees who took part in the HR association activities – P2, my business partner – P3), conflicts arose calling into question the sense of power and my identity (P2 and P3). I also now understand the doubts I raised in the progression viva and when I needed to fill out forms with my title before the residential in Parkview. Rosa (2020) claims that struggle for power can be understood as a struggle for control: "the struggle to expand our share of the world" (ibid: 18). He claims that the pursuit of controllability may result in disappointment, alienation, disenchantment and the world becoming unreadable (ibid: 28). Moreover, Rosa (2020) draws our attention to the paradoxical nature of control, our "desire for control produces, behind our backs, a world that in the end is utterly uncontrollable in all the relevant aspects" (ibid: ix) in addition he claims that a fully controllable world eventually would be rigid and sclerotic; a “dead world”.

The meeting with Paula brought the uncertainty and confusion we were in after retirement to the surface. Paula admitted that she is going through a crisis and described the feeling of helplessness and confusion, feelings that resonated with me even though I remained distant and was surprised that she admitted she is in a serious crisis. The sense of uncertainty that became clear in our conversation caused us to fall back on familiar management tools: to plan a new retirement workshop that actually only differs in timing. Working on the programme gave us a sense of power, control and predictability for us as a professional activity. Furthermore, we thought we would provide others with a sense of certainty in coping with the transition to retirement; thus being relatively more powerful. It all temporarily collapsed with the response of the HR executive Paula and I met, who did not want to talk about retirement. Now I can see that the management and control tools that I learned in my MBA studies, experienced at work, and used in order to be in control ensure that the movement into the future would realise the plans I envisioned and predicted, were not effective for me in dealing with retirement and caused frustration, doubts and anxiety. I started to question my identity and my ability to influence (power), but I continued to hold onto the management methods I

knew. Brinkmann (2012:48) a Danish psychologist who writes about qualitative study methods, refers to moments of doubt and to acts that cause frustration as breakdowns.

3.4.6. Retirement provoking anxiety

The meeting with my supervisor brought about awareness that I related to other peoples' breakdown and feelings that result from the transition to retirement, but did not refer to what is happening to me. Actually, I could not express what I was feeling when I was asked, I had no words to articulate my feelings. I repeated the positive mantra that I had mixed feelings of loss of influence and status on the one hand and an opportunity to do new things on the other. When I was asked about feelings of shame, vulnerability or violence, I pushed back with a certain amount of anger. Moreover, I treated Paula critically when she told me that she was in a crisis. Emotions, in the way I was educated and experienced in organisational conduct, are a hindrance to rational thinking and the ability to be in control and to expose vulnerability is to loss power.

Mead (1934) claims that emotions are "part of the organization of the social act, and highly important elements in that organization" (ibid: 44). Thus, emotions arise in the social interaction, in communications of gesture and they can be bodily expressed. Burkitt (2018), a professor of social identity at the University of Bradford, whose work addresses the sociology of emotions, developed the relational approach to emotions. Burkitt argues that emotions are both bodily and cognitive phenomena, thinking and feeling arise at the same time in our bodies, because we are embodied beings, while also he puts them into a social context "it is within relations and communicative interactions with others to whom we are directed that the emotional self is formed" (Burkitt 2018:3). I take from Mead and Burkitt that emotional expression is part of the social interaction with others, this makes me wonder why I could not express or relate to my feelings although the emotions erupted physically in the form of tears. Menzies (1960) in her study of the Nursing Services of a General Hospital argues that struggling against anxiety to help the individual avoid the experience of anxiety, guilt, doubt and uncertainty leads to the development of socially structured defence mechanisms (ibid:101). One of these is detachment and denial of feelings: to control feelings, refrain from excessive involvement or avoid disturbing identification. Anxiety is understood as the emotion which emerges when experiencing uncertainty as a consequence of recognising that the events with

which one is confronted are not compatible with the convenience of one's construct system (Simpson and Marshall, 2010:357).

When I started to question my identity after retirement, and my experience of not having control over the direction of my life when the professional activities I joined did not yield the professional success I had hoped for and I did not return to a position of power and status, I felt anxious. Rosa (2020) argues that anxiety in daily lives lies in the gap between theoretical control and actual control (ibid: 110). Stacey and Mowles (2016:347) claim that "changes in how one experiences one's self are bound to be highly emotional and anxiety provoking".

I understand now that retirement is a 'flash-cut' from previous life that was thought to be controllable and a move to significant uncertainty that I had not experienced before (one day you are working and the next you are retired). In a sharp transition, I was stripped of many assets I thought I had: the sense of power and influence over employees, the possibility to initiate and make changes in the bank's conduct; I lost the senior status with all the symbols that accompany this status, and the possibility of being significant in the professional community. All this, in addition to facing the finality of my professional career and the uncertainty of how the rest of my life is going to be. "Uncertainty arises when we can no longer make sense" according to Marris (1991:80). Additionally, I also experienced being excluded from the social community I was a part of for many years, no longer part of events and happenings.

I realise that retirement is a significant event of uncertainty. A major change in life which confronted me with loss, confusion, and changing rules. All these are causes for anxiety and a threat to my identity. To deal with feelings of anxiety, I turned to familiar management tools of planning and control which did not work. Furthermore, I now understand that my inability to express my feelings was a defence mechanism I used in order to hold onto my sense of control and protect my identity. For a long time after I retired, I found it difficult to introduce myself as a retiree. I thought that by introducing myself as such, I would be viewed by the professional community as no longer relevant, and if so, what am I recognised for? In projects 1 and 2, I tried to define this as 'leaving a senior position and looking for a new way', or I put an emphasis on my 'early' retirement. By emphasising that I had taken early retirement, I tried to convey a number of messages: I am younger, and it is therefore legitimate to look for employment, as well as to wear it as a kind of badge – 'it was my decision to retire'. This led my research colleagues in my learning set to point out that I avoided using the word

'retirement' – the "R" word, as they called it. I was sure this was my problem, and I was so involved in my situation that I could not even bear to talk about retirement.

3.4.7. Retirement as a social object

The way I made meaning of retirement is based on the social culture that I was involved in and on my personal history and experiences. I am starting to think that retirement can be regarded according to what Mead defines as a 'social object' (Mead, 1925) that is distinguished from the physical object which exists in nature and may be understood in terms of itself. The social object is a "generalised tendencies, common to large numbers of people, to act in similar ways in similar situations" (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 374). The social object has to be understood in terms of social acts, it is a result of population-wide patterns that have evolved over time in the many interactions, and is influenced by the culture and history of the particular society. The social object is taken up by the people in their local interaction and is particularised in each interaction and situation. People interact locally in the social object which is made particular. In these interactions the population-wide patterns emerge. The way I treated older employees in the bank was my particularistion of the general tendency 'to rejuvenate the bank', in this I contributed to the creation of the general tendency- forming and formed at the same time. It is a paradoxical process of generalisation and particularisation at the same time. However, after my retirement, relying on the same perception of retirement, I imagined that this is how I am perceived by others. I could not recognise myself in how I was reflected in the eyes of others. This led to negotiations about the interpretation of retirement, such as clarifying to my family that I do not have unlimited grandparenting time or when we met with the HR executive, who was not ready to talk about retirement, Paula and I were negotiating with her different understanding of retirement. Drawing on conversation of gestures (Mead) where meaning evolves in the social interactions, I felt in her response as if she perceived us as not professionally relevant (the way I thought before) and we (Paula and I) tried to convince her that older employees (also us) can be productive.

A generalised tendency to act, a social object, does not mean that people in a certain social environment behave exactly the same. Drawing on Mead (1934) who argues that we interact in conversations of gesture with others in which self, consciousness and mind arise. The self is conceived by Mead as "I / Me" dialectic in which the "Me" is social, taking the attitude of others towards one's self that is made particular in the response to the "I" which can be spontaneous.

That is what makes the interpretation of each individual unique. In each of my interactions with HR colleagues or managers in an organisation, family and friends, I particularise the 'social object' of retirement which was expressed in detachment, waiting for other managers to retire or critically, as in my reference to the non-business-like photo Paula's daughter posted on Facebook. In contrast, the colleague who retired with me chose to respond to the issue of retirement with defiance.

Elias (1991, 2000) also refers to tendency to act. He uses the habitus concept, although due to translation from German to English the phrase appears as 'second nature' or as 'personality structure' (Elias, 2000: xvii). Habitus helps him to understand how the 'internal steering mechanisms' work. His basic assumption is that humans are interdependent: need others and are oriented towards others. Every activity is created within the dynamics of the power figuration in which they are involved. For him, what drives the dynamics is not the visible interactions but the less visible power differences, in this he connects habit and power.

Bourdieu (2000), a French sociologist and public intellectual, to whom the expression 'habitus' is attributed, refers to it through social classes. Habitus is sets of dispositions operating largely beneath the surface of discursive consciousness among the people we are social with (ibid: 140) which are embodied effects of their social position, the people of their social class. Habitus steers the individual responses in the present as well as the orientation to the future.

Elias and Bourdieu, both link habitus to resources of power (thus continuing Marx). Elias refers to the power relations in particular figurations in which the individual is involved, while Bourdieu refers to 'fields' which indicates arenas of production and exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or status and competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to influence - Bourdieu refers to social and cultural capital (power). Paulle et al (2012) sociologists from the University of Amsterdam and Wisconsin–Madison compare the sociological perspectives of Elias and Bourdieu. They sum up that both can be treated as "sociologists of shifting configurations of power" (ibid: 21).

The individual tendency to act in particular ways in social routines creates habit. Dewey, an American pragmatist philosopher, for whom the concept of habits is central, claims that "we are our habits" (Dewey, 1917: 19), the virtues as well as the vices. Dewey focuses on the productive role of habits. Habits relate to our functions and how they benefit us, they are acquired and they require the cooperation with the environment (Brinkmann, 2017: 83).

Habits are constantly evolving in our relationship with the environment and are our way of being in the world.

Pedwell (2021), a pragmatist lecturer in Cultural Studies and Media at the University of Kent, reviews the literature of different researchers into habits, points to the paradox at the root of habituation: on the one hand, automation and stability allows unthinking reaction, yet on the other hand, allows for creativity and change: particularising inevitably leads to conflict and change. She concludes that 'without habit change will not survive. 'Pedwell brings Ravaisson's claim that "habits enable both grace and addiction", "at once poison and remedy" (ibid: 11, 19). Pedwell draws on Dewey and yet criticises him for the fact that for him there is no rational thought, emotion or action that are not habits, therefore he does not distinguish between embodied habits and rational thinking.

The way I understood and referred to retirement is according to Mead's 'social object'- population-wide patterns that have evolved over time in the many local interactions, and is influenced by the culture and my experience and history. According to Elias, it is influenced by power relations in a certain figuration and according to Bourdieu, it is influenced by power relations and class position. Dewey claims we are habits which are acquired in routine social interactions. In all of them, the tendency to act is the result of social interactions, however, this raises the question of how a change in perception and propensity to act occurs.

3.4.8. From denial to awareness

Reluctantly, I was pushed to talk in the research community about what was happening to me. I found myself talking about the fact that I was denying the feelings and experience of crisis. I was overwhelmed with emotions which caused an outburst of crying that did not allow me to understand in real time what was happening. Immediately after the meeting, I was bothered by the embarrassment of crying. Only a few hours later did I realise that the conversation in the research community allowed me to see and admit that retirement was an experience of anxiety that I coped with by denial and use of familiar management tools of control. This made me, to a certain degree, feel a sense of relief: I can say 'I am a retiree' and the 'sky did not fall'. The community of research sits in a 'community meeting' which draws on the Institute of Group Analysis (IGA) tradition of group analytic psychotherapy methods, however as an experiential group which is distinguished from the group analytic that runs for the explicit purpose of therapy. In the chapter on methodology, I will elaborate on the community

meeting. In an encounter with the group, which is an encounter with others who are different, one's patterns of behaviour can be challenged. Foulkes (1964), a German-British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, terms it a 'hall of mirrors' where participants can see themselves and their reactions reflected back at them in the group. During these encounters, individuals can understand themselves better, see the patterns of behaviour they are stuck in and make different meaning of something which has caused them distress (Mowles, 2017a:510).

