The kinds and character of changes adults negotiate across worklife transitions

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Abstract

The transitions adults negotiate across their working lives need to be further understood for governments, workplaces, and the community to effectively support these adults. Through analyses of worklife history interview data with 30 working age adults, distinct kinds of changes comprising these transitions have been delineated as representative of changes that have person-particular meanings and impacts. This delineation represents understandings of processes and outcomes for adults' learning and development. These transitions have specific kinds of scope, duration, and impacts in terms of continuity/discontinuity with individuals' earlier activities and knowing. Transitions can be objectively observed, captured, and represented by a complex of personal, institutional, and/or brute factors. Understanding the changes comprising these worklife transitions and how they can be supported and facilitated requires accounting for societal factors as well as individuals' personal histories and legacies and impacts of maturation. A schema representing six kinds of changes is presented and illuminated.

Worklife Transitions

The transitions adults negotiate across their working lives as they seek to secure, maintain and develop further their employability are of interest to governments, workplaces, and workers themselves. Governments and their supra-governmental counterparts (e.g., Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]) are concerned that working age adults can respond to changing work and occupational requirements to sustain their employability across lengthening working lives (OECD, 2006). That employability positions them as helpful contributors to economic and social goals. Workplaces seek currency and adaptability in the skills of their workforces to effectively respond to changing requirements for the goods and services they produce (Bughin et al., 2018; Healy et al., 2017). Through this currency and adaptability, enterprises' viability and sustainability can be realised. Working age adults are needing to navigate pathways to sustain their employability, including maintaining their occupational and workplace competence in changing circumstances and when seeking advancement (Andersson & Köpsén, 2018; Bocciardi et al., 2017; Malcarney et al., 2017). Understanding how these adults come to confront and negotiate worklife transitions and the changes they comprise is, therefore, central to understanding what constitutes worklife learning and how it can be mediated by these adults, by others, or by institutional interventions (e.g., lifelong education). Existing understandings and accounts of learning across working life, whilst helpful and informative, now need extending to accommodate the diversity of the transitions that adults encounter in contemporary working lives. With increased frequency of change in occupational and workplace requirements, and diversity in the ethnicity, culture, education, and gender of working populations (Billett 2006), these transitions are likely to be increasingly complex, heterogeneous and person-dependant. Consequently, we need guiding precepts that can accommodate and account for the complexity and person-dependence of the diverse

working age adults' learning pathways and the kinds of transitions they encounter. There are helpful and established bases to inform these precepts, however.

Explanations of the processes and outcomes of human development across the lifespan variously emphasise stages of development associated with individuals' age and their biological, societally-derived or sociopsychological progress (B. Baltes et al., 2019). Quite commonly, some form of linearity (i.e., age, physical and cognitive maturation, societal roles) or sequential and lock-step transitions across these stages act as key explanatory premises. These accounts (i.e., theories) emphasise biological maturation (usually of children and adolescents), characterising the physical and cognitive capacities possessed at certain maturation stages as determined by biological changes that permit or signal the transition to the next stage (e.g., Piaget & Inhelder, 1973). Theories privileging sociopsychological development (e.g., Erikson, 1959) extend these considerations into adulthood and emphasise alignments between developmental stages and particular societally derived roles and expectations upon which developmental processes and outcomes are judged in terms of successful transitions (e.g., adults becoming good providers, parents, employees). Others offer explanations of adult development broadly encompassing combinations of maturation and societal roles (e.g., P. Baltes & Staudinger, 1996), whilst others focus on specific aspects of worklife history from psychosocial (e.g., Olesen, 2007) or ontogenetic (i.e., development across personal life history; Billett et al., 2005) positions. The former of these emphasise the social and societal suggestions as comprising and constituting transitions individuals encounter across their working lives, whilst others privilege individuals' experiencing of them, as shaped by earlier personal experiences and maturation – their ontogenetic development (Billett, 2003).

These latter accounts of development across the adult lifespan are helpful for understanding what directs and supports learning across working lives. Not the least is the suggestion that this learning can be illuminated and elaborated through the transitions in activities and roles working age adults engage in. This analysis needs to include the complex of maturational, social, and personal factors comprising these changes and also shapes how working age adults negotiate those transitions (B. Baltes et al., 2019), albeit in person-dependent ways. That person-dependence is positioned as both the process through which these transitions are negotiated and resolved and a product of them: these adults' development. However, being person-dependent, worklife transitions are often a product of press or pressure of societal or community-derived suggestions (e.g., Erickson 1959) such as the need to be employed in productive work and to identify with socially derived forms such as occupations, managing family responsibilities, and this includes maturational factors such as ageing and its impacts upon the ability to engage in paid work. Societal suggestions and pressure comprising transformations in economic, technical, and social factors are often becoming more frequent in working life (Billett, 2006) and social forms and practices are claimed as becoming more fluid in the contemporary era (Shamy, 2020).

