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**WORK TRANSITION TO RETIREMENT AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY:
IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT – ANALYSIS OF
PERSONAL IDENTITY VERSUS PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

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Abstract

This dissertation explores psychological and identity-related challenges experienced by workers transitioning to retirement. Using a qualitative research approach, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore current and future retirees' experiences. The findings reveal that work-related, gender, and individual factors impact retirement experiences. In addition, this dissertation identifies key interventions in human resources such as pre-retirement guidance, phased retirement, and post-retirement activity programs to lessen identity-related hardships and create a less turbulent transition. Not only do these interventions instill a continued purpose and well-being in retirees but they also promote a fairer and more sustainable transition in the workforce.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Work-Related Identity, Personal Identity, Organizational Behavior, Retirement.

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1. Introduction

The transition to retirement is becoming increasingly salient with an aging workforce, with implications for both organizations and workers. Retirement is no longer seen simply in terms of a financial, career-related decision, but increasingly in terms of a significant life transition with consequences for an individual's identity, mental well-being, and social role (Beehr & Bennett, 2015). Organizations today have a dual challenge in supporting a successful transition for retirees while practicing workforce planning, including succession and knowledge transfer (Bolz, Peters, & Kintscher, 2023).

Retirement is increasingly understood not simply as an event, but as a complex, multi-faceted transition, comprising a range of psychological, social, and structural adaptations. To retire, one must make a transition in one's working and private lives, emotionally adapt to a perceived loss of work-related purpose, and determine how one will contribute to life post-retirement (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2023). Research into liminality accentuates the transitional nature of this period, in which one occupies an uncertain position, neither part of the workforce nor part of post-retirement life (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2023). Transition in identity can have an impact in terms of creating a state of emotional uncertainty and a challenge in redefining one's self-concept (Ashforth, 2001; Beehr & Bennett, 2015).

2. Current state of literature

Research concerning retirement has moved away from its early days of financial planning towards a broader consideration of psychological and social adaptation. Several theories form a basis for understanding these identity shifts. *Social identity theory*, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), explains how people develop a concept of themselves through social group affiliation. For many professionals, work forms an integral part of social identity, with retirement possibly creating a state of self-image crisis. The concept of work identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), extends and refines this through an examination of the level at which individuals assimilate work-related accountability into their inner lives. Those whose jobs represent a defining feature of their lives will have a problem redefining themselves in retirement, but individuals who have a range of roles in life apart from work adapt with more ease.

The concept of liminality, discussed by Ibarra and Obodaru (2006), presents a critical alternative perspective. Liminality describes a state of transition in which individuals cease to have a full association with work identity but have not yet developed a new concept about themselves outside of it. Most retirees go through this stage of uncertainty, nervousness, and even a potential for individual rebirth. Finally, *identity continuity theories*, such as those developed by Bluck and Alea (2008), propose that individuals work towards maintaining parts of their identity during life transition phases. Some retirees seek to maintain a state of continuity through work-related engagements such as mentorship, volunteerism, and advising roles.

These theoretical frameworks form a basis for appreciating the individual and organizational barriers in retirement processes. This study seeks to bridge gaps between theoretical studies of identity transition and actual work-related human resource management interventions that could make the process of retiring less cumbersome, facilitating smoother transitions for retirees and organizations.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

To explore constructs of identity and emotion surrounding retirement, a **qualitative approach** was taken, employing **semi-structured interviewing**. As retirement is a profoundly individualized and personalized transition, a qualitative approach captured effectively the participants' narratives, feelings, and self-concepts. By combining **narrative inquiry** (Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk 2007, 459) and **grounded theory** (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 1), a thorough analysis could be pursued with deep intensity. Narrative inquiry allowed for a rich examination of how participants make sense of their experiences in retirement through storytelling, and grounded theory helped in identifying recurring themes and patterns, allowing for a systemic examination of the data.