With my supervisor's encouragement, I began to talk more about retirement, albeit initially with colleagues who had retired, and to become more aware of different attitudes towards retirement and defense mechanisms that others use, such as defiance used by a colleague who told me that she enjoys defying those who ask her what she does by answering 'nothing' which makes them feel uncomfortable. It took me a few months to find the strength to facilitate a peer meeting to discuss the retirement experience. On occasions I present myself as a retiree but still only occasionally, aware of my response as in the peer group I held where I followed the pattern of the group introducing myself through my past roles.

I can see that my habitual patterns have changed. It makes me wonder what caused the change.

Dewey contends: "We can only change ourselves by changing our habits, and we can only change our habits (or at least, we can do so most effectively) by changing the social conditions that determine the formation of habits " (Brinkmann, 2017:87). That is, change in habits are formed and reformed through the ongoing interaction of subjects and environments, and they also affect and reconfigure environments.

The conversation over breakfast with my supervisor and the meeting with the research community that followed, made me aware of my denial of retirement and the crisis that accompanied retirement. Did this lead to the process of change in acknowledging retirement? Indeed Massumi, a Canadian process philosopher who is inspired by Deleuze, focuses on encounters that produce 'a shock to thought': an emotional upheaval that can cause critical inquiry and transformation (in Pedwell, 2021:57). Yet pragmatists such as Dewey (1934) and Sullivan (2006) do not recommend bringing problematic habits into awareness because they trigger the unconscious defence mechanisms, rather they suggest it may be best to address "the environments that 'feed' habits" (ibid: 9). My initial reaction to the shock of the awareness was resistance and anger, but at the same time it pushed me to take it seriously by being more reflexive. Pedwell (2021) claims that an approach which focuses on altering the environments

in which the habits were formed might shift habitual behaviour without requiring conscious commitment; "do not engage people's own experiences, desires, and visions, or enable the kind of affective and psychosocial processing vital to more-than-fleeting transformation" (ibid:169). She argues that change in the level of the habit is possible through individuals cooperating with the environment, alongside introspection and inhabitation involving opening up the modes of consciousness and emotional attention. When sensing becomes active (by uncomfortable encounters) then change at the level of habit becomes possible.

Rosa (2020) also argues that change is possible in the combination of relationships with others and emotions. He uses the terms 'resonance' - one of his key theoretical concepts, to describe the kind of successful relationship to the world. In resonant relationships, the individuals and the world they encounter are changing in mutual relations, forming and being formed. As Rosa puts it: "Without the trifecta of af←fect (in the sense of being affected by an other), e→motion (as a self-efficacious response that creates a connection), and adaptive transformation, appropriation remains a relation of relationlessness. The fact that there must be some interplay among all three of these aspects makes it clear that—like a violin or guitar—we must be open enough to be affected or changed, while at the same time we must also be closed off enough to respond effectively with our own voice." (ibid: 35).

Following the conversations and planning with Paula, other retired HR executives joined us to establish a social venture that wants to raise awareness among HR people and managers in organisations in order to change the discourse and treatment of older employees to create a more inclusive working environment. In this figuration, I leverage my being a retiree in favour of expertise. In this figuration, I feel recognised and appreciated. According to Elias and Bourdieu, the change in the figuration and the power relations affects perception.

This bring me to the third theory of change that Stacey (2006) describes as the transformative causality in which "the individual change cannot be separated from change in the groups to which an individual belongs" (Stacey, 2006: 191). This is a social approach that draws on the tradition of Hegelian thinking according to which "individuals are fundamentally social and what they do, think or say takes form in the context of social practices" (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 306). It is a perspective in which individuals are paradoxically forming and being formed at the same time by social relations, and in which the individual and the social cannot be separated. Elias, and Mead, who were both influenced by the Hegelian tradition, argue that as

individuals we are born into an existing society, the 'self' who is not initially there at birth, develops through an ongoing interaction with society.

I understand now that a change in habits and hence in the sense of self (drawing on Dewey: we are the habits) are not the result of a one-time event or of a cognitive decision of the individual but rather a social process through social interactions, which requires the ability to reflect and reflexivity. Mowles (2015: 60) differentiates between reflection and reflexivity as separate, yet connected activities. While reflection is the ability to detach ourselves from our involvement, (involved and detached perspectives together is more helpful (Elias, 1991: 47)[32]) and yet, it is not "necessarily inclined towards answers, solutions and conclusions, but rather to doubt, questioning and uncertainty" (Mowles, 2011: 265). Reflexivity is our ability to think about how we are thinking about how we are engaged. Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009:9) define reflexivity as the interpretation of interpretation.

In reflecting on my feelings after retirement, I came to realise that my sense of loss of belonging, power, recognition and doubts about my identity stemmed mainly from the loss of status. I do not have the title of a senior manager with all the benefits and effects it has on relationships with others and sense of self. Status is the common denominator in all I experienced as change and loss as a result of retirement. This brings me to examine the theme of status now

3.4.9. Status

The theme of status came up in my progression viva two years ago. It makes me wonder why I have put off pursuing this subject until now. This may be part of my avoidance due to the difficulty and embarrassment in admitting status considerations[33].

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, status is a "position or rank in relation to others" or "relative rank in a hierarchy of prestige", a definition that implies a relative worth (value) or importance. That is, status refers to a relative position and can refer to any axis for which we

[32] Elias (1991:47) argue that once one has gained a longer-sight perspective, which he calls the view of the airman, one must revert to the other perspective from within the flow which he calls the view of the swimmer. Each of these perspectives, isolated from the other, shows the picture with a certain foreshortening.

[33] Although, achievement and status are important factors in Israeli society (P4), I felt it difficult to openly admit probably due to the values of socialist democracy, the basic values in the establishment of the State (Sternhell 2009) and especially in the city where I grew up which was the first cooperative agricultural settlement. It is also possible that it stems from a gender issue. According to Williams and Dempsey (2020), one of the challenges that women face in the workplace is The Tightrope: women are often caught between the expectations of being seen as competent and assertive, while also being liked and respected.

would like to check where we are located. According to this definition, my status in the bank was relatively high and this was supported by how I felt located. All my career I worked in a bank which was, and probably still is, a hierarchical orthodox organisation with clear rules regarding the positioning of managers and employees. Each position has a job title and formal requirement of acquired rank, if not there are rules how soon they can reach that rank. In addition, each position has the prestige and status symbols that is not person-dependent, such as the size and the location of the office, and other clear and visible status symbols. I had a corner office with large windows in one of the towers in Tel Aviv that overlooked the sea, I had a personal secretary and a personal assistant who took care of organising my schedule and all the administration. In addition, I had at my disposal a company car with a preferred parking space that also included weekly maintenance. The hierarchal structure institutionalised the relationship so that each position is supervised by a higher position of downward transmission of orders and upward transmission of information (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011:1517-8). Within the boundaries of the organisation, greater value is inherent in positions of higher formal rank. This division corresponds with the Marxist perspective of class according to which social class is defined primarily by its relationship to the economic mode of production (Wright, 2002). Yet, there is also the informal hierarchy which is person-dependent social relationships. Diefenbach and Sillince, drawing on Crozier (1964), claim that in orthodox organisations, "one can find informal hierarchy at the same formal level of hierarchy" (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011:1521). In addition, they claim that the informal hierarchical order helps to keep the formal hierarchical order working. In the last 15 years in the bank, I enjoyed roles with formal high positioning and prestige that gave me the benefits of status symbols as well as many informal social relationships. The spokesperson role, which was officially a lower formal rank than the roles that followed, gave me a highest informal status and an extensive network of connections mainly with those of higher ranks. In my experience, there is a connection between the formal and informal status, but it is not necessarily a direct relationship, there are other effects on the subjective status.

Destin et al. (2017) sociologists from Northwestern University and a psychologist from Yale University define "status, in general, captures an individual's standing on any dimension along a hierarchy" (ibid: 271). Their research examines how people understand and make meaning of their socioeconomic status (SES) which relates to status as consisting of a combination of

people's income, financial assets, educational attainment and occupational prestige (according to the American Psychological Association, 2016)[34]. One's access to resources (income, education and occupation) is based on objective measures while one's perceived social standing relative to others is based on subjective understanding.

Studies in the field of psychology draw on a distinction between objective and subjective status based on Jackman and Jackman (1973) a sociologist and a political scientist from University of California, Davis. Their study examined the relationship between the two, among an adult population in the USA. The subjective notion is "the individual's perception of his own position in the social hierarchy" (ibid: 569). They found in their research that "the socioeconomic status of the individual has implications for the status of the friends and neighbours with whom he mixes; and in turn this social milieu partly channels the impact of his objective status on his development of a sense of class identification" (ibid:580). Meaning that the socioeconomic status (SES) constitutes the basis of subjective social status (ibid: 570) and is salient with social contacts. In the same line, a study that investigated the role of subjective social status as a predictor of ill-health (Singh-Manoux et al., 2003), also confirms that "subjective social status reflects the cognitive averaging of standard markers of socioeconomic situation and is free of psychological biases" (ibid:1321). I understand from these studies that the individual's subjective perception of their social status is based on their objective SES. It resonates with me as my experience of belonging to a group of senior managers at the bank, I felt valued and recognised among the bank's employees as well as outside the bank. Each time I introduced myself as the head of the bank's TD (the bank is considered a relatively large corporate body), I felt the appreciative looks of the members of the professional community, partly thanks to my innovative and professional activity. The very definition of the role made me feel appreciated and recognised as having a high status and it influenced my sense of identity.

Destin et al., (2017) use the term 'status-based identity'. Based on a review of studies and existing approaches on identity and SES, they claim that the objective and subjective SES has an effect on psychological tendencies (such as degree of independence or interdependence, understanding of social events and pro-social behaviour) and the cultural experience of the individual that affects how he or she experience the world - SES influences one's identity. They argue that status-based identity is "situated within the broader self, and our viewpoint builds

[34] Many of the studies on status use this definition

upon existing models of the sociocultural self" (ibid: 275). However, they distinguish between different dimensions of identity: narrative, social and future identity, and refer to the effects of the status perception on each of the identities separately. The focus of their research is on the individual, how SES affects his cognitive thinking, how he reevaluates his past, the degree of pro-social behaviour, the understanding of power, how he imagines and plans his future and how the individual behaves according to what is expected of him by the group he belongs to.

The literature I have considered so far connects class/SES and status in direct relationship. According to Bourdieu's perspective, one of the leading researchers in contemporary class theorists, class and status are related and their relationship is mediated by the concept of habitus. He refers to class in a more complex way than the Marxist reference (in relation to the means of production). His model of the class structure is constituted by three orthogonal axes: first, locations in the occupational system according to the total volume of capital (there are different types of capital, the most important of which are economic and cultural capital). The second axis is position within the class positions (practical use of the sources of power); class fraction locations. The third axis is economic and cultural capital of the family of origin and the changes in it over the time. The three axes which constitute the social space - volume, composition, and trajectory – are viewed as continuous dimensions (Weininger, 2002). Habitus refers to the socially learned dispositions, attitudes, and behaviours that individuals develop within a specific class or social group and status is expressed in practices of consumption (resources that individuals possess and can deploy) that creates the social collective of a lifestyle. Honneth criticises Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital which he claims suffers from ambiguity: capital, if it is to underpin a status order should be given its value by everyone else and not qualitative and unique in its value by their own group of lifestyle. In addition, he asks how and on what basis is cultural capital valued (Blunden, 2021:396-7). Blunden himself does not agree with Honneth's criticism and claims that "capital is always dependent on the social conditions in which it may be exchanged" (ibid).

In my experience, my sense of status came from my social interactions. A high rank in the bank means a relatively high salary (SES-compared to others in the bank) but the feeling of status was influenced by belonging to a relatively small group of senior managers, being recognised and being appreciated by my social network. This raises the question of whether the feeling of social status needs broad social recognition of a certain group. Taylor (2021), a Canadian

philosopher, writes in the tradition of Hegel and explored the multiplicity of the self. He claims that the formation of identity and the self is taking place and sustained in a continuing dialogue, recognition and struggle with 'significant others' (a term he borrowed from Mead, 1934). Recognition by insignificant others is less valuable to one's sense of status.