Therefore, contemporary explanations of adult development across working life need to focus on the (a) personal bases and impacts of these transformations, (b) imperatives creating worklife transitions and their consequences, and (c) means by which they are mediated (i.e., worklife learning, lifelong education, support within community). These changes include working life transitions now being less linear, often incomplete before new imperatives, challenges and change arise; also, occupational sustainability, whilst intense, is often of shorter durations and more disrupted and dynamic than in earlier times (Billett et al., 2005). The focus on being negotiated in person-dependent ways is likely

stronger now because of the diversity of working age adults' goals and intentions associated with those transitions. These workers' capacities to engage with and respond to these transitions is mediated by personal factors, not the least being that their learning and development is a product of premediate (i.e., earlier) experiences (Valsiner, 1998). Added here are how brute facts (i.e., those of nature (Searle 1995)) of maturation (e.g., ageing) shape societally derived roles and imperatives that mediate the kinds of work options that are available and viable (e.g., age-tolerant work).

This complex of factors emphasises the central interplay and interdependence between dynamic and increasingly unpredictable social suggestions (e.g., unexpected and unprecedented changes to work), on the one hand, and how individuals come to construct and construe these experiences, on the other. It is necessary, therefore, to understand the qualities and characteristics of those transitions in terms of the relations among societal suggestions and brute and personal facts that together comprise changes that working age adults confront as they negotiate changes across working lives. These transitions and changes are captured as institutional, a socially or institutionally derived fact (i.e., that from society or its institutions) and brute facts (i.e., those of nature) (Searle, 1995) and personal factors comprising individuals' ontogenetic development and their accompanying personal epistemologies (i.e., those that arose through individuals' personal histories) (Billett, 2009). Together, these premises provide a platform to illuminate worklife transitions in the contemporary era, the changes they comprise and learning necessitated for their negotiation. That platform, however, also requires the delineation and elaboration of the kinds of changes that constitute the transitions that working age adults need to negotiate. An initial attempt to offer such delineations is advanced here.

In advancing categorises of these kind of changes and their qualities, firstly, the concept of transitions and changes they comprise are presented and discussed. Following this is a brief description of the procedures through which a set of six categories of changes associated with worklife transitions are delineated. Then, these categories of changes are described, illustrated and elaborated. Some initial considerations for the mediation of those changes and implications for worklife learning and lifelong education are advanced in conclusion. It is anticipated that the approach adopted, and findings presented and discussed can contribute to understanding the kinds and combinations of changes working age adults confront and to which they respond by learning across working lives. Importantly, it also informs discussions about what constitutes lifelong education and how it might be enacted.

Transitions

As noted, many key explanatory accounts of human lifespan development emphasise transitions at specific life stages and the importance of successfully negotiating them and those of working age adults is no exception. A key measure of the quality of individuals' development is their ability to, and legacy of, successfully negotiating these transitions as their personal, workplace, or societal circumstances change. As noted, some accounts, such as Piaget's account of cognitive development in children, emphasised maturation or biological development (i.e. brute facts) as bases for readiness to make transitions to the next stage of cognitive development and activities (Piaget & Inhelder, 1973). However, with adults that readiness is likely to be premised upon what they know, can do, and value (i.e., their knowledge) and its adaptability to new and changing circumstances, because these developmental goals are societally premised. Beyond their understandings (i.e., what they know) and procedural capacities (i.e., what they can do) are dispositions (Perkins, Jay, & Tishman, 1993) their engagement in, intentionality for, and direction of thinking and acting are directed, albeit set within cultural and social

dispositions. For instance, Erickson's (1959) stages of psychosocial development emphasised successfully negotiating socially defined transitions was foundational for development progression across the lifespan. While this explanation proposed linear progression across a set of predictable adult life events, contemporary lives and working lives are often less linear, predictable and more circuitous, particularly for those electing social or geographic mobility and/or encountering significant change, destruction, or displacement (e.g., Campion, 2018; Wehrle, Kira, & Klehe, 2019). Socially and societally defined roles may now be more dynamic and fleeting than in earlier times, albeit still distinct across different social and cultural contexts. And whilst lifespan remains linear, the movements within and across it are seemingly less lockstep and often more uncertain and dynamic than a few decades since (B. Baltes et al., 2019; DeRobertis & Bland, 2020). Yet, there is also constancy, with development across the entire lifespan as being ontogenetic and shaped by both maturational and societal factors, with the possibilities that transitions in each stage comprise both gains and losses for the individual (P. Baltes & Staudinger, 1996). So, whilst individual's maturation and societal roles and imperatives remain central elements to transitions in adult life, what they constitute and how they are negotiated have evolved. Not the least here is that working life has, for many workers, become longer and issues of maturation are likely to be particularly impactful in occupations that are age intolerant.