3.2. Sample Selection

The study involved **15 semi-structured interviews** with professionals between **55 and 70 years**, representing a range of phases in transitioning toward retirement. Participants were selected through **purposive sampling** (Patton 1990), allowing for diversity in terms of gender, job sector, and types of employment. There were **ten men** and **five women**, allowing for a comparative analysis of adaptability in retirement between male and female respondents. Four participants had retired, and eleven continued to work but moved towards retirement. Including both groups in a single study provided a comparative view of respondents at two phases in the path toward and through retirement.

The interview process with the participants took place from **August 19th to September 13th, 2024**. To preserve confidentiality and maximize structural transparency, all participants were coded into four categories: **gender** (male/female), **age** (specific age range), **title** (e.g., CEO, high school teacher, IT manager), and **stage of retirement**.

3.3. Anonymity and Confidentiality

This study conformed to high ethical standards. Participants' confidentiality was assured by excluding any identifying information in the reports, and grouping them according to gender, age, work, and retiree status (Smith and Dougherty 2012). In addition, verbal consent was taken from participants before participating in the interviews and participants were informed of their freedom to withdraw at any point in case of any kind of discomfort (Kvale 1996; Gabriel 1995).

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The duration of each interview ranged between **40 and 90 minutes** and resulted in **113 pages of transcriptions**. A semi-structured format (Appendix A) was utilized in an attempt to enable a thorough examination of salient themes, such as loss of identity, emotional adjustment, and post-retirement activity, and at the same time allow participants to present their experiences in a less scripted manner (Kvale 1996).

Data analysis followed the **Gioia Methodology** (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013), grouping the findings under three phases (see Figure 1). First, first-order concepts were derived directly from narrative information gained through participant testimony. Next, these first-order concepts were synthesized to form second-order themes, namely, **work-related identity, liminality, and identity complexity**. Ultimately, these themes merged to form three aggregate dimensions that represent the key factors in transitioning toward retirement: *Professional Identity versus Personal Identity, Emotional and Cognitive Adjustment, and Post-Retirement Engagement*. In doing so, this method guaranteed that the findings were firmly grounded in participants' lived experiences yet at the same time linked with general theoretical constructs.

