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Exploring the professional journeys of exemplary
expatriate field leaders in the international aid sector

A collective case study

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Abstract

The international aid sector is a multi-billion dollar industry that has continued to grow in size, influence and complexity since the 1970s. The stakeholders are globalised and diverse, from elite UN politicians in New York and Geneva to malnourished infants in Somalia. This study attempts to focus on the professional development of one category of *player* in this multifaceted sector, that is the expatriate field leader employed international non-government organisations (INGO) and responsible for the implementation of projects in a cross-cultural environment. The study found that *relationships, results, and grit* were three foundational traits of exemplary expatriate field leaders in the international aid sector.

This collective case study takes a grounded theory approach to explore the professional journeys of 12 exemplary expatriate field practitioners in the international aid sector who work in Central Asia, Middle East, and North Africa with ten different INGOs and have an average of 12.5 years of field experience. The participants were nominated for the study by their supervisors or peers as being exemplary field leaders. The study purposes to gain insight into the professional journey of exemplary field leaders by examining their work-life experience from age 18 until present. Biographic narrative interviews were conducted and supplemented with professional development timelines to create the initial data set.

The study provides insight into the processes of professional identity formation of expatriate aid workers and identifies seven events that shape their professional self-identity. These experiences consist of a variety of reflected appraisals and intrinsic rewards that validated or changed how the research participants saw themselves. Participants credited good relationships and seeing the results of their work as what keeps them going in spite of difficulties. On the other hand, the most difficult work experiences of the aid workers were not carjacking, riots, dust, heat, bugs, strange food, or low funding but relational conflicts and the grief associated with relational disappointments. Interpersonal relationships were core to both the best experiences and the most difficult experiences of the research participants.

Gritty appears to be a better construct to describe exemplary field leaders than *resilient*. Grit is a trait defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. The research participants demonstrated grit in many situations, not least of which was in their commitment to learn the local language *in-situ* of crisis-affected people. The research participants believed that learning local languages was a key to establish and maintain meaningful relationships and cooperation with local people.

The study also includes a discussion of an apparent incongruity in the international aid sector. On one hand the sector promotes the necessity of humanitarian professionals to establish and maintain collaborative relationships with crisis-affected people, but survey evidence suggests most workers in the humanitarian sector put a low priority on learning the languages of crisis-affected people while others do not have sufficient opportunity to learn the local languages because of the well-entrenched tradition of short-term employment contracts of 1-12 months and the practice of *churning* (rotating experienced staff from project to project). It appears that the current system of doing business in the humanitarian sector may actually obstruct professional competence and contribute to failed outcomes.

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List of Abbreviations

AOG	Armed Opposition Group
ALNAP	Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
BNIM	Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (an interview method)
CBHA	Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (now Start Network). CBHA changed their name in 2013 to <i>Start Network</i> . As of June 2013 membership included: Action Against Hunger, ActionAid, Cafod, Care, Christian Aid, Concern, Handicap International, HelpAge International, International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid, Oxfam, Relief International, Save the Children, Tearfund, War Child, and World Vision)
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (part of OECD)
DCD	Development Co-operation Directorate (part of OECD)
DPKO	Department for Peace Keeping Operations (part of UN)
EC	European Commission
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
EADI	European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes
ELRHA	Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance
IDP	Internally Displaced People
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (part of UN)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OL	Organisational Learning
RRDO	Relief, Reconstruction and Development Organisation
TEFOL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language (also TEFL)
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organisation

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

The phrase “do good and do it well” is the motto of Devex, a network of 200,000 international development, global health and humanitarian aid professionals (Devex, 2010). It is one of many indicators that professional competence is an important aspiration for both the organisations and individuals working in international aid. The international aid sector is comprised of many actors and the complexities surrounding the context and character of aid work make such aspirations difficult to navigate. Graham Hancock (1989:3) in his critical assessment of international aid says, “Western relief workers in Third World disasters have become potent symbols of the fundamental decency and rightness of international aid.” On the other hand he lambasts the privileged lifestyles of international civil servants and so called ‘development experts’ who staff the upper echelons of multilateral aid agencies such as the World Bank, UNICEF, USAID, and Britain’s Overseas Development Administration as “unsavoury, greedy, stupid, and dangerous” (ibid.).

This research is not about the actors in the upper echelons of multilateral aid agencies but about the professional journeys of 12 people from Europe and North America who work for international non-government organisations (INGOs) as project leaders of grass-roots humanitarian and development aid projects in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Sudan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Mauritania, Yemen, Congo, and Pakistan. This research explores their experiences in an effort to learn how they grew into exemplary practitioners. It is a study about the professional development of expatriate INGO field leaders.

Within the context of my study, the term *professional development* is defined as all the various formal and informal learning activities and experiences that enhance the worker's knowledge and skills and the personal qualities that facilitate effective and competent job performance. It includes formal undergraduate and graduate education, on-the-job learning, unstructured learning, and continuous professional development (CPD) activities. On the other hand, the term *professionalisation* refers to the processes by which an occupation is transformed into a formal profession. Typically, a formal profession requires graduate level education, universal standards of practice, professional associations that provide credentialing/licensing and legal monopolies of services. The process of professionalisation is described in greater depth in *Chapter Two*. This study is about the professional development of expatriate project leaders in the international aid sector.

The International Aid Sector

The international aid sector consists of many different categories of actors and organisations. Three prominent categories of actors include: *government agencies* such as SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency), USAID (United States Agency for International Development), and Britain's ODA (Overseas Development Administration); *multilateral organisations* such as UNICEF, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund; and *international non-government organisations* (INGOs) such as Oxfam, Médecins Sans Frontières, and World Vision. All these organisations are involved in worldwide aid interventions aimed at saving lives and increasing life quality. Other prominent stakeholders include national and local host

governments, civil society organisations like local NGOs, and the aid recipients, sometimes referred to as project beneficiaries.

International aid interventions are often categorised according to the spectrum, or category of need, the interventions are designed to address (Moore, 1999). On one side of the spectrum is *humanitarian aid*. In practice and in the literature, the term *humanitarian aid* most frequently refers to short-term emergency interventions that primarily focus on saving lives. On the other end of the spectrum is *development aid* which is normally longer-term and designed to address underlying causes of poverty. Development aid focuses on improving quality of life and encompasses healthcare, education, poverty reduction, gender equality, economics, environment, human rights, and related issues. *Reconstruction aid* is a somewhat borderless middle space between short-term humanitarian aid and long-term development aid. Reconstruction aid typically focuses on rebuilding infrastructures that were destroyed or damaged during a disaster. However, not all the literature, nor all the actors within the sector, make a clear distinction between these categories. In practice, the distinctions between humanitarian aid and development aid are arguably blurred and frequently artificial (Moore, 1999). Louk Box (2003:2) points out that there are no universally accepted definitions of these categories, “OECD/DAC defines everything except development and humanitarian aid.” In spite of several important functional distinctions between humanitarian, reconstruction, and development aid; in this study I argue that the expatriates who staff these projects in the field essentially belong to the same occupation category; that category being; *international aid worker*. Some of these similarities include the prominence of project management, the need to live and

communicate cross-culturally, face-to-face involvement with project beneficiaries, necessity of team work, staff safety/security issues, and the likelihood of high stress work environments. One of the research participants, with over 12 years of field experience in the international aid sector, told me that the biggest distinction he experienced as a project leader of both humanitarian aid and development aid projects was the comparative ease in finding funds for humanitarian aid projects because international media coverage gave them higher visibility. In my study, 10 of the 12 research participants had been involved in both humanitarian aid and development aid interventions during different chapters of their professional journeys. In this study, I do not maintain a strict distinction between humanitarian aid, reconstruction aid or development aid professionals, unless I judge it is relevant to the discussion or unless the authors I reference make the distinction. Therefore, in the context of this study, unless otherwise noted, I treat the terms *humanitarian aid*, *reconstruction aid* and *development aid* as nuances within the *international aid sector*.

Why is there a need for this study?

Toomey and Brewster (2008) argue that there is an immediate and pressing need for an in-depth understanding of the needs and aspirations of the humanitarian sector's managers and leaders. Horwitz (2010) says that the development of leaders within the humanitarian sector is a high priority and there is insufficient research on critical success factors for leadership development in aid agencies. My own experience of working for two decades with expatriate project leaders in the international aid sector is consistent with the statements above. Dickmann, Parry, Emmens, and Williamson (2010) investigated key motivations and core competencies of humanitarian leaders.

Walker and Russ (2010) and Russ (2012) carried out global surveys regarding the professionalisation of the humanitarian sector. These three survey-based studies took significant steps in identifying and building consensus regarding the competency frameworks for core humanitarian occupational tasks. I will discuss these competency frameworks in the next chapter, but none of these studies explore how real-life, field-based, expatriate aid workers actually become professionally competent. What paths have people taken to learn their trade and thrive on-the-job? These are questions explored by my research. I believe we know too little about the lived experience and professional development process of actual exemplary practitioners. My research is a collective case study that explores the professional development journeys of 12 exemplary expatriate international aid workers from age 18 to present.

The Researcher

My interest in the professional development of expatriate leaders is quite pragmatic, practically all my adult life I have worked for international profit and non-profit organisations. From 1987 to 2009 I was based in Istanbul, Turkey and worked in various capacities managing and supervising humanitarian and community development projects in Central Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. In 2009 I moved to Scandinavia to become the director of an international relief and development organisation headquartered in Örebro, Sweden. The organisation has over 100 expatriate and 200 national staff working with humanitarian and development projects. As an educator and leader of a mid-sized INGO, I am motivated to explore what things I should do or not do, to facilitate the development of capable expatriate field leaders. I am curious about what can be learned through an exploration of the

experiences of those who appear to be navigating their journeys successfully. In the methods chapter I discuss issues related to conducting research as an insider, although I do not consider this study insider research.

Since 2005, I have also worked 24-32 days a year for a multi-national Fortune 100 company as a leadership training facilitator for mid-level leaders in Europe and the Middle East. Many of these mid-level corporate managers are working in factories and sales offices as expatriates. They lead project teams and service customers from cultures different to their own. Thus, my occupational experience over the past 25 years has involved working with leaders at various levels of multi-national organisations in both corporate and non-profit sectors. In order to become better equipped to coach and facilitate the professional development of others, I became certified to administer and interpret several licensed assessment tools. Some of these include: the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*®, the *CernySmith Adjustment Index (CSAI)*®, *Emotional Competence Inventory*®, *Kolb Learning Style Inventory*®, *Inventory of Leadership Styles*®. This training supplemented my Bachelor of Science degree in Business Education (1980), Master of Science in Education (1983), and a Master of Divinity in Counselling (2004) from universities in the United States. It is my belief that this research project has increased my competency as a researcher and my insights as a coach/counsellor to facilitate the professional development of others within the INGO and corporate sector. I believe the taught section of the University of Edinburgh's Doctorate of Education programme and the mentoring by my faculty supervisors have equipped me with sufficient skills and experience to complete this research project successfully.

The Research Topic

My research subject is the lived experience of ordinary people, who have chosen cross-cultural careers in the international aid sector, and appear to be successful practitioners of their trade. I am curious to explore how they became competent in spite of the many issues which complicate the professional development of expatriate field leaders in the international aid sector. Some of the complexities are held in common with other occupations, such as teachers and social workers, where the input of the beneficiaries has not always been part of the process used to design, monitor, and deliver services. Some issues are common to any expatriate occupation in any context. The cross-cultural nature of working overseas increases one's vulnerability to failure (Buckley and Brooke, 1992). Studies suggest that the job success of expatriates is linked not only to their professional skills and their personal ability to adjust cross-culturally but also linked to their family's ability to adjust cross-culturally (Tung 1981; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). Several studies indicate that 80% of those who accept assignments overseas take their spouse and children along with them (Black and Gregersen, 1991; Guzzo, Noonan and Elron, 1994; Stroh, Dennis and Cramer, 1994). There are additional issues that appear to be especially prominent in the international aid sector and it is to these which I now turn.

Occupational Complexities of the International Aid Sector

The international aid sector is complex for many reasons. Consider the wide variety of stakeholders and their agendas, including host governments, host communities, individual beneficiaries, private and government donors, partner organisations, and the

global context. According to Roper and Pettit (2002) the complexity of the development process, of accountability, of measurement, and self-inflicted complexities are particular challenges for professional development within the international aid sector.

Lewis (1998), Walker (2004), Luff (2009), Dickmann, et al. (2010) and Williamson (2010) identify the following issues.

- **Expectations:** Project leaders supervise expatriate and local staff from various parts of the global north and south where the multi-cultural atmosphere (and/or tribalism) creates complexities regarding expectations in work values, leadership styles, and communication (Lewis, 1998).
- **Theoretical:** Project leaders must operationalise various theoretical, strategic, and moral frameworks in their projects. For example, the expatriate project leaders (or their organisations) who embrace the traditional¹ humanitarian values of impartiality and neutrality are often in conflict with other humanitarian traditions that embrace a broad agenda to address and prevent suffering and injustice through an explicit political agenda such as social justice and human rights (Walker 2004).
- **Cooperation and Partnerships:** Project leaders must navigate organisational cultures to cooperate in the international humanitarian response to a disaster. This requires humility, effective communication, and effective relational practices for cooperation between INGOs, funders, partners, host governments, and benefactor communities (Luff, 2009; Dickmann, et al. 2010).

¹ The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was established in the 1860s to aid battlefield wounded on both sides of a conflict. The premise of neutrality (to gain access to the wounded) and impartiality (to minister to the wounded on all sides) was thus established as a tradition for humanitarian action.

- Security: Project staff face security issues such as violence, kidnapping, and theft that are often part of today's humanitarian context. Aid workers are arguably in greater jeopardy today than at any time in the history of humanitarian endeavours (Williamson, 2010).
- Professionalisation: While there are a multiplicity of standards, training, communities of practice, and capacity building initiatives there is a lack of coordination and cohesion between them. In a survey of 17 universities who offer humanitarian master's degree level programmes there was a wide range of topics with little or no consistency between programmes (Walker and Russ, 2010).

In addition to these, from my own experience I have observed the following issues:

- Health management: Project leaders and their staff endure stress, fatigue, health, and lifestyle issues that are related to their own living conditions and/or the conditions of the project beneficiaries.
- Moral complexities: Project leaders can face tough decisions/negotiations with authorities who demand bribes and other forms of corruption. Project leaders may face moral tension to remain value-driven rather than project-survival driven (Walker, 2004).
- Leadership issues: Project leaders often oversee a diverse range of project responsibilities that fall significantly outside their area of previous professional experience. For example, an expatriate nurse with MSF was given responsibility to supervise the 50 local staff of an emergency feeding centre including assistant nurses, cooks, security guards, and janitors (Breslin, 2012). Many project leaders manage secondment agreements, contracts or memos-of-understanding that allow

staff to work for one organisation while actually being funded, supervised, evaluated, or pastorally cared for² by a second or third entity.

In my own mind, these complexities begged the questions: How then does professional development actually happen? What can we learn from people who appear to have successfully navigated these complexities and become exemplary practitioners? How did they do it?

Research Question

Given the issues identified in the previous section it seemed both timely and appropriate to explore how real-life expatriate project leaders actually develop their professional competence. My research questions were developed by reflecting on both my experience and the literature. As a newly appointed leader of an INGO with over 300 staff in 12 countries I wanted my research to help make me a more informed leader. In over two decades of INGO work, the need for competent project level leadership has been a consistent issue for me and my colleagues. My own questions regarding how to help facilitate the next generation of international aid field leaders influenced me to start this research. Early in this project I studied literature on international aid, leadership development, organisational learning, mentoring, and human resource management. The literature helped me craft my research questions. For example, it was clear from my readings that leadership development was a priority for many INGOs. It was also clear from my readings that a professionalisation agenda

² *Pastoral care* or member care refers to tending to the emotional, psychological, social, and/or spiritual wellbeing of the expatriate professional and/or family.

was one of the dominant discourses with INGOs and graduate education programmes serving the international aid sector. In this discussion, competency-based frameworks were being proposed as guidelines for curriculum development, professional practice, and credentialing criteria for the next generation of international aid workers. My experience and interests overlap with discourses in the literature. Specifically, my research contributes to the professionalisation discourse taking place within the international aid sector. I framed my research questions with that in mind. The primary question is: *What do the professional journeys of expatriate international aid workers reveal about how they grew to become exemplary field leaders?*

This question presupposes that exemplary practitioners develop over time as they are resourced and nurtured. The meaning behind the word *grow* in my research question unveils my not-so-hidden assumption in the existence of an organic process whereas given correct nurturing an apprentice can grow into a master practitioner. My research proposes to gain insight into those processes that may facilitate an expatriate aid worker's growth into an exemplary INGO field leader.

This study repeatedly uses the metaphor of *professional journey* to represent the experiences that influenced their growth towards becoming exemplary practitioners. The goal of this research is to better understand how real life professional development actually happens. The research explores the values and experiences that help expatriate project leaders navigate through the obstacles and complexities of their occupations. In order to help develop the contexts and frame this study within an on-going discourse in the literature the following sub-questions were developed:

- *What do the difficult and rewarding experiences of the research participants reveal about their professional journeys?*
- *To what degree do the experiences of the research participants compare with the humanitarian core competencies frameworks being promoted by advocates of the professionalisation agenda such as the ELRHA and CBHA?*
- *How important did the research participants believe the learning cultures of their own organisations were to their continuous professional development?*

Contribution to Knowledge

ELRHA research (i.e. Dickmann, et al. 2010 and Walker & Russ, 2010, Russ, 2012) has provided many useful findings regarding the professionalisation of the humanitarian sector and the development of humanitarian leaders. These important studies however did not investigate how real-life humanitarian leaders actually learned their jobs and gained their professional competencies and identities. The findings of this study complement the ELRHA research with additional data to create a more holistic and in-depth exploration of how professional development actually takes place for some exemplary practitioners. This study provides insights to theory, policy, and practice regarding the professional development and retention of expatriate field staff in the international aid sector. It provides evidence that exemplary field practitioners can be developed without a graduate school education or even sector specific undergraduate education. My study provides data that can inform the policy, design, development, and execution of professional development interventions for INGOs, universities, consultants, donors and other stakeholders in the international aid sectors.

CHAPTER TWO: Context and Current Debates

The objective of my literature review is two-fold. The first aim is to provide the reader with background information surrounding the complexities of the professionalisation discussion taking place within the humanitarian aid sector. Much of this literature is not written in academic journals but in the publications of various stakeholder networks. The second purpose of the literature review is to provide a context for interpreting the findings of my research. My research covers multiple academic disciplines, including: education, professional development, psychology, international relations, culture studies, human resource management and organisational science. I had to make difficult choices as to what, and what not to, include. In the end I decided to organise my literature review around what seemed most germane to the themes I present in the findings chapters. I reasoned that this would give the readers additional background to interpret and evaluate my findings.

I start this chapter with a discussion on professionalisation and issues regarding the professionalisation of the humanitarian aid sector, a subsector within international aid. The reader should be aware that networks of INGOs and other stakeholders are taking steps to professionalise the humanitarian aid sector. One of the current leaders in these initiatives is the ELRHA, a collaborative network of INGOs dedicated to supporting partnerships between higher education institutions in the UK and humanitarian organisations and partners around the world. Over the past few years the ELRHA has published several studies to help facilitate the professionalisation process. One of

these was Peter Walker and Catherine Russ' comprehensive report titled, *Professionalising the Humanitarian Sector*. According to Walker and Russ:

Over the last three decades humanitarian work has evolved to become a well-established full-time occupation in the absence of most of the typical characteristics of a profession. Although training is widely carried out, it does not take place in an agreed or systematic way (Walker and Russ, 2010: 9).

Another ELRHA study conducted by Michael Dickmann, Emma Parry, Ben Emmens and Christine Williamson entitled *Engaging Tomorrow's Global Humanitarian Leaders Today (2010)* explored key motivations of humanitarian leaders and the core competencies required for success. More recently, Catherine Russ authored a second global study for the ELRHA called the *Global Survey on Humanitarian Professionalisation* (Russ, 2012). Among other things, it sought endorsement of a revised framework of humanitarian competencies.

Second, this chapter focuses on issues of professional identity formation. This is connected to, yet independent from, the previous issue of professionalisation. Professionalisation is a macro topic that involves the cooperation of many global stakeholders such as INGOs, funding bodies, UN bodies, universities, national governments, and other stakeholders. However, my treatment of *professional identity formation* is at the personal or micro level of how an individual's role identity is formed or changed. Over time, most of the research participants identified less with their original professions, such as accountant, engineer, physical therapist, or nurse and saw themselves as international aid professionals. I look at *identity theory* as understood from a symbolic interactionist framework drawing on the work of Mead, Stryker, McCall, and Burke. In particular, I look at the concept of reflected appraisal in the formation of role identity in the research participants. The majority of literature

on professional identity formation seem to explore single aspects of professional identity such as socialisation (Obi, 2008), membership (Allan and Lewis, 2006), or ethics (Loui, 2004). In *Chapter Five* I identify various landmark experiences that seemed to shape and affirm the research participants' professional identity.

The third section of this chapter looks at continuous professional development (CPD) and on-the-job learning. I start this with a discussion of the literature on organisational learning (OL) which is representative of the growing expectations within profit and non-profit multi-national organisations that they be places of learning and self-development. I finish the section on CPD with two constructs that are being increasingly discussed as CPD topics in the work place, *resilience* and its younger cousin *grit*. Increasingly, adult resilience assessments are not only being used by clinical psychologists, but also by human resource/personnel consultants in international organisations. The constructs of resilience and grit are discussed in my findings. Thus, my literature review starts with a macro, or bird's-eye, level discussion of professionalisation and finishes with a micro level discussion of emerging curriculum topics for workplace learning.

Meanings of Professional

Throughout this thesis the term *professional* carries different meanings according to the context, just as it does in the literature and on the street. The Oxford Dictionary (2013) defines three meanings of professional: First, a person engaged or qualified in a profession such as lawyers and surveyors. Second, a person engaged in a specified activity as a main occupation rather than as a pastime and third, a person competent or

skilled in a particular activity. In order to help the reader differentiate the context and the meanings used most frequently in this thesis and in the literature, I offer the following guide for the terms *professionals*, *professionalisation*, *professional journey*, *professional identity formation*, and *continuous professional development*:

- *Professionals*: Practitioners of occupations whose membership to the occupation requires years of intense theoretical education, adherence to codes-of-conduct and good practice, membership in a credentialing organisation, and a monopoly on practice based on licensing. Clerics, medical doctors, lawyers, and university professors are examples of traditional European *professions*. Psychologists, teachers, nurses, social workers, and physical therapists are examples of more recent *professions*. Typically, the more exclusive the profession the more status it carries (Barber, 1963). In the context of this study and the literature to which I refer the terms professions and professionals most often carry this meaning. In this context, neither a master craftsman in a building trade nor a Premier League footballer would fit this meaning of professionals (Raelin 1985; Weick and McDaniel, 1989).
- *Professionalisation*: Is the process by which an occupation or segment of an occupation becomes a profession. For example, in social work in the UK approximately 70,000 people are employed as qualified professional social workers while an additional 1,200,000 are employed who provide direct practical care to people but who are not qualified social workers but may have lower level vocational awards (Ellinor, 2004). The General Social Care Council was set up in 2001 to accredit and approve programmes leading to professional registration and to maintain a register of qualified social workers (Pugh, 2005). According to Sarah

Gehlert, the tradition of modern day social work in the UK and USA was started between 1895-1905 when medical institutions in England and America began hiring *hospital almoners* who were normally nurses, to assess if people were poor enough to be deserving of free medical treatment (Gehlert and Browne, 2006). Therefore it can be argued that the professionalisation process of the modern day social worker in the UK took around a hundred years. The professionalisation process of the humanitarian aid worker is in process and discussed extensively later in this section.

- *Professional journey*: Refers to the work-life experience of the 12 research participants in this study starting from age 18. In this context the term *professional* is broader and synonymous with occupational or working life.
- *Professional identity formation*: Is the process by which a person gains confidence in self and credibility from others as a competent practitioner of a particular occupation or job role. Professional identity formation relates to both a person's self-identity and the occupational role society identifies with a person. Here the term *professional identity* is synonymous with occupational identity. In this study, I reflect on how the research participants' role identity was *formed* into that of international aid worker and/or *transformed* from one role identity, i.e. physiotherapist, to another, i.e. international aid worker.
- *Continuous professional development* (CPD): This term refers to on-the-job training that proposes to enhance or develop work performance. CPD can include formally organised courses, workshops, conferences and mentoring or less formal learning such as participating in debriefings, communities of practice, and volunteer work. Some organisations require their staff to participate regularly in

CPD and have devoted substantial budgets to their human resource departments for this purpose. Many professional organisations require their members to participate regularly in accredited CPD in order to maintain their professional licences (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2006).

The Professionalisation of International Aid

If it every truly existed, the era when international volunteers could spontaneously launch out into effective service with INGOs, driven solely by an inner calling *to help others in need* seems to be coming to a close. Today, expatriates are expected to have both relevant education and practical experience before they get their foot-in-the-door of an international aid agency. Employers in the aid sector are very selective (Blattman, 2009) in part because donors demand effective and accountable use of their money. In 2010 member nations of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) spent more than 128 billion USD on aid (Provost, 2011). International aid has become a big business. There appears to be a demand to professionalise both from within the sector and from without. Walker and Russ (2010) found that 92% of the 1,500 workers in the humanitarian aid sector they surveyed want their sector to be professionalised. The advocates for professionalisation include major INGOs, academic institutions, and multilateral organisations as evidenced by the membership lists of the ELRHA, EADI, and CBHA who champion professionalisation. Is the professionalisation of the humanitarian aid sector a good thing? Consider Hugo Slim's caution on the topic in Walker (2004):

Professionalism also serves to exclude as well as include. And here is the ambiguity of professionalising. While some degree of exclusion is responsible, as with brain surgery for example, professionalising certain activities can be

self-serving, like the medieval artisan guilds that ensured that no one other than their mates or their heirs could ply their trade. Walker (2004: 2)

My research takes a look at the lived experience of 12 exemplary international aid leaders in the pre-professionalised era of the humanitarian aid sector. I believe an understanding of the history and evolution of professionalisation within the sector provides valuable background information for my research.

Over the years, different perspectives have been proposed as models by which to define, understand and discuss professionalism (Barber 1963; Johnson 1972; Weick, 2001; Evetts, 2003). These studies suggest attributes that distinguish *professions* from other occupations or non-professional work from professional work. According to Barber (1963) the greater the prominence or intensity of each attribute, the more professional the occupation. The *attributes approach* has consistently been used in the literature over the past sixty or more years (Barber 1963; Wilensky 1964; Johnson 1972; Raelin 1989). The following five characteristics consistently appear as normative assumptions within the discourse of professionalism:

- *Expertise* - They pass rigorous standards of selection and specialised training within an organised body of scholarly or scientific knowledge.
- *Codes of Practice* - They render services according to set norms, codes, and practices.
- *Autonomy* - They are trusted to operate with freedom, autonomy, and authority within their area of expertise.
- *Affiliation* - They identify with fellow professionals through formal association to advance, monitor, and promote their profession.

- *Power/monopoly* - They tend to protect and police the provision of their expert services through a monopoly.

Gary Sykes (1999) adds an important nuance that is interwoven in the five traditional characteristics of professionals. He observed that traditionally professionals also make the normative claims, 'we know better than you' and 'we protect your best interests.'

In the following section I argue that currently, the concept of professionalism within the international aid sector has evolved and reformed to represent something quite different from the traditional criteria described above. Specifically, I argue that the concept of professionalism in the international aid sector has rejected the 'we know better' attribute and adopted concepts of facilitation, cooperation and contextualisation into a new participatory concept of professionalism. To do this, I use an example of how the traditional understanding of professionalism worked poorly in the social work sector, which has a clientele similar, in some regards, to that of the international aid sector, but is further advanced in the professionalisation process.

Parallels with the Professionalisation of Social Work

Back in the 1970s, when the social work sector was in early stages of professionalisation, William Eimicke (1974) argued that two traditional concepts of professionalism were at least partly responsible for the difficulty involved in the administration of social work in the United States. These traditional concepts being:

- we know better;
- we protect your interests.

Specifically, he argued that when these two claims are expressed in the social work professions they produce negative unintended consequences for clients. Eimicke (ibid.) argued that in the administration of social services to the poor the *we know better than you* professional norm becomes paternalistic, disempowering and harmful to clients. It is no surprise that under such circumstances the clients were often viewed as inferior to the professional. Eimicke (ibid: 410) wrote how the patronizing rehabilitation orientation of many welfare agencies had encouraged professional social workers to treat clients as impersonal, abstract problems. He argued that the nature of social work requires emotional engagement and client participation in the process and attributes the patronising orientation of many social workers as a consequence of the occupation's professionalisation. Eimicke quotes a survey from the 1970s of professional social workers that found 78% of those surveyed saw their responsibility as 'teaching the poor how to live' (ibid: 409). If in the context of social work the *we know better than you* mindset is patronising and inappropriate, it is also likely to be inappropriate within the context of international aid work.

Old Issues, New Context

Eimicke's 50 year old comments on *then* current issues facing the newly professionalising occupation of the *social worker* has parallels today. Similar arguments have been made by voices within the international aid community over the past twenty-five years (Timberlake, 1985; Edwards, 1989; Easterly, 2006). Maybe this is because much of what is considered international aid can also be considered a form of social work (Beristain, 2006). The clientele for international aid and social work share characteristics of being poor, marginalised, and disempowered. In the international aid sector there is increased disillusionment in those who promote an expert or *professional* centric approach. Previously the dominant mindset among international aid professionals was *we can save you from your poverty if you only let us* (Gould, 2005). The *we* being the *developed world*. This sounds strikingly similar to the mindset of the social workers of the 1970s who saw their responsibility as *teaching the poor how to live* (Eimicke, 1974: 409). William Easterly puts it like this,

The fallacy is to assume that because I have studied and lived in a society that somehow wound up with prosperity and peace, I know enough to plan for other societies to have prosperity and peace... this is like thinking the racehorse can be put in charge of building the race tracks (Easterly, 2006: 26).

Thirty years ago, Lloyd Timberlake (1985) pointed out that advising Africa has become a major industry, with at least 80,000 expatriates at work south of the Sahara at a cost of more than US\$4 billion a year. That amount has increased exponentially today,

However, the fact that this immense outpouring of information and advice is having demonstrably little effect on the problems it seeks to address should at least give us cause for concern ... At root then, development is about processes of enrichment, empowerment and participation, which the technocratic,

project-oriented view of the world simply cannot accommodate (Edwards, 1989: 116).

Michael Edwards argues that professional development studies in universities have been fundamentally irrelevant when it comes to being part of the solution for Third World problems. Chambers (1985), Edwards (1989), and Easterly (2006) are three of many voices calling for reforms in both international development studies and expert centric development practices. Edwards (1989) claims that if training institutes continue to promote a technocratic, project-oriented, *we know better* approach to professional practice it is doomed to irrelevancy and likely to make bad situations worse.

What is required, as Paul Richards has argued, is a *people's science* which uses local knowledge to explore local solutions to local problems. Such a *science* differs radically in approach from the traditional one, which ignores indigenous knowledge or relegates it to a subordinate position (Edwards 1989: 120).

Here Edwards is calling for a reformation in professional international development studies that had already begun decades earlier in the world of professional social work studies. International development studies during the 1980s-1990s were relatively new as an academic discipline and still promoting the normative *we know better* understanding of professional practice that Eimicke (1974) identified as having negatively affected the practice of social work. Today, within the international aid sector the concept of professionalism has moved away from the *we know better* concept to concepts that are more participatory. I discuss these in the following section.

Conceptualising Professionalisation in International Aid

Over the past thirty years international aid in general, and humanitarian aid specifically, has experienced different initiatives to professionalise. According to Walker and Russ (2010) in order to professionalise the humanitarian aid sector, key stakeholders will need to:

1. Agree on codes of conduct and standards of practice in the profession
2. Agree on the qualifications for credentialing/licensing practitioners
3. Form a professional organisation that:
 - Accredits and monitors training providers
 - Credentials/licenses and monitors the professionals

This has proven to be a difficult task because of the globalised nature of international aid, the diversity of the actors, and the contexts makes the process particularly complex; but there appears to be general consensus in the international aid sector that the concept of professionalism embraces Richard's (1989) *people's science* concept. The traditional notion of *we know better than you* seems to have been replaced by a concept of professionalism that embraces participation, facilitation, cooperation and contextual thinking. "The new participatory professionalism embraces self-critical reflection and learning, unlearning and unceasing personal and professional change" (Chambers, 2004: 29).

Karl Weick and Reuben McDaniel (1989) suggest another distinguishing attribute of professionalism which seems to me as especially appropriate to international aid work. They argue that professionals must be *particularistic* rather than *universalistic*. They derive this from Hage's argument that as people develop more complex views of the

world, the idea of *one best way* breaks down and is replaced by the idea that varied responses are needed for varying environments. With a more complex view of the world goes a more particularistic value framework. In international aid, the professional must learn how to be an expert facilitator in order to help *discover* the *best ways* in consultation with the community rather than bringing them pre-packaged from the outside. Weick and McDaniel (ibid.) go on to argue that a particularistic worldview requires more interaction and relationship with people.

To apply universalistic values is a lot like applying a standard operating procedure; no matter what happens, the same value fits - so it is applied. Thus, universalistic values can be applied without much interpretation or discussion, which means that they make minimal demands for communication, information processing, or feedback. Particularistic values, however, because they are often tailored to unique configurations of people and demands, impose much greater demands for communication (ibid: 335).

Weick and McDaniel concept of *particularistic* is very compatible with the concept of participatory professionalism. I prefer the term *contextualised* over particularistic as it carries a similar meaning and is more broadly used in the literature. Derek Armstrong also considers contextualisation an important aspect of professionalism.

... in examining the work of professionals it is clear that real professional life is about integration of knowledge into contexts which are changing continuously. That knowledge becomes valuable when it is *contextualised* in the narratives of professional experience (Armstrong, 2006: 18).

Weick and McDaniel's (1989) concept of *particularistic* is not saying that professionals tend to produce cookie cutter solutions. Rather they are emphasising the importance and complexities of integrating multiple perspectives for contextualised solutions. What I find most interesting is Weick and McDaniel's (ibid.) emphasis on

the centrality of meaningful and continuous communication in order to achieve successful contextualised judgments.

Edwards (1989) also highlighted the critical importance of contextualised problem solving processes rather than imposing cookie cutter solutions.

In all sectors of development, the adoption of problem-solving approaches is much more important than communicating particular packages of technical information. If people can analyse, design, implement and evaluate their work in a critical fashion, they stand a good chance of achieving their objectives. However, a system of education and training that relies on experts will never be able to do this, because the attitudes of the expert prevent people from thinking for themselves (ibid: 117).

Participatory professionalism as practiced in the international aid sector is a cousin to that which is promoted among some in social work (Jung, 2004) and education (Sachs, 2001). In summary, three concepts of professional practice emerge as normative in the international aid sector. These are:

- *Facilitative* - the professional postures themselves more as a facilitator and fellow learner and not as an expert who can solve everyone else's problems.
- *Collaborative* - the professional is skilled in consensus building and insists on stakeholder participation and ownership in diagnosing problems and formulating solutions.
- *Contextual* - the professional passes on problem solving skills and not fixed solutions. Communication and relationships appear to be key to contextualisation.

As mentioned earlier in this section, one of the key steps towards professionalisation within the humanitarian aid sector requires key stakeholders to agree on standards of

practice. This brings us to the context of a research sub-question in my study which asks:

To what degree do the experiences of the research participants compare with the humanitarian core competencies frameworks being promoted by advocates of the professionalisation agenda such as the ELRHA and CBHA?

The ELRHA and the CBHA have actively promoted the professionalisation of the humanitarian aid sector. These two organisations represent key stakeholders in the humanitarian and higher education sectors. The ELHRA sponsored two studies to assess and support the process of professionalisation that will be discussed shortly. One of the key purposes of these studies was to identify and develop consensus on the core professional competencies of humanitarian workers. This then becomes part of the standards of humanitarian practice, a key step in the professionalisation process. Before I discuss the studies, I feel it is important to discuss the concept of *competency based frameworks*, which were key outcomes from these studies. Such a discussion develops a context for understanding these studies and my research.

Competency-Based Frameworks

Competencies are the behaviours, technical abilities, or personal attributes that lie behind competent job performance. A competency framework is a list or outline of the behaviours or personal attributes required for a particular job such as bank clerk or auto mechanic. Typically, a competency framework for a single job will contain over a hundred observable behaviours and personal attributes. These may include

behaviours such as: builds consensus among stakeholders, meets deadlines, acts within the limits of authority, and manages budgets on MS Excel spreadsheet.

The competence based approach was first popularised in the 1970s as the foundation for occupational analysis that informed curriculum design in vocational and occupational education. The US Air Force was one of the early adopters of competency frameworks and based all of their technical training programmes on this concept. In the 1980s, competency based approaches were implemented nationally in the UK for vocational training and soon became part of the national vocational qualifications (NVQ). By the mid 1990s most vocations in the United Kingdom had implemented competency based models (Boritz and Carnaghan 2010). Competency frameworks have been used in many INGOs to provide a common language to link the processes of curriculum development, recruitment, performance management, and career development (Swords, 2007). According to Adams (1975) competency frameworks are typically based on the hypothesis that:

- Expert workers are better able than anyone else to describe their occupation.
- An occupation can be described effectively in terms of the tasks successful workers perform
- Successful task performance is directly related to the knowledge, skills, tools, and attitudes that workers must possess to perform the tasks correctly.

Within the competency based literature there is not universal agreement on how to define competencies, but that has not prevented the use of competency based frameworks to evolve from widespread use in the vocations to widespread use in the

professions. In the mid 1980s I was extensively engaged in the development of competency frameworks as a training consultant for PriceWaterhouse (now PriceWaterhouse Cooper), for clients such as the US Foreign Service and the Arab-American Oil Company for the purpose of developing occupational training systems. Typically, competency frameworks endeavour to define an occupation or job into 5-12 domains with 5-15 associated behaviours within each domain. Thus, competency frameworks usually attempt to describe the tasks of any given occupation in terms of 100-200 observable behaviours.

Since the 1980s, competency frameworks have been adopted for use way beyond curriculum development and vocational training. In the 1990s the business sector increasingly developed competency frameworks as tools for performance management for all types of job titles. Today, professional organisations are increasingly turning to competency frameworks as the basis to establish professional requirements and assessments for certifying professionals (Boritz and Carnaghan, 2010). In international aid, the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations developed their own competency framework that serves as the basis for a new vocational certificate in development or humanitarian assistance (ISC, 2012).

My purpose here is not to argue the strengths or weaknesses of competency-based learning theory. It has without doubt been adopted as a *best practice* by many INGOs for use as a tool for performance management and continued professional development. Some have considered the development of a competency framework for

humanitarian workers a priority for several years. While various humanitarian competency frameworks already exist, until recently, there has not been consensus within the sector on any given framework. Advocates of professionalisation such as the ELRHA and CBHA consider consensus on a framework an important step towards the formation of a professional association, standardisation, curriculum development, and credentialing (Walker and Russ, 2010; Russ, 2012).

Competency frameworks in the professionalisation process

The development of a competency framework that has broad acceptance in the humanitarian sector has been in development for several years with two major iterations. First in this discussion is the ELRHA (Enhancing Learning & Research for Humanitarian Assistance) published *Professionalising the Humanitarian Sector: Scoping Study* led by Walker and Russ (2010). The ELRHA is a collaborative network dedicated to supporting partnerships between higher education institutions, humanitarian organisations and partners around the world. It is hosted by Save the Children on behalf of the humanitarian and higher education communities. The ELRHA plays a key role in the professionalisation agenda within the humanitarian sector. The ELRHA's *Scoping Study* launched a sector-wide consultation in 2009 which resulted in 21 humanitarian competencies being published in 2010 (Camburn, 2011). This competency framework was a comprehensive table of behaviours expected of exemplary humanitarian professionals. It was an amalgamation of materials from the existing literature, comments from surveys, and consultations with focus groups and inter-agency meetings (Walker and Russ, 2010). It appears to be the most comprehensive generic competency framework of its type.

This document and the iterations that followed, purposed to be applicable to all humanitarian professionals no matter what their profession or expertise. They are intended to underpin any occupation or role in the sector and to provide guidance on the skills, knowledge and behaviours expected of people working in the humanitarian sector (Russ, 2012: 31).

