

# Integrating Your Self-Assessment and Developing Implications 3

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*A successful life is one that is lived through understanding and pursuing one's own path, not chasing after the dreams of others.*

—Chin-Ning Chu

**T**he critical next step in the self-assessment process involves taking all the information you have generated and making sense of it—not an easy task. The process of self-assessment that we have outlined begins with the notion that career satisfaction and career success depend on many factors. These factors include most importantly a clear sense of oneself, and developing this is a complex task. To this point we have asked you to develop information that will provide you with a clearer sense of your identity. This self-awareness is derived through no single source but rather through an understanding of your experiences, values, goals, interests, skills, and motivations. The instruments you have used and the information they have generated now must be integrated into a comprehensive picture.

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## Integrating Your Self-Assessment

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The idea of using career data in a structured fashion to achieve greater self-understanding is hardly new (Bolles, 2007; Clawson, Kotter, Faux, & McArthur, 1992; Hall, 1976). Many writers in the career field have outlined a process of using summarized self-assessment data as a filter or focus for identifying appropriate career options and for managing one's

career over time. The process we will use for distilling this self-assessment information into a comprehensive view borrows most heavily from the work that was done at Harvard Business School for the second-year elective course in the MBA program “Self-Assessment and Career Development.” This innovative class, first taught at Harvard Business School in the mid-1970s, was developed to help students through the career transitions that many of them were making during their 2 years in business school and in their early careers (Clawson et al., 1992).

You have compiled a lot of detailed information about yourself. How do you pull it all together and make sense of it all? We offer two alternatives. The first and quickest way is a simple summary of the information, drawing implications for what your strengths and weaknesses are and possible actions for development. The second is a more thorough data analysis that will help you find the underlying themes in your self-assessment. The first alternative might be easier to do if you are using this book on your own. The second alternative, thematic analysis, might be done more effectively as part of a formally structured course experience. We describe each alternative in the following sections.

## **EXERCISES TO ORGANIZE YOUR DATA**

### **Alternative 1: Your Self-Assessment Summary**

Now that you have done the hard work of completing the self-assessment instruments and activities, take a few minutes to go over them. Reflect on each one and come up with a few sentences for each that capture what that exercise means for you. What did you learn from it? What strengths did it reveal? What areas for development does it suggest?

To help you pull together all you have learned from these exercises, we have provided a Self-Assessment Summary Sheet (Table 3.1). Please take a few minutes to reflect on the work you have done by completing this sheet. It probably will contain spaces for more activities than most people will be able to do, and we have included some instruments (e.g., the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), which we did not cover but which many people have taken). Just use the rows for the activities that you were able to complete.

### **Alternative 2: Developing Self-Assessment Themes**

Clawson and his colleagues called for a rigorous inductive reasoning process of developing *life themes*. These themes are grounded in data from a variety of sources and say something significant about the person that can be used for the purposes of career planning and development. In essence, this is no different from the process

**Table 3.1** Self-Assessment Summary Sheet

<i>Self-Assessment Tool</i>	<i>My Strengths</i>	<i>My Weaknesses</i>	<i>Possible Developmental Learning</i>
Interview With Others			
Career Autobiography			
Career Values Card Sort			
Strong Interest Inventory or Campbell Interest and Skills Survey			
Identities Exercise			
Lifestyle Representation Exercise			
10-Years-Out Exercise			
Peer Coaching Exercise			
Performance Evaluations			
Peak Experiences Exercise			
Draft Personal Mission Statement			
Learning Tactics Inventory			
Career Leader			
Team 360 Feedback			
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator			
Career Survey			
Learning Log			
Other			

any professional career counselor would use to help a person see how his or her interests and values might suggest a good career fit and help the person choose the right career.

The basic approach followed by the authors includes the following steps (Clawson et al., 1992):