Various studies on status refer to small groups of interactions as a face-to-face group (Anderson and Kilduff, 2009; Anderson et al., 2001, 2006; DiMaggio, 2012; Mazur, 1973, 1985) which "implies that the group is small enough so that all members may take part in face-to-face interaction with each other" (Mazur, 1973:513). Anderson et al., (2001) argue that status within face-to-face groups is defined by the "amount of respect, influence, and prominence each member enjoys in the eyes of the others" (ibid: 116) together with the individual's personality characteristics. This means that status is a function of sources located in the environment, in the collective judgment of the group, and in tandem, places the determinants of status within the individual (ibid:118). It appears to be two separate processes, running concurrently. However, in a later article Anderson et al., (2006) argue that in face-to-face groups status is allocated to group members who are believed to contribute to the group's goals (ibid:1095) which I understand as a mutual recognition process. The individual contributes to the goals of the group to which he belongs, his actions are an expression of recognition and the group's recognition of his contribution is expressed in status. I understand, drawing on Anderson, et al. (2001, 2006) that social status is a position within a group to which the individual belongs, given to him by others through mutual recognition (respect is part of it as I detailed in P3). Status cannot be taken or achieved but rather requires others to voluntary bestow it which makes status part of a relationship rather than a characteristic of the individual (similar to power) which can shift. This observation therefore connects status to mutual recognition within which identity is formed. Moreover, an individual's need to belong outweighs the need to inflate self-esteem attached to status. Anderson et al., (2006:1109) found that individuals do not engage in status self-enhancement, rather they perceive and interpret information about their status accurately since overestimating their status in the group can lead the group to dislike and reject that member (ibid:1095).

My rank in the bank placed me in a certain reference group (the senior group) which gave me relatively more power as a result of being in positions in which there were greater chances that others would need me more. That is, social status is not only a function of relationship within

a certain group, but is also influenced by external factors such as organisational hierarchy. My formal and informal status at the bank affected my relations and status in other groups I belonged to. I was chosen to be a board member of the HR association due to my formal and informal status in the bank. I gained respect from my friends because of my senior position in a large bank. Even among my family, my formal and informal status had a significant affect on the way I was recognised and on their own status in their social network. I remember how proud my father was when he entered his branch of the bank and was recognised as my father.

I came to understand that the sense of status is a position or rank in relation to others created in the process of mutual recognition in the group of belonging, where the others evaluate the individual and his importance to the group. Status is not only part of social interactions of recognition and influence within a certain group, but is also influenced by factors outside the group relationship such as hierarchy and/or status in other organisations or communities and from belonging to other groups. Furthermore, the sense of status is created from belonging to a certain group and it has implications on status in other groups the individual belongs to. In addition, peoples' perceptions of their status influence on their sense of self (P2).

In my transition to retirement, the day came that I did not have the official rank, I no longer belonged to the bank's senior group where I was known and appreciated. It even manifested physically: I handed in my employee badge and received a retiree's badge that was a different colour (of a competing bank) from the bank's dominant brand colour. The retiree badge felt to me like another expression of the HR personnel's avoidance of dealing with the issue of retirement just as I did when I was responsible for the bank's branding and maintenance when I was head of marketing and advertisement. I felt that I was being told that from that day on I belonged to the retiree group, a group that I did not see myself belonging to and was not seen as significant to me; a mutual failure of recognition . Later, I felt the effect of loss of status in other figurations as well: when Sara (head of the HR association) wanted me to give up managing the mentor project (P2), in relationships with Adele when I needed her more and even with family and friends who less respected my unwillingness to make time for recreation. I remember that when I informed the family about my retirement, my son responded with joy that now I can take care of the grandchildren and my daughter-in-law to this day does not understand why I am ‘wasting time ’on this research programme.

The loss of status can have positive sides as well. For a time, I enjoyed leisure activities, I felt relieved to be freed from status constraints such as formal dress, to be constantly available and being on my best behaviour at all times. I do not miss the responsibility I had for many people who waited for me every morning to solve problems that in many cases were administrative and personal. In the peer group meeting I conducted, one of the participants stated that she enjoys sports activities and drawing. There are retirees for whom the loss of status feels like bankruptcy as reflected in a TV interview with the retired Israeli commander of the Air Force, as opposed to retirees for whom the loss of status is worthwhile in order to be freed from the burden of status. In my experience, through the research and the interactions with the research community, a process over time in which I realised that together with the relief as a result of the loss of status, I also experienced a breakdown around my identity which made me questioning 'who am I now?'

3.4.10. The value of activities

For me, even though I did not admit it out loud, the title, the status symbols and the subjective feeling of the status were valuable. It symbolised success, achievements and independence as a woman who did not let the gender issue stop her. It was the full realisation of my father's message that I will sleep on a bed as I made it. This is in addition to the fact that achievement and productivity are valued in Israeli society. In the peer group I held, the participants avoided mentioning their hobbies because they are not considered valuable. I also abandoned handicrafts because I imagined (judged according to my perception) that it was not appreciated by my social network, seen as belonging to the previous generation, which made me engage in it only when I had nothing else to do, without telling others about it.

However, in my case I understood that it is not possible to return to the status I had. I looked for other sources of belonging and recognition. In P2 and P3 I called it to 'find something meaningful to do' without knowing how to explain what something meaningful is. 'To do something meaningful' is also an expression I often hear from other retirees.

Meaning/meaningfulness is a topic that has entered in recent years as one of the indicators for 'optimal ageing'- one of the government's goals. 'Map of national indicators for optimal aging' is a government decision from 19.07.2021. This program consists of 3 themes: health, meaning/meaningfulness and economic resilience. Meaning in this programme, meaning is

measured by a subjective questionnaire that includes questions about quality of life (control, autonomy, self-actualisation and pleasure), a sense of loneliness and satisfaction with life.

When talking about meaning, the name that is most associated with this term is Viktor Frankl, whose works I read in my youth. At first, I avoided using him because, being the daughter of Holocaust survivors, every mention of the Holocaust evokes a feeling of sanctity. It is impossible to compare retirement to the Holocaust experience, however Viktor Frankl (1984) a Jewish-Austrian psychiatrist from humanistic psychology who survived three years as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps, survived the worst thanks to the meaning he found in his life. He founded logotherapy, a school of psychotherapy that describes a search for a life's meaning as the central human motivational force. He claims that "the search for meaning is seen as the primary motivation of humans" (Viktor Frankl Institute website). According to Frankl's logotherapy, the focus is on the meanings to be fulfilled by the person in his future, the individual decides what is meaningful and effort is required in the search for meaning. Moreover, it is likely that in cases when things go wrong, a traumatic event or gradual change that are "'problems in life that prompt a review of personal meaning" (Frankl, 1984:2). It seems like an individualistic approach, but Frankl claims that perfect individualism can cause loneliness, that is why resources from the community are needed. That is, Frankl recognises individual and social but he separates them. The individual chooses what is meaningful to him and is helped by society in order to realise it. The assumptions here are a combination of rationalist causality and formative causality according to Stacey's (2006) review of different theories of personal change.

Drawing on Frankl and my experience, I argue that the sense of loss of status in retirement and the breakdown that followed are events that can prompt a review of personal meaning. Dewey also claims that"… our reflexive knowing of this world is necessitated by breakdowns of, and problems with, our activities" (in Brinkmann, 2017:164). We only become aware of the world and ourselves when we encounter obstacles, then a learning process is created that enables the creation of new habits via doing. I lost my senior status, it undermined my identity, made me question who am I? Work has a significant place in shaping one's identity (P2), now this meaningful part is gone. In retirement workshops, consultants encourage the retirees to find meaning in the realisation of old dreams that were repressed during the working years or write down what could be meaningful for them, set goals and plan how to get there. Finding meaning

resonates with me, but raises the question whether every realisation of a desire means finding meaning? What is meaningfulness? Can you plan it?

Soon after retiring, I tried to fulfill my dreams that I did not have time to before, e.g. travels to distant places that require more time than short trips I used to go on, participation in lectures on fashion, movies and other general knowledge and doing handicrafts that I neglected. I quickly lost interest in them as they did not give me a feeling of a valued activity. In P2, I describe my increasing involvement in the activities in the HR professional association. I encountered power struggles and did not feel that in this activity I was recognised, in fact the programme did not progress or change beyond replacing the person who was managing it. In P3, I joined a consultant to promote a management model, an activity that faded due to the Covid epidemic. Now I realise that my search for what I called meaning was a pursuit of belonging, recognition and status and it runs through all my projects.

Paula's and my conversations about the crisis and our feelings eventually led us to a social activity that promotes age-friendly employment among businesses. Our mutual recognition (P4) and our social action, despite the objections we encountered, has attracted another two retirees who join us (an expression of appreciation). These activities of searching and reading materials, discussions, debates, preparing plans and meetings with government and business officials, fill us with a sense of value, recognition, purpose and fulfillment, feelings that were created without prior planning and goal setting. It started as a meeting to encourage Paula who was in the middle of a crisis, continued as a programme of early retirement planning of five to ten years prior to retirement which we realised is only different in timing from the existing retirement programmes, which was not accepted by HR people in organisations. Through the journey, the content and partners continuously evolved. Our activity is still in the process of adjustments and changes. This brings me to Mead's conversation of gestures according to which meaning arises within the interplay between gesture and response. A sense of meaning is created by interacting with our social network. In this conversational process, the individual adjusts his behaviour according to the reactions.

Elias refers to search of meaning in a more social perspective. In his book *'The loneliness of the dying'* (1985) he argues that "the meaning of everything a person does lies in what he or she means to others" (ibid: 33). He claims that when an individual seeks meaning independent of others, he fails and feels disillusioned and lonely (ibid: 53). That is, the sense of the individual's

fulfillment is not individualistic but social. Searching for meaning in interaction with society is also brought by Rosa (2013, 2019, 2020) a German sociologist and philosopher influenced by the Hegelian tradition. He argues that human beings' basic desire is for relationships, relationships that are not controllable. To develop relationship that will allow us to feel that we are alive and fulfill our desire, we need to bring the relationship within reach (semi-controllable) rather than controllable. Complete control in all four dimensions (making it visible, reachable or accessible, manageable and useful) extinguishes desire. The problem is that in order to realise our desire, we try to achieve full control and, since it cannot be reached, we transition to objects that can be controlled. "We seek fulfillment not through the uncertain, uncontrollable process of adaptive transformation, but through the reliable, controllable appropriation of commodified objects" (Rosa, 2020: 107). Pedwell (2021) adds the involvement of emotions in the process. She argues that when sensing becomes active (through uncomfortable encounters) then change becomes possible.

This leads me to agree with Frankl about the importance of searching for meaning as the primary motivation of humans. My research indicates that this is the way to cope with a major change in life or a breakdown, as can happen after retirement. However, I argue that the search for meaning is more social than the approach in the retirement workshops to search for meaning within yourself cut off from the social context, and is different from Frankl's approach to find meaning within yourself and realise it through society. Meaning arises in social interaction in which the activity is recognised and valued by the significant others. When it is not recognised and valued, there is a reasonable chance that it will not be meaningful for the individual. Meaning is not planned, it evolves in a conversation of gestures in which the response is predictably unpredictable and entails being open, releasing control and being attentive to emotions.

3.4.11. Conclusions

In this project, I describe my experience of making sense of retirement.

I learned that retirement is one of the most significant events a person goes through in life. It is a flash-cut from the feeling of a structured work and social environment to a world of uncertainty. In transitioning to retirement, I felt stripped of significant assets such as a sense of power, status, and recognition that can cause questioning one’s sense of self.

When I retired, I saw it as an event, one of many changes that I went through during my career, an event that needs to be managed properly. I assumed that through proper planning I could control the direction of development and thus I had the illusion that I could choose my identity. Through a reflexive auto-ethnography that included self-observation, writing the experience, the feeling and the process I went through during the last two years that actually created the process of change I found that:

- Retirement, mainly for senior executives, can be felt as a 'flash-cut' from the previous life of what was thought to be controllable to significant uncertainty that was not experienced before. In a sharp transition, a person loses the senior status, the ability to influence (power) and starts questioning his identity. The most common way in Israel to cope with retirement is through retirement workshops held by outsourced consultants. These workshops, part of the rites of departure from the organisation and transition to retirement, are where retirees receive important information and meet other retirees. However, the models for dealing with the transition to retirement on which the workshops are based, assume a linear process in phases until the retiree reaches a new equilibrium of acceptance and stability in retirement. The assumption is rational causality which means a rational individual choses goals for the future. This is done by using management and control tools which is a common approach in the management of systems thinking (Stacey and Mowles, 2016). The pursuit of controllability may result in disappointment, alienation and disenchantment (Rosa, 2020).
- I came to understand retirement as a social object which is a generalised tendency, common to large numbers of people, to act in similar ways in similar situations (Mead, 1934). It is a result of population-wide patterns that have evolved over time in the many interactions, the same process in which self and habits emerge. The way I understood retirement was influenced by the family I grew up in, my personal history as a manager in the bank I worked in and by Israeli culture that values youth and is a competitive and achievement orientated society. All of these are contrary to retirement as I perceived it: finality of the professional career, old people who are not productive. The social object is taken up by the people in their local interaction and is particularised in each interaction and situation, in a conversation of gestures in which the response is a result of the 'I/Me' dialectic (Mead) where the 'Me' is social that is made particular in the

response to the "I" which can be spontaneous. A social object can also be understood as habit or habitus, and when habits are interrupted, it can experienced as a breakdown.