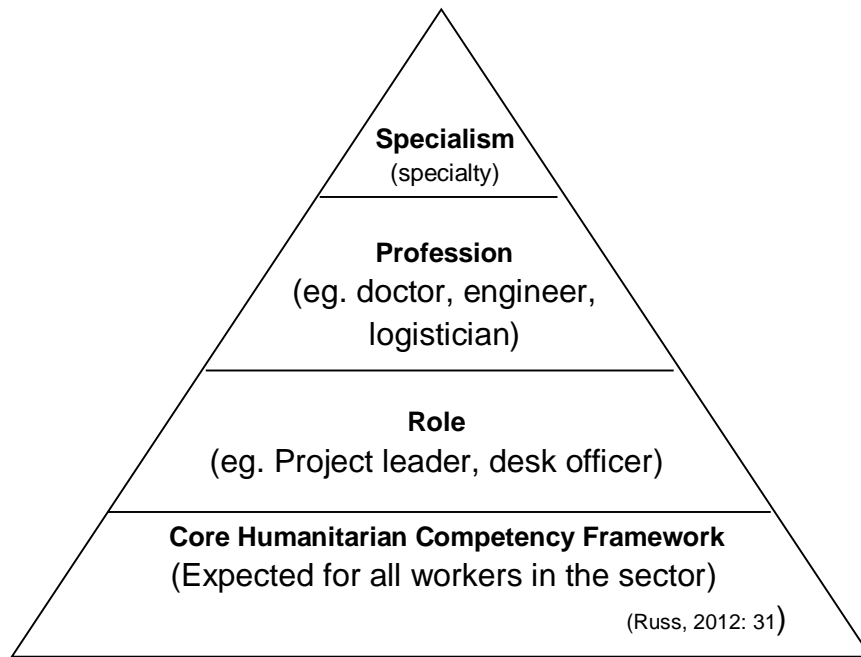


Figure 1: Pyramid Diagram

The pyramid diagram (Russ, 2012: 31) illustrates how the framework *complements* other professions and roles within the humanitarian sector. Therefore, the goal was to produce a competency framework for the humanitarian *sector* not for a specific job or occupation within the sector.

A key purpose of the *Scoping Study* (Walker and Russ, 2012) was to put forward a framework which could be used as a foundation for the professionalisation of the

humanitarian sector through a professional association and through accredited training programmes. The study identified 21 competencies with approximately 270 associated behaviours (skills and knowledge) into three different three levels of experience. Level 1 behaviours are expected from those with up to 18 months of experience, Level 2 behaviours are expected from those with 18 months to five years, and Level 3 behaviours for those humanitarian workers with five years or more experience. The following is a sample from the first page of their five page table of competencies. Notice that the competency of *resilience* is associated with five behaviours for Level 1 (beginner) practitioners, four behaviours for Level 2 and three behaviours for Level 3 practitioners. I discuss resilience in more detail later in this chapter.

Humanitarian Core Competencies				
Areas of focus	Competencies	Behaviours – Level 1	Behaviours – Level 2	Behaviours – Level 3
Managing yourself	Resilience	Identifies symptoms of stress and takes steps to reduce stress	Draws on previous experience and support mechanisms to reduce the impact of stress on self and others	Creates a working environment that aims to minimise pressure and stress
		Remains optimistic and persistent, even under adversity		
		Copes well under pressure, particularly in difficult environments	Acts as a role model for others and displays courage under difficult circumstances	Recognises the limitations of staff and takes action to limit their exposure to harm when needed
		Identifies and makes use of personal support mechanisms	Helps others to identify personal support mechanisms	
		Recovers quickly from setbacks	Able to see the bigger picture and helps others to do the same	
	Integrity	Works within a framework of clearly understood humanitarian values and ethics	Takes prompt action in cases of unethical behaviour	Stands by decisions and holds others to account when necessary
		Does not abuse one's own power or position	Ensures team members do not abuse their power or position	
		Resists undue political pressure in decision making	Supports staff in maintaining ethical stances	Identifies where individuals or the organisation is straying from agency goals and challenges them to uphold ethics
		Shows consistency between expressed principles and behaviour	Ensures transparency is at the heart of programme development and implementation	
		Acts without consideration of personal gain	Ensures programmes are acting with integrity and recognises the impact of not doing so	
	Time Management	Sets priorities, goals and work plans to achieve maximum effectiveness	Establishes priorities according to team and project goals	Assesses appropriate time allocation against objectives
		Develops or uses systems to organise and plan workload	Ensures ratio between staff time allocation and resources are appropriate	
				Makes strategic decisions with regard to time and resources

Figure 2: Sample page of the Humanitarian Core Competencies in the ELRHA's *Scoping Study* with 21 competencies and approximately 270 behaviours. (Walker and Russ, 2010: 34).

The *Scoping Study* recommends:

The listing/table of humanitarian competencies should be further developed, as an urgent task for a yet to be created International Humanitarian Professional Association (IHPA). The sooner there can be consensus around competencies; the sooner training institutions can start offering courses capable of being certified by the IHPA. (Walker and Russ, 2010: 33).

Next, in 2010, the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA) now *Start Network*, a consortium of large British INGOs, with the help of ActionAid and People in Aid, produced an iteration (Camburn, 2011) of the ELRHA *Scoping Study's* competency framework with a distilled version of six competencies and 82 associated behaviours called the *Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework*. Thus, this framework

... has built on a number of previous initiatives, synthesising frameworks from within and external to the CBHA, with the goal of drawing out the behaviours that are fundamental to all humanitarian positions (Rutter, 2011:5).

Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework						
Keeping disaster and conflict affected people at the centre of what we do						
Competencies	Understanding of humanitarian contexts and application of humanitarian principles Key issues and practices impacting current and future humanitarian interventions	Achieving results effectively Behaviours to use resources efficiently and effectively to achieve results, considering the need for speed, scale and quality	Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships Behaviours to develop and maintain collaborative, coordinated relationships at times of heightened complexity and risk	Operating safely and securely in a humanitarian response Behaviours required to take responsibility to operate safely in a pressured environment	Managing yourself in a pressured and changing environment Essential personal behaviours required to operate effectively within a humanitarian context	Leadership in humanitarian response Seeing the overall goal within the changing context and taking responsibility to motivate others to work towards it, independent of one's role, function or seniority.
Core Behaviours for all staff in humanitarian response, informed by skills and knowledge	<p>The humanitarian context Demonstrate understanding of phases of humanitarian response including preparedness and contingency, DRR, response and recovery</p> <p>Apply understanding of the political and cultural context and underlying causes of the humanitarian crisis</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of the gender and diversity dimensions of humanitarian situations</p> <p>Keep vulnerable people at the centre of the humanitarian response</p>	<p>Programme quality Demonstrate understanding of agency project cycle management</p> <p>Participate in the design and implementation of effective projects and programmes</p> <p>Accountability Collect, analyse and disseminate information to and from communities and other stakeholders</p> <p>Demonstrate accountability to partners and disaster and conflict affected people and communities</p>	<p>Listening & dialogue Actively listen to different perspectives and experiences of stakeholders</p> <p>Establish and maintain clear communication and dialogue with disaster and conflict affected people and other stakeholders</p> <p>Working with others Contribute positively in the team to achieve programme objectives</p> <p>Share appropriate information and knowledge with colleagues and partners as and when appropriate</p>	<p>Security context and analysis Identify and communicate risk and threats and minimise these for you and your agency</p> <p>Personal safety & security Build and maintain a reputation in line with humanitarian standards and acceptance for your work</p> <p>Take appropriate, coordinated and consistent action to handle situations of personal risk and situations of risk for others</p> <p>Reduce vulnerability by complying with safety and security protocols set by your organisation and contextualise</p>	<p>Resilience Recognise stress and take steps to reduce it</p> <p>Remain constructive and positive under stress to be able to tolerate difficult and sometimes threatening environments</p> <p>Remain focused on your objectives and goal in a rapidly changing environment</p> <p>Able to adapt to changing situations</p> <p>Keep yourself emotionally stable when helping others</p>	<p>Self-awareness Show awareness of your own strengths and limitations and their impact on others</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of your skills and how they complement those of others to support team effectiveness</p> <p>Seek and reflect on feedback to improve your performance</p> <p>Motivating and influencing others Communicate humanitarian values and motivate others towards them</p> <p>Inspire confidence in others</p>

Figure 3: Sample page from CBHA's Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework of six competencies and 82 behaviours (CBHA, 2011). See Appendix C for the complete document. Notice that the construct of *resilience* is also included as a core behaviour in the CBHA framework under the competency *Managing Yourself in a pressured and changing environment*.

In order to get wider agreement on the CBHA's competency framework the ELRHA included the CBHA's competency framework in a second professionalisation survey called the *Global Survey on Humanitarian Professionalisation* (Russ, 2012). In this survey, 85% of the 938 respondents indicated that CBHA competencies represented behaviours necessary for aid workers either very well (35%) or fairly well (50%).

Approximately 53% of the respondents were field personnel and 47% headquarter staff. 52% of the respondents described themselves as having more than five years' experience. In relation to the competencies, the respondents were given the opportunity to suggest any areas they thought needed to be added. The single most frequent competency that some felt to be missing was, "Communicating with disaster-affected populations, involving them in disaster response programmes and measuring overall performance against their expectations" (Russ, 2012: 9). In *Chapter Six* I compare the research participants' experience with the competency based frameworks.

Two departures from standard practice

Both the *Scoping Study* (Walker and Russ, 2010) and the *Global Survey* (Russ, 2012) are unusual as competency frameworks in that the responses of non-field practitioners and those new to the sector (under two years) were given equal weight to those who were veteran (five years or more) field practitioners. In these two studies, of those surveyed only 40% and 52% respectively, were reported to be veteran humanitarian practitioners. This is a significant departure from standard methods for developing competency frameworks (Gonczi, Hagar, and Oliver, 1990). Standard methods elicit information only from expert practitioners. Non practitioners, novice practitioners, educators, and other stakeholders are almost always excluded from competency framework development.

The second departure from standard practice, as mentioned earlier, is that the ELRHA and CBHA competency frameworks are designed for all roles and occupations within the humanitarian sector rather than for specific occupations within the sector. This is undoubtedly the rationale for including all stakeholders, including educators, and

donors in their surveys. Nonetheless, *sector* professionalisation is unusual (not wrong) and more complex than professionalising a single occupation. It is also complex because of the globalised nature of international aid. There is no organisation with global legal jurisdiction to offer accreditation. Even if atypical, I believe these competency frameworks are excellent documents and can be used effectively for developing curriculum for diplomas, undergraduate and graduate programmes.

The literature reveals that specific professions, such as doctors, logisticians and project managers who work in the humanitarian aid sector have already begun to create for themselves professional organisations and affinity groups. A survey of health professionals involved in international humanitarian assistance showed that there was interest in forming a humanitarian aid speciality in medicine (Kene, Pack, Greenough, and Burke 2009) that would complement existing professional associations, like the Emergency Personnel Network (EPN) and the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM). Another study describes how logisticians working in the humanitarian sector have organised themselves into professional associations such as the *Humanitarian Logistics Association* and the *Fritz Institute* and that several universities offer graduate degrees and certificate programmes (Thomas and Mizushima, 2005). Project managers have also organised themselves into a professional association. The Project Management Institute (PMI) an international professional and credentialing organisation of project managers has a new humanitarian sector sub-specialty. PMI in partnership with LINGO (Learning for International NGOs) teamed up to organise a project management training for NGOs that leads to credentialing in the sub specialty of humanitarian project management.

Eleven of the twelve research participants in my study had university or occupational credentials before they began working in the international aid sector. While on the job many of the research participants experienced a form of professional identity transformation. Some no longer saw themselves primarily as an accountant, a physical therapist, a nurse, or an engineer but experienced professional identity reformation to that of an international aid professional. The following is a review of literature on professional identity formation to provide context for what will be discussed in *Chapter Five*.

Professional Identity Formation

One finding in my study relates to the experience of professional identity formation in the research participants. I identified seven events that seem to serve as key landmarks that help shape professional identity. In this section I look specifically at the literature on *professional identity formation* and how it is framed in the *identity theories* of some of the prominent theorists of symbolic interactionism in order to provide a framework to discuss the professional identity development experienced by the research participants.

According to Burke and Stets (2009), identity theory has its roots in the views of Scottish moral philosophers such as Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), Adam Smith (1723-1790) and later American philosophers such as William James (1842-1910) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1932). Mead's seminal work was termed *symbolic interactionism*, by Herbert Blumer (1900-1987) who took over Mead's famous course in social psychology at the University of Chicago after Mead's death (Turner, 2013).

Blumer (1969) described three of symbolic interactionism's foundational ideas as follows:

- Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.
- The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society.
- These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters.

However, as it has evolved over the last 60 years, symbolic interactionism has neither focused on symbols nor interaction as Blumer had advocated; but rather more on the dynamics of self and how people's behaviours with others in social settings are governed by their conception of themselves (Turner, 2013).

Self serves as a kind of gyroscope for keeping behaviours consistent and in line; moreover, as has increasingly been emphasized in symbolic interactionist theory, individuals are motivated to verify their sense of self in the eyes of others. The notion of identity became one prominent way to reconceptualise self over the past few decades (ibid: 331).

Over the past few decades, in an effort to develop notions of self, a number of symbolic interactionists have focused their research on the development of identity theory. Some of the most predominant among these include George McCall, J.L. Simmons, Sheldon Stryker, Peter Burke, Jan Stets, and Jonathan Turner. I will turn to them now to give an overview of identity theory as put forward by symbolic interactionists.

Role identities

An *identity* is the meaning(s) belonging to a person who is a member of a particular group, occupier of a particular role, or claims certain personal characteristics. Burke and Stets (2009) describe how identity theories within social interactionism typically

focus on three basic categories of identity: role identity, social or group identity, and person identity and how they are shaped, validated and understood through social interaction. *Role identities* - refers to the meanings and expectations associated with a particular role or social position that people apply to themselves. For example, a *football coach* may apply meanings of *leader* and *disciplinarian* to himself. These meanings are derived partly from society and partly from the individual's distinct interpretation of the role (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Other examples of role identities, include parent, friend, brother, neighbour, student or teacher. In my study, I look at the formation and transformation of the research participants' *professional identities*. Professional identities are types of role identities and therefore of particular interest to my study. Unlike social and person identity, role identities tend to be more frequently activated or deactivated according to the context. The more frequently a particular role identity is activated the higher saliency that role identity has. *Social or group identities* on the other hand, are based on an individual's identification with a social group, where they have identity as insiders or belongers (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). Having a particular social identity implies being like others in the group, sharing similar perspectives, and taking on the group's identity. Examples of social identities might include Manchester United supporters, street gangs and Oxfam members. Thirdly, *person identities* are the meanings that define a person as a unique individual. They may focus on character or personality traits that an individual internalises as their own like *intelligent*, *resilient*, or *kind*. Foundational to identity theories within the symbolic interactionist perspective are the notions that people can and do regulate the meanings of their identities; and that these identities are shaped

and verified within a social context. The meanings of a person's identities are shaped by *identity standards*.

Identity standards

Our *identity standards* are the criteria we use to define or give meaning to role identities. So for example, if my *identity standard* for the role of *father* includes the criterion; *good fathers don't necessarily change nappies (but good mothers do)*, upon perceiving an odour (input) from my infant; I might call for my wife rather than attempt to change the nappy myself. Of course, such behaviour might trigger confusion, conflict, or disappointment with my wife if her role *identity standard* of *husband* includes the criterion; *loving husbands help their wives* or her *father* identity standard, includes the criterion: *good fathers change nappies*. You do not need to be a holder of a role identity to have an identity standard for that role. In fact, that is a key point. Identity theory promotes the view that our role identity standards are largely, but not completely, shaped by our social identities or cultures we belong to. Thus, the meanings behind a person's identity of what a father or husband is or is not are largely shaped by the values of our culture to which we belong. In the symbolic interactionist's perspective, our *identity standards* are formed by a combination of culture, socialisation and personal choice. Our mind consciously and unconsciously regulates our actions according to the meanings of our identity standards. Symbolic interactionists suggest that people's multiple identities are arranged and regulated in a *hierarchy of control* called a *comparator*. Burke and Stets (2009) liken our comparator to a house thermostat that is programmed to signal (output) the furnace to turn on or stay on according to the temperature (input) it perceives. Our comparator monitors

which behaviours to activate based on whether or not an input is consistent with our *identity standards*. At the same time, the comparator is responsible for monitoring our identity hierarchy, as not all our identities carry equal weight or salience. The frequency with which an individual activates a particular identity in a situation is called salience. For example, if in my role as a *boss* my identity standard includes the criterion, *bosses make the rules*, but in my role as a husband my identity standard includes the criterion, *wife has freedom to disagree*; how will I respond if my wife, who is also an employee, wants to come to work at 09:00 rather than 08:30? In this given situation will my role identity as husband or my role identity as boss have greater salience? This scenario represents a role identity conflict which symbolic interactionists consider a mechanism that will inevitably facilitate identity change, i.e. the adjustments and realignments in my identity salience hierarchy and/or the meanings in my identity standards. Symbolic interactionists assume that identities and identity standards are not static but are regularly being shaped and modified through social interaction.

Identity formation and transformation

Stryker (1980) hypothesised that the more a person is committed to an identity and the values a specific identity represents, the greater the likelihood that the identity is invoked in any given situation. Stryker contends that when a change in role identity still reflects the individual's value-commitments, the less the individual will resist adopting a new role identity or identity standard (Turner, 2013).

Burke and Stets (2009) suggest that symbolic interactionist research points to seven mechanisms involved in identity formation and modification. These include: social learning, direct socialisation, reflected appraisals, changes in situation, identity conflict, behaviour conflict, and negotiation. Even though I briefly discuss all seven here, it was the mechanism of reflected appraisals that was predominant among the research participants.

1. *Indirect Socialisation or Social Learning* refers to the identity standards in the general culture in which we are raised and is considered the first source of identity standards. Children learn these standards from parents, family, television, school and from observing others. *Boys in White* by Becker, Geer, Hughes, and Strauss (1961) was a classic study which describes how professional identity for medical doctors is formed through indirect and direct socialisation of medical school.
2. *Direct socialisation* is the second mechanism for identity formation. This refers to formal and informal instruction about what is expected from a particular role. Schooling, job training, religious services, orientation meetings, premarital counselling, are examples of direct socialisation and basically involves being told what is to be expected of various role holders in society.
3. *Reflected appraisals* are where our identities, at least in part, are shaped by what we think others think about us. For example, children can come to define themselves in terms of how they think their parents see them (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). The primary idea behind the concept is that the self-concepts of individuals are affected by the displayed thoughts, emotions and behaviours of others. The theory is not without its critics (Felson, 1985) and limitations, but it appears to have become a normative assumption in social psychology literature (Felson and

Reed; 1986; Ichiyama, 1993). The notion of reflected appraisals is important to my conceptualising the experience of professional identity formation and transformation. I will develop the connection between reflected appraisals and professional identity formation in *Chapter Five*.

4. *Changes in situation* that cause us to adjust our identity standard. This could be as simple as no longer identifying yourself as a teacher because you are no longer employed as a teacher or changing the definition of teacher to include people who are licensed to teach even if you now work as an estate agent.
5. *Identity conflicts* happen when there is incongruence between a person's identity standards. This can occur for example when an employee redefines her identity standard of *friend* after being promoted to manager over her former peers and close friends. When two identity standards come in conflict with one another something will change.
6. *Behaviour conflicts* occur when we choose a behaviour that is inconsistent with our current identity standard. For example, this may happen when a man redefines his self-identity standard as a *masculine male* in order to accept a well paying job arranging floral displays for weddings. As mentioned earlier, when there is incongruence between one's identity standards, change is facilitated.
7. *Negotiations and the presence of others* facilitate changes to our identity standards by conscious or unconscious conformity to the expectations of others. Unlike the previous three mechanisms for change that involve the verification, or not, of identity standards, this mechanism is facilitated by group dynamics, expectations of others, conformity and by role play.

In Education, much of the literature on professional identity formation is dominated by discussions on how educational institutes can facilitate professional identity formation in students. However, this literature does not seem to reference the identity theory work of symbolic interactionists. Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) attempted a systematic and comprehensive literature review on all the peer review articles on teachers' professional identity published over a 12 year period between 1988-2000. They choose this time frame because it was the period that teachers' professional identity emerged as a research topic. In total, they collected 22 articles and evaluated them based on their purpose, definition of professional identity, concepts related to this identity, methodology and major findings. I found two findings from the Beijaard, et al. (2004) study particularly relevant and in alignment with my findings discussed in *Chapter Four and Five*. These findings include:

- Students can be equally successful in their professional identity formation although they follow different development paths.
- Professional identity is understood as an on-going process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences.

Trede, et al. (2012) also did a systematic review of the literature similar to Beijaard, et al. (2002) but focused on the ten years since Beijaard's study, between 1998-2008 and looked only at articles published in higher education journals. Trede, et al. (2012) included 20 articles in their review and reported:

Our analysis revealed that there is a dearth of journal articles in the higher education literature that comprehensively explore the development of professional identity through higher education. Rather than focusing on professional identity development, the journal articles reviewed only tangentially discussed it by exploring dimensions such as professional

reasoning, personal epistemology development, and socialisation into professions and learning theories (ibid: 368).

Two findings in their review were consistent with observations from my study and fit nicely into how leading symbolic interactionists, Burke and Stet (2009) for example believe identities are formed and modified. These are:

- Professional identity development requires active engagement by students.
- Professional identity development is fostered by authentic experiences in the workplace.

It is informative that Trede, et al. (2012) found an apparent lack of alignment in the higher education literature in regard to what professional identity actual means. They found no consistency in the limited definitions that were offered in the 42 articles reviewed in the two literature surveys covering 1988-2008. In addition, it was interesting that none of the articles appeared to consider the contributions of symbolic interactionists in relation to role identity development theory. When I reviewed the references of Beijaard, et al. (2002) and Trede, et al. (2012) the works of leading contemporary identity theorists such as Stryker, McCall, Simmons, Burke, Felson, and Turner were conspicuously absent. I interpret this to mean one of two things. Either the professional identity researchers who publish in the higher education literature are unfamiliar with the identity theory contributions of leading symbolic interactionists or, perhaps more likely, the leading identity theorists among symbolic interactionists are not publishing in higher education journals. In either case, it seems unfortunate that symbolic interactionists and theories on professional identity development seem to be insufficiently discussed in higher education literature. It seems to me that these

theories could help inform the curriculum and administration of professional and occupational training programmes in universities and vocational schools.

One of my research questions asks, *how important did the research participants believe the learning cultures of their own organisations were to their continuous professional development?* As a leader in an INGO, I wonder how I might influence organisational structures to help facilitate the professional development of staff in my organisation. The concepts of organisational learning (OL) and continued professional development (CPD) seem to me very much related to the context of my study. They concern how people learn at work and how workplaces facilitate on-the-job learning. I turn now then to a discussion of on-the-job learning and organisational learning cultures.

Organisational Learning and Professional Development

Human resource departments typically oversee the design, implementation and monitoring of CPD within any given INGO. The findings of my research imply that the smaller the INGO, the fewer in-house CPD programmes it has to offer. However, perhaps the organisational learning climate is more important than the volume of in-house CPD programmes. In this section I focus on several theories related to how organisations attempt to acquire, share and use knowledge to achieve their organisational goals. This body of knowledge is typically referred to as organisational learning (OL) literature.

In February 2013, my web search on *organizational learning* (American spelling) produced over 1,700,000 hits and 400,000 more hits using the British English spelling

of *organisation*. This seems dramatic when compared to the 92,000 hits when a similar search was done by Laura Roper in 2002 (Roper and Pettit, 2002) and is evidence that the literature is extensive and growing. More than 15 years ago Mark Easterby-Smith (1997) did an extensive review of organisational learning literature and categorised what he found into six different academic streams or perspectives:

- *Psychology Perspective* - studies that focus on human development within the organisational context.
- *Management Science Perspective* - studies concerned with the gathering and processing of information so as to maintain organisational memory and experience.
- *Sociology and Organisational Theory* - studies that focus on the broader social systems and organisational structures which affect organisational learning.
- *Strategy Perspective* - studies focusing on competitive or organisational advantage of organisational learning.
- *Production Management Perspective* - studies that focus on the relationship between learning and organisational productivity.
- *Cultural Perspective* - studies that see national and organisational cultures as being significant influences on organisational learning.

Easterby-Smith (ibid.) argued against trying to develop a single framework for organisational learning because each academic discipline provided unique and complementary contributions and perspectives on the issues. The reader is unlikely to be surprised that my own interest, and those of this study, have drawn heavily from the psychology perspective or human development stream of organisational learning. As mentioned earlier, I am concerned about how organisational learning contributes to the professional development of my 12 research participants. My study focuses on

their human development and not on organisational structures, organisational performance or corporate memory. On the other hand, for more than 30 years, the management science perspective has been a dominant voice of organisational learning as expressed through human capital theory (Shultz, 1977). This notion promoted investing in the learning capacity of employees so as to improve organisational performance (Gilley and Maycunich, 2000). The concept has been widely embraced and has played an increasingly dominant role in the corporate strategy of multi-national organisations including INGOs. Therefore I highlight the management science perspective of OL to develop the context for this study. Marsick and Watkins (1990) began to advocate a more holistic, and somewhat less capitalistic approach to human capital theory and learning at work, which has greatly influenced much of what has been written in the field of Human Resource Management and learning in the workplace (Garrick, 1999). Their approach involves changes to work structures, team approaches, quality circles and, most importantly, in my opinion, an emphasis on employee development for its own sake.

INGOs have also been caught up in the organisational learning movement that has become a prominent force in the multi-national corporate world (Roper and Pettit, 2002). It appears that:

Learning at work has become one of the most exciting areas of development in the dual fields of management and education. It has moved to become a central concern of corporations and universities... A new focus on learning is changing the way businesses see themselves (Garrick 1999: 1).

This is part of the context of the research participants' professional journey and a prevailing context in many of the INGOs they work for. Let me develop this further.

Within this framework, a nuanced OL theory called the Learning Organisation (LO) was initially popularised by the writings of Peter Senge (1990, 1993) and promoted widely by the Harvard Business School and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). It refers to an *ideal type* of organisation where workplace learning and professional development are considered essential elements of the business strategy. It is promoted by business leaders, human resource departments and academics in both the private and public sectors, including INGOs (Roper and Pettit, 2002). The LO framework has had a tremendous impact on the humanitarian sector. It fits neatly into the human development theme that many INGOs value and promote (ibid.).

Another reason that the concept of the LO is important to this study is in the type of leadership that it promotes. Gilley and Maycunich (2000) contrast the difference between the type of leadership that is needed in traditional organisations and learning organisations. They describe how autocratic leadership prevails in most traditional organisations where there is a focus on hierarchical structure, power and control. Managers function primarily as controllers, gatekeepers and overseers of performance and production and employees are relegated to performers of services, with little or no participation in decision making, performance improvement or strategy formulation. In contrast, in learning organisations leaders need to inspire and motivate employees to achieve results with as much emphasis on intrinsic rewards as extrinsic. The role of the managers within a learning organisation is that of synergist, who creates an environment in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Employees accept the role of self-directed learners and understand the importance of learning to themselves and the organisation (ibid.). This seemed to be the lived experience of the

research participants. They led as synergists and took responsibility as self-directed learners.

Leadership in the International Aid Sector

I choose not to discuss leadership literature in great detail because it was not a topic that came readily out of the data. However, it seems appropriate to highlight a few issues here, as it is pertinent to the context of the research participants. There are many definitions of leadership. People in Aid, the global network dedicated to improving people management in the humanitarian and development sector define it in this way:

Leadership is about seeing the overall goal within the changing context and taking responsibility to motivate others to work towards it, independent of one's role, function or seniority. (Dickmann, Parry, Emmens, and Williamson, 2010: 13).

The Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA) endorsed the above definition of leadership and went further to agree that core humanitarian leadership behaviours can be helpfully articulated through three dimensions (Emmens and Swords, 2010: 15):

1. Self-awareness (including commitment to personal development)
2. Motivating and influencing others (relationship building, communication, develop individuals and teams)
3. Critical judgement (problem analysis, judgement, handling ambiguity and decision making)

Both the definition of leadership and the three core leadership behaviours adopted by the CBHA fall squarely into Gilley and Maycunich's (2000) understanding of LO leadership values. In regard to CPD interventions, most traditional organisations focus on knowledge acquisition, defined as the collection of new information useful in

identifying, recalling, or recognising the basic components and steps of their jobs (ibid.). In contrast, in a LO the two most common focuses of CPD are on reflection and application. Perhaps this is a sign that adult learning theory is now being more widely applied by human resource departments of multinational organisations.

There are important complexities that need to be acknowledged in the cultural distances between organisations and concepts of leadership within host societies, local NGOs and other INGOs. Dickman, et al. (2010) contented that there is an increased urgency for improvements in inter-agency cooperation and partnership within INGOs. It is also significant as more expatriates from the global south take leadership roles in INGOs. James (2005) identifies how INGO leaders work in at least three different worlds simultaneously, the global aid world, their own work or organisational context, and the world where project beneficiaries may live. There are issues which complicate the professional development of expatriate field leaders in INGOs be they from the global south or global north. For example, one study of multinational organisations showed that 80% of those who accept assignments overseas take their spouse and children along with them (GMAC, 2005). Unlike professionals working in their own culture, the success of expatriates' job assignments are linked not only to their personal ability to adjust cross-culturally but also linked to their family's ability to adjust cross-culturally (Tung 1981; Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991). Some studies of INGOs indicate that the predominant reason for premature return (also known as *attrition*) is stress, induced by misplaced expectations and conflict with co-workers (Foyle, 2001). According to Gary Wederspahn (2002) the divorce rate among expatriates is forty percent higher than that of their domestic counterparts and their children have a 50

percent higher school dropout rate. While the risks seem to be significant for expatriate professionals, there also may be professional advantages in being an expatriate. Richard Sennett (2008) in his book, *The Craftsman* describes how sociologist George Simmel argues that strangers learn the art of adaptation more searchingly than people who feel entitled to belong. The foreigner, he says, holds up a mirror to the society into which he enters since he cannot take for granted ways of life that go unexamined by the native (Sennett, 2008: 13). The focus in research on expatriate careers has shifted from expatriate adjustment models, to work which considers individual experiences within broader frames of reference and in particular the concept of symbolic capital as a framework to understand the impact of international assignments (Doherty and Dickmann, 2009). Sparrow, Brewster, and Harris (2004) and Edstrom and Galbraith, (1977, in Doherty and Dickmann, 2009) have endorsed the importance of international assignments as a key way of benefiting the organisation and as an important mechanism for professional development.

Increasingly, the topic of resilience is being discussed and promoted as a topic in leadership development, CPD, and international aid work. I explore the subject of adult resilience and *grit* as possible explanations in which to frame some of the data that emerged from the research participants, specifically their capacity to face and navigate through adversity.

Reflections on Resilience

The concept of resilience has received increasing attention in management and humanitarian literature (Blanchetiere, 2006; Barron, 1999; Berk, 1998). In

management and leadership literature, *resilience* has been a buzz word for more than ten years. Dean Becker is quoted in the Harvard Business review,

Thirty plus years of research have shown that more than education, more than experience, more than training, a person's level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails. That's true in the cancer ward, it's true in the Olympics, and it's true in the boardroom (Coutu, 2002: 1).

Several years ago my interest in resilience was sparked by the above statement by Dean Becker. I wondered to what degree his statement was true and why I had never heard resilience associated with leadership and workplace success. I considered myself a *workplace training consultant* and even if Becker's statement was only partly true, it was something I thought I should know about. Previously, I had only heard of resilience in the context of disadvantaged school children. While analysing my interview data I wondered if resilience was a key to the research participants' longevity and success at work. My interest in resilience then, is from a leadership and professional development point of view and not from that of a clinical psychologist. I thus framed my literature review on resilience from a workplace learning perspective. In particular, I wanted to know if resilience is a theme I could use to categorise the behaviours I observed in the research participants. I was also interested in learning how international aid workers can promote resilience in themselves, their colleagues, and their programme beneficiaries as much of the literature seemed to claim was possible. The construct of resilience appeared relevant to my research.

The word resilience is derived from the Latin *to bounce back*, and refers to a person or group's capacity to withstand or recover from difficulty. Initially, the resilience literature was predominately a discussion about resilience in children and youth.

Today, there is a robust discussion of adult resilience and resilience in the workplace. The research literature presents resilience as having multidimensional characteristics that varies with context, time, age, gender, and cultural origin, as well as within an individual subjected to different life circumstances (Connor and Davidson, 2003).

Definitions of resilience have evolved as the construct has been examined by researchers from a variety of fields including education, psychology, medicine, nursing, social science, education, and management. In the literature, resilience is characterised as consisting of a set of capacities, strengths or abilities. Each definition provides different perspectives and emphasis on the construct, yet a common sense of resilience emerges from the literature (Isaacs, 2003). I believe that *sense* is captured in a statement by developmental psychologist Edith Grotberg, of the International Resilience Project:

Resilience is important because it is the human capacity to face, overcome, and be strengthened by or even transformed by the adversities of life (Grotberg, 1995: 5)

Grotberg's perspective represents a growing consensus within psychology (Reivich and Shatte, 2002; Higgins, 1994), social science (Henderson and Milstein, 1996), nursing (Jones, 1991), and other disciplines that resilience is not only the capacity to endure adversity but also the capacity to improve and grow from adversity.

The challenges of measuring resilience

Originally, resilience assessments were primarily conducted through inductive methods like open-ended life histories such as Werner and Smith's (1982) longitudinal study that followed nearly 700 children and youth in Kauai, Hawaii living in high risk

environments (alcoholic and/or absent parents, poverty, and high crime). This study tracked the children into their mid-thirties. The intent of the study focused heavily on ways to identify the damage done and to provide services to help them develop. But what Werner and Smith discovered, somewhat to their surprise, was that about one third of the children living in these difficult environments were well adjusted, happy, and successful. The researchers wondered what was going on and how the success of these children could be accounted for (Grotberg, 1996). Among other things, they developed a list of traits or characteristics that these *resilient* children seemed to have in common. For example, they were self-controlled, confident, resourceful, energetic, humorous, sincere and adaptive. The Werner and Smith (1982) study has become a cornerstone of the resilience literature. In his extensive literature review on resilience theory, VanBreda (2001: 14) articulated how the research on personal resilience seem to evolve around seeking answers to variations of the question, “Why, when people are exposed to the same stress which causes some to become ill, do others remain healthy?” Research has focused on differentiating between those traits (or social environments) evidenced in the healthy that were not evidenced in the ill.

Over the past three decades, the traits that make up the construct of resilience continue to be debated and adult resilience research has increased. Many researchers have developed self-reporting, multiple choice questionnaires to measure adult resilience. The self-report method, in spite of its many limitations, is the most common mode of resilience assessments (Paulhus and Vazire, 2007) and a very different approach to accessing resilience than the face-to-face life-history interviews conducted by Werner and Smith (1982). Since resilience assessments reflect both the researcher’s own

construct of resilience and the researcher's purposes, it is natural that numerous assessments to measure resilience have been developed. For example, in my reading I became familiar with the following five adult resilience scales:

- *Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA)* is a 37 item instrument developed by Hjemdal, Friborg, Martinussen, and Rosenvinge (2001) of Norway. It looks at perception of personal competence, personal structure, social competence, family cohesion, and social resources.
- *The Connor-Davidson Resilience scale (CD-RISC)* comprises of 25 items developed by Kathryn Connor and Jonathan Davidson (2003). This construct of resilience is the only scale, as far as I am aware, that recognises *benevolent intervention* or faith as a characteristic of resilient people. It was designed to help assess the modifiability of resilience in response to pharmacological treatment in a clinical population.
- *The Resilience Scale (RS)* is a 25 item assessment looking at perseverance, equanimity, meaningfulness, self-reliance, and existential aloneness (Wagnild and Young, 1993; Wagnild, 2009).
- *The Personnel Resilience Questionnaire (PRQ)* a 75-item instrument that helps individuals gain insight into their resilience strengths and weaknesses, based on comparisons to a database of over 70,000 individuals. The PRQ is based on the resilience framework developed by ODR (now Conner Partners).
- *The Resilience Factor Inventory (RFI)* is a 60 item inventory that measures an individual's current level of resilience with normative data from more than 26,000 people. It is based on the resilience framework developed by cognitive psychologists Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte (2002).

These five resilience scales each represent different constructs of resilience. I found the *Resilience Factor Inventory (or RFI)* particularly interesting because it was: a) transparent in design, b) validated by other studies, c) adapted for use as personal and professional development tools, d) currently used by multi-national organisations for CPD of staff, and e) simple to administer online.

The Resilience Factor Inventory (RFI) is built on the foundation that our responses (i.e. fear, disappointment, stress) to difficult events are not caused by the events themselves but by how we interpret those events. Therefore if we can learn to reinterpret difficult events we can increase our resilience. This model presents resilience as consisting of seven basic factors (ibid.):

- *Emotional regulation* - the belief in our ability to manage our internal world (emotions and thought life) in order to stay effective under pressure.
- *Impulse control* - the belief in our ability to control our behaviour in the face of adversity and remain goal-focused.
- *Casual analysis* - the belief in our ability to accurately identify the causes of our adversities and generate effective solutions
- *Self-efficacy* - the belief that we are effective in the world.
- *Realistic optimism* - the belief in our ability to stay positive about the future yet to be realistic in our planning for it.
- *Empathy* - the belief in our ability to read the verbal and non-verbal cues of others and thus build better relationships.

- *Reaching out* - the belief in our ability to be proactive in embracing new opportunities.

The RFI also has some conceptual links to Emotional Intelligence Theory (Boyatzis, Goleman and McKee, 2002). In addition, the RFI-O aggregates individual RFI scores across a given group as a way of assessing the resiliency of a team or department. The RFI also has a 360 multi-report version called the RFI-360. This version incorporates feedback from peer, subordinates and bosses into the instrument. As far as I know, this makes the RFI-360 distinct from most other resiliency assessments. Adaptiv Learning Systems, Inc administers the RFI. See www.adaptivlearning.com. Dean Becker, whom I quoted at the beginning of the resilience literature review, is co-founder of Adaptiv Learning Systems.

Although my research was not designed to be an exploration of resilience in expatriate humanitarian leaders, I soon began to suspect that resilience would emerge as a theme. During my data analysis process I became conscious of two behaviours in the professional journeys of the research participants that seemed to be strongly connected to their ability to keep going in spite of setbacks and disappointments. These were:

- Strong relationships with colleagues and beneficiaries.
- Seeing the positive results of their work.

Reflections on the Construct of Grit

While doing a literature review on the construct of perseverance, I came across Angela Duckworth's research on *grit*, which is the subject of a series of studies she published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews,

and Kelly, 2007). *Grit* is a construct that contains three fundamental characteristics; *perseverance* and *passion* over the *long-term*.

We define grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course (ibid: 1087-1088).

Duckworth's concept of grit perked my curiosity as I was questioning, 'What construct, other than resilience might better describe the research participants?' While considering the construct of perseverance, I came across grit, which was a new construct for me. The premise being a dedicated, unrelenting person who, over the years, stays-on-track in spite of obstacles and setbacks will accomplish more than a very smart person who changes directions or gives up when things don't go as planned. Grit is described as a non-cognitive quality that is fundamental to high achievement. Gritty people are able to maintain their perseverance and passion over long periods of time despite obstacles and failures. Grit is not a new concept but a new construct:

Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up. - Thomas A. Edison

It's not that I am so smart; it is just that I stay with problems longer. - Albert Einstein

Continuous effort - not strength or intelligence - is the key to unlocking our potential. - Winston Churchill

So while the concept behind grit is not new, Duckworth is one of the early pioneers to focus on investigating it scientifically.

As a student at Harvard College and the University of Oxford and later, as a secondary school maths teacher, Duckworth observed many bright students. She noticed that those students who tried hard did better than those who do not and wondered what role *trying hard* plays in success (Jain, 2012). While studying with positive psychologist Martin Seligman, she began to wonder what characteristics, beyond IQ, differentiated the students who went on to be leaders in their field (Packard, 2007). Duckworth theorised that people who reach high levels of success have the qualities of *dogged perseverance* and sustained passion towards long-term goals. She coined the term for this quality *grit* and developed a brief self-report assessment called the *Grit Scale* (see Appendix D). Over the past seven years, evidence has been accumulating showing grit predicts success better than the traditional metrics of intelligence and talent. In Duckworth's premier *grit* studies, published in 2007,

Across six studies, individual differences in grit accounted for significant incremental variance in success outcomes over and beyond that explained by IQ, to which it was not positively related (Duckworth, et al. 2007: 1098).

