You Only Live Twice:

Midlife as a Creative Transition Into Our 'Second Act'

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Advisor: Dan Tomasulo

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Abstract

Our rising life expectancy mandates a re-design of our life span and redefines 'midlife' both technically and conceptually. Lagging behind other life stages in its scientific study, midlife is often connoted with a 'crisis' of sorts. Yet historically, midlife represented an apex in life; moreover, conclusive 'crisis' evidence has yet to emerge. Some manage to *thrive* in midlife by maintaining an attitude rooted in The Good Life, a concept tracing back to Aristotelian ethics. Positive psychology, the science of what makes life worth living, has studied The Good Life in modern times and contributed to understanding midlife in well-being terms. Together with neuroscience, positive psychology can help dispel myths regarding midlife, reframing it from the onset of decline into a creative transition for our 'second act' based on an enhanced sense of authorship. This self-creation process involves three key well-being themes: revision, prospection, and individuation. Reviewing these themes and 'layering' them with different well-being perspectives relevant to midlife, we may achieve meaningful positive psychological constructs and activities (and eventually, interventions) in three areas: positive narrative identity, serious play, and self-regulation. Of these, serious play, which unlocks the tacit knowledge our bodies disseminate in a state of play, seems especially key to enhancing authorship. One serious play application, LEGO Serious Play, which aims to build identities trough metaphors, seems especially promising for enhancing well-being at midlife in positive psychology workshops.

Keywords: authorship, individuation, life design, midlife, positive psychology, prospection, self-creation, serious play, well-being

Acknowledgements

Dedication

   I dedicate this capstone to my many fellow 'mid-lifers' who, despite appearances, may *also* be going through life wondering if the Talking Heads were right to proclaim, "Well…How did I get here?" and "My God! What have I done?" in their iconic 1980s song, *Once in a Lifetime*. This capstone is for all of us living (or not living) in a shotgun shack, in another part of the world, behind the wheel of a large automobile, or in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife. You may also ask yourself, "how do I work this?" Well, I suggest we say to ourselves: "we have only just begun." Midlife is our best opportunity to get started with the second part of becoming our 'real selves'.

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Introduction: Midlife (Mis-)Conceived

The majority of newborns in rich countries today have an average life expectancy of over one hundred years old (Scott & Gratton, 2016). Long term trends indicate that each generation lives up to a decade longer than its parents; eighteen-year olds, for instance, now have a more than fifty percent chance of living beyond one hundred years (Scott & Gratton, 2016). Longer life expectancy means longer and more complex working lives, especially in the face of globalization, automation and outsourcing (Scott & Gratton, 2016), and an increased pursuit of meaning in our personal lives (Smith, 2017). Yet, we continue to organize our lives and careers the way our parents, or even grandparents, did: around a seventy-year timeline based on education, career, and retirement. We look to formal education for guidance, trusting that when we finish university, we find a suitable career. Conventional career counsel in turn encourages us to take leaps into the dark, guided by the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator and other psychographic classifications that miss crucial aspects about our identity, our past, and our possible futures.

The longevity shift dictates major change: several authors propose we replace our current life views by a multi-stage life view with new stages, new ages, and with the potential for greater individual sequencing (e.g., Scott & Gratton, 2016; Super, 1990). However, what does this really mean? Do our life stages need to increase in number or become longer in duration? And what about midlife, the 'mid' point? Will we have our 'midlife crisis' at age sixty-five in the future (though this term was coined over fifty years ago, when the average lifespan was seventy years and 'midlife' came at age thirty-five; Jaques, 1965)? Will there still *be* a midlife crisis? And what will we do with the rest of our lives? It would seem that 'midlife', itself an ambiguous term, will be affected significantly by the life expectation increase that is quietly but decidedly

humming away in our lives. Yet this is not all bad news. In fact, it is a monumental opportunity

to swing our well-being pendulum decisively in the right direction.

A design thinker, I ask for your understanding of my design and making-centric world

view. Yet it seems that, besides creating the need to 're-design' our longer lives, a longer life

span also demands clearer thinking as to how our capacities *to learn, adapt* and *predict* might

yield long-term growth and well-being from multiple points of view (e.g., for individual,

organizational, cognitive, physical, and subjective well-being orientations). This is especially

true for midlife, as it falls in the mid-point – though *how* and *of what* we do not understand very

well – and not least, because the term 'midlife' carries so many negative connotations. Yet in the

context of increased longevity, midlife becomes a *transition* to what follows, not a crisis at the

onset of decline. What follows is a profoundly prospective and positive psychology-heavy point

of view that appeals to different sensibilities and capabilities than the 'usual suspects'. Let us

start with some facts and a review of how midlife has been considered historically.

Midlife: Initial Definition and Data

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 84 million middle-aged adults (aged 40-

60) in the United States, comprising 26% of the entire population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

The word 'midlife first appeared in Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary in 1895 (Lachman,

2001). According to the online Oxford English Dictionary, midlife is defined as "the central

period of a person's life, between around 45 and 60 years old." However, the boundaries for

midlife are ill-defined as no commonly agreed-upon demarcation exists. Those between the ages

of forty and sixty are typically considered to be middle-aged; yet, a ten-year range on both end

seems to exist (Lachman, 2001).

Historical Conceptions of Midlife: From Peak to Crisis

Cohen (2012) claims midlife is a relatively new phenomenon: it was invented roughly one hundred and fifty years ago. Earlier depictions of it trace back to the sixteenth century, when artists depicted the life course as a series of steps, first ascending, then descending, with a peak in the middle. This representation remained for another two centuries (Cole, 1992). The entire notion of a 'midlife' in those times, claim Lachman, Teshale, and Agrigoroaei (2015), seemed tenuous as the average life span was less than fifty years. However, the 'peak' association of midlife continues into the twentieth century; Hall (1922) presents midlife as "the middle life or the prime, when we are at the apex of our aggregate of powers, ranging from twenty-five or thirty to forty or forty-five and comprising thus the fifteen or twenty years now commonly called our best" (p. vii). Historically, then, midlife occurred earlier in the life span, and it was considered the *prime* of our life.

Today, claim Lachman et al. (2015), midlife is typically thought to occur between the ages of forty and sixty; however, they add that age may not be the best way to define midlife. Midlife, they claim, might be better conceived in terms of the roles we assume (e.g., parent, boss), timing of life events (e.g., first loss of a parent), and life experiences (e.g., losing our job, struggling with depression; Lachman, 2004). Jung (1933) emphasizes a process he termed *individuation*, the balance and integration of various psychological dimensions of our selves (e.g., strengths and weaknesses). To him, midlife (or, the "afternoon of life", as he refers to it) is key to linking our earlier ("morning") and later ("evening") life phases (Lachman & James, 1997). Lifespan developmentalist Erikson positions midlife as the life stage with *generativity* at its core (1963), stressing our perceived duty to connect with those younger and older in life. According to Lachman et al. (2015), the individuation and generativity themes summarize what

they refer to as the "*pivotal nature*" (p. 3) of midlife in that they grasp the navigation and control aspects of growth as well as of decline; they connect young and old age, and they do so within individuals as well as in groups, in the present as well as across generations.

In contrast to the view of midlife as an apex in life in the past, the term 'midlife' today carries connotations of stress and crisis (Lachman, 2004). This could be related to publications in the 1960s and 1970s focused largely on problematic issues associated with midlife (e.g., Jaques, 1965; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Sheehy, 1976). Moreover, the claims in these writings are for the most part derived from conversations with clinical patients and have not been replicated in subsequent more representative studies (Lachman, 2001). While most of the stressors mentioned in these publications we commonly associate with midlife (e.g., empty nest syndrome, menopause, mortality) have been shown to not be more significantly linked to midlife than to other life periods (Lachman, 2004), there is some evidence to suggest that 'serious' stressors (e.g., financial difficulty, task fatigue) may cluster in midlife (e.g., Almeida & Horn, 2004). Negative events, claim Lachman et al. (2015), seem to cause greater stress during midlife because we may *experience* them more negatively. Thus, it seems that misconceptions about midlife persist, especially linked to psychological (subjective) well-being: witness the 'midlife crisis'.

Yet for all the above claims, research on midlife seems to lag behind that for other phases in the life course (Lachman & James, 1997). A number of possible reasons exist for this gap: i) the common belief that, with the exception of the midlife crisis, midlife is a relatively dull period sandwiched between the more tumultuous early adulthood and old age life stages; ii) middle-age adults, with their full agendas, are notoriously difficult to tempt into a laboratory for participating in testing; iii) as mentioned, 'midlife' is a poorly demarcated period, making it difficult to

compare study results, and iv) our paths in midlife diverge significantly – perhaps more than in

any other life stage – as a result of our experience, choices, as well as genetic composition,

making it more difficult to model patterns of development (Lachman & James, 1997).

Psychological well-being in midlife did not become an outright target of scientific inquiry

until the late 1990's (Keyes & Ryff, 1999). Until that time, it was primarily addressed indirectly

via other studies (Keyes & Ryff, 1999), including studies of successful aging (which took midlife

as the starting point), large survey studies that tracked the relationship between age and

happiness and life satisfaction reports, and finally, questionnaires that addressed particular

psychological dimensions in relation to midlife (e.g., parenthood, work).

Started in 1994, the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) survey was the first national

research effort centered on middle-age adults as part of a longitudinal study, using

biopsychological pathways to health and illness as its key measures (Lachman, Teshale, &

Agrigoroaei, 2015). As such, the MIDUS has become a prominent forum for midlife health and

well-being studies. The MIDUS survey presents evidence that the 'crisis' label cannot typically

be associated with midlife; crisis is equally likely to strike at other points in life, and those who

do experience a midlife crisis are likely to experience crises in other life stages as well (Lachman

et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, the above misconceptions have caused midlife to become undesirable: most

adults would prefer *not* to be middle-aged: on average, they wished to be 33 years old (Lachman

et al., 2015). Also, less desirable realities (e.g., multi-tasking, signs of physical and neural aging,

displays of nervousness and stress) can readily be observed in the lives and faces of midlife

adults. Yet, midlife can also be a period in which we are at our best – in terms of income, work

rank and responsibilities, skills, self-confidence, and contributions to others – children and the community (Finke, Huston, & Sharpe, 2005).

I propose that well-being in midlife deserves a closer look for three reasons. First, the classical life stage model is becoming outmoded, bringing with it the necessity as well as the opportunity for re-conceiving it. Second, midlife frequently gets 'under-sold', especially compared to older age, as the latter usually turns out to be significantly better than expected (Lachman et al., 2015). Third, little attention has been paid to the detrimental effects of those with poor well-being on others they interact with (or who are dependent on them): stress, depression, and suicide tendencies 'carry over' to others.

While this capstone does not intend to fabricate new, scientifically-validated positive psychology interventions, it aims: i) to identify possible directions for reframing midlife as a *creative transition* by exploring relevant well-being aspects as they relate to midlife; ii) to introduce relevant themes – and cohesion among these themes – for identifying relevant constructs; iii) to identify how creative principles might act as catalysts in this process, yielding an appropriate mix of established and innovative constructs, and iv) responding to identified limitations of positive psychology methods, to help develop a methodical approach that might allow for a more rapid creation of new interventions going forward.

In the following pages, we will place midlife in the context of The Good Life (Part I), a concept with roots in ancient philosophy and that can teach us valuable lessons with regard to how we might interpret 'being good' in modern times to flourish in the second half of our productive lives. Positive psychology, the science of what makes life worth living, has much to contribute to both the conceptualization and the actual realization of well-being in midlife. In Part II, we explore to what degree the field has enabled these contributions as well as to what

degree it has been limited by challenges and limitations of its own. Once equipped with the

positive psychology baggage, we explore in Part III how it adds to a better understanding of

some myths around midlife – especially that it represents the low point in our life satisfaction

(and thus, that we should have a 'midlife crisis'). From there, we will re-imagine midlife in Part

IV based on what neuroscience tells is *actually* needed based on adaptive-creative cognitive

principles that occur in our brains at midlife. In particular, we will see that 'making our mark in

life' (or authorship) needs to be approached creatively – or better, constructively – to truly

'create our selves'. We will review three key authorship themes and in Part V we will explore

and combine different aspects of well-being to arrive at three key action areas (detailed in Part

VI). Finally, Part VII will explore the crucial one of these action areas: to enhance our sense of

authorship in midlife through experimentation and play.

The Good (Mid-)Life: A Short History of the 'Glass Half Full'

As my generation, Generation X, has entered midlife full-blown, we should aspire to tackle midlife differently than previous generations as we cannot afford to be as wasteful in our perceptions of life's options and possibilities narrowing down. Until recently, 'having a midlife crisis' was an excuse to justify reckless and self-indulgent behavior, ranging from infidelity to buying an expensive sports car (or the unmistakable Harley-Davidson motorcycle). 'Having a midlife crisis' has also become a well-known subject of Hollywood movies including *Lost in Translation* (2003), where Bill Murray plays a midlife husband attracted by a younger woman (Scarlett Johansson) on a business trip, and *American Beauty* (1999), where Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey) quits his job, buys a sports car, and lusts after his daughter's seductive friend.

In no small part to longevity-related trends, the old notion that midlife marks the start of our decline seems increasingly irrelevant. In Jaques' (1965) time, midlife came at age thirty-five. Now it comes at least ten years later, and in the context of our current lifespan of well over eighty years, that means that most of Generation X has between thirty and thirty-five years left in life to be productive. In terms of working years, we can expect to look forward to at least as many working years ahead of us as we have behind us. Moreover, it seems that Generation X is equipped to take on midlife in a more creative and resourceful way. To illustrate, the average forty-two-year-old American adult has already held eleven jobs and is looking to move anytime (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Yet he or she also has had to be more resilient: of jobs started between ages thirty-eight and forty-two, thirty percent end within one year; forty-seven percent end within two years, and sixty-five percent within three years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008).

Erickson (2007) claims that more than prior generations, Generation X has experienced adversity – among others in the form of divorce, corporate downsizing, and economic crises directly affecting their purchasing power – to prepare it for coping with unexpected snags, for relishing challenge, and for planning to be resilient when the moment calls for it.

In architecture, the field in which I was first trained, it was assumed that only those with grey hair (or no hair at all) were able to do any work worth remembering: the further one progressed in life, the better one would become, with glory waiting at the end. Applying such logic to the rest of life, Strenger and Ruttenberg (2008) propose that "midlife is [y]our best and last chance to become the real you" (p. 92). The authors claim that our midlife years can be our best time to flourish and grow towards who (and what) we really want to be. Although we may perceive we have fewer options in midlife than we had as young adults, the second half of our life is becoming ever-more filled with potential. After all, the 'second half' is now longer, our resourcefulness can reduce obstacles to fulfilling our potential, and we are wiser (or at least, we know what happened to the Lester Burnhams of this world). The question is: how will we use this time? Will we, using our creativity and innovative approaches, use it to create resources for carrying on with our lives, or will we wither?

The answer to this question has a lot to do with the choices we make in life. We like to 'keep our options open', yet we are not that savvy at creating them. Most of us make our key life decisions before we really understand who we are, where we come from, and where we might go. By age thirty, most Americans will have done most of the following: marry, buy a home, and select a career. While we might think these actions enhance our well-being for the rest of our lives, there really is no way of knowing: by the time we make these major decisions, we typically have the majority of our adult years still ahead of us.

However, by midlife, claim Strenger and Ruttenberg (2008), many pressures begin to lose most of their urgency. If we make good use of our discoveries about our self in the first half of our lives, and are able to craft a possible way forward, the second half may well end up the more fulfilling of the two halves of our lives. To illustrate, Strenger and Ruttenberg (2008) cite the example of Elliott Jaques (1965) who invented the term 'midlife crisis' in his influential article 'Death and the Mid-Life Crisis'. In it, he explained that midlife makes us acutely aware of our limitations, dwindling options, and mortality. Yet, in the 38 years that remained between publishing 'Death and the Mid-Life Crisis' and his death, Jaques "wrote 12 books, he consulted to the U.S. Army, the Church of England, and a wide variety of companies; he married Kathryn Cason, his wife and collaborator of over 30 years; and with Cason, he founded a consulting company devoted to the dissemination of their ideas" (Strenger & Ruttenberg, 2008, p. 82).

To be sure, midlife is no walk in the proverbial park. We zig-zag between needy children, demanding jobs, and increasingly frail parents. In short, we are "under-rested, under-exercised, and over-fed" (Hagerty, 2016, p. 6). Yet, while some us are indeed miserable, 'midlife crisis' actually affects very few of us. In fact, some *thrive* in this period. Interviewed by TIME Magazine, psychologist Carlo Strenger observes (Harrell, 2010):

> "[…] I noticed a disparity between two groups: some people at midlife just begin to dim – physically, intellectually, and in their general outlook. But you also have an ever-growing number of people who actually go into a higher gear. They often make quite significant changes, they are very vital, they often do their most significant work after midlife. My suggestion is: replace the term midlife crisis with midlife transition and look at it totally differently in order to make the second, vital group the norm." (para. 3).

In trying to explain why some of us thrive in midlife while others suffer, Hagerty (2016) observes that midlife is all about the *choices* we make. She posits that we are who we are (and are where we are now) because of the many choices – big and small – we have made until now. While we can no longer do *anything* in midlife, we have an abundance of choice. And to be sure, Hagerty adds, we are able to make much more informed choices than when we were twenty-five or even thirty-five years old. Maintaining this attitude, says Hagerty (2016), more than anything else, is at the core of well-being at midlife.

This brings up the question: what are the ingredients of this attitude? Also, how might we acquire it? Here, we enter positive psychological territory: what does it mean to be happy and to live The Good Life? How do we focus on what matters and live up to our own potential? And why then, do some people succeed when others merely seem to 'get by'? These simple but essential questions have been with us for thousands of years. Most of us find ourselves wondering about questions like these as we mature. And we are in good company: a long line of philosophers, spiritual teachers, and religious leaders have pondered very similar thoughts.

A compelling discussion about these questions was posed by Aristotle over 2300 years ago. Since these questions focus on our behavior, they are ethical questions. The Good Life (and indeed, 'being good' in Aristotelian ethics) involves three key principles: eudaimonia, virtue, and practice (Aristotle, 2000).

Eudaimonia: Purpose and Meaning

Aristotle associated The Good Life not with *hedonia* – or feeling happy – but with *eudaimonia* – being happy or having meaning and purpose in life. Rather than happiness, *well-being* and *flourishing* come closer to what Aristotle means: they capture the full range of the way Aristotle uses the word, and someone who flourishes is living The Good Life, although the

distinction between hedonia and eudaimonia is subject to debate (e.g., Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008).

According to Aristotle, all human beings seek to flourish: it is the proper and desired end of our actions (Melchert, 2002). Flourishing, however, is a functional definition; to understand the function of something, we have to understand its nature (Melchert, 2002, p. 189). To this point, The Good Life, Aristotle claimed, is not about feeling good, it is about *achieving our own true potential* (Hagerty, 2016): "we all come into life with uniquely human capacities, something that Aristotle called the *daimon*. And our task in life is to figure out what those unique capacities are and then to do our best to bring them into reality" (p. 130). Eudaimonic happiness, therefore, is about trying, about working hard. It might be stressful or even painful in the short run but over the long run, it brings meaning and purpose.

The answer to the question, "what is eudaimonia good for in midlife?" is answered by Hagerty (2016) claiming both our minds and our bodies *prefer* it. She cites Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci (2009), who divided recent college graduates into groups that either pursued extrinsic goals (e.g., wealth, fame) or intrinsic goals (e.g., aiding others in life, valuing profound relationships). After two years, the researchers returned to measure the psychological health of the two groups, observing that the extrinsically-oriented group did significantly worse; it reported more negative affect and more physical discomfort. Conversely, the intrinsically-oriented group reported more positive affect toward themselves and others, and experienced fewer physical stress symptoms. Other studies, including Ryff, Singer, & Love (2004), provide evidence that our bodies prefer selfless well-being to self-centeredness, and that they will reward eudaimonia with a number of biological and health-related benefits.

Virtue: 'Social Prototyping' and Engagement

With age, I prefer to lead an Aristotelian excellent life. This raises the question, "What is virtue, and how might we apply it?" First, virtues involve *standards of conduct*. Aristotle claims we are not born with these standards; we come to grasp them in social settings, using role models and interactions with others. We also learn them through example and instruction (Aristotle, 2000). While we may initially have these standards forced upon us, eventually we must learn live by them freely and happily in order to be considered 'of good character'.

Benjamin Franklin believed that by practicing moral virtues, one each week, he would become a better man. He used these virtues in his quest for 'moral perfection'; yet, he admitted he often fell short: "I hope, therefore, that some of my descendants may follow the example and reap the benefit" (Franklin, 2005, p. 72). When we fall short, we need codes of conduct even more.

Since moral virtue isn't something we are born with, becoming 'of good character' requires *practice*. This is why Aristotle describes being virtuous as being in a "state" (Melchert, 2002). We become a virtuous person by acting virtuously until acting in accordance with virtue becomes habit. Once a habit, it becomes part of our being. We go from being someone who consciously acts virtuously to someone who simply *is* virtuous (James, 1984). Thus, to be virtuous, we must first learn what it means to be virtuous, then we must practice living virtuously. Aristotle (2000) says: "For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy" (p. 12). To me, this means that to be truly happy, we must make the pursuit of virtue a perpetual practice. Through the active pursuit of virtue (i.e., testing our virtue in social settings), we become virtuous. It is one of the beauties of Benjamin Franklin's self-improvement method: he studied virtue to

understand what kind of person he wanted to be; then, he practiced virtue with the aim of being

virtuous. Franklin gives us a practical way to cultivate the virtues that matter to us. Aristotle

helps us understand the role of moral virtue; Franklin gives us a way to develop it.

Furthermore, virtues are *relative* to the individual and the situation; they are not one-size-

fits-all, and this, too, is where 'social prototyping' comes in. Take generosity, for instance.

Different degrees of generosity may be appropriate in different circumstances. Giving a ten-year

old ten thousand dollars is overly generous, but giving ten thousand dollars to a relative to help

him buy his first house may be appropriately generous. This difference is not something that

'occurs' to us: it requires experimentation in different social settings. Our roles in life may also

dictate the appropriate degree of virtue: firefighters, for example, *should* have more courage than

the rest of us. Aristotle describes virtues as being the "mean" between two vices, one of which is

the deficiency of that trait and the other its excess (Melchert, 2002).

Practice: Choosing What to Attend To

Our thinking is our experience. How we think directly impacts how we experience the

world around us, including our career, our relationships, our health, and our happiness (Hagerty,

2016). Whereas our genetics define our emotional 'set point' for up to fifty percent of our

behavior, we also have an 'emotional rudder' that we can control: the way we think, the way we

process joys and setbacks in life, and so on. Up to forty percent of our well-being comes from

our ability to regulate our emotions.

Our 'emotional rudder' is paramount to positive psychology as well as to how we

experience midlife. The associated virtue, *attentive discipline*, allows us to not get bogged down

into negative emotions; done habitually; it builds our self and fosters well-being. Several

important authors provide phenomenological views on well-being where disciplined attention

and intentions (and ultimately, our actions) are in a perpetual feedback dynamic.

The first key author, Aristotle, notes that excellence or virtue can be learned by practicing

behavior becoming habitual, with reason serving a dual purpose. The first is theoretical: one

cannot aspire to be 'excellent' without using some of one's rational qualities. Second, reason also

has a practical role in habit creation: using sensing and deliberation, it helps us find the "mean"

(or the 'just right' point) at which our emotions, our dispositions, our actions, and therefore our

happiness, are optimal without getting distracted by impulse or emotion (Melchert, 2002).

The second important author, William James (1892/1984), also emphasizes habits and

practical rationality in *Principles of Psychology*. He argues habits are key to conserving neural

energy in paying attention while we perform routine activities. The main advantage of habits,

according to James, is that they allow us to rely on mere sensation in order to establish our

actions, thereby freeing the brain for other acts of computing and making the resulting action

faster and more precise (James, 1892/1984). One cannot start early enough in life with

establishing these virtuous circles of attention and behavior: practice makes perfect, and early

success sets us off on the right course. James adds that we should strive to *act* on our resolutions

(or judgments) and any signals that lead us towards habits, as soon as possible. For it is in the act

of *producing* habits (not the subsequent *forming* of them) that motor effects send messages to the

brain about new ways of reaching resolutions and intentions (James, 1892/1984).

It is James' suggestion while discussing habits, "to make our nervous system our ally

instead of our enemy" that he explores further in *Talks to Teachers* (1892/1984; 1899/1983).