- Understanding retirement as a social object means that transition to retirement is a change of habits. Change becomes possible at the level of habit (Pedwell, 2021) when emotions, deliberate attention, reflective thoughts and opening up occurs as a result of moments of doubts (Brinkmann, 2012) and uncomfortable encounters (Pedwell, 2021). Retirement is a significant event of change in habits and hence in the sense of self (drawing on Dewey: we are the habits). It is not the result of a one-time event or of a rational decision of the individual. It is a transformative process of becoming, which took place over time. It occurs in ongoing iterative interactions with the social environment. As we interact in a communication of gestures (Mead, 1934) where the 'I' can be spontaneous, the direction of change is unpredictable.
- The avoidance of managers in organisations to talk or deal with the issue of retirement alongside the assumption, in the retirement workshops, that it is a temporary crisis and, with advance knowledge, can be prevented or shortened. This creates difficulty in admitting crisis, it feels as an individual experience. It was only through the community of researchers in a group analysis session that I was able to admit the difficulty I was experiencing in retirement. For the peer group, the meeting I conducted was an opportunity for them to talk for the first time about their difficulties and frustrations and to find out they are not alone in this experience.
- In retirement I also felt I had lost status. I came to understand that the sense of status is a position or rank in relation to others created in the process of mutual recognition in the group of belonging, where the others evaluate the individual and his importance to the group. Status is not only part of social interactions of recognition and influence within a certain group, but is influenced by factors outside the group relationship such as hierarchy and/or status in other organisations or communities and from belonging to other groups. Furthermore, a sense of status is created from belonging to a certain group and it has implications on status in other groups the individual belongs to.
- Drawing on Frankl and my own experience, I argue that the sense of loss of status in retirement and the breakdown that follows are events that can prompt a review of

personal meaning. Meaning emerges in the social interactions, in mutual recognition process in which the value that the individual gives an activity is obtained from the judgment reflected in the eyes of others.

4. Synopsis

4.1. Synoptical summaries of research projects

In this chapter, I reflect on my four projects. The projects above are presented as they were written at the time. Returning to them after a time period has elapsed, with the focus on working through the retirement experience, which only arose in P2, helped me to understand the process I went through in making sense of my retirement experience. Through the interactions with the research community, the developing reflection and reflexivity[35] abilities, as well as gaining a better understanding of the intellectual basis of the DMan programme, enables me to see the movement in my way of thinking. In addition, re-visiting the projects from a more detached position and a perspective of time helps me to better identify the emerging themes, the connections between them, identify the process I went through and articulate my arguments more clearly.

I began my research by examining the taken-for-granted assumptions and ways of thinking that had shaped my thinking and conduct, but which I had not previously questioned. This process involved writing a detailed account and reflection on critical moments from my upbringing, intertwined with my professional experiences that influenced my thinking.

4.1.1. The assumption of control

A key theme that emerged from the above reflection was 'control' as a means of dealing with uncertainty. I now recognise that the theme of control has been pervasive throughout my personal life and particularly in my professional career. As a manager, the question of control was a central concern. Early in my management career, I grappled with the extent of control a manager should exert. I sought answers and guidance from colleagues, management lectures, and my MBA studies. Over time, my uncertainties evolved into convictions. In my professional role as a manager, I focused heavily on decision-making, goal-setting, and strategic planning. As I advanced in my career, the emphasis on meticulous planning and rigorous monitoring became even more pronounced.

As I re-read the descriptions of my professional activity, I can see the emphasis on preparing plans and the assumption that the quality of the managers' plans is what makes the

[35] Reflection is the ability to detach ourselves from our involvement. Reflexivity is our ability to think about how we are thinking about how we are engaged (Mowles, 2015: 60). Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009:9) define reflexivity as the interpretation of interpretation.

organisation thrive. My concept of management was that it is a personal ability that can be learned and people can be trained. In a linear view of a direct connection between cause and effect, as head of TD I invested a lot of effort in training managers at all levels, based on the assumption that this will improve the capability of managers in the bank. It also affected the assumption regarding my own competence: in moving between different fields, I gained experience and expanded my range of thinking, which makes me a better manager.

I believed that a manager's primary role was to plan meticulously and to maintain control. This mindset was evident in my role as a spokesperson, where I focused on crafting messages with precise wording based on the sender-receiver communication model, proposed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) (in Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 83). I thought I could control the recipient's understanding through this approach.

In subsequent positions, such as head of marketing and advertising, I assumed that managers should plan thoroughly and monitor the execution of delegated plans. When plans failed, I attributed the failure to insufficient planning or to employees' lack of understanding of senior management's intentions, often describing it as them not "seeing the light". Even in my final position at the bank, I believed I could control and shape the organisational culture. This belief was rooted in the assumption of rationalist causality, where change results from individual rational efforts (Stacey, 2006). This theory, one of three theories of personal change reviewed by Stacey, was introduced in P4 (p. 121, 131).

I can see that the need to be in control is also expressed in rushing to make decisions; not to stay with uncertainty which I now understand as anxiety (P4). Anxiety is understood as the emotion which emerges when experiencing uncertainty as a consequence of recognising that the events with which one is confronted are unfamiliar (Simpson and Marshall, 2010:357).

Quick decision making made me feel in control, as in the case of the decision to postpone the operation during my pregnancy (P1), stopping the sorting process on the DMan programme (the experience with which I opened P1 p24) or the decision to take early retirement in order to avoid waiting for a new position and uncertainty that accompanied it (P1). The desire to leave the position of spokesperson was probably also my desire to reduce the uncertainty that, as I mentioned, characterised the position (P1). This way of thinking is informed by systems thinking that is dominant in management theories which influenced my practice and reflect a powerful ideology of control, efficiency, progress and improvement (Stacey and Mowles, 2016:

203). Later, I write in P4 about another way I dealt with uncertainty - denial. Rosa (2020), to whom I refer to in detail in P4, argues that in the modern world the individual copes with uncertainty by increasing controllability "The driving cultural force of that form of life we call “modern” is the idea, the hope and desire, that we can make the world controllable" (ibid:2).

Taking the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating seriously fundamentally challenges my assumptions about control, which were rooted in the notion of predictability. From this perspective, humans are diverse, thoroughly social individuals interacting through self-organising processes based on their own local context, making behaviour both predictable and unpredictable. Elias's (2000) analysis of the emergence of ’civilisation’ demonstrates how interdependent players became entangled in ways that no individual, regardless of power, could fully control. His use of game models (Elias, 1978; see section 3.3.3, pp. 91–92) further illustrates that no one can control the actions of others. This realisation led me to accept that my ability to plan and control outcomes in retirement is limited, as Mowles (2021, p. iii) aptly states: "Managers can influence but never control an uncontrollable world."

4.1.2. Individualistic and linear assumptions

Reflecting on my upbringing revealed my individualistic perspective, shaped by the struggles of being an immigrant child, frequently moving and adapting to new cultural environments. My father's message that I was responsible for my own success reinforced the belief that change is a cognitive decision driven by individual effort. This perspective led me to become introspective, disconnected from others, and unconcerned about the consequences of my actions on those around me. For instance, I took personal risks without considering their impact on my family, implemented service principles without understanding employees' resistance, and bypassed my line manager to promote my marketing programme, ignoring the damage to our relationship.

Reflecting on my cultural, societal and professional conduct reveals that my basic assumptions were individualistic and linear. According to this way of thinking, I am responsible for my life, I can control and plan, and change is a result of rational decisions. Furthermore, there is a direct connection between planning and result and between investment and return. These assumptions were challenged as a result of the exposure to social approaches drawing on complex responsive processes of relating perspective (Stacey and Griffin, 2005: 3; Stacey and

Mowles 2016: 295-301). According to this perspective, which emphasises people being interdependent and interwoven with each other locally, in the present, in the form of a conversation of gestures, with no blueprint or plan, outcomes arise, some of which no one could have predicted. Human conversation is understood as a complex, nonlinear, iterative process of communicative interaction between people of gestures and responses. Mead (1934: 43-44), writes about what he calls a 'conversation of gestures', as an ongoing process of gesturing and responding between individuals, in which meaning arises and is affected by the situation, history, and indivudality of those involved. What is radically different about this theory is that Mead argues that since the gesture/response occurs at the same time (rather than sequentially, as in the sender-receiver model), we can only discover the meaning of what we say when we see how others respond to our gesture.The result of the interaction depends on the interplay of intentions and choices. This understanding challenged my assumptions about control and planning and their effectiveness in dealing with uncertainty including uncertainty arising from retirement.

4.1.3.Power

Moving to a more social understanding of people being interdependent prompted me to examine the development of relationships in a voluntary capacity within a professional association I was involved in (an involvement that started before my retirement). The shift that occurred in these relationships after my retirement puzzled me. My assumption was that a voluntary activity of retired professional women should not involve power struggles. I assumed that power struggles are part of organisational conduct that stems from the desire to advance through the ranks. In practice, as I describe in my research projects, the entire process of establishing the team and conducting a community meeting of HR executives involved power struggles between the volunteer team leading the project.

I researched different schools of thought about power: power as an individual possession that an individual has over others that allows him to realise his will despite resistance (Weber, 1978), power with its actual exercise in situations of actual conflict between interests (Dahl, 1957), power to prevent carrying out decisions (Bachrach and Baratz) and power as the ability to influence the decision-making of others (Lukes, 2005). In the organisational literature that influenced my practice at the time, power is one of the key characteristics of leadership. In a more social perspective, which moves from the priority accorded to the individual and granting

it instead to the social, drawing on Elias (1978), I understood that we are interdependent and that power relations are part of the relationship of the figuration we are involved in. According to Elias, power is not something that belongs to the individual, but rather, a structural characteristic of relationships. He claims that human beings are interdependent, that they need each other (to varying degrees) for different reasons. The difference in the degree to which who needs whom more is what constitutes power relations (Elias, 1978:93). I learned that power relations are part of every relationship.

When I retired from the bank, I felt powerful and believed that power belonged to me. Now reflecting, I understand that my sense of power stemmed from my status as a senior executive. The bank, where I worked, had a hierarchal structure of ten management levels. Progressing up the rank of hierarchy involved, beyond an increase in salary, status symbols such as the location and size of the office, personal assistant, a company car and more. Status symbols were also reflected in organisational day-to-day conduct: invitations to most meetings and significant events, a seating place in meetings, the most senior person in a meeting who can summaries and accept the decisions that cannot be appealed. There have been cases of hierarchical bypassing as I describe in P1, when I brought the CEO to approve a marketing plan, despite the opposition of my line manager, and power struggles (mainly between peer groups). Concurrently, the official rank confers power as Weber (1947) claims, that power is a function of position (formal position) or personality (charisma). In my experience, my status at the bank reflected on my status in other areas such as in the HR professional association where I was chosen to be a board member, among family and friends who were very proud of me. In fact, a significant part of my identity was based on my status at work.

I realised that status mannerisms continued to be part of my conduct after leaving the bank. A habit that I continued to hold in my post-retirement conduct since I assumed that the power is something I accumulated over the years and it belonged to me. I demanded that other members of the team would not contradict the things I said and was sensitive when one of the team members repeated things I presented in the mentoring community meeting of HR executives we conducted. I 'played' according to the previous rules of the 'game', even though the conditions had changed and this was a new game. The unexpected encounters of power struggles with the retirees in the volunteer team made me feel I had lost the power I had before my retirement. In the process of writing this project and with the help of my learning set, I

became aware of my part in creating these struggles and my sensitivity to my position as the project manager. For example, when I announced that we (the other volunteers and I) were replacing the previous project manager who is now the sponsor of the project. This made her jump up and comment that I was not replacing her. Reflecting on the events, today with greater detachment, I can identify my pursuit for recognition of my previous status. Now I can see that I was self-centred and failed to recognise her perspective.