Consequently, understanding the transitions adults need to negotiate and the changes that these transitions comprise are helpful to elaborate adult learning and development in the contemporary era. Responses to governmental, workplace, and individual concerns about employability and continuity in working life can be informed by such an elaboration including what should comprise lifelong education and its enactment. Yet, in acknowledging that lifespan learning, and development are personally distinct; or, put another way, that there are inter-individual differences comprises an important premise for understanding learning across adult life. The concept of ontogeny or ontogenetic development – learning and development across individual life course (Billett et al., 2005) – emphasises the person-dependence or uniqueness of individuals' experiences from which they construct meaning. Their earlier or premediate experiences shape how they engage with and what they subsequently experience and learn (Valsiner, 1998) in person-dependent. The interdependence between premediate and immediate experiences render legacies (i.e., ontogenetic development) a product of individuals' experiences and how they have been construed, and constructed (i.e., lifelong learning). Premediate experiences are not sufficiently captured by the concept of prior learning, as comprise the ongoing bases through their development arises and how they imagine, reimagine, and direct their thinking and acting and the intentions that sit behind it, and the brute fact of energy, time, and effort they can expend (i.e., their experiencing). Distinguishing experiences, therefore, seems essential in the person and the ways in which the process of experiencing progresses.

These kinds and complexes of premises can be illuminated and appraised through investigating the transitions and changes that they comprise across individuals' working lives. As proposed within the accounts provided below, often these transitions are initiated, suggested and even pressured by the social world beyond the person. In the case of working life, this includes changes to work, occupational practices, and societal circumstances, such family responsibilities, needing or forced to migrate etc. It can include moving to new locations and new countries and having to engage with languages and unfamiliar social and cultural mores and practices. Yet, apart from and sometimes including the most forceful of circumstances, how these transitions are initiated, enacted, and negotiated by adults, including resistance(Knights & Willmott, 1989). Consequently, judgements made about their resolution,

offer bases for analysing learning and development across adults' working lifespan (Mishler, 2004). Central to those transitions is what changes they represent to individuals, and how they respond to and secure legacies in terms of their learning and development. In all, given these complexities, identifying the kinds and qualities of changes that comprise these transitions for adults offers a means by which both the objective character of these social suggestions and the personal implications of these changes can be understood, including brute facts of maturation.

Worklife History Interviews

The investigation reported and discussed here seeks to generate evidence-based premises and understandings about supporting worklife learning arrangements that can promote workers' employability. It aims to understand how their learning arises across and through working life and can be supported more effectively through work activities, educational provisions, and other forms of mediation and guidance. As a starting point, the investigation reported here attempts to identify the kinds of changes and transitions that working age adults have had to confront, particularly those associated with their working lives and how they have negotiated them. The method for data gathering was life history interviews: interviewing a cohort of adults to capture retrospective accounts of their worklife experiences and learning. Each informant initially engaged in an unstructured interview to provide a retrospective account of their worklife histories. The worklife history approach (Olesen, 2016) uses initial prompts about how informants' working life commenced; they are then encouraged to provide a narrative or story of their worklife history. The interviewer's role is to encourage and support the unfolding narrative, but not to intervene to make judgements or seek justifications. Such considerations are engaged with in a second interview once the life history narrative has been tentatively analysed.

In this study, participants were recruited through local contacts. Participants are given a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity. The first interviews took approximately an hour and the second interviews up to 40 minutes. The analyses reported here comprised identifying significant transitions the informants had been subject to or had initiated in the first interview. The second interview enabled an exploration of specific events or incidents in the participants' narratives, with questions specifically: (a) verifying transitions identified for these informants, (b) elaborating factors associated with their initiation and enactment, (c) identifying the learning required to negotiate these transitions, and (d) elaborating any forms of external mediation (e.g., education programs) playing a role in negotiating those transitions. This form of interview was considered most suited for securing the narration of participants' life histories (Olesen, 2016).

Criterion-based sampling was used to recruit 30 informants able to provide detailed and substantial retrospective accounts of worklife learning processes and outcomes. This required identifying informants who had confronted changes and transitions in their working life. Collectively, the cohort (a) roughly had same number of men and women, (b) who represented a range of work and occupations, (c) reflect the multicultural Australian adult population (i.e., those born in and outside of Australia), and have had experience in the "old and emerging economies" (i.e., ways of working and kinds of work). Informants were required to have had at least two decades of work and have had career transitions, albeit in changing their kinds of work (e.g., different occupations) or circumstances in which they had worked (i.e., immigration, refugee status, decline or rise of their industry/occupation), or disruptions associated with health or family; and have sufficient English to articulate their experiences.

The interviews were mainly conducted face-to-face; however, social distancing requirements (i.e. COVID-19) meant some second interviews were conducted via electronic means (e.g., Zoom, Skype, or Teams). Using the above criteria, the 30 participants were identified, selected, their informed consent gained and then interviewed on the two occasions.

Changes That Initiate, Shape, and Represent Worklife Transitions

From 30 detailed work history interviews with working age adults, a list of changes that initiate, shape, and represent transitions they needed to address were identified. Through a process of thematic review and analysis, the transitions' informants reported were categorised as comprising six kinds of distinct and delineated changes (i.e. in life stages; employment status, occupations, location, physical and psychological well-being, and lifestyle), albeit with some subcategories (10 kinds) as shown in Table 1. In that table, the centre column is used to describe the kinds of changes, and the right column provides a brief description based on whether these changes are primarily a brute fact), or personal facts. These three categories were used to initially delineate them.