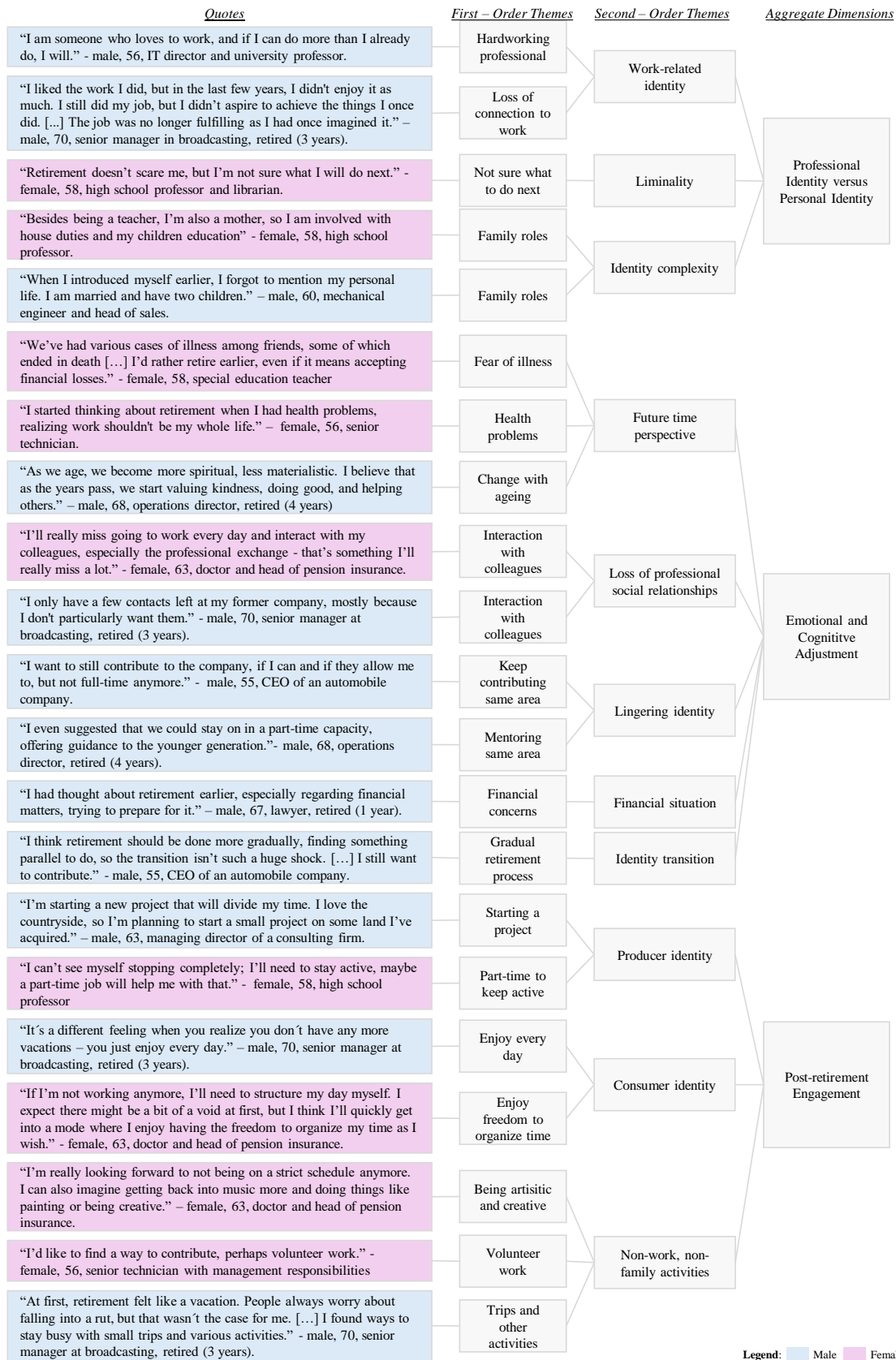


Figure 1. Data Structure. This table integrates the verified data from the interviews and the theoretical framework, reflecting the transition into retirement accurately.

4. Interplay between the Aggregate Dimensions

An examination of the information collected from all respondents showed that several interrelated psychological and social factors played a significant role in transitioning to retirement. The three aggregate dimensions—*Professional Identity versus Personal Identity*, *Emotional and Cognitive Adjustment*, and *Post-Retirement Engagement*—had been determined to be critical for an understanding of retiree experiences. These dimensions do not exist in isolation; instead, in a state of dynamic interrelationship, they impact an individual's journey through identity transition, emotional transformation, and taking on new roles in retirement.

To illustrate the complex relationships between these **three key dimensions**, a model was developed (see Figure 2). In this model, **second-order themes** serve to tie together the dimensions in a manner in which a change in one will cause a concomitant change in another.