Up to this point in time, I treated retirement as another one of the transitions in my diverse career. The power struggles between the voluntary team within the association activity undermined my feeling powerful. I came to the realisation that power is part of every relationship and retirement has a wider impact than just leaving a workplace as I previously thought. Retirement had a significant impact on my other relationships as well.

4.1.4. Identity

While realising that power is not my asset and that in retirement I lost some of my ability to influence, in a conversation with a colleague from the DMan research community I was made aware of the question of my identity, "who am I now?" "How do I present myself?" "What to write on a name tag?" "When is it not legitimate to say I was… I am ex…? when does this start sounding pathetic?" Yet, the definition 'retiree' was not an option. I held onto my being part of the professional community. The long list of activities I was involved in, which even then seemed long to me, indicates my ambition to maintain the professional recognition and status which I expected to continue to reflect on my social relationships. This conveyed the message: I am still professionally active and I do not have time for grand-parenting nor do I want to spend time with friends and I continued to expect them to appreciate my professional career.

Work occupies a great deal of our day-to-day as claimed by Marx, Sève[36] (in Burkitt, 2008: 139-141) and William James (ibid 34), which means work plays a very significant role in shaping one's identity, and so retirement or a change in the workplace can have a significant impact on us. I started to realise that retirement is not only a change of workplace, as I thought, but also a major change in life. I no longer belong to the bank hierarchy where I had worked for 35 years where the daily routine included a full set schedule that was taken care of, my phone was never silent and my mailbox was never empty. Now I no longer manage people and I am

[36] A French Marxist philosopher and psychologist

not busy preparing breakthrough work plans, but rather I am searching for leisure activities, general knowledge lectures alongside a search for professional activity. In addition, this has also affected other areas such as family relationships, where I am expected to be fully available to take care of the grandchildren, and even a change in relationships with friends who no longer respect my time. Some changes are permanent, and with some of them I am in an ongoing process of negotiation.

Questioning 'who am I now?' and following the conversation with a colleague about whether having a 'core identity' brought me to explore the theme of identity, starting from considering that self is "located inside the individual either in thought or in inner nature" (Descartes, Rousseau and Kant in Burkitt, 2008:10) to the social self. Drawing on Mead (1934) and Elias (1978), I now understand that identity is social and is constantly being formed in ongoing social interactions. We can experience ourselves only indirectly from the way others in the social group we belong to respond to us (i.e. what. Mead calls a social object to other people – detailed p. 164-5). In the narrative, I describe how my sense of self was affected by the conduct in the project team and the association head's attempt to remove me from the management of the project. When my hobby was not appreciated, I reduced my activity and stopped talking about it, on the other hand, the social activity that I initiated to promote age friendliness in organisations is appreciated so I find myself presenting this activity as my business card. I came to understand that identity is constantly being formed in an ongoing social interaction process and in retirement I felt that my identity was undermined.

The feeling of uncertainty regarding my sense of power and identity pushed me to further attempts to be professionally active on a part-time basis in order to maintain my status in the professional community. I became a partner with a consultant, who had been a service provider to the organisation in which I was the Head of TD. I thought that a figuration of two would enable me to control the conduct, and in addition, would contribute to my status in the professional community, I would lead the partnership to a breakthrough which would give me a superior position. In practice, I experienced a shift in power relations between my business partner and me. From power relations that were in my favour, as the one who had hired her, in addition to my feeling of power following her proposal for me to join her, to a figuration where I felt a sense of losing power as I was dependent on her knowledge of the model and later when she asked to add another consultant. This brought me again to continue to explore

the theme of power. Drawing on Elias's (1978) illustration through game models how individuals are interdependent, influencing and being shaped by their interactions within figurations (networks of relationships). These models simplify the relational dynamics of power by exploring contests between groups with competing interests, and helped clearify that I cannot control the conduct of other colleagues, not even in a figuration of two or three.

4.1.5. Conflict

Later, a conflict arose between my business partner and I about a proposal to a HR colleague from a financial organisation for an employee development course. The conflict caused me much distress, since my perception as an HR executive was informed by the thought in which conflicts were something that disrupts organisational efficiency and should be avoided or resolved (Heifetz et Al., 2009). Success and effective conduct should be harmonious, all the more in a new partnership of two or three. Rahim, (2001: 7-14) reviews different approaches to conflict: a number of classical scholars (Frederick Taylor, Fayol, and Weber) who regarded conflict as negative; the neo-classical scholars (Elton Mayo, Kurt Lewin and Rensis Likert) who considered conflict a negative factor, but they tried to eliminate it by improving the social system. Some modern scholars (Litterer, Whyte) who view conflict as not necessarily bad, and some (Kerr, Miles) who believe that a degree of conflict, handled in constructive manner is essential to maintaining the level of organisational effectiveness. Rahim suggests diagnosing the type of conflict according to his ten categories, and then using one of five styles of dealing with conflicts that he suggests. In my experience as a manager in organization, I could not analyse the type of conflict, choose the right way to deal with it, and control the intensity of the flames as Rahim suggested. Conflicts were unpredictable in their outbreak as well as in their outcome.

Drawing on Mead (1934) in communication of gestures between people, the response of the individual is expected and unexpected at the same time. Mead (1934) also claims that self-consciousness involves the 'I/me dialectic' in which the 'me' is social taking the generalised tendencies, and the 'I' which emerges in individual's life history, can be spontaneous. However, the 'I' and the 'me' are inseparable, they are two parts of the same act. Individuals act in relation to what is expected, according to the generalised tendency, but respond differently in the living present, which can be unexpected. In addition, following the complex responsive processes of relating perspective that proposes that behaviour is not directed by a detached

outsider. The focus is on what is happening when people respond to each other, with an emphasis on people being interdependent, suggesting that interactions among diverse humans are always complex and uncertain. Furthermore, drawing on Mowles (2015) who critiques the assumption that managers can stand aside and control the actualisation of a planned outcome, and that managers are assumed to be objective and dispassionate. He suggests that practice precedes theory "the hand often precedes the brain" (Mowles, 2015: 127) and there is no way of avoiding conflict in organisations. Moreover conflict is "necessary consequence of living amidst thoroughly social individuals who are negotiating their power differences. Without it there could be no social evolution" (ibid: 28).

In the light of this analysis, I realised that conflict is not necessarily bad, it is inevitable when doing things together and is not necessarily the result of a single event. On reflection, the conflict probably stemmed from longstanding differences in the way each of us perceived the model we used and difference in our intentions in using it. My business partner wanted to use an app, probably aiming to focus on the top management of the organisation, while I, who gained recognition from personal conversations with employees about the results of the model, resisted switching to an app. In addition, I realised that the conflict with my business partner was part of my negotiations for recognition. I wanted to be recognised by her for my professional experience, especially as I felt my influence was slipping away and I was questioning my identity. This brought me to explore the theme of recognition.

4.1.6. Recognition

Honneth (1996), a German philosopher and Hegelian, was also influenced by Mead, and develops the foundations Hegel set out for three different modes of recognition: love, law, and the ethical life. Honneth stresses the importance of social relationships for the development and maintenance of a person's identity. According to Honneth, an individual's identity depends on the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, which can be acquired through reciprocal social processes. These are developmental processes leading to the emergence of an adult. Self-confidence refers to the basic ability to express needs and desires, self-respect refers to the legitimate opportunity and moral responsibility to make claims, and self-esteem refers to the way in which a person is recognised for their unique value and achievements. He contends that recognition is not just being aware of one's existence, but is a "behavioural reaction in which we respond rationally to evaluative qualities that we have

learned to perceive, to the extent to which we are integrated into the second nature of our lifeworld" (Honneth, 2002: 513). In my experience in feedback meetings I had with people on their EQ[37] tests, I found that they felt recognised even in recognition of their weak spots. Indeed, Taylor (1997) refers to the situation in which we also do not like what others recognise in us and Sarra (2019) adds that recognition may be experienced as confrontational or conflictual. While Honneth refers to recognition of human being among other human beings, Ricoeur (2005), a French philosopher, offers the notion of 'recognition' to guide ethical action in a particular situation. Only through being recognised by others do we understand and thereby recognise ourselves, and others recognise themselves only through our recognition of them.

Exploring the theme of recognition through Honneth, (1996, 2001, 2002), Ikäheimo and Laitinen (2007), Taylor (1997), Ricoeur (2005) and Sarra (2019), I came to understand that mutual recognition is an essential component through which our sense of identity evolves, and recognition can also be experienced through conflict and differences.

My conflict with my business partner stemmed from my struggle to be recognised for my experience and knowledge. Following retirement, the loss of status and belonging to the bank from which my identity was formed, I struggled for recognition from my business partner, the professional community as well as from the consultees in the organisations where we worked with our model.

At this stage, reflecting on my attempts to join various HR activities and on a further reflexive turn, I acknowledged that I jumped from activity to activity in an attempt to reposition myself in the professional community. In each activity, I encountered power struggles and began to realise that in retirement I felt a loss of my sense of power, recognition and status that I previously thought were assets that belonged to me. This led me to feel that my identity was undermined. I realised that retirement is an even more significant event than I previously thought. It was different from merely another transition between roles.

This led me to focus on exploring retirement in depth. Taking the first step, I wanted to know what I missed when I did not take seriously the retirement workshops offered to me.

[37] Our partnership was based on a model that included Emotional Quotient (EQ) assessments. Reuven Bar-On (2006) an American and Israeli clinical and organisational psychologist coined the term EQ for emotional intelligence (as an analogy to Intelligence Quotient -IQ) and developed an assessment to analyse it.

4.1.7.The prevailing approach to retirement in Israel

Through meetings with retirement workshop consultants, I learned that most of these workshops are based on Atchley's (1976) model which is a seven-phase model of transition to retirement until a person builds a new routine and identity. The phases are: the pre-retirement phase when retirement is still a distant event; as the retirement date approaches and becomes more concrete; the retirement date; the honeymoon period immediately after retirement; the disillusionment phase that is characterised by a decrease in mood and sometimes a feeling of emptiness is added; the reorganisation phase when the retirees develop a more realistic view of the overall situation and build a new routine and identity; and the stability phase, the existence of a stable life framework. Consultants also use a linear curve model that describes how people adapt to changes based on the Kübler-Ross model (1972) that describes the stages a person experiencing events of loss may go through: denial → anger → bargaining → depression → acceptance. These models assume rational causality: the cause of any personal change is believed to be the rational effort of the individual without the involvement of society. This is in addition to the assumption of the expressivist theories of self, which are also used in retirement workshops and consultants. According to them, the individual realises his inner self in communication with others, unfolding of enfolded mature form. This individualistic perspective places the responsibility for change on the individual. In the case of difficulties, it can cause feelings of personal failure that are not shared with others, as happened to me. In the peer group meeting of retirees which I instigated, the participants were surprised to find out that others were also experiencing difficulties.

For me, throughout my career, retirement was seen as the end of the professional career and a reminder of the finitude of life, a kind of professional death "As in the case of death, the problem is that the living find it hard to identify with the dying" (Elias, 1985:3). I could not recognise myself as one of those retirees I had previously treated as a burden and less worthy when I was in HR, an image I held and felt reflected in the eyes of others as in the meeting with the HR executive who did not want to engage in preparation for retirement at the age of 55, her age.

In addition, I had difficulty associating the challenges in retirement with myself. I preferred to relate to the difficulties of the silent phone, and emails, the sense of losing power, the

confusion and frustration that plans did not go as expected, through the story of the others, while I remained in a detached position.

Through interactions with the research community, which is an encounter with others who are different, one's patterns of behaviour can be challenged. Foulkes (1964), terms it a 'hall of mirrors' where participants can see themselves and their reactions reflected back at them in the group. I became aware that my attempts to cope with the transition to retirement through habitual management and control tools and pursuing professional activity caused me frustration and anxiety. A breakdown which I denied. When habits are disturbed and we encounter obstacles, it feels like a breakdown. Breakdowns can trigger reflexive awareness that enables the creation of new habits through actions. (Dewey in Brinkmann, 2017:164).

