

## EAD 864- Adult Career Development

### Unit 6

Becky Jones

Throughout this class various case studies have provided a glimpse into the vast array of paths that are possible throughout adult career development. In addition they have given us an insight into how, despite these differences, and seemingly unconnected careers, we can still draw generalisations and apply theories of development. Boyatzis and Kolb propose one such theory that can be applied across a spectrum of careers. They propose that we, as adult learners, move through three different modes: Performance Mode, Learning Mode and Development Mode. Unlike many developmental theorists, whom believe we progress throughout states of learning as a progression, Boyatzis state that one can move fluidly between and across modes, and that we may alternate between modes and even be in different modes in different areas of our lives. It appears that they believe a mode to be a state, or a manner of acting, and therefore can be observed as a behavior. Their modes can be defined as: Performance Mode- in which learners are trying to master new skills or navigate a new environment, Learning Mode- in which learners seek to expand their role, seeking for self-improvement and a desire to apply newly acquired skills and knowledge to a wider context and finally Development Mode- in which the focus becomes the meaning of our lives and values to achieve self-fulfillment. To explore the application of these modes I will focus on the case studies of Erin Brockovich, Dr. Danielle Ofri, and Linda Greenlaw. Whilst focusing on the modes it is clear from their definitions that those persons embodying their characteristics are extremely driven in their chosen careers and learning. It is no coincidence therefore that I have chosen to focus on the three of the highly driven females focused upon in this class. All three have had a profound impact on myself through their exploration and, I believe, demonstrate all three modes at various times throughout their development.

Boyatzis and Kolb state that the performance mode can be demonstrated by a "person's growth and adaptation through a focus on effective job performance." Brockovich's initial drive to succeed in her career was led by her desperation to provide for her family. This primal urge to protect her children led her to begin her employment with the legal firm, kick starting her highly focused but unstructured learning into the Pacific Gas case. Throughout the case Brockovich's drive moves from her need to provide for her family to her single-handed drive to protect and help the families impacted by the water pollution. She is seen throughout the movie, and indeed real life events, straddling the bridge between performance and learning mode. We see Brockovich struggle with the routine of the legal firm and her difficulties as an outsider to her new environment, whilst simultaneously seeking to expand and develop her own knowledge and applying this in wider contexts of her work. Brockovich's deep empathy for the families she meets through her investigations lead her to further her own knowledge in order to gain justice. Her focus on bringing PG&E to account for their actions developed a routine of confrontation and investigation leading to her development of new skills, elevating Brockovich's effective job performance and her own ultimate personal growth. Despite a career in law not being her initial focus, she was able to adapt to a successful career in law.

It appears there are many links and indeed crossovers between the modes of Performance and Learning, and it can be said that most, if not all, cases move between the two. It is worth noting that the "quest for mastery" outlined by Boyatzis and Kolb in their Performance mode will often require some of the skills listed under the Learning mode, specifically: application of skills, self-image and contingent values. Therefore a spiral path between the two might be needed in all career development. Boyatzis and Kolb identify the Development mode as "a person in this mode is preoccupied with

perpetual human and social dilemmas, typically in the form of a 'calling'. The person's intent is focused on fulfilment of his or her pursuit, or calling, in terms of a specific agenda." And "the prerequisite to entry into this mode is typically an event in life that provides the search for purpose or calling." Throughout the events Brockovich does not appear to develop through the need for self-fulfilment, however it can be said that her interaction with the cases and her personal struggle with continuing in the case could be seen as her life event and calling, entering her into the Development Mode.

Throughout the book *Incidental Findings*, Dr. Ofri demonstrates her "quest of mastery" into the discipline of medicine. We hear of her development from formal training and learn of the continuous need to further her knowledge in order to successfully treat her vast array and variety of patients and illnesses. We see Ofri move between Performance and Learning Mode, through her travels to various clinics during her sabbatical, in order to develop her knowledge of medicine. As a practitioner we are constantly seeing Ofri moving from the understanding and development of knowledge or skills and its practical application in her consultation room. Despite Ofri's clear passion and talent in her career, we do at times however see Ofri in a state of flux, both morally and at the hands of her insecurities. It is at these times when we see Ofri move into Development Mode, searching for her place in medicine. Two events stand out to me from her writing: her interaction to help a young woman obtain a safe abortion and her treatment of Mr Karlin whom has an unexpected reaction to valium. Both events prompted Ofri to re-evaluate her role as a doctor. The first prompted Ofri to question her obligation to employer, patient and the medical code of conduct and the second led her to rethink and second-guess her actions for several days. This insecurity does not stop Ofri from doing her job but does act as a reminder to the difficulties she will face in her career. Ultimately Ofri is clear that medicine is her calling and reinforces her belief that the patient always comes first.

Boyatzis and Kol's theory of Performance Mode is clear throughout the journey of Greenlaw's career. In *The Hungry Ocean* Greenlaw demonstrates a "quest for mastery" throughout her career as a sword fish boat captain, "To be considered a successful Grand Banks Fisherman, a captain must manage three things: the boat, the crew and the fish". Much of her learning is grounded in the basic need for survival and her love of the ocean. It is clear from her writing that she has a passion for the ocean and an intrinsic desire to succeed in her career. She is looking to develop her own skills and is clear that this is for self-fulfilment. Greenlaw describes the necessity of safety in her work: the need for maintenance of equipment, developing trust and work ethic with crew and innate sense of fishing with a respect for the environment around her. Through this she embodies the need to master her skills in order to return safely to shore with enough fish to make the trip worthwhile.

It could also be said however that Grennlaw enters development mode in her career change. Her desire to develop family ties and return to shore could act as her final pull to self-fulfilment and her daily events providing her realisation to the dangerous nature of her work and her "calling" for safety. She quickly realises however that her real calling is that of the ocean, and she returns to her one true love following short breaks for writing and now public appearances.

Greenlaw's daily career has similarities with Ofri, despite their polar opposites in terms of activity. They both deal daily with demanding positions, extended working hours, a need for minute detail and focus, operations and people management, and occupational hazards. Both seek self-fulfilment in their careers, have received their "calling" to their profession, but, at times, have challenged their position and involvement in their career.

Boyatzis and Kolb's theory can be widely applied across a variety of careers and apply common themes across the diversity this brings. They present ways in which

professionals pass through "modes" at various points in both their career and personal lives. Although their belief we are, as learners, in one "dominant" mode at a time, they leave the door open for movement and development between these modes "The basic question that allows insight into the mode is not the choice of activity but what people are doing with the experience." Careers form an integral part of our modern human nature and this class has reinforced to me the individual nature that their development can take.