Here, he suggests that while being mindful of the virtuous circles of attention and behavior that

create habits, we not only apply disciplined attention but also disciplined behavior. Instead of

letting our attention give way to feelings, James suggests we employ our attention to control our

actions in such a way that they regulate our feelings (James, 1899/1983). Thus, should we

observe our happiness diminishing, we should not direct *attention* to how this affects us (e.g.,

being sad), but rather direct *intention* to how we might put ourselves in a happier state (e.g.,

acting happier). In the end, James' (1890) suggestion that emotions occur by means of paying

attention after we act physically, frames positive psychology. It is one of the first examples – if

not the first example – in which emotions and physical expressions are linked in writing.

     A third author paramount to positive psychology, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990), also

argues that well-being, and specifically, the flow concept, are related to the consciousness of our

attention and intention. Similar to Aristotle and James, Csikszentmihalyi argues that since we

cannot control our emotions, we should distinguish between 'reactive' consciousness that is

biological and determined by our genes, and an 'intentional' consciousness that is self-directed

and allows our nervous system to 'override' our genetic inclinations and chart a self-determined

path of action. It is this self-direction, writes Csikszentmihalyi (1990), that is crucial to both

doing well and to well-being in life. As with the other authors, disciplined attention

(consciousness regarding where to pay attention) and directional intention (choosing what to do

towards clear goals) prove the key to well-being regardless of context or environment. Attention

is driven by intention and vice versa. It is this system of energetic flows that constructs our

subjective reality (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). As there is a limit to this system's capacity, our

attention, our consciousness, and our well-being are bound by limits as well. However, if our

actions are optimally aligned with our goals, we enter a state of *flow* in which the positive

feedback strengthens our self and similar to James' argument, more of our attention is freed up

for our inner and outer environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

In the end, Csikszentmihalyi, James, and Aristotle agree that we have a type of 'CPU' (or 'Conscious Processing Unit') key to midlife. Running on proper intention, our CPU directs our attention, intentionally orders the information that comes to us, disciplines our emotions, identifies a disposition based on set goals, and is capable of plotting an independent course of action. The more experienced our CPU becomes, the better it will be at 'multi-tasking' between attention and intention, learning from each and letting them mutually inform each other. With experience, our CPU is therefore also more likely to provide us with positive feedback, and consequently, the higher our probability of experiencing well-being in the context of The Good Life.

The Good Life in Modern Times: Various Perspectives

In modern times, the mindset that leads to thriving instead of 'dimming' in midlife has been studied extensively by the MIDUS study. "Whereas most modern research on midlife has focused on pathways to illness, disease, and dysfunction," says Carol Ryff, who directs MIDUS, "[…] we've given far too little attention to the factors that actually keep people healthy and well" (Hagerty, 2016; p. 134). Ryff and her colleagues have researched seven thousand individuals in an effort to uncover what internal resources make us healthy and happy when faced with adversity. Ryff (1989) concluded that six mindsets seem to predict health and well-being (Appendix A): i) *self-acceptance* (i.e., knowing and accepting our strengths and weaknesses); ii) *purpose in life* (i.e., our search for meaning and a sense of direction in life); iii) *personal growth* (i.e., our continued learning and development as persons); iv) *positive relations with others* (i.e., warm, trusting interpersonal relations); v) *autonomy* (i.e., controlling our behavior from within without looking to others for approval), and vi) *environmental mastery* (i.e., our ability to choose or create environments suitable to our psychic conditions).

Of these mindsets, 'purpose in life' seems to be a category of its own. Indeed, purpose as a construct stems from humanistic psychology and the writings of Victor Frankl. Frankl observed while incarcerated in concentration camps during World War II that life can have meaning even in the face of extreme adversity, and that having a sense of purpose is key to maintaining our psychological health and general wellness. He is credited by saying, "Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose" (Frankl, 1959). In other words, in spite of the adversity we may experience, it is our duty to find opportunity and meaning in it.

The health benefits of pursuing meaning seem clear: Boyle, Barnes, Buchman, and Bennett (2009) show evidence for older people scoring high on purpose in life being twice as likely to be alive after five-years. Kim, Sun, Park, and Peterson (2013) find that American men who say they have a tangible purpose in life are twenty-two percent less likely to suffer a stroke (compared to those with little purpose). Middle-aged and older Americans who have close family ties, meaningful jobs, or are invested in a hobby or organization, live longer: Kim, Stretcher, and Ryff (2014) claim that a sense of purpose changes our behavior. We are more likely to take care of our health, and we spend significantly less time in the hospital. Lastly, Friedman and Ryff (2012) claim that purpose in life seems to lower the risk of multiple chronic health conditions.

So strong is the influence of eudaimonia that we start seeing the glass more 'half full' automatically with time: Carstensen, Isaacowitz, and Charles (1999) claim the balance between positive and negative affect improves with age, linking age with a rising motivation to derive emotional meaning from life. For those in midlife, this means that we begin to appreciate the smaller and richer things more, especially relationships and the present moment. This is probably linked to the 'positivity effect' following our sensation of time running out: as life goes on, we

spot more positives, and we decide to enjoy and experience them for what they are worth (Hagerty, 2016, p. 139).

In the context of The Good Life it is interesting to note that older brains behave different than their younger counterparts: Mather et al. (2004) found, for instance, that older people regulate their emotions better than younger people, and secondly, related to the functioning of our amygdala (our brain's emotion center), that older brains 'ignore' bad news more than younger ones. Other researchers (van Reekum et al., 2007) found that people with great life purpose process negative inputs in similar considered, more positive ways.

Lastly, English pediatrician Donald Winnicott merits inclusion in a review of The Good Life for the dramatic simplicity of his approach. Winnicott proposes that our happiness and future satisfaction depended ultimately not so much on external issues, but on something far closer to home: the way we bring up our children.

Winnicott (1971) is probably more willing than any other psychoanalyst to ask radical questions with regard to what makes life worth living, and in doing so, his views are remarkably similar to those of positive psychologists:

> […] What I say does affect our view of the question: what is life about? You may cure your patient and not know what it is that makes him or her go on living. It is of first importance for us to acknowledge openly that absence of psychoneurotic illness may be health, but it is not life. Psychotic patients who are all the time hovering between living and not living force us to look at this problem, one that really belongs *not to psychoneurotics but to all human beings.* I am claiming that these same phenomena that are life and death to our schizoid or borderline patients appear in our cultural experiences." (pp. 117-118).

Winnicott's ideas about The Good Life are largely based on his beliefs that such a life must be lived *creatively* and *actively* rather than reactively. Therefore, he focuses on how we might grow our self within the context of our physical environment. He then illustrates the importance of this process by pointing out the infant's need to experience her environment as being in harmony with her needs. Winnicott views this alignment as a basic necessity for the possibility of being truly alive (Winnicott, 1971 as cited in Strenger, 1998, p. 626).

Winnicott goes on to argue that, if our early environment affects us in unbearably manner, our personality develops a protective layer, the 'false self', protecting us from any further negative influences (Winnicott, 1965).

Bollas (1989) has further elaborated this claim with his 'sense of destiny' concept; following Aristotle's views on flourishing, he views this as the self's attempt to realize its inherent potentiality. However, Bollas' emphasis is on the self's need for objects for developing a narrative that makes us who we are. We will re-visit this alluring idea in more detail later.

Positive Psychology: What Makes Life Worth Living

It seems that the primary reason the nascent field of positive psychology (PP), the proclaimed science of what makes life worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), came into being was that psychology, until the end of the twentieth century, had amassed surprisingly little knowledge about The Good Life.

The question, "What makes life worth living?" seems to strike a chord with many of us as 'quality of life' seems to be an increasing concern – especially in more individualistic societies that urge people to "follow their bliss". Yet, it is not always clear how to best do this, leaving people looking for guidance on building a rewarding life and better societies. Whereas individualism offers us freedom, little guidance exists once our material needs have been met. Moreover, individualism creates undesirable externalities when people make decisions that favor themselves but harm others. It is thus clear that PP should consider not only the point of view of individual actualization, but also the contributions we make to other people and the world (Diener, 2009).

PP originated in 1998 as one of the initiatives of Martin Seligman in his role as President of the American Psychological Association, and specifically, as a result of his inaugural speech at the 107th Annual Convention of the APA in Boston on August 21, 1999, in which he introduced his agenda for correcting the agenda of modern day psychology (Seligman, 1999).

Seligman's trigger for bringing PP into the world was the premise that psychology since World War II has joined forces with psychiatry and focused much of its efforts on human problems and how to remedy them. While unprecedented strides had been made in addressing and preventing psychological disorders, this emphasis come at a significant cost. Scientific psychology, write Peterson & Park (2003), had largely abandoned the study of 'what can go

right' with people and had little more knowledge of The Good Life than most self-help gurus.

'Under the hood', they claimed, psychology's underlying premises had quietly shifted to

embrace a "disease model of human nature" (p. 143).

PP intended to challenge the assumptions of the disease model and to correct the above

discrepancy. Its aim: to catalyze a change of focus in psychology from "preoccupation only with

repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities" (Seligman &

Csikszentmihaly, 2000, p. 5). To 'move the needle' by effecting a step change in thinking, the

capacity of asking good questions was elevated to a prospective art. "Can we take what we have

learned about the science and practice of mental illness and use it to create a practice of making

people lastingly happier? That is, can we create an evidence-based practice of PP?" wondered

Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005). Yet, 'negative' psychology as usual was not to be

abandoned altogether: "PP calls for as much of a focus on strength as on weakness, as much

interest in building on the best things in life as in repairing the worst, and as much attention to

fulfilling the lives of healthy people as to healing the wounds of the distressed" (Peterson &

Park, 2003, p. 144; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihaly, 2000).

Although not a psychological intervention, the story of Seligman and his daughter Nikki

in their rose garden has become PP folklore: "The moment took place in my garden while I was

weeding with my five-year old daughter, Nikki. I have to confess that even though I write books

about children, I'm really not all that good with children. I am goal-oriented and time-urgent, and

when I'm weeding the garden, I'm actually trying to get the weeding done. Nikki, however, was

throwing weeds into the air, singing, and dancing around. I yelled at her. She walked away, then

came back and said, "Daddy, I want to talk to you." "Yes, Nikki?" "Daddy, do you remember

before my fifth birthday? From the time I was three to the time I was five, I was a whiner. I

whined every day. When I turned five, I decided not to whine anymore. That was the hardest

thing I've ever done. And if I can stop whining, you can stop being such a grouch" (Seligman &

Csikszentmihaly, 2000, p. 6). This revelation of *developing what was right* rather than fixating

on what was wrong, sparked what Seligman would go on to promote for the rest of his career:

that we should be teaching our children and ourselves to look at our strengths instead of at our

weaknesses.

As Peterson & Park (2003) subtly proclaimed, "Proponents of positive psychology [were]

merely saying that the psychology of the past 60 years [was] incomplete" (p. 144). Seductively

simple as this observation appeared, it has required profound change in reality. Now that the

initial fog has cleared, we can deconstruct the concerns of PP into three related nodes: i) the

subjective node (the study of positive subjective experiences and states across past, present, and

future – see below); ii) the *individual node* (the study of positive individual traits of 'the good

person' that enable positive experiences), and iii) the group or *collective node* (the study of

positive institutions that enable positive traits and thereby, positive experiences) (Seligman,

2002).

Not only does PP classify three nodes of wellbeing; at the subjective experience level it

also separates the subject area across three time points (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000):

past (centering on well-being, contentment, and satisfaction); *present* (focusing on concepts such

as happiness and flow experience), and *future* (focusing on optimism and hope).

Positive psychology does not claim to have invented The Good Life or to have initiated

studying it in scientific manner – Ryff (1989), for instance, preceded it by at least ten years – but

PP has unified various isolated research strands and made a convincing case for The Good Life

to become its own line of research under the overall 'psychology' umbrella. Notwithstanding

this, PP has not been without its challenges or limitations; I will discuss some here that appear

relevant to the topic of well-being in midlife.

First, PP has suffered from clear etymological definition, as it is a term with at least four

commonly used senses (Rebele, 2015): i) a movement to re-orient psychology (the sense that

Seligman used in his APA acceptance speech); ii) a sub-discipline of psychology (viewing this

field as combining 'positive' and 'negative' psychology); iii) a professional field that applies 'the

positive' to professional contexts (e.g., education), and iv) an organizing philosophy that views

PP as a 'positive' way of thinking or behaving. It is this latter – incorrect – interpretation, claims

Rebele, that has plagued PP since its inception.

Second, what does 'positive' signify, anyway? For one, claim Peterson and Park (2003),

the label might lead "business as usual" psychologists (p. 144) to believe that what they have

been practicing is being dismissed as 'negative' psychology.

As Pawelski (2016) has argued, much of the confusion regarding the 'positive' in PP has

to do with the fact that 'the positive' as a concept has not yet been adequately mapped. Such a

conceptual mapping is key to: i) understanding how the positive and the negative relate, ii)

constructing a robust theoretical foundation for PP, and iii) avoiding basic misunderstandings.

The 'positive' means more than is intended by the domain of PP, since it means different things

in different contexts. Even if we limit the meanings of the 'positive' to only include those linked

to well-being, it is still unclear what PP actually comprises. Seligman (2011a) writes that he

intends PP to be about "what we choose for its own sake" (p. 11). When explaining his PERMA

model of well-being (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and

Accomplishment), he states that he associates well-being with a 'choice' (or preference) that is

unforced or influenced by negative circumstances (Pawelski, 2016; Seligman, 2011a).

Yet, this choice is not as straightforward as it seems. In Pawelski's 'red and green cape' thought experiment (2016), the choice whether PP should address only the positive ("using a green cape") or only the absence of the negative ("using a red cape") cannot be settled without somehow compromising our well-being. This demands that we can opt for a third choice, a "reversible cape" with one side red and one side green. The 'reversible cape' metaphor follows a key PP tenet, the Keyes Mental Health/Dual Continua model of flourishing: *the absence of the negative* (mental illness) *does not equal the positive* (mental health or flourishing) (Hefferon, 2013). In practical terms, this means that whereas PP concerns itself with moving toward what is desirable (i.e., green cape) as a complement to the deficit orientation of mainstream psychology (i.e., red cape), it also concerns itself with The Good Life. Therefore, argues Pawelski (2016), PP is not just about the green cape or just about the red cape, but about their balanced use.

In the context of midlife, the first major limitation of PP theories is that they do not include – or even hint at – the body and how it might contribute to well-being. As I intend to clarify below – and create as an important argument for the review of midlife that will ensue – our bodies are interpreters as well as shapers of the world around us; they help us develop ideas, and they are our primary tools for exploration an adaptation.

Our cognition goes well beyond the brain, and how we experience our physical self 'from the neck down' can influence our well-being. *Embodiment* states that our body is a key part in our everyday experiences (Howson, 2005, as cited in Hefferon, 2013). Shusterman (2006) proposes that embodiment manifests in at least four different ways: i) our bodies are the social embodiment of social norms and values; ii) as such, our bodies are the key medium (or tool) by which we communicate our norms and values; iii) our bodies are the key source of agency and freedom, with movement as the prime enabler (e.g., Ratey & Manning, 2008; Ratey &

Hagerman, 2014); iv) our bodies represent a way to see the world around us and develop a point

of view. Thus, our bodies are involved in *constructing* reality as well as *being constructed by* that

same reality (Hefferon, 2013).

A second limitation of PP theories is located in the fact that our bodies, not just our

brains, can help generate ideas. Our subjective experiences are inextricably linked to our

physical embodiment and can sometimes even be 'in the driver seat'. The James-Lange somatic

theory states that physiological changes inside our bodies force us to construe these changes,

generating associated emotions and behavior as a result (Passer & Smith, 2006, as cited in

Hefferon, 2013). The prime example of this theory is James' (1890) claim that emotions come

after we have physically acted out, signaling to us what is going on. Damasio (1994) offers

another reading of the James-Lange theory, claiming that our bodies help us 'shape the decision'

about how to act in different conditions, rather than shape the experience. In the wake of

progress in science and medicine, our understanding of the link between body and emotion has

developed to the point where we now know that the body acts as an 'amplifier' rather than a

'generator' of ideas (Kringelbach, 2009, as cited in Hefferon, 2013).

There is one last somatic limitation of PP theories that merits attention: *exploration*. It is

explained through homeostasis, our bodies' tendency towards equilibrium by means of a

feedback-induced error correction – visible, for instance, in how our bodies 'tell' us they need

sleep and how they cope with stress. Ratey and Manning (2008) argue that homeostasis acts like

a thermostat that keeps our bodies' metaphoric 'room temperature' (not body temperature)

constant, balancing a number of physical variables. However, this is not how our bodies work:

they function more like a high-tech thermostat that actually *remembers* changes we make in our

room temperature *according to conditions*, not through a simple memory and program function.

This high-tech thermostat learns, remembers, and predicts our behavior. It knows what time we

get up on a cold day and turns up the heat in advance (Ratey & Manning, 2008). Therefore,

conclude Ratey and Manning, the homeostasis premise is flawed: the goal of regulation is *not* to

preserve constancy of our internal environment; it is to continually *adjust* it to promote

reproduction and survival. A newer model, *allostasis*, proposes that efficient regulation requires

anticipating needs and preparing to satisfy them before they arise (Sterling, 2004). Homeostasis

can deliver only stability, and that is a dead-end strategy in life. Instead, our bodies must operate

like an *adaptive system*, allowing for growth. This means more than simply adjusting for existing

conditions 'on autopilot'; it means that our consciousness and sense of well-being need to be

engaged in the entire process. Our brains are indeed wired with carrots and sticks, claim Ratey

and Manning (2008), but the more interesting aspect is *the degree to which* our adaptive circuits

are connected to our carrots and sticks. In the end, we seem to derive the greatest pleasure not

from predictable rewards but from *unexpected* ones; it is precisely there that growth resides –

also in midlife (Sterling, 2004).

As Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, and Minhas (2011) as well as Linley, Nielsen, Gillett, and

Biswas-Diener (2010) have argued, PP interventions, especially in a client environment, can

appear ad hoc and simplistic. By and large, these interventions are used in an "identify and use"

manner, in which the aim is to identify a suitable intervention and once identified, to apply it

without too much consideration of its optimal application levels. The above authors' argument

for modulation makes a similar point as Sterling's (2004) case for allostasis: PP should leave

more room for exploration (instead of a one-off 'hit') as well as alternative, body-oriented

approaches in which outcomes might be explored more actively and dynamically. As we shall

see, this is an important tenet for well-being in midlife as well.

The last relevant limitation that characterizes PP as well as traditional psychology is that they tend to prioritize 'action' as a remedy. As Lee, Lin, Huang, and Frederickson (2012) found, two streams of thought exist regarding well-being: a more Western, self- and action-oriented stream that emphasizes 'imbuing' our conscience with positive emotion, and a more Eastern, 'other-aware' and reflective stream that emphasizes peacefulness and inner conditioning. Although an action orientation doesn't always lead people to do what is best for them, PP may benefit from both. In fact, a holistic approach that wholeheartedly features the reflective stream may be an opportunity for PP to truly distinguish itself.

Spirituality serves as a case in point: Pargament and Mahoney (2009) claim that psychologists have ignored spirituality, viewing it as 'pathological' and treating it as a process that can be reduced to basic underlying psychological, social, and biological functions. However, spirituality offers a unique set of resources that speak precisely to the fact that a significant part of our lives remains beyond our immediate control. In spirituality, we can find ways to understand and deal with our fundamental human insufficiency – the fact that there are limits to what we are capable of. As Pargament (1997) noted elsewhere, American psychology seems largely control-oriented in its attempts to help people develop control of their lives in relation to their environment. In midlife, as we shall see, the point is to increase control over our *selves* as well.

Midlife and Well-Being: Crisis? What Crisis?

Subjective Well-Being

Probably as a result of the lack of definition and clarity surrounding midlife, the shape of the association between age and subjective well-being (SWB) has been the subject of fierce debate: U-shapes, inverted U-shapes, and linear functions have been proposed, with both low (U) and high (inverted U) points being linked to midlife (Ulloa, Møller, & Sousa-Poza, 2013). One reason for this debate is the multi-dimensional aspect of SWB, comprising life satisfaction, happiness, and low negative affect (Galambos, Fang, Krahn, Johnson, & Lachman, 2015). To complicate matters, life satisfaction and happiness labels have been used interchangeably to describe results based on different underlying constructs, confusing interpretations of links with age. Another source of debate is related to the relatively heavy reliance on cross-sectional studies (Easterlin, 2006, as cited in Galambos et al., 2015).

Perhaps the best-known research with regard to well-being in midlife is the finding that life satisfaction reaches a low point in midlife. This depression is commonly known as the 'U-curve' (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008). This curve, in which happiness and life satisfaction bottom out, is often presented as evidence for the midlife crisis (Lachman et al., 2015). Schwandt (2016) claims that the driver for this 'bottoming out' is *over-optimism*: in our early adulthood, Schwandt proposes, we are overly optimistic, expecting significant change in life satisfaction (rather than anticipating what typically happens: a descent down the U-curve). This is related to our belief, as young adults, that we will 'out-do' most of our peers and end up with a near-perfect life (Schwandt, 2015). As we age, however, our images of a near-perfect future may fail to materialize, forcing us to adjust our expectations downward, leading to a double misery of disappointments and evaporating aspirations.

While Blanchflower and Oswald's U-curve are often cited as the reason for a midlife crisis, the evidence is not conclusive. Subsequent studies have suggested that: i) the U-curve may reflect cohort differences (especially with regard to baby boomers); ii) only life satisfaction (the evaluative part of well-being) bottoms out – not hedonic aspects, which in fact may be trending upward due to the aforementioned 'positivity effect', and iii) with regard to eudaimonic well-being, only purpose in life and personal growth are diminishing, while autonomy and positive relations are improving during adulthood (Lachman et al., 2015; Ryff, 1995). Moreover, Galambos et al. (2015) provide evidence of happiness (as an indicator of SWB) steadily *increasing* from the late teens (or early twenties) until age 43. Furthermore, the MIDUS study presents evidence for an *optimistic* view of midlife: Lachman et al. (2015) observe that the time frame between ages forty and sixty performs rather *well* when considered from a ten-year change perspective: of future life satisfaction, middle-aged adults display stable levels in their thirties and forties and *increases* from their forties into their sixties. In other words: from a longitudinal viewpoint, midlife appears to be "the best of times" (p. 6) when it comes to what the future has in store. When present and future life satisfaction are tracked against one another, we can observe a steadily declining line for future satisfaction and a steadily rising line for present satisfaction (Lachman et al., 2015), Midlife falls just before – and on – the point where the two lines cross, and where present life satisfaction is about to out-perform future life satisfaction. Thus, until midlife, the future looks brighter than today; yet after midlife, the future is expected to be worse (even though present life satisfaction is peaking).

Age Differences

Another influential dimension with regard to well-being in midlife is age. Keyes and Riff's (1999) analysis of age differences, in which they conclude that well-being is not a stable

phenomenon throughout our lives, illustrates the point. Age curves tend to differ based on the measured construct, with the U-curve applying to life satisfaction, a linear decreasing trend for negative affect, and upward or U-shaped trends for positive affect (Galambos et al., 2015).

Midlife shows evidence of gain across all of Ryff's (1989) well-being dimensions, whereas from midlife to adulthood, some aspects remain constant while others decline. Moreover, the degree to which we are past or future oriented depends on age, with midlife falling between prospective (young adulthood) and retrospective (old age) orientations.

Most importantly, Keyes & Ryff claim that Ryff's (1989) six well-being dimensions carry an implicit sense of temporality with them. Fixed in the *past,* Keyes & Ryff claim, is 'self-acceptance', referring to our evaluation of accomplishments and our 'lived' life. In contrast, fixed in the *future* are 'personal growth' and 'purpose in life', emphasizing how we construct our futures and emphasize personal future attributes, as well as our our faith in continual learning, all of which project our self into the future to some degree. Lastly, fixed in the *present* are 'positive relations with others', 'autonomy', and 'environmental mastery', emphasizing how we see ourselves performing now.

Keyes & Ryff (1999) propose a congruence exists between age (or life stage) and our past versus future orientation on Ryff's well-being dimensions. For example, older adults with a mostly retrospective view tend to exhibit lower levels of 'purpose in life' and dimensions fixed in the future than younger people. Younger adults with a mostly prospective view tend to exhibit lower levels of self-acceptance (a dimension fixed in the past) than older people. Midlife adults, finally, tend to exhibit the highest overall profiles of well-being.

Midlife Re-Imagined: From Decline to Self-Creation

From a neurochemical, physiological, and transmission interactions perspective there is little hope our brains will improve as we get older: they begin to shrink and decline in terms of performance around age thirty. Well-known symptoms include *memory 'loss'* (though nothing is really ever 'lost') and *inattention* or *mindlessness* (e.g., where we forget what we went to do one minute after setting out to do it). This mostly involves a change in our default mode network, a neural network that makes this wandering of the mind possible and that becomes more and more continually active as we get older (Hagerty, 2016).