Grit involves sustained focus on goals over a long period of time while pressing through obstacles and adversity. It is not just about passion, but about sustained passion and perseverance. Duckworth also believes that her research points to what she calls the *Ten Year Rule*. She asserts that there is no domain that has been studied where the world class performers have put in fewer than ten years of consistent deliberate practice (Duckworth, 2009). In *Chapter Seven* I argue that the construct of grit better fits the profile of the research participants than the construct of resilience. I will also present some possible explanations of why the participants scored low on the *Resilience Factor Inventory*.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

In this chapter I aim to present a clear and reflective analysis of the decisions and processes I employed to design, collect, analyse and report my data. This chapter begins with an outline of my research questions followed by a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that informed my assumptions and decision-making processes. I then describe the phases of my research process from data gathering to analysis. In actuality, my research process was not as linear as the organisation of this chapter might imply. My underlying aim in this chapter is to reflect critically and transparently on my research processes so that the reader may have confidence that my findings are based on a reliable and rational interpretation of my data. As mentioned previously, my principal research question asks:

What do the professional journeys of expatriate international aid workers reveal about how they grew to become exemplary field leaders?

My research was designed to explore the values, knowledge, and experiences that expatriate project leaders in international NGOs utilise to navigate the obstacles and complexities of their occupation. I anticipated the primary audience of my research to be practitioners and stakeholders in the international aid sector involved in education, internship supervision, training, on-the-job coaching, and other areas of personnel development. Thus the following sub-questions evolved:

- *What do the difficult and rewarding experiences of the research participants' reveal about their professional journeys?*

- *To what degree do the experiences of the research participants compare with the humanitarian core competency frameworks being promoted by advocates of the professionalisation agenda such as the ELRHA and CBHA?*
- *How important did the research participants believe the learning cultures of their own organisations were to their continuous professional development?*

The first and third sub-questions were brought to the study through my experience of working with INGOs and refined by my review of the literature. They are in part motivated by the desire for my research findings to inform professional practice. The second sub-question was developed primarily through my reading of the literature.

Design Rationale

The decision regarding what tradition of inquiry to pursue for my research was most directly influenced by my research purpose. As such, a qualitative approach to collecting, analysing and interpreting my data appeared to be the most suitable. Like Miles and Huberman (1994), I view qualitative data, with its emphasis on *thick descriptions* and *lived experience*, as fundamentally suitable for revealing complexity and exploring the meanings people place on their experiences. Silverman (2011) also suggests that qualitative methods are particularly suited for research questions that ask *what* and *how* questions which mine certainly do.

My own theoretical orientations also undoubtedly influenced my rationale and choices in designing my research. I find a level of affinity with critical realists in that I hold to the possibility that social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the

objective world, and that some lawful relationships may be represented by scientific theories (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1994). For the critical realist,

...the fact that [a construct] is socially defined and produced does not make a social phenomenon less real... Something is real if it has a casual effect that is if it affects behaviour and makes a difference (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009: 41).

Thus, I may be a little more interested in patterns and causalities than some constructionists, but I may be less interested in identifying *deeper lying mechanisms* (ibid: 40) than some critical realists. In this research project I adopted many assumptions and methods commonly associated with constructionism. Charmaz says,

Whether you judge a specific study to be constructivist or objectivist depends on the extent to which its key characteristics conform to one tradition or the other (Charmaz, 2006: 130).

If so, most will consider this study as falling within the tradition of constructionism.

On the other hand, Stephen Gould (2003) reminds us that throughout history we humans have blundered in our powerful and persistent tendency to frame complex issues as a struggle between two opposing sides.

Surely the time has come to abandon these constructed dichotomies and embrace the complexity and richness of the space between entrenched perspectives (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 62).

Methodological Congruence

I believe methodological congruence within my research design and theoretical framework(s) was achieved at each step in the process. Foremost in my thinking is a desire to provide a transparent, reflective, and critical account of my data generation, analysis, and interpretation processes. I agree with the advice of Elizabeth Merrick and tried to apply it throughout my thesis:

A primary emphasis is placed on making the steps and influences conscious to the researcher and visible to the reader. Implicit in the aim of trustworthiness is a goal of awareness of self-as-researcher engaging in the research process ... Given that the reader evaluates trustworthiness, through what is presented, a premium is placed on the researchers ability to communicate in a compelling way what and how he found what he did as well as the meaning he makes of it (Merrick, 1999: 32).

Grounded Theory

My research design was informed and guided by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). In particular, Kathy Charmaz's (2006) understanding of grounded theory had a strong influence on my research design. Her book *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2006) provides an alternative perspective on grounded theory as compared to Glaser and Strauss' original ground breaking work *Discovering Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Charmaz demonstrates how grounded theory is a methodology flexible enough to encompass a range of theoretical perspectives.

Grounded theory guidelines describe the steps of the research process and provide a path through it. Researchers can adopt and adapt them to conduct diverse studies ... I view grounded theory methods as a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages (Charmaz, 2006: 9).

In particular, I adopted the following key concepts of grounded theory into my research process (ibid: 5-6).

- A focus on seeking to construct tentative themes and qualified generalisations directly from the data, not from preconceived hypotheses.
- Data sampling intended for theory construction rather than population representativeness. I use purposive sampling.
- Conducting literature reviews after data analysis. In my case, I did extensive literature reviews before, during and after data analysis.

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis.
- Use of the constant comparative method for data analysis.

These five foundational concepts of grounded theory provided the overall methodological framework of my research design. In the second half of this chapter I reflect on how these elements are incorporated through the research process.

Reflexivity

The central concept behind reflexivity is the notion of self-awareness, researchers are reflexive when they are aware of the multiple influences they have on research processes and on how research processes affect them (Gilgun, 2010). A commitment to reflexivity suggests that the research topic, design, and process, together with the personal experience of doing the research are reflected on and evaluated by the researcher (Merrick, 1999). Wilkinson (1988) discusses three different categories of reflexivity.

- Personal reflexivity: Acknowledging who you are and how your personal interests and values influence the research process.
- Functional reflexivity: Continuously examining the research process to reveal assumptions, values, and biases.
- Disciplinary reflexivity: Considering larger issues that including questioning your academic discipline (such as education or international development).

Merrick (1999: 32) suggests that reflexivity is necessitated by the constructionists' assumption that findings are the researcher's personal view of reality. As such,

reflexivity provides a type of mental audit trail of the research process. I suggest that reflexivity is beneficial no matter what methods or theoretical perspective is used. I consider it an act of respect towards my readers to provide *background* reflections, be they personal or functional that would otherwise be invisible to them. I also find it helpful for my own learning process. Gilgun (2012) agrees and adds several more reasons why reflexivity is important. Among them is the idea that reflexivity can mitigate researchers pulling the *God trick* by representing themselves as voices of all-knowing beings rather than the fallible humans we are (Haraway, 1988). I have attempted to demonstrate a commitment to reflexivity throughout my research.

Case Study

I chose to do case study research with the understanding that it is a common research strategy for exploring meanings and complexities of social phenomena within real life settings (Stake 1995; Yin 2003). Since my research explores the real life experiences, and values of humanitarian/development aid practitioners, a multiple case study approach seemed the logical choice. Yin (*ibid.*) also describes case study as the ideal research design for exploring *how* questions and Hammersley (2002) sees case study as an approach to educational research which attempts to facilitate understanding rather than promote solutions. My research is asking *how* questions and attempts to facilitate understanding and identify potential themes across cases. Yin (2003) might call my research an *exploratory* case study since it is not designed to test a hypothesis in the classic positivistic sense but aims to take a holistic and in depth *exploration* in how practising expatriate project leaders develop professionally.

Gerring (2007) describes case study as intensive research where the purpose of the study, at least in part, is to shed light on a larger population but he clarifies that the unit(s) under special focus can never be perfectly representative of the larger population. My research consists of a collection of 12 cases combined into a single study. In a later section I will describe the size of the population from which my cases are samples, but I do not make a claim that my cases are representative of the entire population. Consistent with Gerring (2007), my research claims to *shed light* on a larger population without having to prove my cases are perfectly representative of the larger population. Some case study researchers, Stake (2000), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Bassey (1999), for example, have written extensively about how case studies can make many types of qualified generalisations or claims even from small population samples. For example, I found Stake's (1995) argument that case studies can facilitate vicarious learning for the reader very convincing. Stake explains how people can learn much that is general from even a single case because they may be familiar with other cases/experiences and they add this one in to their own experience. Thus readers make a slightly new group from which to generalise and have a new opportunity to modify old generalisations. Stake calls these naturalistic *generalisations* and considers them the primary ingredient for vicarious learning (Stake, 1995: 85). From a different angle, Bassey (1999) argues that case studies produce what he describes as *fuzzy generalisations* that tell us something may happen, but without any measure of its probability. Bassey argues that these *qualified generalisations* carry the idea of possibility but not certainty. He and others argue that qualified generalisations make very important contributions to the professional discourse (Gromm, et al. 2000: 259).

Ethical Issues and Confidentiality

My research conforms to the published guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) and the *code of practice for research* adopted by The University of Edinburgh (UKRIO, 2009). My research was overt among consenting adults who were informed of their rights and my obligations as a researcher. Some of the research participants were concerned that the publishing of my research might compromise their security situation in the countries where they lived and worked. Therefore, I designed a consent form (see Appendix A) where each research participant was able to specify the degree of autonomy/confidentiality they desired in order to participate in the research. As such, in the interest of the participants who wanted their names and organisations to remain confidential, I represented all the participants and their organisations with pseudonyms in this study. This level of anonymity was satisfactory to all the research participants and I believe it did not impede the reporting of my research. All other information, such as the participants' gender, age, civil status, nation of origin, and location of work, are represented in the study as they were represented to me by the participant. All participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time before submission of the thesis.

Power and insider privilege

The impact of qualitative researchers who are insiders to the populations they study has been much discussed in the literature (Adler and Adler, 1987; Kanuha, 2000; Asselin, 2003; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). While engaged in this research I was

also employed in the international aid sector just as the participants, but I never considered myself an insider nor this project *insider research* as it has traditionally been defined. I am headquarters based not field based and my experience as a field leader is not recent. I make no claim in my research to be a member of the population I study. However, I was aware that my long-term involvement in the international aid sector in Central Asia, Middle East, and North Africa gave me privileges and made me vulnerable to potential pitfalls. My previous involvement in the region as a project leader, travelling coach, and participant in regional conferences over the past two decades resulted in having previously worked with, met, or recognised some of the people recommended to participate in my research. I felt particularly excited about the possibility of having several of those whose reputations I was distantly familiar with participate in my research. One was a field leader in the same INGO I had recently joined. When this field leader was recommended to me by others, I felt the benefit of including this person in the study outweighed the potential pitfalls and took steps to manage it. Zinn (1979) suggests that the community confers insider or outsider status on the researcher and that status shapes the data available to the researcher by relating to her as an insider or outsider (Griffith, 1998). I believe the research participants conferred me with a degree of *insider status*. I believe I experienced a level of trust and openness that a researcher conferred with *outsider status* would not likely have enjoyed. I suspect my insider privilege was one reason none of the participants who accepted my invitation to participate in the research dropped out in spite of being busy people. There are other examples of how insider privilege likely benefitted me. Consider my interview with Peter. Previous to the interview Peter and I had never met but we had heard of each other through mutual

colleagues. I arranged to interview Peter during a conference in Europe that we were both attending. When I showed up for the interview, Peter was experiencing severe back pain. For more than half of the interview he lay on the floor in order to ease his pain. In spite of the difficulty, Peter insisted we continue with the interview. I felt honoured and humbled by this experience. It was one example of the trust and openness I felt with the research participants. I think the insider status contributed positively to the richness and fullness of the data I collected. Of course, there are also other ways of looking at it, and I tried to consider the potential pitfalls carefully.

For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a non-native scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised ... (Kanuha, 2000: 444).

Asselin (2003) recommends the following techniques for data collection and analysis to avoid the pitfalls of insider research and power. I have attempted to implement these guidelines at all times.

- Do not take for granted you know the culture. Probe as if you do not.
- Maintain a concise and accurate account of how data were collected and analysed so that another researcher can follow the process and concur with the findings.
- Consider doing your research somewhere other than your own worksite.
- Ask participants to check your findings.
- Set expectations for participation.
- Guard against role confusion.

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) challenge the dichotomy of insider versus outsider status as overly simplistic. They advocate the *space between* as a dialectical approach that allows the preservation of the complexity of similarities and differences. In addition, they cite Acker (2000) as concluding,

... the insider-outsider question cannot be resolved... and suggests that we follow the lead of other researchers who attempt to find a way to be both (Dwyer and Buckle , 2009: 62).

In my own case, as mentioned earlier, I do not claim to be an insider but have been sensitised to the pitfalls of being one. I made a conscious effort to help mitigate potential pitfalls by implementing Asselin's (2003) recommendations. I was careful to invite only participants who had been recommended to me by others and I informed those I invited to participate in the research who had recommended them. To set expectations, I wrote formal but personalised invitations and information letters about the scope and purpose of the study. I explained the expected amount of time that participation in the study would involve. I gave the participant control over anonymity issues by using customisable participant consent forms and worked to create auditable data collection and analysis processes. I also gave participants copies of their transcripts and invited them to give input on my findings. However, in spite of these precautions, it would be naïve for me to assume that all bias was mitigated.

Use of pseudonyms

Most of my case participants requested their real name and organisational name be kept confidential. They felt that they could not speak freely without putting themselves or their organisation at risk. Readers of this research may be unaware that many INGOs maintain precarious relationships with the national or local governments that host them. INGOs operate as guests of host governments whose policies and practices, or lack thereof, are often seen to contribute to the problems the INGOs are there to work with. As such, 10 of my 12 research participants requested various assurances of anonymity as a condition of participating in the study. This in itself is a research

finding regarding the lived experience and working environment of my case participants. Therefore, I used pseudonyms for all my participants and the organisations they represent, even for the two who did not request it. The pseudonyms for the participants' names were derived by randomly choosing one of the top 100 popular names from the participants' passport country. The organisation names were derived by taking the reverse of the first three or four letters of the country name where they worked. For example Olav from Norway works for REZA in Azerbaijan. REZA is the reverse of the first four letters of AZERbaijan and the pseudonym I choose for Olav's actual organisation. It was important for me to use the real name of the country where the research participants worked. I felt this was important to the research. Nigel was the only participant who asked I used a pseudonym for his workplace country. Therefore, we compromised and I used the region where he works, *North Africa* as if it were the country name for Nigel's workplace. This was acceptable to Nigel and seemed to be of little significance to my research outcomes. Otherwise, all the research participants' nationalities, their workplace location, and their years on field, and all other data are as originally reported to me.

The Research Process

In this section I aim to present a reflective rather than a strictly chronological or thematic account of my research process. I started with the idea of doing research that would inform my own professional practice and potentially that of my colleagues working in the international aid sector. From my own experience, for as long as I can remember, there has always been a shortage of good field leaders. Neither I, nor the people that I knew, could ever find enough of them. I anticipated that lessons could

be learned about how to develop good field leaders with a research project that explored the lived experiences of successful ones. Therefore I decided to pursue this idea for my Doctorate of Education research project. My initial research questions were developed through a process of reflection on the types of data I anticipated I could collect.

Case Selection

In a qualitative study using a grounded theory framework, the aim of sampling is to gather rich data (Charmaz, 2006) more so than notions of representativeness. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which the researcher decides who should be included based on the participant's expected contribution of data, both in terms of relevance and depth (Jupp, 2006). I started this process by asking INGO leaders to recommend people for the study who met seven criteria; these criteria are discussed in depth later in this section. I was aware that people tend to recommend people like themselves in such things as values, gender, and ethnicity thus potentially limiting the diversity of the cases and increasing researcher bias (Collier and Mahoney, 1996). I attempted to offset this potential pitfall by asking a diverse range of INGO leaders to make participant recommendations and by providing a full and reflective description of my selection process.

Qualitative studies generally focus on a relatively small number of cases, often a single case, since the focus is on in-depth analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I originally planned to have six research participants in my study. I was advised it would be prudent to engage more than six participants due to the likelihood of some dropping

out. In the end, none of the people who agreed to participate in the research dropped out so I had 12 research participants. As mentioned earlier in the ethics section, this might be related to the insider privileges I sensed were conferred on me by the research participants. On the other hand, it could be evidence that I was tapping into something the participants considered significant and relevant. Not least of which, in my opinion, is an opportunity to tell their own story as one recognised by peers and supervisors as an exemplary field leader. I feel privileged to be able to tell the stories, at least in part, of these exemplary people.

How big is the population from which the cases belong? There is not a reliable method to estimate the size of the population of expatriate project leaders in the humanitarian and development aid sectors due to poor data and vague definitions.

Oxfam GB worldwide has 4,603 employees. Of these, 203 (or 4.4% of the workforce) are classified as filling professional humanitarian posts. If we were to assume that this percentage is valid across all agencies, we would reach a figure of 29,239 professional humanitarian posts in the global workforce (Walker and Russ, 2010: 12).

This figure of 29,239 is only slightly better than an uneducated guess. In any case, this figure does not delineate who are *expatriates* or who are working in Central Asia, North Africa, or the Middle East. Based on casual observations from more than 20 years of participation in regional conferences and interagency collaborations in these areas I estimate there are fewer than five thousand people who would fit my research criteria, but there is simply no accurate way to determine the size of the population. I did not find it particularly easy to find twelve which I blame on the short-term (under two years) nature of INGO work contracts and the high stress of the job. In any case, I make no claim that my participants are a representative sample of any specific

population.

Two of the 12 participants met only six of the seven criteria. Upon reflection, I decided to keep all 12 in the study because I believe the contributions of the two outweighed the possible benefits of eliminating them from the study. I agree with Stake (1995) who promoted the potential for learning as a greater priority for selection of cases than notions of typicality or 100% homogeneity in my case samples. I believe the participation of two *outliers* in a sample size of 12 made the study richer without compromising the purposes of the research. A table with summarising information about the research participants is found later in this section.

Criteria for case selection

The criteria for participation was largely driven by: a) desire for rich data, b) their underrepresentation in the literature, c) my professional interests, d) an intuitive sense for the learning potential, e) the availability and willingness of participants, and f) thesis constraints.

The most basic criteria for the research participants are mentioned in my research question which asks, “What do the professional journeys of expatriate field leaders in the international aid sector reveal about how they grew into exemplary practitioners?” The following Venn diagram, adopted from Walker and Russ (2010: 11) illustrates the criterion for participation in the research.

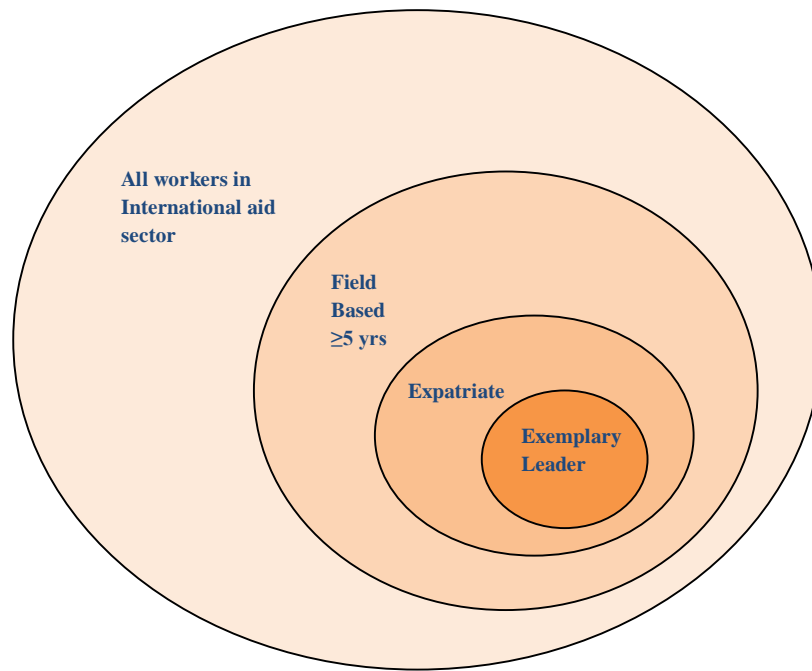


Figure 4: Venn Diagram of basic criteria for case selection

In addition, I anticipated that the potential for rich data collection/creation would be enhanced if the research participants represented a variety of international aid organisations, nationalities, and host countries. I made further refinements on my sampling criteria until I settled on the following seven points:

1. ***Recognised by his/her peers or organisation as exemplary.*** Originally when I framed the first drafts of my research question I used the word *successful* rather than *exemplary*. I decided to change the wording of this criterion from successful to exemplary. I found the meaning of *successful* somewhat problematic when I initially discussed it with those I asked to suggest research participants. In the course of those conversations I realised that what I really wanted was a case study full of *role model* practitioners. My rationale for this was based on the assumption that role model practitioners could provide richer data than others. Arguably there is much to learn from failure. The famous English poet John Keats (1795-1821)

believed so when he said, “Failure is, in a sense, the highway to success, inasmuch as every discovery of what is false leads us to seek earnestly after what is true.” So while I do not argue Keats’ point, a core purpose of this study is to investigate the experience of people, who in spite of failures, obstacles and complexities grew to become exemplary in their practice.

I also wanted to avoid veteran field leaders who might be in a leadership position because they were *survivors* rather than exemplary leaders. I have observed in my experience, field workers who were given leadership roles because they were the last person standing. In other words, they appeared to survive into leadership rather than grow into exemplary leadership.

My strategy for finding role model practitioners was simple, I began by asking four INGO leaders whom I knew to make recommendations of people whom they considered exemplary field leaders and met the other six criteria. They not only recommended people from their own organisations but from other INGOs. When they asked what I meant by exemplary I responded, “Veteran practitioners you think are good role models for your organisation and profession.” I also asked several of the research participants to recommend people for the study. After two people from two different INGOs recommended someone from my own INGO I decided to break what some might consider a taboo and invite the person to participate. Eleven of the twelve participants in my research were recommended to me by their supervisors or professional colleagues as exemplary field leaders. Four of the twelve participants were recommended by more than one person. Only

Doris did not completely meet this criterion. She was recommended for inclusion in this study by her husband Manfred and not by a peer or supervisor. Manfred asked if I wanted to include Doris in the interview after I had showed up at their home to do my first interview with him. She met all the other criteria and so I agreed. My initial interview was done with them as a couple and produced one of the richest accounts of all my interviews. I discuss this interview later in the chapter.

2. ***A veteran of at least five years of cumulative field experience in humanitarian or development projects.*** I was looking for experienced career professionals for my research. My rationale for this was my belief that there would be richer data about professional journeys from experienced professionals than there would be from inexperienced ones. This criterion also helped me eliminate short-termers and those who are still exploring the profession. Of the 12 research participants, Anders and Spencer had the least amount of field experience with only five years each but the mean field experience was 12.5 years. This criterion accommodates a potential criticism and weakness to my research. It eliminates the possibility that exemplary leaders with less than five years' experience are represented. I do not make the claim that all exemplary leaders have at least five years' experience. However, I felt richer data could be constructed from veteran aid workers.
3. ***A leader.*** Initially I expected my research participant to be leaders who were currently supervising direct reports, overseeing finances, and responsible for project outcomes. In the course of my research I broadened my definition of leadership to include field based opinion leaders and subject matter experts who were not necessarily supervising direct reports at the time of the interview.

Manfred and Mike fit this latter category. Upon reflection, this criterion was probably superfluous in light of the criterion for being experienced and exemplary. Both Manfred and Mike had supervised staff earlier in their field careers but not in their roles at the time of their interviews.

4. ***An expatriate.*** I wanted research participants who were working cross culturally. This is one of the key professional distinctions between *international* aid professionals and those who are part of local or national NGOs. For my research, I defined expatriates as people whose passport identity was different from the country where they worked. They are typically guests of a host government. Expats typically speak a different language and have different values than the project beneficiaries they are attempting to help. I believed the complexities of delivering professional services as a *foreigner* would add richness to my data. All of my participants were expatriates.
5. ***Currently on the field or within the last 12 months moved from the field.*** As Creswell (2007) points out; understanding of any human activity is best realised in context or *in situ*. I felt it was more critical for my research that my participants be *in situ* than me doing my interviews with them *in situ*. None of my interviews were conducted *in situ*. In my thinking, the potential benefits did not justify the certain costs. My interviews took place in homes, hotel rooms, conference meeting halls, and two via Skype. All the participants were currently working as INGO field leaders at the time of the interviews.
6. ***Represent a range of international organisations in different countries.*** I wanted my cases to represent different organisational cultures as an additional reference point when comparing the cases with each other. In addition, Schostak (2002)

suggests that a multi-site study is one potentially useful approach to increase the generalisability of qualitative work. Ten different host nations are represented in this study to provide a range of host cultures. Ten different INGOs are represented in this study to provide a range of organisational cultures. However there is less range in the size of the INGOs represented in the study. All the participants, except two, worked for INGOs that had fewer than 500 expatriate field staff. These would be considered small to mid-sized INGOs. I had originally hoped to have an even mix of small, medium, and large INGOs in my study. I expected that this would add to the richness of my data, but it did not happen. However, I believe what I ended up with, although not from any purposefully design, is a range of INGO sizes not unlike what you find across Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. That is, many small and medium sized INGOs and a few much larger ones.

7. *Work in Central Asia, Middle East, or North Africa as opposed to black Africa, Latin America, or South East Asia.* I chose this population because it is: a) under represented in the literature, b) the fastest growing socio-geographic area for international aid (Hyder, 2007), c) the population that I am most curious about, and d) where I had a significant relational network from which to identify participants. I believe this criterion adds interesting nuance to my case population rather than being core or indispensable to my research purposes. Muslim majority nations have become the major focus of international aid spending in the decade following 9/11. Thus, European and North American relief and development professionals are far more likely to be involved in projects in this socio-geographic area than they were before 2001. Spencer was the only research participant who did not work in a Muslim majority nation. He is also the only person in my

research who I have never met face-to-face. Our interview was conducted over Skype and we corresponded by email. While Spencer is somewhat of an *outlier* in this study, his participation contributed additional nuance and richness to the data.

Summary of research participants

The 12 research participants work for ten different INGOs. Four of the INGOs are small (under 100 field staff) four are medium size (100-500), and two are large (over 1000). At the time of the interviews the research participants worked in ten different host countries. These being: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Yemen, Mauritania, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sudan, *North Africa*³, and Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some of the participants had additional significant humanitarian field experience in Egypt, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Sudan. The average age of the participants is 47 and average field experience is 12.5 years. They speak three to five languages each. Their details are summarised in the following chart.

³ *North Africa* is the region not the country where one participant works. The participant wanted me to use a pseudonym for the country.

Summary chart research participants

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Civil Status	Nationality	INGO Staff Size	Type or Phase of Aid Work ³	Years on current field	Current Field Location	Total Years on field
Nigel	49	male	Married	English	50-100	1-3	12	North Africa	12
Olav	48	male	Married	Norwegian	100-200	2-3	15	Azerbaijan	15
Sean	46	male	Married	Irish	50-100	1-3	3	Pakistan	8
Clare	44	female	Married	Irish	50-100	1-3	3	Pakistan	8
Manfred	56	male	Married	German	>1000	2-3	7	Yemen	20
Doris ¹	55	female	Married	American	100-200	2-3	7	Yemen	15
Betty	48	female	Single	American	50-100	1-3	20	Mauritania	20
Peter	47	male	Single	American	100-200	1-3	5	Darfur	15
Mike	38	male	Single	English	50-100	1-3	2	Kyrgyzstan	14
Karin	43	female	Single	German	300-400	1-3	4	Tajikistan	14
Anders	39	male	Married	Swedish	400-500	2-3	5	Afghanistan	5
Spencer ²	52	male	Single	English	>1000	1-2	3	DR Congo	5

Table 1: Summary Chart of Research Participants

¹Met all but one criteria (participant was recommended by her husband Manfred rather than by supervisor or peer)

²Met all but one criteria (participant was not working in Central Asia, Middle East, or North Africa)

³While not without controversy, international aid work is often categorised into three phases or types of aid. Typically these are: Phase 1-Emergency relief/humanitarian aid, Phase 2- Reconstruction, and Phase 3-Development. Many INGOs in the aid sector work in all three categories. Many field staff also work in all three categories of aid work during their careers.

Biographic narrative interviews

Charmaz (2006: 14) says, “Obtaining rich data means seeking *thick* description.” I wanted to collect thick descriptions about the professional journeys of exemplary expatriate field leaders in the international aid sector. I believed it would be helpful to try and construct a comprehensive picture of their work history from age 18 so as to better understand how they ended up where they are today. I anticipated I could collect richer data if the research participants came from a variety of organisational, cultural and geographic contexts. I anticipated that interviews would provide the core of my research data. While doing research on interview techniques for life histories I came across a form of semi-structured interviews called *biographical narrative interviews* that Tom Wengraf reports as having “been used over the past fifteen or more years in a variety of collective research projects ...” (Wengraf, 2006: 1). This interview technique seemed ideal for collecting life histories and exploring the lived experiences of the research participants.

There is a large body of literature about the purpose, design, implementation and analysis of semi-structured interviews and biographic narrative interviews or life histories (Wengraf, 2006; Mason 2002; Drever, 1995; Wragg 1978). Life history research is a form of interpretative research that is retrospective in nature. It focuses on the stories people tell about their *lives so far* (Wengraf, 2006). The biographic narrative interviews are designed for life histories, lived situations and personal experience. I used biographic narrative interviews to help the research participants reflect on their professional journey and how they navigated through the obstacles to get to where they are today. Like other forms of semi-structured interviews, it is

necessary to prepare questions in advance but the researcher must anticipate the need for improvising along the way (Wengraf, 2001).

Wengraf (2006) suggests a three-session format for collecting a life history according to the *Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM)*. I followed Wengraf's model with only slight modifications. For example, Wengraf (ibid.) suggests that the first two sub-sessions take place during a single two or three hour interview. In the first sub-session the researcher collects a chronology of objective life events, meaning events that, in theory, could be independently checked. Later, once the chronology is complete, and immediately following the first sub-session, the researcher asks for more narrative on some of the objective life events. After the first two sub-sessions have been transcribed and analysed, a second interview (third sub-session) with follow up questions takes place.

Professional development data forms

In my interview process, I eliminated the need for what, according to the BNIM process would be the first interview, by asking the research participants to complete what I called the *Professional Development Data Form* well before our first actual interview. I created the *Data Forms* to solicit their life and work history information similar to what might be expected in a job application. Besides asking for detailed information about their current employment, I asked for details about their education and work experience starting from age 18. I also asked for personal and family information and a copy of their CV if they had one. Nine of the 12 research participants emailed me the completed *Data Form* well before their first interview was scheduled. From their completed *Data Form* and CV (when included) I constructed a

personalised *Professional Development Timeline* for each research participant.

Professional development timelines

The *timelines* created a visual and chronological representation of the formal education, work experience, work roles, life events, locations, ages and other information the participant reported to me regarding their professional journey starting from the age of 18. In order to create the *timelines* I modified a free Microsoft Excel timeline template I found on Microsoft Office's official website. See below.

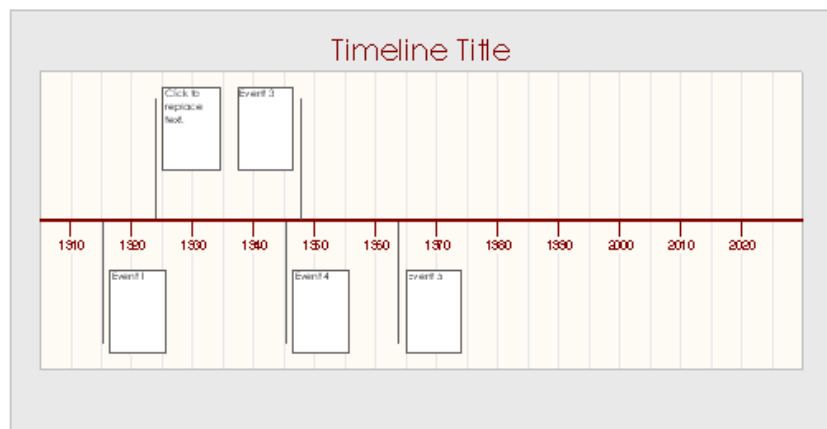


Figure 5: Original timeline template

I modified this to create a draft template of the *Professional Development Timeline* for my study. See below.

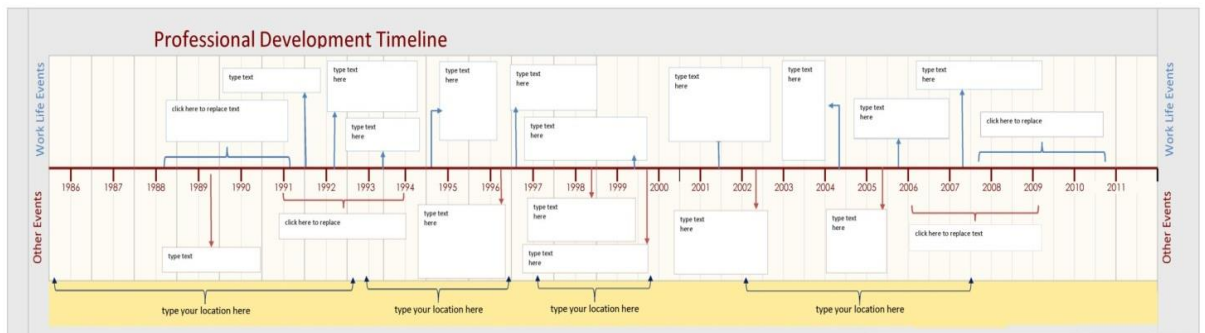


Figure 6: Modified timeline template

The full size versions of the *timelines* are between 40-70 cm. (16-27 inches) in length depending on the age of the research participant and 14 cm (5.5 inches) in height. I then used the data from the research participants' *Data Forms* and CVs to construct a draft timeline for each person. Upon completion of the first draft, I sent a copy of each person's *timeline* to them for verification. If corrections were needed I edited the draft and sent it back to the participant for final verification. I used the *timelines* as a point of reference during my interviews. Later, I also incorporated the timelines into my data analysis process.

Each *timeline* has three basic zones. 1) *Work Life Events* zone on the top side of the year line. In this zone you can see the organisation and position the participant had and for how long. 2) *Other Events* zone on the bottom side of the years line. In this zone you can see formal education and other life events volunteered by the participant. 3) *Age & Location* zone is below the *Other Events* zone. In this zone you can find the location and age of the research participant. The stars represent events that were self-reported to me by the participant but could not be easily represented as a bar or line. Events such as marriage, birth of first child, hospitalised with malaria, kidnapping of colleague. These events seemed significant in their professional journey but could not be easily represented by a timeline bar.

A reduced example of a participant's timeline is on the next page. The original size of this timeline is 57 cm long and 14 cm high. A slightly larger rendition of the same timeline can be viewed in Appendix C.

The *timeline* was my own innovation to Wengraf's biographic-narrative interview model. The *data form* and the corresponding *timeline* were the functional equivalent of what Wengraf suggests for the purpose of the first interview sub-session. Instead of gathering this data in an interview I chose to collect it through a completed *data form* and construct a *timeline*. I found the process of constructing the timeline from the *data form* was the real genesis of my data analysis process. The construction of the *timeline* gave me a pre-interview head start in reflecting on the life experiences of the research participants. Therefore my first interview was equivalent to the second interview in the *biographical-narrative interview method*. Upon completion of the transcripts, I sent a digital copy to each research participant via email. I believed sending the transcripts and *timeline* would not only facilitate accuracy but also promote trust, transparency and accountability both in my research and towards the participants. I had additional post interview follow-up correspondence with each research participant via email and/or Skype. Thus, I was very consistent in following Wengraf's model of biographic-narrative interviews.

Interviews

The interviews were the primary source of data for my research. Earlier in this chapter I described the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) interview process I used. I conducted my interviews over a seven month period between August 2011 and February 2012. I did not visit any of the participants at their places of work to conduct the interviews. Six of the interviews took place while the participants were on a break in Europe and six occurred during conferences in Europe and Thailand that I attended. Ten of the interviews were face-to-face and two were conducted by Skype. The

participants all agreed to have their interviews recorded. The interviews lasted between 45 and 190 minutes and were recorded simultaneously on two digital recorders. This was originally in order to have a backup, but the second recording also helped me be more efficient during transcribing. The Skype interviews were also recorded by a free online application called MP3-Skype recorder. The Skype interviews did not reach the same depth of discussion as the face-to-face interviews and thus tended to be shorter.

Interview questions

Earlier in this chapter I described how I collected education and career data from each research participant before their interview. I also described how I constructed *Professional Development Timelines* from this data. In nine cases I had the participant's *timeline* at my side during the interviews. The *timelines* helped me visualise their age, dates, and places as they told the stories of their professional journey during the interviews. Some had worked in three or four countries over their career and the *timeline* helped clarify the context of their stories. My interviews were framed around eight open ended questions. These were:

Q1 - What steps or events led you into this line of work?

Q2 - Tell me about your work. What is a typical day like?

Q3 - What type of experience or training did you have before you started this job?

Q4 - What advice would you have for someone starting a similar job?

Q5 - In what way does your organisation(s) contribute to your professional development?

Q6 - Tell me examples of difficult work situations?

Q7 - How about examples of rewarding work situations?

Q8 - What keeps you going?

These questions were sent to the participants prior to the interview. Some research participants brought a printed copy of the questions to the interview. I noticed a few had made handwritten notes on their copy. This led me to believe that the participants had spent some time thinking about their answers. In most cases I asked the questions in nearly the same order as above. However, as explained below I decided to switch the order of question Q6 with question Q7 after the first two interviews.

Trial interview

I did a trial interview that I found very useful from several perspectives. I did not collect detailed information about the interviewee's education and work history background prior to the trial interview. This oversight reinforced the utility of collecting background information prior to the interview and carefully studying the participant's timelines prior to the interview and the pre-interview correspondence. Not only was the trial interview longer than it needed to be but, perhaps more importantly, I felt I did not have the same relational permission that I sensed in subsequent interviews. For nine of the 12 subsequent interviews I had exchanged five or six emails with each person before the interview took place. In a sense, the interview process started weeks or months before the actual interview. It was my impression that the pre-interview correspondence and information gathering/creating facilitated a sense of positive expectation and collegiality that was not attained in my

trial interview. The trial interview had other positive consequences in that it alerted me to a potential issue in the sequence of my questions.

After my second interview, I noticed a possible pattern starting to develop between the participants' answers to questions Q8-*What keeps you going?* and question Q7- *How about examples of rewarding work situations?* I thought "What keeps you going?" would be a good question to finish my interviews with. I hoped the question would elicit data about the motivations that sustained the research participants on the field. However, I began to see a pattern emerge when I asked *what keeps you going?* in that their stories were often other examples of *rewarding experiences* from the previous question. I became suspicious that the sequence of my questions was leading my participants to answer the way they did. Therefore, I began to ask question Q8-*What keeps you going?* after question Q6-*Tell me examples of difficult work situations?* Switching the order of these two questions seemed to elicit better data than the original sequence. By asking Q8 -*What keeps you going?* after the interviewee finished telling me examples of difficult work situations provided a natural contrast that flowed well in the interview.

Reflections on the interview process

I tended to spend a minimal amount of time in small-talk before starting the interviews. The act of setting up my digital recorders, notes, and timeline seemed to add a degree of formality to the atmosphere that made small-talk seem a bit out of place. My main goal was to let them talk about their experiences in a way that would help me gain insight into their professional development journey. I did not find that difficult. As

expected, some participants needed less prompting than others to tell their stories, but all the research participants, even those for whom English was not their native language, seemed focused and engaged. However, I did find that one of my interview questions appeared to be a dud. I had expectations from this question that were not met as planned. Let me explain.

The participants' response to question Q5-*How does your NGO contribute to your professional development?* was surprising. I did not realise that I had built up expectations about how this question would be answered until their answers fell short of my expectations. Most of the research participants told me their NGOs contributed very little to their professional development. While this was an interesting outcome (discussed in *Chapter Six*) I had anticipated and prepared for more. This section of my interviews was always the shortest and produced the fewest number of codes during the analysis phase. My clarifying questions did not seem particularly useful in helping facilitate *rich descriptions*. In retrospect, I believe the question was not sufficiently open ended. I believe I would have gotten more by asking, "How do you learn on the job?" and use clarifying questions regarding their NGOs' contribution to on-the-job learning. Unfortunately, I was always hoping for a different answer, and I kept asking the original Q5 and only used the question *How do you learn on the job?* as a qualifying or follow-up question. In retrospect, I think my stubbornness with the original Q5 revealed my own bias and wrongful assumptions. I had done a lot of reading on Organisational Learning (OL) and assumed that exemplary field practitioners must work for INGOs that are proactive in organising *on the job* learning and CPD, but that was not the case. Instead, I discovered that the research participants

belonged to INGOs who *gave permission* and time for learning *if* the participant was proactive to seek it out. Only one of the INGOs was proactive in organising and delivering a wide-range of in-house CPD programs. Only one of the 12 research participants was disappointed in the lack of in-house CPD opportunities, the others felt CPD was available if they sought it out. While this is very useful data, it was not what I originally expected to hear and reminded me that I am not an unbiased researcher even if I try to be.