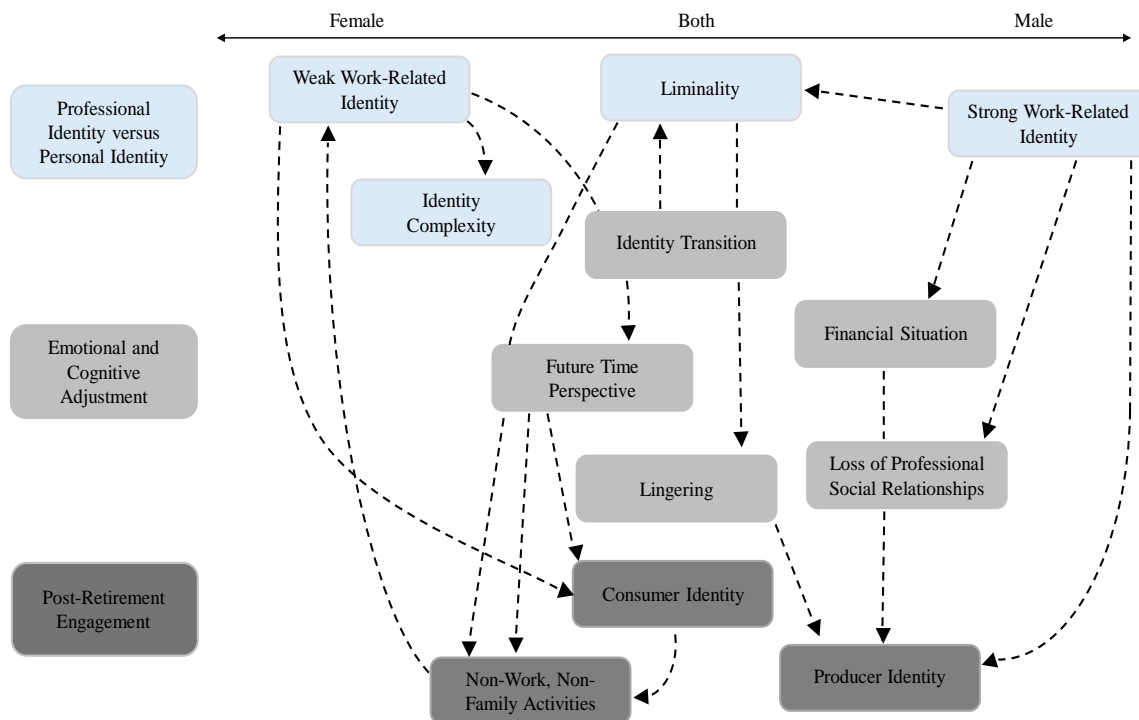


Figure 2. The interplay between Professional Identity versus Personal Identity, Emotional and Cognitive Adjustment, Post-retirement Engagement and their corresponding second-order themes.

4.1. Professional Identity versus Personal Identity

Participants consistently demonstrated the tension between their professional and personal identities, which emerged as a significant theme in both retired and non-retired groups. Within this aggregate dimension, *Professional Identity versus Personal Identity*, three second-order themes became apparent: **work-related identity, liminality, and identity complexity.**

4.1.1 Results

During the period of transition to retirement and the respective preparation for this new phase of life, it is normal to observe professionals questioning their personal identity since, after so many years in the workforce, it often mixes with their professional identity, making it difficult during retirement for one to understand who they are without their work (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). This mix becomes more complex as time goes on, especially for those with a strong work-related identity.

Many participants, particularly men, see their professional identity as the core of their being, identifying more deeply with it than with their personal identity (Ibarra 1999). Therefore, professional identity serves as a means of not only providing financial stability but, most importantly, acting as an anchor that provides these individuals with emotional stability and a continued sense of purpose (Schein 1978). Over time, personal identity becomes mixed with their professional identity, the latter having gained a greater dimension in the person's identity over the years in the workforce. Hence the retirement process constitutes a stage of reconsideration, and all individuals need to try and redefine themselves outside of their professional roles if they so desire to discover new sources of self-worth and meaning (Carstensen 2006).

For many interviewees, especially those who had not yet retired, their professional identity remains central to how they see themselves. This is evident in their strong attachment to their

work and their reluctance to fully disengage from their professional roles (*hardworking professional*). Men, in particular, find it hard to imagine life without the structure and validation that work provides. A 60-year-old male mechanical engineer and head of sales describes this professional fit: *“I still enjoy my job and feel that I have found the right profession.”*

Work-related identity denotes the coherence between one's self-concept and occupational role, which involves the core self; that is, the working self-concept forms an integral part of the person's identity. This fact holds particularly true for individuals with a strong **work-related identity**, given that their sense of life, self-esteem, and identity emanates from their successful experiences and roles at work. A strong attachment to one's profession is often associated with feelings of pride and personal fulfillment because careers signify an individual's contribution and skill as well as his or her worth to society. In males, such great emphasis on career success creates a vacuum in their lives when this source of validation gets taken away by retirement.