However, there is sufficient hope for our midlife brain. Midlife represents a special point in our life where everything is as optimally arranged as it will ever be: we have *cognitive resource* (e.g., speed, memory, working memory), and we have *experience* (e.g., knowledge, judgement). According to neuroscientist Denise Park, this combination probably makes midlife "the most efficient, effective time of [y]our life" (Hagerty, 2016; p. 61).

And there is more reason for hope: according to Park and Reuter-Lorenz (2009), the midlife brain shows signs of extraordinary adaptation by engaging in an adaptive-creative act called *compensatory scaffolding*. Our aging brains, which shrink by up to twenty-five percent in certain regions, compensate by becoming more *efficient* – by using more neural regions, more neural circuits, and linking the left and right sides. Park and Reuter-Lorenz use the 'scaffold' metaphor to signify that, unlike pristine new neural structures, the midlife brain has to 'make do'. Yet, one thing neural scaffolding does well is to provide protection and support for things to continue more or less unchanged. This leads Park to reflect: "How do we maintain as well as we do? Not: Why are we showing these declines?" (Hagerty, 2016; p. 69).

However, given that the first signs of decline enter so noticeably in midlife, how do we *amass cognitive reserve*, our brain's defensive elixir against decline and dementia, to make

midlife a stepping stone for a prolonged 'second half'? According to Stern et al. (1994), we can

'top up' our cognitive reserve at three points in life: in the beginning (via education), in midlife

(via work), and in the end (with more time available). People with a college education, for

example, may be half as likely as people with less education to contract Alzheimer's disease. Yet

newer evidence by Richards and Deary (2005) provides evidence that cognitive reserve may be

conceived as the sum of its lifetime input (and drain). Just as our IQ is malleable, claim the

authors, so is cognitive function. They key is *cognitive engagement* (Hagerty, 2016). Park and

Reuter-Lorenz (2009) recommend cognitive engagement, exercise, and low levels of default

mode network engagement (i.e., staying busy) for enhancing neuroplasticity. This may sound

simple, but it is hard to maintain. Therefore, according to Park, we need to "do something that is

unique, challenging, and interesting to you to maintain the commitment" (Hagerty, 2016; p. 79).

Midlife as a Creative Transition: Revision, Prospection, and Individuation.

What if doing this 'something' involved not something exterior to us, which we may or

may not be able to influence, but our *selves*, creating our *'second act'?* Chopra (2009) claims

that "The most creative act you will ever undertake is the act of creating your life." Adding to

this, I posit that in the context of engagement and 'staying busy', what makes our midlife worth

living is to make it a creative transition to our '*second act'* in life, and to do this using the

creative, adaptive, prospective, part-somatic, part-cognitive paths we have described above.

If we accept the above (cl)aims to life, midlife, and The Good Life, we can start to

reframe midlife as a time in which *making our mark*, or a *sense of authorship*, becomes a guiding

force in shaping our selves. According to Strenger (1998), authorship implies living The Good

Life: it is about the possibility of choice. As a consequence, people who fully identify with their

lives feel that they shape their lives *actively* rather than reactively (Strenger, 1998).

Such a creative transition, in my view, involves three themes: i) *revision* (reviewing our life thus far, cultivating acceptance, and constructing our sense of identity – anchored in the past); ii) *prospection* (mentally representing and evaluating possible futures through experimentation; anchored in the future), and iii) *individuation* (enhancing our longevity by developing discernment, protective factors, and coping mechanisms; anchored in the present). We will review each along a reflective and along an action aspect below.

Theme 1: Revision (Awareness)

The awareness aspect of the revision theme is about *cultivating self-acceptance*. Strenger and Ruttenberg (2008) propose that we navigate between two cultural myths about midlife. The first myth is that we can only stay sane if we accept growing limitations by disengaging from the world, among others to prepare for retirement. The second myth, Strenger and Ruttenberg claim, has been created by the self-help industry: the notion that with sufficient amounts of foresight and drive, we can achieve anything. Strenger (2009b) proposes an alternative 'middle way' particularly suited to midlife. It avoids the extremes of the above myths in the form of *'active self-acceptance'*, a process not of resignation but of self-transformation. Active self-acceptance demands we develop articulate self-knowledge and acceptance and that we combine these ingredients into a self-development process.

Our human craving to leave a mark (Becker, 1974) would not make sense if we didn't possess a consistent self that is actually able to do so, claims Strenger (1998). Such an "unchangeable core" (p. 49) might be a reason for distress (if it proves too rigid, for example), but it can also be a source of pride and give us a sense of identity. Our relationship vis-à-vis this unchangeable core becomes particularly acute in midlife when we have gained enough experience to actually begin to know and understand who we are, according to Strenger (1998).

Clearly, acceptance goes beyond the self. It also translates to other forms of intimacy including close relationships and love (Smith, 2017). In fact, several go as far as to say that "happiness begins and ends with love": we are ultrasocial creatures and we simply cannot be happy without friends and secure attachments to others (Vaillant, 2017; Haidt, 2006, p. 219). Relationships are also key to a long and healthy life. Friedman & Martin (2011) show that what matters in particular is our social network: not the quantity but the quality of our connections adds years to our lives.

Interestingly to those in midlife, accepting others might be the most effective way to effect change. Thomas Bradbury, a professor of psychology and prominent marriage researcher at UCLA, argues that the prevailing paradigm for married couples to achieve ascendance (or more harmony) is changing from the conventional therapy model, which says that in order to be happy, each partner must change the way he (or she) relates to the other and especially, how the two argue, to a new model of ascendance that proclaims that *accepting your partner for who they are* will inspire change in him (Hagerty, 2016; p. 180). To be sure, contempt seems a guarantee for remaining stuck. David Burns, a psychiatrist and cognitive therapist, in his search for 'secrets to intimacy' to determine whether couples would have a long and happy marriage or a short and contested one, found one predominant factor: *blame* (Hagerty, 2016). Burns is cited as referring to blame as the "atom bomb of intimacy", arguing that blaming our partner is ineffective at best. Instead, we should fix ourselves first. When we begin working on our own shortcomings, Burns argues, our partner will change as well (Hagerty, 2016, p. 180).

Theme 1: Revision (Action)

The action aspect of the revision theme is about *uncovering our real narrative*. In midlife we become aware that there is not enough time left to waste: after years of living as if the years

never counted, we are suddenly faced with signs of physical decline, the death of a loved one,

career or relationship burnout, or other subtle signs of life not being forever. Midlife initiates a

process in which questions arise to challenge us what we really want our lives to be about

(Strenger, 2009a): "Who am I, really? What do I most care about? What are my deepest

concerns? What is my place in this world? What am I really good at? What gives true meaning to

my life?" And crucially: "On what do I need to focus in order to leave something of lasting

value?" Such questions touch the essence of who we are and can thus be intimidating; resolving

them tends to come at a price (Strenger, 2009a). Yet, the tradeoff, not living our lives fully, can

come at an even higher price: not living the second half of our adult life with purpose (or a voice

of our own). Author Charles Handy likened his midlife to sculpting his life in the way that

Michelangelo describes the process of sculpture: chipping away the superfluous pieces of stone

(Strenger, 2009a, p. 255). Life becomes more focused; anything that detracts, continues harmful

illusions, or sets up false hope, is called into question.

     In this sense, our sense of authorship is tied to our need to organize life around a central

theme around which everything else can be organized. To do this, in the words of Strenger

(2009a), life needs to be "pared down do the essentials," sending us on a quest to define what is

essential to us as well as to discover and develop a narrative for describing this essence that truly

describes who we are.

     This 'paring down' is also useful as we may unknowingly remain victims of other

people's values, aspirations, and expectations (Ibarra, 2014); we may have 'unexamined

premises' or assumptions that we use in making important decisions (Kegan, 1994), and we may

lack a set of tools to reinforce our beliefs and to scale potential obstacles along the way. The task

here is to understand those hidden assumptions and to uncover our story (and self), breaking free

from what Molinsky (2017) calls the "should self" – what important people in our lives want us to be – is core to the revision process in midlife.

Theme 2: prospection (awareness)

The awareness aspect of the prospection theme is about *re-signifying meaning for ourselves* (e.g., via purpose, process versus outcome orientation, and transcendence). Purpose, illustrates Smith (2017), sounds big: the term conjures up images of 'ending world poverty' or of athletes visualizing winning the 100 meters at the next Olympic Games. However, purpose can also reside in small things, like being good parents to our children. Damon (2008) proposes purpose has two important dimensions. First, it is a "stable and far-reaching intention" (p. 33). In other words, in contrast to the many routine goals we pursue, purpose is a goal towards which we will be working forever without reaching it. Second, purpose is "meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self" (Damon, 2008, p. 33). While we might use purpose in our personal search for meaning, it goes beyond: purpose involves a contribution to the world. It implies a desire to make a difference by creating something new, by contributing something to others, or to things larger than our self. In short, a purpose is the reason behind immediate goals that guide most of our day-to-day behavior.

From the paradox of egoism, writes Setiya (2017), we learn that purpose is not about getting too self-involved: "the obsessive pursuit of happiness interferes with its own achievement" (p. 33). Setiya describes how John Stuart Mill, the nineteenth-century British philosopher, struggles with depression in his midlife and then found comfort in the poetry of W. H. Auden. Reflecting what benefits poets bring to society, Mill (1960) describes the reversals in his thinking as his spirits improved: "Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the

improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way" (p. 117).

Setiya (2017) argues that this larger-than-self variety of purpose goes against our nature to strive for happiness in a self-centered way. Yet self-interested happiness will not us make us truly happy. The irony is that we need to do the *opposite*: we need to care about other things.

Adam Grant, a professor of business focused on how people find meaning at work, points out those who report the most meaning in their jobs are service providers: educators, medical staff, religious professions. They see their jobs as meaningful because it allows them to help others (Grant, 2013). As Smith (2017) observes: "If these jobs didn't exist, other people would be worse off" (p. 94). Grant's research offers clues about how we all can adopt find purpose in their work by adopting a service mindset.

The bad news, however, is that purpose is not easy to come by. Damon (2008), in the Youth Purpose Project study (conducted between 2003 and 2007), found that only 20 percent of adolescents between the age of 12 and 26 had a fully developed and pro-social purpose that they were actively pursuing. Research points to identity to put us in the right direction: Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, and King (2009) studied the intimate relationship between identity and purpose, concluding that knowing one's "true self" (identity) is a prime predictor of meaning in life. People who know themselves can choose to pursue different pathways aligned with their values and skills. In the midlife quest for finding authorship, this, too, can be considered a creative act.

In the spirit of juxtaposing the Western, action-oriented approach to well-being with its reflective Eastern counterpart, a discussion of purpose must be accompanied by a reflection on its counterpart: the *absence of having goals*. Here we arrive at Arthur Schopenhauer's (1969) dilemma on which Setiya (2017) elaborated:

What gives purpose to your life is having goals. Yet in pursuing them, you either fail (not

good) or in succeeding, bring them to a close. If what you care about is achievement […]

the completion of your project may be of value, but it means that the project can no

longer be your guide. Sure, you have other goals, and you can formulate new ones. The

problem is not the risk of running out, the aimless nightmare of Schopenhauer's

boredom. It is that *your engagement with value is self-destructive*. The way in which you

relate to the activities that matter most to you is by trying to complete them and so expel

them from your life. Your days are devoted to ending, one by one, the activities that give

them meaning. […] In pursuing a goal, you are trying to exhaust your interaction with

something good, as if you were to make friends for the sake of saying goodbye. It is this

structural absurdity that we learn from Schopenhauer […]. (pp. 132-133)

It is here that we encounter the difference between 'telic' activities – aiming at terminal

states, at which they are finished and expended – and 'atelic' activities, that do not aim at some

final state in which they will have been achieved (and therefore have no limit). It is in midlife

that our addiction to telic activities surfaces, claims Setiya (2017), as by then long-desired goals

will have either been accomplished or proved impossible. By midlife, we have developed a

chronic affliction to projects and related activities. We don't *not* enjoy going for a stroll or

spending time with family, yet we have been conditioned to derive meaning from the telic realm.

White (1959) posits that we possess a basic drive to make things happen; psychologists

refer to this basic need as a need for competency, industry, or mastery (Haidt, 2006). White calls

it the "*effectance motive*", which he defines as the need or drive to develop competence via

interacting with (and meanwhile, controlling) our environment (Haidt, 2006). Effectance is

nearly as basic of a need as are food and water, but unlike the latter two, effectance never

disappears. For this reason, effectance seems well-suited to explain our affliction to projects, as well as our chronic, telos-related happiness challenges.

If our problem is a disproportionate investment in telic activities, the solution is to turn to their atelic counterparts – that is, *to find meaning in the process* instead of the project (Setiya, 2017). Atelic activities, ones that do not aim at completion, have their value. Going for a walk, not to get anywhere but just for the sake of walking, noticing the little things (like sounds and smells) along the way, and saying hello to strangers can boost our well-being; it is possible to derive meaning from the process. Turning our attention from being absorbed by projects to mastering our cognitive focus – of our own thoughts and feelings – can be nurtured by mindfulness meditation (Baime, 2011). Meditating on our breath, our body, and sounds in the environment is a way to develop our capacity to be in the moment. It helps us to appreciate, claims Setiya (2017) the atelic counterparts of the telic activities that matter to us.

The last aspect to the reflective dimension of prospection is transcendence which, in the context of doing engagement shares an aspect of 'eliminating our self' with being atelic. Yet, transcendence implies rising above the everyday and letting our self connect with a higher (and larger) reality. Many people, writes Smith (2017), have had transcendent experiences, and they consider them among the most meaningful and important events of their lives (p. 132). Yaden, Haidt, Hood, Vago, and Newberg (2017) claim that during self-transcendent experiences (STEs), not only does our sense of self, along with all of its petty concerns and desires, seem to vanish, but secondly, we then feel deeply connected to other people and, for that matter, anything else in the world. STEs can be induced by a variety of psychological constructs that contain a self-transcendent aspect, such as mindfulness, flow, peak experiences, mystical-type experiences, and certain positive emotions (e.g., love and awe).

Once again, we can distinguish between personal and interpersonal experiences. As Haidt (2006) observed, "anything that shrinks the self creates opportunity for spirituality". Although spirituality is commonly thought of an individual dimension, it can also feature relationally. Sacred moments, brief periods of time in which people experience spiritual qualities of transcendence, ultimacy, boundlessness, deep connectedness, and powerful spiritual emotions, can feature in such experiences and are usually the defining variables in therapeutic relationships (Pargament, 2002; Pargament, Lomax, McGee, & Fang, 2014).

Furthermore, similar in spirit to being atelic, a sense of sacredness can come from *rest* (instead of constantly striving and achieving), *relaxation*, and the "*in-between*." All major religions feature such moments – think of Sunday, for instance. Some well-being-oriented cultures institutionalize them as well; a good example of this is *fika*, the twice-daily coffee, sweets, and small talk break taken by many Swedes that stimulates social cohesion by really leaving work behind (Morley, Angervall, Berggren, & Dodillet, 2018).

Theme 2: Prospection (Action)

The action aspect of the prospection theme is about *experimenting with the self as a work of art*. Strenger (2003) claims that we are, as late modern humans, involved in a process of continuous self-examination. According to Strenger, "a life lived without such experimentation is a life not truly lived" (p. 427). The urban gym culture, claims Strenger, exemplifies experimentation by promising us the body of our dreams. We are not constrained to the body we were born with. In fact, sculpting our body nowadays goes well beyond weightlifting and running on treadmills. We now have body piercings, tattoos, surgical implants, hair transplants: in other words, our body has become a work of art. Strenger (2003) argues that the body as a work of art is only the most tangible aspect of a larger theme: the urban self as a potential work

of art. In the 1950s and 1960s, he claims, we were told to 'find our true self', humanistic

psychology spoke of self-realization, and Winnicott (1965) focused on the idea that our true self

is located behind layers of false selfhood. Nowadays, urban culture, with the concept of our body

as a work of art, follows Nietsche's imperative to *create* our self rather than simply 'find' it. The

goal, says Strenger (2003), is no longer to find our true self behind layers that have been imposed

on us. Rather, our freedom resides in our ability to shape our self at will. In this sense, our sense

of authorship is tied to the possibility of *choice*.

The idea of the self as a work of art also manifests metaphorically in Kintsugi ("to join

with gold"), the 400-year-old Japanese art of putting broken pottery pieces back together, and

here, we get a glimpse of what might ensue as a result. Kintsugi is built on the idea that in

embracing flaws and imperfections, we can create an even stronger, more beautiful piece of art

(Kumai, 2018). Every break is unique and instead of repairing an item to a state as if it were new,

Kintsugi actually highlights the "scars" as a part of the design. When pottery or dishes become

cracked or broken, a bonding lacquer mixed with gold, silver, or platinum dust is used to repair

the crack (or broken piece). This bonding agent highlights the cracks (instead of hiding them),

releasing a beauty in what is broken. The theory is that cracks (or brokenness) are (is) not to be

hidden but instead should be valued. In fact, cracks are a significant part of life; there is no need

to be ashamed of using or displaying the cracked item. While the original form of the artefact has

forever been affected, through Kintsugi, the essence of its beauty not only survives, it *thrives*.

Using Kintsugi as a metaphor for self-creation, Kintsugi holds a message for those of us

in midlife: sometimes in the process of repairing things that have broken, we create something

more unique, beautiful and resilient. The transformation is not just about putting the pieces of

one's life back together, it's about a *total reinvention of self* in which the pieces are alchemized

into a beautiful, thriving masterpiece. Kintsugi can make us accept and respect what is damaged and scarred, vulnerable & imperfect, starting with ourselves, and with those around us.

Just as with acceptance, the notion of experimentation, too, extends beyond the realm of the self in the context of authorship in midlife. Arthur Aron, in studying the psychology and neurobiology of midlife couples in romantic love as it relates to their ability to keep their marriage invigorated, found that about one-third of couples in long-term marriages claim to be "intensely in love", suggesting they discovered a 'secret sauce' to staying happily married: novelty, the ability to stay 'off auto-pilot' (Aron, Aron, Norman, & McKenna, 2000). Interestingly, the key to novelty was found to be the *shared participation* of both spouses. Both need to work together in conceiving and completing new tasks from time to time to create dopamine-driven rewards for their brains. This requires joint effort, experimentation, and action. It also explains why so many midlife couples around me seem to be talking about renting an RV to go see the National Parks in the Western states together. In short: love and relationships, amorous and non-amorous, are a prime area for meaningful experimentation.

Theme 3: Individuation (Awareness)

The awareness aspect of the individuation theme is about *developing practices*, *awareness of our engagement*, as well as *discernment*, for discovery-based decision-making.

Design thinking is a human-centered problem-solving method for addressing ambiguous problems. It involves a five-step process that draws from the designer's toolkit (Roth, 2015): i) *empathize* (identifying the issues by adopting the user point of view); ii) *define the problem* (narrowing down which issue will be addressed); iii) *ideate* (generating possible solutions); iv) *prototype* (building possible solutions and/or develop a plan of action), and v) *test* (obtaining feedback on ideas and solutions or plans). Design thinking can also be applied to (mid)life in the

form of life design, a set of tools that can increase well-being by learning to *choose well* in our careers and lives (Burnett & Evans, 2016). Life design creates new possibilities by letting us discover and examine our lives and, subsequently, "design into our future" (Burnett, 2017), meaning we don't follow explicit instructions (e.g., from psychographic tests, texts, loved ones, colleagues, or 'experts'), but instead, we initiate a discovery-driven process –*wayfinding* – in which we examine: where we are now and where we might go by observing what gets us excited, what turns our career, what works for us, what is available to try, and what might get us to the next step (Burnett, 2017). In this sense, wayfinding can be said to add a dynamic aspect to exploring what makes life worth living.

In establishing 'where we are now', life design suggests we turn first to the concept of *flow* to achieve clarity and focus on what *engages* us and what creates peak experiences for us, as people in flow: i) experience complete involvement in the activity; ii) feel a sense of ecstasy or euphoria, and iii) have great inner clarity – knowing just what to do and how to do it; iv) are calm and at peace, and v) feel as time were standing still (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Second, life design suggests we look what types of activity we spend our time on in a typical working week (Burnett & Evans, 2016). Energy and engagement levels often coincide, but not always: energy can assume negative readings, for instance. The third key element is the tracking of joy in the form of maintaining a 'good time journal', which tracks the above three variables, identifies energy 'suckers' and enablers, and clarifies what we really should be focusing our energy and attention on (Burnett & Evans, 2016).

In determining 'where we might go', we first need to understand a key cognitive choosing process that occurs in our brain. This starts with Goleman (1996) and the 'emotional intelligence' concept and proposed that its associated 'EQ' was at least equal in importance to

our IQ in achieving happiness, success, and well-being. Goleman (2011) continues his

investigation into our emotional brain by claiming that a neural circuit located in the most

primitive parts of our brain, the *basal ganglia*, is responsible for something critical to navigating

the modern world: it extracts decision rules (of the "when I did that, that worked well; when I

said this, it did not work well" variety). Our accumulated life wisdom, claims Goleman, is stored

in this primitive circuitry; as it is part of the primitive brain, the basal ganglia only communicates

in terms of feelings – not words – and crucially, it turns out to have rich connections to our

gastrointestinal tract (the gut). Our own wisdom is thus made available to us emotionally (as

feelings) as well as intestinally (as somatic 'gut responses').

   When creative people solve problems, they use this gut connection. Knowing that

thinking and feeling are inseparable, they 'feel' the solution, sometimes literally by becoming

part of the answer. As creative thinking occurs pre-verbally and pre-logically, without the use of

words or numbers, ideas emerge in the form of feelings, emotions, movements, images, and

patterns. When we truly understand something in words, we can feel it as well (Root-Bernstein

& Root-Bernstein, 2013). From the above, we might conclude that: i) all of our decisions have an

emotional component to them, and ii) if we want to make good decision, we will need access to

our feelings and to our gut reactions to the alternatives.

   In practical terms, good decision-making starts with *paying attention* – principally

noticing, or attending at the time, and reflecting, or attending in retrospect (Burnett, 2017). The

quality of our subsequent decisions regarding 'where we might go' hinges on our *practices* and

our *discernment*. Discernment concerns our ability to notice objective differences among stimuli

along relevant dimensions for thinking through how we can best live our lives and use our gifts

and assets that might lead us to experiences of well-being (Raghunathan, 2011). It assumes that

no one is superior to anyone else in terms of overall intelligence (i.e., we can all do it), and

secondly, that success depends critically on chance. To a person who recognizes both these

axioms, it is possible to 'judge without judging'; that is, to be both discerning and non-

judgmental (Raghunathan, 2011).

Discernment requires three things (Burnett, 2017): multiple knowledge forms, knowledge

indicators, and forms of practice. Besides *explicit knowledge* about a reality observed external to

our self, researchers including Goleman (1996), Gardner (1993), and Scharmer (2001) have

proposed we also use *tacit-embodied knowledge* about a reality we enact, as well as *self-

transcending knowledge* about a reality we have not yet enacted or embodied (Scharmer, 2001).

These three knowledge forms appeal in different ways to our attention regulation as they

represent three fundamentally different relationships between ourselves and what is known

(Scharmer, 2001). Explicit knowledge concerns reality we observe from outside, reflecting on it

internally using conventional analytics and cognition; tacit-embodied knowledge enables us to

produce the known and bring it into existence (using kinesthetics or the body) while reflecting on

it through a *process*. Self-transcending knowledge relates to reality both from within and from

outside (using emotion, spirituality, intuition, or wisdom), reflecting on it though a *pure

experience*, or what Csikszentmihalyi (1991) calls "flow".

Knowledge indicators, argues Burnett (2017), are "those things that indicate how well

things are going", including recognition, intuition (fast, unconscious knowing, described by

Kahneman as "system 1 thinking"; Kahneman & Egan, 2011), insight and epiphany, simultaneity

(e.g., pregnant women tend to observe more pregnant women in life), and body signs (including

gut feelings).

Lastly, Burnett (2017) points out, several forms of *practice* for building our discernment 'muscle' exist in the form of journaling, flow reflection (or mapping), meditation, prayer, music, exercise, yoga, and the well-known gratefulness exercise.

Theme 3: Individuation (Action)

The action aspect of the individuation theme is about: i) *adopting protective factors* for building resilience & growth and ii) *enhancing positive affect* for broadening our view and for growing our resources.

Becker (1974) claims that we are driven by a fundamental denial of mortality and that it is therefore the key impetus for individuation. Our denial of mortality can take many forms. Becker emphasizes the *heroic attitude* aspect: we desperately fight what we know to be true. One way of doing this is to create a belief system that shields us against death awareness; another way is to be part of something that will survive (or create the resilience to survive) forever.