In spite of my stubbornness with Q5, I believe I became increasingly proficient at conducting good interviews. For example, while transcribing the first two interviews I noticed that several times I interrupted my research participant in mid-sentence to ask a clarifying question. I noticed that my clarifying question unnecessarily disrupted the flow of their stories. In the following interviews I was more careful to interrupt only during natural pauses in the narratives. As mentioned earlier, I found that slightly adjusting the sequence of questions also produced positive results. I found the actual interview sessions a highlight of the entire research process.

Reflections on couple interviews

Seven of the research participants were married. However, in one case both the husband and wife (Sean and Clare) were recommended to me as potential research participants. I originally planned to interview them separately, confident that each had their own stories to tell. I also thought it would be easier in the data analysis stage to compare individual interviews with each other if the interviews were done separately. However, my view changed while I was travelling to a conference in Europe and

stopped at the home of Manfred for an interview appointment. Manfred had been strongly recommended to me by a former colleague and agreed to participate in my research. As I drank a pre-interview coffee with Manfred in his living room, he asked me if I would like to include his wife Doris in my study. As a guest in their home, I did not want to appear rude so I agreed to include Doris even though I knew little of her qualifications. It also seemed practical as I was still looking for research participants at the time. I figured if Doris did not meet the criteria I could simply exclude her from the study later. In fact, she met all the criteria but one, she was not recommended by a colleague or supervisor. So, more by default than plan, I spent the next 190 minutes doing a joint interview with Manfred and Doris. It proved to be one of the most interesting and data rich interviews.

One of the factors that made the dual interview so interesting and data rich was the way Manfred and Doris played off each other's narrative with validating, correcting, qualifying and supplemental data. This included data that would probably not have been volunteered if I had interviewed the couple separately. The dynamic of a three person discussion produced rich data. From time to time, during the interview, Doris interjected while Manfred was telling a story. Not so much correcting Manfred but adding background information and interpretation that created a much fuller picture of both their professional journeys. By the end of the interview it became clear to me that Doris had played an instrumental role in facilitating and supporting Manfred on his professional journey and vice versa. Especially evident was Doris' moral and financial support which enabled Manfred to pursue university studies in England. I saw how Doris and Manfred's professional journeys were not two separate roads that

crossed from time to time but were deeply shared and intertwined with one another. I am convinced that if I had interviewed Manfred separately, as originally planned I would have walked away with a much different picture of his professional journey. Because of the insights gained from my joint interview with Doris and Manfred, I decided to interview Sean and Clare together. The joint interview with Sean and Clare was also rich and packed with meaning.

In retrospect, I wish I had interviewed Nigel, Olav, and Anders with their spouses too. With better planning I probably could have arranged to do so, but the idea came too late in the process. As such, I am left with a nagging dissatisfaction that I missed an opportunity to collect richer data. This does not mean that I am dissatisfied with the quality and authenticity of my interviews with the other married participants, Nigel, Olav, and Anders. It is more the feeling one might get after eating your fill at a delicious five star Christmas smorgasbord you learn there was an exotic dessert table in the other room.

Gathering, Creating, and Analysing Data

The transcripts of interviews and professional timelines are the core of my research data. They were designed so that participants could highlight significant experiences in their own professional journey and provide insights into the complexities of their professional development.

In research design there is sometimes a distinction made between the collection of data and the analysis and interpretation of data. In this study, data analysis started to take place during data collection and thus the distinction between *data collection* phases

and *data interpretation* phases were somewhat blurred (Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2006). This became increasingly obvious while transcribing my interviews. As mentioned earlier, I first became conscious that I was engaged in analysing data while constructing the *Professional Development Timelines* from the research participants completed data forms and CVs prior to the interviews. My second conscious experience in analysing my data was during the transcribing process.

Transcribing interviews

I invested well over 200 hours transcribing over twenty hours of interview data from my digital recorders. I tried to begin the transcribing process within 48 hours of the interview although there were several times where I could not begin until after six weeks. I am happy that I used two recorders for my interviews because it made it faster to transcribe and provided a 'second opinion' when there was a word or phrase that was difficult to hear. My initial plan to automate the transcription process by using a top rated transcription software program (Dragon Naturally Speaking v11.5) ended after several hours of trial and error. The software worked well when I could train it to my own voice but I found it completely unusable for transcribing my interview data. In most cases I began transcribing within 48 hours of the interview and averaged between 10-12 hours of transcribing for every hour of interview. In retrospect, I would not do it in any other way. The process of transcribing highlighted several important points. First, it highlighted the artificial divide between data collection and data analysis. I found the transcribing process particularly conducive to analysis and felt no obligation to resist the urge to beginning the initial coding of my data while I transcribed. In fact, after transcribing the first 20 minutes of my first

interview I went back and redesigned my *transcript form* so that it would be more conducive to coding and note taking as I went along. The following is a sample of the top part of page 3 of 327 pages of the transcript form I designed and called the *Transcript Analysis Worksheet*. See sample below.

CONFIDENTIAL ANONYMISED transcripts		TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET	
Nigel:1-24 Olav:25-47 Sean&Clare:48-83 Manfred&Doris:84-162 Betty:163-180 Peter:181-241 Anders:242-267 Spencer:268-281 Mike:282-299 Karin:300-327		Page 3 of 328	
Transcript	Code Ref #	Theme/Notes	
turns out, various doors were shut and things moved on and it actually took me 17 or 18 years to get back out to north Africa. So I stayed working with PriceWaterhouse or PriceWaterhouse Coopers as it became. [min 04:38] I was working there for 14 years. I made a number of visit to different African countries during that time ...but it wasn't until the late 90s that my wife and family and I started to explore I think we realized we needed to start taking some steps if we were going to realize this dream. Eventually we moved out in 2000. The development of my thinking during that time was I didn't want to go and work for a big NGO. Both my wife and I felt very strongly that we wanted to be in amongst the people we wanted to really be there at grass roots level. So when we came across N.FRA we found that was exactly what they were doing among the urban poor in Bashkent,	Nigel 3	Nigel3	
	Q1-004	Perseverance (or resilience?) Q1-004	
	Q1-005	Spouse involvement in career decision making Q1-005	
	Q1-003	Goal Clarification Q1-003	
	Q1-005	Spouse involvement	
	Q1-003	Goal Clarification (progressively more details)	

Transcribed text with color highlights

Initial codes & categories

Notes and code descriptions

Figure 8: Transcript Analysis Worksheet Sample

Since the main transcription document was a Microsoft Word file, I was able to quickly find any and all occurrence of a code in any of my transcripts by doing an automatic search on the code number.

It was also during the transcribing process that I became increasingly conscious that I had entered my research with preconceived theoretical frames that could affect what I pay attention to, and what was included or excluded from my accounts. For example, I would listen to a complete sentence or thought, usually 5-10 seconds of an interview before pressing the pause button on the recorder. I would then attempt to transcribe exactly what I heard. Next I would press the play button on my *backup* recorder to

verify that what I typed was accurate. To my surprise, many times I discovered that the second half of a sentence I typed was my interpretation of what I heard rather than the exact words of the research participant. This experience drove home the point that we are part of the world we study and the data we collect (Charmaz, 2006). Without proper checks and balances, even in the seemingly *objective* process of transcribing, a researcher can be vulnerable to becoming more part of his data than he wants to be.

Data Analysis Process

At the heart of grounded theory is the *constant comparative method* of data analysis (Lacey and Luff, 2001). The constant comparative analysis involves coding data into multiple categories and looking for relationships between these categories by constantly comparing them with each other to identify possible patterns or themes. It is not a linear process but requires the researcher to frequently revisit the data until various points of *theoretical saturation* occurred. Theoretical saturation refers to the point when further analysis does not produce significant new categories, nor yield further insights (Charmaz, 2006). A grounded theory approach to constant comparative analysis involves using the analysis of previously collected data to inform the research regarding what additional data should be collected, analysed, and compared. Data collection, data analysis, and interpretation continue in a looping interactive relationship until theoretical saturation is achieved. In the following section, I reflect on the constant comparative analysis methods I employed to analyse and interpret my data.

According to Charmaz (2006: 46) grounded theory coding consists of at least two major phases. First, there is the process of closely reading the data and assigning names or categories to segments of the data called codes. Through this process the researcher identifies areas for further data collection and analysis. Second, there is a process of sorting, synthesising and integrating large amounts of data. At this phase, the focus is on developing relevant theoretical categories that will be used in subsequent analytic processes.

Initial coding of transcript data

The initial coding of my data began concurrently with the interview transcribing process. As I transcribed, I began categorising words, phrases and sections with codes I constructed on the spot or with codes I had constructed while transcribing a previous interview. Each code represented a topic, idea, or category I associated with a segment of text from an interview. Concurrent to finishing the transcription of an interview I also finished my initial coding of the text. I then went back and reread the transcript several times with the purpose of assigning more codes to the text. I studied the transcript until no further codes emerged. I assigned both a code number and a descriptive code title to each theme. For example, a code titled *Short-term experience in professional journey* was my first code from my first transcript. I assigned this code number Q1-001. The Q1 tells me that this code appears somewhere in the section of the interview where I asked question “Q1-What steps or events led you into this line of work?” which was normally the first question in my interview process. The coding process for the first transcript produced approximately 60 codes. The initial coding of the second transcript added nearly 25 additional new codes. I developed the following

Microsoft Word document which I called the *Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet* to consolidate my codes and cases. The codes were transferred from the *Transcript Analysis Worksheet* shown earlier.

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Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet

Transcript Size in word count:		7K											
CODE	CODE DESCRIPTION	Nigel (NRFA)	Olav (REZA)	Sean (TKAP)	Clare (LKAP)	Manfred (HNFY)	Denis (MFEY)	Billy (RUAM)	Peter (ADUS)	Anders (HGH/A)	Spencer (GNOC)	Mike (GRYK)	Karin (KJAT)
Q1	What steps or events led you into this line of work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Q1-001	Short-term experiences in professional journey	XX											
Q1-001a	Given important responsibility early	X											
Q1-001b	Exposure to the occupation	X											
Q1-001c	Pre-field visit exposure to future colleagues	X											
Q1-001d	Contributed to Goal Clarification in choice of profession	X											
Q1-001e	Built Confidence ("I can do this one day") 3	X											
Q1-002	Long-term planning	X											
Q1-003	Goal Clarification (progressively more details)	X											

Figure 9: Sample of *Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet*

After creating a new code, I reread previous coded transcripts to see, if in retrospect, the new code was missed or not. This process continued as each transcript was coded in turn. By the 11th transcript only three new codes were added and by the 12th transcript only two new codes. This was an indication that I was reaching a level of theoretical saturation (Bowen, 2008) in my initial coding process.

After transcribing and coding each interview I would consolidate the codes on the *Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet*. The final version of this document was six pages long and contained 169 code numbers, with their code descriptions and cases where

they were found. The following is a section of page 1 of this document showing my first ten codes and the cases to which they belong.

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Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet

Transcript Size in word count:		7K	7K	10K		20K		6K	18K	7K	6K	7K	7K
CODE	CODE DESCRIPTION	Nigel (NRFA)	Olav (REZA)	Sean (IKAP)	Clare (IKAP)	Manfred (EMEY)	Doris (MEY)	Betty (RUAM)	Peter (ADUS)	Anders (HGEA)	Spencer (GNOC)	Mike (GRYK)	Karin (KJAT)
Q1	What steps or events led you into this line of work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Q1-001	Short-term experiences in professional journey	XX	X	XX	XX	X	X	X	X	UN	UN	XX	XX
Q1-001a	Given important responsibility early	X	X	X	UN	UN	UN	UN	X	UN	x	x	X
Q1-001b	Exposure to the occupation	X	UN	X	X	X	X	X	X	UN	UN	UN	UN
Q1-001c	Pre-field visit exposure to future colleagues	X	x	x	x	x	x	X	UN	UN	UN	UN	UN
Q1-001d	Contributed to Goal Clarification in choice of profession	X	X	x	x	X	X	X	X	UN	UN	UN	UN
Q1-001e	Built Confidence ("I can do this one day") 3	X	x	XX	x	x	x	X	X	UN	UN	UN	UN
Q1-002	Long-term planning	X	NO	X	X	NO	NO	UN	UN	X	x	x	X
Q1-003	Goal Clarification (progressively more details)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	XX	UN	X	XX
Q1-004	Perseverance	XX	UN	X	X	X	X	x	X	X	x	X	X
Q1-005	Spouse involvement in career decision making	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	NA	NA	XX	NA	NA	NA
Q1-006	Shared Values with NCO (value alignment)	XX	UN	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	X	X

Figure 10: Sample section of completed *Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet*

I used the following keys to mark whether a code was represented in a particular case transcript and to what degree:

XX means the theme was directly mentioned in transcript

X means the theme was indirectly mentioned or observed

x means the theme was observed in retrospect or in another context (like the timeline)

UN means Unknown. The theme was neither mentioned nor observed.

NO means that the theme was *known not to* be present.

NA means not applicable.

Focused and theoretical coding

Charmaz describes *focused* and *theoretical* coding as the second and third steps of coding (2006: 57, 63). Focused coding is the beginning of synthesising and explaining larger segments of data. It requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise the data. “Theoretical coding is a sophisticated level of coding that follows the codes you have selected during focused coding” (ibid: 63). Theoretical codes suggest possible relationships between categories and become the foundation for theory. In my own process, focused coding and theoretical coding were not at all linear. I did not finish with focus codes and then move on to theoretical codes. In fact, even while I was doing initial coding, ideas for theoretical coding (phase 3) were emerging from the data. As such, I have decided to present these phases together as they were not clearly divisible in my process.

From the beginning of the coding process my codes were being categorised or clustered according to the interview question from which they emerged. So for example, code *Q6-016: Dealing with disappointments (grief?)* was initially constructed under my sixth interview question, Q-6-“Examples of difficult work situations?” If I saw the concept of *disappointment/grief* appear in another section of a transcript, say Q2-“Tell me about your work?” than it might be duplicated as say, *Q2-007: Relational Disappointment*. If so, I examined the context and determined whether the codes were redundant or not and decided either to combined them into one code or keep them separate. I also had a coding system for miscellaneous observations that were unrelated to my interview questions. These codes had a prefix of XQ. So for example, code *XQ-012: Salvaging something good out of a bad experience* was a code that I constructed while transcribing Peter’s interview. I then revisited the

previous six transcripts to determine if *XQ-012* was present or not in them. If so, I made a note on the *Transcript Analysis Worksheet* and made a *X* or *x* to the appropriate case on the *Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet*.

During the data analysis process, I began doing a literature review on the theme of resilience because I began to observe that the research participants experienced a great deal of disappointments and difficulties in their professional journeys yet kept getting back up and continuing on. In the literature, Conner (1993) and Reivich and Shatte (2002) state that one characteristic of resilient people is a belief that most people and most situations have positive and negative aspects. I made a theoretical connection between the code *XQ-012 Salvaging something good out of a bad experience* and the construct of resilience. The literature identifies several characteristics of resilience that seemed to be consistent with some of my codes. For example, *Q2-004: Prioritise relationships*, *Q2-009: What I do makes a difference (self-efficacy?)* *XQ-004: Self-awareness*, *XQ-011: Finds alternative path when roads are blocked (resourcefulness?)*. Thus, the concept of resilience began to emerge as a theoretical code in my data analysis process. I later tested this theoretical code of resilience by asking the research participants to take the RFI resilience assessment. A discussion of this process follows later in the chapter under the heading *Triangulation*.

The initial synthesising of my codes was facilitated by the *markers* (XX, X, x, UN, NO, NA) that I had employed on the *Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet* I had developed. The *markers* provide clues to help me judge the presence and degree of presence a code had across cases and within particular cases. The presence of many

XXs, Xs, or x ratings of a code was evidence that a code may represent a universal theme in my data set. For example, see codes Q1-001 and Q1-004 highlighted below.

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Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet

Transcript Size in word count:		7K	7K	10K	20K	6K	18K	7K	6K	7K	7K		
CODE	CODE DESCRIPTION	Nigel (NRFA)	Olaw (REZA)	Sean (IKAP)	Clare (IKAP)	Manfred (EMEY)	Doris (MEY)	Betty (RUAM)	Peter (ADUS)	Anders (HGFA)	Spencer (GNOC)	Mike (GRYK)	Karin (KJAT)
Q1	What steps or events led you into this line of work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Q1-001	Short-term experiences in professional journey	XX	X	XX	XX	X	X	X	X	UN	UN	XX	XX
Q1-001a	Given important responsibility early	X	X	X	UN	UN	UN	UN	X	UN	x	x	X
Q1-001b	Exposure to the occupation	X	UN	X	X	X	X	X	X	UN	UN	UN	UN
Q1-001c	Pre-field visit exposure to future colleagues	X	x	x	x	x	x	X	UN	UN	UN	UN	UN
Q1-001d	Contributed to Goal Clarification in choice of profession	X	X	x	x	X	X	X	X	UN	UN	UN	UN
Q1-001e	Built Confidence ("I can do this one day")	X	x	XX	x	x	x	X	X	UN	UN	UN	UN
Q1-002	Long-term planning	X	NO	X	X	NO	NO	UN	UN	X	x	x	X
Q1-003	Goal Clarification (progressively more details)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	XX	UN	X	XX
Q1-004	Perseverance	XX	UN	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	x	X	X
Q1-005	Spouse involvement in career decision making	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	NA	NA	XX	NA	NA	NA
Q1-006	Shared Values with NGO (values alignment)	XX	UN	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	X	X

Figure 11: Synthesising of codes on Coding/Theme Analysis Worksheet

If the code was limited to just a few cases, it was evidence that it was not a universal theme in my data set. I gave priority to XX and X marks.

After many iterations of coding I began a process of code reductions, consolidation, re-categorisation, streamlining, and re-conceptualisation. I considered if it was possible to reduce the number of codes without compromising or biasing my data. I analysed the 169 codes for repetitions, redundancy, and consistency throughout the 12 transcripts. I determined that I had better grounds to defend constructing *themes* and making claims of importance if I could show from my data that a code was represented in over 50% of the cases but also paid attention to the single voice. Through a process of consolidation and re-categorisation, I reduced the number of codes to 65. Then

through a process of further analysis and reflection I clustered these codes under the following theoretical codes or themes:

- Primary skills and behaviours
- Perseverance and other qualities
- Professional identity transitions
- Paradox

These four themes are discussed as findings in *Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven*.

The first theme, *primary skills and behaviours* is in part driven by my interview question Q2-*Tell me about your work?* which in turn is related to one of my sub-research questions regarding the occupational competency frameworks being promoted in the professionalisation agenda of the ELRHA and others. This was the most straight forward consolidation. I reduced 27 initial codes to the 20 most common job behaviours reported to me by the research participants. In my opinion, more than half of these 20 behaviours can be categorised as *project management* behaviours. The seven codes that were deleted were reported by less than half the research participants. The remaining 20 were sorted by frequency and are discussed in *Chapter Six*. The theme of *perseverance and other qualities* concerns the motivations and character qualities of the research participants that emerged from the data. This discussion takes place in *Chapter Seven*. The third theme, *professional identity transitions* concerns patterns of data which point to validation, development and maturation of research participants' professional identity. Observations from research participants' *timelines* are incorporated within this data cluster and presented in *Chapter Four* and *Chapter Five*. The fourth theme, *paradox* is what I believe is evidence of incongruence between my research data and the data found in my reading of the ELRHA scoping

study (Walker and Russ, 2010) and other literature. One example of this emerged when I compare the high priority my research participants put on learning local languages with the low priority given by humanitarian sector workers surveyed by Walker and Russ (*ibid.*). This discussion takes place in *Chapter Six*.

Triangulation and Cross-Referencing

Cohen and Manion (2000: 254) consider triangulation an “attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint.” Triangulation offers the possibility to increase validity (or not) of research. Denzin (1978) writes about four types of triangulation: data, investigator, theory, and methodological. In this section, I will briefly describe how I triangulate one of my data sets and one of my tentative theories. First, the tentative theory.

Early in my research process I tentatively identified resilience as a thematic code or theme. I came to this conclusion as a consequence of a) hearing the stories of difficult situations that the research participants experienced, b) reflecting on their experiences of grief, and c) comparing their characteristics/codes from the transcripts with characteristics identified with resilient people in the literature. I interpreted my data to say the research participants were resilient people. I was growing increasingly convinced that the research participants were some of the most resilient people I had ever met.

I was ready to agree with Dean Becker, whom I quoted in *Chapter Two*. Becker had said, “Thirty plus years of research have shown that more than education, more than experience, more than training, a person’s level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails” (Coutu, 2002: 1). I was ready to argue that resilience was a key to the research participants’ exemplary performance. In order to test this interpretation, I decided to ask the research participants to take an online resilience assessment. I choose to give the research participants the *Resilience Factor Inventory (RFI)* developed by Dr. Andrew Shatte and licensed from the University of Pennsylvania’s Department of Psychology to Adaptiv Learning Systems (ALS). I anticipated high scores on the RFI. I contacted ALS and Mr. Becker kindly assisted me in administrating the assessment to the research participants online at no charge. Ten of the twelve research participants completed the survey. In addition to myself, each participant received a copy of his/her RFI. The results were not as anticipated. I was surprised that from a normative sample of more than 26,000, nine out of the ten research participants scored below the norm, three well below the norm.

Next, I had a two hour Skype conversation with Dean Becker to discuss the assessments and confirm that I was interpreting the scores correctly. Together we discussed the results of each participant and the low score results. Mr. Becker reminded me that the scores represent how the participants felt the day they did the assessment and is not a tool that measures overall disposition. Yet, I was frustrated that the scores did not validate my tentative theory. At one point I considered discounting the results of the RFI and moving on to present the research participants as highly resilient, based on their data from my in-depth interviews. However, the

results of the RFI forced me to look more deeply at the data and construct possible alternative interpretations. This discussion is presented in *Chapter Seven* as it led me to reinterpret my data.

I also cross-referenced the list of 20 occupational behaviours I constructed from my interview data with the *Humanitarian Core Competencies* (Walker and Russ, 2010) and the *Humanitarian Competencies Framework* (CBHA, 2012). The latter document is a list of 93 job competencies that is being promoted by influential stakeholders in the humanitarian sector as the basis for professional credentialing in the sector. My purpose was to compare what the research participants said they did, with what is being promoted as the curriculum foundation for professional credentialing. The results of the triangulation are presented in *Chapter Seven*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to establish the validity of my methodology via a transparent and reflective analysis of the decisions and processes I employed to design, collect, analyse, construct, and report my research. I began the chapter by outlining my research questions followed by a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that informed my assumptions and decision-making processes. I tried to demonstrate my commitment to reflexivity and transparency throughout this chapter. I described myself as sharing a level of affinity with critical realists while accepting the fact that my findings are socially constructed. But the idea that my findings are constructed does not necessarily make them less real or useable if I limit my claims to what is found in the data. As such, I described how I applied a grounded theory methodology

to my research design and transparently reflected on how I moved from one phase of the process to another.

I argued that a collective case study using a purposive sample of participants was the best way to frame and gather the data I needed to explore the professional journeys of the research participants. I explained my reasons for selecting different criteria for research participation and the benefits and potential pitfalls of being considered an *insider* by the research participants. I described how I constructed *professional development timelines* for each research participant and my rationale for using the biographic narrative interviews to capture their lived experiences. Finally, I explained how I applied the constant comparative method by giving examples of how Charmaz's (2006) three phases of coding played out in my data analysis process. The findings of that analysis are described in detail in the following four chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: Getting Started on the Journey

This chapter is the first of four findings chapters. In it I discuss how the research participants started their careers in the international aid sector. This chapter identifies four doorways the participants used to launch their careers in the international aid sector. It also discusses the key roles that internships and short-term experiences played in convincing them to pursue international aid as a career.

Doorways to the Professional Journey

Among the 12 research participants there appeared to be four distinct approaches, or doorways, by which they launched their careers in the international aid sector. I call these doorways: 1) Credentials First, 2) On-the-Job, 3) Sector-Switch, and 4) Late Bloomers. I do not assume that these doorways are unique to the international aid sector.

Like careers in other sectors, the careers of aid workers are “not determined in a causal way by structural and cultural factors ... they result from earlier decisions, from happenstance, serendipity and from chance coincidences and encounters as well as from career planning, structural and organisational changes and changes in cultural conditions (Roth, 2009: 10 quoted from Evetts, 2000: 64).

My findings are consistent with Roth’s (ibid.) comments above. It is impossible to pinpoint when their professional journey began but the research participants appeared to use four different doorways to enter their careers.

Credentials First

Betty is an example of what I call the *Credentials First* approach to establishing initial professional identity and career path. It could also be called a *front-end* approach in that education and credentialing were done at the front-end of her career. Once Betty

determined that she wanted to be involved in international aid work she went straight to earn her Master's degrees. This pathway is classic in the sense that it is the approach often required by established professions such as medicine or law and even the relatively newer professions such as psychology or physiotherapy. In this approach extensive professional education and credentialing are done upfront before extensive field practice. Betty for example, earned a dual graduate degree in public health and international development shortly after completing her undergraduate degree in Near East studies. Betty did all her formal professional education in the beginning of her twenty year career as a humanitarian aid project leader in Mauritania. The first half of Betty's professional development timeline looks as follows:

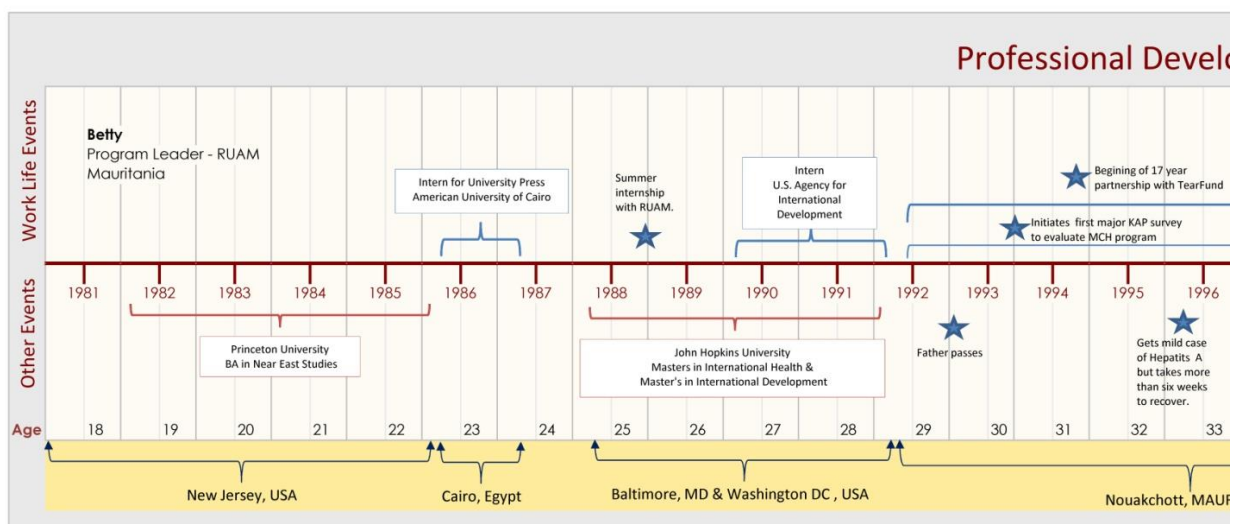


Figure 12: Betty's professional development timeline from age 18 -33

Perhaps because humanitarian and developmental aid workers are not yet professionalised the *Credentials First* pattern was atypical among the 12 research participants. It may also simply be a reflection of Betty's learning style and the opportunities presented to her at the time. In Betty's case, she considered her career

decision to pursue international humanitarian work as *cemented* during an internship immediately after completing her undergraduate degree at Princeton University.

...I got an internship to the American University in Cairo. Not doing anything specifically development related. I was working as an assistant editor in the university press. But it gave me the chance to actually practice my Arabic in the real world and in a sense test my calling or my passion for international work in a third world city. What is it like for a single American woman living in Cairo on my own for a year? Could I handle it? Did it seem like something I'd like to do long term? I originally was thinking of working in an international university setting. I wasn't always necessarily quite geared towards development, but my year in Cairo cemented that because I got to know some folks who were living in one of the poorest districts in Cairo working among poor illiterate women with a women's health clinic. And just to see their engagement with people and the opportunities they had to really make a difference in people's lives. The academic setting ... I was really wrestling between the two. With academia and teaching at an international university verses the development side. In Cairo the development side won. That was really where I saw my gifts and my heart fitting in. Betty, pg 165.

Internships or short-term overseas experiences were part of all the research participants' professional journey. For Betty, after this internship she never turned back from a commitment to a career in international aid. Her decision to pursue professional qualifications led her to enrol in a four year dual Master's degree programme in public health and international studies at John Hopkins University in Baltimore. Upon completion of her graduate studies she started her twenty year career in Mauritania where she is still working at the time of this writing. The primary characteristic of the *Credentials First* approach is the education and credentialing comes at the front end of a career before gaining significant hands-on experience in the field. This distinguishes Betty's approach from that of Olav (Norway), Peter (USA), Clare (Ireland) and Mike (England) who are examples of people who launched into international aid work with *unrelated* academic credentials and no professional

work experience. Olav, Peter, Clare, and Mike learned their new occupation and gained their credentials on the job.

On-the-Job

The second pattern and second most prevalent in my case study is characterised by those who develop professional competencies and credentials on the job rather than through formal academic education. Olav, Peter, Clare, and Mike fit this category. In each of these cases university degrees were earned in subjects such as media (Mike), finance (Peter), and petrol engineering (Olav), but they never worked in these fields after university. Instead, they went into humanitarian and development work with no formal academic or professional education specifically related to international aid work. In the cases of Olav and Peter, they worked 7-10 years in jobs unrelated to their university training and with no obvious relevance to international aid work before starting long and successful careers in the international aid sector. Peter studied finance at university because he was good with numbers not because he enjoyed accounting. After graduating he worked in a low paying social work job because he enjoyed it and it gave him time to travel. Olav, after graduating with a degree in Petrol Engineering in Norway decided to work on the staff of a Christian student organisation. Mike, a year after graduating from Leicester University accepted a volunteer job in Uzbekistan that was vaguely related to his university training. However, once in Uzbekistan he was challenged by the needs and opportunities he saw. Mike's approach is an example of the *on-the-job* pattern. The first half of Mike's professional timeline follows:

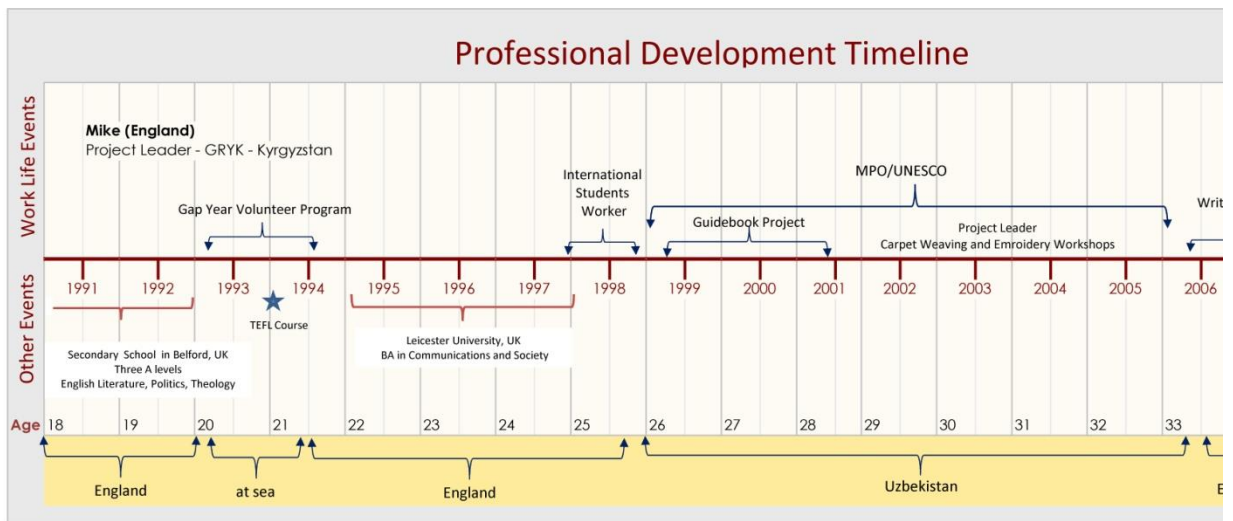


Figure 13: Mike's professional development timeline from age 18 to 33

Mike led development projects for over ten years. He worked for seven years in Uzbekistan, three years in Tajikistan, and at the time of this writing was in his second year in Kyrgyzstan. The excerpt below is from Mike's interview transcript regarding his first job in the international aid sector in Uzbekistan.

So when I came to Khiva [Uzbekistan] I came specifically because I'd been invited to do something I had some kind of qualifications for. So I think I was quite bound by that Western concept that you need that piece of paper before you can do something. So I had a piece of paper that showed I had studied media and I was asked to come and work on a guidebook. So I was excited about that but at the same time I remember thinking that what I would really like to do is something with income generation. And I still remember my future team leader talking to me on the phone when I was still in England. I was having some doubts whether I would fit in at Khiva or not and he was saying the great thing about going to some place like Uzbekistan is that you get to do things you are not qualified to do and wouldn't get the opportunity to do anywhere else just because no one else is. Those words really stuck with me and turned out to be very true. That was the case and so that is how I got stuck into things. Mike, pg 282.

Mike, Olav, and Peter *got stuck into things* and did their jobs well and moved from one success to another in their international aid sector jobs. They seem to have learned what they needed to know on the job and rarely felt a need to top off their learning

with academic credentials such as a graduate degree. All three of these men felt that their project successes were their credentials. Mike captured the reflective scepticism towards learning development work in a classroom that seems representative of Peter and Olav as well.

I still question sometimes whether academia is really the best place for something like development work which I think is still, to a degree being made up as we go along. I don't think it has been there long enough to have vigorous academic principles applied to it. But I might be wrong. I completed the community and health education trainers-of-trainers course. I found that quite narrow. And I don't know anyone who has done it and who has followed that model in Central Asia. I'm not averse to training at all. I'd love to have more training. But, I think that training in development work can also be done best through mentorship. Through mentoring and just observing how another person does things. Doing it with them rather than sitting in a class room. Mike, pg 16.

Besides being highly competent, these three seemed to demonstrate a high tolerance for risk and an ability to learn quickly from observing others. Interestingly, none of the international NGOs that Mike, Olav, and Peter worked with had the organisational capacity or institutional commitment to formal on-the-job training or consistent CPD. However, Olav, Peter, and Mike managed to learn the necessary competencies on-the-job. When they recognised their need for mentors they proactively sought them out. When they were aware they lacked necessary skills or knowledge they found it in others or found ways to learn it themselves. I conclude that a combination of self-awareness and proactivity in learning were critical to their success. Mike wrote a well received book about his experience in Uzbekistan and Peter's advice is sought regularly when top level UN delegations make visits to Darfur. Olav has risen to the top leadership position in his Norwegian INGO. At the time of the interviews, all three were active as field leaders in Kyrgyzstan, Sudan, and Azerbaijan.

Sector Switch

The most popular doorway for a career in the international aid sector was the *Sector Switch*. This pattern is most clearly demonstrated in the professional journeys of Nigel (England), Sean (Ireland), Anders (Sweden), Spencer (England), Doris (USA), and Karin (Germany). In each case, they first earned professional credentials and then worked 7-22 years as practitioners in their profession before starting careers as overseas staff in the international aid sector. Development work became a second career for Nigel (chartered accountant), Sean (manufacturing engineer), Anders (construction engineer), Spencer (food processing engineer), Doris (registered nurse), and Karin (physical therapist). The *Sector Switch* approach is characterised by people who have already established a professional identity through credentialing and job experience. Upon moving overseas, within one year, five of the six were in field leadership roles. For those who had management roles in their previous occupation there was normally significant common ground in their new roles. Sean for example worked for 15 years in various roles as a manufacturing engineer in the UK before he started his *second career* in the humanitarian sector at the age of 38. He gained significant people and project management experience that transferred nicely into his humanitarian sector work.

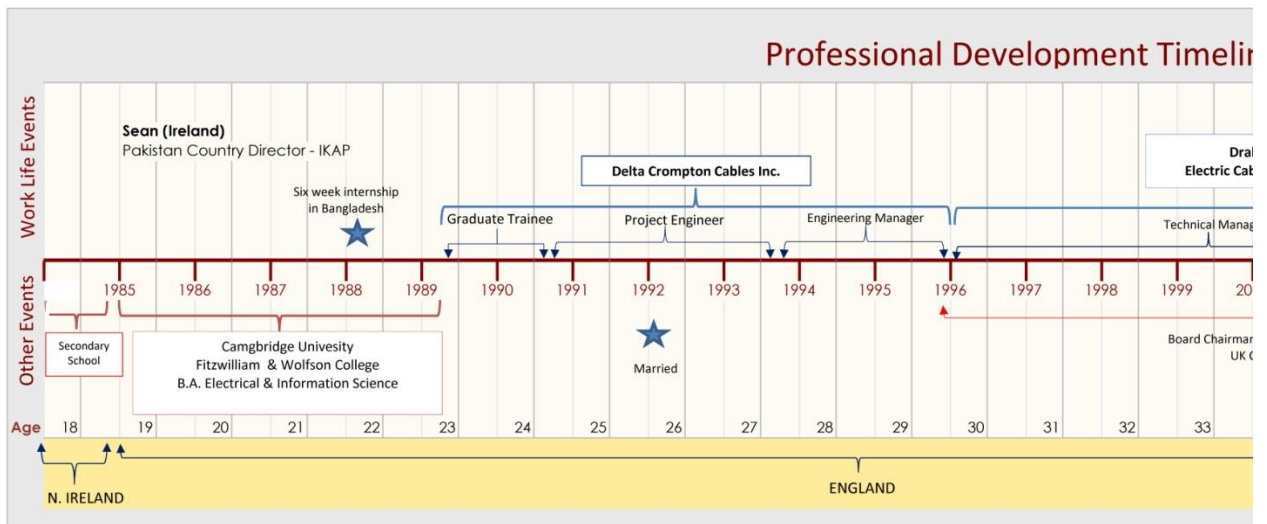


Figure 14: Sean's professional timeline from age 18 to 33

At age 33 Sean had been working in his profession for more than ten years. Of the six people who fit the *Sector Switch* approach; they worked on average 12 years in their first occupation before switching sectors at the average age of 35. In four cases, a clear change in professional self-identity took place within a few years of working in the international aid sector. For most, the idea to be involved in international aid work had been planted at an early stage of their original profession. Sean puts it like this:

At Cambridge, a lot of people at the college were people who had maybe taken a gap year and have been to see lots of different places. I was interested in seeing the world. I had always liked hearing about it from other people... When I finished my three year degree I took the opportunity to go and see a bit of the world. I wanted something where I could use my new engineering skills that I'd been picking up in my three years. And there was an opportunity to go with TEAR Fund to Bangladesh to do some electrical work in a hospital. And there was a team of four going out. Two were doing building work and two were doing electrical work. So I went and had six weeks doing that... So I had my time in Bangladesh which had been great but wasn't something that meant I was immediately going to change all my other plans and go do that. It did mean, I think that I was open to the idea in the future. I thought maybe someday I could do this. I could do this kind of life. I could see how I could be useful. Sean, pg 50.

Of the six people I classified as *sector switchers*, only two later topped-off their credentials with further graduate studies specific to the international aid sector. Karin for example, after eight years of leading humanitarian projects in Central Asia did a two year Master's course in International Community Disabilities at University College London. For the majority, CPD in the form of on-the-job training, seminars, and conferences sufficed.

Anders is an interesting case whom I initially could not decide if he belonged in the *On-the-Job* or *Sector-Switch* category. Anders worked as an engineer for one of Sweden's largest construction companies before he moved to Afghanistan to work with a well-established INGO. Anders anticipated he would be using his skills as an engineer in Afghanistan; however that was not to be. Instead he found his niche in running a micro-loan operation which is similar to running a bank. This case highlights the need for all *sector switchers* to be flexible. Sometimes the cross-over between original professions and international aid sector programmes is not obvious. The following are Anders' reflections on the cross-over between his construction sector job in Sweden and his role in Afghanistan.

Well what strikes me is that when I went into micro finance it is all about risk management ... because the construction business is also about taking risks. That's all it is about in a sense. And I think project organisations are used to handle risks in many ways ... And I realized that I was actually running a bank. I didn't know that much about banking and I'm not a banker as a person, I'm more an entrepreneurial person that thrives on taking certain risks ... In a sense, even though I had no previous experience in micro finance... I got a lot of assistance from our other partner that is an American micro finance network that had a lot of knowledge working in several other countries and had technical assistance to give us. Anders, pg 253.