Table 1

Kinds of Changes that Initiate, Shape, and Represent Worklife Transitions

Categories/ Sub-categories	Kinds of changes	Descriptions
1	Stages of life changes	Maturation – brute fact
2	Change of employment status	Socially derived – institutional fact
3	Change in occupations	Individually and socially derived – intersection between personal and institutional facts
3a	Change in occupations or occupational focus	
3b	Change in skills and capacities	Personal fact
3c	Change in employment through restructuring or changed economic circumstances	
4	Change in location	Geographical or societal: accommodating new language, norms, forms, and practices – institutional facts
5	Change in physical and psychological health/well-being	Maturation – brute fact; institutional facts such as societally derived pressures
5a	Change in personal health and well-being	
5b	Change in family health and well-being	
6	Change in personal/lifestyle	Personal facts – individual choice/agency
6a	Change in personal preferences and values	Personal facts
6b	Change in subjectivity	Personal facts

Many transitions informants often reported experiencing were the product of or shaped by simultaneous changes and shaped by multiple imperatives and of different scale. For instance, a transition comprising a geographical relocation might include change of occupational status or changing occupations. These, in turn, might involve learning a new language and societal norms, forms, and practices, when relocating across countries, particularly when migrants confront new linguistic, social, and cultural practices. To understand how adults' learning and development progresses across working

lives, it is helpful to define and characterise a set of transitions, their scope and means of transaction albeit they are likely to be distinct in some ways. Among the changes associated with 205 transitions identified across the 30 life history interviews, personal or lifestyle changes (193/205) and their associated impacts were most frequently reported. Whilst there is much emphasis on changing requirements of work and employment as captured in the second and fourth most frequently reported change (i.e., Occupational of 188/205, Employment status of 123/205), the personal was that most frequently reported as subject to change. Issues of maturation and changes in physical or geographical location follow, with physical and psychological health being the least frequently reported (15/205). However, these frequencies are primarily a means of indicating what factors are most prominent and of engaging in a process that tested and demanded that the categories of change identified above could be used to categorise informants' responses about transitions.

Categories of change that capture adult life transitions

In the sections below, each of the six categories of change introduced above is defined and characterised, including that the kinds of transitions and their impact are person-specific to some degree. Pseudonyms are used when referring to participants' worklife stories, whose brief backgrounds are described below. These informants engaged in diverse kinds of work and work histories. Alex is a qualified electrician, has retired from full-time employment, and is engaged in casual maintenance work. Damien, as a civil engineer, and Dylan, as a manual arts teacher, have both retired from their full-time employment. Annita is employed as a carer in the disability support sector, in addition to having her own business providing personal care. Beau, originally from Britain, and Susan, originally from Fiji, are university academics and researchers. Danim, originally from Vietnam, is a contractor of the national broadband network rollout. James, a PhD holder, is looking for paid employment after his early retirement plan was impacted by COVID-19. Randall, originally from Hong Kong, is managing an optometrist practice. Salim, a refuges migrant from Iran, is a project manager for a construction company. Sarah, originally from Britain, is the deputy principal at a primary school. Shirley is an Australian, born with a learning disability (i.e. dyslexia) and is a casual administrative worker. Simon, originally from New Zealand, is self-employed in his computer software business.
The following sections, these categorises of changes are delineated and described.

1. Stages of Life Change

Transitions can occur in response to different stages of life, which might include physiological maturity or societal roles and expectations. For instance, in early adulthood, finding a partner and commencing a family (e.g., Salim and Simon) can initiate transitions associated with needing to secure better paid or more stable employment. During the transition to parenthood, women's and men's trajectories in education and work are affected differently, women tending to have longer periods out of work than men (Nilsen & Brannen, 2012). In this study, career disruption is common to women when becoming mothers, which is aligned with findings from elsewhere, such as Cabrera (2007). Thus, a woman who has been a "stay-at-home mother" (e.g., Sarah and Susan) on completing responsibilities as primary caregiver to their children might initiate a transition by seeking employment through which personal identities can shift from being a caregiver to being defined through paid employment. At some point in their working lives, adults may elect to actively seek work or occupational pathway that is more interesting to them than their current job. Hence, such a transition is precipitated and realised by

reaching a particular stage of adult life, perhaps enabled by financial security, fulfilling parental roles, or a reappraisal of life goals etc. Yet, with each of these comprise changes for informants.

For example, *Danim* decided not to follow the rollout of the national broadband network across Australia as this would have required working away from home, wife and young children. His ability to work were premised on the availability of work that fitted with a priority to be close to his immediate family. *Randall*'s need to secure Australian citizenship and to practise an occupation that meets his mother's approval led to changes in his approach to work and working life. *Salim*, needed to find employment in post-revolution Iran to provide for his new wife and child led to him taking any available work. Here, societal and cultural sentiments prompted these changes. Salim's culturally-derived beliefs are that individuals should live by their own means and not be reliant on the state, as this indicates indolence, lack of agency required of an adult. So, here is an interplay between institutional facts (i.e., societal norms) and imperatives of the personal (i.e., to be meaningfully engaged in work that is worthwhile and provides ability to support family). In this way, the changes they encountered and needed to negotiate were a product of change in life stages.