The process of gaining a sense of authorship in midlife via revision and prospection might seem straightforward, but the associated change process is rarely direct or simple (Levinson et al., 1978). On one hand, midlife is associated no more or less with difficulties including career disillusionment, divorce, anxiety, alcoholism, depression, or suicide than it is at any other life stage; in fact, these problems tend to peak at other periods in our lives (Bering, 2011). Yet on the other hand, it *does* seem that for many of us, troubles begin to add up during midlife: we *are* more likely to lose someone dear to us after the age of forty; we *are* more likely to be diagnosed with cancer after the age of forty-five, and we are *significantly* more likely to be substituted at work by a younger and cheaper version of ourselves after fifty years of age (Hagerty, 2016). How, then, can we equip ourselves, for coping with adversity while engaged in the self-creation process?

The concept of post-traumatic growth (PTG) is highly relevant for people facing such things as difficulty and failure, including business executives (Seligman, 2011b) and those in midlife (Hagerty, 2016). As such, it represents a major pathway to resilience (Tedeschi, 2011). Trauma creates significant challenges not only for our coping abilities, but also for the beliefs we hold about ourselves. Traumatic events often assault core beliefs; however, changing our thinking can make a big difference, ultimately resulting in PTG (Tedeschi, 2011).

As Seligman (2011b) explains, people's reactions to trauma is essentially normally distributed: those on the left end of the bell curve experience negative outcomes, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and suicide. Clustered around the mean are those who at first show anxiety or depression symptoms, but after some time, will bounce back to their original state. Then, to the right of the mean, we find those who also may experience PTSD, but after some time, end up doing *better* than they were in their original state. In an ongoing $145 million initiative directed by the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Resiliency Program for the US Army called Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program aimed at fostering resilience in soldiers prior to deployment, the mandatory module on PTG embodies the aforementioned pathway to resilience. It emphasizes a renewed appreciation of being alive, enhanced personal strength, acting on new possibilities, enhanced personal relationships, and spiritual well-being. The module teaches soldiers five skills that can contribute to PTG (Seligman, 2001; Tedeschi & McNally, 2011): i) understanding failure as a precursor to PTG; ii) emotional regulation enhancement; iii) constructive narrative about the self; iv) creating a trauma narrative in which the trauma is seen as a fork in the road that enhances appreciation of paradox (the co-existence of opposites), and v) articulating life principles that are robust to challenges. The recent evaluation of Master Resilience Training (Harms, Herian, Krasikova, Vanhove, & Lester, 2013), CSF's

"teach the teachers" module, concluded that resilience training helped reduce soldiers' mental health issues including depression, PTSD, and anxiety.

Southwick & Charney (2013), while researching the biology of (and possible remedies for) post-traumatic stress disorder, observed from military service veterans that PTG and resilience depend in large part on how our prefrontal cortex (the reasoning part of our brain) and the amygdala, the brain's fear center, communicate. As the former modulates the latter, the prefrontal cortex really drives everything (Southwick & Charney, 2013). Using it optimally, resilient people have the capacity to suppress their fears under stress to the point where they can handle things (Hagerty, 2016 p. 238).

Also relevant to midlife, finding meaning in adversity is closely related with the quality most associated with resilience: *optimism* (Hagerty, p. 241). What seems to help the most is a kind of 'realistic optimism' that recognizes the bad things in front of us but doesn't let itself be taken aback by them. The mental and physical benefits of optimism are too many to discuss here; however, in the next section we will discuss the ones relevant to authorship in midlife. Once again, the prefrontal cortex seems key (Davidson & Irwin, 1999): not only can it suppress the fear center, it also keeps the ventral striatum, a region central to positive emotions, engaged for longer time periods. After a happy experience, happy people thus manage to 'stay in the positive emotion' for a much longer time.

One of the most effervescent positive psychology concepts that shows the intimate relationship between resilience and positivity is Frederickson's (2001; 2009; 2013) 'Broaden and build' theory of positive affect. Broaden and build proposes that, unlike negative emotions, which narrow our ideas about possibility, positive emotions broaden our ideas about possibilities and open our awareness to a much broader range of thoughts and actions. Positivity, claims

Frederickson, opens our hearts and minds, making us more receptive and more creative. Frederickson also claims that positive and negative emotions matter in different time dimensions: while narrow mindsets brought about by negative emotions were once useful in prolonging our ancestors' survival (e.g., in the form of 'fight-or-'flight' responses), broadened mindsets brought about by positive emotions were valuable in different ways and over longer periods of time. They helped *build resources*, better equipping our ancestors to handle threats.

A good contemporary example of this 'building capacity' of positive affect relevant to midlife is the 'joy' emotion which we experience when we receive (or produce) good news or a pleasant surprise. Joy catalyzes our inner urge to play and get involved, or what Frijda (1986) referred to as "an aimless, unasked-for readiness to engage in whatever interaction presents itself" (p. 89). Ultimately, joy leads to the accrual of durable resources, in this case skills gained via the experiential learning it instigates (Frederickson, 2013). Hope, as a positive emotion, is another relevant example. We experience hope when the odds seem stacked against us and yet, we can envision at least a chance that things might change for the better (Lazarus, 1991). Hope catalyzes our inner urge to plan for a better future, and it leads – of all positive emotions – most directly to the accrual of the durable resources of resilience and optimism (Frederickson, 2013). A third example is the positive emotion of 'inspiration'. We feel inspired when we are confronted with excellence (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Inspiration catalyzes our inner urge to excel ourselves, and it leads to increased motivation for personal growth (Frederickson, 2013).

As mentioned before, stress (and more generally, adverse life events) is (are) a key topic in midlife (Hagerty 244). Seery, Holman, and Silver (2010) propose that exposure to stress and adverse events are typically associated with negative outcomes on mental health and well-being: more adversity predicts more adverse outcomes. Yet, these adverse experiences can also *enhance*

resilience. In a national longitudinal study, the authors found that people who had experienced at least some adversity reported better health and well-being than both people with a high *and* with a low history of adversity. Also, they found that having no stress was nearly as damaging as having experienced multiple trauma's in life (Seery, Holman, and Silver, 2010). One of the researchers, Roxane Cohen Silver, commented, "[…] it suggests that a few events teach people how to cope and people learn from these experiences. They learn their own strengths and weaknesses, and they come out stronger for the next event" (Hagerty, 2016 p. 244).

Three Tenets

Lastly, I argue that the above three themes regarding the development of authorship in the context of midlife as a creative transition to our 'second act' are to be accompanied by the following three tenets: i) *reflection and action* (or rather, reflection *in* action); ii) switching perspectives be*tween the self and the other*, and iii) the so-called '*wayfinding engine'* that resolves our 'being-doing' tension.

Reflection and action feature prominently in each theme. Whereas these terms reflect Western and Eastern approaches to well-being, in the specific context of midlife, another aspect of this division – what Scharmer (2009) referred to by claiming that "the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor" (p. 27) – gains importance. It means that change is not only about *what* is done and *how* it is done, but also about the *interior conditions* from which the changer operates. Scharmer's 'Theory U' is a process model that derives meaning from internal motivations and experiences. This involves deepening our consciousness in order to access the wisdom of our subconscious. At the lowest point on the U curve (not to be confused with the longitudinal global life satisfaction U-curve presented before),

different aspects of a complex issue connect with our (and others') insights and learnings as well as with our capacity to reach a solution via change (Scharmer, 2009).

The Theory U process contains seven different elements of awareness and action, each with a different source, organized along a U-shaped trajectory: i) *paying attention*: beginning to open up; ii) *seeing*: the view from outside; iii) *sensing*: the view from within; iv) *presencing*: the view from a surrounding presence; v) *crystallizing*: vision and intent; vi) *prototyping*: living microcosms, and vii) *performing (or creating):* embodying the new (Scharmer, 2009). While most of these actions will look familiar, the one probably least familiar is *presencing*, the blending of 'presence' and 'sensing'. It means to sense and access our own highest future potential and can be seen as the equivalent of Aristotle's "highest of all goods". Presencing, notes Scharmer (2009), is a critical capacity for confronting the essential threshold of nothingness: it involves discovering that one future element of our selves is already present within us as well as using this element as a vehicle for going forward (Scharmer, 2009).

For profound change to occur, the process must cross a threshold at the bottom of the U. This point, claims Scharmer (2009), is the location of the self – our highest future possibility – and it is at this point that we must engage in what Schön (1983) calls "reflection-in-action," in what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls "flow," or in what Scharmer (2001) calls "self-transcendent knowledge", based on a reality both from within and from outside. It is while moving through the bottom of the U that the self and the collective connect best, as we are closely connected with both at this point. This threshold also represents the point of creative endeavors: creativity fosters connection both with the self and with others. For this reason, every great leader or innovator has a way of tapping into this deeper human capacity to create – and so should everyone in midlife.

This process can only succeed when we are open to the restrictions of current thinking patterns as well as to the opportunities that new situations present (Scharmer, 2009). We should also remain open to the possibility that things unfold differently than we thought, and we shouldn't be perturbed by this. At times, we must conquer our fear, our biases, and cynicism.

This leads us to the second tenet, the need to switch between the perspectives of the self and the other in the acts above. Haidt (2006) notes that the self-concept is one of the great paradoxes in our evolution: whereas attributing a 'self' to ourselves gave our mental apparatus the ability to focus on it, by giving us an inner world, the self also gave us a "personal tormenter" (p. 206). In Haidt's terms, it is important to note that "the self is not exactly the rider [referring to Haidt's 'rider and elephant' metaphor symbolizing much of what constitutes what we refer to as our 'selves' is unconscious and automatic]; yet, the self can only be constructed by the rider" (Haidt, 2006, p. 207). Assuming we are all creative leaders of our mid-lives, we stand to make our 'rider' stronger from learning though interaction with other 'selves', and vice versa. In the same spirit, midlife is not just about the goings-on of the self; it is at least as much about interacting and influencing others. This is especially important in a well-being context; poor functioning in midlife, for instance, can take an unnecessarily great toll on others.

The third tenet connects directly to the two above: it posits that a potentially powerful solution may exist for the classic 'being-doing' dichotomy. Especially in Western cultures, we see ourselves as *human doings*: armed with agency, we know *how* to do things. More prevalent in Eastern cultures, is the view of people as *human beings*: armed with insights and reflections, we know *what* to do (Burnett & Evans, 2016). For those who feel 'stuck' in midlife, this seems a near-impossible tension. However, since midlife is a complex problem that we never really "solve", we should focus on improving by simply 'building' our way forward, claim Burnett &

Evans (2016). In life design, we start with who we are (the individuation question); then we

generate many ideas and try them out by doing them (the prospection question), all the while

exploring how to make the best possible choice (which is a resilience issue). As we 'build our

way forward', claim Burnett and Evans (2016), we grow several dimensions of our personality

and identity that link back with who we really are: we become more our authentic selves.

Furthermore, 'building our life forward' stimulates a productive growth cycle – one that

naturally evolves and iterates from being, to doing, to becoming – that Burnett (2017) refers to as

the "wayfinding (or voice discovery) engine." With the right mindset, Burnett claims, we can not

only keep this growth cycle going, but equally important, we develop a mindset of *immunity*

against failure. This does not mean that we won't fail going forward. Yet, we adopt the ability

along the way to reframe failure and transform setbacks into things that enhance well-being.

Layering Authorship with Well-Being Perspectives: From Themes to Activities

Starting off this section, we briefly re-visit the major perspectives (or 'layers') presented thus far of midlife as a creative and resourceful transition into our 'second act' as associated with each of the three themes derived from Ryff's (1989) mindsets and Keyes & Ryff's (1992) temporalities (Appendix B). Then, we will explore how three further perspectives on well-being in midlife (i.e., layers containing an individual-pathological task focus, an organizational well-being focus, as well as a creative leadership focus) can be layered onto this vision to generate a multi-view, and above all authorship-driven, view of well-being in (and beyond) midlife capable of producing meaningful positive psychological constructs and associated activities. But first, we return to one of PP's original premises: Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) three temporalities (the past, the future, and the present). Using this premise as a starting point, will subsequently layer the already-discussed perspectives as well as the new ones listed above to reflect different angles or authorship (or 'making our mark').

So far, we have reviewed two key layers that follow a similar structure and take the subjective node as a departure point (Appendix B): i) Keyes & Ryff's (1999) implicit temporalities to Ryff's (1989) six well-being mindsets, and ii) three self-creation themes (revision, prospection, and individuation) regarding what makes life worth living (enhancing authorship by doing something that is unique, challenging, and interesting to maintain engagement). To these, we may add Scharmer's (2009) 'Theory U' process layer – specifically, the *presencing* stage – to reflect the perspectives of the self and of the collective, as well as of 'reflection-in-action' (distinguishing awareness and action). In addition, three additional layers round out the authorship-driven perspective on well-being in midlife: the 'red cape' layer, the organizational well-being layer, and the creative leadership and innovation layer.

The 'Red Cape' Layer: **Levinson's Three Tasks**

Next, we turn to the individual pathological perspective. Although we have commented on positive psychology representing a corrective to pathological psychology, it can still help to integrate such a view. With relevance to subjective well-being in midlife, Biswas-Diener and Kashdan (2014) point out that pursuing only positive affect is unlikely to lead to professional achievement and personal satisfaction. Instead, we should accept and attempt to come to terms with all parts of our personality, including the darker ones, and thus seek a more holistic approach in order to experience happiness and well-being. Moreover, Pawelski's (2016) 'red and green cape' argument invites us to at least *consider* a 'reversible cape' view.

Psychologist Daniel Levinson, building on Erikson's (1963) life stage theory, is credited with having popularized the terms 'mid-life crisis' and 'seven-year itch'. In the late 1970's, he began publishing tales of middle-class, middle-aged men who were struggling with a stark, painful "disillusionment process" while transitioning to a time where "one is no longer young and yet not quite old." Levinson claimed (Levinson, 1986; Levinson et al., 1978) that our life is organized around alternating periods of structure-building (stability) and structure-changing (transition). During periods of stability, typically about five to seven years in length, we build our lives around a few key realms – usually work and family life – by making some basic choices, forming a structure around them, and pursuing values and goals within this structure. Key decisions we make during these periods with regard to our careers and relationships in turn become the key concerns around which we organize and fit in (or leave out) other apects.

During periods of transition, typically about five years in length, we question our choices, explore our options, and plant the seeds for new periods of stability. According to Levinson, change is not necessarily better, but our growth comes from navigating recurring cycles of

dedication and uncertainty (Levinson, 1986; Levinson et al., 1978). When we commit to a direction without ever questioning whether it befits us, we foreclose on other potentially valuable options. Yet, when we question endlessly without ever committing to anything or anyone, we also give up maturity and mastery. Thus, to be in our midlife means, besides being half-way to death, making commitments that are informed by prior questioning. We may entertain doubts, however, only to conclude we are on the right path, or make changes that are invisible to the outside world. Levinson argues that every decade of our life has its unique issues, challenges, and transition periods; yet he finds that the most turbulent transition period for most is around age 40 (Levinson et al., 1978). There are several reasons for this (Levinson et al., 1978; Ibarra, 2014): i) *professionally*, we have amassed significant experience, with success and setbacks, gained experience with multiple career paths, changed, and begun to want different things; ii) *in our life and career*, we realize that we will not, or no longer want to achieve, goals we held dear earlier in our lives, leaving us wondering how to cope not with failure but with 'incomplete success'; iii) in *health*, we begin to feel mortal; yet as discussed, we are living longer than previous generations, forcing us to find ways to pass our remaining years meaningfully and in good health, and iv) in *life*, we have not devoted time and attention to things outside our priorities, including our spouses, children, civic service, religion, fitness, leisure, friends, and hobbies. Seemingly exactly now, the aspects we ignored for some time start to feel unsettled.

According to Levinson et al. (1978), people in midlife people have three key tasks during transitional periods. These tasks are congruent with the three self-creation themes (revision, prospection, and individuation) regarding what makes life worth living (Appendix B).

Levinson's Task 1: Re-Appraise the Existing Structure

During transition periods, it is important to take stock, asking fundamental questions such as: "What have I done with my life? What do I really get out of my relationships – personally and professionally? What is it I truly want for myself and others?" (Levinson et al., 1978). As we attempt to reappraise our life, we also discover how much of it has been based on illusions, and that long-held assumptions and beliefs about the world are no longer valid. This task appears congruent with the 'revision' theme for self-creation and is anchored in the past.

Levinson's Task 2: Explore Possibilities for Change

After re-appraisal, we may 're-balance' the externally visible aspects of our lives, for instance through (re-)marriage, divorce, or changes in lifestyle or career. These actions are usually accompanied by significant internal change. For many of us, this is at the core of what we mean by 'mid-life crisis'. According to Levinson et al. (1978), a primary task of the midlife transition is to modify the existing life structure and explore possibilities for a new structure appropriate to middle adulthood. A radical re-appraisal of our life and career often means that we come to challenge those parts of ourselves that are strongly invested in the status quo (e.g., security, comfort, and benefits). Now, the only way to test exactly how much these matter to us is to experiment with them. This task seems congruent with the 'prospection' theme for self-creation and is anchored in the future.

Levinson's Task 3: Move Towards Commitment to Choices at the Core of a New Structure

In successive periods of development (notably infancy, puberty, and midlife), argue Levinson et al. (1978), we form a clearer boundary between ourselves and the world. We form a stronger sense of who we are and what we want, and also a more realistic and sophisticated view of the world around us. Every developmental transition involves polarities, including termination

and initiation. In midlife, we must modify the early adult self (including unresolved problems from childhood and puberty) and the life structure of our late thirties (Levinson et al., 1978). Greater individuation is needed to form a life structure appropriate for midlife. To arrive at this state, Erikson (1963) emphasizes generativity versus stagnation as a stage of ego development; according to Jaques (1965) and Becker (1974), the central issue is facing our mortality. Others speak of "greater interiority" (or turning inward to the self), while Jung (1971) interpreted individuation as the balancing of all systems of the psyche to their fullest expression (Lachman & James, 1997). In all, this task seems congruent with the 'individuation' theme for self-creation and is anchored in the present.

The Organizational Well-Being Layer: Positive Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

Following the individual 'red cape' perspective, we turn to behavior at a larger scale, the industrial-organizational realm, as this, too, is key to well-being for most in midlife. As we gain more work experience, we assume a more sophisticated perspective of what organizations can (or cannot) mean to us; therefore, this view merits inclusion here.

Following Seligman's choice to choose PP as the theme of his presidency of the American Psychological Association, two new branches of PP have seen the light in an organizational context: i) positive organizational scholarship (POS), led by Kim Cameron and associates at the University of Michigan, concerning itself with the study of especially positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members to facilitate their ability to function during the best as well as the worst of times (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), and ii) positive organizational behavior (POB), led by Luthans and focused on valid measures of positive psychological states that we can develop and also have impact on desired employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance. (Luthans, 2002).

POB asks the rhetorical question what it takes to achieve true competitive advantage in the global market space of tomorrow, with the effects of aging working populations (calling for a 'war for talent', among others), and perhaps most saliently, a *new psychological contract* in a turbulent corporate landscape (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). In this contract, employees are expected to manage and, essentially, take active ownership of their own careers. This implies keeping their skills and competencies up to date in relation to employers' needs and making strategic moves across employers (or even sectors) when necessary.

Conversely, employers' responsibility to their employees, claim Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007), has evolved into a "service provider" mode, which is limited to the duration and capacity as costs are justified. Instead of the ubiquitously propagated 'war for talent', which perpetuates a model of competitive strategy based on outmoded capital generation models (see below) and short-term growth, POB proposes a new approach: the investing, leveraging developing, and managing of positive psychological capital (PsyCap; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Instead of relying on "what we have" (economic capital), "what we know" (human capital), or "who we know" (social capital), PsyCap emphasizes "who we are" – collectively and individually (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004). Drawing from positive psychology constructs and empirical research, four psychological resources best meet the scientific inclusion criteria for POB (measurability, open to development, and manageable for more effective work experiences) with regard to the workplace: *self-efficacy* (or confidence), *hope, resilience,* and *optimism* (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004; Appendix B).

PsyCap Resource 1: Self-Efficacy

The basic idea of self-efficacy theory is that "people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce desired effects by their own actions" (Bandura, 1997, p. vii). Relevant to self-creation at

midlife, Maddux (2009) states that self-efficacy hails from social cognitive theory (SCT), an approach to understanding cognition, action, motivation, and emotion that assumes *we are active shapers of* – rather than passive reactors to – our environments. SCT includes the following premises key to midlife: i) our capabilities for self-reflection (i.e., analyzing and evaluating our behavior, thoughts, and emotions) facilitate self-regulation; ii) constantly interacting with (and reacting to) our environments, we control our behavior though cognition, which then influences our environment as well as our cognitive, emotional, and biological states; iii) our self and our personality are not just what we *bring* to social interactions; instead, they are also *shaped* and *changed* by them, and iv) we are able to use experience to enhance our self-regulation (Maddux, 2009). Our development of self-efficacy beliefs, argues Maddux (2009), is influenced by agency and exploration; efficacy beliefs encourage exploration, which in turn enhances agency. Performances, and to a lesser degree vicarious experiences, are powerful sources of self-efficacy information: successful attempts at control that we attribute to our own efforts will amplify self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In the context of authorship in midlife, the backward-looking PsyCap dimension of 'self-efficacy' seems apt for complementing Levinson's 'reappraise the existing structure' task: by cultivating acceptance and by uncovering positive narrative based on our past experience and life, we create self-efficacy.

PsyCap Resource 2: Hope

Hope is not optimism about things improving in the future; rather, it is a positive and goal-oriented motivation. Snyder et al (1991) define it as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful *agency* (goal-oriented energy) and *pathways* (planning to meet goals). Though hope appears similar to other positive capacities, empirical evidence has shown its conceptual independence and validity; in fact, the pathways

dimension is an important differentiator (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004). In the context of self-creation in midlife, the forward-looking PsyCap dimension of 'hope' seems apt for facing Levinson's 'explore possibilities for change' task: by redirecting meaning (via purpose, a process – versus an outcome – focus, and transcendence) and by experimenting with our selves as a work of art, we create hope, which in turn encourages exploration.

PsyCap Resource 3: Resilience

Resilience, or the ability to 'bounce back' from adversity or even dramatic positive change, seems particularly relevant in today's turbulent business environment (and likewise, for midlife people). At first, resilience was conceived to be quite rare in people, yet Masten (2001) provides evidence that resilience can originate from "the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources" and as such, it impacts human capital. Masten, Best, & Garmezy (1990) propose that we derive three uses from resilience: i) *overcoming* the obstacles of childhood; ii) *stress resistance* for steering through our everyday adversities; and iii) *recovery* from a major setback. Reivich & Shatté (2002) add a fourth use, *connecting with others* and taking on *challenges* and *opportunities*. The above authors also propose that, contrary to common belief, the major roadblock to achieving resilience is not genetics or lifetime events but our cognitive (or thinking) style – our ways of looking at the world and interpreting events that everyone develops from infancy. Resilience, they claim, is like a muscle: while many of the early external obstacles to resilience – low birthweight, childhood poverty, divorce, or abuse – can never be reversed, some of the internal causes of low resilience – like thinking styles – can be changed. Better yet, we can use this change to undo further negative consequences from events in our childhood that we had no control over (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Ellis (1962) claims that different reactions to adversity are based on our thoughts about the adversity (say, a traffic jam).

When adversity happens, the first thing we try to do is explain to ourselves why it happened. Our beliefs about the cause of the adversity initiate our reaction—how we feel and what we do. Ellis (1962) created the ABC model to help us understand the *meaning* of our reactions to adversity: A is the adversity (the event or trigger); B is our belief (our explanation about why the event happened), and C is the consequence (the feelings and behaviors that our belief causes). The B is the novelty that the ABC model introduces: most people believe that A leads directly to emotional and behavioral consequences (or C); yet, it is not the events that happen to us that cause our feelings and behaviors, it is our beliefs (or thoughts) about the events that drive how we feel and what we do in response (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). "Learning our ABCs" (Seligman, 1998) – that is, to identify the adversities that challenge our resilience ("what pushes our buttons") as well as our beliefs and consequential behaviors – is a key exercise for enhancing our resilience. An important related exercise derived from the ABC model is to identify our predominant "B-C couplet (or couplets)": for each of belief type, our emotions and behaviors are predictable (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Of these couplets, those most relevant to midlife appear to be: i) (B) *real-world loss* or *loss of self-worth* & (C) *sadness and depression* (sadness and depression originate from our belief that we have something real, e.g., a relationship, job, or a loved one), and ii) (B) *future threat* & (C) *anxiety and fear* (anxiety and depression-prone people tend towards 'what-next' beliefs).