Anders attributed much of his success to his skills and experience of risk management, which he learned in the construction industry; and to intense *on the job* mentoring. All of the research participants had the ability to learn on-the-job and found themselves doing jobs where they had no training or experience. Yet some form of mentoring was present in the professional journey of all of the research participants. I conclude that on-the-job coaching and mentoring was the most successful form of CPD activity among the research participants.

Late Bloomer

Manfred is what I call a *Late Bloomer*. Upon reflection, this term may reveal my own unexamined preference that assumes a career should be launched before a person is in their thirties and thus one could think I am labelling Manfred as a deviant to the norm. However, for better or worse, *late bloomer* is a term commonly used in education literature to refer to adults who earn academic credentials later in life (Levin and Levin, 1991). While Manfred's doorway into international aid shares characteristics found in the other starting points, he was none the less unique among the twelve research participants. He started the latest yet earned the highest level of academic credentials compared to the other participants. I found myself impressed by his achievements and by how his wife Doris was integral to his accomplishments. At the age of 18 Manfred finished his secondary education in Germany with a diploma in vocational technical design. He spoke little or no English. The following 14 years Manfred worked in various jobs in Germany, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen, learning Hebrew, Arabic, and English along the way. He loved to read and was not afraid to explore the mountains and deserts of the Middle East alone and on foot. At age 32

Manfred got to know Doris (his future wife) while working as an assistant at an NGO hospital in Yemen.

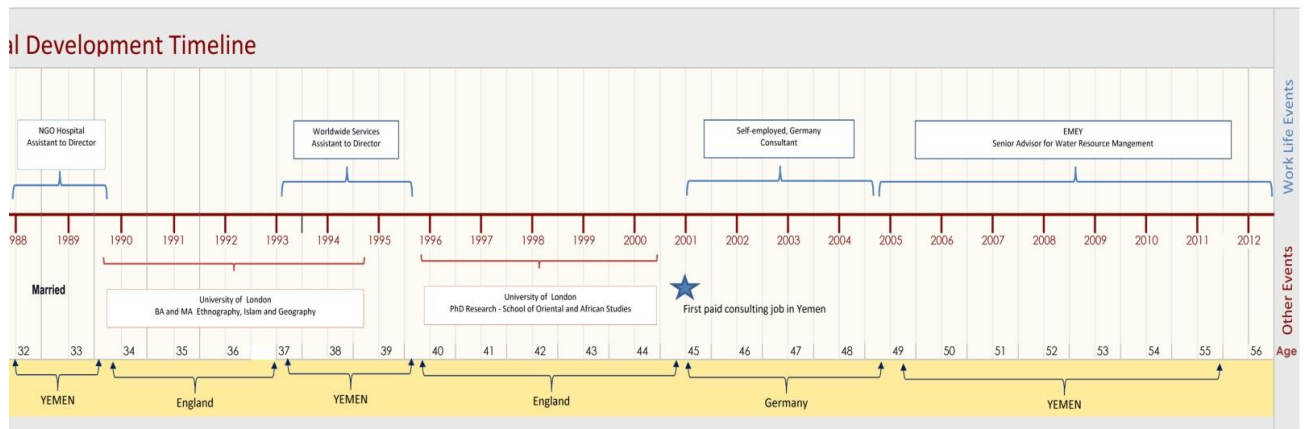


Figure 15: Manfred's professional development timeline age 33 to present

Manfred had no clear profession or career but had strong people skills and was very effective in being the liaison between the hospital and Yemen government. He was recognised in the expatriate community as highly intelligent and with a self-taught expertise in language, Middle East history, geography, and culture. At 33 Manfred married Doris and continued to work with the hospital until a Dutch couple, who were physicians in Yemen, offered to financially sponsor him to study for a university degree. This is how Manfred described it:

... we thought oh I have never studied. I have a lot of experience but I can't show anything you know. No papers no nothing. And a German friend mentioned this institution where they have some connection to which was one of the best in studying that part of the world. The School of Oriental and African Studies in London. And he said why don't you go there? I said, "What me? I don't even have a German high school diploma. I can't!" To me this was impossible. How can I apply to university? I was scared. They said no, there is a mature entry programme. If you are older than 24 or something this doesn't apply. You can apply and have an interview and you can see if you get in. We wrote and a letter came back and said, yes we are interested. Can you come for an interview to London? ... And we decided to go for the interview

and start. And I don't think that without Doris I could have done this. I would not have had the confidence. Manfred, pg 99.

In the academic world Manfred found his stride and over the next ten years earned his BA, MA, and PhD at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. Today, and for the past 12 years he has been working in the Middle East as a senior advisor for water resource management for one of Europe's largest and most prestigious international aid organisations. Manfred's professional journey got a late start and was strongly facilitated by his wife Doris and friends who recognised his talents. I found emotional satisfaction in hearing how other people recognised his talent and took what seem to me extraordinary measures to invest in his professional development. I drew two basic conclusions from Manfred's *late bloomer* story. First, that Manfred's achievements were made possible by others, especially his wife Doris who made career and other sacrifices to help facilitate Manfred's achievements. This may be an important issue for couples who are considering careers in the international aid sector. Success in the sector is likely to require career and other sacrifices by the other partner. Second, I concluded that Manfred's ability to build strong interpersonal relationships facilitated the commitment of others to invest in him. This same ability is also what endears programme beneficiaries to Manfred and also what gives him the greatest job satisfaction.

Implications for professional practice

My analysis of the research participants' *Professional Development Timelines* and interview narratives showed evidence of four distinct doorways from which they launched their career. This sheds light on my main research question: *What do the*

professional journeys of expatriate international aid workers reveal about how they grew to become exemplary field leaders? It appears that the research participants were all able to become exemplary field practitioners even though they had a variety of starting points. This finding is evidence that there are multiple starting points for those wanting to be successful project leaders in the international aid sector. The starting point one chooses is most likely to be dependent on a combination of factors including, but not limited to: the aspiring practitioners' self-confidence, risk tolerance, available opportunities, personal preferences and professional experience. However, the starting point may also be influenced by a similar combination of factors related to the employing INGO's risk tolerance, available opportunities, preferences, programme focus, and funding. The starting point was a well-planned decision for some of the research participants but for others it was more *going with the flow* decisions where they took advantage of opportunities as presented.

The *Credential First* approach involved earning academic and professional credentials up front before starting a career. This approach worked well for Betty who was already confident in her career choice. Good internships, academic competence, and enjoyment of the subject material seemed to give her clarity and confidence in making her career choices. Once she was confident in her career choice, she made the decision to earn professional credentials. Her field of study was chosen based on the needs of the region she anticipated working in, her own interests, and in consultation with the INGO she anticipated working with in the future.

The *On the Job* approach involved learning job competencies *in situ* with little or no directly relevant formal education at the front end. By analysing the interview data I observed four characteristics that were present among all the research participants whose starting point was *on the job*. I concluded that the following characteristics likely contributed significantly to their success. First, all had university credentials even if their topics of study had no obvious relationship to their international aid work. I believe their academic credentials demonstrate a level of intelligence, self-discipline, and perseverance. Second, all appeared to have a high tolerance for risks. I do not mean they were willing to live in dangerous places, although many of them did, rather, I observed that Mike, Olav, and Peter seemed to consider failure and mistake a normal part of the normal learning curve. They believe *doing* is the best form of learning. They were not nervous about trying something they had not done before. Perhaps equally important, their INGOs and supervisors appeared to consider mistakes as normal too, although I cannot show from my data that their INGO were aware of their mistakes. Third, and related to the former, all the *on-the-jobbers* had a self-confidence that they could learn what they needed to know or find someone who could. Mike expressed it like this:

When it comes to development work we sell ourselves too short. I often tell people “You have all these skills but you don’t realise that you do. One of the most important skills that you have is that you know what you don’t know. So, if you know that you don’t know something ... I don’t know anything about... bee keeping. Well then you go on the internet and you look for people who do know.” Mike, pg 284.

I presume that their tolerance of risk and their self-confidence are integral to one another. Fourth, their initial job responsibilities were of lesser weight than their latter career responsibilities. They had easier access to mentors in the early part of their careers than they did in the later part. In the earlier years of their careers they had

supervisors assigned to them and their supervisors were normally located in the same town or city. However, later in their careers their supervisors were off-site and mentoring was something that had to be pursued and initiated by them if it were to happen. In all three cases, I found that the research participants were proactive in pursuing mentors even if their INGOs lacked the capacity to provide them. They found the support and mentoring they needed even if it meant seeking the help outside their own INGO.

The *Sector Switch* approach was the most common career starting point among the research participants. *Sector Switchers* can bring many relevant job skills to their INGO, particularly in project management. There is evidence to suggest that sector-switchers enter the international aid sector with a higher status than those who enter via the *Credential First* or *On the Job* approach. I came to this conclusion by observing that all of the *Sector Switchers* were fast-tracked for leadership roles, even those *Sector Switchers* who were assigned leadership roles for which they had no previous experience or education. Earlier, I presented Anders as an example of such a person. As such, Anders was effectively the same as *On the Job* learners and shared the same characteristics of research participants in that category. With one exception, the *Credential First* and *On the Jobbers* were not given responsibility to supervise staff and managing their own budgets in their first years. In comparison with the *Sector Switchers*, who with one exception were all managing people and budgets within their first year.

Late Bloomers are becoming less of a phenomenon because many European and North American educational systems have made special provisions to accommodate them

(Levin and Levin, 1991). If health and life expectancy continue to increase in Europe and North America as some studies predict (Oeppen and Vaupel, 2002) I believe the international aid sector will increasingly see more *Late Bloomers* working in the field with INGOs. These late-bloomers will be early retirees and pensioners, in good health with project and people management experience. They will resemble *Sector Switchers* in their experience and skill levels. However, I anticipate that many will want to re-tool themselves with professional credentials relevant to international aid work before seeking a job in the sector.

My study does not claim that these four doorways to the professional journey are unique to the international aid sector; on the contrary, I assume that they are not. Other not-yet professionalised occupations are likely to be similar if there is no monopoly on credentialing. Nor do I make any claim regarding which of these doorways are better or worse, recommended or not recommended. Rather I believe that my study provides evidence that four distinct starting points exist and all four have the capacity to produce successful expatriate international aid field leaders. I suggest that the English idiom, *horses for courses* is an apt application for my findings. A person suited for one starting point may not be suited for another. INGOs, funders, academic institutions and other stakeholders championing the professionalisation process of the humanitarian and development aid sectors should plan to accommodate all people who come through any of the four doorways.

Overseas Internships and Short-term Experiences

My research identified that there were four different career starting points among the 12 research participants. However, overseas internships and/or short-term experience were part of all but one of the research participants' journeys. All the internships occurred in the early stages of their professional journeys. All the research participants did overseas internships before starting their careers as aid professionals. These experiences appear to be very influential and formative in their professional journeys. In this section, I look at the internship experiences of the research participants and identify what they considered key components of their internships.

The first three weeks we were involved in moving the hospital's main switch board. Moving it out of the autoclave room where it got filled with steam every few hours, to some where it was going to be safer. So we were doing that for three weeks and then we were doing things like wiring up some buildings and that kind of stuff. And then big floods hit and everybody downed tools and it was all hands on deck carrying chapatias [Chapatias are a type of local bread] into flooded villages. It gave me an opportunity to be useful and be not a burden to the people out there but to actually do something they wanted done. It gave me a great opportunity to see relief work first hand and also to help with some on-going hospital work there. Sean, pg 50.

The concept of *being useful* seemed to be important to Sean during his six week project experience in Bangladesh. This experience was not organised as an internship but as a work project. He reports that this experience gave him confidence that he could live successfully overseas and be involved in humanitarian work. He became a full time humanitarian worker more than 15 years after his initial short term experience.

I pursued a degree in an international relations area, Middle Eastern studies and international development and went overseas for a short term in 1985. And that first year overseas in 1985 after graduating from university helped me narrow my focus professionally. And I went back to the States and went back to grad school and then I've been working in North Africa since 1991. ... But the really key steps were meeting some people who had already been doing

this, both in the short term and eventually the long term and hearing their passion for the work.... I went to Egypt for a year, Cairo. Princeton has an internship programme. They have Princeton in Africa and Princeton in Asia where they set up just graduated students into one or two year internship positions. I got an internship to the American University in Cairo... Betty, pg 164.

Betty reports that her one year internship in Cairo helped *cement* her career plans. It gave her what she needed in order to choose a career in aid work. One of the deciding factors was getting to know other people working with the poor. The experience of getting to know international aid practitioners was important for her. Meeting potential work colleagues and building accurate expectations seems to be characteristic of good internship experiences. Betty's experience also allowed her to *answer* her questions, "Could I handle it? Is this something I could do long-term?" These questions seem to be indicative of people with a level of self-awareness that can facilitate resilience (Reivich and Shatte, 2002). Getting a head start with Arabic learning was an added benefit. After this experience she returned home and focused on getting professional qualifications in international health. Nigel credits his short-term experience in Sudan as instrumental in his career choices.

Probably the earliest, most significant first step was when I did a gap year in the Sudan. In 1981-82 I was between school and university. I went out as a volunteer and ended up working for two separate NGOs or two separate projects. One was with an American NGO called the International Rescue Committee and we were employed or hired by them to set up an education project for refugees from Ethiopia. So that was our main task while we were out there. As 18 year olds we were responsible for everything really. Setting up the buildings, selecting the students, hiring the teachers, and the aim of the project was to help Ethiopians who had left Ethiopia as political refugees to finish their education so they could have a qualification to enable them get to university in Africa or in the West. So that was my first exposure to both NGO work and to a Muslim country. Alongside that for part of the year I worked as a resettlement officer for the UN, UNHCR carrying out first interviews for people who applied for resettlement in the US. So it was a screening process. We were actually based in a town that at that time was the centre of where most of the administration was for the Ethiopian refugees from northern Ethiopia during the civil war there. So that opened my eyes, first of all to relief and

development work and also to living in a North African environment. From there I went on to university... Nigel, pg 2.

There are several outcomes from Nigel's experience that I would like to highlight. First, he was given real work that was vital to the INGOs success. It was not work that he had previous experience with, yet he was able to figure it out even though he was rather young (18 years old) to carry out such a responsibility. This experience undoubtedly helped build his confidence by allowing him to *see* that he was capable of doing humanitarian work. He reports that it "opened his eyes" to both humanitarian work and to what living in a North African environment is like. An important outcome from Nigel's experience appears to have been that it built realistic expectations of the work and living environment. His experience was not so much an internship in the traditional sense as he was thrown into the deep-end. Mentoring and reflection was not part of his experience. It could have gone badly but he made it work. Nigel would not get back to North Africa as a full time humanitarian worker for 18 years, but it was the seed for his future career.

Peter highly valued internships and had many interns work with him over the years.

He advises those considering a career in international aid as follows:

I think you should follow your heart. And if you really desire to do something get experience in it ... It kind of depends on their vision. I just want to give them exposure ... So find things that will get you exposure and then jump in. And even though it seems like you've made a choice all of a sudden you are going to see how big that is, how many options there are within that choice. And get exposure to the different things. Peter, pg 173.

Spouses and internships

Seven of the twelve research participants were married. The professional journey of the married research participants appeared to be significantly shaped by their spouses. A decision to choose a career that takes spouse and children to live abroad in potentially insecure environments is undoubtedly not a career decision that can be made alone. I discovered more by happenstance than plan, that all the spouses of the research participants also had overseas internships and/or work experiences before marriage. Take the example of Nigel's wife who also had an experience overseas which helped shape their joint expectations of the future.

[Regarding Nigel's wife's willingness to go to North Africa] Oh yes, absolutely yes. It was very much a joint decision. When she was a student she went on a three month trip to Asia and spent a month of that time in India as a tourist. She felt very much that she was separate from the local people and so it was very much a formative experience for her. It was on that trip where she really felt uncomfortable and she decided if she were ever to go back to a developing world environment she would want to do it in a way that she was really involved with local people using the local language. And that was before we ever met. Nigel, pg 13.

Nigel's spouse was not a full-time humanitarian worker in North Africa but Nigel credits her with playing a critical role in his success. She had her own short-term experience overseas before they ever met that was influential in their decision to integrate and build relationships with people in the local community rather than find their emotional and social support solely from within the foreign expatriate community. The importance of spouse and child satisfaction on overseas work assignments has been the topic of other studies (Caligiuri, Hyland and Joshi, 1998: Black and Stephens, 1989). It also surfaced from time to time during my joint interviews. I found it informative that the spouses of exemplary expatriate

international aid leaders also had overseas internship and work experience. Perhaps we can deduce that this contributes positively to field staff longevity and retention.

When I analysed the research participants' narratives regarding their overseas internships or short-term work projects, several outcomes appeared to be instrumental in shaping their professional journeys. Their internships:

- Exposed them to various jobs and competency requirements of the sector.
- Provided a new level of clarity as to their potential “fit” in the occupation, organisation, and host culture.
- Helped answer the questions, “Could I handle it?” or “Do I have the right stuff?”
- Introduced them to potential future colleagues.
- Provided real and meaningful work to do.

Perhaps if INGOs can help shape internship and short-term work projects to include the five components mentioned above, more of the right people would choose careers in international aid and go on to become exemplary field leaders. In *Chapter Eight*, I return to discuss some of the issues flagged in this chapter with additional reflections and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: Professional Identity Landmarks

Throughout this research project I have likened the professional development of expatriate field leaders to a long and complex journey. If this metaphor (even if overused) is any shadow of the reality, then my research also identifies *landmarks* these travellers encountered that helped confirm they were making good progress on their professional journeys. My study provides evidence that professional identity is shaped by seven *landmark* experiences. These seven experiences or events seemed to affect the research participants in the same way a physical landmark might affect a traveller journeying along an unfamiliar road. They shaped the professional identity of the research participants by affirming their competence, as well as verifying they belonged. None of these seven *landmarks* were found in all the participants but all the *landmarks* were found in multiple participants. These are:

- Having a job (internship, volunteer, full-time or consultancy)
- Being entrusted with leadership responsibility
- Being invited to *sit at the table*
- Seeing the impact of their work or experiencing job success
- Mastering vocabulary and jargon
- Earning a sector specific qualification or graduate degree
- Experiencing inner pleasure or *fit*

I used the present continuous tense to name these landmarks because professional identity seems to be continuously in process of being verified, or not, through lived experience. Earlier, I defined professional identity formation as the *process* by which

a person self identifies with a particular profession. Reflected appraisals appeared to play a prominent role in the landmarks and thus in the formation of professional identity. These landmarks of professional identity formation appear to carry different weight for different people. Different research participants seemed to attach different meanings and importance to different landmarks. All the landmarks emerged from the lived experiences of the research participants.

Having a Job

I struggled with what to call this landmark. After considering various options such as; *being hired, getting experience, being employed, and being paid*, I finally settled on naming this landmark *having a job* because it was more comprehensive than other options that came to mind. Having a job as an international aid worker is the first professional identity landmark in the journey. Without work experience it seems difficult, if not impossible, to get validation of one's professional identity from either self or others. It also appears that *having a job* that is unpaid can be just as significant in shaping professional identity as a paid job. My data seemed to show that the experience of having a job within the aid sector influenced the formation of professional identities because a job a) influenced how others saw them, b) how they described themselves, and c) in some cases what they imagined they could become. In the *Chapter Four*, I showed how in Nigel's case, he regarded a job during his gap year as being the most important first step in shaping his professional identity as an international aid worker. His short term experience helped him understand that international aid work was a good fit for him. After Nigel's gap year in Sudan he went on to university and gained his chartered accountant credentials believing that such a

qualification would help him get back to North Africa as an international aid worker. Eighteen years later, at age 36, Nigel returned to North Africa as a financial director for an INGO.

For Manfred, having a paid job appears to have been an important landmark in his professional identity formation. Below he and Doris describe their excitement when a German government institution was willing to pay Manfred high fees for his first consultancy job. Their family had lived for several years on Doris' modest nursing salary while he studied at graduate school in London.

Manfred: But things went quite well and after one of these short trips where I was one of the consultants and I got paid for the first time. It was a lot of money! It was great! Ten days' worth of money just for giving some advice and being along and writing a couple pages!

Doris: Oh what a nice change. Plus they paid the airplane ticket and the housing! It was another world! Manfred and Doris, pg 123.

Manfred and Doris were pleased to learn how much Manfred's knowledge was worth both in monetary terms and social capital. As a result of landing a high paying consultancy with a prestigious German organisation Manfred's professional identity received powerful validation. He now knew *experientially* that his knowledge and experience were in demand and it seemed to contribute significantly to the birth of a new self-identity. Having a job with a prestigious INGO or UN body seemed to have special validating powers with at least five of the research participants. *Having a job* as an international aid worker appears to be the initial validation of professional identity by self and others. Other landmarks seem to be what delineates their identities as exemplary aid workers.

Being Entrusted with Leadership Responsibility

Being asked to lead a programme or project (even more so than a Master's degree) seemed to serve as important landmarks in the professional journey and professional self-identify. This landmark appeared frequently in my case studies. Peter had a university degree in finance but never worked in finance as a profession and did not self-identify as a finance guy. After graduating from university he battled thyroid cancer for three years and then completed two years of a three year graduate school programme. Peter then worked five years as a social worker in America. Next he moved overseas and worked for five years coordinating a small community health project in Uzbekistan. At age 37 Peter was fluent in Uzbek but did not have a clear professional self-identity as an international aid worker. He could do many things well but did not have a particular focus. That began to change in 2001 as a humanitarian crisis in northern Afghanistan began to unfold.

I've always had in my heart a desire to respond when there was an emergency someplace. But I never had a talent that anybody wanted. You know, "Are you an engineer? A water engineer? Are you this or are you that?" No, I was never any of those things. So nobody ever wanted me in one of those critical situations. But now in Afghanistan, in the northern part of Afghanistan a large part of the population speaks Uzbek ... And the country director for our NGO [in Uzbekistan] had been at meetings all about Afghanistan because he had worked with Afghan refugees in Pakistan. So he really wanted to see us start an office down there and expand our work into Afghanistan. He asked me if I'd be willing to do it. It sounded interesting but scary because I had never done relief work on that kind of level. I didn't have experience but I also had the desire to do something and the willingness to risk failure. Because I don't think you ever learn if you are good at something unless you try it. So this was my opportunity to try it. Peter, pg 187.

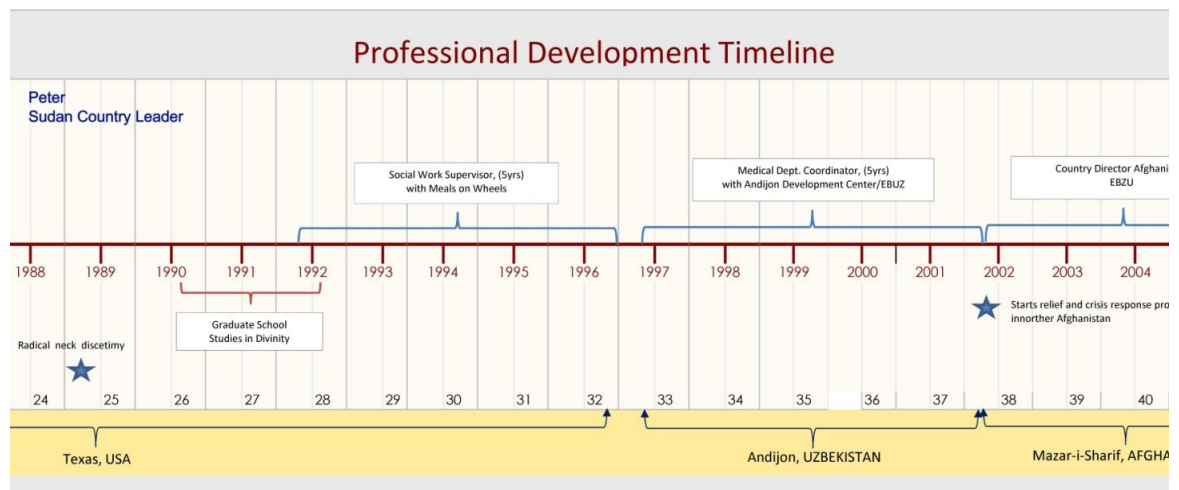


Figure 16: Peter’s professional development timeline age 24-40

In Peter’s case, his country director had confidence that he could succeed and gave him an opportunity to try. This was the start of Peter’s transition from being a community development/social worker to becoming an influential humanitarian aid leader in Afghanistan and Darfur (where he works today). Peter’s willingness to take risks coupled with his boss’ confidence in him was instrumental at this pivotal time in his professional development.

Karin is a licensed German paediatric physical therapist. She had four years of professional education and more than six years of professional practice in Germany before moving to Uzbekistan at age 28 where she worked for nine years. Within a few years of working in Uzbekistan Karin began to experience a change in her professional self-identity. She felt a transition taking place from physiotherapy to international development programme leader. Before she started her Master’s in International Community Disability studies at the age of 37 she had already made the transition in her professional self-identity. She described her transition experience from physiotherapy to humanitarian project leader like this:

I mean I was just a physio, just wanting to go out there and work with the kids. I didn't really think about what is going to happen when I'm gone or teaching someone else how to do that. Those things hadn't been on my mind before going [to Uzbekistan]. Karin, pg 318.

I think somewhere half way in the Uzbekistan years, maybe after four or five years... I think with taking on the leadership. Even in 1999 I was taking on more responsibility – to talking with governments and things like that which obviously I wouldn't do as a physio. Then also, when the other projects started to become bigger ... the income generation carpet making project. I did spend a good part of my time talking with the project leader there about taxes and business registrations which is totally different from physical therapy. So that is definitely the time that things kind of changed ... Probably in those early years as a leader that transition from physio to "I'm a leader of a development organisation" Karin, pg 322.

When asked what affect her master's degree had on her professional identity she responded:

I think it was more about getting it on paper rather than just in my head and my heart. [laughter] So I think I had the identity much earlier. And because I had that and I knew that if I would have to leave the development work for some reason and go back to Germany for family reason or something else, I didn't want to be a physio again. I felt I needed to get a diploma that actually said I was what I was. So that was part of the motivation for doing it. Karin, pg 322.



Figure 17: Karin's professional development timeline from age 18 to 33

So for Karin, her professional self-identity had changed to the point where she wanted a diploma as evidence of her new professional identity. Peter however, expressed no

interest in earning a diploma as evidence of his new professional. He felt his job success (and other verifying landmarks) was evidence enough of who he was to self and others. So for both Peter and Karin, job success, especially their experience of being given increasingly more leadership responsibilities, served as evidence that they were successfully mastering the job competencies expected of international aid professionals and they experienced a transformation in their own professional self-identity.

Being Invited to *Sit-at-the-Table*

Manfred's first experience with being invited to sit-at-the-table happened when he was around 44. Up to this point his professional self-identity was in the process of being formed. He had recently finished his PhD and what he thought was a one-off consultancy job for a major German institutional aid donor. He only got the consultancy job because the donor's normal consultants were unavailable. Manfred describes his experience of being invited to sit-at-the-table as follows:

... after one of these short trips where I was one of the consultants, and I got paid for the first time ... I was invited along to give a briefing on something. All of a sudden I find myself sitting with EMEY people [a highly respected German development organisation]. People I didn't know before and from government ministry which funds it all. So on one trip we came back from Saa'da and there we were, ten people sitting there... and [one of them asks] "Oh Herr Manfred, what do you think is going to happen now in Saa'da [capital of Yemen]?"...and they looked to me and said, "Give us your perception on how to manage this and the likely risks." Manfred, pg 124.

The experience of being *invited-to-the-table* was a landmark experience for Manfred and several of my case study participants' professional identity formation. During the interview Manfred related this experience with fond affection. I interpreted the fact that he volunteered this story without any specific prompting regarding professional

identity development was indicative of how important and transformational the experience was to his professional identity verification process. Within a short time Manfred was regularly being invited to *sit-at-the-table* by other experts and members of respected institutions. He became one of them as they assimilated him into their exclusive circle of expert consultants.

Peter’s professional journey is also full of *sit-at-the-table* landmarks. The invitations grew in number and quality as his professional experience and competency grew. He described it in this way:

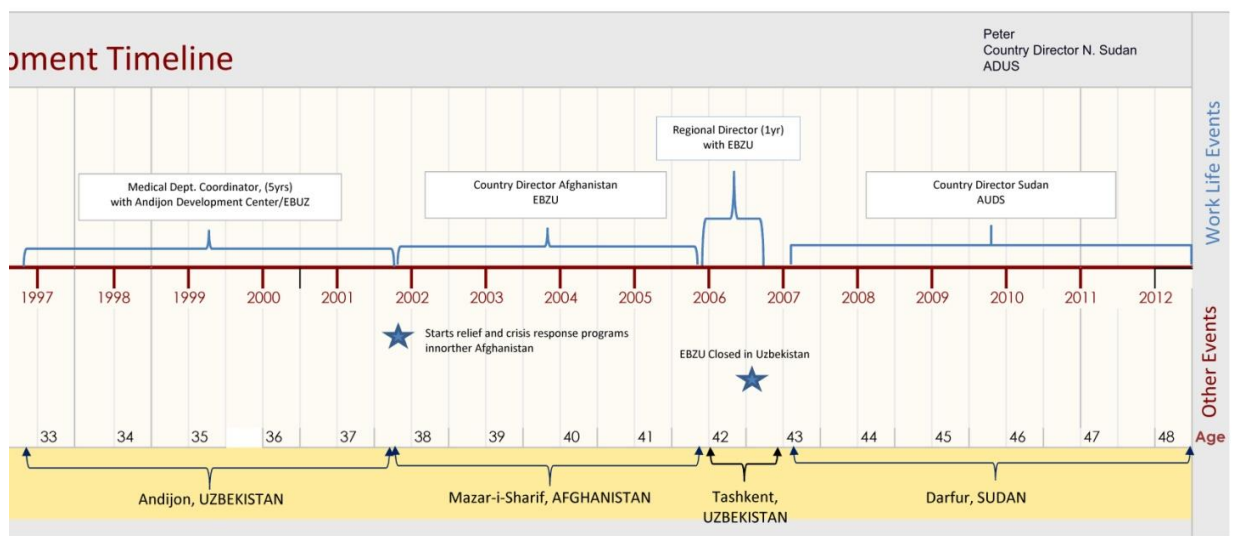


Figure 18: Peter’s professional development timeline from age 33 to 48

So in Afghanistan, I kind of went from afraid of being embarrassed (that I don’t know all these acronyms) and at first not saying anything to “I know as much as these people do and I may even know more.” For two and a half years we didn’t have an official representative structure of the NGO community but me and this other guy became kind of the defacto [leaders of the NGO network in northern Afghanistan]. So when I arrived in Darfur, there it’s a more formal structure. You have an NGO steering committee, an NGO forum, etc. Then the NGO steering committee members are in the humanitarian forum with the UN and the area security management team. So when I first got there, I think the first meeting I was at, one of the ladies on the NGO steering committee (after drilling me with questions for one hour) said, “Okay, the next time we do elections you need to run for NGO steering committee.” Peter, pg 214.

So I played a bigger role in Darfur than even in Afghanistan. I've met with Ban Ki-Moon, the ambassadors, the special envoys, and the top people coming from DPKO and New York and the OCHA people who come from New York. Everybody kind of knows now to talk to me when they come. Which gives me a chance to try to put some input into the madness which is the humanitarian work in Darfur. Peter, pg 215.

Peter's professional journey took him from the quiet backwater of social work in Texas, to community development work in Andijon, Uzbekistan (an even remoter location) and eventually to becoming an influential INGO leader in Darfur. It seems that the experience of being invited to *sit-at-the-table* is the functional equivalent of an accomplished journeyman being invited to join a master's guild. In my case studies, the invitations typically came from:

- International bodies (like UN organisations)
- Host governments
- Donors and partner organisations
- Programme beneficiaries
- Communities of Practice
- Colleagues

These all appear to validate the professional identity of international aid workers. I noticed that Peter and Mike volunteered the most extensive and diverse set of *sit-at-the-table* invitations. It made me wonder if *sit-at-the-table* invitations are not especially cherished and validating by those new to the profession and/or by those who do not have strong academic validation of their professional identity. From their comments, Peter and Mike seemed to esteem *sit-at-the-table* invitations more highly than academic credentials as evidence of professional competence. They seemed to enjoy a quiet satisfaction that *experts* came to them for help even though they had

fewer academic credentials than those they advised. But as I studied my data it appears to indicate that being asked to *sit-at-the-table* has strong validating effects for both professionals who have strong academic credentials, like Manfred and Karin, as well as those who do not, like Peter and Mike.

Being commended, published, or invited to present at conferences could also be considered forms of being invited to *sit-at-the-table*. The notion that other professionals value your work appeared to shape the research participants' view of themselves. Being asked to *sit-at-the-table* can be interpreted as an example of what symbolic integrationists refer to as a reflective appraisal; in that our identity is shaped by how we interpret others to perceive us (Burke and Stets, 2009). When the research participants discovered influential stakeholders thought highly of their professional opinion it shaped their own self-identity. Five of the seven landmark experiences identified in my study can be interpreted as forms of reflected appraisals.

Seeing the Impact of Your Work

This landmark appeared in different forms in almost all of my case study participants. It was the most consistent answer to my interview question, *What keeps you going?* For example:

I think it's to see that it actually makes a difference. That's my main motivation. In all aspects of the work. Olav, pg 32.

I think too, there is enormous satisfaction ... in Pakistan the NGO we work with, during the floods helped more than 50,000 people ... to know we are making a difference in those peoples' lives. Clare, pg 73.

Hope that things will change! [Laughter] No, I think definitely seeing change. Karin, pg 313.

So another part of it is that we are doing something worthwhile. We are making a positive difference. Spencer, pg 273.

In a *Chapter Seven* I discuss how *seeing impact* appears to influence perseverance. However in this chapter I present the lived-experience of *seeing impact* or *job success* from a different angle. I argue *experiencing job success* serves as evidence of professional competence and validates professional identity.

International aid interventions are judged on their impact but there is no clear consensus of what *impact* means or how it is measured, but the notions of positive change or averting negative change are central to the concept (Hofmann, 2004). Nonetheless, impact is a key expectation of all stakeholders involved in aid interventions (ibid.). It can be inferred from my transcripts that when the case study participants saw the impact of their work it reinforced their sense of professional competency and job satisfaction. Therefore *job successes* become important landmarks of professional identity development. For example, Karin describes how her work in Tajikistan had an impact both on individual local women and on government policy. In the narrative below she is talking about her work to help integrate children with disabilities into the regular public school system in Tajikistan.

And there are two ladies that I met as moms of disabled children. Very insecure women wondering, “Why do I deserve this? Why do I have a disabled child?” And today the project is serving 165 children and families and these two ladies have both joined us as staff and are now on the leadership team for this new NGO that has just been established so they are NGO directors ... They are totally different people then they were five years ago. To see that sort of thing, individual lives change. But also I think on a bigger level. Like recently after the polio outbreak there has been a change in the government in looking at community based ideas of rehabilitation rather than hospitals. So suddenly the government is getting something that you’ve tried to explain for five or six years. And them saying, “Yes, we need your help with that... It feels like there

is momentum, something will happen in the next two or three years that I want to be part of. Karin, pg 315.

It seems that Karin's experience of seeing the impact of her work gives her confidence that she will see more impact in the future. Experiencing job success appears to be a landmark that contributes to the enjoyment and sustainability of the professional journey. I believe this is particularly important for the expatriate humanitarian professional. Typically they are making personal sacrifices to work in situations that are considerably more difficult and unsafe than their home country situations. Seeing the impact of their work helps answer the question; "Is it worth the sacrifice? Is it worth all the hardships?" Apparently my case study participants were able to consistently answer "Yes, it is worth it!" For example Betty, after 20 years in Mauritania says:

And every now and then you see something just wonderfully encouraging. I was just thinking of a survey we did maybe two years ago. We really did see the difference that literacy makes. You can read about all the studies that other people had done that shows how literacy reduces infant mortality, but here to see it with our own data, with our own programmes. You know, that these women who were literate really did have fewer child deaths than illiterate mothers. Wow, the things I read about in India or Brazil or Kenya or Uganda ... to see it is true here in Mauritania too ... and look this is happening because of our programme. Yeah, so that is something... Betty, pg 170.

Doris had a professional identity transformation from nurse to educator in development projects when she began to teach English to adult Yemenis men.

Scott: Was there a time when you stopped seeing yourself as a nurse and started seeing yourself as an educator?

Doris: Yes, very much so ... when I started [teaching English] with these Yemeni engineers they were in their 30s but had all studied abroad and I would ask them a lot of questions and I always say that being an older foreign women in the Middle East is the best position you can have because as an older woman you are respected. So because that was such a positive experience I saw, 'Oh, I do this quite well.' And I had other groups and then when I started planning programmes that was something I volunteered for because I had good ideas. It

kind of builds up ... 'Oh, I can do this. I'm quite good at this.' Then you get more ideas. So it was probably during those first three years [i.e. that I began to see myself as an educator]. Doris, pg 132.

Doris had such a positive experience as an English teacher in Yemen that she began to develop a professional self-identity as an educator. Over the next few years this professional self-identity superceded her self-identity as a nurse. I contend that the experience of *job success* validates and shapes professional identity formation.

Mastering Vocabulary and Jargon

Speaking a common language is an important characteristic of community membership and role identity (Burke and Stets, 2009). If you do not understand the vocabulary associated with an identity for which you claim membership your identity and membership will neither be authenticated by self nor others. This is a foundational premise of identity theory. The connection between language and professional identity is well established (Richards, 2006). Therefore it is not surprising that during the early stages of their professional journey lack of sector specific vocabulary was a source of anxiety for some of the research participants. For example:

Then I got to Afghanistan and you have the weekly NGO humanitarian meeting maybe UN as well at the OCHA office and at first I just sat quietly because the relief field has its own vocabulary. I was uncomfortable. I thought 'Oh wow, these people really know what they are talking about.' And I was very intimidated. Peter, pg 207.

And at the beginning I was kind of a bit scared. The terminology I didn't know. Manfred, pg 123.

Karin explains how her promotion from being a hands-on physiotherapist to being a project manager over several international aid projects forced her to learn about accounting terminology.

I certainly had to learn a whole new language. I kept telling people that I wasn't just learning Tajik but also bookkeepish because of all the specialized terminology that auditors use and all that. It was quite a new area. Karin, pg 309.

Learning sector specific vocabulary and jargon appears to reduce anxiety and promote professional identity. Those who enter the international aid sector via the *on-the-job*, *sector-switch*, and *late bloomer* pathways will likely experience anxiety and lack certain validations to their professional identity until the sector specific vocabulary, jargon, and acronyms are learned.

Earning a Sector Specific Graduate Degree

Betty, Karin, Doris, and Manfred were the four research participants who earned sector specific graduate degrees. Betty earned her graduate degree(s) before launching into her humanitarian career. In some professions a Master's degree or equivalent is considered the normative route for acquiring occupational competencies and a prerequisite for being granted a license to practise. Betty seemed to adopt this posture not because she needed a license but because she felt the fastest route to professional competence was through an intense graduate degree programme. Betty also appeared to enjoy academics as she once considered it as a career. Manfred had spent a lot of time in the Middle East in non-professional roles before he earned his BA, and MA in his mid 30s, and his PhD in his 40s. Karin a paediatric physiotherapist and Doris a registered nurse earned graduate degrees in order to retool and validate their newly emerged professional identities. We already heard that Karin's professional self-identity had changed before she pursued a sector specific graduate degree. However,

she reckoned a graduate degree was necessary if people in Europe were to also validate her new professional identity especially if she was no longer in the field.

... I went to London and joined the Institute of Child Health for a Masters in community disabilities studies. It is part of the University College of London. So I did a Master's in International Community Disabilities Studies, which is basically development studies, international health, with a focus on people with disabilities. Karin, pg 306.

... I felt I needed to get a diploma that actually said I was what I was. So that was part of the motivation for doing it. Part of it I just wanted to learn and reflect on things we've been doing and learn for the future but part of it was to have the right piece of paper so I could do it in Europe or in Germany from a headquarters' perspective. Karin, pg 322.

Doris's professional journey was shaped more by taking advantage of opportunities than it was by long-term planning. She earned her Master's in educational management because she increasingly found pleasure, job satisfaction and opportunities in education. Unlike Karin's master's degree which built upon her original professional degree, Doris used her master's degree to transform her professional identity from nurse to an educator.

I think ever since that time my career has evolved in response to opportunities along the way ... [my Master's] in Educational Management from Aston University in Birmingham. Actually it started when I was working as a nurse and someone asked me if I could coach their husband [in English] and I kind of got in to that and I first started with some kind of advanced certificate and kind of worked up. Because in the time that I was teaching I found out that I was quite good at that and it was something I could do. It was actually Educational Management in TEFOL. But it was the educational management that appealed to me. By that stage I had seen that a lot of jobs are being at the right place at the right time, or contacts or whatever. I use to think that was just in the Middle East but it really is not. You know it is who you know and being introduced and being there at the right time and I thought that would help. So I guess all of that is to say that it has always been happen chance. Opportunities that were presented or the circumstances you're in. How can you make the most of it? Doris, pg 89.