2. Change of Employment Status

Change in employment status often comprises a combination of personal and institutional facts. For instance, shifting from being an employee to a supervisor, or self-employed, or owner of a business and employer of others, will likely bring about transitions in what individuals know, can do, and value. As such, these transitions are likely to require and/or bring about significant learning and the prospect of support, such as educational provisions to successfully negotiate these changes. Likely, these changes play a powerful role in: i) individuals' sense of self and well-being at the commencement of working life (i.e. the formation of adult occupational identity), ii) progression across working life in terms of how individuals themselves and others might view and come to judge their development and success (i.e., achievement, relative success, societal standing of occupations), and iii) towards the end of working life as they move out of paid employment and occupational roles. Hence, such transitions might be defined as those initiating, advancing, or reconciling employment status (i.e., interaction between institutional and personal facts). For instances: *Salim* moved from being a builder to a project manager (i.e., an institutional fact, but a response shaped by a combination of brute fact [work injury] and personal [interest in construction]); and *Randall* and *Simon* seeking to own businesses, rather than being employees and working for somebody else. Upon arrival in Australia, *Susan* moved from being a high school teacher to employed on a casual/part-time basis with various roles (including being an admin assistant, research assistant, and project officer) to full-time employment as a project manager at a Technical and Further Education college. So, these changes in employment status require the development of new occupational capacities and fulfilling requirements of particular work settings.

3. Occupational Change

Informants report changing their occupations across working life either voluntarily (e.g., to secure more desirable occupations – personal fact) or involuntarily because of shifts in demand for location of, or decline of demand for specific occupations or kinds of work, or even prompted by the prospect of such changes. For instance, Beau could foresee the end of clothing manufacture in Australia, so sought an alternative career. These transitions require developing new sets of occupational capacities that, by degree, may be similar to or distinct from those already possessed. This necessitates adapting what they

already know (e.g., Salim – from builder to building project manager) or generating an entirely new set of occupational-specific capacities (e.g., Salim - from builder to coffee shop owner). They may also constitute continuity or further development of what working age adults know, can do, and value, albeit in a different occupation. For instance, the tradesperson who becomes a trade teacher in a technical college builds upon their occupational capacities and experiences (e.g. Beau) but needs to develop new capacities associated with being an educator. In this way, transition as an occupational change might be defined as the further development of worklife capacities in the form of occupational-specific concepts, practices, and values. However, the imperative to do so may be personal, institutional, or brute.

3a Change in Occupations or Occupational Focus. This subcategory is associated with individuals' change in their occupations or a variation of their occupational practice. Occupations are characterised by specific work role requirements that define the tasks to be performed, and the knowledge and skills needed to accomplish these work tasks (Dierdorff et al., 2009). Thus, changing occupations implies entering different work environments where new skills and knowledge need to be acquired, whereas changing occupational focus or changing jobs might refer to mobility within an organisation or across different work settings, albeit within the same occupation (Ng et al., 2007). When *Salim* ceased working in the construction sector to become a coffee shop owner, he confronted changes in work tasks, how and with whom he engaged and how he would describe himself to others. Later, he experienced another kind of change in occupational tasks – that is, from being a builder to becoming a project manager for a building company, which more aligned with his core capacities and subjectivity. Similarly, when *Randall* went from being an optometrist to owner of an optometry practice and then a chain of optometry practices, his occupational focus shifted from being an optometrist to a businessman. Here, a distinction is made between discontinuity across occupations and a form of continuity or development within the same occupation. Yet, in both, the imperative to change can be a personal decision, like *Beau* moving from working in industry to being a vocational educator.

3b Change in Skills and Capacities. This subcategory refers to changes within individuals' capacities to practise occupations or associated roles. That is, the change comprising learning that allows individuals to engage in different or new kinds and forms of work. So, this change is about individuals' learning to appropriate and apply new knowledge. *Salim,* in attending a course on building and construction, learnt knowledge that augmented what he had learnt through an informal apprenticeship when working with others, comprising observing, imitating, and practising building work as observed in and guided by others. Later, he undertook a course about managing a coffee franchise that allowed him to operate it. However, as in Salim's case, not all occupational skill development is premised on undertaking courses (i.e. lifelong education). Nevertheless, more broadly paid employ refers to institutional facts that enable personal imperatives to be realised. For instance, *James* refers to changes in his skills through working in pubs and then a cardboard box-making company. Yet, these changes were directed and motivated by personal facts: there was an interplay between "Change in occupations or occupational focus" and "Change in skills and capacities" and amongst personal, brute, and institutional facts.

Other examples here include *Danim's* move from managing a grocery store to engaging in the broadband network rollout; *Salim* shifting from being a builder to a coffee shop franchisee; *James* moving from being an estimator and salesperson for cardboard boxes into a role within the air force.