PsyCap Resource 4: Optimism

Optimism is perhaps the PsyCap dimension most closely associated with PP. It is what hope often gets mistaken for: the expectation of things to improve in the future (Carver, Scheier, & Fulford, 2009). Optimism has been described as the "Velcro construct" (Peterson, 2006, p. 119) as it has many correlates, including happiness, health, and achievement (Carver & Scheier,

2009). Within PP, two schools of thought exist with regard to optimism: *dispositional optimism*

and *explanatory style*. Dispositional optimism is a personality trait that relates to generalized

outcome traits (Scheier & Carver, 1987). Thus, optimists are characterized by their broad

expectancy that outcomes are likely to be positive, and pessimists generally expect negative

outcomes. Carver, Scheier, & Fulford (2009) claim optimism is included in their model of self-

regulation, which states that all our activity is based on goals. To reach these goals, we must

regulate our actions and behaviors. Faced with adversity in attempting to reach these goals,

optimists will continue and keep going in order to reach their goal, while pessimists will more

likely give up (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Dispositional optimism has two key elements:

expectancy and confidence. Expectancy is the crucial one of the two as it is directly linked to

expectancy-value models of motivation, which assumes that our behavior reflects our pursuit of

goals (desired states or actions). Therefore, in order to achieve our goals, they must be valuable

and motivate us to go on (Carver, Scheier, & Fulford, 2009). The second element, confidence, is

influential on optimism. If we are confident that we can achieve a goal, we are more likely to act;

if we have doubts, we are more likely to disengage.

Explanatory (or attribution) style refers to how we explain the causes and influences of

positive and negative events in the past in order to create expectancies about the future

(Seligman, 1998). Pessimists explain negative events by inferring internal, stable, or global

causes, as in: 'the event was caused by myself, (internal), by something chronic (stable), or by

something pervasive and will affect other situations as well (global)". Optimists, on the other

hand, explain negative events by inferring external, unstable, or local causes, as in: "the event

was caused by something (or someone) other than myself, (external), by something that is

unlikely to persist (unstable), or by something that is probably limited to this specific event

(local)". Optimists, in other words, adopt unstable, external (leaving their self-esteem intact), and specific (depending on specific circumstances) explanations for negative events.

The key difference between dispositional optimism and explanatory style is that the latter recognizes optimism as a learned skill (based on Seligman's earlier work with learned helplessness; see Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale; 1978) and not as a personality trait. To facilitate this 'learned optimism', Seligman (1998) recommends that we monitor our 'automatic' thoughts, ruminations, and attitudes, and secondly, that we challenge our pessimistic explanations. Key to this capacity is the reframing technique, which brings us closer to the realm of innovation and disruption, where developing an attitude of relentless questioning of assumptions is second nature. Benammar (2012) proposes reframing as a four-step process: i) *determine your current position*: this is your core belief; ii) *analyze this core belief*: what are the reasons you think that? Come up with 'supporting beliefs' and pick the four most important ones of these; iii) force yourself to *construct the opposite of each of these supporting beliefs* by finding antonyms and grammatical opposites (this is the artificial element in the technique, to jolt our thinking). Generate variations on these opposites until you find extreme formulations, and iv) *consider your opposite supporting beliefs* and suspend disbelief by asking what would happen if they were all true. What reframed core belief would this lead to?

Explanatory style, argue Reivich & Shatté (2002), was such a definitive finding that the search began for other areas in which pessimism was a liability. Evidence was found in multiple areas. Seligman and Schulman (1986), for instance, found that pessimistic insurance salespeople achieved significantly less sales and had higher dropout rates than optimistic peers, and Seligman, Nolen-Hoeksema, Thornton, & Thornton (1990) found that optimistic athletes tended to recover and perform better after a defeat, as their pessimistic teammates performed worse. The

above makes the salient point that resilient people are optimistic as they believe they can change things for the better. In short: resilience and optimism go hand in hand in setting the scene for making improvements. For this reason, resilience and optimism, as inter-connected PsyCap dimensions with an emphasis on choosing in the present, are *both* key capabilities for facing Levinson's 'move towards commitment to the crucial choices at the core of a new structure' task.

The Creative Leadership Layer: Innovation and Disruption

As mentioned above, we are all creative leaders of our (mid)lives, but what does this mean? Creativity and innovation are hot topics these days; yet, we often lack context for why they are so important. The need for creative leadership has many layers and cannot be reduced to 'directing' ourselves or others, or to competitive advantage, as Pallotta (2013) argues:

> …the best creativity comes from a much deeper place than the desire to win. It comes from a desire to contribute to the lives of others, either by introducing something new that improves the quality of their lives or by showing people. That something thought to be impossible is in fact possible. When you change people's perceptions about what can be accomplished or achieved, you contribute to their humanity in the richest possible way. You give them hope for the future – a sense that life is not the demoralizing, unchanging drudgery day after day that the world so often teaches us that it is. When you change the way people think about possibility, it is an existential experience. It makes them feel understood. More than that, it makes them feel loved. (para. 3).

We live in a world in need of hope and love. In this sense, creative leadership is about leading our selves *as well as* about leading and positively affecting others (or, a hybrid between the individual and organizational perspective): we need to give ourselves and others a sense of hope, possibility, and love – especially in midlife.

Hill, Brandeau, Truelove, and Lineback (2014) claim that traditional, direction-setting leadership can work well when there is a straightforward, known solution; yet if the problem calls for a truly original response, no one can decide in advance what the response should be. The role of a creative leader, therefore, is not to set a vision and motivate others (or oneself) to execute on it; it is to create the *willingness* and the *ability* to innovate over time (Appendix B).

Creative Leadership: Creating the Willingness to Innovate

Willingness is about: i) purpose, ii) values, and iii) rules of engagement (Hill et al, 2014), or the "*what to do*". Most of us *build* (not find) purpose, or our 'why' (Coleman, 2017a; Sinek, 2009; Sinek, Mead, & Docker, 2017). Working with a sense of purpose day-in and day-out is an act of will that takes thoughtfulness and practice. Some examples of imbuing work with purpose (and meaning) with PP interventions include (Coleman, 2017b): i) connecting work with service; ii) crafting our jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), and iii) investing in positive relationships (Seligman, 2011a). Values, whether personal or shared, are about what is understood as important; in this sense, values are similar to meaning, but they can also apply to experimentation: innovative people (and organizations) embrace values such as bold (or multi-dimensional) ambition, responsibility to the community, collaboration, and learning (Hill et al., 2014). Rules of engagement, much like optimism and resilience (in the form of explanatory style) reflect how we think about problems, and how we interact with one another, maintaining focus on what is essential (e.g., encouraging desirable behaviors).

Creative Leadership: Creating the Ability to Innovate

Ability is about creating three specific capabilities for innovation, or the "*how to do*": for collaboration, *creative abrasion* – or the ability to generate ideas through discourse and debate (with ourselves and with others); for discovery-driven learning, *creative agility* – or the ability to

test and experiment through quick pursuit, reflection, and adjustment – and for integrative

decision-making, *creative resolution* – or the ability to make decisions that combine disparate

and sometimes even opposing ideas (Hill et al., 2014).

Creative abrasion is important to counter our innate thinking style preferences; as such, it

can support the 'revision' process linked to Levinson's first midlife task (Appendix B). Jerry

Hirschberg, the first director of the Nissan Design International studios in San Diego, resisted the

temptation to hire only people in his own image. Instead of only hiring big-picture, visually-

oriented, and right-brained design types, he hired staff in complementary pairs, deliberately

mixing in left-brained individuals who preferred structure and always asked "why" before

proceeding. It was here that the term 'creative abrasion' was born (Leonard-Barton, Swap, &

Walter, 1999).

Creative agility, largely similar in spirit to design thinking, can support the 'prospection'

process linked to Levinson's second midlife task (Appendix B). It typically involves three

phases: i) pursuing new ideas quickly and proactively with multiple experiments; ii) reflecting on

(and learning from) the outcomes of those experiments, and iii) adjusting plans and actions based

on the results and repeating the cycle while integrating this knowledge until a solution emerges

(Hill et al., 2014). Creative resolution can support the 'individuation' process linked to

Levinson's third midlife task as it involves integrative thinking, the making of decisions that

combine or even opposing ideas (Appendix B). Martin (2007) points out that the definition of

integrative thinking contains within it the creative act (also based on design thinking). As such,

integrative thinking concerns:

> the ability to face constructively the tension of opposing models and instead of choosing
>
> one at the expense of the other, to generate *a creative resolution of the tension* in the form

of a new model that contains elements of the individual models but is superior to each. (p.

15).

Thus, rather than being forced into making trade-offs when it comes to hard choices, the

creative resolution approach focuses on creating new opportunities. Integrative thinkers start

from a place of *consideration* – openness to learning from the ideas of others, especially those

ideas that conflict with our own. This mindset allows them to approach challenges from a unique

position: where conventional thinkers opt to choose between points of view, integrative thinkers

instead consider the value inherent in opposing models from more than one perspective.

Understanding the value of each point of view lets integrative thinkers begin a problem-solving

process with a richer array of possibilities. After deep-diving into opposing views of the world,

integrative thinkers – like design thinkers – make sense of the tension between the ideas and

reframe the problem to be solved in light of what they now see differently. They linger in this

amorphous sensemaking phase until the reach a clearer perspective on the problem to be solved,

and then explore possibilities and iterate on prototype solutions.

What is the relevance of creative abrasion, agility, and resolution to those in midlife, seen

through an authorship lens? At the most basic level, it is that *tension* is the most elemental part of

life, and that we need to continue to investigate, engage, and experiment with it. Tension enables

us to wonder, to make sense, to experiment, to interact, and to learn from and with others, and to

become stronger and better versions of ourselves. Thus, we had better learn to navigate tension

in midlife – without replacing one thing outright for the other.

A highly relevant example is what Ibarra (2003) refers to as 'working identity', is a

concept used in relation with career progress (or change) to signify both our *sense of self* in our

professional roles as well as the *action* we take (or the effort we make) to reshape our identity.

Ibarra claims this identity is a matter of skill, not personality, and can thus be learned by nearly anyone in search of professional renewal. In today's chaotic world, but also in complex processes such as career change, Ibarra (2003) claims, change actually occurs via *doing first*; knowing comes second. Therefore, an appropriate course of action is to try new things, get a sense of how it suits us, and then use this information to understand ourselves, and take appropriate action. This iterative loop continues, taking us closer and closer to our goals. As our working identity is an amalgam of: i) the type of work we do; ii) the relationships and organizations that are part of our (work) lives, and iii) the stories we tell about what we do and how we have arrived at where we are now, reshaping this identity requires reshaping these elements with time. Ibarra's proposed "test and learn" method for our working identity (Ibarra, 2003, p. 32-33) therefore includes: i) *making sense* (finding or creating triggers for change in reviewing our lives, stories, and identities – linking who we were an who we may become); ii) *crafting experiments* (trying out new activities and roles on a small scale before making major commitments), and iii) *shifting connections* (diversifying our networks to open doors to new things, and looking for role models and guides). Ibarra proposes that we look in the 'mirror as little as possible to gain self-knowledge. Instead, she claims that the self-knowledge required to make changes in our lives comes largely from social interactions and experiments in the process of *making* those changes. Not playing around with options, we will miss valuable skill (Ibarra, 2003). As an example, we should reframe the paramount question, "Who am I?", to: "Among the many possible selves that I might become, which is the most intriguing to me at the moment? Which is the easiest to test?" A transition phase, proposes Ibarra (2003), sees us move between holding on to the past and embracing the future. It is a phase in which we are in the process of leaving, but of not yet having exited, our 'old selves', and we have entered something new, but

not yet fully. This can be a long-drawn and painful period, as we are stretched between old selves (as several things, not least including work, demand), and our emerging new selves. It involves experimentation (e.g., asking ourselves, "Do I want to be like him or her? Can I be like him or her?" every time we meet a new contact) and navigating tension (maintaining several 'possible future selves' up in the air, as if they were plates held in the air by a juggler) for as long as possible.

Hill et al.'s creative leadership layer, complemented by Ibarra's 'working identity', adds a tangible, action-biased layer, stressing that creativity and innovation do not apply only to organizations; they also apply to midlife.

Putting it All Together: Layering Authorship with Relevant Well-Being Perspectives

The layering of well-being is a useful start in obtaining PP constructs (and ultimately, interventions) for enhancing authorship in the midlife transition (Appendix B). First, this layering helps to obtain a richer, multi-dimensional view of issues with respect to 'making our mark' in several dimensions of (mid)life – not as an end of things but as a creative transition to our 'second act'. Second, the first three layers – SWB-anchored temporalities, self-creation themes derived from a set of midlife challenges, and Levinson's tasks inspired by a set of problems – seem to dimensionalize authorship. Third, as discussed in this section, the layers share a number of commonalities relevant to the midlife transition (e.g., Hill et al.'s creative leadership dimensions appear congruent with the SWB mindsets, the self-creation themes, and with Levinson's midlife tasks), and therefore, they "read across" well (Appendix B).

Using the above logic, we arrive at the following PP constructs (Appendix B): for the 'revision' theme of self-creation in midlife, *acceptance* and *narrative identity*, with creative abrasion, the capacity to counter our thinking style biases for achieving collaboration as the

'how'; for the 'prospection' theme, *eudaimonic purpose* and *play*, with creative agility, the capacity to use discovery-based learning for iterating and finding solutions as the 'how', and for the 'individuation' theme, *engagement & discernment* and *psychological fitness & resilience protection*, with creative resolution, the capacity to use the ability to face the tension that opposing models present for integrative decision-making (avoiding "either-or" reasoning as much as possible) as the 'how'.

While this capstone is not intended as a platform for fabricating new, scientifically-validated PP interventions, its aim is: i) to identify possible directions for PP to reframe midlife as a creative transition by augmenting the authorship concept with different well-being layers as they appear relevant; ii) to introduce relevant themes – and cohesion among these themes – for identifying relevant constructs in catalyzing the above "positive creation" process; iii) to identify how creative abrasion, agility, and resolution might act as catalysts in this process, yielding an appropriate mix of established and innovative constructs (for the subsequent translation into proper, scientifically valid interventions – beyond the scope of this capstone), and iv) responding to identified limitations of PP methods thus far – chiefly, the 'ad hoc-ness' and simplicity of its interventions – to heed Pawelski's (2009) call for a "more methodical approach that would allow us to tap into the silos of research to create new interventions" (p. 2), allowing for a more rapid creation of new interventions.

This last motive brings us to a second *leitmotiv* for the layering of well-being: the conscious attempt to separate out constitutive elements of interventions to identify what type(s) of existing – and potentially new – constructs and interventions might be suitable for reframing midlife as a creative transition.

Pawelski (2009) posits that the first elemental category in any attempt to synthesize and test an intervention is *desired outcome*, the intended effect (Appendix C). Here, our desired outcome is the opportunity of gaining the "internal resources" that predict health, well-being, and resilience during midlife (using Ryff's six mindsets). The second elemental category, the *target system*, is (are) the realm(s) in which the change occurs. Here, the target systems are embedded in three proposed self-creation themes involving, true to Pawelski's (2009) claim, psychological, physiological, and social systems. Then, there is the *target change* that we intend to generate in the target system. Depending on our perspective, we might consider this change as oriented primarily towards the individual, towards the organization, or towards creative leadership. Having identified the target change, next is the *active ingredient*, the active element that may cause the target change in the target system. Active ingredients, proposes Pawelski (2009), may include performance experiences, persuasion, and physiological as well as emotional states; yet, for the purpose of clarity, they have been stated here in the form of constructs. Most of these constructs have been tried and tested; others (e.g., discernment) are included in an attempt to push the field's envelope. The last element of PP interventions following Pawelski's (2009) logic is the *activity*, or the intentional action recommended by the intervention. This category has been populated with sample activities, but this list does not pretend to be complete (Appendix C).

Three Action Areas: Positive Narrative Identity, Serious Play, and Self-Regulation

Having identified positive psychological constructs (active ingredients) for enhancing

authorship – and sample activities to go along with these – the temptation is to enter straight into

the detail of what relevant PP interventions should be fabricated (and how). However, this

capstone does not have the design or empirical research (or validation) of such interventions as

its objective. The aim here is to make Pawelski's (2009) "silos of research to create new

interventions" (p. 2), or combinations of interventions – existing or new – catalyze their

application in programs aimed specifically at enhancing well-being in midlife. Therefore, we

turn to the 'action'-labeled rows, with a specific focus on the synergy between the columns

containing self-creation themes and their associated positive psychology constructs (Appendix

D). Without losing track of the associated 'awareness'-labeled rows (just above) or the 'how'

related to both (i.e., creative abrasion, agility, and resolution), we arrive at three action areas:

positive narrative identity, *serious play*, and *self-regulation* (Appendix D). I will discuss two of

these action areas (positive narrative identity and self-regulation) below; serious play follows in

the next section.

Action Area 1: Positive Narrative Identity

Positive narrative identity is an action area that speaks to who we are at heart. It

encapsulates Ryff's (1989) self-acceptance mindset (anchored in the past), the revision theme of

self-creation, re-appraisal, self-efficacy, and our values (Appendix D). Specifically, its two key

constructs, acceptance and narrative identity, connect with the self-acceptance and narrative

aspects of revision (Appendix D).

Contrary to the modernist approach to identity which views it as objective, disembodied,

and independent of human understanding – and therefore, as an objective representation of

reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) – social constructionism is a post-modern movement that

challenges the modernist objectivity. It proposes that social experiences shape our perceptions of

reality via the meaning we attribute to our experiences. Our self is, according to social

constructionists, shaped socially and continually in a process of 'fine-tuning' (Neimeyer, 1998).

For social constructionists, the construction of knowledge, itself an interactive process, is

facilitated by language. Language is at once an extension of our thoughts and feelings as well as

a social interaction tool (Burr, 1995; Gergen & Gergen, 1988). When received well by others,

language can focus on specific features of the world, and in turn alter how we perceive that

world (Burr, 1995). More recently, social constructionists have theorized that we make sense of

our lives through stories to explain both our stronger and weaker sides (Bauer, McAdams, &

Pals, 2008; McAdams, 1993; 2003), thereby challenging the traditional view that our

personalities are shaped by fixed characteristics or by a predictable succession of life stages.

In the words of McAdams (1993), "we are the stories we tell," and as part of these

stories, we construct metaphors, or vehicles for "understanding and experiencing one kind of

thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). Similar to language, the metaphors we

use shape how we process and conceptualize information (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Our use of

metaphors also enhances our identity-based motivation: Landau, Oyserman, Keefer, and Smith

(2014), for instance, claim that students using a 'journey' metaphor show increased academic

intention compared to students who think about their 'academic possible identity' without a

metaphoric frame being provided. This illustrates contemporary thinking about identity in

psychology: we do not possess one 'self', but multiple versions (Tarragona, 2013; White, 2004).

Narrative psychology claims it is important to make sense of events in our lives by

converting them into a retrospective, story-like format (Pennebaker, 1999). After all, the way in

which we recount stories about our experiences directly influences the way we think and feel, the way we see ourselves and our relations with others, as well as how we interact with others (Tarragona, 2013).

Besides providing descriptions, forming narrative is about 'putting our own twist' on story. Walton and Cohen (2011) illustrate the effectiveness of this seemingly simple yet transformative act. In a randomized control trial, they asked minority college freshmen to read non-threatening interpretations of social adversity (framed as shared and short-lived) and self-affirmation to stimulate a sense of efficacy and belonging. Then, they asked the students to complete a survey and write an essay describing how their experiences in college echoed the experiences summarized in the survey. The students then turned their essay into a speech, which was videotaped for fellow students to see. The intervention group experienced significantly higher social belonging as students were able to 'transform' a narrative into a one of their own.

Creating such a narrative-based identity, says Ricoeur, starts with *prefiguration*, which is a basic kind of practical knowledge about how the world works (Ricoeur, 1984), including an awareness about what motivates people to do certain things. Narrative creation itself is an act of *configuration* which pulls together different elements into a certain order for telling a story. This includes *emplotment*, in which various elements are organized into one coherent whole, giving the arrangement a time-based dimension as well as a whole story, with start and finish, that has an end point embedded within it from which the whole story can be understood and viewed in order to make sense of it (Ricoeur, 1985). Lastly, there is *refiguration*, in which our general learnings from the narrative begin to feed into how we live life and understand the world. In Ricoeur's view, the time dimension is crucial to narrative; yet it also every needs to involve an action, as well as a story of a life (Ricoeur, 1988). Such a dynamic, time-led identity creation

process enables us to interpret the past via trait-like perceptions of "who we are" and to plan for the future in terms of desirable traits as well as how we will 'master' the environment in which we live (Bauer et al., 2008).

Our ability to "tell who we are" emerges in our adolescent years, claims Singer (2004), when we begin to internalize life stories and identities based on narratives and metaphors. This 'narrative identity' can help us overcome traumatic experiences, clarify our thoughts, provide purpose and meaning, acquire and retain new information more easily, solve problems, and even improve our health and immune functions (Pennebaker, 1997; 2000; 2004; Singer, 2004).

To be sure, no description of actions for revising our narrative can be complete without first elaborating on *acceptance* – towards the self and others (as introduced before) – or the healing capacity of putting words on what bothers us to paper (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker, Evans, & Evans, 2014). Making sense of negative outcomes, writes Wilson (2011), is the first step to recovering from them. The *Pennebaker writing technique* capitalizes on this principle by encouraging participants to wait until they have some distance from whatever issue they want to address; then, they are asked to write about that issue for at least fifteen minutes for three or four consecutive days. This can be a simple yet impactful exercise for making sense of confusing or distressing times in our lives; the Pennebaker writing technique can help to give closure and allow us to move on in life. Subsequent research has found that the Pennebaker writing technique works best if, instead of merely *recounting* an event, we: i) gain some distance from the event we are addressing, so that thinking about it won't overwhelm us (allowing ourselves to reconstruct it), and ii) analyze *why* the event occurred, allowing us to explain it (Wilson, 2011).

This leads to another approach, *self-distancing*, in which we are encouraged to take a mental 'step back' when thinking about past experiences – as if we were mere "fly-on-the-wall"

observers of our own lives – recalling the scene of the event in our mind's eye, taking a few steps

back, and observing the event by observing ourselves. As we continue to watch the event unfold,

the key is to try to understand the feelings of our self in the event: *why* did he (or she) have those

feelings (Wilson, 2011)?

Tarragona (2013) posits that our life narratives are not mere 'objective' accounts of our

experiences. By providing targeted writing exercises, Tarragona makes us experience viscerally

that our life narratives do not only *create* experiences – in the form of feelings, thoughts, and

reactions to adversity, as we have seen – but perhaps more importantly, that many more possible

versions of the same life story are possible.

Specific to midlife, McAdams (2014) claims that, in the spirit of Erikson's (1963)

'generativity versus stagnation' midlife theme, the big challenges in life may have to do with the

issue of *generativity* – our concern for establishing, maintaining and directing the next

generation. Narrative identity stories can help, McAdams writes, and we need to look no further

than highly generative adults who score high on well-validates generativity measures. These

people are usually involved in several activities for making a positive difference in life (e.g.,

church, family, community, politics, et cetera; McAdams, 2001). Even though these adults, too,

struggle with their share of frustration in life, we can learn from their stories. For highly

generative Americans, narratives tend to revolve around *personal redemption* (McAdams, 2013).

In stories of personal redemption, the protagonist often experiences an early advantage: he or she

enjoys a special status in his (or her) early years while others may be suffering. However, as time

goes on, the protagonist experiences misfortune as well, yet the associated negative events tend

to result in positive outcomes (or the protagonists learns or gains strength from the event). The

adversity is overcome, and in appreciation for the received blessings, the protagonist resolves to

leave the world with something positive, essentially committing himself (or herself) to future generations. Redemptive stories, claims McAdams (2013), reinforce our hope that our hard work and investments in future generations will pay off; generativity becomes a kind of personal mission – to live a life of service to others.

Lastly, we should note that an important step in the development of a positive narrative identity is the identification of its constituent elements. Many of these can be identified using the techniques proposed by Tarragona (2013) employs, including DITL (Day In The Life) for identifying our 'dominant' as well as 'alternative' stories that can explain the same events in our days (and lives) in positive rather than the customary drab or negative terms.

A discussion would not be complete without mentioning *character strengths*. One of the core tenets of PP is to identify and develop our strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). We all have strengths, yet it is important to discover them for ourselves and bring them into focus. Our strengths represent our potential (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000); they matter here because our strengths serve as excellent building blocks for our narrative identity.

Studying our strengths is not as straightforward as studying our weaknesses. Literature on the latter is significantly more prolific, and since science is predicated on studying facts and objective truths, concepts like strengths may seem difficult to define. Peterson and Seligman (2004) provided much of the groundwork for the use of strengths in PP via an extensive review of thousands of items of literature, science, and text from around the world and throughout time, applying an extensive set of inclusion criteria, and distilled these into a collection of twenty-four *character strengths*, organized into six virtues, that form a common language describing what is best in people and are aligned with numerous positive outcomes (Niemiec, 2017).