Not all of the research participants thought master's degrees were important to their professional identity. They considered experience and job success enough to validate their professional identities.

I don't have a Master's degree in humanitarian international development or something like that, but I have a lot of experience. And I think the cultural understanding background and realising the value of knowing the language, even though my Arabic's poor I can at least do some of the stuff in Arabic... that village leaders will call me and there are a number of them that will just call me if I'm leaving on vacation and they know it, they'll call me. We have a relationship. Peter, pg 217.

Experiencing Inner Pleasure or *Fit*

According to Iaffaldano and Muchinsky (1985) there is no strong pervasive relation between job satisfaction and job performance. However, there is evidence in my case study that the experience of inner satisfaction or *fit* is an element that helps shape professional identity. I saved the discussion of this landmark to the end because it is a bit more nuanced than the previously discussed landmarks. Early in my coding process I noticed that three of the research participants used a variation of the phrase *fit me well* to describe different aspects of their work. I also noticed that other research participants seemed to enjoy their job and not just because they achieved good results or outcomes but they seemed to find pleasure in the job itself. Not pleasure in every aspect of their job but in many aspects. As I was reflecting on this a quote came to mind from Eric Liddell, the Scottish 1924 Olympic gold medallist in the 400 meters and subject of the movie *Chariots of Fire*. Liddell is reported to have said:

I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast! And when I run I feel his pleasure.

This quote seemed to capture a concept similar to what I was seeing in the lived experiences of many of the research participants. I concluded that many of the research

participants felt the equivalent of what Eric Liddell experienced when he ran, that is an inner sense of pleasure, satisfaction, or *fit* while doing their job. This pleasure seemed to be generated from the doing of their jobs rather than just from successful results. I propose that the experience of inner satisfaction or *fit* helps verify professional self-identity. It is a type of intrinsic reward. Identity theorists credit intrinsic rewards as a primary determiner in an identity's prominence (Burke and Stets, 2009). Not all job requirements gave inner satisfaction or joy but those that did seemed to contribute to professional identity formation. Consider Manfred's longing to go back to the good old days when he was not restricted to the capital of Yemen because of security concerns:

I'm most confident and happy if I could go back to some small village and try to help people. That would give me a lot of satisfaction and joy. Manfred, pg 126.

At several places in Manfred's interview there was evidence that he found deep satisfaction and pleasure in face-to-face conversation with local villagers. To him it was the greatest pleasure of his work. As security issues restricted him from making visits to the villages he seemed to experience less pleasure from his job. Similarly, Karin, now an NGO leader stationed in the capital of Tajikistan, talked about the pleasures she derived from face-to-face grass-roots development work. Notice that in both these narratives the pleasure seems to emerge from the doing rather than the results.

I think getting out myself again and doing some project work is definitely positive rather than just doing administrative things and government relations. So actually meeting with the village people and teaching and training people myself again is something I immensely enjoy and it adds value to the job to be able to do that. Karin, pg 313.

Karin also seems to derive a great deal of satisfaction from meetings with people from other NGOs as part of her role as an INGO leader.

A lot of people are asked to lead the development work in our circles feel they have to waste a lot of time in meetings, while I don't feel they are a waste of time. I actually quite enjoy that part. So that has definitely helped in job satisfaction and that is a good way to spend my time because that is also relationships. Karin, pg 327.

Betty said the following while commenting on how much she enjoys her leadership role in a business training programme she is helping run in Mauritania:

There are times I feel like I'm doing something I've been made and gifted to do. But, I would say that one of the big reasons I've stayed on the field so long - continued in this NGO work - is that there is a sense of how well it fits my gifts and skills. I very much feel made to do this, so that most days I truly enjoy being here, and enjoy the work I have to do. Betty, Skype chat 20 Feb. 2013.

So while it is difficult to prove a direct link between intrinsic pleasure in doing a task and professional identity formation, the proposition is consistent with McCall and Simmons' (1978) articulation of identity theory.

Another factor influencing placement of an identity in the prominence hierarchy is the rewards individuals receive from the identity, both extrinsic and intrinsic ... Intrinsic rewards are the gratifications that individuals experience, internally, for the performance of a role ... The more the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards associated with a particular identity, the higher that identity is in the prominence hierarchy (Burke and Stets, 2009: 40).

If intrinsic joy, pleasure, and sense of *fit* are derived from performing a task or role as an international aid worker, identity theory suggests that it is an important factor in professional identity formation.

Implications for professional practice

I discussed seven events or experiences that contribute to the formation of professional identity. My research suggests that these seven landmarks validate professional identity for self and others. I hypothesises that these landmarks are likely to be prominent in shaping professional identity in many occupations. Evidence of reflective appraisals can be found in most of the seven landmark experiences of the research participants, these being: *having a job*, *being entrusted with leadership responsibility*, *being invited to sit-at-the-table* and *earning a sector specific graduate degree*. Two of the landmarks appeared to influence professional identity formation through intrinsic reward. These are the *experience of inner pleasure or fit* and *experiencing job success*. One of the landmarks, *mastering humanitarian sector language and jargon*, points to the well-established link between language and identity formation. Richards (2006: 3) says, "... every time we speak we reveal, whether deliberately or accidentally, something of ourselves and who we take ourselves to be." Several of the research participants expressed that they lacked confidence interacting with colleagues from other INGOs until they mastered the sector specific vocabulary.

All the landmarks of professional identity formation appear to carry different weight for different people in that an experience that affirmed one participant's identity was not necessarily equally significant for another participant. Different research participants seemed to attach different meanings and significance to different

landmarks. While analysing the data, specific landmarks emerged from the lived experiences of the specific participants:

	Having a job	Mastering vocabulary	Being entrusted with leadership responsibility	Being invited to <i>sit-at-the-table</i>	Experiencing job success	Earning a sector specific graduate degree	Experiencing inner pleasure or fit
Nigel	X		X		X		X
Olav	X		X		X		
Sean	X		X	X	X		
Clare			X		X		X
Manfred	X	X		X		X	X
Doris					X	X	X
Betty	X				X	X	X
Peter	X	X		X	X		X
Anders	X		X	X	X		
Spencer	X	X	X		X		
Mike	X		X	X	X		X
Karin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 2: Participants' identity formation landmarks

These landmarks appeared to affect the research participants in the same way a physical landmark might reassure a traveller journeying along an unfamiliar road. For the research participants, landmarks provided evidence not only that they were competent but also that they belonged. I do not assume that the list of seven landmarks is comprehensive; rather that there are likely other landmarks on the professional journey of international aid workers that have not been identified in my study. I also predict that many of these landmarks are generic to a wide variety of professions and occupations.

When reflecting on the seven landmarks, at least three of the landmarks could be experienced in part through pre-field training and professional education. For example:

Having a job- Internships played an important role in all the research participants' professional journey. A successful internship shapes professional identity differently than being hired by an INGO, but still internships influenced the professional identity formation. Internships provided opportunity to master vocabulary, experience inner pleasure or fit from the job, and potentially experiencing some level of job success.

Mastering vocabulary – As mentioned earlier, there is a well-established link between language and identity. Mastering the vocabulary of the international aid sector is an important part of professional education.

Experiencing inner pleasure or fit – If a training programme does not include a field internship of several months it is difficult to imagine that a student would have enough time to experience the inner pleasure or fit from the job. It was not *imagining* the fit and inner pleasure that shaped the professional identity of the research participants, it was the *experiencing* of it. Therefore extended internships are likely the best scenario for a student to experience (or not) inner pleasure or fit from the job.

Earning a sector specific graduate degree – A graduate degree is the de facto professional credential until the sector has been professionalised by law. However, in this study there was some evidence suggesting that a graduate degree was more important to how the research participants thought others viewed them than it was to how they viewed themselves.

Four landmark experiences; *being employed in the sector*, *being entrusted with leadership responsibility*, *being invited to sit-at-the-table*, and *experiencing job success* are really aspects of professional identity validation that take place primarily on-the-job. Experiencing inner pleasure or fit may be experienced in an internship but will be tested on-the-job as new and varied experiences become part of the professional journeys. INGOs should consider taking an active part in helping staff find roles within the organisation where they can experience these landmarks. If a person is not experiencing *job success* or *inner pleasure* in their current role perhaps there is another job within the INGO where they can. This would require INGOs to have an organisational culture that could tolerate a degree of experimentation and even failures from new staff. Staff would also need to be conscious and proactive in seeking jobs where they can be successful and experience *fit* rather than seeking jobs because they provide more status, power, or money. I suspect this would require a high degree of self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-discipline from staff and a high level of commitment from the INGO.

CHAPTER SIX: Competencies, Complexities, and CPD

This chapter reports on the findings of the research sub-question, *To what degree do the experiences of the research participants compare with the humanitarian core competencies frameworks being promoted by advocates of the professionalisation agenda such as the ELRHA and CBHA?* I compare the lived-experiences of the research participants with ELRHA research and the 2010 competency-based framework of the CBHA. The outcome of this comparison identifies a dilemma between theory and practice. This chapter closes with my findings to my research sub-question, *How important did the research participants believe the learning cultures of their own organisations were to their continuous professional development?*

In *Chapter Two: Context and Current Debates*, I discussed how many stakeholders connected to the humanitarian aid sector are interested in seeing the sector professionalised. A professionalised humanitarian sector would at a minimum "... establish a baseline for humanitarian work that is accepted across the sector (Russ, 2010: 14) and establish a system for credentialing qualified humanitarian professionals that is accepted and enforced within the sector. The research participants in this study are international aid workers that hail from the current *pre-professionalised* era. They are not contractors but long term field leaders working in both the humanitarian and development aid sector. I believe their combined lived experiences have something to say regarding how aid workers grow into exemplary field leaders and thus the on-going professionalisation process of international aid in general and the humanitarian aid sector specifically.

The ELRHA (Enhancing Learning & Research for Humanitarian Assistance) network and the CBHA (Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies) promote learning, research, cooperation, and best practices among member INGOs in the humanitarian sector. They are also active in promoting and facilitating the professionalisation of the humanitarian sector. The ELRHA and CBHA have collaborated to develop competency based frameworks that can serve as a basis for curriculum development and professional credentialing for humanitarian workers. The key document in this regard is the CBHA (2010) Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework. See Appendix C. It consists of six Competency Domains and approximately 85 Core Behaviours. When I compared the experience of the 12 research participants with the CBHA's competency based framework there was great congruence. Here I would like to focus on one area of congruence. Consistent with the research participants' experience, the CBHA framework highlights the importance of *developing and maintaining collaborative relationships* as one of its six Competency Domains. Within this domain are Core Behaviours, which includes behaviours such as, *actively listen to perspectives and experiences of crisis-affected people* and *establish and maintain clear dialogue with crisis-affected people*. These competencies are consistent with what the research participants experienced. However, my research makes me sceptical in regard to the humanitarian sector's commitment to *actually developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with crisis-affected people*. My scepticism is based on the sector's wide-spread tradition of using short-term employment contracts of 12 months or less and *churning* that does not permit the time or space for humanitarian workers to learn local languages. Granted, in some disasters and complex emergencies there is not time for first responders to learn the local

language. However, most key actors in the humanitarian sector are deeply invested in many on-going long-term humanitarian interventions, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Haiti to name a few. When compared to the experience of the 12 research participants, short-term contracts do not allow the time needed for: a) learning the local language, b) building relationship with local beneficiaries, and c) seeing the impact of their work. All three of these experiences appeared to be foundational to the research participants' success and longevity in the field. The CBHA framework rightly identifies the importance of *developing and maintaining collaborative relationships*, including maintaining clear dialogue with crisis-affected people. However, the humanitarian sector's hiring practices do not appear to support it. In this section, based on the research participants' experience, *I argue that unless professionalising the humanitarian sector can bring reform to the employment norm of hiring short-term humanitarian contractors who have either no commitment to, or time to learn local language, and move towards supporting longer-term professionals who are committed to developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with crisis affected people (as evidenced by fluency in learning local languages) there will be no net gain in the humanitarian sector when it is eventually professionalised.* To set the stage for my argument, I will first present my findings regarding the daily routines of the research participants.

The Day to Day Routines

According to my data, the day to day work of international aid field leaders is not particularly exotic or adventurous. There is more office and paper work than many

people might expect. Writing reports, updating MS Excel spreadsheets, meetings, Skype conversations, and email correspondence can take large parts of their day.

A dominant day-to-day activity of the research participants was attending and convening meetings of various sorts. Some seemed to enjoy this aspect of the work and others tried to participate in as few as possible. Meeting with private language tutors was not unusual especially during their first years in a new field. As mentioned in a *Chapter Five*, attending INGO meetings played a role in the professional identity formation of several research participants. Attending INGO meetings seemed to be the price humanitarian leaders pay to maintain good coordination and communication.

The research participants appeared to have decreasing *hands-on* work with programme beneficiaries after they received leadership and supervision responsibilities. This trend seemed to continue over time unless they declined opportunities to take additional leadership responsibilities. Many of the research participants spent the bulk of their *people time* facilitating local staff, rather than doing the hands-on field work themselves. To a large degree, the work of the 12 research participants involved equipping and facilitating local staff rather than direct hands-on work with beneficiaries. They normally did this in the local languages rather than in English, Russian, or French.

A second cluster of skills practiced by the research participants were tasks related to *project management*. Project management in the aid sector is not particularly different from project management in other occupations. Those research participants who were

experienced in project management before entering the international aid sector (i.e. Nigel, Olav, Sean, Betty, Anders, and Spencer) seemed to have little difficulty transferring these skills to their new context. Those who had less previous experience in project management (i.e. Clare, Doris, Peter, Spencer, Karin, Manfred, and Mike) were able to learn on the job. Below are examples of how the research participants described their day to day work.

So my day will be spent typically working on financial or accounting reports or proposals or budgets or whatever. That would be part of the day. Part of the day will be working spending time with programme heads. Talking through programmes, maybe visiting the programmes; working through the issues; setting strategies, and reacting to problems. So that would be a good chunk of the day. Initially a lot of my day would be spent in language learning. Less so obviously now; in Africa you cannot separate your work life from your home life, from your contacts and friends in the community. So I spend an hour or two each day with local people who just come to see me or want to talk. So that is always the unknown part of the day, how much time is going to be spent doing that. You need to be extremely flexible, that's what I've found. The only time I can guarantee I'm going to have a quiet time is either when I shut the door or when I go in and hide myself away when I have a deadline to meet or something. We try to keep our doors open. We try to be as open as we can for local people coming and visiting. It is really why we are there. Nigel, pg 5.

If I'm in the office there are a lot of people wanting to meet with me. So it is not unusual to have days of meetings more or less back to back. Some days I choose to not go to the office and stay at home and work. Often it is following up emails, correspondence, and Skype conferences. We are doing a lot more board meetings and advisor leadership forums, via Skype conferencing. Olav, pg 30.

Okay, I spend too much of the time sitting behind a desk. [laugh] Sometimes from 9-5 responding to emails, analysing survey data, helping monitor our staff, or developing training programmes. Sometimes I get out into the communities ... I used to be out in the communities a lot more when I was really involved in our feeding programme. I was out doing nutrition screenings but these days I'm involved a lot more in programme administration. My role is a combination of things. It's meetings with government officials, keeping abreast of what other international organisations and NGOs are doing ... so sometimes, especially when there is some kind of short-term crisis situation there will often be strategy meetings with UNICEF or UNDP or World Health Organisation or other NGOs trying to coordinate responses to things. There

are also regular meetings with government officials to update them on our project activities. And then there is training our staff. One of the reasons I'm less out in the community now is that we have well trained local staff. Otherwise we'd be the ones doing the day to day running of things. And so I don't have to be involved so much on a day to day basis to run with programmes. Betty, pg 167 and 169.

I would get there in the morning before the other workers would come if I could because you could get some things done. A lot of it was reacting to whatever problems there were. I would be kind of managing and trouble shooting, working with people, and I'm an introvert. So while I found I did that really well, I would be exhausted by the end of the day and they were usually ten hour days or so. It was extremely varied. I would like to say there was a time for planning [laughter], but it was just way too full. I took things as they happened and would improvise. Doris, pg 141.

I don't have a day planner and I don't have a calendar that I write things on. Okay, I have this meeting and this and this and then I'll meet with this person. That is kind of my personality but it is also because I know that I'll get to the office and I know that they'll need some help over here first to get this going. There will be some problems that I'll have to tackle immediately. By the time everything is said and done, it is time to go home. I have meetings, weekly meetings, with the NGO steering committee, the area security management team, the area. Peter, pg 222.

You know the tax inspector comes and very clearly says either you pay him something or else he will stay a long time until he finds a problem. And then you just need to wait and let him try to find something. They can be very persistent, telling you every day that "You can make this much easier on yourself if you just give in and give us something." So for weeks and weeks we had to stand firm and not give in. Other times you need to negotiate, and kind of make sure that if you do need to bargain with people on some semi-corrupt things, at least there is some way to make it official with documents and everything. I ended up employing some relative of the minister of justice as an adviser so that I could get a tax report [i.e. receipt] on everything. So just to get your head around some of the things that are going on in the government. Name withheld.

Twenty Competencies from My Data

From 367 pages of interview transcripts I developed a list of 20 occupational behaviours that most of the research participants did at work. The purpose for compiling these 20 competencies was to present a summary of normative work behaviours using a format similar to the ELRHA (Walker and Russ, 2010) and CBHA

(Russ, 2012) competency based frameworks. I did this to facilitate a comparison between the two sets of data.

None of the behaviours (except language learning) were observed in all the research participants but all the activities in the list were observed in at least half of the research participants unless they are marked with an asterisk (*). The three competencies marked with an asterisk I observed in at least two participants. I also tried to approximate at what point in their professional journey the research participants began performing these tasks. I made some educated guesses because I did not have all the information to be certain with the dates. I followed the model used by Walker and Russ (2010). That being; *Level 1* are tasks performed within the first 18 months experience. *Level 2* were tasks performed between 18 months and five years. *Level 3* were tasks performed after five years or more experience. I wrote the behaviours in a classic competency-based framework approach, using a verb to describe the outcome for each competency. While this approach to competency based frameworks is not without controversy, it is undoubtedly the most influential methodology (Kerka, 1998) and appropriate for my limited purposes here. It is also similar to the style used in the ELRHA and CBHA frameworks.

Exemplary expatriate field leaders:

1. Learn language(s) of beneficiaries. (Levels 1-3)
2. Develop relationships with beneficiaries. (Levels 1-3)
3. Take risks when judged appropriate. (Levels 1-3)
4. Maintain boundaries. i.e. Say no to some funding opportunities. (Levels 1-3)
5. Prepare proposals and reports. (Levels 1-3)
6. Respond to and solve problems. (Levels 1-3)
7. Correspond with stakeholders; primarily via email and Skype (Levels 1-3)

8. Advocate on behalf of beneficiaries before funders and governments (Levels 1-3)
9. Plan and participate in meetings with staff, government representatives, NGOs, beneficiaries, and conferences. (Levels 1-3 but this tends to increase as one gains responsibility)
10. Monitor staff performance. (Levels 1-3)
11. Train/mentor staff. (primarily Levels 2-3)
12. Perform needs assessments. (primarily Levels 2 and 3)
13. Evaluate programme impact. (primarily Levels 2 and 3)
14. Lead multi-ethnic projects teams (primarily Levels 2 and 3)
15. Plan strategy (primarily Levels 2-3)
16. Negotiate with government officials. (primarily Levels 2- 3)
17. Take breaks/monitors mental and physical health. (Levels 1-3)
18. Supervise contractors*⁴. (primarily Levels 2-3)
19. Evaluate and manage security*. (Levels 2 and 3)
20. Analyse data, surveys, and reports*. (primarily Levels 2-3)

Comparing with the ELRHA Competency-Based Framework

I compared the 20 generic competencies which emerged from the research participants' experience with the 270 competencies ELRHA Humanitarian Core Competency framework (Walker and Russ, 2010). Comparing the two documents was a bit like comparing apples and oranges. My 20 competencies were created by analysing 327 pages of interview transcripts from the experience of 12 exemplary expatriate field leaders. The ELRHA framework on the other hand consisted of approximately 270 competencies developed by panels and subject matter experts and validated by surveying over 1300 humanitarian sector stakeholders including donors, interns, and headquarters staff. Our documents were products of different research

⁴ "*" indicates the behaviour was identified in less than half of the participants.

methodologies and created for different purposes. Nonetheless, the results of my comparison left me with two strong impressions. First I was impressed by the quality and comprehensiveness of the ELRHA competency framework. All 20 of my competencies were covered within the ELRHA framework in one way or the other. The ELRHA framework is much more detailed and comprehensive than my 20 item framework. In retrospect I could see that the research participants were doing many of the 270 behaviours mentioned in the ELHRA framework. My second impression was that the ELHRA framework did not seem to emphasise the priority and commitment to language learning as compared to the 12 research participants. It is this issue of *commitment to learn local languages* that I want to discuss now.

The Humanitarian Sectors' Self-Inflicted Language Learning Dilemma

Eleven of the 12 research participants learned local languages because they believed developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with crisis-affected people was crucial for the success of their programmes. One participant operated in French because that was the language understood by the local staff. But in the other cases, Betty for example, did not just learn French so she could manage with the Mauritanian government authorities but she also learned Hassaniyya Arabic and studied Pulaar so she could communicate with project beneficiaries. Peter learned Uzbek in Uzbekistan, then Dari when he was in Afghanistan, and is now working on communicating in Arabic in Darfur. Since the learning of local languages takes hundreds of hours, most of the INGOs the research participants worked for gave them time and space to work on it.

I spent probably the first 9 months in cultural and language learning. Just understanding the setting *took time* because with that work we were planning on staying a long time. *We wanted to do* development work that communicated in their own language and not Russian but their heart language of Uzbek. So at first we invested time in that. Peter pg 183

...we didn't live in a compound where you have a lot of expats. We had Afghans as neighbours. We had to learn the local language. We worked with a lot of Afghans. Anders pg 183

Eleven of the twelve research participants worked hard at learning local languages during both work time and free time. They believed that learning language was essential for them to develop and maintain collaborative relationships with locals. In post-interview correspondences, I asked the research participants to comment on the role language learning had, if any, on their professional journey. Here are some of their answers:

You can't really learn culture without language or learn language without culture as the two are so interwoven, and I think it's very hard to be effective in another culture if you haven't first been a learner, been needy and received help from the local community. I see many international NGOs struggle with their projects because they're dependent on gate-keepers, i.e. people through whom they interact. I have yet to see this work well for anything other than short-term crisis aid (and even then it's not great). Case in point: in the aftermath of a pogrom by Kyrgyz against Uzbeks in south Kyrgyzstan in 2010, two thousand Uzbeks had their courtyard homes burnt down and international aid agencies were suggesting they be housed in yurts, the traditional homes of the Kyrgyz. Foreign aid workers who knew the language and cultural context pointed out how this would be rubbing a lot of salt in a very fresh wound. Mike, *personal correspondence*.

Learning local language is extremely important for my work. It is the key to making deeper friendships with locals and to understanding the local culture. I can go a lot deeper with those people when I speak their language... which can really improve all aspects of the work. Sean, *personal correspondence*.

Learning language is very important as it brings you closer to people and makes it easier to communicate. It also makes living in the culture/country more enjoyable and, thus, increases the probability of you stay long-term. You can't really understand the culture unless you master the language in a relatively fluent way. Olav, *personal correspondence*.

During her interview, I asked Betty what advice she would give to people considering a career as an international aid professional. She responded:

Learn languages so that you are really able to talk with people in communities one-on-one and not have to rely on translators so that you are not always just hearing what they want you to hear or so you're not an outsider but are trying to be as much as you can be an insider in the community to try and understand what motivates people. And to understand too what works. There are some things that might not make any sense to us Westerns but actually really works well in their culture. And if we were to come out and say no, you have to do it this way, we would lose a lot of credibility because that coping system is a really valid one and it worked for them for years. Betty, pg 272.

The commitment to learn the language of crisis-affected people displayed by the research participants seems to stand in contrast with the priority and commitment displayed by many working in the international humanitarian sector. Let me explain.

There are indications in the ELHRA competency based framework and scoping (Walker and Russ, 2010) the many workers in the humanitarian sector do not consider learning the language of crisis affected people a high priority. One example of this can be found in the *Scoping Study* (ibid.) which surveyed over 1300 humanitarian workers asked them to rank five skills they thought to be central to being a humanitarian worker. Note the question is *humanitarian worker* not people working in the humanitarian sector. The respondents ranked *multi-tasking*, *team building*, and *negotiation* as the top three skills and prioritised *accounting* and *languages* at the bottom, tied for fourth and fifth place. I found this result disturbing in light of the research participants' experiences and in light of the humanitarian mandate to *keep disaster affected people at the centre* of humanitarian interventions⁵. I wondered how humanitarian workers can expect to keep disaster-affected people at the centre if they

⁵ The slogan of the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA)

do not speak their languages. I emailed the authors of this study, Peter Walker and Catherine Russ and asked them if they could comment on my observation that their study seemed to indicate a general lack of expectation that humanitarian professionals learn local languages. Peter Walker kindly responded to my inquiry with the following:

I think there are a couple of things going on here. First, our survey did not focus on ex-pat workers. I think most of the people who answered it were local employees. So if you are already working in your first language, and it is the useful one, you are less likely to think of “local language skills” as being a competence. Peter Walker, personal correspondence, 27 August 2012.

While the survey did not focus on expatriate workers, page 5 of the *Scoping Study* (ibid.) indicates that 72.8% of the 1,166 people who took the online survey were from Europe or North America so I did not find Peter Walker’s response totally satisfying. I can understand that not everyone employed in the humanitarian sector needs to learn the local language of crisis-affected people since many in the sector may have no direct contact with programme beneficiaries. However, the survey asked to rank the five skills thought to be central to being a humanitarian worker, not a worker in the humanitarian sector. In normal usage, an accountant or a fund raiser employed at an INGO headquarters are not understood to be *humanitarian workers* any more than a secretary or accountant employed at a hospital are considered to be medical workers. The literature also normally reserves the term “humanitarian worker” to refer to staff working in the field not people employed in the sector. Keeping in mind that over 70% of the respondents in this survey were North Americans or Europeans, it begs the question, how can international humanitarian workers *develop and maintain collaborative relationships; listening and creating dialogue with crisis-affected people* if language learning is ranked below *multi-tasking, team building, negotiating*, and

given equal priority to *accounting*? I hypothesise that the sector has become dependent on using translators because of the widespread use of short-term contracts and churning in the sector, but testing this hypothesis is outside the scope of this study. An equally disturbing hypothesis is that the political and individual *will* needed to implement the concepts of *collaborative relationships and dialog with crisis affected people* is not yet sufficient in the sector, but testing this hypothesis is also outside the scope of the current study.

I would like to present a second, more subtle, piece of evidence from the ELRHA competency framework and scoping study (Walker and Russ, 2010) that also appears to indicate the low priority given to language learning in the humanitarian sector. Out of approximately 270 job competencies listed in the ELRHA competency framework, there was only one that touched on language learning while there are at least 13 related to financial management and 15 related to using technology. The one competency reads, *Shows an interest and willingness to learn other languages* (ibid: 36). While this competency is admirable, I believe it is more evidence of the low priority given to language learning among many actors in the humanitarian sector. The presence of only one competency out of 270 is one signal. Perhaps equally telling, when we reflect on the wording of the one competency i.e. *showing an interest and willingness* to learn a local language strikes me as being indefinite and non-committal. My research suggests that *showing an interest and willingness* is not enough. Eleven of the twelve research participants invested hundreds and perhaps thousands of hours to actually learn local language(s) *in situ*. Some invested 20 hours a week on top of their normal workload. Showing interest and being willing were not enough for them, they did it.

Not only that, language learning appeared to add to the research participants' stress levels and pulled them out of other important duties. It was costly in time and energy but it was a cost that eleven of the twelve research participants accepted as part of their job.

Transformational benefits of *in situ* language learning to aid workers

When I reflect on the research participants' commitment to learn local languages, it makes me wonder if this *commitment* to learn local languages was in itself a primary enabler which made them exemplary. What if the *process* of learning a language *in situ* helped shape their self-identity and endeared them to their host community? More than one of my research participants suggested this was the case. The process of learning a new language *in situ* can be profoundly unsettling psychologically. Dr. Greg Thomson, a linguist and language learning coach for several INGOs, says:

My main point in mentioning this study (Ehrman, 1994) is that it provides yet another piece of evidence that the language learning experience interacts with other psychological forces at a deep level. It supports Guiora's (1984) proposal that some of the increased difficulty with language learning that adults experience in contrast with children derives from the fact that the child's ego is permeable, while the adult's ego is relatively impermeable and adults feel a greater need than children to protect their egos. A new language is a two-edged sword. While functioning in it we are reduced to personal incompetence, being robbed of much of our ability to be who and what we are. At the same time the emerging competence centered around the new language invades our closed package of personal self-understanding and group identity ... In short, the acquisition of a second language is a major life change. Comparisons of second language acquisition with such life changes as puberty, marriage, the onset of parenthood, the transition to mid-life, etc. are not at all exaggerated (Thomson, 2004: 10).

If Thomson's observations are correct then the transformational *process* of learning a local language *in situ* may be nearly as important as learning the language itself. The process seems to force the aid worker into the role of learner and listener rather than

teacher and expert. Eleven of the research participants learned local languages *in situ*. Betty and Manfred had learned Arabic before starting as aid workers but also spent significant time learning the dialects of Arabic spoken in Mauritania and Yemen. Betty also learned Pulaar. Several of the research participants verbalised that learning language *in situ* was a two-edged sword experience similar to what Thomson (*ibid.*) spoke about.

A whole new way of seeing the world slowly begins to open up before you as you learn the language and the culture. We experienced that twice - in the same place where there were two trade languages. Frustratingly slow but in its own way wonderful. Sean, personal correspondence.

Consider Mike's response when I asked him what advice he gives to people who want to have a career in international aid.

Learn the language. Be needy. Let the community take care of you. If you let people care for you, then certainly in the Central Asia context, hospitality is one of the foundation stones of the culture. I think when you let people take care of you it becomes much more of an exchange than just some kind of cultural imperialism where we know better. This is what you should be doing! Mike, pg 286.

The Dilemma Caused by Short-Term Contracts and Churning

The Global Survey on Humanitarian Professionalisation (Russ, 2012) was published by the ELRHA. One of the purposes of this study was to have the humanitarian competency framework endorsed by the sector. This study featured a different competency based framework than the previous ELRHA Scoping Study by Walker and Russ (2010). This competency-based framework had been developed by the 15 member organisations of the CBHA (Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies). The CBHA competency-based framework (see appendix C for the current version) consists of approximately 85 behaviours. Russ (2012) reported that 85% of the 938

respondents to her survey endorsed the framework as representing those necessary for professional development of aid workers either very well (35%) or fairly well (50%). As mentioned earlier, prominent in the CBHA framework is a Competency Domain called *developing and maintaining collaborative relationship*. Within this domain are behaviours such as actively listen to the perspectives of crisis-affected people, and establish clear dialogue with crisis-affected people. These competencies are completely consistent with the practices and commitments of the research participants. My literature review, research, and personal experience in the sector, suggests that there are two well-established traditions within the humanitarian sector that work against the possibility of *developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with crisis affected people*, especially if they are minorities or marginalised people within the crisis zone. First, there is the wide spread use of short-term employment contracts in the humanitarian and development aid sector. Second, and integral to the first, is the widespread dependence on translators to communicate with crisis-affected people. One study reported that the average duration of an assignment from MSF-France is 5.2 months and 10.1 months for ICRC (Loquercio, 2005). In the humanitarian sector, a contract of 12 months is considered long term (ibid.). It is understandable then, that according to one study, only 47% of INGOs have *any* foreign language requirements for expatriate aid workers (Moresky, et al. 2001). Short-term assignments (12 months and under) appear to be the industry standard in the humanitarian sector for at least two decades.

A frequent concern expressed by humanitarian workers has been the short duration of assignments. It has been argued that short assignments are frustrating to staff because they do not permit sufficient time for staff to become familiarised with the job, and the situation and location they are working in (Simmonds, et al. 1998: 14).

Short-term contracts and short mission assignments are typical even for prolonged humanitarian emergencies (James, 2004; EPN, 2005) and in post-emergency or rehabilitation phases of humanitarian work. In addition, full-time and open-ended contract personnel are often part of staff *churning* or the frequent rotation, usually under 12 months, of personnel from one assignment to another has also been discussed for years in the human resource literature. The reliance on short-term contracts is also related to the short-term funding cycles (Loquercio, et al. 2006), but the fact remains that humanitarian contracts are almost never long enough to accommodate language learning even when aid workers aspires to do so. Walker and Russ (2010: 32) included a very thoughtful quote from a humanitarian worker who responded to their survey. It is considered a summary of key aspirations of humanitarian professionals:

Over and above anything else I think it is important that humanitarian workers understand participatory process for engaging with affected populations, and this has implications for, and touches on, the four categories I selected. If we are talking/listening to the correct people from the beginning, as well as throughout the process – women, children, elderly, handicapped, and not just those who claim to represent the group, *or who happen to speak our language* - then we will be able to best build on their own coping capacities; resulting in more appropriate, sustainable and comprehensive, as well as cost effective, solutions (ibid.).

The concepts of participatory processes, listening to the correct people (women, children, elderly, disabled), and sustainability are all considered critical elements of humanitarian and development aid, but they require time and commitment from aid workers and other stakeholders. Jonathan Moore, an adviser to the United Nations Development Programme summarised the issue this way:

The prodigious difficulty of the task facing the international community ... on behalf of, and in league with, the afflicted societies - in attempting to treat wounds, heal emotions and build capacity into something capable of improving chances for survival, is profoundly underestimated. This is because the scale of the task truly staggers the imagination, because it can be debilitating to admit the big troubles and the long odds involved and because we are unwilling to

commit the means needed to get the job done. Almost subconsciously our perceptions and policies are oversimplified and downsized in order to prevent us being intimidated or overwhelmed and to permit the illusion that what we are providing is enough. Of course there is cost in not recognizing the enormity of the endeavour; with insufficient will and resources that endeavour will fail (Moore, 1999: 2).

I believe the professional journey of the research participants is a story of people who did better than most in calculating the difficulties their endeavours would entail, including learning local languages. I believe my research suggests that their exemplary reputations are largely a consequence of their long-term commitment to their jobs and colleagues. They are not extraordinary people in the sense of intelligence, skills, and abilities. However, they accepted the premise that in order to *make a difference* in afflicted communities they would need a long-term perspective, including a commitment to learn the local language(s) and stay longer.

Somehow, because we'd been in Afghanistan and spoke their language we came in with a lot of credibility. And we were just received with open arms into these communities, with very few visits. Clare, pg 70.

And because I stay for a long time I get that. I think this is one of the differences. Everybody else is 9 months and out, a year and a half and out. It takes six months to even get a slight grip on what's happening in Darfur. So if you are on a year contract you only have six months of that contract year to have even a slight understanding of what's going on ... and then you're gone. So I think me staying on the ground for a long time in these settings ... especially these really complex crisis is ... even if I'm not smarter than these other people who came in ... just by the very nature of staying longer, I have a better understanding and grasp of the history of what's happened ... who else would know what we were doing *4 years ago*? You just don't know any more. All you know is what you see on the ground today. So I like that aspect of being in these situations for a long time. It's draining. It's hard. You need regular breaks or you go crazy. But it is a unique opportunity as well. Peter, pg 217.

Having a longer term perspective helps in this regard rather than a 12-24 months' time frame. Of course you can see some things and see some results in shorter periods but the longer you are there, the more you will be likely to really see what is going on. Sean, personal correspondence, August 2012.

Implications for professional practice

One of the unavoidable consequences of short-term contracts is the certainty of aid workers needing to rely on translators as conduits to do their communicating. However, the humanitarian mandate to *establish and maintain clear dialogue with crisis-affected people* is an unlikely proposition if the strategy is to communicate through translators (Lewis and Mosse, 2006). It is also the experience of my research participants that maintaining clear dialogue with crisis-affected people cannot be accomplished through translators. Even if in the future more crisis interventions will be done by local agencies (civil society and government) there is no evidence to suggest that in other parts of the world the on-going need for expatriate humanitarian intervention will stop. My research was not designed to argue definitively against the negative impact reliance on translators has on international aid but it is an important issue that needs further study. I will close this argument with the following anecdotal but provocative comment made to Dr. Arley Lowen by Dr. Ahmadi, the president of Ibn-e Sina College in Afghanistan:

Translation in our country is a disaster! International companies, NATO and INGO's need to transfer their wisdom to local people. They think that the only barriers are words. They hire young Afghans who know some English. You know yourself how the wisdom gets diluted through the translator - who does not care for clear communication, does not understand the wisdom themselves and disdains the local people (Karte Char, Kabul, March 2010 as reported in a personal email correspondence with Arley Lowen).

When compared to the experience of the research participants, short-term contracts and *churning* does not normally allow the time needed for: a) learning the local language, b) building relationships with crisis affected people, and c) learning if projects are actually having long-term transformational impact. All three of these

experiences appeared to be foundational to the research participants' success and longevity on the field. Unless professionalising the humanitarian sector can bring reform to the current sector tradition of *reliance on short-term employment contracts, churning, and reliance on translators* the humanitarian mandate to engage crisis affected people in dialog and collaborative relationship will never happen. Therefore, unless this reform can take place I predict there will be no cumulative net gain when the humanitarian sector eventually professionalises.

Organisational Learning Cultures in INGOs

From the beginning of my research I have been interested in exploring the role INGOs play in the professional development of their exemplary expatriate field leaders. I hoped to identify themes of good practice based on the organisational learning cultures of the INGOs who employed the research participants. One of my research sub-questions is, *How important did the research participants believe the learning cultures of their own organisations were to their continuous professional development?* To my surprise, only three of the 12 research participants credited their organisation as having contributed proactively to their CPD. In 11 of the 12 cases the research participants had positive attitudes but low expectations regarding their INGO's active participation in their own CPD. In only one case was there clear disappointment in the INGO for not doing more. Some credited their INGOs for being willing to accommodate training and coaching opportunities but in retrospect saw that practically all CPD was self-initiated rather than organised by their INGO. The INGO's active initiation of CPD was not an expectation for most of the participants. I did not talk

with the CEOs or Human Resource directors of the research participants' INGOs to get their views.

The research participants seemed to understand CPD as their personal responsibility rather than the responsibility of their INGOs. Among the research participants the following appeared to be standard practice:

- CPD was available to those who pursued it. The INGO did not promote or initiate regular CPD but gave permission for field leaders to attend. Sometimes the INGO helped finance CPD. Sometimes INGOs promoted certain courses.
- Many field leaders regularly organised CPD opportunities for their local staff. The local staff were not privy to the same CPD opportunities as the expatriates.
- Major partner organisations positively influence CPD opportunities for local and expatriate staff.
- Formalised mentoring relationships initiated by the INGOs were rare. The research participants who had mentors initiated the relationships themselves.
- Most felt they had access to international networks and learning resources when they needed them.

Below are excerpts from four of the research participants when I asked, "How does your NGO contribute to your continued professional development?"

I wouldn't say they've ensured that we had adequate professional development but certainly in terms of our needs as a couple or our needs as a family they've been very much on board with that. So really what we've done we've gone and sought out. For example ... my level of French was not good enough to be an NGO director, to deal with government departments or other NGOs, etc. So one thing I did after three years was spend a month in Switzerland at a language school getting up to the level that I needed. So that was in part funded by the NGO. Other conferences and courses that I've been the NGO has been willing to fund or partly fund or given me time off. Nigel, pg 15.

I would say it provides an opportunity for networking. Our first director, and founder of our organisation, had a lot of great contacts. He was just someone who was good at meeting people and getting to know some movers and shakers, as it were. And so we've had some pretty influential people come and visit Mauritania. Betty, pg 175.

Mainly on my own initiative, mainly on my own efforts. There would be no resistance to it but not necessarily all that much money to get. Olav, pg 40.

The biggest area GNOC has contributed has been giving me the opportunity to do the job that I've done. I'm quite keen on training. Some of the courses are given by GNOC and others by outside agencies. We develop stuff. I think it has been more about learning on the job. Learning how things work. The country directors meet together for a week every year. We have a week coming up. I get a lot out of being with these other country directors and discussing issues that come across... There are ways that we can learn from one another. Spencer, pg 276.

In conclusion, it seems that lack of in-house formal CPD programmes did not inhibit the professional development of the research participants. Nine of the 10 INGOs represented in this study did not offer regular in-house CPD. There seemed to be a learning culture that expected the initiative for CPD to come from the field staff. If the staff sought CPD the INGOs tried to accommodate them.