The participants' statements, mentioned above, reflect a deep work-related identity, where individuals see their work as integral to their self-concept (Bordia et al. 2020). The continuation of this identity is particularly salient for men who struggle with the idea of fully disengaging from professional roles.

On the other hand, every shift in circumstances, including occupational ones, can strongly influence an individual's attitude toward his or her occupation: the formerly meaningful goals may lose their importance, and a person may feel less and less associated with his or her occupational responsibilities as time passes (*loss of connection to work*). The following represents a change in attitude toward work for a 70-year-old male retired senior manager in the broadcasting industry: *“I liked the work I did, but in the last few years, I didn't enjoy it as much. I still delivered results, but the drive I once had - ambition and career goals - was gone.*

I still did my job, but I didn't aspire to achieve the things I once did. [...] The job was no longer fulfilling as I had once imagined it."

Another critical theme within this aggregate dimension is **liminality**, where participants find themselves in a state of transition, uncertain about their next phase in life (Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly 2013). According to Ibarra and Obodaru (2006), liminality describes the condition in which people temporarily lose their old identities while trying to search for a new one, fluctuating between states of loss and anticipation. It is indeed disorienting, yet sometimes very creative, transitional phases. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) said that liminality embraces identity work characterized by an individual's experimentation and reflection on himself or herself. Dhar and Boyatzis (2023) further cement that this transitional state supports individual growth by urging individuals to reevaluate their values and priorities to end up with a more integrated identity.

Men often report ambiguity in finding direction as they retire, with many indeed mentioning feelings of existential crisis. A 60-year-old male mechanical engineer also shares the same concerns as a head of sales: *"I think the loss of identity [when leaving the workforce] can be an issue. I enjoy what I'm doing, and when that's gone, I'll need something to compensate for that."* This statement highlights how men's reliance on their work-based identities allows them to be more vulnerable and depressed due to stress, particularly during the transition stage.

Participants often describe the challenge of navigating this in-between stage, where they no longer feel as strongly connected to their work but have not yet fully embraced a new identity beyond the workplace. This sense of limbo might be translated into a form of an emotional vacuum in which men search for something to replace structures, status, and recognition from work. In men, this confusion can also be further heightened by the general lack of well-defined non-professional roles and a consequent fear of aimlessness. Missing hobbies, family

caregiving-related responsibilities, or other kinds of alternative activities increase their liminality, hence prolonging the psychological discomfort related to the transition into retirement.

This is especially difficult for men for whom their identities are poorly differentiated outside their jobs. A 55-year-old male CEO of an automobile company also articulates this uncertainty: *“I think retirement should be done more gradually, maybe finding something parallel to keep doing so the transition from work to retirement isn’t such a huge shock.”* It is from this perspective that a gradual disengagement would help alleviate emotional and identity problems that men generally face in the process of retirement.

Some participants, especially male ones, have professional identities that dominate their personal lives, creating a sense of duty and responsibility that goes beyond their post-retirement plans. A 60-year-old male mechanical engineer and head of sales noted: *“When I introduced myself earlier, I forgot to mention my personal life. I am married and have two children.”* This demonstrates the centrality of work in their self-conception, often pushing personal identity to the background, while simultaneously showcasing the multiple roles that a person can hold.

For women, by contrast, there is a more diffuse identity that merges family and personal roles along with employment, and whereas an expanded sense of identity no doubt facilitated women's adjustment to retirement, men experience more difficulties because of dependence on a single dominant occupational identity.

The above findings indicate how the transition into retirement is a gendered experience; it can be considered that men, because of their more restricted identity roles, have an added challenge to face, including increased emotional dependency on work for self-worth and meaning.

4.1.2. Discussion

Work-related identity was a core part of the interviewees' self-concept and, thus, part of their professional and personal identities. **Liminality** is interwoven into this theme because the transition away from employment can be problematic due to the impact of abandoning roles that have played an instrumental part in sustaining identity and giving life meaning. The impact of identity loss is compounded through the interplay of professional and personal roles investigated under **identity complexity**. In the case of male participants, this is often vice versa; their occupational identity predominates in their self-concept and leaves little room for other roles or sources of identity apart from the job.

