

1. Description

Reflecting on my professional journey at the age of 56, I recognise that my career has been shaped more by survival than by structured development. While many younger individuals today enter the workforce with multiple languages, qualifications, and confidence, my own path was marked by instability, hardship, and limited opportunities. Much of my employment consisted of short-term, physically demanding roles that required resilience rather than cognitive or academic skills. These included manual labour, painting boats, and long shifts in low-paid industries. As my physical health has declined, sustaining such work has become increasingly difficult, leaving me dependent on social support systems. This background has significantly influenced how I perceive my career and my place in society.

2. Feelings

Looking back evokes complex emotions. There is a strong desire to distance myself from painful memories of poverty, homelessness, and instability. At times, I have felt that my past overshadows my present, creating a sense of inadequacy when comparing myself to those with academic achievements or stable career paths. I have also felt frustration with societal expectations and the belief that higher education automatically guarantees success, when in reality many graduates still struggle to secure meaningful employment (Brown and Scase, 2005). Despite these feelings, engaging in higher education now has allowed me to confront these emotions and begin reframing my identity.

3. Evaluation

When evaluating my career, it is difficult to identify traditional markers of success. My employment history was fragmented, and I often felt that nothing had worked in my favour. However, through reflection I can recognise strengths that emerged from these experiences, including resilience, adaptability, and the ability to navigate hardship. Access to support services, such as housing assistance and food banks, provided stability during critical moments. Entering education later in life has also offered new opportunities for growth, including developing digital skills, improving literacy, and beginning to build a personal development plan (OECD, 2019). Although my past roles did not offer progression, they contributed to my perseverance and capacity to rebuild.

4. Analysis

My earlier perceptions of career development were influenced by structural inequalities and limited access to education. Theoretical models such as Holland's RIASEC (Holland, 1997) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Furnham, 2020) often assume stable environments and consistent personal development, which did not reflect my lived reality. These tools can be useful for some individuals, but they may oversimplify human complexity and fail to account for socioeconomic barriers. Research shows that

career trajectories are shaped by social class, opportunity, and life circumstances as much as by personality or preference (Brown and Scase, 2005). Understanding this has helped me challenge the belief that my past defines my future. Instead, I now recognise that personal growth, education, and reflective practice can support new directions at any stage of life.

5. Conclusion

Although I have felt disappointment and frustration when reflecting on my career, I now understand that my past does not determine my future. Developing a personal brand, building confidence, and engaging in education are meaningful steps toward change. Personal identity is not fixed; it evolves through experience, reflection, and purposeful action (Moon, 2013). My journey demonstrates that resilience can be a foundation for transformation. While my spelling, digital skills, and confidence are still developing, I am now on a path toward self-understanding and empowerment.

6. Action Plan

Moving forward, I intend to apply the professional development methods introduced in this module. This includes continuing to build digital and academic skills, completing my driving licence, strengthening communication abilities, and developing healthier relationships. I will also construct a structured Personal Development Plan (PDP) to set realistic short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Developing critical thinking and the ability to question assumptions will support my confidence and independence (Moon, 2013). Most importantly, I aim to cultivate resilience not only as a survival mechanism but as a tool for growth, enabling me to overcome obstacles and pursue new opportunities. By focusing on education, self-reflection, and purposeful action, I can create a future that is not defined by past hardship but by ongoing development and hope.

Reference List (Harvard Style)

Brown, P. and Scase, R. (2005) *Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion*. London: Routledge.

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