The imperatives for these in most of these were, shaped by combinations of personal, institutional, and brute facts. *Danim* was born into a family who ran small businesses, but his parents' retirement led him to find employment within his family as this was his work habit. *Salim* injured his back and could no longer continue as a builder and then proceeded to engage in employment commensurate with his physical health (i.e. coffee shop franchisee). *James* was largely motivated by personal imperatives and through his work choices and capacities, he was able to find employment and secure work at a time of financial insecurity. In all these changes, the participants were required to develop new skills to negotiate these transitions.

3c Changes in employment through economic restructuring or change. There are also changes brought about by external factors such as economic restructuring that made some forms of work and occupations either redundant or in low supply. This often results in unintended and unpredicted worklife pathways, particularly for young adults (e.g., Bradley & Devadason, 2008; Lawrence & Marshall, 2018). The current COVID-19 pandemic has caused re-appraisals of worklife pathways.

The last 40 years has seen significant economic restructuring in many countries, sometimes premised upon globalisation and shifts in how and where goods are produced, and services provided. For instance, technological developments have seen a massive decline in rural employment in many Western countries in the 25 years leading up to the current century. Similarly, manufacturing has experienced a significant decline in many countries and shift to other countries where the labour costs are lower and/or closer proximity to materials. Hence, employment in industries such as motor vehicle and garment manufacturing has shifted to countries that have either very low labour costs or high levels of technology, or both. These are inherently institutional facts: arising from society. For instance, the restrictions on travel caused by the 2020 coronavirus has had a devastating impact upon employment within the airline sector, for pilots, cabin crew, and ground staff, as has lock downs in the hospitality sector for those working in accommodation and food preparation and service. Although the source of the changing work was a brute fact (i.e., COVID-19), the decisions arising from it (i.e., closure of workplaces and borders and quarantining efforts) are all institutional factors arising from societal decisions and practices.

For examples, *Alex*, an electrician reports struggling to find employment following the introduction of electronics and had to accept early retirement to maintain his superannuation benefits because of the global financial crisis in 2008. *James* had intended to retire from the paid workforce given his relatively strong financial situation that comprised having significant savings and investments, and accommodation that were rented to students. Together, these provided an income that allowed him (53 years old) and his wife to retire from paid work and to live in another country at relatively low cost (e.g., recently in Peru). However, this was all changed by COVID-19. Firstly, when universities in Australia were closed and overseas students could not reach Australia, their rental accommodation remained untenanted. Secondly, they needed to leave Peru when living there became increasingly dangerous in terms of health care, provision of food, and concerns about civil disorder, and their income from investments and shares dropped in value. In this way, James found himself needing to secure employment. So, changes associated with the restructuring of work generate transitions that workers have to negotiate, albeit in different ways and in diverse circumstances.

4. Change in Location

Relocation, particularly when it is involuntary can constitute significant transitions for adults. The shift from a community where the norms and practices are well known and understood, the language possessed, and futures visible and viable, to another in which all of these are unfamiliar and difficult to access and comprehend represents a significant transition regardless of their initiation (i.e., voluntary/involuntary). The scope of what needs to be learnt to successfully relocate will vary by degree. Migrants to Australia from English-speaking countries (e.g., John, Sarah, Beau) and who are able to immediately engage in occupations for which they possess competence – because they are conducted in Australia in ways similar to their birth country – will have quite distinct transitions from those who come from non-English speaking countries (e.g., Felicia, Salim, Randall) and where occupations and work practices are enacted differently. Then, there will be those from countries whose economic base is distinct from Australia's and whose occupational skills and experiences are quite remote (e.g., Salim) from those that are valued or even employable in their new country (e.g., Nathan). Beyond the occupational aspects of such relocations are also differences in societal mores and practices, such as language, employment patterns, work cultures, and composition of workforces. Males relocating from some countries might experience female co-workers or supervisors for the first time. Females locating from some countries might find that their previously restricted roles (e.g., primarily in the home) are outside of expectations that adults should participate in paid work. So, relocation as a transformation might be defined as the need to understand, accommodate, and engage in occupations and working life in ways that are, by degree, different from the previous adult life experiences.

Some examples include *Salim* coming to Australia as a refugee migrant and needing to learn English and finding an occupation to cater to his family's needs. His relocation comprised a combination of institutional factors that caused him to flee from a country where he understood the cultural norms, forms, and practices to one in which some of those were quite alien. *James* moving to a capital city to find more employment opportunities comprised a combination of personal and institutional factors. That is, the kinds of work he might seek out were not available in his country town, but his willingness to leave his country town and live in a capital city were personally intentional.