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1. *Generate data:* This is done primarily by completing career planning instruments (like those introduced in chapter 2) that cover a wide range of topics and perspectives about the individual.
2. *Understand each data-gathering device:* Once you have used a device or instrument, ground yourself in an understanding of what the device can (and cannot) tell you.
3. *Practice interpretation by following a process of inductive reasoning:* By *inductive* we mean working from the data to develop a theory, not working from a theory to assess findings. Induction sometimes is framed as reasoning about the future from the past, but in its broadest sense it involves reaching conclusions on the basis of what is observed.
4. *Interpret your own data:* To develop the integrated view, we will use a process borrowed from qualitative research. In qualitative research, there is a process that uses inductive reasoning to do theory building. Put simply, the idea is to take various sources of information and mine each source for key pieces of information. The process of interpretation suggested is similar to one used by any qualitative researcher to understand, sort, and analyze data. In effect, one is using an inductive process to build a theory of oneself that is well grounded in facts. The ground rules Clawson and his colleagues suggest for this process are as follows:
  - *Stay close to the data:* State the facts in concrete terms. Do not abstract ideas or make generalizations.
  - *Do not filter:* Use all the data that seem significant. Do not use information selectively to bolster what you already believe to be true. Likewise, do not ignore data that conflict with what you believe.
  - *Avoid use of inference or judgment:* Maintain objectivity when reviewing the data. It is particularly important at the early stages of reviewing data and developing potential themes to avoid making inferences or judgments about what you are reviewing.

## Developing Themes From Your Data

To do a thorough thematic analysis, we suggest the following approach. Start by reviewing the data sources and determining what each tells you (or cannot tell you) about yourself. The data sources used thus far include

- The Career Autobiography (CA)
- The Identities Exercise (IE)

- The Career Values Card Sort (CVCS)
- The Campbell Interest and Skills Survey (CISS) or Strong Interest Inventory (SII)
- The 10-Years-Out Exercise (TYO)
- The Lifestyle Representation Exercise (LRE)
- The Interview With Others (IWO)
- The Peer Coaching Exercise (PEER)
- Performance Evaluation Analysis (PEA)

To develop themes, you should follow these steps:

### *STEP 1: CODING YOUR DATA*

Given the richness and depth of information it provides, it makes sense when coding your information to start with the Career Autobiography (CA). Reading through the biography, highlight key pieces of information and code each piece of data. By coding, we mean establishing potential categories of information by identifying data that are similar. It is important at this stage not to get stuck on these as your final themes. They will be a method for you to begin to sort the data. You may need to read through each piece of information a few times to begin to think of how to categorize. These categories might be labeled as follows:

“I have a strong and persistent interest in being in a helping role.”

“I am highly motivated to achieve financial success.”

“I strive to excel at everything I take on.”

“I follow my own instincts rather than path prescribed by others.”

“My roots in the South are of great importance to me.”

“I have always succeeded in roles that include a significant technical component.”

“The importance of family plays a dominant role in my career decision making.”

An alternative is to create label codes using letters and numbers. For example, if geographic location surfaces in your data, you might label all data related to this with an *L* (for *location*). Subthemes that emerge could include the area of the country you want to live in (labeled L1), a preference toward living and working in an urban area (L2), and a desire to work

in a certain kind of environment (L3). This coding process will allow you to go through your data and quickly assign a code to every important piece of data. One piece of data can support more than one theme. After you've assigned codes, group all data accordingly. **Note: Each time you pull data from its original source (e.g., the Career Autobiography or the 10-Years-Out Exercise), remember to note on each piece of data the original source with the abbreviations listed earlier.** The important thing is to remember that these themes begin as highly tentative. The tentative themes derived from the data serve as a framework for sorting and analyzing the data.

The CA probably will be the richest single source of data for developing these tentative themes. However, when you move to data sources other than the autobiography, it is critical that you dig deeply into them to find and use as much information as possible.

In using the CVCS, for example, it is natural to focus on the "Always Valued" cards because these are areas that you have highlighted as critically important to you. However, it may be equally important to look at cards that appear in other categories, such as "Seldom or Never Valued." The fact that you never value high earnings or profit and gain is extremely important information about you and can have a profound bearing on your career choices. If financial gain does not weigh heavily in your career thinking or your needs, this opens up many options that might be closed to those who are more concerned about financial gains or material possessions.

In using the SII or the CISS, use as much of the rich and detailed data that their reports provide as possible. Look well beyond the most basic information (e.g., "It said I would be a good car salesman") and scan the data from the general themes and orientations, basic interest scales, matches with occupations, and information about your personal style. Dozens of reference points can be drawn from each of the instruments used in the self-assessment process. If you fail to pull out these nuggets, you will develop themes that are not as rich, textured, or robust as they could be. Ultimately, this will decrease the rigor and the quality of your self-assessment process.

## *STEP 2: GROUPING YOUR DATA*

After you have gone through all of your documents and done your coding, cluster each piece of coded data into groups. There are two ways to go about this (assuming you don't have qualitative research software on your computer). One is to write each piece of data on a card or piece of paper, then physically sort and resort the information into groups. The other is to type all data points onto your computer and then sort the information into categories. Unfortunately, both processes are laborious and time consuming. In establishing the groups, lean toward being more discriminating in putting groups together. It is better to have more groups of data that

are highly connected. Fewer groups with many data points that are more loosely related will result in less clear themes and will undermine the rigor and usefulness of your themes and your self-assessment.