The way I made meaning of retirement was influenced by my upbringing, my experience at work and the Israeli social culture. I grew up with my parent's messages of being productive, independent and in control of my life. I worked all my career in a bank where older employees were treated as a burden. As an HR executive, I did not spend training budgets on those approaching retirement. When we considered promotion or expensive training, one of the first things we looked at was age. This preference for youth corresponded with the Israeli culture that values achievement and youth.

In reviewing the prevailing attitude in my environment to retirement and retirees and reflecting on my own attitude towards retirement and older employees, I now realise that my perceptions were a reflection of the environment in which I operated.

4.1.8.Retirement as a social object

This led me to conclude that rather than seeing retirement as an individualistic phenomenon, it may more helpfully be understood as a social object (Mead, 1925, 1934), a population-wide tendency to act in similar ways in similar situations that has evolved over time in the many interactions, and is influenced by the culture and history of the particular society. Individuals tend to act in particular ways in social routines, which creates our habits according to Dewey. I also draw on other authors who point to a social perspective, but describe this in different terms, for example: 'second nature' or 'personality structure' according to Elias (2000:xvii) ; Bourdieu (2000:140) uses the term 'habitus' which he describes as sets of dispositions, influenced by their social class. These dispositions are embodied and operate largely beneath the surface of consciousness.

I find that understanding retirement as a social object is more helpful than seeing retirement as an event of loss that needs to be overcome individually. It means that coping with the transition to retirement is a change of habits. Pedwell (2021: 169) drawing on Dewey's (1934) claim that we are our habits, posits further that change in the level of the habit is possible through the cooperation of the individuals with the environment and the involvement of emotions, in which change at the level of habit becomes possible. In addition, I draw on Mead (1934: 215) who claims that as a person adjusts himself to a certain environment he becomes a different individual and in that he affects the community in which he lives. I argue that the transition to retirement is a change of habits which happens in social interactions with our social environment. At the same time our social environment also changes: the social object of what it means to be retired is forming and being formed at the same time by social relations, in which the individual and the social cannot be separated. This is transformative causality in which "the individual change cannot be separated from change in the groups to which an individual belongs" (Stacey, 2006: 191). This social perspective differs from rationalist or formative causality that underpin the retirement workshops, I reviewed above, which presume that the individual makes rational decisions and acts separately from the social, or the individual comes before the society and uses society to realise his inner self.

4.1.9. Status

On a reflexive turn of all the projects, I recognise the topic of status as a common thread woven throughout all the projects: my status in Israeli society as an immigrant girl, my promotion in the hierarchy at the bank where I worked. After retirement, this was emphasised in my sensitivity to my status as a project manager in the professional association (P2) and my status in the configuration of the partnership with Adele (P3) which further emphasised how much I tried to maintain my status in the professional community. Furthermore, in P4 I mentioned that I did not participate in retirement workshops due to status considerations.

In exploring the theme of status, I came to understand that status refers to a relative position/worth and can refer to any axis for which we would like to check where we are located. This insight draws on Diefenbach and Sillince (2011) who claim that in orthodox organisations there is connection between the formal and informal status, as well as on Destin et al. (2017) who found in their research that socioeconomic status (SES) constitutes the basis of subjective social status, from which I understand that the individual's subjective perception

of their social status is based on their objective SES. Bourdieu expands the content of capital to include cultural capital, class fraction (divisions within classes), locations and capital of the family of origin and the changes in it over time. In my experience, my status was mainly influenced by my official position in the bank. I realised that the official status at the bank had a wide effect beyond the bank framework. For example, I was chosen as a board member of the HR association and was invited to other professional frameworks. My status at the bank also influenced relations in other figurations I belong to, such as with my family and friends. My father was proud when he was recognised as my father in his branch of the bank and my friends appreciated my limited leisure time. All of these influenced my sense of identity. Destin et al., (2017) use the term 'status-based identity'.

Drawing on Anderson et al., (2006), I understand that the sense of status is a position or rank in relation to others, created in the process of mutual recognition in the group of belonging, where the others evaluate the individual and his importance to the group. The way I saw retirees and what I imagined that I saw reflected in the eyes of others is a lack of appreciation for retirees, those who are no longer contributing to the group (the way I used to think about retirees). In other words, status is a sense of value as we imagine others are judging us. Status is part of relationship rather than a characteristic of the individual (similar to power) and, drawing on Elias (1978: 93) it can shift.

After retirement, I described the search for being recognised and valued as a search for meaning; 'to do something that would make me feel meaningful'; to feel valued (a common expression among retirees). Frankl (1984) claims that a search for a meaning in life is the central human motivational force, and that breakdown events can promote a review of personal meaning. According to him, the individual chooses what is meaningful for him and is helped by society in order to realise it. In a more social understanding of the self, I draw on Mead (1934) who claims that meaning arises within the interplay between gesture and response, on Elias (1985:33) who claims that the meaning of everything a person does lies in what they mean to others, and on Rosa (2020) who claims that human beings' basic desire is for relationships. Thus, I understand that meaning arises in social interactions. In my experience of initiating, together with colleagues, a social activity to promote inclusion of older employees in organizations (see p 170 in section on contribution to practice), I now talk publicly about retirement at conferences and on our website and present myself as a retiree without

reservations. In this new figuration, I feel appreciated and recognised by my colleagues, managers in social organisations who cooperate with us, government officials and managers in business organisations who are beginning to show interest in the subject. This makes me feel I am involved in a meaningful activity. I argue that new meaning arose in a process of mutual recognition and resonance.

Social interactions could be conflictual at times, both between myself and others, as well as in my own personal attitudes as I was forced to confront my own prejudices about the value I had previously given to retirees. I came to recognise and value older employees by becoming more aware of my own and others' emotions and responses to what 'retirement' meant. When this resonated with other retirees, and they responded in a way that helped me understand I was not alone, I found myself exploring new ways of thinking about what retirement might mean. In hindsight, I appreciate these insights arose as I became less centred on my own experience, through taking account of the values and experience of others through social interactions and reflection. This enabled me to talk and share my retirement experience.

I therefore conclude that the process that makes the individual feel meaningful, valued, belonging, recognised and appreciated, is the same social process of sense of status. I argue that in the process of retirement, our sense of status is constantly ebbing and flowing as a consequence of shifting power figurations, as we constantly re-evaluate our interdependencies with each other, based on who needs whom the most. However, the change is not only individual, but it also influences our social groups at the same time. Our activity also affects the environment in which we operate and I am starting to see a change in the discourse I am involved in regarding retirement. HR managers who previously refused to talk about retirement and older employees, have begun to show interest. Furthermore, a well-established organisational consulting firm is negotiating with us on expanding their consulting activities to retain older workers in the workplace.

4.2. Key arguments

In this section, I summarise my key arguments as they emerged through writing the projects and reflecting on them in retrospect.

4.2.1. Argument 1: Conventional frameworks and models based on individualist and linear assumptions of retirement have limitations when applied in practice.

The prevalent models of retirement are based on individualist and linear assumptions in which the transition to retirement is in stages until the individual reaches a new equilibrium, which is a result of rational decision making and planning of the individual. This creates a sense of control and certainty. In this way, the transition to retirement is understood as self-centred and certain. The assumption of linearity is reflected in the different stages that retirees go through, which gives a sense of a process: a series of actions in order to achieve a result and an assumption of a direct relationship between planning and the result. In order to succeed in dealing with the transition to retirement, the individual is required to set goals and a plan for how to reach them, assuming that the future can be planned and predicted and it is possible to reach an equilibrium.

Understanding retirement as an individual experience meant that I understood the transition to retirement through individual decision-making and efforts to reach goals, which is a centred perspective that focuses on the efforts of the individual. This means taking a more involved perspective, attributing to the self what is happening and being unaware that we are interdependent.

In reality, I found that not all the stages took place, they were not sequential and nor were they necessarily one-off. I found that behaviour and results cannot be controlled and plans are not necessarily realised. This caused me to repeatedly attempt to find professional activities and a sense of being stuck. As a result, I felt anxious and frustrated. In addition, I have not yet reached a sense of acceptance and equilibrium.

When the individual feels he is not fulfilling his expectations, there is a probability that they will perceive it as a personal failure and experience a lack of hope, which is probably what happened to the retired executive who could not get out of bed, according to the gossip (P4). This person felt a sense of permanent loss of the assets they had which is frustrating and potentially paralysing. In my case, when my plans did not turn out as expected and there was

a gap between what I had imagined retirement would be and reality, the uncertainty led to anxiety and repeated attempts to recreate what I felt I had lost - status, power and identity - rather than reflecting on what was happening to me. I tried to cope with the feeling of uncertainty by re-planning and re-setting goals, a habitual use of control and management tools.

Exploring my retirement experience, I realised that the value of prevalent models have their limitations when applied in practice. For these reasons, my inquiry has led me to seek additional ways of making sense of retirement, in particular, ways that are based on a more social understanding of the self. I draw on Elias and Mead, who were both influenced by the Hegelian tradition, who argue that, as individuals we are born into an existing society which shapes our sense of self and is constantly being formed in an ongoing social interaction process.

In my next argument, I put forward how a more social understanding of the transition to retirement can be more helpful.

4.2.2. Argument 2: Understanding retirement as paradoxically an individual experience, and at the same time also a social process offers a different perspective that can be more helpful for retirees in dealing with the transition to retirement.

From my experience, retiring involves uncertainty, encountering unfamiliar situations and a disruption of habits. My assumption was that with the management experience I had gained and with proper planning, I would be able to continue being professionally active and would continue to receive the recognition and status I had. As is often heard among retirees, I also stated that I was searching for meaning. I thought that the power I had accumulated throughout my progress up the ranks at the bank belonged to me. In P2, I describe a conversation with a colleague from the DMan research community. I argued that I have a core identity and that retirement, which I saw as a temporary interruption in my career, does not affect my identity at all. I was aware that I had lost my official status, my title, but I expected that my social status would remain. My colleague Paula (P4) also described the feeling of losing status, influence and not receiving the help she was used to from those who worked with her (P4). I was looking for new professional networks to belong to, instead of belonging to the bank, as a solution to my desire to continue being professionally active. I thought I just needed

to find a new professional community from which I could recover what I perceived as a temporarily loss of capital.

I describe how the power struggles I encountered in the activity with other retirees in the HR association made me feel that I was losing power (P2). I had a conflict with my business partner over the recognition of the relevance of the knowledge I gained over the years (P3). The head of the HR association, my family and my friends changed their attitude towards me making me feel that my social status had been undermined. The meeting with the HR executive who avoided talking about retirement made me feel not valued as a retiree (P4). All of these made me question my identity, which was reflected in the confusion regarding the definition of my title and wondering how to introduce myself (P4). The gap between my expectations and what happened in practice led to feelings of a lack of control and anxiety, which were manifested in the defence mechanism of denial and my refusal to recognise myself as being a retiree. When the research community confronted me with my denial of the breakdown I was going through, I burst into tears. I felt those were irreparable losses and I felt trapped in a Sisyphus circle; unable to reach the goal I expected to reach.

The assumption that retiring is an individual experience is a perception that is supported by the retirement workshops I describe in P4 (p. 118-122) and I refer to in my first argument. This perception causes those who experience difficulties to feel it as a personal failure and not to talk about or share their difficulties with others. In making such assumptions, I realised how I and others silenced ourselves from exploring what might be happening. I pushed back questions about feelings of shame or vulnerability (p. 124). The participants in the peer group I held (P4) were also surprised to discover that others also experienced such difficulties.

To understand my retirement experience, I explored those themes I felt I had lost: power, identity, recognition and status. In P2, I write about how I felt that my sense of power was undermined. Drawing on Elias (1978), I came to understand that power is not something that belongs to the individual, but rather, is a structural characteristic of relationships. As human beings are interdependent, they need each other (to varying degrees) for different reasons. The difference in the degree to which who needs whom more is what constitutes power relations (ibid: 93), (P2 and P3).