5. Physical Health/Well-Being Change

Maturation brings changes in physical capacities and dispositional well-being, through both biological progress and the accumulation of lived experiences(Billett, 2017). Physical strength, ability, and acuity of the sensory system evolve and transform across individuals' lives, and in different ways and by degrees. This maturation has impacts upon individuals' choices about working life, and at different stages across working lives as well as differing abilities to perform specific occupations. For occupations such as the military, emergency services requiring physically demanding manual work, these occupations are not age tolerant. Other aspect of age intolerance and not able to be fulfilled over lengthening working lives include being an à la carte chef and being creative in advertising or marketing (Billett, Dymock, Johnson, & Martin, 2011). So, some occupations whilst not physically challenging lead to physical and mental exhaustion and demands upon individuals' well-being and sense of self as competent adults. These are jobs from which workers do not retire at the end of a long working life. Other occupations are more age tolerant, such as the work of an academic. Consequently, such transitions might be defined as being necessitated by, or the product of, changes to physical and mental maturation that impact upon the individual's choice and ability to practise occupations.

5a Personal Health and Well-Being Change. Factors associated with personal health and well-being can lead to transitions across working life. For instance, as noted above, not all work is age tolerant. That is, employment that is physically demanding can take a toll on the human body; also, it may not be possible for adults above a certain age to carry out that work. For instance, it is quite common in emergency service work and the military for workers to retire by 40 or 45 from frontline activities, because they do not have the strength and may thus put themselves and others at harm. Sometimes those workers find related activities, such as administration or training. In an earlier study with firefighters (Billett et al., 2005), many of them were seeking roles associated with firefighting because of their sense of self as firefighters. Other workers report that beyond a certain age, although it is not regulated, it is not possible to continue the work. In one study, when a construction worker was asked what constituted an older worker he replied, insightfully, "if you are a concreter it's 40, if you are an academic it is much older". Some work, such as construction, exposes workers to the elements and after many years working outside and being exposed to heat or cold they can no longer keep on undertaking that work. Then, there are forms of work that take adults away from home for extended periods of time. This includes those in the armed forces, airline workers, fly-in and fly-out workers, and those in the merchant marine. Whilst these forms of employment may not directly affect the physical health of individuals, there are psychological consequences from being absent and continually travelling that can warrant changing either jobs or occupational roles.

5b Family Health and Well-Being Change. There can also be circumstances where issues of family health and well-being require workers to change occupations or modes and forms of work. For example, *Salim* having to move away from building work (to own and manage a coffee shop) because of a back injury was in part a consideration of concerns about being employed and continuing to make decisions, perhaps rather than being an employee. *Alex* as a diesel mechanic working on small boats had his career disrupted as he injured his back and was told he might not be able to walk for a while. *Dylan*, a civil engineer, due to health problems had to take early retirement at the age of 55 when the government offered it. Being dyslexic, *Shirley* had restricted occupational opportunities due to her limited literacy. In these ways, maturation and changes in abilities bring about changes that can shape the kinds and qualities of transitions in which workers wish to engage.

This can include the impact upon the families of workers who are absent from home for extended periods of time, or who are engaged in long term shift work that can disrupt family life, particularly childcare. Then, circumstances arise in which care for family members, including ageing parents, requires changes in location or workplaces or transitions to different forms of work or workplace. For example, *Damien*, a manual arts teacher, chose to retire at the age of 58 to take care of his wife who was injured after a fall. *Annita*'s career trajectory was totally changed after the death of her husband, as he left her with a young child; she found herself living on a single-parent pension for years before progressing into employment in the disability support sector. So, changes in family circumstances associated with others' health can require transitions.

6. Personal/Lifestyle Change

This kind of change is brought about by personal factors such as existing or emerging beliefs that could be religious, political, or ethical. For instance, the hairdresser may stop using chemical treatments on clients' hair because of the impacts upon their personal health or views about the environment (Billett,

2003); an early childhood educator might leave the sector because of beliefs about how children should be educated (Hodges, 1998); an aged care worker might leave the sector because of concerns about how elderly people are being treated in aged care residences (e.g., Hognestad Haaland et al., 2020), or an individual may experience dissonance between their environmental, vegetarian, or religious beliefs and their paid work. For example, social workers whose employer changes to an economically driven model of social care, rather than one based upon clients' needs, may decline to continue working for that company. So, such changes in either individuals' personal beliefs and approaches to lifestyle (e.g., being a vegetarian, environmentally active, commercially disengaged) bring about transitions caused by either the exercise of those beliefs or changes in occupational workplace practices which precipitate the need to transition away from that occupation, form of work, or workplace.