### *STEP 3: ASSIGNING TENTATIVE THEMES*

Each group already has a tentative label or a code. At this point, the tentative theme should be ratified, modified, or perhaps even changed significantly. If the change is significant, then it is highly likely that some of the data you have clustered under the tentative label should be redistributed. It is important to start by reading all the data in the group and ask yourself, "How would I label this group?" Don't read the tentative theme and ask, "Can I justify this piece of data under this theme?" That approach may lead you to force information into categories that are not appropriate. As stated earlier, an inductive reasoning process goes from the individual facts to build a theory.

### *STEP 4: CONSTRUCTING THE FINAL THEMES WITH SUPPORTING DATA*

It is probably best to create a system with one theme per page. Put the theme title at the top of each page. Then, for each theme, list all the supporting data you have compiled that suggests that the theme is truly an indicator of who you really are. A typical theme should have at least eight pieces of confirming data that suggest the theme's strength. This should include data from multiple sources. Although the CA is a rich source of data, ask yourself, for example,

- Is this theme supported by the values I identified in the CVCS?
- Is this theme supported by my goals as identified in the TYO?
- Do the interest areas identified in my inventory results support this theme?

An important point: In looking for information that builds and supports a theme, it is important not to ignore data that may seem, or in fact be, contradictory. Although they are challenging to work with, contradictory data or even contradictory themes are extremely important to factor into the career equation. Careers often are riddled with contradictions (e.g., "I'd like to help the poor, but don't see how I could live without a summer home in Nantucket."). These contradictions should not be ignored and may hold tremendous value in refining individual themes and understanding and ultimately resolving career conflicts.

### SAMPLE THEMES

It might be helpful to look at one or two sample themes to better understand what your themes will look like. The sample themes presented are merely that; they are not ideal, nor should all themes be like these. It is reasonable and even desirable that some of your themes be highly specific and concrete. You might have themes that state,

I am totally fulfilled in my work in the field of accounting.

I enjoy being part of a very large organization with at least 10,000 employees.

I would not consider a profession in which I could not earn at least \$70,000 per year.

Although it is not always possible to be so specific, if your data support a very exacting theme, by all means you should embrace it. The more themes you have that are specific, the easier it will be to focus your job search and to make career decisions.

#### **Theme 1: Location is an important factor in my work and a very significant determinant of career choice and job satisfaction.**

##### **Supporting Evidence:**

- I was offered an interesting role as worldwide management development manager for HP, a perfect fit for my interests and background with one major drawback: It was based in Palo Alto, California. Despite our lack of interest in relocating, after discussions with the new manager I accepted the position. (CA)
- The company had many opportunities that I did not even consider because they would have required me to leave the Boston area. (CA)
- My motivation to move to Europe was primarily personal. I was looking for an experience that would allow me to live and work in a new culture and travel and learn more about the European continent. (CA)
- I loved my time living and working in Europe and always felt at home there. (CA)
- I was never happy working in California. Not only was I far from home, but I also never felt comfortable with the West Coast as a place to live. (CA)
- My office is in a brick building on campus with a very homey quality. The campus is located in a New England town. (TYO)
- I am living in New England, either in Boston, Portland, Maine, or western Massachusetts. (TYO)
- Location is always valued. (CVCS)
- Lifestyle representation shows home and location as a central theme. (LRE)



- I think that the location and your work environment matter a great deal to you. (IWO)

**Contradictory Evidence:**

- I accepted an important job in California despite the fact that I could not see myself living there. (CA)

**Theme 2: I am very passionate about issues of social justice and value diversity.**

**Supporting Evidence:**

- I had been a long-term member of the business's Diversity Advisory Board. (CA)
- I was asked to act as the executive sponsor for the Gay and Lesbian Employee Network, which I was happy to do. I learned a great deal from working with the officers of this employee group about the prejudices and difficulties they face. (CA)
- "He is a true champion of an inclusive work environment. This stems from his strong personal philosophy and commitment to these issues." (PEA)
- "He was recognized for his work with the disabled and received the Outstanding Citizenship Award from a group that provides employment opportunities for the disabled." (PEA)
- Helping others is always valued. (CVCS)
- Helping society is always valued. (CVCS)
- Diversity is always valued. (CVCS)
- I scored very high on social orientation and basic interest scales, including adult development, counseling, and religious activities. (SII)
- High match with jobs: social worker, counselor, psychologist, religious leader, and rehabilitation counselor. (SII)
- We spend a few weeks every year doing volunteer work with the family. (5YO)
- I took an enormous pay cut in order to work in a role that I felt would have a more direct and positive impact on working people. (CA)
- My sympathies politically have always gone to the poor and disenfranchised. If I had my way, the well off would pay higher taxes, and we would create more social programs to help those in need. (CA)