Similar to power, status is part of relationship. In retirement, I lost the official status. Drawing on Anderson et al. (2001, 2006), I came to understand that the sense of status is a position or

rank in relation to others and it is created in the process of mutual recognition, where recognition is also a social process. According to Honneth, (1996, 2001, 2002), Ikäheimo and Laitinen (2007), and Ricoeur (2005) recognition is a response towards perceived evaluative qualities of the other which arises from power relations: who needs whom the most. Taylor (1997) adds that recognition is also a situation in which we do not like what others recognise in us, such as the HR executive who did not recognise the benefit of our proposal to start preparing for retirement five to ten years prior to retirement. Thus, mutual recognition is an essential component through which our sense of identity evolves and our social status is formed. Only through being recognised by others do we understand and thereby recognise ourselves, and others recognise themselves only through our recognition of them. In addition, drawing on Elias (1985), meaning also emerges in a process of social interactions of mutual recognition in which the value that the individual allocates to an activity is obtained from the judgement reflected in the eyes of others. I conclude that status emerges in social processes of mutual recognition, in which the value that the individual gives to something is reflected through the eyes of others. In the process of retirement, our sense of status is constantly ebbing and flowing as a consequence of shifting power figurations, as we constantly re-evaluate our interdependencies with each other, based on who needs whom the most.

This understanding reflects the change in my way of thinking on power from an individualistic perspective to a more social one. Power relations, recognition, status and the sense of value, which I felt as a personal experience, emerge in social interactions since humans, are interdependent.

My understanding of my experience of retirement as socially formed, and (paradoxically) individually felt, arose from my research inquiry and my experience, which led me to openly talk and share my experience and to realise that others may have similar experiences. To understand that the future is predictable and unpredictable at the same time, things can happen unexpectedly and this may, or may not, be because of my personal failure or success or the way others may judge retirees (as a result of their habitual patterns, as I previously did). This understanding enabled me to reduce my anxiety. It helped me become less centred and more detached for reflection to take place and thus I could recognise myself as a retiree from the way others in my social group responded to my recognition of them, which was different

from Paula's and my expectations. It enabled me to be open to other activities that eventually developed into an activity that leverages my experience as a retiree for the benefit of older employees.

I argue that understanding retirement paradoxically as both an individual experience, and at the same time also a social process offers a perspective that can be more helpful for retirees in dealing with the transition to retirement, consultants who conduct retirement workshops, HR managers who take care of employees from recruitment to retirement and policy makers who are considering changing the retirement policy.

4.2.3. Argument 3: 3. Retirement is a 'social object' which means that the transition to retirement is a change of habits which takes place in interactions with the community to which one belongs. Thus, both self and society are paradoxically 'forming and being formed 'by what the concept of retirement means, which may therefore differ within and between communities.

For me, throughout my career, retirement was seen as the end of a professional career and a reminder of the finitude of life, a kind of professional death which I could not identify with nor could I recognise myself as one of those retirees. In reviewing the prevailing attitude in my environment to retirement and retirees and the way I understood retirement and older employees, I realise that my perception is a reflection of the environment in which I operated. My upbringing was conducted beneath a cloud of individuality, I worked my entire career in a bank where elderly employees were seen and treated as a burden. Furthermore, in Israeli culture, retirement is linked to old age (Manor, 2017), which has a lower value due to it being a culture that values youth, achievement, economic production and action.

This led me to conclude that retirement can be viewed as what Mead calls a 'social object' (Mead, 1925, 1934), a population-wide tendency to act in similar ways in similar situations that have evolved over time in many interactions and is influenced by the culture and history of the particular society. The social object is particularised by the individuals in their local interactions in the living present, in the specific situation they are in, and in the same act the wider pattern is formed. Stacey and Mowles (2016: 371) point out that Mead draws attention to paradoxical processes of generalisation and particularisation at the same time. Individuals act in relation to that which is common to all of them (generalising) but respond somewhat differently in each living present (particularising). Each particularisation makes the further evolution of the

generalisation possible, and at the same time individuals will differ in the way they particularise the generalisation (Stacey and Mowles, 2016: 367). For example, when I was the head of TD, I particularised the common message of rejuvenating the organisation by avoiding spending budgets on older employees, thus contributing to the tendency to relate to older employees as a burden. According to what Mead refers to as the 'I/me dialectic', the 'me' is social taking the generalised tendencies, and the 'I' which emerges in individual's life history, can be spontaneous. However, the 'I' and the 'me' are inseparable, they are two parts of the same act. Individuals act in relation to what is expected, according to the generalised tendency, but respond differently in the living present, which explains the difference in perceptions towards retirement among different individuals. I explain below how these insights helped me come to a different understanding of retirement to those I had summarised in my first argument.

When I retired, the general expectations I imagined about retirement were, according to the generalised tendency in Israeli culture. I would engage in leisure activities, devote more time to social gatherings and help the younger generation, as my parents did, in taking care of the grandchildren so that their parents could invest in their careers, and if I aspired to meaningful activity then I could volunteer for social causes. Accepting this perception means thinking of an individual as part of a whole, which means a loss of individual agency, being like everyone else, being part of a general pattern. As a result of the influence of my upbringing (P1), I could not recognise myself in this generalisation, I wanted to continue being professionally valued. This lack of mutual recognition was the initial breakdown (although at the time I did not recognise it as such)

At the other pole is acting individually, doing what the individual wants and perceives as the right thing to do and refusing to recognise the prevailing approach to retirement, as I did through denial. Agency is thus perceived as being located in the autonomous individual. This means being centred on individual experiences (as I refer to in argument 1) with fewer resources paying attention to social influences. Expressing a different interpretation than mine was seen by me as a personal rejection. Thereby being at the risk of being excluded. I felt devalued when the 55 year old HR executive did not want to talk about retirement which I felt stigmatised older people. My self- centredness caused me to blindly accelerate in repeated cycles of searching for professional community. My belief in my own autonomy made me feel as though this impasse was my own fault, and that I could unilaterally find my own way out of

it. This led me, and also many others in my retiree peer group, to feel anxious and stuck. It was manifested in different ways such as the retired executive who could not get out of bed according to gossip, or the concern of Paula's daughter that caused her to publish a post on Facebook (P4). It took me some time to realise that I had lost status and value.

I argue that understanding retirement as a social object means that the transition to retirement is a paradoxical process of particularising a generalisation of what retirement means in local interactions in the living present, in the specific situation in which we find ourselves. Since the generalised tendency is particularised differently by each individual in the living present, it can explain the difference in perceptions towards retirement. Understanding retirement as a social object enabled me to be less self-centred and judgmental, meaning an understanding that the interpretations of retirement can stem from generalisations. This can enable a discourse for new understanding, continuation of discourse and the possibility of influencing social change.

Individuals tend to act in particular ways in social routines, which creates our habits. According to Dewey "we are our habits"(Dewey, 1917: 19), the virtues as well as the vices. Habits are functional, useful and are constantly evolving in our relationship with the environment and are our way of being in the world as Brinkmann (2014: 83) expanded on Dewey. Habits are our habituated ways of acting and thinking in the world. They not only have the potential for change in social interaction, but they also maintain and reinforce it.

In my experience, the transition to retirement involved a change in my professional working habits that has been accompanied by a more important change: that in my previous and habitual perception of what retirement means. According to Dewey, habits are being formed and reformed through the ongoing interaction of subjects and environments, and they also affect and reconfigure environments (Brinkmann, 2013: 87). Pedwell (2021: 169) also argues that change in the level of the habit is possible through the cooperation of the individuals with the environment, alongside introspection and inhabitation involving opening up the modes of consciousness, reflective thoughts and emotional attention, when sensing becomes active by uncomfortable encounters (ibid:170). Dewey claims that when habits are interrupted it can be experienced in a breakdown or when we encounter obstacles. We then become aware of the world and ourselves, and a learning process is created that enables the creation of new habits via doing (Brinkmann, 2014: 164). Rosa (2021) also argues that change is possible when

relationships with others involve emotions. At the community meeting, when I realised that I was denying being a retiree, I mourned the realisation of the loss of status and at the same time felt a sense of relief. Emotions are part of the social communication (Mead, 1934: 279). For example, after the meeting with the research community in which I became aware of my post-retirement breakdown as a result of my habits being interrupted, I was able to start talking about the retirement experience with others, to invite colleagues to share experiences and started to renegotiate a different understanding about what retirement might mean for us and for each other.

In addition, drawing on Mead (1934) who claims that conversation of gestures directed at oneself and others at the same time, I was also negotiating with myself, (thinking) regarding the value of different activities and my recognition of myself as a retiree. At the same time, I was negotiating with my social environment, struggling for recognition of my professional value as a retiree. These ongoing parallel processes of communication enabled me to make continuous adjustments between the general expectations and my perceptions of retirement. At the same time, it allowed me to try to influence the perception of others about retirement, thus the change of self is not separate from the change of the society to which the individual belongs (Mead, 1935: 215-6). According to Stacey's (2006) review of different theories of personal change, this is a transformative causality in which "the individual change cannot be separated from change in the groups to which an individual belongs" (Stacey, 2006: 191).
I argue that understanding retirement as a social object means that the transition to retirement is a paradoxical process of particularisation and generalization, which is a continuity and change of habits that takes place in interaction with the community to which one belongs. It is an ongoing process of iterated interactions that involves being aware, reflective and emotionally attentive. In addition, it involves recognising being a retiree through which an inner parallel process (thinking) enables adjustment between the general expectations and individual perceptions of retirement. Thus, the individual change in what retirement might mean cannot be separated from change in the groups to which an individual belongs, small changes can be amplified and in the same act a wider pattern is formed. This can explain variation within and between communities' attitudes towards retirement and can encourage individuals and collectives to try and change the general tendency.

4.3. Contributions of this Thesis

In this section, I present how the insights I reached in my research on retirement can contribute to others. The main audience of my research are retirees with an emphasis on senior executives who are about to retire or have retired; as well as managers in organisations, with an emphasis on HR managers who are responsible for taking care of employees from the moment they join the organisation; retirement consultants, and policy makers in the field of employment and welfare.

Below, I will refer separately to the contribution of my thesis to knowledge and its contribution to practice.

4.3.1. Contribution to knowledge

My research contends that retirement is a social object. Retirement is recognised for large numbers of people as a global social patterns of general withdrawal from work and a greater orientation to family and leisure activities. But these patterns never quite play out in exactly the same way because they are context and culture dependent and these will differ from time to time, and from culture to culture. In addition, at the same time each individual negotiates retirement differently in their particular group. This means that retirement can be played out differently by different communities and by different individuals.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of retirement as a paradox. It is experienced individually, but at the same time socially formed. The individual experience is informed by the particular social relationships which s/he has developed over time. This is radically different from how the prevailing models in Israel relate to retirement, namely as an individual experience that requires management tools. There are some models that relate to social relationships, but as secondary to the individual: the social is the source of support for the realisation of individual plans or they talk about social processes in a general sense. My research understands this in a very different manner, and claims that the social object of retirement is a paradox of the individual and is realised through negotiation and meaning-making with others (social).

Furthermore, my research explores retirement through the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, an angle that has not been researched so far. In doing so, I extended the areas in which this perspective is manifested by drawing attention to the predictably unpredictable nature of the experience. At the same time, I have contributed to the existing literature on retirement through offering a more social understanding.

Although this thesis focuses primarily on retirement within Israeli society, I claim that it also contributes to the broader body of knowledge in both retirement studies and HR management. I write in the tradition of HR scholars such as Wang and Ulrich. Wang (2007; 2012) who writes on retirement as well as providing a review (Wang, and Shi 2014) of theoretical development and empirical findings in literature on retirement in the past two decades. In their review, they focuson identifying various factors embedded in the retirement process (e.g., individual attributes, preretirement job and organizational factors, family factors, retirement transition factors, and postretirement activities) that may influence the adjustment to retirement (ibid: 224) reflecting an individualistic approach.

Ulrich's seminal work on HR management (1997, 2005, 2009) addresses retirement primarily in terms of maintaining employee rights. However, in response to increasing life expectancy, Ulrich has recently advised HR managers to reconsider their approach to retirement. The contribution of my thesis lies in its adoption of a social perspective, offering a more nuanced understanding of retirement as a process shaped through negotiation and meaning-making within social contexts.

My research contributes and adds to to the existing academic literature on retirement in Israel. In the course of my research, I found that much of the available literature focuses on financial planning in retirement, which is not the subject of my study. The predominant models I encountered were those of Atchley (1976) and Kübler-Ross (1972), which assume linearity and the autonomous individual making rational decisions or going through a grieving process, as detailed in P4. My research can enrich the existing literature by incorporating the perspective of a retiree and offering an understanding of retirement as a social process which involves questions of identity, power and status. I

intend to publish an article based on my research in the forthcoming book '*When the Workplace Meets Ageing: Social and Organisational Aspects*', which brings together articles on retirement from various perspectives. Among the submitted topics, my article stands out in presenting a social perspective on retirement.