A 60-year-old male mechanical engineer and head of sales described this dependence on professional identity as follows: *"I think the loss of identity [when leaving the workforce] can be an issue. I enjoy what I'm doing, and when that's gone, I'll need something to compensate for that."* This comment reveals the difficulty for some male individuals to let go of a role that has provided both their identity and satisfaction.

Ibarra and Obodaru (2006) argue that individuals with strong work-related identities find it increasingly difficult to let go of established professional routines and sources of validation; thus, they are particularly vulnerable to uncertainty and ruptures in their identities. This phenomenon was much more pronounced among the male participants, showing how retirement often presents a challenge to many men, whose professional identity follows from restricted roles and avenues of affirmation outside the work sphere. A 55-year-old male CEO of an automobile company shared a similar sentiment: *"It's hard for me to 'switch off.' I don't know what I'll do without work."*

Among participants, especially the male ones, the concept of **work-related identity** was particularly evident, so much so that it became a second-order theme in Figure 1. Also, at times,

the dominance of professional identities causes a conflict with changing personal identities, and one has to re-evaluate one's self-concept to make professional-personal identity congruent (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Several participants mentioned that professional congruence made them feel like there was a true **professional fit**, as those roles aligned with their values, enhancing the argument that their work provides or provided them with affirmation that is or will be extremely difficult to replicate in retirement. As one 60-year-old male mechanical engineer said, *"I still enjoy my job and feel that I have found the right profession."* This demonstrates how a strong attachment to work often provides the person with meaning and identity, and that is why most people find the adjustment of retirement very difficult.

The struggle ensuing from this was much more intense among the male respondents, who had fewer other roles available to take on when professional identity was no longer accessible.

For many interviewees, work has been an important part of their identity, a source of meaning and achievement. Such a strong work-related identity also meant that losing their job (to retirement/illness) felt like losing part of themselves overnight and created a feeling of loss and a huge void in their self-definition (Levinson 1978). This sense of loss was more profound in males as they had no other clearly defined compensatory functions by which identities were defined other than professional identities.

Additionally, being a hardworking professional has become one of the key aspects of identity. *Hardworking professionals*, as many participants identified with the title themselves, emphasize this narrative of success and intrinsic value in their work as part of who they are as a person. Existing literature highlights that workplace culture values and encourages the "hard worker" identity (Schein, 1992; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), creating this sort of "barrier" that makes it difficult for employees when they retire, to develop or adopt any form of non-work-related identities. Among many of the male respondents, attachment to being a "hard worker"

exacerbated their struggles with retirement because they held little else outside their work. A 56-year-old IT director and university professor also mentioned: *“I would describe myself as a hardworking professional [...] I am someone who loves to work, and if I can do more than I already do, I will.”* This promotion and encouragement of the “hard work” identity throughout their entire career was the key factor (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Kira and Balkin, 2014) on why some participants struggle so much to let go of this professional identity when transitioning to retirement or when already in it.

At the same time, *identification with work* was significantly associated with the participant's perception of their self-worth connected with their work performance. Therefore, people who consider their jobs highly influential in touching and changing other people's lives daily tend to have a harder time adjusting when retired. For male participants, this connection between work and self-worth was particularly pronounced.

For many participants, the identity built over the years of practice is much more than just a role or a way to guarantee financial security; it is their source of self-esteem and a motive for existence. Thus, for those whose identity is rooted in their vocation, retirement signifies a devaluation and loss of regard for these individuals whose recognition was embedded primarily in the vocation. This is especially true for males, whose self-esteem has a deeper connection to their occupation, leaving them more vulnerable to identity loss in retirement. A 60-year-old male mechanical engineer and head of sales explained this profound attachment to his work: *“I think the loss of identity [when leaving the workforce] can be an issue. I enjoy what I'm doing, and when that's gone, I'll need something to compensate for that.”*

An absolute identification is increasingly being included in the self to the effect that success and dedication in their careers establish them as worthy individuals. Retirement thus destroys this source of identity, leaving a vacuum and often culminating in a crisis during the rebuilding

of self-esteem. A 55-year-old male CEO of an automobile company added to this sense of loss, noting: *"It's hard for me to 'switch off,' I don't know what I'll do without work."* This is further supported by how socio-cultural and occupational norms signal the 'hard worker' identity as a core marker of worth; thus, making the transition harder for people with a strong work-related identity.