**Contradictory Evidence:**

- I sometimes find myself talking about helping others but not acting on it. I get too preoccupied with my own concerns. (CA)
- Most of my career has been spent working in environments that are made up predominantly of affluent white employees with high educational levels. (CA)
- "I know you feel strongly about issues relating to diversity, but that does not always gel with the fact that you live in an upper-class, predominantly white suburb." (IWO)

The question of how many themes one should develop is an interesting one. Although students sometimes are surprised to hear this, about 15 themes is probably a reasonable number to aim for. Some people's first reaction is that 15 themes are too many; there couldn't possibly be that many truths they can derive from the data with conviction. However, it is important to remember that themes do not have to be large, sweeping statements; in fact, it is sometimes better if they are not. A theme does not have to encapsulate your philosophy of life in a single sentence. Instead, they are simply statements you can make about yourself with a high degree of confidence because they reflect a clear pattern of behavior, interests, values, and choices, as is evidenced in your self-assessment data.

The breadth of topics that themes can cover also gives you ample opportunity to develop a large number. Topics probably will include things such as fields you are interested in, the importance of family or friends, things you love doing, places you want to live, and roles you enjoy playing. They might also include such things as the level of your aspirations, the kinds of organizations you like being part of, the importance of certain values in your work (e.g., status, prestige, affluence, helping others), and the importance of values in your life outside work. The following is a sample list of themes:

### Sample Themes

1. My career has always involved working in "people" professions, which has been a good fit.
2. I am highly effective process facilitator.
3. When I think about my professional identity, "teacher" or "being an educator" has always been the most central way to describe it.
4. As I get older, family plays an increasingly important part in my identity and is now more important than my career.
5. Living and working in the Boston area is very important to me.
6. My work environment is a very important determinant of job satisfaction.
7. I have a very strong interest in issues of social justice and diversity.
8. I have always enjoyed being in an academic environment.
9. My wife is my best friend and my most trusted advisor.
10. Although I have always been a good saver, I also enjoy having the opportunity to be frivolous (even if I don't act on it).
11. I enjoy working in organizations that have high status and credibility.

12. I deeply dislike traveling on business and being away from my family.
13. I vacillate between being involved too much with others and seeking refuge in isolation.
14. My self-concept wavers from extremely confident to highly self-critical.
15. I no longer have the ambition to climb the hierarchy that I once did.
16. I do not spend enough time smelling the roses and reflecting on my good fortune and success.
17. I take great joy in appreciating the arts, aesthetics, and beauty.
18. I have never lost my connection to growing up in a working-class environment.
19. I enjoy consulting with organizations on complex problems.

## Developing Career and Work–Life Implications

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Once you have done the hard work of developing your themes, you can now ask the profound question, “So what? Now that I know all this about myself, how can I use this in a way that informs my career decision-making process?” Peter Drucker offers thoughts at this stage of the process that are quite useful. He suggests one should now move to another set of questions:

- Where do I belong? According to Drucker, some people know their calling early on, but many or perhaps most do not know until they are in their mid- to late 20s. This assumes that by that time people understand answers to the more fundamental questions of who they are, what their strengths are, and what they value. Once these questions are answered, people are much more clear about where they belong and where they don’t.
- What should I contribute? To answer this question, Drucker suggests three distinct steps: “What does the situation require?” “Given my self-knowledge, how can I make the greatest contribution to what needs to be done?” and “What results need to be achieved to make a difference?” (Drucker, 1999, p. 71).

Drucker’s questions move us to a transition process from self-assessment to deriving implications for career choice and development. Referring back to the text originally developed by Kotter and his colleagues at Harvard Business School, then updated by Clawson, this step is called drawing implications from themes. As Clawson and his colleagues state,

The final step in the self-assessment process involves identifying the career and job implications inherent in a set of themes. The ultimate purpose here is to translate the basic assessment into a more useful form. (Clawson et al., 1992, p. 229)

We are indebted for Clawson and his colleagues for developing this process of thematic analysis as a way of summarizing the important elements in a person's career identity. The following approach bridges the gap from self-assessment to career development.