Additionally, my thesis contributes to the literature on business management, with a focus on HR management. HR management literature in Israel with key texts including *The New HR* (Smilansky, 1997), *Human Resource Management* (Meshoulam and Harpaz, 2015), and a textbook by the Open University (Bar Chaim, 2007). In this literature, the main emphasis is on management within the boundaries of the organisation from hiring employees to retirement, with the latter mainly addressing finance and pension rights. My research contributes to HR professionals' understanding of retirees and their post-retirement experiences, a topic that, as I demonstrate in my research, is rarely discussed or addressed in organisational discourse. The attitudes of HR professionals have wider implications for how older employees are treated, as I illustrate with examples from my own experience, where retirees were viewed as a nuisance. This has broader consequences for the organisation's influence on its external environment.

Organisational impact on the community is usually addressed under the banner of social responsibility or sustainability. Chandler (2014) discusses how organisations can actively engage with communities, including retirees, and contribute to their well-being. My thesis proposes an expansion of the circles of influence of the organisation on the community through their retired employees. The understanding of retirement as a social object, which is influenced by the individual history and experience at work means that attitudes towards it within the organisation affect the community from which the organisation's employees come and vice versa. Cultures which do not value retirees tend to also affect the value that those in stigmatised groups come to accept for themselves (as in the case Elias and Scotson (1994) describe in their book "*The Established and the Outsiders*"). Moreover, it is an extension of the understanding of HR managers that their management affects the ability of the individual who leaves the organisation to continue working (employability). Their managerial responsibility does not end at the moment the employee leaves the organisation. My colleague and I presented our approach to not-for-

profit organisations that expressed support and connected us to organisations, some of which began to express interest and a desire to promote the issue.

Finally, my thesis contributes to the understanding of retirement in Israel. With a life expectancy of 82.1 years, Israel ranks 11th among OECD countries (Ministry of Health and OECD report). The proportion of the 55-64 age group is steadily increasing, and by 2019, it represented approximately one-fifth of the working-age population (25-64) (Aaron Institute for Economic Policy, 2021). These demographic shifts, alongside other studies, have led academics to highlight potential economic and social challenges, including the financial burden of pensions and shortages in certain professions as a growing portion of the population reaches retirement age. My research supports the direction taken by research institutes like the Aaron Institute for Economic Policy and the Israel Democracy Institute by shedding light on the neglected topic of how changing demographics pose risks to organisations. My research presents the individual experience of retirement, offering an additional perspective that may be of interest to policymakers, particularly in discussions surrounding the extension of the retirement age.

4.3.2. Contribution to practice

My contribution to practice has evolved throughout the writing of this thesis. In Project 4, I describe a meeting with my colleague Paula, where we shared our retirement experiences and explored alternative models for preparing retirees. This initial model was revised based on insights from my research. Subsequently, alongside two colleagues, we established an organisation aimed at promoting age inclusiveness in the workplace.

The increase in life expectancy and quality of life means that many employees of retirement age wish—and often need—to remain in the workforce. Organisations willhave to consider how to engage these employees and leverage their skills. We provide consulting services to managers, offering tools to address age bias through measurement and guidance. Our approach, based on both subjective employee perspectives (Eppler-Hattab et al., 2020) and client data, aims to raise awareness of ageism and foster organisational improvement in managing employees of all ages. We advocate that including older employees can enhance age diversity, positively influencing organisational culture, knowledge retention, and financial performance.

Since the workplace has a significant impact on recognition and thus on forming identity, our activity of raising awareness and discourse about age bias can influence discourse and increase the chances that employees of retirement age will be professionally valued. This can create a social change of the prevailing perception (social object) of retirement.

Our collaboration with a consulting firm has opened dialogues with several organisations about measuring employee perceptions of older workers. Based on these findings, we intend to develop tailored action plans to promote age inclusiveness. We also plan to bid for an upcoming government tender to certify "Age-Friendly Employers," supported by a philanthropic foundation dedicated to promoting age diversity.

In parallel, I presented my findings in academic forums:

1. Israeli Association for Gerontology Conference – I submitted a proposal for the session on "Employment and Retirement" at the 25th biennial conference, which focuses on ageing as a social and economic resource. The conference is attended by academics in relevant fields and policy makers.

2. European COST Actions (LeverAge) – I applied to participate in this multi-age workforce research network, fostering collaboration among scientists across Europe.

Furthermore, my research has already influenced HR education. In collaboration with a colleague teaching HR in a Master's programme, we developed a course on retirement and ageism, which was taught in 2023 and received positive feedback. I hope that more academic institutions will adopt similar courses to shift the discourse and attitudes towards older employees.

My findings can also contribute to retirement consultancies by broadening their approach to include a social perspective on retirement. I do not advocate cancelling traditional retirement workshops but instead propose complementing them with insights that challenge assumptions of rational, linear transitions. My work may also assist senior executives in understanding the emotional challenges associated with retirement, helping them find resonance through shared experiences, as demonstrated in the peer

group meeting I facilitated. This group provided participants with an opportunity to discuss their anxiety about retirement, revealing that their struggles were not isolated experiences.

My research offers valuable insights to policymakers, particularly in light of recent government initiatives to extend the retirement age. I support recommendations to abolish mandatory retirement ages, enabling individuals to work as long as they wish, fostering a sense of agency. We have engaged with government ministries about aligning our initiative with their broader "optimal ageing" strategy, aimed at enhancing the employment of older workers.

I am completing this research during a profoundly difficult time in my country. The recent terrorist attack, resulting in the deaths of over 1,000 civilians and ongoing war, has placed much of the burden of civilian life on older generations. This crisis has highlighted the critical contributions of retirees, whose experience and wisdom have supported both the nation and family structures during these challenging times.

In summary, the primary contribution of my thesis is to introduce a social perspective on retirement, advocating for a shift in organisational practices. Through lectures, consulting, and academic engagement, I aim to raise awareness of age bias and the social dimensions of retirement. Incorporating these topics into HR education and organisational discourse can foster inclusiveness and position ageism as an integral part of corporate social responsibility.

4.3.3. Limitations of research

My research is a result of a reflexive inquiry into my own experience of retirement and my struggle to deal with the transition to retirement. The conclusions that emerged are the result of my history, the situation I was in and the other characters that were involved in my experience. Additionally, my interpretation of my experience was influenced by the response of the research community that was involved in my research process. The research framework in which I conducted my research: the supervisors, the research community and the learning set had a significant influence on my final thesis, and they too learned from and contributed to these conclusions by their consistent involvement.

A different group of people may have taken different research avenues and potentially different conclusions.

Autoethnograpy entails recollection, reflexivity, and storytelling. My narratives were written retrospectively, recalling events and nuances without real-time records, meaning that some details may be incomplete or shaped by what I found convenient or significant to remember. Through engagement with the research community, their questions, and comments, I developed the ability to analyse events both as involved and detached, engaging in reflection and reflexivity. This process enabled me to consider others' perspectives and refine the details of my narratives. Importantly, it also required me to confront aspects of my experience that I found uncomfortable. In addition, there is no claim here to search for truth, but to bring those experiences of retirement that influenced me.

In addition to the emotions involved in writing autoethnograpy, my narratives includes unflattering personal experiences that I do not usually exposed to others. In doing so I exposed myself, subject myself to scrutiny and relinquished some sense of control over my own narratives. In chosing autoethnography as a method of my research I acknowledged the risk as part of my desire to deeply explore and understand the retirement experience and in the hope that this will encourage an open discussion about the difficulties in the retirement process - a discussion that will facilitate and contribute to changing the attitude towards retirement.

Writing autoethnography is inherently emotional, as it involves revealing personal, and often unflattering, experiences that I would not typically share. In doing so, I exposed myself to scrutiny and relinquished some control over how my story is interpreted. By choosing autoethnography as my research method, I acknowledged the risks involved but embraced them as necessary for a deeper exploration of the retirement experience. My hope is that this openness will encourage candid discussion about the challenges of retirement, fostering a shift in attitudes and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the retirement process.

There is a limitation that I did not refer to in my research which may be of interest for further study: the influence of gender. When I held the peer group meeting, which included only women, the topic of gender came up. Some wondered if men's experience of retirement is different. In my research, I did not refer to the topic of gender as the literature on retirement in Israel, that I reviewed, contained hardly any reference to this variable.

As an example, an area where there might be different experiences by gender is related to helping the extended family with childcare. There seems to be a cultural expectation for a retired woman (who is a grandmother) to take on such duties in order to help her adult children manage their own careers. I have not researched this, but observing my social group in Israel I note that this expectation is highly gendered, and that retired men have far less expectations placed on them in this area. I think it would be interesting to explore this topic.

4.4. Further research

My colleagues and I, through our work with organisations would like to explore whether gender affects the perceptions of retirement. The data we expect to receive from organisations as part of the age-friendly index may form the basis for further research including gender in retirement. In addition, in Israel, people who continue to serve in the army or the other security forces retire at the relatively young age of 45. Even in the start-up organisations, especially those acquired, young people find themselves retiring. It would also be interesting to understand their perception of retirement.

While my research is specific to Israeli culture—the environment in which I live and work—it also presents opportunities for further study. Future researchers in different contexts may consider applying these methods to explore the concept of retirement in other cultural settings.

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6. Appendices

Summary of the focus group meeting

Dated: August 8, 2022

Participants: 8

Question: Introduce yourselves

M: For 35 years worked in a variety of positions in the field of education. After retirement she studied nursing but does not practice it.

O1: Worked for 25 years in the field of finance in the hi-tech industry. Currently a director in few companies. Has developed several hobbies, mainly dancing.

O2: Worked for 25 years as an accountant in an industrial organization. Currently a director of two not for profit organizations.

D: Had a long career as a legal advisor in a municipality. Towards retirement studied tourism but does not engage in it. Today mainly volunteers and is a full time grandmother.

L: Worked for 35 years as an engineer. Before retirement she studied law but realized she was an engineer. After retirement she was unable to stay at home and returned to work as a freelance engineer in addition to a volunteer project.

P: A HR executive, retired over retirement age, tried to work part-time in a not for-profit organization. She left after she felt that she was busy with politics and not promoting the cause. Currently she volunteers in career counseling and tries to promote a social project.

O3: Career in a variety of positions: industrial engineering, communication, and in the field of education. After retirement, she enjoys sports activity and drawing. She tries to develop a business activity with business partners from another country.

Me I had a long career in a bank in diverse fields, the last of which is in the field of HR. Currently participant in a programme for doctoral studies. In addition starting with partners to promote inclusion of older employees in organizations

Concluding remarks: Past roles were presented in detail, while family was briefly mentioned, half of them also mentioned hobbies.

Question: Each introduced herself, can you say what you have heard in this introduction

- We retired but we are still looking to be professionally active
- We have a strong desire to work
- We are looking to do something in addition.
- Leisure is a privilege
- I am not ready to engage in hobbies because then it would mean that I have accepted retirement.
- Looking to be in a place where we can influence, looking for meaning
- Fear of the title 'retiree'
- Trying to reinvent ourselves.
- What we have done in the past defines us - it is our business card
- A process of redefining identity
- an experience of loss
- Others label us, I refuse to accept others labels me.
- Success is measured in the workplace, how can we measure success in current situation
- An attempt to wrap in a beautiful pink paper.
- I think there is still a demand for who I am, I have not been deleted.
- Not interested in full time job, want to control our schedule
- Addicted to adrenaline

Concluding remarks: The word retirement was almost never uttered and it was important for them to mention their current activities in volunteering, consulting or part-time work.

Question: I scattered pictures around the room, you are asked to choose a picture that resonates with you

O2 Two pictures: one which represents the fear that the fire will go out and the other of hope for curiosity and discovering new worlds

M Two pictures: one of a whirlpool representing the internal conflict and the other representing levitation, wanting to break free and be less committed.

L one picture that represents now being part of a big project, the realization that she is an engineer

O1 Two pictures: one of a family that represent how the children occupy a significant place in her life and the fear of an empty nest. The second picture represents the desire to discover the world

D Two pictures: one that represent the desire to be free and the other represent cooking and baking she does more of now

P One image which represents determination and at the same time walking on the edge

O3 A picture of very exotic wrinkled women that represents women's wisdom and a desire to travel and discover new worlds.

Concluding remarks: Most of them talked about duality, an internal struggle between fear and the longing to discover new worlds, an internal struggle between the desire to do and the desire to fly.