The Values in Action (VIA) Institute on Character, co-founded by Seligman, defines character strengths as "stable, universal personality traits that manifest through thinking, (cognition), feeling (affect), willing (volition), and action (behavior; Niemiec, 2017). Its VIA Classification of Strengths and Virtues has become known in the positive psychology field as the "un-DSM", referring to its opposite, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) for being a reference to psychologists that recognizes positive functioning and strengths instead of dysfunction and weaknesses (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011).

The alternative to VIA is the Clifton Strengths Finder (CSF), which is organized into thirty-four talent themes (Lopez & Ackerman, 2009). The CSF claims that talents are at the core of strengths, which are produced when talents are refined with knowledge and skills. The CSF was created by aggregating data from thousands of interviews with top performers (primarily in business and academia) and feed this data into a semi-structured interview schedule, which was delivered to millions of participants. From this effort, statistical analysis reduced the resulting data to thirty-four themes.

Besides using strengths as building blocks for narrative identity development, by simply *following* our strengths we can gain insight and perspective into our lives, gain optimism and confidence, as well as experience a heightened sense of vitality (Clifton & Anderson, 2001). Strengths can also protect us from physical ailments including allergies, diabetes, chronic pain, and even some mental disorders (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Also, using our top strengths, we can build physiological resilience in work, love, play, and parenting though creating positive emotions. Furthermore, taking a strengths approach has been claimed to be at the core of successful psychological forms of therapy (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Rashid, 2015).

Lastly, like our identity, our strengths are also not static. Research suggests we can *develop* our strengths – and as such, our strengths are a potential resource for addressing issues in midlife. Linley, Nielsen, Gillett, and Biswas-Diener (2010) as well as Biswas-Diener et al. (2011) suggest that strengths are not fixed traits across environments and time (the dominant, contemporary approach to personality) but instead highly contextual phenomena that accompany our goals, interests, values, and other aspects. The latter authors suggest that clients might receive more benefits when PP practitioners adopt a more refined 'strengths development' approach in which the traditional 'identify and use' approach is replaced by a strengths regulation approach that, much like Aristotle's "golden mean," concerns itself with optimal strength dosages (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011).

Action Area 3: Attention Regulation

Next, we will first discuss action area 3, attention regulation, for two reasons: i) it builds on the point about strengths regulation made above, and ii) in my opinion, action area 2 is the most important of the three, and therefore merits its own section, which will follow next.

Attention regulation is an action area that speaks to how we use our head to guide our actions. It encapsulates Ryff's (1989) positive relations, autonomy, and environmental mastery mindsets (anchored in the present), the individuation theme of self-creation, Levinson's third task (move toward commitment for choices central to a new structure), optimism and resilience, and rules of engagement (Appendix D). Specifically, its two key constructs, 'engagement & discernment' and 'psychological fitness & resilience protection', connect with the 'flow awareness & discernment' and 'protective factors & positive affect' aspects of individuation (Appendix D).

Attention regulation can be associated with Ryff's (1989) positive relations, autonomy, and environmental mastery mindsets (anchored in the present), with Levinson's third task, with optimism and resilience, and with rules of engagement (Appendix D). In short, attention regulation is about the cognitive powers in our head.

Regulation of the self, argue Baumeister, Gaillot, DeWall, and Oaten (2006), is perhaps the most uniquely human trait. Our relatively large capacity for it may be related to our group activity throughout evolution: as a result, we can use self-regulation to offset any other negative trait or experience to adapt and 'do the right thing'. Self-regulation is like a muscle: with exertion, we weaken it, but with interaction and with time, we strengthen it. Equally significant, claim Baumeister et al. (2006), self-regulation serves our need for socially desirable outcomes, covering inclinations and impulses that would otherwise make us act differently. This is especially true when we are depleted of self-modulatory strength, and it reinforces the influence of environmental forces over our modulation behavior.

Little research exists with regard to the specific relationship between self-regulation (or attention regulation) and midlife other than longitudinal studies that include midlife as a measuring point (e.g., Mischel, 2014; Moffitt et al., 2011). However, there is conclusive literature with respect to the relationship between self-control and one of midlife's key stressors: *making choices* (and decisions). Each day, we make many decisions, whether far-reaching (e.g., what job to take, whether to send soldiers to the battle field) or relatively insignificant (e.g., how much sugar to take in our coffee). Additionally, due to the explosion of choice in our lives, the number of decisions we are forced to take each day has sharply increased. We only need to look at the realm of consumer behavior to observe that our well-being has not necessarily increased in the above scenario: consumer behavior experts have reported for some time now that consumers

feel overwhelmed with the choice they are offered and frustrated with having to choose from hundreds of products just to satisfy relatively simple needs.

In a well-known consumer behavior experiment, Iyengar and Lepper (2000) found that shoppers who were offered twenty-four types of jam in a grocery store were much less willing to make a purchasing choice than those who were only offered six types of jam. Worse, those who did select a jam from the twenty-four-item selection felt *less satisfied* with their choice post-purchase. Though in Western cultures, having choice is almost without fail considered a good thing, authors like Schwartz (2000) have commented on a "tyranny of freedom" in that our ever-increasing choice is putting our self-modulatory muscles to the test (p. 79). Vohs et al. (2008) claim that Baumeister et al.'s (2006) 'self-regulation muscle' argument and Schwartz' (2000) 'tyranny of choice' argument converge in the decision-making realm. Making many decisions impairs self-control, depleting the same resource needed for a range of executive functions, including active responding and self-regulation.

In practical terms, these conclusions imply three concrete actions for those of us in midlife wishing to strengthen our attention regulation muscle; these actions are in line with William James' adage, "my experience is what I agree to attend to" (James, 1890). The first action is coping with the simple yet inescapable fact with that there will be *loss* in our lives, or as Setiya (2017) claims: "To wish for a life without loss is to wish for a profound impoverishment in the world or in your capacity to engage with it, a drastic limiting of horizons" (p. 62). What we learn from this, Setiya continues, is that difficulty in midlife is near-impossible to avoid; instead of fighting it, we should become better at *coping* with it. Especially in midlife, we must attempt to banish our fears of losing out, our hunger for having (and maintaining) options in life, our nostalgia, and the regrets from our lives as much as possible. There is value in having each of

them – we will of course miss having them – and yet, their value is easily overrated. With

options, for instance, "it is silly to think that having options could make up for reaching

outcomes you would not prefer, considered alone" (Setiya, 2017, p. 70).

The second action related to developing our attention regulation muscle involves

practical attention management: to reduce the distractions and creating opportunities in our day-

to-day existence to support who we are and what we deem truly important. Thomas (2018)

suggest we control both 'external' and 'internal' factors. External factors include controlling our

technology (e.g., by turning off so-called 'push' notifications designed to distract us and by

keeping electronic devices at bay when we do not really need them) to concentrate better and

longer on things we want or need to focus on. Internal factors are about controlling or modifying

our immediate environment to minimize distractions (e.g., by using headphones or calming

music while working in concentration). Internal focus, according to Thomas (2018), is about

reducing the noise within our selves: our brains are continually being worn out by external

factors and can enter into a tailspin if unmonitored. Therefore, we should first try to control our

own behaviors, for instance by avoiding multi-tasking or by completing one task at a time and

continuing to work on it until it is completed, by taking strategic breaks to re-energizing and de-

focus, and preferably by engaging in a 'digital detox' as often as possible. Second, there is

controlling our thoughts, which for many in midlife is one of the greatest challenges. During

moments in which ruminations in our head prevail, we should try to identify the 'sidetrack' we

are taking and attempt to steer our thoughts 'back on track'. Moreover, Masicampo and

Baumeister (2011) claim that our ruminations about our to-do's (or so-called 'unfulfilled goals')

can cause intrusive thoughts while we are completing other tasks and lead to poor performance

on those other tasks. However, this performance increases significantly when we are allowed to

make and jot down concrete plans to finish the unfulfilled goals. Therefore, Masicampo and Baumeister (2011) suggest, maintaining to-do lists and writing tasks down with some idea about how and when they might be completed can make us more effective and free us from anxiety.

A third possible action related to developing our attention regulation muscle involves the act of '*letting go*'. We want to make good decisions, yet there is no way of knowing if we have taken "the best decision". Crucially, our mindset about taking good decisions is equally important to what decision we make, and any second-guessing or ruminating about decisions we make *lessens* satisfaction with the choice we just made.

To show the importance of 'letting go', Gilbert and Elbert (2002) asked study participants to view framed posters of paintings by well-known artists such as Claude Monet, Vincent Van Gogh, and El Greco, and rank them in order of preference (1 to 5). Of the prints the participants ranked '3' and '4', the participants were told by the experimenters that they 'happened' to have post-card-size copies of these prints and that they would let participants take one of these home with them. Naturally, most participants took the print home they had ranked third. Then, the experimenters told a subset of the participant group that they could exchange the print they chose to take home for another print later; the remainder of the participants was not offered this option. After fifteen minutes, the experiments gauged participants' satisfaction with their cards. Those who had been offered to exchange their prints – but did not do so – showed lower satisfaction with their choice than those who had chosen the same prints but were told they could not exchange them. In other words, the invitation to some participants to reconsider their choice – thereby keeping their options open – made them devalue the choice they had made.

In another study about abandoning goals, Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, and Carver (2003) propose that in circumstances in which we are confronted with unattainable goals, we can

benefit from abandoning goal-directed activities (called 'goal disengagement'). Instead, they claim, we should engage in *alternative goals* (called 'goal re-engagement') if and when those alternative goals are available. This will reduce the distress associated with our desire to 'attain the unattainable' and allow us to encounter a sense of purpose by finding other meaningful interests. Wrosch et al.'s (2003) findings confirm that goal disengagement and goal re-engagement correlate with subjective well-being. Therefore, it seems that one of our action goals in midlife should be to develop a capability to 'let go', or more specifically, to: i) develop the capabilities to locate and activate these 'alternative goals' when called upon, and ii) attribute appropriate value to these goals to really engage and derive utility from them (i.e., not only for the sake of having alternatives at hand, but truly believing in their intrinsic worth).

Since the second half of the twentieth century, behavioral economists have questioned the seemingly logical adage of "going for the best". Simon (1956) was the first to introduce "satisficing" (p. 138), a strategy in which we settle for 'good enough' outcomes in life without wondering if other outcomes could have been more beneficial. To be sure, satisficing is a way to cope with our options fatigue caused by modern life, technology, and our selves; yet as Setiya (2017) argues, "the most we get from satisficing is indifference to the better option, not an active desire for something else […]" (p. 92).

Recalling Pawelski's (2016) discussion of the positive, 'letting go' consists not so much of 'not doing' something as it does of finding meaning elsewhere: we should do this in an intentional way anchored in the present, not the past. In this regard, our inclinations in midlife to 'take stock' (or step back) and to abstract details of our lives (or over-generalize in the same way negative explanatory styles do to explain negative events) work squarely against us. Clearly, we all commit errors, have misfortunes, and experience failures – especially in midlife. However, to

take stock is to continue "wrestling with the past" (Setiya, 2017, p. 101) and to weigh

alternatives theoretically. We can avoid a lot of misery by simply zooming in on the details of

our lives, and by staying in the present (if necessary, aided by techniques such as meditation or

the recognition of our cognitive biases, which lead to flaws in our reasoning). In doing so, we

may find we "cannot regret what we should have resisted at the time" (Setiya, 2017, p. 102).

Lastly, the fourth route to developing our attention regulation muscle to enhance our

decision-making is to bolster our psychological fitness (Seligman, 2011). For this purpose,

Southwick and Charney (2013) identified ten 'protective factors' for enhancing resilience:

adopting a positive attitude (e.g., Frederickson's 'broaden and build'), *being cognitively flexible*

(e.g., Benammar's reframing), *having a moral compass* (e.g., practicing Pargament's

spirituality), *finding resilience role models*, *facing our fears* (i.e., learning and practicing skills

for facing fears head-on), *developing active coping skills* (i.e., actively coping with stressors

instead of withdrawing and surrendering to them), *finding social support*, *prioritizing physical*

well-being, *training our brain*, and lastly, *using our strengths*.

The moral compass factor merits more elaboration as it is especially highly correlated

with resilience; therefore, our key 'to-do' is to develop core beliefs that very few things (or

people) can break (Southwick & Charney, 2013). Besides the spiritual dimension discussed

before, two other factors contribute to the moral compass factor: *altruism* and *gratitude*. Writing

about altruism, Hagerty (2016) proposes:

>If you want a healthy glow and a happy midlife, here's a secret. Give it away: your time,
>
>your money, whatever is at your disposal, give it to someone else. Especially your time.
>
>Volunteering prolongs your life. It makes you happier and spares you depression. And
>
>heart attacks. It helps you stay sober and boosts your immune system. It cures burnout. It

fires up your dopamine system, giving you chemical rewards. It lowers your stress level

and reduces chronic pain. It gives you purpose in life. (p. 300).

With this quote, referenced with multiple peer-reviewed studies for each of the points

made within it, the case for volunteering seems clear. To be sure, we should volunteer for purely

selfless reasons (i.e., not to look good), and make it work for us in the scarce time that we have at

our disposal in midlife (Hagerty, 2016). This is where we must distinguish between volunteering

and working pro bono. The difference is a strategic use of our skills, not just our time, for the

greater good. As most in midlife still have active careers, *how* and *where* we expend our skills

and time is a strategic decision. While many of us grew up with the idea that we should be paid

for whatever job we do, working pro bono can be a good opportunity for 'prototyping' our career

while deriving the benefits mentioned above (e.g., Burnett & Evans, 2016; Johnson, 2015).

Gratitude is another key aspect to our moral compass and resilience, and therefore, to

developing our attention regulation muscle. Gratitude has been conceptualized as many things:

an emotion, a mindset, a virtue, a habit, a personality trait, and a coping response (Emmons &

McCullough, 2003). As an emotion, claims Weiner (1985), gratitude is an attribution-dependent

state that originates from the recognition that something positive has occurred to us, and that

someone (or something) else is responsible for making this happen.

Gratitude, claims Emmons (2010a), allows us to celebrate the present as it magnifies

positive affect (which tends to wear off quickly). Gratitude makes us appreciate the value of

things, and when we appreciate the value of something, we are less likely to take it for granted.

Moreover, gratitude blocks toxic negative affect, even to the point where it can reduce the

frequency and duration of depression spells (Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008).

This makes intuitive sense: after all, it is impossible to feel, say, envious *and* grateful at the same

time. Also, grateful people are more resistant to the effects of stress, and will recover more quickly from trauma, adversity, and suffering (Emmons, 2010). Furthermore, grateful people have an enhanced sense of self-worth. This is probably due to the fact that when we are grateful, we feel that someone is looking out of us – adding to our well-being.

In midlife, we stand to learn from Emmons (2010b), who suggests we: i) *maintain a gratitude journal* (as a daily practice); ii) *remember the bad* (as a red cape/green cape practice): being grateful can be spurred by remembering hard times; iii) *practice asking ourselves three questions* from the Naikan meditation technique (Emmons, 2010b): "What have I received from _____?"; "What have I given to _____?", and "What troubles and difficulty have I caused?"; iv) attend a religious service and learn prayers of gratitude; v) *use our senses* to appreciate the bliss of the human condition and specifically, of being alive; vi) *use reminders*, such as other people, for triggering our own gratitude; vii) *apply ourselves* to practicing gratitude (e.g., by vowing to count our blessings every day); viii) *be mindful of our use of language*. Grateful people use language that includes the mention of gifts, givers, blessings, fortune, and abundance. Furthermore, gratitude is not about describing how good we are, but on how good *others* are; ix) *keep trying* by smiling, saying thank you, and by showing gratitude in heartfelt ways, and x) *always look for opportunities* to be grateful.

In the end, I propose we consider *gratitude* as a key (if not *the key*) adaptive strategy – for its own sake as well as in support of Frederickson's broaden-and-build process. As Frijda (1988) claims: "Adaptation to satisfaction can be counteracted by constantly being aware of how fortunate one's condition is and how it could have been otherwise, or actually was otherwise before…enduring happiness seems possible, and it can be understood theoretically." Adaptive strategy leads us to action area 2, serious play, which will be discussed in the next section.

Experimenting with Authorship: Play, Serious Play, and LEGO Serious Play

Action Area 2: Serious Play

This action area encapsulates Ryff's (1989) purpose and personal growth mindsets (anchored in the future), prospection, exploring possibilities for change, hope, and purpose (Appendix D). Specifically, its two key constructs, eudaimonic purpose and play, connect with the meaning and self-experimentation aspects of prospection (Appendix D). Serious play unlocks what our bodies tell us. It acts as a complement to the heart- and head-oriented action areas of positive narrative identity and self-regulation. I intend to show how play and serious play are central to the goal of developing authorship, making them prime agents for change in midlife and a major contributor to well-being. We will review three relevant aspects to the serious play action area: first, play itself, then serious play, followed by the LEGO Serious Play application.

Play: Test and Learn

Everyone, positive psychologists included, can appreciate Ryff's (1989) purpose and personal growth mindsets as they are 'positive', aspirational, indicative of a better future, and energizing. As most of us who have ever tried to diet or monitor and limit their children's 'screen time' know, future-oriented mindsets can be difficult to make a reality. We all desire for promised outcomes to happen at once. Yet, doing the hard work is difficult if these outcomes can only be construed using mental images, and worse, there is little guarantee that these desirable outcomes will happen exactly as we have been imagining.

What if we conceived these future outcomes (e.g., in the form of purpose or personal growth) not as work, but as *play*? And what if, following Ibarra's (2003; 2015a) line of thought, we thought of the act of playing as *playing with our identity* (i.e., our heart) while using self-regulation (i.e., our head)?

The notion of play evokes elements of fantasy and potential (Ibarra, 2015a) as well as images in our heads regarding who (or what) we might become. "Possible selves", Markus and Nurius (1986) write, includes a wide range of 'noise' with respect to our goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats of (and to) these images. They are a natural extension of our 'self' concept in the past; they provide context for our behavior at present and also include self-representations in the future. Combining play with the 'possible selves' concept is the key objective of life design; it favors a mindset in which we might say the following: "I have no idea what I should do or where my future might lead me, but I am going to try things and see where that gets me. If one direction shouldn't work, I can always pivot to something else because I won't be locked in to that first direction. As a life designer, I want to keep learning: I prefer to be a *wide achiever* instead of a *high achiever"* (Burnett & Evans, 2016; Krznaric, 2012).

In 'work mode', claims Ibarra (2015a), a sense of purpose dominates: we set goals and objectives, we keep close track of our time, and we aim to achieve results as quickly and efficiently as possible. Work is mostly about being serious, not about straying from the pack; it often may feel like a test for which there are only two possible outcomes: success or failure.

In 'play mode', no matter the context, we enjoy and discover more, letting our curiosity get the better of us, and often we are not very consistent or efficient. We may experience a 'flow state' in which we forget the time, and many different outcomes seem possible.

However, when do we *truly* give ourselves permission to be playful? Too often, play is deemed the opposite of work, feeding skepticism that play is a valid categorization for our behaviors (Rieber, Smith, & Noah, 1998). Nussbaum (2013) claims that American society views play as "kid stuff" and as "the territory of those lucky enough to work in creative fields or the arts" (p. 118). He proposes that play may or may not happen within a game context; in fact, the

words "play" and "game" are interchangeable in many languages yet separated in English. Crucially, the very experiences children look for in play tend to be the those that organizations are intentionally designed to avoid: disequilibrium, novelty, and surprise (March, 1976).

Huizinga (1950) offers the following definition of play:

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it. It proceeds with its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy. (p. 13)

Whereas the necessity of "fixed rules," or indeed, any rules at all, has been debated, Huizinga's reading concurs largely with other readings of play, stressing, among others, its: i) purposelessness; ii) voluntary character, iii) inherent attraction (providing physical arousal or excitement); iv) freedom from time; v) flow (or diminished consciousness of the self); vi) improvisational character, and vii) facilitation of our desire to continue playing (Brown, 2009).

It might seem trivial to assume that our reason for playing is any of Brown's (2009) above reasons; however, Gray (2011) argues that play has social-evolutionary roots: both in childhood and adulthood, play seems to have been the primary way in which our hunter-gather ancestors shed their selfish inclinations, came together, and organized themselves along collaborative and democratic dimensions that guaranteed their survival. As Gray (2011) notes, social play is Mother Nature's 'ultimate leveler': it shows that no one is special, and even those who are more skilled need to be respectful towards their peers, or else they will be excluded.

In our own lifetime, play starts when we make eye contact as a baby with our mother. As we gaze into her eyes and as she responds, we (the baby) will show off a beaming smile, and subsequently, our mother will respond with a surge of emotion and joy. According to neuroscientists, at that moment, our neural currents will be *attuned* (Brown, 2009). This attunement can be viewed as the *base state of play*. It is also key to how our lives will unfold: this 'base state' buffers growing children from excessive surges of emotion and will be critical to self-regulation during the rest of our lives. As we get older, play takes on the form of exploratory body movement: with primal movements, we create knowledge of the world. Play becomes a way of learning and knowing (Brown, 2009). Through this '*movement play'*, we *think while we are in motion*. Specifically, we internalize our movement using movement-based metaphors such as 'close', 'distant', and 'open' (for using them later in such expressions as, "we are 'close' with one another"). Movement play, claims Brown (2009), encourages learning, innovation, flexibility, adaptability, and resilience. These key characteristics of what makes us human require movement to be deployed in full. This explains why many warm-up activities at meetings, conferences, but also therapeutic environments, involve encourage people to get up and move: using our bodies to play is one of the actions that comes most naturally us.

Closely related to the attunement and somatic activity argument is the reading of play as *engagement* (Gauntlett, Ackermann, Whitebread, Wolbers, & Weckstrom, 2010). When we play, we pick up objects, ideas, or themes, we turn them upside down, experiment with them, and are inspired and amazed with them; we don't play for an outcome but for its own sake. Play as engagement plays a critical part in our learning and development through the deployment of two critical mindsets. *Curious minds* look for evidence and ask 'why' questions, seeking to convert a mystery into something familiar. *Playful minds*, on the other hand, convert realities into fantasy

or fiction and ask 'what if' questions, seeking to convert the familiar into the unfamiliar (Ackermann, Gauntlett, & Weckstrom, 2009). Both have their place, and both manifest themselves in children's pretense and role-play via *making things* (constructing and creating), *making things up* (picturing and fantasizing), *make believe* (inventing and pretending) as well as by *sharing their stories* (Ackermann et al., 2009). These ingredients of play are inextricably linked and fuel the process of play-based learning in which children (but as we will see, adults as well) invent different ways of seeing or doing something.

To make learning *meaningful* we must allow for 'playing around', experimenting with 'alternative ways of doing'. Meaningful learning is more likely to occur when a child invents those 'alternative ways of doing' herself; this will allow the child to grasp how those ways relate to other ways (or techniques) he (or she) experimented with before.

The effects of play on cognition are significant. Brown (2009) cites neuroscientists reporting a strong positive link between brain size and playfulness. Panksepp (1998) presents evidence for play stimulating brain-derived *neurotrophic factor* (which enhances nerve growth) in the amygdala (our emotions processing center) as well as in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (where we process executive decisions). Byers (1998) relates our play to the development of our frontal cortex, the part of our brain that handles cognition. Moreover, the period of maximum play is tied to the rate and size of growth of the cerebellum, which also processes key cognitive functions. Crucial to authorship, Byers postulates that *during play, our brain is making sense of itself via simulation and testing*: play activity stimulates neuroplasticity (or the changing of the structure, function, and organization of neurons in response to new experiences). This is because in play, we can try things without any negative consequences to our well-being. This risk-free

experimentation, claims Byers (1998), may be play's most valuable benefit: we can test new situations, find out what works, and learn from them, making new neural connections.

The low-risk possibility for experimentation using play has many, often under-utilized possible applications. Ibarra (2015a), for example, writes that her research reveals that the most productive way for leaders is often the most seemingly inefficient: by engaging in what she refers to as "committed flirtation" or pretend play (Ibarra, 2002). This involves committing to new possibilities pretending they are real and attractive yet limiting out commitment to being (or becoming) those possibilities to the "play mode". In pretend play, argues Ibarra (2002), it is acceptable to borrow from a variety of sources (instead of hanging onto to a sense of authenticity that constrains us). Moreover, Ibarra argues, being playful changes our attitude from being performance-focused to becoming *learning-focused*. Many of us in midlife may feel there is a 'lot on the line' in our careers, and thus, we minimize stretching beyond our 'current selves' because we fear our performance will suffer. Adopting a more playful posture might make us less defensive about our old identity. Furthermore, claims Ibarra (2015a), play generates variety (instead of the consistency we think is required). In Jung's words, play allows our "shadow" – the tacit aspects of our identity – to be expressed more comprehensively (Jung, 1958).