6a Change in Personal Preferences and Values. This subcategory refers to changes in individuals' values leading to new priorities and values. So, for instance, *Beau* made specific decisions about exploring ways of using his clothing manufacturing skills. He became interested in theatre work and learnt how to become a costumer in professional theatre. However, he became dissatisfied with this work and moved back into manufacturing but into a different kind of company. Later, he moved away from the clothing industry because of a limited future for it in a relatively high labour cost country such as Australia. In these ways, his interests and beliefs changed and this precipitated intentional changes in his worklife history. He also made a calculation that securing higher level qualifications would likely lead to a higher salary and standard of living across his life and made changes accordingly. *Randall* experienced a series of changes in his preferences by first opening a chain of optometry practices, then realising that the personal service he most valued, was not possible across multiple practices. Yet, his beliefs and values changed from being concerned with optometry to being involved in a range of businesses. And, and in doing so he began to change his subjectivity from being a professional optometrist to a businessman (see Change in Subjectivity). These transitions are initiated and enacted through interaction between personal and institutional facts. Some examples include *Salim* wanting to find work that was fulfilling for him; *James* leaving the Air Force because of a religious conflict about the death of civilians in war (i.e., interplay between personal and institutional facts) and essentially retiring from paid work as he has sufficient wealth for himself and his wife, and a desire to live elsewhere (i.e., personal options opened up by institutional facts). So, for some working age adults, there will be changes in work or personal beliefs that warrant initiating transitions to other forms of employment.

6b Change in Subjectivity. This subcategory referring to changes in how individuals come to see themselves (their sense of self or subjectivity) is evident in many of the interviews. For example, *Salim* went from being a Bahai and an Iranian citizen to a refugee migrant, to intentionally becoming an Australian, and to forming the occupational subjectivity of a builder. This change was sometimes associated with changes at stages of life, such as *Sarah* or *Susan* becoming mothers or *Randall* moving from being a student to a worker. However, *Randall* also experienced other changes in subjectivity across his working life, such as intentionally moving from being a practitioner to being manager and from being an employee to be an owner or manager. *Sarah* also experienced changes in subjectivity from being a teacher to being a deputy principal. Similarly, *Susan* experienced change in moving from being a project officer to becoming a project manager. These all led to changes in individuals' subjectivity, or how they view themselves and projections to the future. Hence, changes to or

transformations of sense of self or subjectivity can bring about the need to negotiate significant transitions.

In all, the processes that initiate and involve changes that comprise the transitions adults need to transit through are often complexes of institutional facts (i.e. those pertaining to and emanating from society)(Searle, 1995) brute facts (i.e. those pertaining to and emanating from nature) (Searle, 1995) and personal facts (i.e. those pertaining to the person) (Billett, 2009). Yet, the process of initiating, enacting, and successfully resolving transitions in adult life is rarely attributable to just one set of factors. These factors are things we cannot wish away, but we can act upon them. Even maturation and the process of ageing can be enacted quite differently. Institutional facts might be powerful and ubiquitous, but individuals have the capacity to appropriate, master, ignore, resist, or flee from them. Personal facts are often the basis for initiating and enacting transitions, but also for negotiating with them. These findings support contemporary notions of career transitions that are highly individualised, a characterisation strongly emphasised in the current career literature (Chudzikowski et al., 2009).

Adults' Working Life, Transitions, and Changes

It is evident from the life history interview data that the worklife transitions these working age adults reported negotiating were initiated and shaped by changes of different kinds and complexes of personal, institutional and brute factors. These transitions comprise, variously, changes in (a) life stages, (b) employment status, (c) occupations, (d) location, (e) health/wellbeing, and (f) personal preference or trajectories. How individuals came to respond to the changes presented to them provides a basis for analysis of learning and development across adults' working lifespan that can be based upon the scheme of factors set out here. It can also assist with illuminating the processes that initiate and support effective transitions and lifelong learning. These processes are rarely attributable to just one set of factors (i.e., personal, institutional, or brute facts); rather, they involve the initiation of transitions, support for the initiatives, and the outcome (i.e., the degree to which the intentions of these transitions are realised). Understanding the qualities and characteristics of those transitions in terms of the interrelationships among societal suggestion and the brute and personal facts that shape the changes they comprise would, firstly, provide the basis for understanding how the learning for and through these transitions progresses, and the role that lifelong education plays in affecting such transitions. Secondly, further understanding of these processes helps inform practices supporting worklife learning arrangements promoting adult workers' employability. For the latter to be realised, further analyses of the transitions are needed to identify the kinds of learning required for individuals to effectively respond to changes presented in these transitions and the kinds of educational provisions that are available and/or to be developed to support that learning for effective transitions. Those analyses can be based on and advanced through the scheme of changes set out here.

In sum, through the initial analysis of the data from 30 worklife history interviews, distinct kinds of changes comprising a transition have emerged and have been interpreted as representative of changes that have personal meaning and impact. Each transition has particular kinds of scope, duration, demands, and impacts in terms of continuity/discontinuity with earlier activities and knowing that on the one hand might be described as being able to be objectively observed, captured, and represented, but on the other are more or less shaped by personal, institutional, or brute imperatives. So, here, three forms of changes are being exercised: changes in (a) societal expectations, suggestions, cultural practices (such as occupations), norms, forms, and practices; (b) maturational development as

emphasised within societal expectations and roles; and (c) ontogenetic development – individuals' unique personal sets of experiences and negotiations leading to person-specific legacies in terms of what they know, can do, and value. So, when considering lifelong learning or lifelong education it is important to understand societal conditions and factors, unique personal histories and legacies, and impacts of maturation. Identifying key transitions in people's worklife learning and illuminating the processes and outcomes of those transitions are means through which these can be realised.

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