The goal here is to create a list of implications that are derived from your self-assessment themes. In some ways, the implications may sound similar to themes. But rather than stating something about you per se, an implication suggests what your theme means in terms of potential career options. A simple example of the difference between a theme and an implication is as follows:

*Theme:* I am very committed to living in the Boston area.

*Implication:* I will focus my job search on positions and employers in the Boston area.

Like themes, implications are rarely derived from one piece of data. Most implications come from combinations of a number of related themes. By combining a number of themes, we can begin to see how these themes spell out implications for one's life and one's work. An example of this is as follows:

*Theme:* One of my highest priorities in life is to help the poor.

*Theme:* I am not motivated by the need for high earnings.

*Theme:* I would like to have a position of leadership in an organization.

*Implication:* A senior-level position in a social service agency might be an excellent career option to consider.

A process for developing these implications is as follows:

1. Put each theme on a card or piece of paper.
2. Group all themes together that seem to be strongly related.
3. Because each theme probably will relate to more than one group, make duplicate theme cards wherever necessary and have the theme appear in each appropriate group.
4. When the groups are completed, review the themes in each group carefully and come up with an implication that captures the ideas expressed in the collective themes (Clawson et al., 1992, p. 229).

Like themes, implications should be supported by data; in this case, the data are the themes. But as with themes, it is important to remember that contradictions are to be expected. You may find that you have five or six themes that strongly support a given career implication. For example, you might have themes that suggest the implication “I would probably enjoy being a high school teacher in a public school system.” However, if you have themes that suggest you are highly motivated by monetary rewards or you value working alone, you cannot ignore this information. These should be listed as contradictory evidence, or perhaps you should develop other implications that ultimately will be incorporated into your career thinking.

An example of a list of implications is provided. Working from the list of sample themes presented in the last section, the following is a list of potential implications and how they could be presented:

### Sample Implications

1. I should consider a role in an academic environment, possibly as a college professor. (Supporting themes: 1–8, 11–13, 15, 19)
2. I should focus my job search on careers related to human resource management or workforce management. (Supporting themes: 1–3, 7, 11, 13, 18, 19)
3. I should not seek positions that are or will lead to roles in senior management. (Supporting themes: 4, 8, 12–16, 18. Contradictory themes: 1, 2, 19)
4. I would like a role that keeps me living and working in the Boston area. (Supporting themes: 5, 12, 17)
5. At this stage of my life, my family is more important to me than career success. (Supporting themes: 4, 9, 12, 15, 16)
6. Whatever industry I work in, I should be involved in work that is focused on education, individual development, or organization development. (Supporting themes: 1, 2, 3, 8, 19)
7. I should consider working in high-status not-for-profit organizations that might be focused on issues such as education, social activism, or healthcare. (Supporting themes: 1, 3, 6–8, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18)

You could develop even more implications than the sample ones listed here. The important thing is that you understand the process and apply it rigorously to the development of your implications. This is almost identical to the process you have just used to create your life themes, although it should be much simpler because you are using a much smaller data pool for your implications (i.e., your 15–20 life themes). This activity often

benefits from group brainstorming. Working with others who know you, or simply fellow students from a career class you are participating in, can help you to identify implications you may not previously have come up with on your own.

Finally, you might ask, "How specific should an implication be?" They should be as specific as possible. As with themes, don't try to come up with one statement that says it all. It might be possible to look at the sample themes in this chapter and make one sweeping statement that sums them up (e.g., "This person should be a director of education for a high-status university in Boston."). Although an implication such as this is acceptable, at this stage it is premature. We are looking for pointers that give direction, not final answers. Any implication that suggests that there is only one very specific course of action is premature and channels one's focus too narrowly at this stage of the process. Career exploration and information gathering, covered in chapter 4, are the important next steps. Being open to a number of possible options is where most readers should be at this stage of the process.

## Summary

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At this point you should have an excellent idea of who you are, what is important to you, and what you are looking for from your work. We now have a self-assessment that is grounded in a set of well-developed life themes. We have also begun to think about the implications of this knowledge for your career options, direction, and decision making.

Now it is time to move from your internal world to the exploration of the external world of work. The clarity you have gleaned from the self-assessment phase should help you focus your work as you begin to ponder what work you want to do and in what environment you want to do it.