As we have seen above, we are more and more tasked with developing our own careers. Particularly for those in midlife, it is therefore important to provide our own alternative pathways for what Ibarra (2015b) has labeled "do-it-yourself transitions". This signifies that instead of the customary promotion, for example, we now often encounter transitions that take us sideways, into other roles, departments, companies, or upward but without a change in salary rank. In the face of such scenarios, Ibarra (2015b) suggests we 'play' more professionally by: i) *spending less time in routine operations* and more time away from the work we prefer to do (and do best)

in order to gain a big picture view, for instance by signing up for a new project, professional

organization, or extracurricular activity; ii) *diversifying our professional networks* away from the

'usual suspects' in order to develop a more strategic view of ours business, and iii) *change our*

leadership style and identity by broadening our repertoire of stylistic strengths in order to be able

to influence and inspire a broader set of work colleagues – despite apparently 'violating' the

natural leadership identity we developed and nurtured for years.

Lastly, to the point of pretend play, Phillips (1994) posits we tend to flirt only with

important matters such as madness, disaster, and other people's affections. In this sense,

flirtation might be considered dangerous. However, as Phillips suggests, flirtation might also be a

form of 'productive pleasure' about the spaces flirtation opens in the stories we tell ourselves,

allowing for their arrangement and re-arrangement.

Serious Play: Tacit Integration

Whereas play allows tacit aspects of our identity to be communicated better, its goal is

not necessarily to extract value – at least not in consistent ways – and much less to derive direct

economic value. This changes with serious play, in which the value extraction, as well as

subsequent externalization and expression, become explicit aims. Acknowledging that all value

in our modern-day economy can ultimately be traced back to tacit knowledge (Nonaka, 2007;

Polanyi, 1969), we cannot extract value from tacit knowledge. To achieve this, we must first

externalize the value and make it explicit (Nonaka & Teece, 2001). Thus, in order for tacit

knowledge to be converted into explicit value it must pass through so-called "knowledge

conversion processes" (Nørgaard Jensen, 2017).

Serious play and other enhanced forms of communication as proposed by Rittel (1972)

and Roberts (2000) have been welcomed as a promising way of engaging stakeholders in a

process of concretizing, designing, and integrating knowledge for resolving so-called 'wicked problems' (Rittel & Weber, 1973). "How might we turn midlife into a creative act?" is an example of a wicked problem: it cannot be 'solved'; no one discipline can do so, and an inter-disciplinary approach is required. To progress towards ways of 'solving' these 'unresolvable' problems, it is essential that the above knowledge conversion processes leverage experience, knowledge, and skill sets from a diverse range of backgrounds (Amabile, 1996; 1998; Nørgaard Jensen, 2017; Rittel, 1972; Roberts, 2000).

As a result, methodologies seeking to enhance or expand communication forms are crucial to solving wicked problems (Nørgaard Jensen, 2017, Roberts, 2000). Rittel (1972) posits that the resolution process for wicked problems relies on: i) *participatory design*; ii) *'humble' experts* with an awareness of their limitations; iii) awareness and mindfulness of *different personal perspectives*; iv) rational and *clear processes*; v) conditions for participants to engage in *critical thinking* over problem-solving; vi) maintaining an *optimistic mindset*, and vii) a process in which *arguments* can be expressed safely.

Serious play, argues Schrage (1999), offers a promising mode of these enhanced forms of communication using a collaborative, inter-disciplinary approach for creative exchange. Yet, Schrage stresses, serious play is not about teamwork, but about *shared space* – the objects and artefacts people play with to transform their ideas from concepts into innovations. Schrage (2000) also posits that collaboration involves not just coordination of people and activities (as we regularly conceive it), but more importantly, a process of shared creation is involved. According to Schrage (1999; 2000), shared creation is at once *the single most important process and relationship* to manage for achieving innovative results. The value generated by the knowledge

conversion processes is situated in people interacting with one another around a representation of their ideas; the communication issue is not bandwidth, but shared space (Schrage, 2000).

Serious play has been presented in organizational literature to describe moments where work and play are deliberately and meaningfully juxtaposed: we can engage in playful behaviors to achieve serious, work-related goals, including strategy development, scenario planning, organizational development, and teamwork. Within these contexts, serious play has been associated with various outcomes, including new insights, improved social dynamics (e.g., shared understanding), and shifts in emotional experiences (Statler, Heracleous, & Jacobs, 2011).

Switching perspectives to the personal side, Schrage (1990) proposes a core principle for how we are to apply serious play, and indeed, creation-led authorship to steer us through (mid) life: at the core of innovative approaches we find not creative individuals, but *creative relationships* (Conner, 2001). Blackboards, whiteboards, games, intranets, the Internet, and various other digital media can support creative relationships; however, the concept of shared space comprises more than media alone: it also should include facilities for constructive collaboration, including perspective-taking, thinking creatively, solution orientation, as well as self-reflection (Nørgaard Jensen, 2017). To illustrate, Schrage offers the example of getting into a well-intentioned discussion with a friend or colleague over lunch, when we pull out a pen and start scribbling on a napkin, and our friend or colleague says: "No, that's not what I mean." He or she then asks to use our pen, changes what we jotted down (or drew), and a discussion over the altered images on the napkin ensues (Conner, 2001).

In addition to the importance of creative relationships, the napkin-and-pen discussion introduces three more important tenets regarding serious play with regard to well-being in midlife. First, serious play is not only about organizational well-being but equally about

individual well-being: in other words, individual benefits can be derived from both a group

setting and in one-on-one (or one-on-few) applications. Second, if serious play can contribute to

individual well-being, then we need to pay close attention to the influence shared space has on

each of us: as a consequence, the objects and artefacts will need to assume a personal meaning.

Third, serious play provides an excellent opportunity for generating shared understanding with

respect to our identities as it harbors *validity* (i.e., weight, depth, and relevance via shared space),

purpose (via narrative) and *interactivity* (letting us play out our ideas and experiences in front of

one another).

Given the above, a latent demand may exist for discussing methods on how to organize

participatory change and processes of learning, experimentation, and sharing relevant to midlife

as a creative act (i.e., involving authorship). Now that we have arrived at a sufficiently clear

understanding that this creative act involves the creation of shared meaning, the facilitation of

such processes is also of interest.

Serious Play Methods

Schulz and Geithner (2011) claim the process of gathering people as well as eliciting and

capturing their perspectives is a complicated undertaking: it involves intense communication and

often a good deal of misunderstandings and contradictions. Yet, the important legwork is done

not so much using words: creating shared understandings is mostly an "unconscious process" (p.

2) while we develop ideas and solutions. Thus, methods should be used that specifically aim to

create understandings and shared meanings (Schulz & Geithner, 2011). Such process, they claim,

require the easy fabrication and understanding of *metaphors*.

Besides the aforementioned writing techniques, commonly used therapeutic methods

based on social research include (Carey, 2006; Schulz & Geithner, 2011): i) *art therapy* (in

which the arts are used to bring out our thoughts and emotions), ii) *family constellations therapy* (which attempts to reveal a hidden family dynamic spanning multiple generations, and to resolve the dynamic's effects by having us meet with representatives from the past and accept how life has taken its course), iii) *psycho drama* (where clients act out problems and events from their family or their past); iv) *dance or movement therapy* (which uses kinesthetic means for facilitating interactions between people); v) *video & photo collections or collages* (that can complement where words fail us); vi) *singing* (like writing, to facilitate catharsis); vii) *family sculpturing* (where a family member is asked to physically place other family members in positions in relation to one another), and vii) *sand play therapy* (in the Jungian tradition, using a sandbox, toy figures, and sometimes water, to create scenes of miniature worlds that reflect a person's inner thoughts, struggles, or concerns).

The general issue with the above methods is that they are individualistic, focused mostly on emotion, and dependent on manual and/or expressive skills of the creator. Moreover, most approaches require participants to provide *immediate accounts* of their views or responses; it is what most language-based studies consider as 'data' (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). Yet, most of us can't provide accurate accounts of why we do, like, or desire things – and even less so, *why* – when interviewed. It seems, then, that a reflective process (that takes some time) needs to be provided in order to arrive at data that results from careful reflection. For these reasons, the above techniques are likely to pose challenges to a significant percentage of users, making them less suitable for addressing the prospection theme of the midlife transition.

LEGO Serious Play: Thinking with Our Hands

An alternative to the less suitable techniques above can be found using the LEGO®

Serious Play® (LSP) method, which was developed by the LEGO company in 1999 in

association with two professors from the IMD business school, Johan Roos and Bart Victor

(Roos & Victor, 1999; Roos, Victor, & Statler, 2004). LSP is a tangible and interactive tool that

helps build knowledge and create understanding about individual and group interaction regarding

thinking, communication, and problem-solving challenges within organizations, teams, and

individuals (Schulz & Geithner, 2011). Tapping into our ability to imagine, the LSP

methodology aims at unlocking the potential of all participants in a workshop. Fundamentally,

LSP is about: i) navigating complexity using the group dynamic principle; ii) using prospective

thinking for solving 'wicked' problems such as the midlife transition, and iii) effecting tangible

change (LEGO SERIOUS PLAY, 2002; James, 2013; Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014;

McCusker, 2014). Though facilitating deeper learning, it can catalyze personal, group, and

systemic change and improvement.

LSP Workshop Logistics

In practice, LSP is a facilitated workshop in which six to ten participants (who may or

may not know one another) are asked questions with regard to work or life issues. They answer

these questions by building metaphorical models, using LEGO bricks, of their insights into (or

views on) these issues, and subsequently presenting their models to the others. This exercise may

repeat itself in various iterations, yet the central LSP process always begins with a skill-building

phase where participants re-acquaint themselves with the practice of assembling LEGO bricks.

They are subsequently introduced to some of the key aspects of the LSP methodology, including

the hand-brain connection (theory) and the construction of metaphors (action). Although this

introductory phase consumes anywhere between one and two hours, it cannot be left out as it is

critical to subsequent exercises (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014).

The introductory phase then leads to one or more of seven core LSP applications, each

increasing in complexity in terms of the problems it addresses (Gauntlett, 2007). The advanced

applications include shared model building by the group, building connections within and across

models or systems, the identification of external entities that may impact the professional

workplace, the identification of emergent future scenarios, and the joint establishing of guiding

principles for navigating and adapting to change (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014; Peabody,

2015). Though many of these applications are geared toward systems and organizations, the

same strategies are useful for identifying and evaluating the 'wicked' problems (and systems) in

our individual lives (Peabody, 2015).

The most popular of the core LSP applications include modules aimed at the *enterprise*

(e.g., 'real time strategy for the enterprise', oriented toward achieving a shared identity of the

organization); at the *team* (e.g., 'real time strategy for the team', oriented toward group

dynamics), and at the individual (e.g., 'real time identity for you', in which participants build

models of their identity at work, then make adjustments to the model to show their perceived

identity, and then change it once more to produce an aspirational model depicting what they can

be 'at their best', reflecting on the differences between each of these models). Appendix E

provides a brief overview of the workings of the 'real time identity for you' application.

LSP and Constructionism: Building Knowledge for Solving Problems

LSP is situated in the belief that we can use our bodies, and specifically our hands, to

construct models for knowledge and learning, and that using our hands in this way opens up new

pathways for free, creative, and expressive thinking (Gauntlett, 2007). Penfield and Rasmussen

(1950) found that a surprisingly large portion of our brain's motor functions are dedicated to the hand. More specifically, the LSP facilitator manual claims that seventy to eighty percent of our brain cells are connected to our hands (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2013). Their findings suggest that our hands are not only a valuable place for the brain to be receiving information *from* – in addition to manipulating objects *with* – but that 'thinking with our hands' can be intrinsically meaningful (Gauntlett, 2007).

LSP borrows from the learning philosophy of the creative arts and design through its association with constructivism, developed by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget. Piaget (1954) argued that we amass knowledge from the interaction of our mind with our surroundings, building so-called *knowledge structures*. One of Piaget's students, Seymour Papert, explored how we 'build' knowledge especially fast when we are engaged in the building of tangible objects external to ourselves (Papert and Harel, 1991). Papert (1993) also noticed that when students were fabricating something with their hands, they were in a more engaged state similar to that of flow. LSP thus uses both Papert's 'hands-on learning' and Csikszentmihalyi's flow state in a free-thinking, playful process.

Vallée-Tourangeau, Steffensen, Vallée-Tourangeau, and Sirota (2016) claim that in contrast to our common conception of the mind as a computer, we actually 'live through' a situation while we think: when we problem solve, we engage with artefacts and manipulate them to enhance and transform our ability to think and explain ourselves. To illustrate the point, the authors offer an example of how we play Scrabble: we naturally touch, move, and re-arrange the tiles we receive. These actions are key to the process of generating words. As we re-configure the spatial properties of our environment, we are not only facilitating our problem solving; we are in fact problem solving. Changes in the physical environment make it easier for us to

remember the information we are processing, and secondly, they allow for the problem to be reconfigured, which can in turn spur new possibilities for action or thinking about the problem. Thus, the authors claim, thinking is an embodied activity embedded in a physical environment. The above explains why LSP can be an essential tool in 'building knowledge' about ourselves.

LSP and Narrative Identity Development

Gauntlett (2007) and others have proposed that central to LSP's utility is the use of narratives and metaphors for sharing complex insights (or meaning) with others. Specifically, building a metaphorical model of one's identity in LSP constitutes a literal representation of Ricoeur's (1984; 1985; 1988) *configuration process*: we begin the exercise with bits (of information) and pieces (LEGO blocks) – which equates to *prefiguration*. Then we select bricks and other LEGO building materials from the range of pieces; we attach a personal meaning to these pieces, and arrange them in a specific formation, connecting the parts and building a meaningful whole – which equates to *configuration*. When we consider our models together with other participants and tell the story of our model, we may arrive at new insights about our identity by reflecting on the configuration process – which equates to *refiguration*.

How LSP and PP can enhance well-being

Creating models, metaphors, and narratives, we can explore positive qualities and employ LSP for implementing PP activities and interventions (Bab & Boniwell, 2016). Moreover, LSP geared toward PP can generate well-being – for instance, along all dimensions of the PERMA well-being model (Seligman, 2011).

LSP creates *positive emotion* as it is a powerful way of adapting and developing new skills; as such, it is a positive activity (Brown, 2009). 'Thinking with our hands', we create new

neural connections, unleashing creativity and novel ways of thinking and seeing that most adults

forgot they possessed (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014).

LSP also stimulates *engagement*: Papert (1991) authored a 'broaden and build'-like

theory for engagement: when we construct things, we 'learn by making' by simultaneously

constructing knowledge in our minds. This new knowledge enables us to build even more

sophisticated things, yielding still more knowledge and creating a self-perpetuating circle of

learning and creating. As we have seen above, 'living through' a situation (for instance while

playing Scrabble) enhances our relationship with the information we are considering and

ultimately, our problem-solving.

LSP enhances *relationships* by assuming that, in line with Polyani's (1969) tacit

integration concept, the answers are 'already present in the room'. The following LSP tenets

support this positive effect on relationships: i) *leaders don't have all the answers*; their success is

commensurate with all voices in the room feeling safe and being heard; ii) we have an *innate*

desire to contribute and take charge; iii) more sustainable relationships start with *encouraging*

everyone to contribute and express themselves – verbally and using bricks, and iv) *much group*

knowledge is left untapped due to group think and the '20/80 meeting syndrome' (20 percent of

meeting participants talking 80 percent of the time; Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014).

In LSP, *meaning* is conveyed through the story which is told by the model's creator and

accepted and respected as being the creator's (i.e., others cannot superimpose their own meaning

on it. Moreover, this meaning can be easily grasped by others (though they can make

observations, ask clarifying questions, or offer comments). After the individual models are

shared and expressed, the models can be linked physically (or even joined) to express

connections or form a shared model – embodying the shared understanding (James, 2013). The

stories shared between participants subsequently catalyze learning and discussions that in turn

fuel creative thinking, ideation, reflection, and motivation to change (Gauntlett, 2007).

Lastly, LSP boosts our sense of *achievement*. After all, we value self-made objects more

than any other (the "IKEA effect"): building an object increases both thoughts about its positive

attributes as well as positive affect and emotional attachments related to that object. Also, self-

assembly of objects may allow people to feel competent and display evidence of their

competence (Norton, Mochon & Ariely, 2012).

Using PP-focused LSP exercises, we may expect positive impact on the following

dependent variables (Bab & Boniwell, 2016): i) *intrinsic motivation*: as Ryan and Deci (2000)

posited, an intrinsically motivated person is moved to act for the fun or the challenge involved in

a task; using components of play is associated with fun, thus tapping into our intrinsic

motivation; ii) *confidence*: SP can be used to identify and discuss evidence of previous

achievements, a key means to developing confidence; iii) *creativity*: SP facilitates and enhances

creativity, problem solving, and re-framing; iv) *strengths use*: models and metaphors, when

helping to craft positive stories, can be used to illustrate and contextualize our strengths. Those

able to identify and apply their strengths to daily life will build stronger, more positive

relationships with themselves and others; v) *teamwork*: SP is a helpful intervention for team

building and collaboration. Inviting others to take part in creating a new perspective or finding a

solution together generates a spirit of sharing and belonging and enhances interpersonal and

group skills, and vi) *meta-perspective*: this acknowledges that everything has a positive and a

negative side and allows us to see the benefits and downsides of our strengths and competencies,

enabling us to adopt a more holistic approach to situations and put things in perspective through

creating stories and using visual means.

Demonstrating the Therapeutic Value of PP-focused LSP

LSP is applied around the world in a variety of contexts, including business, consulting, higher education, research, life coaching, and nascent work with families and mentors (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014; Nolan, 2009; Peabody, 2015). Nolan (2009) presents evidence for the utility of LSP in mentoring relationships, which in turn has implications for the supervisory relationship between facilitator and participant(s). Specific to identity development and LSP, Gauntlett's (2007) research demonstrates relevance for further research and exploration in clinical supervision.

As Peabody (2015) has pointed out, modifications for the application of LSP techniques in clinical supervision (or coaching) appear necessary as LSP is normally conducted in a workshop format of anywhere from 2-3 hours to two days in length. Though normally conducted with adult groups of six to ten participants, successful LSP adaptations have also included use with one or two participants (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014; Peabody, 2015) and academic exercises extending over full semesters (Gauntlett, 2007; James & Brookfield, 2014). Nolan (2009) and Sutton (2012) have both indicated that LSP holds substantial promise in the area of counseling, and Peabody (2015) has examined its application in play therapy supervision and researching its impact in higher education coursework.

Gauntlett & Holzwarth (2006) claim that whereas the therapeutic value of creative activity has been well-documented (e.g., Edwards, 2014), the possible benefit for clients has mostly been considered a "happy side effect". This is the opposite with LSP: it challenges the seemingly obvious notion that we can explore our social world simply be asking one another questions, using verbal language. Instead, LSP offers a methodology for supporting the

exploration of our identity and experiences. It assumes each of us has something interesting to communicate, that we can do so in creative ways, and that this can raise our well-being levels.

While testimonials and exemplars with regard to the use of LSP abound, empirical evidence remains scarce. This is especially true for the nascent PP focus in LSP that stresses well-being. Two important sources exist to date: the first is from one of the original LSP developers interested specifically in narrative identity; the second from counseling psychology research in which LSP is used specifically for addressing various PP and career counseling topics. As the lead LSP developer for the 'real-time strategy for you' identity-based module in the LSP facilitator manual, Gauntlett (2007) offers the most comprehensive account available to date of testimonials and exemplars with regard to LSP focused specifically on PP. In ten four-hour-long LSP sessions conducted in 2005-2006 with 79 participants in which LSP served to explore how people view their identities and their strongest influences on them, the LSP 'real-time strategy for you' module was developed. In a post-session questionnaire, participants were asked to complete questions including "I think that people see me as: …", followed by "But in my LEGO identity model, we can see me as: …" According to Gauntlett (2007), many responses indicated that the metaphorical models that participants had built revealed aspects of their identity that could not normally be observed; others even claimed their models showed almost the *opposite* of what others might expect. Dedicating seven pages to the overwhelmingly positive feedback on the use of PP techniques in LSP, Gauntlett (2007) suggests that on the whole, the notions of *discovery* and *revelation* have been the most striking theme of the comments provided. Moreover, Peabody (2015) comments that the 'real-time strategy for you' module is "especially useful to explore and clarify the complex notion of […] identity and to gain insight into the notion that identity continuously develops over time."

Harn and Hsiao's (2018) study into measurable benefits of specific PP-focused applications in LSP for a workplace stress reduction research study presents evidence that making LEGO models in a workplace setting has a significant effect on reducing work-related anxiety. As such, it represents one of the earliest and most systematic attempts at measuring the impact of LSP techniques in empirical form. We can only hope that more similarly PP-oriented LSP research studies will follow.

As for myself, entering the MAPP program at the University of Pennsylvania as a trained LSP facilitator in 2017, I became an LSP facilitator for Positive Psychology topics in Copenhagen, Denmark in January 2018, training with the International Association of Master Facilitators in the LEGO® SERIOUS® PLAY® for Positive Psychology Method. This experience, as well as subsequent experiments in the context of MAPP, have made it clear to me that LSP can cater to the need for more dynamic and somatic approaches to specific midlife challenges using positive psychology methods. Appendix F includes more detailed information on such explorations, including: i) a sample step-by-step guide for a strengths-focused LSP exercise (Strong Strengths); ii) a strengths exploration comparing VIA and LSP in the context of a MAPP assignment, and iii) a series of exercises of a 'LSP meets PP' workshop for fellow MAPP students and faculty I conducted at the University of Pennsylvania in April 2018.

Looking ahead, I look forward to co-constructing a future in which many more PP-focused LSP experiments may be conducted – and corresponding PP interventions may be conceived – as part of a concerted effort to enhance our sense of authorship and ultimately, to enhance well-being in our 'second act' of life.

Conclusion

The above review of midlife in the context of The Good Life as well as the creative-adaptive processes that occur in our midlife brain provide a basis for a reframe of midlife as a creative transition for our 'second act' based on making our mark, or our sense of authorship in life. This process of self-creation involves three key well-being themes: revision, prospection, and individuation.

Taking these themes and 'layering' them with different well-being perspectives should provide sufficient evidence that we may arrive at a view of well-being in midlife capable of producing meaningful positive psychological constructs and activities (and in due time, interventions). Having identified sample constructs and activities, we grouped them into three concrete action areas: positive narrative identity, serious play, and self-regulation.

Of these three areas, serious play, which unlocks the tacit knowledge our bodies disseminate in a state of play, seems especially important to developing authorship in midlife. One serious play method, LEGO Serious Play, which aims to build identities trough metaphors, seems especially promising for boosting well-being at midlife in positive psychology workshop settings.

My hope is that the information gathered for this capstone will allow me to develop a website, articles, a book, a keynote presentation, as well as seminars, to help those in midlife in need of authorship to reframe their midlife as a creative transition into their 'second act'. I hope to make them view the midlife years as a source of well-being, cognitive engagement, and a 'beginning' of sorts by taking the three key midlife themes – revision, prospection, and individuation – as a starting point. Most of all, I hope they will take the opportunity to experiment and play with them.

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Appendix A – Ryff's (1989) Mindsets for Predicting Health and Well-Being

1. **Self-Acceptance**
   a. *High scorer*: Possesses a positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life.
   b. *Low scorer*: Feels dissatisfied with self; is disappointed with what has occurred in past life; is troubled about certain personal qualities; wishes to be different than what he or she is.

2. **Purpose in Life**
   a. *High scorer*: Has goals in life and a sense of directedness; feels there is meaning to present and past life; holds beliefs that give life purpose; has aims and objectives for living.
   b. *Low scorer*: Lacks a sense of meaning in life; has few goals or aims, lacks sense of direction; does not see purpose of past life; has no outlook or beliefs that give life meaning.

3. **Personal Growth**
   a. *High scorer*: Has a feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences; has sense of realizing his or her potential; sees improvement in self and behavior over time; is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness.
   b. *Low scorer*: Low scorer: Has a sense of personal stagnation; lacks sense of improvement or expansion over time; feels bored and uninterested with life; feels unable to develop new attitudes or behaviors.

4. **Positive Relations with Others**
   a. *High scorer:* Has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands give and take of human relationships.
   b. *Low scorer*: Has few close, trusting relationships with others; finds it difficult to be warm, open, and concerned about others; is isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships; not willing to make compromises to sustain important ties with others.

5. **Autonomy**
   a. *High scorer*: Is self-determining and independent; able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulates behavior from within; evaluates self by personal standards.
   b. *Low scorer*: Is concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others; relies on judgments of others to make important decisions; conforms to social pressures to think and act in certain ways.

6. Environmental Mastery
  a. *High scorer*: Has a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment; controls complex array of external activities; makes effective use of surrounding opportunities; able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values.
  b. *Low scorer:* Has difficulty managing everyday affairs; feels unable to change or improve surrounding context; is unaware of surrounding opportunities; lacks sense of control over external world.