Implications for professional practice

In the second half of this section I presented findings regarding the role of the INGOs' learning culture in the research participants' CPD and the role of internships in shaping their professional journey. Before I started this research I had high expectations that my study would provide insight into how INGOs develop a learning culture to support the CPD of their field leadership. My expectations were not met. Yet, while the outcome was unexpected, there is evidence in my data that could help inform how INGOs might cultivate an organisational learning culture. My research points to an organisational strategy that opens doors for learning opportunities but does not push

people through the door. This might include a) sponsoring an in-house learning fund that helps offset the cost of training for those that want it, b) regularly announcing or advertising appropriate training events offered by partners and vendors, and c) policies that release staff from work obligations so as to attend training.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Relationships, Results, and Grit

This section is a summary of what my data indicate are three key characteristics of exemplary expatriate field leaders. I present excerpts from the research participants' stories describing their difficult and rewarding experiences. This will help to set the scene to present what keeps them going in spite of the difficulties they face. The data show practically all the participants report two things that help them persevere, *relationships* and *seeing results*. In this section I provide more excerpts from my transcripts so the reader can follow my analysis and conclusions. I have organised the presentation of the selected excerpts according to the themes I identified. However, many of the excerpts have evidence of multiple themes and thus the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. I also present the construct of *grit* as the third characteristic of exemplary aid workers.

The Rewards of International Aid Work

Manfred was the most educated and experienced aid professional among the research participants. When Manfred considered what was most rewarding for him in Yemen he responded:

It's the personal relationships ... people who I can approach and I really feel I can talk to them and they're friends. ... the friendship is often real and I've found very rewarding. And of course, when this morning, the former minister, the first minister we had for water, writing to somebody who was in charge in the ministry here in Germany of our work in Yemen, was retired now and says, "Oh, can you share this with Manfred, who by the way, is a personal friend of mine." You know, getting that bit of feedback, I find this very rewarding. And having so many, whether in the ministry of water or agriculture, in this programme in that programme, around the town, the city, so many personal relationships ... I don't often share their way of programming or doing things about water. I know also that they try to get most rewards out of donor money and so forth, but in spite of all this, there is this personal relationship and friendship. Manfred, pg 156.

Peter had many stories about what he found rewarding. From the following story we can observe his focus on building relationships with programme beneficiaries. He believes it is what makes him effective (and sometimes stand out) from other humanitarian field workers. Here he relates a story which shows how his strong personal relationship with the elders of a recently displaced village in Darfur allowed him to advocate on their behalf to UN agencies.

We have a relationship [with the village leaders] and in the recent displacements we started working in IDP camps because one entire area of our project area was displaced [because of bombing by the government]. So we followed them to the IDP camp and started to set up a clinic there and have been working with them. I was pushing hard because no services were being provided. It didn't fit the political rhetoric of "*It's time to return people from IDP camps*" and nobody was reporting it, nobody was doing anything about all these displaced people. But *they were my friends*. These were people *we worked with for years and years*. We helped them set up a pretty good life in their villages and now they were sitting under a tree with nothing [because the government bombed their village]. Having lost everything ... and nobody was responding because that wasn't the right [political] message ... So I took OCHA and WHO and other people out there with me. And it was interesting to me because they said to me that it looked more like a family reunion than normal NGO work. Somehow the other people see that we know people. We are not just doing work but *there are relationships*. Peter, pg 219.

When asked what she found rewarding, Karin describes how building local relationships is one of the things that she enjoys as an expatriate humanitarian leader.

I think getting out myself again and doing some project work is definitely positive rather than just doing administrative things and government relations. So actually meeting with the village people and teaching and training people myself again is something I immensely enjoy and adds value to the job to be able to do that; and relationships, knowing that the local staff and local friends are valuing what we do, and what I do, and their friendships. Karin, pg 313.

As a whole, the research participants highly value personal relationships. Many of them were also relationally close to some project beneficiaries and were able to witness the impact project interventions have on the beneficiaries' lives. Their reliance on

trust, relationship building and cooperation seem to be keys to their success as humanitarians.

Betty describes what she finds rewarding. In this case how she used her epidemiology and statistics training in public health to help monitor and evaluate the impact of literacy on infant mortality. In effect, this helped her to *see* or *know* that their literacy work among women would (in the future) have an impact on child mortality. She conducted a survey among literate Mauritanian women in a local neighbourhood where they had a literacy programme going for five or six years.

I was just thinking of a survey we did maybe two years ago. We really did *see* the difference that literacy makes. You can read about all the studies that other people had done that shows how literacy reduces infant mortality, but here to *see* it with our own data, with our own programmes. You know, that these women who were literate really did have fewer child deaths than illiterate mothers. Wow, the things I read about in India or Brazil or Kenya or Uganda or where ever ... *to see it is true* here in Mauritania too ... and look this is happening because of our programme [too]. Yeah, so that is something I do enjoy a lot. Betty, pg 169.

Betty's survey data in the target neighbourhood found that literate women had much lower rates of child mortality even when controlled for other factors like household income, age and marital status. Their survey allowed them to conclude that literacy alone was a significant predictor of lower child mortality in Mauritania, just as it has been found in many other countries. However, her NGO had only been doing literacy training in the target neighbourhood for five or six years. Many of the literate women surveyed were literate before their programme began. Betty knows that five or six years is too short a time-frame to see an impact in child mortality. However, the survey allowed her to *see* that their literacy programme would (in the future) have an impact on child mortality. I have two points to make from this story. First, like the impact of

literacy on child mortality, many aid interventions take years for the impact to become visible or measurable. Granted, there are other benefits to adult literacy that can be visible almost immediately (i.e. confidence and self-esteem). Second, sometimes well-constructed surveys (and other frameworks) can help humanitarian professionals *see* or predict the impact of their work with a fair amount of certainty without having to wait around 15 or 20 years to celebrate. I propose we can broaden the definition of *seeing* to include a strong confidence or assurance of a future outcome. This *confidence* or *faith* also helps aid professionals endure the difficulties and disappointments associated with their profession.

Of the many stories of rewarding experiences reported to me, practically all took place after five to ten years into the research participants' careers. I wondered why I did not hear more success stories from their earlier years. What does this mean? Is it significant? Of course this could mean several different things. In some cases it could mean it took five to ten years for the impact to be visible. In other cases it may mean it took five or ten years to be positioned in a role where impact was visible. Or maybe they were telling recent stories because these are the stories fresh in their minds. I suspect that for the research participants it was a combination of these and other possibilities. In the following excerpts I have italicised the phrases related to the amount of time it took for the impact or transformation to become visible.

There were two ladies that I met back then [in 2007 while doing a project for my Master's degree] who were moms of disabled children. They were very insecure women and were wondering "Why do I deserve this? Why do I have a disabled child?" And today [*i.e.* 2011] the project is serving 165 children and families and these two ladies have both joined us as staff and are now on the leadership team for this new NGO that has just been established. So they are NGO directors ... and they are both saying their marriages have changed, their

whole lives, their family life, their outlook has changed. They are totally different people *than they were five years ago*. To see that sort of thing, individual lives change. But also I think on a bigger level. Like recently after the polio outbreak there has been a change in the government in looking at community based ideas of rehabilitation rather than hospitals. So suddenly the government is getting something that *you've tried to explain for five or six years*. And them saying, "Yes, we need your help with that." Karin, pg 314.

Karin mentioned how two women transformed from being insecure and feeling victimised as mothers of children with disabilities to becoming founders of a local NGO serving 165 families. This was a process of five years. Karin also mentions how it took government officials five to six years to adopt a new system of rehabilitation that she had been promoting.

Next is a story that happened in the second half of Peter's 15 years of overseas humanitarian work. It was not the projects themselves he found rewarding but the people. Particularly the joy of seeing the capacity of staff and beneficiaries grow from strength to strength.

It is probably people again. There was a local staff member in Afghanistan who started as a driver and ended up [*four years later*] as office manager. One of the proudest moments, for me, one of the coolest moments was when we were in the middle of a big stop desertification project in this one area in Afghanistan where a village was being taken over by sand dunes and we had a solar drip irrigation projects going with one of my Afghan local staff. We were closing down shop but still hadn't finished the project and this guy, with [practically] no budget was working. The UN would have had a four million dollar budget for this project... we had twenty-five thousand dollars or something. But this guy, with nothing but camels and village labourers flattened two sand dunes. We had a solar water pump installed and a tank and drip irrigation system and then planted all this area so that the soil would become firm and stop the sand dunes from continuing to blow in that direction. He had completed this after I had gone but I came back to visit shortly thereafter. It is a terrible eight hour drive, through sand dunes, desert, all kinds of stuff. And this guy endured. He got trapped out there for three weeks in a snow storm and could not leave and the roof was leaking on him. He endured all kinds of stuff. Not only ... he found somebody that spoke English, so that everything that he planted he had a sign in Dari and in English saying what it was that was growing here. It was

just this beautifully done thing that he did pretty much on his own. For a people ... he's an Uzbek and it was a Turkman village he helped. Yeah! But to me, *seeing* something like that! Like him doing it! Peter, pg 236.

When Sean and Clare were asked to describe an experience they considered rewarding the following came to mind.

I can think of going to visit one friend that we *built up over the years* in Afghanistan, sitting having a meal with him, spending time with him and his family and we got talking about, you know as they looked back over the project what they felt about it. A community leader who had, as part of the process become a staff member for a while but then a locally based staff member and then we reached the end of the project and he was no longer a staff member ... but he was still a friend. So he was looking back over, basically saying; "I know there are a lot of people here who complain and say you haven't done this and you haven't done that, and you haven't done the other, but actually, when I look back at it I can actually see that the NGOs come in and you helped us build our houses. We wouldn't be here if we didn't have the houses. You worked on the water. We have water so we can actually grow crops. We have livelihoods now. You helped us to get our agriculture back up and running. You built a school here. And people have fruit trees in their compounds. So actually, when we look at it, we can see that the NGO has done an awful lot here and life is good here now, in very large part, down to this community development project that's *been here over this period of time, these five to seven years*. And so I think it has been rewarding to be *able to see that yeah, we have made a real difference in that particular village* and different things in other villages ... Maybe battles all along the way, but when you can look back and see successes or when you struggle to get the money together and build a school and you actually have an opening of the school and then you see the kids in the school learning ... that's rewarding. [Clare adds: "Yeah."] Sean and Clare, pg 81.

Sean and Clare's story is more evidence that it typically takes years of struggles before *seeing* the fruit of your labours as a humanitarian leader. It is also more evidence that *relationships* and *seeing results* were the two most rewarding experiences of the research participants.

The Difficulties of International Aid Work

In the course of their professional journeys the research participants consistently identified relational conflict and the subsequent disappointments among their most difficult career experiences. When reading through the interview manuscripts I was struck by the capacity of these professionals to stay on the job in spite of many hardships, disappointments, and obstacles. The perseverance and commitment of these veteran aid workers seemed extraordinary to me. Therefore, I was intrigued to discover that relationship conflicts and grief from broken relationships were considered to be more difficult than physical hardships and potentially traumatizing security incidents.

Peter, for example, worked more than fifteen years in Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Darfur (where he is currently). When asked to describe work situations he considered difficult he explained:

Yes, I've been held-up by gun-point by rebels and forced out of the car on my knees but that wasn't so bad ... The difficult, difficult things that make you want to quit is more the personal problems with people. Our team [in Darfur] was not a healthy team at first. There were two couples and there was no way to get them together. It was just an impossible situation. And so your team, your group that should be what helps energise you was the biggest drain! That was just a nightmare! [*Peter also describes two other situations where he had staff conflicts*] ... So if I were to look back to the times I felt most like quitting and asked "Why in the heck am I doing this?" ... Arrest me, bomb my villages, do that kind of stuff. I'll get over it. It will bring out the best in me, but personnel problems! Peter, pg 232-233.

The idea that Peter considered being carjacked by armed rebels less traumatic than dealing with difficult people on his staff was enlightening for me. How he could be comparatively *unbothered* by the carjacking but nearly traumatised by team conflict would make an interesting investigation. I asked Peter about this during our interview

and reflected on what this might mean. I came to the tentative conclusion that *relational disappointment* had a stronger negative impact on Peter's mental health than being robbed at gun-point. Peter had an expectation that his staff would be a source of energy for him and I believe this amplified his disappointment and frustration. Peter was my third interview. I anticipated that my other research participants would describe to me difficulties more commonly associated with international aid work in developing countries. I expected stories about security issues, corruption, hard climate, equipment breakdowns, lack of electricity, clear water, and/or sanitation. As I did more and more interviews a pattern began to emerge. It turned out that Peter's experience was not the abnormality I had originally thought. I found that almost all research participants described personal disappointments with staff, colleagues, partners, and/or beneficiaries when describing stories of their difficult work experiences. These were not primarily stories about relational conflict but rather relational disappointment. Expressions of grief over the broken trust or lost relationships were present in the stories of ten of the twelve. Several made the point that *relational disappointments* or *relational difficulties* came to mind first or were the most significant to them.

Yeah, the thing that comes to mind always is when trust is broken through the mishandling of finances. I remember our programme director at the time, driving out to one of the centres and seeing sacks of grain being loaded into the back of the centre manager's car ... How do you handle something like that? Very difficult. So those sorts of crisis usually had to do with corruption or the misuse of funding or food was usually the worst things we deal with. Nigel, pg 17.

Okay, I think another naïve idea that I had in the past was that somehow the recipients of my help would all be grateful and I'd be popular. I don't think that happens in reality. In reality people cheat you and I've experienced betrayal and that's been hard. People who I've trusted and have abused my trust. And maybe I've been too quick to trust sometimes. Mike, pg 294.

I think hearing that the Uzbek government didn't want us anymore in spite that we were contributing a lot and our projects were good [was very disappointing]. Feeling that we had strong advocates in the local government but then who felt they couldn't stand up for us because then their jobs would be in jeopardy. So feeling quite lost or like these relationships were not as strong [as we thought] ... or maybe people wouldn't take the risk [for us]. Which is understandable, but still it felt that they were forsaking us in some way. Karin, pg 312.

Are relational disappointments an inevitable consequence of what helped make the research participants successful in the first place? I think, yes. If they had not been the type of people who put a high value on developing trusting relationships I doubt they would have been exemplary aid workers. Difficult experiences with security (riots, bombings, murders, thievery, kidnappings) and living conditions (lack of water, electricity, equipment breakdowns, climate) as well as corruption and lack of programme funding were not at all absent in the discussions of difficult work situations among the research participants. There was often a sense of gratification in successfully navigating through difficult or dangerous situations. Practically every participant had such stories. But I found it more extraordinary and interesting that when asked to give examples of work situations they considered difficult, practically all the research participants reported at least one story with a theme of *broken trust* or *relational disappointment*.

As might be expected, the trust literature shows a strong negative correlation between relationship conflict and team performance (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003) and that low trust negatively impacts employee retention and satisfaction levels (Brashear, et al. 2005). It seems expatriate aid leaders have workplace struggles similar to other professionals dependent on teamwork to accomplish complex tasks. Literature on

member care and staff turnover in the aid sector frequently mention *stress* as a difficulty. According to Fawcett (2003),

The most stressful events in humanitarian work have to do with the organisational culture, management style or operational objectives of an NGO, rather than external security risks or poor environmental factors. Aid workers, basically have a pretty shrewd idea of what they are getting into when they enter this career, and dirty clothes, gun shots at night and lack of electricity do not surprise them. Inter and intra-agency politics, inconsistent management styles, lack of team work and unclear or conflicting organisational objectives, however combine to create a background of chronic stress and pressure that over time wears people down and can lead to burnout or even physical collapse (ibid: 6).

Fawcett credits *stress* as a major threat in aid workers' mental and physical health, perhaps she is right. However, the experience of my research participants suggests that *relational disappointment (not just relational conflict)* maybe the hidden cause behind much of the stress. Perhaps relational conflicts are too often 'managed' rather than resolved and thus stress is a constant companion. I did not anticipate stories about relationship disappointments to be so common among my cases. I had not found this issue emphasised in the research literature. The skill to resolve conflicts and the capacity to endure or process disappointment appears to be an important characteristic of exemplary humanitarian leaders and perhaps should be more prominent in the literature. When trust is broken between colleagues, programme beneficiaries or other stakeholders it often evoked an experience of deep disappointment and grief in the research participants. The relational conflict also appeared to contribute to secondary losses such as project failures, loss of credibility, and loss of self-confidence. The capacity to endure and process disappointments appears to be an important characteristic or behaviour of the international aid field worker. Perhaps it is the willingness to make yourself vulnerable to disappointments that allows you to develop

the relationships that facilitate exemplary aid work. I have yet to encounter a discussion of this type of ‘risk taking’ in the international aid literature.

What Keeps Them Going?

In this section I will discuss what keeps the research participants on the job over the long run and present the results of resilience and grit assessments taken by the research participants. After asking the research participants to tell me about their difficult experiences, I would normally follow up with the question, “So, what keeps you going?” Implied in my question was, “What keeps you going in spite of all the difficulties and setbacks you just described?” The answers were as varied as the research participants, yet as I analysed their narratives I was surprised to discover that practically all the responses had to do with relationships and results. Good relationships with colleagues, and/or local people were almost always part of their narratives, but so was the idea of seeing change or the impact of their work. I understood this to mean good relationships and good results compensated the research participants for the difficulties and hardships associated with their work. When asked, ‘So what keeps you going?’ typical responses included:

I think definitely *seeing* change. Karin, pg 313.

I think there is enormous satisfaction *to know we* are making a difference in peoples’ lives. I think that keeps us going, because it is hard. Clare, pg 73.

So I think *seeing people’s lives change*, particularly seeing people gain hope is probably the biggest source of encouragement for me. Mike, pg 295.

The research participants appeared highly invested relationally with their colleagues (expat and local), beneficiaries, and others. Many of them put high priority on developing relationships with locals in the community as well as their team members.

This was demonstrated by the long hours they invested in learning the local language and in how they spent their day. They enjoyed a sense of camaraderie with their colleagues and worked hard at listening to and developing relationships with project participants. When I asked Sean and Clare about what kept them going after seven years in Afghanistan and Pakistan, they described three factors. First they talked about their love for engaging with people from other cultures. Second, they talked about their sense of knowing they are making a difference, and third,

Sean: I think there are a lot of things about it that we really like.

Clare: Yeah we love it. We just love it... I think also being with a supportive team, so we have a great team on the ground in Pakistan. And we encourage one another and support one another and that's very important. Clare, pg 73 and 75.

When I asked Betty about what keeps her going, without hesitation she said it was relationships. In another part of our interview she described how her relationships with a local family had developed to a point where she was like an adopted daughter.

A great team and wonderful colleagues. That has been one of the greatest joys of being overseas twenty years. I had a friend who just recently left Mauritania who described it as a chance to share blood, sweat, and tears ... wonderfully intense relationships ... sharing so much of your lives with other people ... doing something that really matters. And that is a great way to describe it. My colleagues are more than just work colleagues. They're some of my closest friends. They're really like family. So we pull together to encourage one another. We are really involved in each other's' lives not just happening to work in the same office together. We really look out for one another. My faith, my prayer life ... being pulled out of my comfort zone ... you know where the needs are pretty overwhelming. It has really forced me to rely on God and his strength and find that God's promises are true and his strength is really real. That's been something that has kept me at it too. I'm just finding that I can trust God for what I need day to day. Betty, pg 171.

Betty, like several research participants, also attributes faith as something that has helped her persevere. It is interesting that Betty used relational terminology such as

“*rely on God*” and “*I can trust God*” when talking about her faith. It appears that from Betty’s perspective God is another relationship that helps her persevere through difficulties.

When I asked Mike, what keeps him going, he described how he was disappointed when the Uzbekistan government would not renew his visa after he had invested seven years of his life into a very successful livelihood project.

I feel I’ve been knocked down a few times. I definitely have scares and bruises.
Mike, pg 290.

But he relocated to Tajikistan where again he spent four years developing another creative livelihoods project before he was forced to leave. These two experiences had painful endings. But instead of thinking, “Maybe now is the time to go home and pursue accountancy or something.” he decided to relocate again, this time to Kyrgyzstan. While there were many factors in that decision, he said,

I think if someone is coming just for two years it doesn’t make sense for them to learn the local language. But if they are going to stay for five years or maybe longer then the local language becomes very important. I don’t want my emotional needs to be met only by the foreigners. I want to come into the local community needy; to make friends with them. So those are some of the things that keep me going. Mike, pg 289.

In Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and now in Kyrgyzstan, Mike did his best to develop friendships and a sense of camaraderie with both nationals and expats. Nigel had this to say about what keeps him going:

...the sense of fulfilment in what we are doing. When you see a project come to fruition and when we talk to someone from out in one of our programmes who has a testimony on how his life or her life has been changed. When we see the street kids playing a game of football in our street kids programme ...

these are the things that keep you going. It is incredibly fulfilling. The third thing is the relationships that we develop with people over the years. Our staff, contacts in the community, just those relationships are very important. Nigel, pg 6.

Olav said something similar:

I think it's to see that it actually makes a difference. That's my main motivation. In all aspects of the work. Both in the humanitarian work that REZA is involved in and the micro credit. To see that it makes a difference and it helps. And without that support lots of people would be in a much tougher place. But I've also seen people whose lives have changed and see the world and see reality with new eyes. Olav, pg 32-33.

The reward of *relationships* and *seeing the results* of their work is what helps the research participants persevere. Relationships and seeing results seem to be important enablers of resilience. In contrast, relational conflict and relational disappointment appear to be what the research participants report as the most difficult aspect of their work.

Resilience

As mentioned earlier, before I had even finished my interviews the concept of resilience had already begun to emerge as a potential theme in my data. The lived-experiences of the research participants seemed to indicate that they were people who had more than a *normal* person's share of resilience. The obstacles they overcame, the disappointments they endured, and their long-term perseverance led me to believe that resilience was a fundamental factor in the research participants' professional success. For example, this quote from Mike is characteristic of several research participants and demonstrates an attribute of resilience

So I think *seeing people's lives change*, particularly seeing people gain hope is probably the biggest source of encouragement for me. I'm living in a community of people right now who are institutionally marginalized, harassed, oppressed, and in extreme cases have been tortured, imprisoned, and killed. They have had their houses burned and been ethnically cleansed. So I think

hope is often in short supply. I just celebrate incremental steps. Celebrating small victories that this particular life has changed or this particular life has been improved because of our projects. Even if that leaves thousands of people whose lives haven't been changed. Enjoy the one. Mike, pg 295.

The attribute of resilience in Mike's statement is evidence of a belief that most people and most situations have positive and negative aspects to them (Connor, 1993). Mike and many of the research participants learned to celebrate the small things they could change and not despair over the things they could not. Reality based belief in a positive future is characteristic of resilient people. This belief seemed common among the research participants and perhaps was a clue to their mental and physical perseverance. I thought it would be interesting to triangulate my preliminary conclusion by giving the research participants a resilience assessment. As mentioned in *Chapter Three*, I invited the research participants to take the online Resilience Factor Inventory (RFI) a 60-item resilience assessment that measures an individual's current level of resilience (See Appendix E). I choose the RFI over several other assessments I had reviewed because I concurred with the RFI's construct of resilience, it could be administered online, and I was satisfied with the RFI's validity and reliability. In addition, the RFI is designed as a trait inventory and is typically used as part of corporate leadership training. It appeared to be an ideal assessment tool for my purpose of verifying the research participants' high level of resilience. Over a four-week period, ten of the twelve research participants completed the online assessment and received a copy of their results. I also received their individual scores in addition to a group summary of all ten results. I was surprised to learn that from a normative sample of more than 26,000 people, nine of the ten research participants who completed the assessment

scored below the norm. Three were well below the norm. The following is a summary of the group results:

Traits	Description	Adaptiv Norm*	Research Participants' Average
Emotional Regulation	The ability to control one's emotion in the face of adversity and to remain goal-focused	75	72
Impulse Control	The ability to control one's behaviour in the face of adversity and remain goal-focused	77	69
Causal Analysis	The ability to accurately and comprehensively identify the causes of one's adversities and generate effective solutions	66	61
Self-Efficacy	One's sense of mastery over adversity, challenges, and opportunities	77	73
Realistic Optimism	A reality-based belief that the future is positive due to one's causal analysis and self-efficacy skills	60	50
Empathy	The ability to read the verbal and non-verbal cues of others to estimate their mental state and emotion	67	66
Reaching Out	The ability to deepen relationships with others and to take on new challenges and opportunities	74	68
	Average	71	66

*The norm is based on a sample set of approximately 26,000 people, mostly mid-level American corporate managers.

Table 3: Group summary of the research participants' average RFI scores

A few of the research participants were slightly above the norm in some traits but a few of them were well below the norm. I was both surprised and disappointed to discover that the results did not triangulate my interpretation of the narratives. I was expecting the research participants to score well above the norm. Apparently some of my research participants also considered themselves resilient because three of them emailed me to express their surprise on the low scores they received.

Is it resilience or perseverance?

I found myself in a dilemma. As I mentioned earlier, the overall narrative of the research participants' professional journey appeared to me as *resilience personified*. They had navigated obstacles, endured adversity, bounced back from disappointments, and not given up. I considered discounting the RFI results, as they were not part of my original research plan. I was confident the research participants possessed many characteristics of resilience even if the RFI did not verify that they possessed enough of them. I considered mounting an argument that the assessment questions were too nuanced for non-native English speakers to be accurately assessed. However, when I looked closely at the individual results, the non-native English speakers scored higher than many native English speakers. I also considered the possibility that some of the research participants, especially those that scored very low were feeling discouraged or sobered from current difficulties. I learned five of the research participants were experiencing visa problems, work transitions, and sickness around the time they took the RFI. Resilient people experience discouragement like everyone else but seem to manage over the long-run better than less resilient people. The RFI, like all resilience assessments can only measure a person's current level of resilience, not yesterday's or tomorrow's resilience level. More significantly, I think the research participants' personal traits of humility, vulnerability, and self-awareness had greater influence in how they marked the RFI than their traits of self-efficacy, realistic optimism, and reaching out. For example, those who have persevered under tough situations (maybe they even failed to cope well) know how vulnerable they really are compared to those people who have never been in such tough situations but *imagine* they would cope well. I believe this is the most likely reason the research participants did not score

well on the RFI. Is the RFI a valid instrument for measuring resilience? I still think yes, especially if assessing managers in corporate America for which it was primarily designed. All self-reporting, multiple choice questionnaires have limitations (Paulhus and Vazire, 2007) but assessing seven characteristics of resilience in seasoned, self-aware, cross-cultural, aid workers would be especially tricky. Although surprising, the results of the RFI pushed me to look deeper at my data. It made me think; perhaps resilience *is not* the best construct to describe the research participants. Could this be a situation where *Occam's razor* should be evoked? Why incorporate the complicated construct of resilience into my theory if a simpler construct (like perseverance) will suffice? Perhaps exemplary performance in aid workers was more a combination of camaraderie (good relationships), results (seeing the impact of their work), and old fashioned perseverance. The metaphor of a stool supported by three legs: *relationships, results, and perseverance* took shape in my mind. See Appendix H.

Grit: Long-term Perseverance and Passion

I began doing reading on the construct of perseverance which soon led me to the work of Angela Duckworth and her research on what she calls *grit*. Duckworth (2006) defines *grit* as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress (Duckworth, et al. 2007). Duckworth (2006) has been mounting evidence to show that grit is a predictor of success over and beyond self-discipline and IQ, and is essential for high achievement. She created eight and 12-item assessments to test for the trait of grit. I read Duckworth's research and felt it was compelling and consistent with what I saw in my own data. The data showed

my research participants had long-term perseverance and passion for their work. Even though I was under no obligation to do so, since I had attempted to triangulate my resilience finding I thought it would be consistent to triangulate my potential *grit* finding. Therefore, I invited the research participants to take the 12-item grit assessment (see Appendix D) and attached it in an email to them. I deleted the title from the grit assessment form because I did not want the name of the assessment to influence the outcome. I felt a little self-conscious asking my research participants to complete yet another survey that was not part of what they originally agreed to do. However, 11 of the research participants completed and returned the assessment to me. I thanked them for responding but did not give them feedback on their scores.

The grit scale is from 1 to 5 with 5 being the grittiest. Like the RFI, the Grit scale is a self-report method assessment. I combined the results from the 11 participants to determine their group average score of 3.75 with a standard deviation of 0.34. The group scores were as follows:

12-Item Group Grit Score	
1. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.	4.45
2. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.	2.72
3. My interests change from year to year.	3.63
4. Setbacks don't discourage me.	3.36
5. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.	3.36
6. I am a hard worker.	4.36
7. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.	3.45
8. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.	3.91
9. I finish whatever I begin.	3.91
10. I have achieved a goal that took years of work.	4.36
11. I become interested in new pursuits every few months.	3.27
12. I am diligent.	4.18
AVERAGE GRIT SCORE	3.75

Table 4: Research Participants' Group Grit Scores

The only grit data available for comparison with my results was average grit scores from Duckworth's previous studies. The following average grit scores (Duckworth, 2006: 1092) give the reader an idea of how the research participants ranked by comparing them to the grit average of the following groups of high achievers in the USA:

	Average	Standard Deviation
Ivy League undergraduates	3.46	0.63
West Point cadets 2010	3.75	0.54
National Spelling Bee finalists	3.50	0.67
Research Participants	3.75	.034

Table 5: High Achievers' Average Grit Scores

The research participants' average grit scores were equal to or higher than the sample sets from three of Duckworth's grit studies. Duckworth's studies were designed to determine if high scores on the grit assessments could predict success. They did. I used the grit assessment to compare the average of 11 research participants' *grit* scores with the average grit scores of three groups of American high achievers. The results show that research participants have grittiness that is equal or above the average grittiness of the high achievers.

Implications for professional practice

Whatever we choose to label the research participants' long-term dogged perseverance by the testimony of the own mouths, they attributed their longevity not to their resilience and not to their grit, but rather to the *relationships* they built and to the *results* they saw from their work.

The following story from Peter summarizes the underlying values that I believe my data reveal were normative among the research participants.

In Sudan there is one village up in Ulamtu [pseudo name] we work in some places where nobody else has hardly ever been to. There's a village that had no buildings. No buildings of any solid structure in their whole village area. It is way off the beaten track up in the mountains. It is very hard to get to and we supported them to build classrooms ... They built five rooms and a latrine out of stones, stones that had been gathered. It is not the prettiest school you've ever seen but when I went back out there for them to show me what they'd done and just to see how proud they were. "This is our school. We built it. Look at this thing." That's what brings me the most joy I think. It's *seeing* them accomplish something. That they feel they've accomplished something and they're proud of what they've done. I think those are the times when I kind of tear up. They worked so hard. They did it together. They didn't have hardly any outside help because it's so hard to get there. So it is that kind of stuff I think for me. Peter, pg 236-237.

Peter's narrative is representative of a pattern I see in the whole of the narratives of the research participants. These are:

- They found joy in seeing change and making impact. This was a key intrinsic reward of their work and helped them endure difficulties.
- They invested deeply in language learning so they could have relationships with locals and understand their contexts.
- They found encouragement and satisfaction in their relationships with colleagues and locals. This was another key intrinsic reward of their work and helped them endure difficulties.
- They found joy in the accomplishments of the people they mentored.
- Their greatest difficulties were the results of relational conflicts and disappointments between colleagues (local and expatriate) and beneficiaries.

When I look at the findings from this chapter several potential implications for professional practice emerge. I present these implications in a series of *if then* statements for potential aid workers.

- If relational conflicts are prominent among the difficult work experiences of exemplary aid workers:
 - Then train yourself (or find training) in inter-personal conflict resolution skills
 - Then join an INGO that has peacemaking coaches available for their staff.
- If developing collaborative dialog and relationships with crisis affected people is important to you:
 - Then be committed to learn the local language *in situ* is your 'spare' time
 - Then be committed to work for 5-10 years

- Then join an INGO that will allow you to do language learning activities during work hours or otherwise accommodate *in situ* language learning.
- Then do not rely on translators to do your communicating for you
- If seeing change and making a difference are important to you⁶...
 - Then learn the local language
 - Then plan to stay on the job 5-10 years.

⁶ In a recent survey of humanitarian workers, 98% said “Making a difference” was the most important factor in their decision to join the humanitarian sector (Dickmann, et al, 2010)

Summary of Findings Chapters

In *Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven* I reported the major findings of my research. Each of these chapters provided different answers to my primary research question, *What do the professional journeys of expatriate international aid workers reveal about how they grew to become exemplary field leaders?*

In *Chapter Four* I presented the four different roads the research participants took to launch their professional journey in the international aid sector. This finding showed that it is possible to become an exemplary INGO field leader from a number of different starting points. I concluded *Chapter Four* by highlighting key characteristics of the field-internships and their positive influence on the research participants' professional journey.

In *Chapter Five* I identified seven events that appeared instrumental in shaping the research participants' professional self-identity. I call these events *landmarks* as they played important verification and shaping functions in the professional identity formation of the research participants. These landmarks consisted of reflected appraisals and intrinsic rewards.

In *Chapter Six* I reported on the research sub-question, *To what degree do the experiences of the research participants compare with the humanitarian core competencies frameworks being promoted by advocates of the professionalisation agenda such as the ELRHA?* I compared the experiences of the research participants with ELRHA research and the 2010 competency-based framework of the CBHA. I

raised the question; *How can humanitarian professionals establish and maintain collaborative relationships with crisis-affected people if they are not committed to learning their languages?* I argued that the well-entrenched system of short-term employment contracts and churning does not give time for language learning and seems to obstruct the possibility of maintaining collaborative relationships with crisis-affected people. I proposed that the very process of *in situ* language acquisition places aid workers into a learning posture that contributes to their personal formation and job success. In the last section of *Chapter Six* I reported how the research participants did not credit their INGOs with being very proactive in their own CPD. However, their INGOs were responsive when they initiated CPD. These INGOs had an organisational learning culture that depended on initiation coming from the field staff. I concluded that CPD works best when field practitioners are proactive in seeking it rather than when the INGO is proactive in pushing it.

In *Chapter Seven* I presented three characteristics of exemplary aid workers; relationships, results, and grit. These appear to be key characteristics of people who successfully navigate the complexities of the international aid sector. Good relationships and seeing the impact of work appears to compensate aid workers for the many difficulties they face. The most difficult work experiences were broken relationships among colleagues and other stakeholders and not physical hardships. In the final section of *Chapter Seven* I discussed the construct of *grit* and proposed *grittiness* as a third characteristic of exemplary field leaders. Grit is long-term passion and perseverance. In the next and final chapter, *Chapter Eight*, I present my closing reflections and recommendations.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Reflections and Recommendations

The Contexts

This study took place during a time when the United Nations is coordinating activities to meet the humanitarian needs of 62-74 million people with 17-19 billion USD in government funding (GHA, 2012). That is to say, the international aid sector is large, visible, and growing. It is a big business with global social, political, and economic implications. It is also a business with new faces on-the-ground. There is a growing diversity of non European and North American expat field leaders working for INGOs. In the past two years I have met expatriate Ugandans working in Sudan, Koreans working in Tajikistan, Indians working in Uzbekistan, Turks working in Jordan, Brazilians working in Uzbekistan and Mongolians working in Afghanistan. Increasingly, expat field leadership will be a diverse mix from the global south and north, east and west, interacting and collaborating. This study took place in an era when white-faced Europeans and North Americans were still dominant among expats in INGO leadership, an era that appears to be ending.

This study also took place when important initiatives were underway to lay the groundwork for the professionalisation of the humanitarian aid sector. Some of these initiatives focused on identifying core humanitarian competencies and seeking endorsement of these competencies by a wide range of humanitarian sector stakeholders. The ELRHA initiatives (Walker and Russ, 2010; Russ, 2012) helped identify and build consensus on core humanitarian competencies. The CBHA (2012) competency framework (see Appendix C) was endorsed by many key stakeholders in the sector. In the near future we may see master degree programmes, credentialing

exams, and a professional association(s) emerge that use the CBHA (ibid.) competency-based framework as one of their foundational documents. The 12 participants of this study became exemplary international aid field leaders in a pre-professionalised era, another era that may soon become history.

There is a third context of this study that is difficult to articulate. In one word I would describe it as tension. I believe the research took place in a context where at least eight of the 12 research participants were experiencing tension from their host government. This was a feeling that their host governments tolerated their presence but did not really want them. If so, it adds a layer of complexity to the context of this study. The *Arab Spring* started to break in December 2010 in Tunisia and affected much of the region where my research participants work. The continued fighting in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda violence, kidnappings and civil unrest created tension in the regions where the research participants worked. Some of the host governments became more visibly inhospitable to the presence of INGOs. Some of the research participants had strong opinions about cooperating with their host government. Peter had this to say about his situation in Darfur:

Scott: Your relationship with the government seems a little tenuous sometimes. Sometimes they're the good guys and sometime they're the bad guys?

Peter: No, they are usually the bad guys. They have their own very strong agenda. We try to keep them happy enough to not kick us out. You know what I mean? But if we were to just do what they want us to do we would never be in the area that had the biggest health needs. We would just be in the areas that the government controls. They now use humanitarian aid as a weapon against the people. Peter, pg 205.

In Peter's view the host government of Sudan was the chief villain of the crisis in Darfur. Other participants had similar but less extreme experiences of feeling their

presence was being tolerated but not wanted, due to government officials demanding bribes, blocking visa applications, or pursuing agendas that, in the opinion of the research participants, were not in the best interest of the crisis-affected people. Instead of cooperation I sensed a context of underlying tension between many of the research participants and their host governments.

It is within these contexts, using a grounded theory approach I attempted to discover what learnings might emerge by examining the work-life experiences of exemplary expatriate INGO field leaders. Fundamentally, I wanted to gain insight into how to grow more exemplary field leaders. I hoped theories on how to do this would emerge directly from my data. That is not to say that I had no preconceived ideas before starting the research of what I might find. I had, and still have, hypotheses on how INGO field leaders grow to become exemplary. Through the course of this research I became increasingly self-aware of my preconceived notions. I mentioned in *Chapter Three* how my disappointments sometimes alerted me to these preconceived expectations. For example, I assumed that the INGO learning cultures and personal mentoring would be an important part of what grew exemplary field practitioners. I had expected, perhaps subconsciously, the research participants would provide me with rich data to confirm my preconceived notions. I was surprised and a little disappointed that they attributed only minimal credit to their INGOs' learning culture. The data led me to believe that mentoring was the most important form of CPD for my research participants but their INGOs did not play a major role in facilitating mentoring. Some of the theory I had anticipated would emerge from the data did not materialise while other things that I did not expect did. For example, I did not expect

to see patterns of professional self-identity formation. Neither did I expect to find relational disappointments and related grief among the most difficult experiences of the research participants. I believe this study satisfactorily answered my research questions as it revealed insight into how expatriate aid workers grew to become exemplary field practitioners and leaders.

The idea that results, relationships, and grit are characteristic of exemplary expatriate aid workers is one of the key findings of this study. This finding suggests that CPD interventions and INGO structures should support and nurture these themes. In *Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven* I presented all my key findings. In this chapter I want to reflect on how some of these findings might be of benefit to specific categories of actors within the international aid sector and conclude with my reflections on the paradox which emerged from my research. I will first make recommendations for:

- New and potential international expatriate aid workers
- Education institutions and training organisations
- Recommendations to INGOs

The following recommendations are based on my interpretation of the data which emerged by examining the lived work experience of 12 exemplary expatriate field leaders from North America and Europe. The generalisations that I now make should be understood in the light of my limited data set.

Recommendations to New and Potential Expatriate Aid Workers

If you are a new or potential aid worker keep in mind that there are multiple roads that can lead to becoming an exemplary field practitioner. The road you take is

exponentially *less* important than the person on the road, i.e. you. Your aptitudes, attitudes and grit are far more crucial to your journey than what starting point you choose or fall into. A university or technical education as well as overseas internships are likely to be important to your professional journey as they can help you test whether international aid work is a good fit for you or not. It is practically impossible to determine if international aid work will be a good fit for you without trying it out. Therefore *good* internships and short-term experiences are critical.

There are different ways a job can be a good fit or not. One way is with the work itself. If it is a good fit you will find intrinsic pleasure in your work and you will become skilled at it. You need to both enjoy the work and be skilled at it for it to be a fit. A second meaning of fit is when there is intrinsic satisfaction and enjoyment of the people and/or organisation you work with. You will experience a sense of belonging so that you feel you are contributing to the people/organisation and they are contributing to you. There should be a sense of mutual benefit. If the benefit is only one way it is not a good fit. A good education and internship should help a person test their fit with either the job or the organisation or both. An education or internship that allows you to test neither of these meanings of fit will be of little value. Therefore consider earning a credential in an occupational field you think you will both enjoy and be good at. If you are not sure what you enjoy and are good at take time to explore and experiment. If you can imagine yourself enjoying it, consider earning an undergraduate degree or credentials in an occupational field such as social work, finance/economics, health, logistics, education, or engineering rather than a degree in international development. Supplement or top-off your undergraduate studies with

development or humanitarian topics or do a master's degree later. There are three job skills that will be of immense practical value to you as an international aid worker if you can learn them. These are project management, *in situ* language acquisition skills, and interpersonal conflict resolution skills. Get training in this if you have opportunity. If you have not had the opportunity or have not yet been successful in learning a second language you will likely need extra time and energy to learn a local language. Your INGO is unlikely to give you the time so you will need to make it yourself. You should be prepared to spend a minimum of 15-20 hours a week on focused language learning. Learning the language *in situ* will likely help you bond with your local staff and programme beneficiaries and help develop your humility and listening skills. It can also be a source of frustration and stress but it will be well worth the effort it will demand. Consider the process of in situ language learning as part of your personal transformation process. I heard a wise person say, *transformed people transform people*. The relationships you build with the local people will help facilitate your future project successes and personal enjoyment. Learning to process sadness will be an important life-skill as an aid worker. Good relationships with others can help facilitate processing sorrow.

As you consider the possibility of a 30-45 year working career, with some of it in the international aid sector, consider that you will likely only possess a professional self-identify as an international aid worker while you are actually working overseas on the job. Once you return to your home country any professional identity you gained as an international aid professional is likely to erode from lack of validation unless you regularly work as a consultant and/or find a job in the sector. Even then, your

professional-identity will likely be re-shaped as people no longer see you as an aid worker but as a professional working with an aid agency. In any case, the experience of working overseas for an INGO is likely to be personally rewarding and may be a source of social and professional capital no matter where your journey takes you.

Recommendations to Education and Training Organisations

The CBHA's Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework provides a good foundation from which to develop a curriculum that could be relevant to both humanitarian and development workers. The values and priorities promoted in the CBHA framework are consistent with those embraced by the exemplary practitioners in this study. There are three skill areas that appeared to be critical for an aid worker to develop into an exemplary practitioner that emerged from this study that might not be obvious from the CBHA framework. These skill areas are:

- Project management skills
- *In situ* language acquisition skills
- Interpersonal conflict resolution skills

Consider how these three skills areas can be incorporated into the core curriculum of your training systems. Project management skills emerged as the most common required by the research participants. Students who already have considerable experience in project management, like *sector-switchers*, should have the possibility to opt out of basic project management since there is a high degree of overlap between project management in the aid sector and outside the aid sector.

Consider providing training and resources to help aid workers learn local languages *in situ*. The course should provide theory and techniques for one-on-one language

learning directly from a tutor or language informant and not from a classroom context. It should not be specific to any single language and should consider the likely scenario new arrivals to the field will face. I assume that aid workers will likely need to take responsibility for their own language learning. They will likely need to schedule focused language learning time outside of regular work hours and manage the curriculum themselves. The training should include how to work one-on-one with language informants who are not necessarily trained language teachers. Language informants (willing native speakers) are normally cheaper and more flexible than teachers. Such a course would likely improve the chances of aid workers becoming fluent in local dialects and languages of crisis-affected people.

Consider providing training in personal conflict resolution as part of the core requirements for aid workers. This course should be a combination of theory and practical interpersonal conflict resolution techniques. It should also include techniques on how to use codes of conduct and memos of understanding to help team members align their expectations of each other as well as provide *best practice* in policy and procedures for handling various types of team and interpersonal conflict.

Consider aid workers' need to process the sadness associated with the poverty, violence, death, and hopelessness they frequently encounter. How can educational institutions prepare aid workers for this certainty?

Another recommendation has to do with institutions involved in organising internships and short-term experiences. These experiences were a critical part of all the research participants' professional journeys. To help ensure that internships have their

maximum impact take steps to ensure that the following four criteria are part of the experience. The interns should be:

- Exposed to various jobs and competency requirements of the sector.
- Given the opportunity to get greater clarity as to their potential *fit* in the occupation, organisation, or host culture.
- Introduced to potential colleagues of the future.
- Given real and meaningful work to do.

For these criteria to be met both the intern and the host organisation need to be clear about expectations before an internship contract is signed. Internship supervisors should be proactive in outlining expectations with the host organisation. In the end, it is the intern's responsibility to make the most of the experience but a good internship supervisor helps.

My final recommendation is for education and training organisations to continue in their efforts to accommodate the non-traditional students like *late bloomers*, *on the jobbers*, and *sector switchers*. I believe *sector switchers* will continue to make up a large portion of the expatriate field leadership in the aid sector. Special programmes that effectively accommodate *sector switchers* will likely be popular and may have a strong impact on the quality of aid programmes.

Recommendations to INGOs

INGOs do not need to have their own extensive selections of in-house training programmes in order to develop their aid workers into exemplary field programme leaders. Much informal training takes place when project leaders attend meetings and conferences with other project leaders. Exemplary field leaders tend to pursue the

training they feel they need and want even without the proactive involvement of their INGO. INGOs should liberally give permission for their staff to attend CPD training and conferences of the aid worker's choice. Financing of this training does not always need to be covered by the INGO, especially if the CDP topic is not directly a part of the aid worker's current job description. The responsibility of continuous professional development should belong to the aid worker, the INGO's responsibility is to encourage and facilitate it.

Every INGO should have conflict resolution policies that outline the process for resolving all workplace conflicts. Every INGO should have specialists available on their staff (or on retainer) to coach field staff on how to resolve team and work related interpersonal conflicts before having to resort to organisational authority. Using organisational authority to resolve interpersonal conflicts should be a last resort. To me, it seems hypocritical to expect humanitarian workers to *establish and maintain clear dialogue with crisis-affected people* (CBHA, 2012) if they cannot do so among themselves. Perhaps the hard work of maintaining good relationships among themselves is what qualifies and equips them to do this with crisis-affected people. INGOs should consider closely the role that good relationships and camaraderie plays in project success and staff retention. Also consider what your organisational responsibilities are in helping your staff the process sorrows of working with crisis-affected people.

INGOs need to reconsider their hiring practices to facilitate their expatriate staffs' learning the language of crisis-affected people. Perhaps *in situ* language internships

of nine to 12 months become a new standard practice that includes vigorous field based language learning support.

Living with Dilemma and Sorrow

This study identified what seems to be a major contradiction between theory and practice. Examples of this emerged when I compared ELRHA research (Walker and Russ, 2010; Russ, 2012) and the CBHA's Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework (CBHA, 2010) with the lived-experience of the research participants and published practices of the sector. I presented survey evidence that suggests many workers in the humanitarian sector consider multitasking, negotiation, and team building more central to being a humanitarian worker than speaking the language of crisis affected people. They rated accounting and language learning as equally important to being a humanitarian worker (Walker and Russ, 2010). This is a clue that in practice, many humanitarian workers have an insufficient commitment to learn the languages of crisis-affected people. Second, there is evidence that for those humanitarian workers who do have sufficient commitment they do not have sufficient opportunity to learn local languages. One reason for this stems from the tradition of short-term employment contracts and the practice of *churning* (rotating experienced staff from project to project). Locally hired managers can run projects but their presence is not a reasonable excuse for expatriates to avoid learning languages, especially if they have not had time or opportunity to embrace the ethos of humanitarian action.

It appears to me that the current system of doing business in the sector actually obstructs professional competence in expatriates. If the advocates of professionalisation do not champion a commitment to learn the languages of crisis-affected people and if they do not champion a reform in the sector's hiring and churning practices, what hope is there that the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian aid will ever improve? I think none. Do these practices demonstrate a drastic underestimation of the *will*, *resources*, and *time* required to facilitate key humanitarian and development goals? I think yes, absolutely.

My study proposed to discover what the professional journeys of exemplary aid workers revealed about how they grew to become exemplary field leaders. I believe for the most part it accomplished this purpose. It revealed that there are multiple starting points for the journey and that there are at least seven landmarks that help verify and affirm the formation of their self-identity as aid workers along the way. Not least of these landmarks was an intrinsic sense of fit or satisfaction in the work itself and/or the people they worked with. Seeing the impact of their work and developing good relationships helped sustain my research participants through difficult times. The most difficult experiences were not the physical hardships or dangerous living conditions but the strain and disappointments of broken relationships. Their commitment to persevere over the long term, a trait called *grit*, appeared to contribute significantly to their exemplary performance as field leaders. It also played a role in facilitating their fluency in speaking the languages of the crisis-affected people which in turn helped facilitate their success as aid workers. It seems too that exemplary field leaders have learned to live with the dilemmas and sorrows associated with their

profession. They seem to have learned, at least in part, how to celebrate the small things they can change and not despair over the things they cannot.

Final Reflections

I conclude this study by inviting the reader to review two *non-traditional reflections* of my research that I have included in the Appendix because they are supplemental and presented in a genre and format that is significantly different than the rest of this study. In Appendix F you will find a *character profile* of a fictitious exemplary expatriate aid worker named MaryAnn. The character profile of MaryAnn is of the same genre used in theatre and film to help actors learn their characters. Her profile represents a conglomeration of characteristics and experiences informed by my data in the form of a TV episode. Perhaps at a later date I will develop case-studies for training purposes using a similar format and character. Another non-traditional reflection on my research is found in Appendix G. Here I created a piece of art in the genre of a game-board to illustrate how a board-game might be used as a metaphor of the professional journeys of my 12 research participants. The game-board highlights several aspects of my research participants' professional journeys in an accessible and light-hearted poster format.

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Appendices

Appendix A: General Consent Form

General Consent Form: permission to use interview data in research and publications

This form is to be completed by individuals participating in interviews with Scott Breslin for his Doctorate of Education research at the University of Edinburgh. The research focuses on the complexities of professional development of expatriate project leaders who work for international humanitarian organizations.



I understand that Scott will edit the interview and develop it into a format that is consistent with his research purposes.

I understand that Scott may corroborate and develop the initial interview data with other sources, including but not limited to other people and publications.

I understand that Scott will carry out his research according to the published ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and The University of Edinburgh's Moray House School of Education.

I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason prior to the submission of the dissertation to the university (estimated December of 2011).

By checking a box below, I request that the specified details remain confidential in all publications and public discussions that may result from this research:

My real name (I give permission to use a pseudonym)

My organization's real name (I give permission to use a pseudonym)

Other(s): _____

I understand that Scott will take due diligence to maintain the requested anonymity and confidentiality at all times.

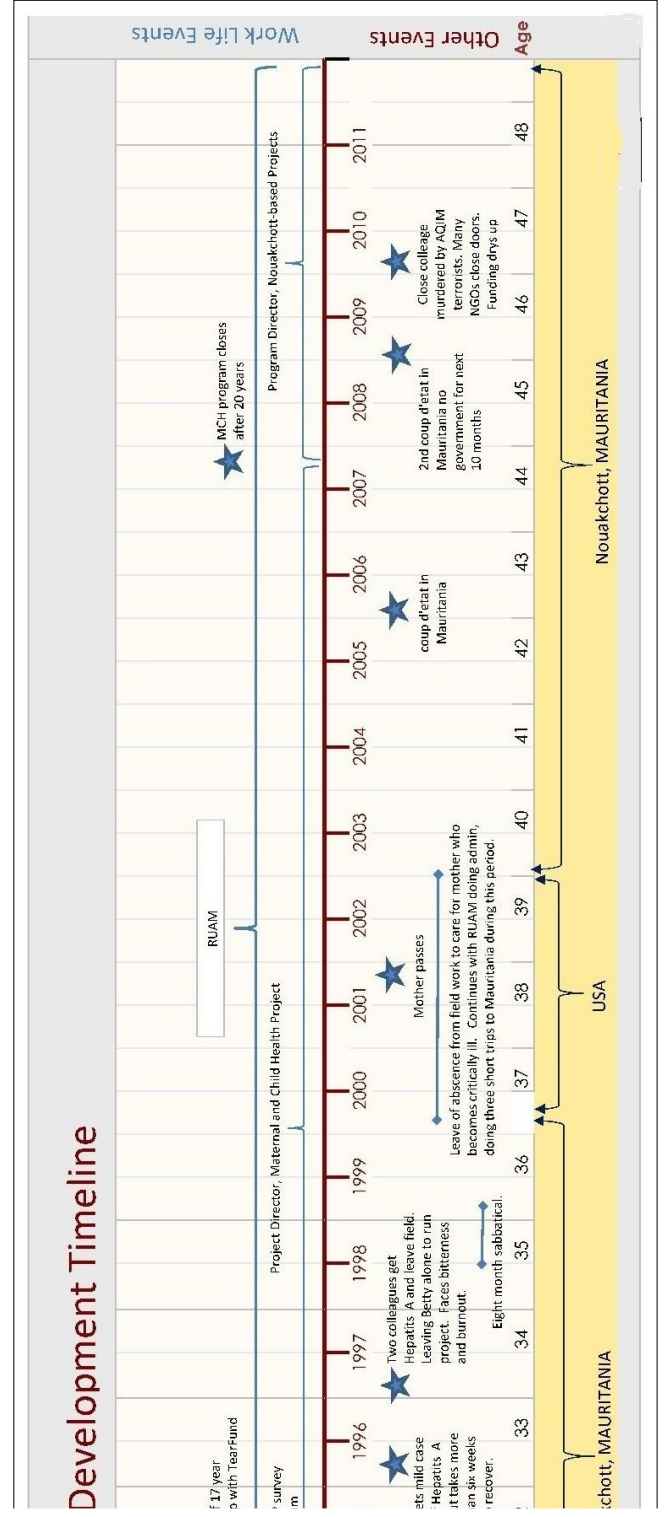
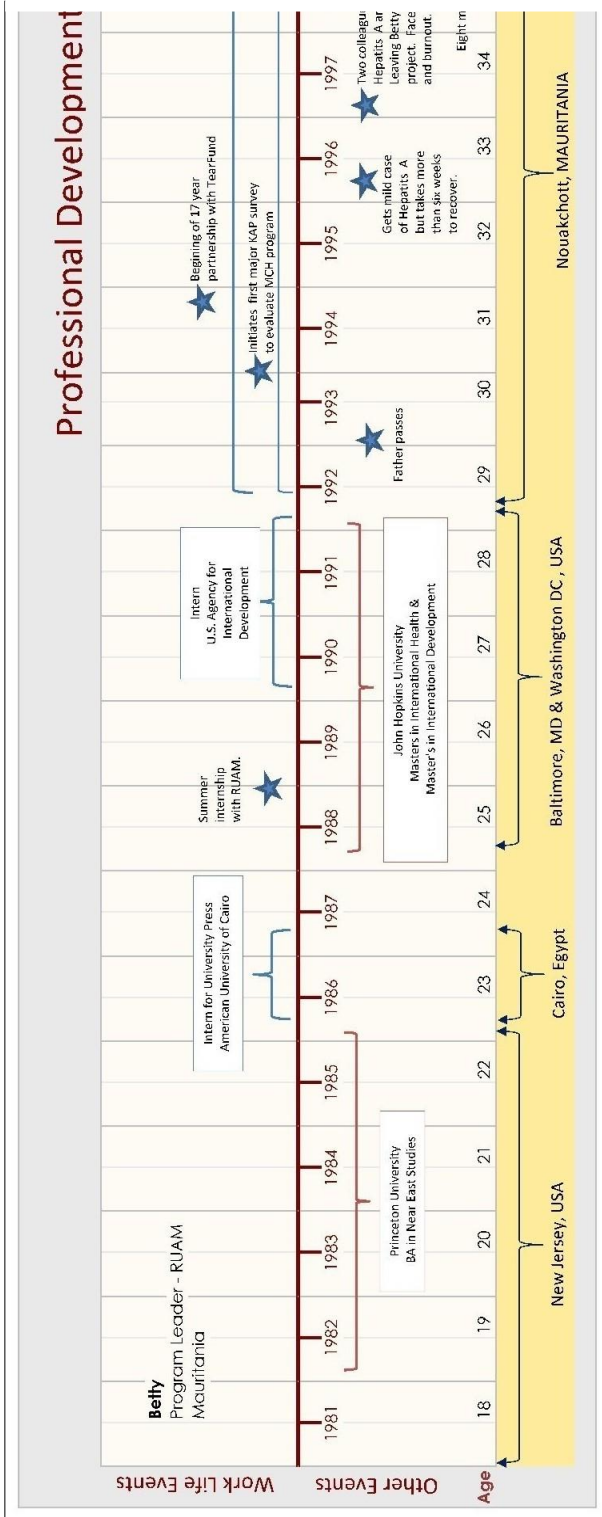
I hereby consent to allow Scott to use the information collected in his interview(s) with me for publication in his doctorate dissertation and in any and all subsequent publications that may result.

Name: _____


Signature: _____


Date: _____

Appendix B: Professional Development Timeline



Appendix C: Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework 1 of 2

	
Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework Keeping disaster and conflict affected people at the centre of what we do	
Competencies	Understanding of humanitarian contexts and application of humanitarian principles Key issues and practices impacting current and future humanitarian interventions
Core Behaviours for all staff in humanitarian response, informed by skills and knowledge	<p>The humanitarian context Demonstrate understanding of phases of humanitarian response including preparedness and contingency, DRR, response and recovery</p> <p>Apply understanding of the political and cultural context and underlying causes of the humanitarian crisis</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of the gender and diversity dimensions of humanitarian situations</p> <p>Keep vulnerable people at the centre of the humanitarian response</p> <p>Applying humanitarian standards / principles Ensure that programme goals and activities uphold the principles of the key national and international humanitarian frameworks, codes and commitments under which humanitarian organisations operate</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of your role and that of your organisation and others within the humanitarian system</p>
Achieving results effectively Behaviours to use resources efficiently and effectively to achieve results, considering the need for speed, scale and quality	<p>Programme quality Demonstrate understanding of agency project cycle management</p> <p>Participate in the design and implementation of effective projects and programmes</p> <p>Accountability Collect, analyse and disseminate information to and from communities and other stakeholders</p> <p>Demonstrate accountability to partners and disaster and conflict affected people and communities</p> <p>Decision making Demonstrate flexibility to adapt plans and make decisions in rapidly changing environments</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of when a decision can be taken and when to involve others</p> <p>Consider the wider impact of the decisions you make in your work to achieve positive results</p> <p>Impact Maintain focus on delivery of timely and appropriate results using available resources</p>
Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships Behaviours to develop and maintain collaborative, coordinated relationships at times of heightened complexity and risk	<p>Listening & dialogue Actively listen to different perspectives and experiences of stakeholders</p> <p>Establish and maintain clear communication and dialogue with disaster and conflict affected people and other stakeholders</p> <p>Working with others Contribute positively in the team to achieve programme objectives</p> <p>Share appropriate information and knowledge with colleagues and partners as and when appropriate</p> <p>Actively participate in networks to access and contribute to good practice</p> <p>Challenge decisions and behaviour which breach the ICRC/NGO and individual agency Codes of Conduct</p>
Operating safely and securely in a humanitarian response Behaviours required to take responsibility to operate safely in a pressured environment	<p>Security context and analysis Identify and communicate risk and threats and minimise these for you and your agency</p> <p>Personal safety & security Build and maintain a reputation in line with humanitarian standards and acceptance for your work</p> <p>Take appropriate, coordinated and consistent action to handle situations of personal risk and situations of risk for others</p> <p>Reduce vulnerability by complying with safety and security protocols set by your organisation and contextualise appropriately to local scenarios</p> <p>Champion the importance of safety and keep the safety of colleagues and team members in mind at all times</p> <p>Minimising risk to communities and partners Take measures to do no harm and to minimise risks for your partners and the communities you work with</p>
Managing yourself in a pressured and changing environment Essential personal behaviours required to operate effectively within a humanitarian context	<p>Resilience Recognise stress and take steps to reduce it</p> <p>Remain constructive and positive under stress to be able to tolerate difficult and sometimes threatening environments</p> <p>Remain focused on your objectives and goal in a rapidly changing environment</p> <p>Be able to adapt to changing situations</p> <p>Keep yourself emotionally stable when helping others</p> <p>Maintaining professionalism Take responsibility for your own work and for the impact of your actions</p> <p>Plan, prioritise and perform tasks well under pressure</p> <p>Maintain ethical and professional behaviour in accordance with relevant codes of conduct</p> <p>Demonstrate personal integrity by using one's position responsibly and fairly</p>
Leadership in humanitarian response Seeing the overall goal within the changing context and taking responsibility to motivate others to work towards it, independent of one's role, function or seniority.	<p>Self-awareness Show awareness of your own strengths and limitations and their impact on others</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of your skills and how they complement those of others to support team effectiveness</p> <p>Seek and reflect on feedback to improve your performance</p> <p>Motivating and influencing others Communicate humanitarian values and motivate others towards them</p> <p>Inspire confidence in others</p> <p>Speak out clearly for organisational beliefs and values</p> <p>Demonstrate active listening to encourage team collaboration</p> <p>Influence others positively to achieve programme goals</p> <p>Critical judgement Analyse and exercise judgment in new situations in the absence of specific guidance.</p> <p>Demonstrate initiative and ingenuity</p>

 Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework		Keeping disaster and conflict affected people at the centre of what we do				
	Integrate beneficiary accountability principles into your approach Demonstrate an understanding of coordination mechanisms					Be aware of internal and external pressures and how they might impact your effectiveness Demonstrate tenacity to achieve solutions Address difficult situations and make tough decisions confidently and calmly Suggest creative improvements and different ways of working
Competencies Additional Behaviours for 1st level line managers* in humanitarian response, informed by skills and knowledge	Understanding of humanitarian contexts and application of humanitarian principles The humanitarian context Able to assess and analyse key issues in the humanitarian situation and formulate actions around them Applying humanitarian standards / principles Participate in the development of an organisational response based on an understanding of the contexts Actively engage in disaster coordination mechanisms and interagency cooperation from an understanding of your agency's perspective and approach.	Achieving results effectively Programme Quality Set standards in your work and follow agreed procedures of work Document lessons learned and apply them to future projects Accountability Ensure efficient and transparent use of resources in accordance with internal controls Establish community engagement mechanisms Impact Clarify roles and responsibilities within your team to maximise impact Continuously provide feedback and updates to achieve improved results Coordinate with stakeholders to avoid duplication and maximise resources	Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships Listening & dialogue Ensure beneficiary and partner feedback is incorporated into programme design, planning and learning Working with others Establish clear objectives with teams and individuals and monitor progress and performance Establish agreed ways of working at a distance with partners and staff Work with your team to build trust with partners, communities and stakeholders Foster collaborative, transparent and accountable relationships through partners to formalise and operationalise partnering agreements Use negotiation and conflict resolution skills to support positive outcomes	Operating safely and securely in a humanitarian response Security context and analysis Demonstrate an understanding of wider UN/NGO security coordination and how your organisation can benefit from, and contribute to, those mechanisms Undertake effective risk assessments and develop contingency plans Personal safety & security Monitor security risks and ensure organisational protocols are consistently followed by staff Take appropriate action and provide appropriate direction and support to team members in the event of a critical incident Minimising risk to communities and partners Undertake effective risk assessments with communities and partners	Managing yourself in a pressured and changing environment Resilience Help team members to practise stress management through prioritisation of workloads and modelling of appropriate self care Maintaining professionalism Set realistic deadlines and goals Facilitate others to carry out their roles and responsibilities Make time to learn from experience and feedback, and apply the lessons to a new situation	Leadership in humanitarian response Motivating and influencing others Inspire others by clearly articulating and demonstrating the values, core purpose and principles that underpin humanitarian work Provide regular and ongoing informal and formal feedback to recognise the contribution of others Adapt leadership approach to the situation Critical Judgment Maintain simultaneously a broad strategic perspective and awareness of the detail of a situation Adapt plans quickly in response to emerging situations and changing environments Take calculated risks to improve performance Able to act decisively and quickly

Appendix D: 12-Item Grit Scale page 1 of 2

Please respond to the following 12 items with an "X". Be honest – there are no right or wrong answers.

First Name:

Date:

1. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

2. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

3. My interests change from year to year.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

4. Setbacks don't discourage me.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

5. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.*

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

6. I am a hard worker.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

7. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

8. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

Appendix D (page 2 of 2)

9. I finish whatever I begin.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

10. I have achieved a goal that took years of work.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

11. I become interested in new pursuits every few months.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

12. I am diligent.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

Scoring:

1. For questions 2, 4, 7 and 8 assign the following points:

- 5 = Very much like me
- 4 = Mostly like me
- 3 = Somewhat like me
- 2 = Not much like me
- 1 = Not like me at all

2. For questions 1, 3, 5 and 6 assign the following points:

- 1 = Very much like me
- 2 = Mostly like me
- 3 = Somewhat like me
- 4 = Not much like me
- 5 = Not like me at all

NOTE: The scoring key and citations were not sent to the participants.

Add up all the points and divide by 8. The maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest score on this scale is 1 (not at all gritty).

Grit Scale citation

Duckworth, A.L., & Quinn, P.D. (2009) Development and validation of the Short Grit Scale (GritS). *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 91, 166-174.
<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/images/Duckworth%20and%20Quinn.pdf>

Duckworth, A.L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M.D., & Kelly, D.R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9, 1087-1101.
<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/images/Grit%20JPSP.pdf>

Appendix E: Resilience Factor Inventory (RFI) page 1 of 3

RFI Resilience Factor Inventory 60-Item Inventory Please carefully respond to each survey item below.	Not at all true	Sometimes true	Moderately true	Usually true	Very or often true	Don't know
1. When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar hurdles and overcame them.						
2. When faced with a problem, it is not important to me to understand what caused the problem; I care only about finding a solution.						
3. I enjoy doing routine simple tasks that do not change.						
4. I am aware of the nonverbal messages people send to me.						
5. I do not have a clear strategy for achieving my goals.						
6. When trying to solve a problem, I trust my instincts and go with the first solution that occurs to me.						
7. I react in a manner that seems out of proportion to the situation.						
8. The costs associated with my line of work seem too great.						
9. I do not spend much time coming up with ideas about what caused a problem						
10. When I get upset, I know it.						
11. I don't need people to think I'm better than most at my job.						
12. I look at challenges as a way to learn and improve myself.						
13. I've been told I misinterpret events and situations.						
14. I have a good sense of my core values and their effect on how I perceive a situation.						
15. I would rather do something at which I feel confident and relaxed than something that is quite challenging and difficult.						
16. By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing.						
17. I get the urge to give up when things go wrong						
18. I am good at controlling my emotions.						
19. When a problem arises, I come up with a lot of possible solutions before trying to solve it.						
20. I recognize my own emotions as I experience them.						
21. What other people think about me does not influence <i>my</i> behavior.						
22. When a problem occurs, I am aware of the first thoughts that pop into my head about it.						

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23. I feel most comfortable in situations in which I am not the only one responsible.						
24. I prefer situations where I can depend on someone else's ability rather than my own.						
25. I believe it is important to be as optimistic as possible, even if it means not seeing a situation 100% accurately.						
26. I think it is better to believe problems are controllable, even if that is not always true.						
27. I often seem to react too strongly to situations.						
28. It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do.						
29. I can easily detect the emotions of those around me.						
30. I understand my own emotions.						
31. When someone overreacts to a problem, I think it is usually because they are just in a bad mood that day.						
32. I expect that I will do well on most things.						
33. People often seek me out to help them figure out problems.						
34. I feel at a loss to understand why people react the way they do.						
35. I am good at identifying what I'm thinking and how this affects my mood.						
36. When I do a job, I do it well.						
37. My emotions affect my ability to focus on what I need to get done at home, school, or work.						
38. I believe that hard work always pays off.						
39. I am able to keep my emotions and behavior in check.						
40. For me, knowing I've done something well is more important than being praised by others.						
41. I try to imagine the outcome I am looking for and this seems to help me get what I want.						
42. I have good control over how I feel and what I do.						
43. If someone is sad, angry, or embarrassed, I have a good idea what he or she may be thinking.						
44. If something happens at work that upsets me, I am able to wait until an appropriate time when I have calmed down to discuss it.						
45. I am good at shutting out anything that distracts me from the task at hand.						
46. If my first solution doesn't work, I am able to go back and continue trying different solutions until I do.						
47. I am curious.						
48. I know what I need to do to reach my goals.						

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49. My emotions affect my ability to work.						
50. I do not plan ahead in my job.						
51. It is difficult for me to remain focused when I have personal problem outside of work.						
52. If someone at work is upset, I have a pretty good idea why.						
53. I believe that in order to adapt to change it is better to react after it occurs than to spend time planning ahead for it.						
54. I am able to keep separate problems at work and home.						
55. I enjoy tasks which are difficult for me.						
56. I prefer doing things spontaneously rather than planning ahead, even if it doesn't work out well.						
57. My first impression about a situation is usually close enough to being accurate.						
58. I feel most confident when I have a plan and follow it.						
59. I don't feel confident that I've done a good job until someone I respect tells me so.						
60. I find it difficult to stop my thoughts						

NOTE: The RFI was administered online to the participants. The 3 page, 60-item sample RFI included here is for the readers' reference.

Appendix F: Fictitious Character Profile

Name of drama: Epic Journeys in Humanitarian Aid

Name of episode: Disturbance at the INGO leaders meeting in Yardim Yer (Season 5, Episode 10)

Basic Statistics for character

Name: MaryAnn

Age: 38

Nationality: Dutch

Socioeconomic Level as a child: Middle Class

Socioeconomic Level as an adult: Middle Class

Current Residence: Yardim Yer, Central Asia

Occupation: INGO Programme Leader

Talents/Skills: Plays guitar, makes a great chai latte

Salary: €40,000/yr

Birth order: 2nd of 3 sisters

Civil status: Single

Myers-Briggs Type: INTP (but could be any)

Physical Characteristics:

Height: Medium

Weight: Medium

Race: White

Glasses or contact lenses: no

Skin color: White

How does he/she dress? Tries to blend in. Nondescript.

Habits: Non-smoker, coffee snob,

Health: Suffers from occasional diarrhea and headaches.

Hobbies: Romantic films, reading, birding

Favorite Sayings: Tomorrows is another day

Greatest flaw: Does not call mother frequently

Best quality: Does not complain about things that cannot be changed

Intellectual/Mental/Personality Attributes and Attitudes

Educational Background: University degree in social anthropology.

Intelligence Level: Average for a university graduate

Mental Illnesses: No more than anyone else.

Learning Experiences: Worked overseas ten months in Ethiopia as a volunteer before university.

Character's short-term goals in life: Gain native speaker fluency in Yardimcu, the local language.

How does character see himself/herself? Adventurous, hard worker, confident in problem solving, realist.

How does character believe he/she is perceived by others? Risk taker, maverick, optimist, sometimes quite.

How self-confident is the character? Normally high but was recently deeply disappointed by a trusted work colleague who deserted the project with only a 24 hour notice.

Does the character seem ruled by emotion or logic? Good balance between the two. Sometimes can get sentimental.

What would most embarrass this character? Forgetting the name of someone whose name he/she should know or forgetting to include overhead costs in a programme budget.

Emotional and Spiritual Characteristics

Strengths: Calm, stable, not easily frightened by bullies.

Weaknesses: Can appear aloof when thinking or disappointed.

Introvert or Extrovert? Naturally an introvert but very able to be extrovert when needed for work or to accomplish her goals.

How does the character deal with:

Anger? Normally becomes quiet *initially*.

Sadness? Becomes moody and quiet.

Conflict? Seeks resolution and dialoug.

Change? Normally open to change but can appreciate routine too.

With loss? Can becomes withdrawn and discouraged.

Communication style: Direct when speaking Dutch, or English but can easily style switch and be indirect when speaking Yardimcu.

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What does the character want out of life? To make a difference in the world and to have no regrets when he/she grows old.

What would the character like to change in her life? That she hadn't adopted the street puppy.

What motivates this character? Friendship and good project results.

What frightens this character? A new team member that cannot do anything for themselves and complains about things that cannot be changed.

What makes this character happy? Seeing her local staff succeed and seeing crisis-affected women have worldview changes regarding how they see their own value. She is also happy when she understands 99% of what two native Yardimcu speakers say when they argue with each other.

Is the character judgmental of others? Occasionally, especially if she thinks they lack commitment to the job. Like the one who recently left just when they were becoming effective.

Is the character generous or stingy? Generous most of the time but tires of locals asking to borrow money.

Is the character generally polite or rude? Living in Central Asia has made her appear more polite and hospitable than when she was in Holland.

Does the character believe in God? Yes, but she is subtle in how she expresses her beliefs publicly.

What are the character's spiritual beliefs? She believes that all human beings have dignity because they are created in the image of God. She also feels her occupation in humanitarian work is a calling and is something she feels is a good fit with her interests, skills, and ambitions.

What is the character's role in the drama (main character? heroine? comic relief?):

MaryAnn plays a small role when you consider the entire *Epic Journeys in Humanitarian Aid* series as a whole. However in this particular episode, she is a main character and heroine, but does not realise it. In an earlier episode we saw how MaryAnn's understanding of Yardimcu (the local language) and her relationship with the crisis-affected people allowed her to include them in the planning, execution, monitoring and evaluating of the projects. The programme had amazing impact. The crisis-affected people felt like they were solving their own problems. Most of them do not even realise the pivotal role that MaryAnn played since she is in the background most of the time. That was an episode from last season. MaryAnn herself does not realize she is a heroine or even a main character in this episode. She realizes that she is one of many in a long chain of stakeholders who are working

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together for change. She is thankful to be able to be at the bottom end of the chain where she can see the impact of the change with her own eyes. This helps her put up with all the difficulties of living in Yardim Yer. Yardim Yer was MaryAnn's first overseas assignment with her INGO. Previously she had been working in Amsterdam as a business consultant. But four years ago she started with this INGO and was sent to Yardim Yer. She started as a programme assistant and was able to squeeze in 20hrs/week of language learning during her first six months. She was good in languages and continued to work on it and steadily became more fluent overtime. By the end of the first year she was promoted to programme manager and oversaw a staff of 15 locals. In her second year MaryAnn's boss invited her to attend the INGO's leaders meeting. She was quite flattered. All the leaders and top consultants attended these meetings. It was not until she began attending these meetings that she began to realise how in two short years she had earned a tremendous amount of respect from her peers and colleagues. She was constantly being asked her opinion on project and cultural issues by people she highly respected.

What scene does the character first appears?

MaryAnn appeared in one of the early episodes of this long running epic drama but you would probably not remember her. She was only 18 at the time. She appeared as an intern on the episode that took place at The Netherlands Embassy Christmas party. She was the one who was caught off guard by the prevailing condescending attitudes she experienced in many expatriate businessmen, diplomats, and NGO leaders she met at the party. They complained about everything that was wrong about Ethiopia but did not speak the language even though some have lived there for ten years. She was the one in that episode who vowed not to be like that if she ever returned overseas. In this current episode she makes her appearance as the lead facilitator at the INGO meeting where there is a big ruckus because a new INGO that just moved into town is paying local staff double the wages of the other INGOs and sheep stealing local staff from other INGOs.

What are her relationships with other characters?

In the current scene at the INGO leaders' meeting she plays the role of a respected senior colleague and peacemaker. She has been in Yardim Yer only four and a half years but still has three years of seniority over everyone else at that meeting. She had become the meeting chairman/facilitator six months earlier and

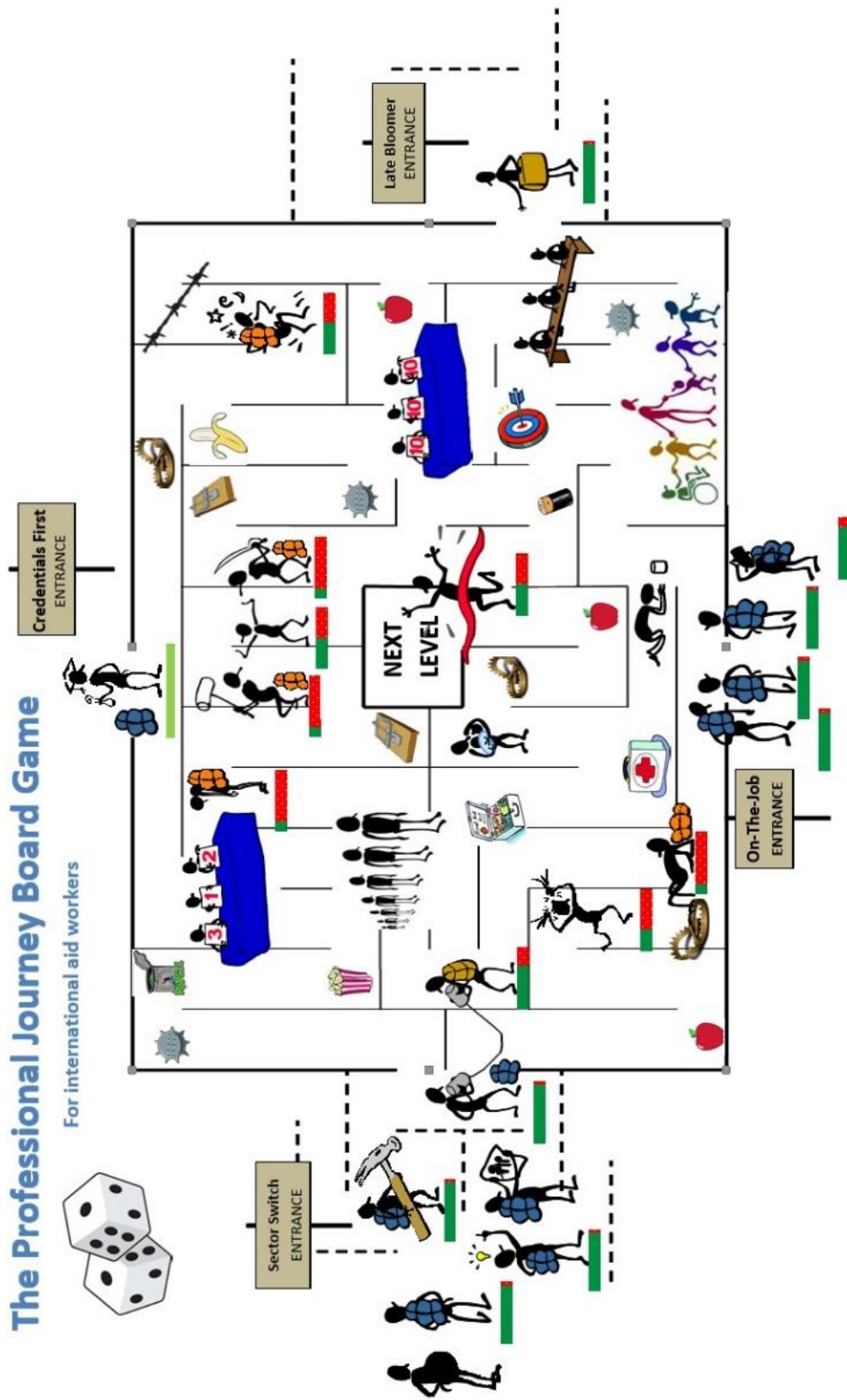
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was respected for her level headedness and street smarts. However, there is a twist in the plot. MaryAnn has a somewhat adversarial relationship with Bigguy, the 50s something government liaison who participates in the INGO meetings. He does not relate well to women as peers and MaryAnn and the other INGO leaders feel as if he has a condescending attitude towards her. This creates some very awkward moments during the INGO meeting. Bigguy is eager for power and prestige. He is one of a few dozen citizens of Yardim Yer who did his university studies in Europe and is convinced his English is perfect and easy to understand. Bigguy attempts to take over the meeting from MaryAnn and settle the dispute in a heavy handed manner. MaryAnn very diplomatically deflects Bigguys aggressive approach without insulting him and facilitates a solution among the INGO leaders. Also at the INGO meeting is Yunggal, a married 30s something civil society leader from Yardim Yer who is smart and motivated to see change to her country. She is watching MaryAnn who in the previous episode agreed to mentor her. Now Yunggal watches with fascination how MaryAnn respectfully and wisely managed Bigguy and facilitated a solution for the INGO leaders. Meanwhile, Bigguy builds resentment towards MaryAnn even though she was careful to keep him from losing face.

How is character different at the end of the story from when the story began?

You do not actually see much change in MaryAnn's character during the current episode. But for the remainder of the season you continue to see MaryAnn's influence grow among the INGO community, crisis-affected people, and government officials. In an episode next season MaryAnn will wrestle with the temptation to use her recently gained influence for her own benefit... but that is not until next season. In the meantime Bigguy's brother-in-law becomes Yardim Yer's Minister of Interior and gets Bigguy promoted to a powerful position in Customs and Border Control. A new plotline begins to evolve. The character who changes the most during this episode is Yunggal. She witnesses how a gentle word spoken at the proper time can bend steel. For the first time she had a role model in how a woman can be a leader in a man's world. Her mentoring relationship with MaryAnn is also going to be the primary reason she chooses not to resign for own NGO (but that story is in the next episode).

Appendix G: Professional Journey Game-Board



Appendix H: Three-Legged Stool of Workplace Longevity

Workplace Longevity