Appendix B – Layering Authorship with Well-Being Perspectives

WELL-BEING LAYER

MIDLIFE THEME

SWB MINDSETS/ TEMPORALITIES Ryff (1989) Keyes & Ryff (1999)	INDIVIDUAL SELF-CREATION Self-creation themes (Proposed)	INDIVIDUAL/ COLLECTIVE Presencing Scharmer (2009)	INDIVIDUAL 'RED CAPE' 3 Midlife tasks Levinson (1978)	ORGANIZATION WELL-BEING Positive Psych Capital Luthans (2002)	CREATIVE LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION Willingness & ability Hill et al (2014)	POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY Constructs for self-creation in midlife	SAMPLE ACTIVITIES Interventions for self-creation in midlife
Self-acceptance (past)	**Revision: cultivate acceptance & construct identity**		**Re-appraise existing structure**	**Self-efficacy**	**Creative abrasion (how):** counter thinking style biases for achieving collaboration		
	a. **Cultivate self-acceptance**	Awareness			**Values (what)**	**Acceptance** (Strenger, 2009b)	• Pennebaker technique • Self-distancing
	b. **Uncover our real narrative**	Action				**Narrative identity** (Ricoeur, 1984; 1985; 1988; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tarragona, 2013)	• Redemption stories • Dominant & alternative stories • Character strengths
Purpose & personal growth (future)	**Prospection: redirect meaning & experiment w/ self as a work of art**		**Explore possibilities for change**		**Creative agility (how):** use discovery-based learning for iterating & finding solutions		
	a. **Re-signify meaning** (purpose, process vs. outcome orientation, transcendence)	Awareness		**Hope**	**Purpose (what)**	**Eudaimonic purpose** (Schopenhauer, 1969; Damon, 2008; Yaden et al, 2017)	• Golden circle (Sinek) • Job crafting • High quality connections
	b. **Experiment w/ the self as a work of art**	Action				**Play** (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Papert & Harel, 1991; Schrage, 1999; Ibarra, 2003; Brown, 2009)	• Possible selves • Test & learn (Ibarra) • Build, share & reflect • Life Design
Positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery (present)	**Individuation: develop resources for resilience & growth**		**Move t/w commitments for choices central to new structure**	**Optimism & Resilience**	**Creative resolution (how):** use the ability to face tension of opposing models for integrative decision-making		
	a. **Develop practices, flow awareness & discernment for discovery-based decision-making**	Awareness			**Rules of engagement (what)**	**Engagement & discernment** (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Burnett & Evans, 2016)	• Flow gauging • 'Ways of knowing' • Knowledge indicators • Practices
	b. i) Adopt 'protective factors' for building resilience & growth ii) Enhance **positive affect** for broadening one's view and for growing resources	Action				**Psychological fitness & resilience protection** (Seligman, 2011; Southwick & Charney, 2013) • Emotional fitness & positive affect • Family fitness • Social fitness • Spiritual fitness • Post-traumatic growth	• Build on small goals • Reframing • Spirituality & gratitude • Real-time resilience • Ask for help • Exercise, R&R • Lifelong learning • Play to your strengths

Appendix C – A Methodical Approach for Fabricating Authorship-Focused Interventions

DESIRED OUTCOME	TARGET SYSTEM		TARGET CHANGE — Individual focus	TARGET CHANGE — Organizational focus	TARGET CHANGE — Creative leadership & innovation focus	ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	SAMPLE ACTIVITIES
Self-acceptance (past)	Revision: cultivate acceptance & construct identity		Re-appraise existing structure	Self-efficacy	Creative abrasion (how): counter thinking style biases for achieving collaboration		
	a. Cultivate self-acceptance	Awareness			Values (what)	Acceptance (Strenger, 2009b)	• Pennebaker technique • Self-distancing
	b. Uncover our real narrative	Action				Narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1984; 1985; 1988; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tarragona, 2013)	• Redemption stories • Dominant & alternative stories • Character strengths
Purpose & personal growth (future)	Prospection: redirect meaning & experiment w/ self as a work of art		Explore possibilities for change	Hope	Creative agility (how): use discovery-based learning for iterating & finding solutions		
	a. Re-signify meaning (purpose, process vs. outcome orientation, transcendence)	Awareness			Purpose (what)	Eudaimonic purpose (Schopenhauer, 1969; Damon, 2008; Yaden et al, 2017)	• Golden circle (Sinek) • Job crafting • High quality connections
	b. Experiment w/ the self as a work of art	Action				Play (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Papert & Harel, 1991; Schrage, 1999; Ibarra, 2003; Brown, 2009)	• Possible selves • Test & learn (Ibarra) • Build, share & reflect • Life Design
Positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery (present)	Individuation: develop resources for resilience & growth		Move t/w commitments for choices central to new structure	Optimism & Resilience	Creative resolution (how): use the ability to face tension of opposing models for integrative decision-making		
	a. Develop practices, flow awareness & discernment for discovery-based decision-making	Awareness			Rules of engagement (what)	Engagement & discernment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Burnett & Evans, 2016)	• Flow gauging • 'Ways of knowing' • Knowledge indicators • Practices
	b. i) Adopt 'protective factors' for building resilience & growth ii) Enhance positive affect for broadening one's view and for growing resources	Action				Psychological fitness & resilience protection (Seligman, 2011; Southwick & Charney, 2013) • Emotional fitness & positive affect • Family fitness • Social fitness • Spiritual fitness • Post-traumatic growth	• Build on small goals • Reframing • Spirituality & gratitude • Real-time resilience • Ask for help • Exercise, R&R • Lifelong learning • Play to your strengths

Appendix D – Three Action Areas for Enhancing Authorship

SWB MINDSETS/ TEMPORALITIES Ryff (1989) Keyes & Ryff (1999)	INDIVIDUAL SELF-CREATION Self-creation themes (Proposed)	INDIVIDUAL/ COLLECTIVE Presencing Scharmer (2009)	INDIVIDUAL 'RED CAPE' 3 Midlife tasks Levinson (1978)	ORGANIZATION WELL-BEING Positive Psych Capital Luthans (2002)	CREATIVE LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION Willingness & ability Hill et al (2014)	POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY	SAMPLE ACTIVITIES Interventions for self-creation in midlife
Self-acceptance (past)	Revision: cultivate acceptance & construct identity a. Cultivate self-acceptance b. Uncover our real narrative	Awareness Action	Re-appraise existing structure	Self-efficacy	**Creative abrasion (how):** counter thinking style biases for achieving collaboration **Values (what)**	*Action area 1: Positive Narrative Identity (HEART)* **Acceptance** (Strenger, 2009b) **Narrative identity** (Ricoeur, 1984; 1985; 1988; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tarragona, 2013)	• Pennebaker technique • Self-distancing • Redemption stories • Dominant & alternative stories • Character strengths
Purpose & personal growth (future)	Prospection: redirect meaning & experiment w/ self as work of art c. Re-signify meaning (purpose, process vs. outcome orientation, transcendence) d. Experiment w/ the self as a work of art	Awareness Action	Explore possibilities for change	Hope	**Creative agility (how):** use discovery-based learning for iterating & finding solutions *Action area 2: Serious play (BODY)* **Purpose (what)**	**Eudaimonic purpose** (Schopenhauer, 1969; Damon, 2008; Yaden et al, 2017) **Play** (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Papert & Harel, 1991; Schrage, 1999; Ibarra, 2003; Brown, 2009)	• Golden circle (Sinek) • Job crafting • High quality connections • Possible selves • Test & learn (Ibarra) • Build, share & reflect • Life Design
Positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery (present)	Individuation: develop resources for resilience & growth a. Develop practices, flow awareness & discernment for discovery-based decision-making b. i) Adopt 'protective factors' for building resilience & growth ii) Enhance positive affect for broadening one's view and for growing resources	Awareness Action	Move t/w commitments for choices central to new structure	Optimism & Resilience	**Creative resolution (how):** use the ability to face tension of opposing models for integrative decision-making *Action area 3: Attention regulation (HEAD)* **Rules of engagement (what)**	**Engagement & discernment** (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Burnett & Evans, 2016) **Psychological fitness & resilience protection** (Seligman, 2011; Southwick & Charney, 2013) • Emotional fitness & positive affect • Family fitness • Social fitness • Spiritual fitness • Post-traumatic growth	• Flow gauging • 'Ways of knowing' • Knowledge indicators • Practices • Build on small goals • Reframing • Spirituality & gratitude • Real-time resilience • Ask for help • Exercise, R&R • Lifelong learning • Play to your strengths

Appendix E – LEGO Serious Play's 'Real Time Identity for You' Application

The below LSP application has been adapted from the LSP facilitator manual (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2013).

This workshop focuses on allowing the participants to understand themselves better, and then, when done in groups, understand their colleagues (or neighbors) better. The phrase "Be better understood by understanding yourself better" encapsulates the essence of the workshop. Real Time Identity for You has a 'coaching feeling' and allows for a rare moment of personal introspection which is often extremely energizing.

Time: A half day

Participants: 4-10

Purpose: This workshop aims to help the participant to:

- Become the best he/she can become right now.

- Uncover who he/she is at the core.

- Learn a better way of communication.

- Enhance his/her value to the organization.

- Realize the skills to become a more effective member of the organization.

- Be able to seize the opportunities in what appear to be chaos.

Expected outcomes: In a professional context, the workshop helps individuals transform the following list of 'tensions' (or opposites): i) from having a job title to having an identity (in the context of work); ii) from being employed to being valuable, and iii) from talking to communicating. Clearly, the value of the workshop also extends to other contexts.

Facilitation guide (beyond the warm-up module):

1. Core Identity

    a. *(script)* We will be constructing a model of your identity, of who you really sense you are. The concept of identity is a rather complex thing, so let's dwell on it for a minute. Identity is not something we are 'given' at birth; it is not something we can choose. It can be argued that it is more like a complex web that continuously develops over time. One way to look at identity, inspired by the researcher Tajfel, is that identity comprises of two aspects: i) personal (consisting of our characteristics, traits, and attributes), and ii) social or relational (deriving from our knowledge of belonging to a certain group, which offers emotional value and social significance). But this is just one of the many ways of thinking about identity.

    b. *(script)* As Piaget said, you cannot present to others what you have not presented to yourself; therefore, please take ten to twelve minutes to construct a model of your core identity. In doing so, it may help to think about your values, your competencies, or what really matters to you. Who do you really sense you are?

    c. *(script)* Share your models and reflect.

    d. Learning points:

        i. Core identity is not the same as a role (whether at work or in private, such as being a mother or a father): it is made up of experiences, values, and other elements.

        ii. Knowing and being honest about core and allows for better understanding of how we may limit ourselves (e.g., by creating internal barriers); it also helps to clarify our aspirations.

2. External Identity

   a. *(script)* So far each of you has explored who you are at your core and shared this with your team members (or neighbors). Many of you were able to dig deep and share this with us. This is the part of identity, the core, we might argue we 'own'. Beyond this core, there is also the element of how you are understood, how other people see you. This is where we will be going next.

   b. *(script)* Your challenge is now to explore and express how you think others see you. You have five minutes to build this in the form of a model. Please keep your core identity model intact.

   c. *(script)* When you have built it and attached it to your model, you may consider where you attach it. Might you be able to express something in doing that?

   d. *(script)* Share your models and reflect.

   e. Learning points:

        i. How we are understood by *others* may be very different from how we perceive *ourselves*.

        ii. How we are *understood* by others may be very different from how we are *seen*.

iii. We may think people see us in one way, but they don't (this insight might inspire emerging dialogue about our 'eternal' identities).

3. Aspirational Identity

    a. *(script)* A third component, our aspirational identity, is important to consider when constructing a 'full' identity: our aspirational identity – the identity you are in the process of becoming, what you strive to become, and also what you are when you are at your very best. We may never become what we strive to become, or we may only reach our aspirational identity only for a moment, and then lose it again. But knowing what it is, and possibly even refining it, can be an extremely important motivator (or driver) for us. Knowing what we strive for helps us and others to better understand the decisions we make (and need to make). Thus, metaphorically, we may think of our aspirational identity as something that is hovering just out of our reach at the moment (and realistic), but that we have not yet obtained. Yet it is not in the realm of fantasy. It may include what we are like when we are at our very best, when we use all of our potential, or it may be what we strive to become within a given period of time.

    b. *(script)* Your challenge is now to explore and express your aspirational identity. You have ten to twelve minutes to build this in the form of a model. Please keep your core and external identity models intact.

    c. *(script)* Share your models and reflect.

    d. Learning points:

        i. The aspirational identity model provides concrete insight into what participants strive toward.

        ii. Participants may start to see relationships between their aspirational and core identities.

        iii. Participants may begin to question how they and others may help them become what they want to become.

4. Reflection

    a. What does these models mean for who you are now (and who you might be)?

    b. How could your aspirational model be placed in relationship to your core and external identity models? What can you learn from this placement?

    c. Close the workshop by reflecting on the process and journey the participants have gone through, and where they have arrived. What did they set out to do and what was accomplished?

    d. You (as a facilitator) might mention how participants:

        i. Built up knowledge about their core identity and shared it with others

        ii. Expressed how they think others see them

        iii. Explored their aspirational identity and related it to the honest representation of their core identity (today), thus helping themselves and others to be the best they can be.

           iv. Consider ending the workshop by having participants write down a reflection of what they learned today or what they want to do differently "on Monday".

5. Additional facilitator notes

    a. The distance between the core identity (today) and the aspirational identity is similar to the 'Creative Distance' concept (Senge, 19xx). Finding the right 'tension' is important. Metaphorically speaking, it is like a rubber band: it should neither be over-stretched, nor provide too much slack. The space between the core (today) and aspiration is where development areas or actions reside.

    b. Additional rounds can be used to get more depth on the aspirational identity, or to make several aspirations, one for each of the various domains in participants' lives.

    c. In addition to the activities described above, models should be thoroughly documented and photographed, and insights can be summarized in accordance with client preferences.

Appendix F – Exploring Positive Psychology-Focused LEGO Serious Play Applications

1. Sample step-by-step guide for a PP-focused LSP exercise: Strong Strengths

With permission from Mads Bab, co-author of *Exploring positive psychology with LEGO® Serious Play®,* below are the key steps from a step-by-step guide for participants in a PP-focused LSP workshop to better understand the keys to their 'strongest self' (Bab & Boniwell, 2016):

Time. A half day to one day

Participants: 4-10

Purpose. Suitable for a session where you want the individuals and the group to better understand the keys to their strongest self and how they can bring these out in one other. The session is also good for people to be introduced to their VIA character strengths.

Expected outcomes. Expect a high level of awareness between group members. Especially a better understanding of what motivates each participant and how participants can support one another.

Facilitation guide (beyond the warm-up module):

1. Being in the right element

    a. The first building exercise has the purpose of getting the participants thinking about themselves when they use their strengths. Frame the model building as follows: *Your task is to build a model that enables you to answer the question, "When am I in my right element at work?"*

    b. Have each participant share their model and use the LSP EQ questions to probe into their stories.

2. The VIA Character Strengths

    a. Pass around a VIA Character Strengths description and briefly introduce the VIA Character Strengths to the participants. Spend as much time as you find appropriate considering the group you are working with.

3. Strengths spotting

    a. Group participants in pairs and tell them they now have to identify which character strengths are present in their model. Frame this as follows: Two and two I would like you to identify two to five character strengths present in the model. I would like you to work together because it sometimes helps to have other people's eyes to see your strengths. Mark the identified character strengths on the paper and prepare to share and motivate this with the others. Spend 2 x 5 minutes on each model.

    b. Have each participant share their identified strengths by having them point out the area (or features) of the model that relates to this strength.

4. Zooming in on strengths

    a. The next building exercise is like zooming in on a Google map. It is about looking into the details around specific strengths. Frame the exercise as follows: *Your task is now to build a model that shows how you understand one of the spotted strengths. Choose the spotted strength that you are most curious to explore. Your task is now to build a model that enables you to answer the question: "How do you understand this strength?"*

    b. Have each participant share their model and use the LSP EQ questions to probe into their stories.

5. Seeing strength in others

    a. The next building exercise is about seeing strengths in others. This will be done by each participant building a character strength they really appreciate in another person. Frame the exercise as follows: *Your task is to identify, build, and share your thoughts on a character strength (or pair of character strengths) you see in the person sitting to your left. Spend a couple of minutes looking through the list of twenty-four character strengths and choose one strength or two strengths combines that you really appreciate about the person. Your task is now to build a smaller model that enables you to answer the question: "How do you understand this strength (or these strengths) if you chose two."*

    b. Have people share their model by looking at the person they have focused on. Ask them why they appreciate this strength in the person. Let the builder hand over the model to the observed person and ask how it feels hearing this story.

6. Connecting strengths

    a. Strengths do not just influence us on their won. They work in combination with other strengths and understanding these combinations can help us understand ourselves and other people better. Frame the exercise as follows: *Your task is to explore how the strength you zoomed in on, and the strength that was 'given' to you, combine. To help you do this we have a set of connectors (talk about the connection brocks and connectors outlined elsewhere and provide examples). Connect the two models by*

applying the connection bricks you find relevant and be prepared to

answer the question, "How do the two strengths work together?"

    b. Have each participant share their connections.

7. Enabling strengths

    a. The next task moves the focus away from the strength and looks at which conditions and what behaviors are needed to ensure a better use of strengths in a specific situation. Start this part by aligning all participants towards a relevant goal and tell them that they will now explore what they need to keep in mind in order to apply these strengths in the situation.

    b. Frame the building exercise as follows: Your task is to build a model that enables you to answer the question: *"What can you or someone else do so this strength plays a bigger role in light of the situation in focus?"*

    c. Have everyone share their models on what can be done.

8. Reflection and moving forward

    a. Make sure you have at least 30 minutes to capture insights, takeaways and learning from the session. It can be useful to discuss all or some of the following questions: i) What did you learn about yourself today? ii) What did you learn about others today? iii) What are your three most important takeaways? iv) What will you do tomorrow in order to have your strengths play a bigger role in your (personal, professional) life? v) What can you do to help others play more to their strengths?

    b. Make sure all models have been photographed if participants to not keep them.

2. Strengths exploration comparing VIA and LSP in the context of a MAPP exercise

In my view, strengths are less about what people are *good at*, and more about what *engages* them (their *internal drive*). A commonly used definition of strengths in positive psychology is offered by Linley (2008): "…a strength is a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking or feeling that is authentic and energizing to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development, and performance." (p. 9). Thus, the following key ingredients apply to the definition of strengths in the context of engagement: *pre-existence* (it is already present within us, not added in from the outside), *authenticity* (we feel like our true selves when using them), *energy* (using strengths is energizing), and *optimal functioning* (when we use our strengths, we enjoy what we are doing).

Seen through the engagement lens, character strengths should be explored more dynamically instead of being defined statically (as the VIA-IS Survey and other strength finders do). With the VIA-IS, users are 'handed their strengths' after responding to questions and waiting for the VIA algorithm to perform its black box magic. Using tools such as LSP, character strength can be uncovered in more explorative fashion as they invite participants to explore strengths by building narratives ("thinking with their hands") and reflect on these artefacts – both as they build them and when they are made (McCusker, 2014).

I decided to explore this tension in the 'Positive Psychology and Individuals' course at the University of Pennsylvania's MAPP program in which we taught learned material to a person external to MAPP and subsequently discussed this with a Class Homework Partner (CHP). Unfortunately, time and logistics did not allow me to explore this tension with my CHP; therefore, I decided to try it with my life partner. First, I asked her to take the VIA-IS Survey. The next day, I did some quick warm-up exercises with her in building LEGO models, and then

did an exercise with her in which I asked her to build a model that could answer the question: *when are you in your element at work?* She built Model 1 (see next page), a situation describing colleagues huddling around a table, trying to tackle a challenge together while feeding each other with inspiration, ideas, laughter, jokes, and potential solutions, all in a pleasant environment, resulting in 'money on the table'.

In the next exercise, I asked her to photograph the model and send it to my CHP to show her what she had just built, with one question: *what character strengths do you see represented in this model?* (using the VIA Classification). My CHP replied: "1) teamwork; 2) perseverance; 3) zest; 4) appreciation of beauty and excellence, and 5) curiosity.

Lastly, I asked my own partner to pick a strength from the above list that she wanted to explore further. She selected 'teamwork'. Subsequently, I asked her to build another model that helped her answer the question: *what do you understand 'teamwork' to be?* (without looking at the VIA Classification sheet). She built Model 2 (see next page), depicting two people helping each other by giving each other lifelines, ideas and inspiration.

As my partner compared her VIA list to the strengths identified in the models she built, she found that 'teamwork' was *not* considered one of her signature strengths in the VIA-IS survey, yet it *was* a strength she deemed integral to thriving in her job. In conclusion: 1) there is not any one method that is wrong or right; rather, both are complementary and serve a purpose. If this comparison shows anything, it is that character strengths are very much alive in nature; 2) in the future, I would ask participants to do exactly as I did with my partner: first complete the VIA-IS, followed by a dynamic exploration using LSP, and then compare and contrast.
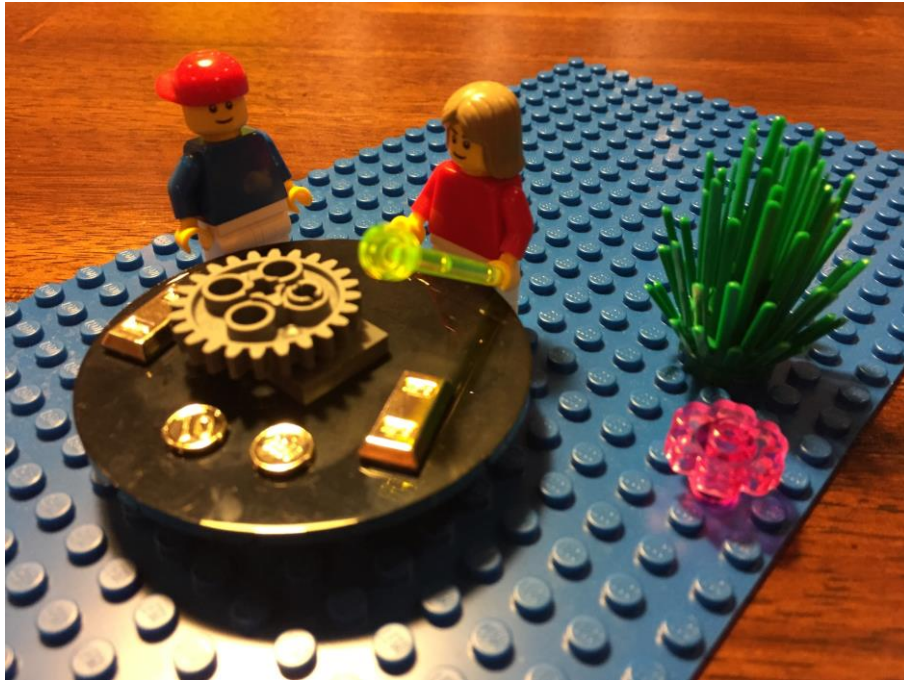
Model 1: "when are you in your element at work?"

Model 2. "what do you understand 'teamwork' to be?

3. LSP meets PP: MAPP class workshop exercises

As a "farewell gift" to my MAPP class, I conducted the following LSP workshop to my fellow students at the MAPP program at the University of Pennsylvania on April 20, 2018.

1. Warm-up exercise 1

    a. Using only the base plate, green and orange brocks, and the flower of your LEGO set, build a tower, with a flower on top.

2. Warm-up exercise 2

    a. Recycle your bricks.

    b. Select five bricks and connect them in any random way.

    c. Now explain this to your neighbor: *How does what you have built represents something you've learned about yourself at MAPP that you weren't (really) aware of before and you are keen to explore more after MAPP is over?*

3. Warm-up exercise 3

    a. With the same five-brick model, explain to your neighbor: *How does what you have built represent a contribution you have made that MAPP will sorely miss when you are finished?*

4. Model build 1

    a. Recycle your bricks

    b. Build a model that helps you answer the question: *When are you in your element at work? Where are you? What are you doing (or what takes place)? Who are you with?*

    c. Share your model with your neighbor and let him or her identify two to five character strengths in your model (using the Character Strengths handout).

5. Model build 2

    a. Recycle your bricks.

    b. From the two to five spotted strengths your received from your neighbor, choose the strength you are most curious to explore (pick one that you haven't tried & tested already).

    c. Build a model of how you understand this strength.

6. Model build 3

    a. Recycle your bricks.

    b. Build a model that helps you answer the question: *Where do I see myself in five years as a result of my MAPP experience? Where are you? What are you doing (or what takes place)? Who are you with?*

    c. With the character strength you just explored, build a model that shows how this strength might help you in your future ambition.