This attachment to their professional identity is also a manifestation of deep emotional investment beyond the routine of daily work duties and tasks. Their profession has given them structured goals, ways to surmount challenges, and an outlet for professional expression, things that will be hard to replace in retirement. For many men in the study, the emotional investment in their job was much stronger, largely because they often had few other outlets for emotional fulfillment outside of work. The *loss of connection to work* theme describes the phenomenon even better, as the participants declared that the absence of a previously maintained pattern of work made them detached and devoid of their usual priceless feeling of self-worth. The connection with work can be lost when people cannot separate their sense of identity from relationships, routines, and self-confidence received at the job they do. Those with a strong work-related identity described a state of existential disorientation and loss in the absence of the support and community provided by their work environment. This was particularly the case for men, who felt isolated after retiring and attributed this to the lack of a daily routine or the companionship they had enjoyed at work. The identity rupture phenomenon may therefore lead to uncertainty, which can affect the emotional well-being of retirees who by this point have not identified a substitute identity or source of meaningfulness (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999).

This research indicates that the professional identity of long-established workers may not be simply occupational but connected with personal values and self-concept or long-life goals. In other words, if a strong work-related identity is at play and this identity is lost due to unemployment or workplace redundancy, then there is a psychological void that has opened

up—validation being stripped away along with the sense of achievement. This loss was even deeper for male participants as they showed difficulty in re-establishing an identity for themselves outside of their work.

The strong linkage to professional identity explains why there is, for many people, a **liminal stage of transitioning into retirement** sandwiched between a well-defined career identity and the uncertainty of life after work. This transition sets the platform, therefore, on which the struggles of individuals facing **identity complexity** while trying to redefine their self-concept, both personally and professionally, are based. The transition was specifically hard to manage for men due to the lack of strongly pronounced non-professional functions and roles, which naturally caused a shortage of a substantial ground to rebuild one's identity.

Liminality exacerbates the challenges of integrating different identities because individuals caught in this transition phase experience reconciling the loss of professional identity with the growth of new roles on the personal front. In this respect, Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) point out that such a state of limbo can prolong the state of uncertainty and therefore make it harder for an individual to redefine their identity in retirement. This longer period of liminality for men often led to a lack of direction since men had fewer roles from which to draw resources for a sense of purpose and identity.

Many professionals find themselves in a state of liminality when transitioning to retirement, no longer belonging fully to the world of work, they've grown attached to and used to, but also not fully establishing an identity outside of this context (Goffman 1959). This sort of "limbo" stage leaves people vulnerable, and without the anchor of a new identity, this stage can lead to feelings of anxiety and insecurity (Ibarra 1999). During this time, individuals don't feel like they belong. They seem to no longer fit in their professional sphere as they once did, and they also haven't found their true selves outside of this sphere. The literature also implies that this

stage of liminality is a normal part of the process of identity reformulation and may last until the person discovers new meanings and constructs to fill the void that their work role has left in their life (Super 1957).

The *not sure what to do next* theme is a key component of liminality and demonstrates how post-retirement participants struggle to find meaning in their lives. Liminality can lead to an identity crisis, as retirees struggle with uncertainty thinking that retirement can't provide them with the same orientation and sense of purpose that they once derived from their careers. A 58-year-old female high school professor and librarian stated: "*Retirement doesn't scare me, but I'm not sure what I will do next.*" The theme of uncertainty came out most strongly among male participants who did not have any clearly defined non-professional roles to replace their occupational identity.

Theories on role transitions propose that if alternate sources of identity are not available to individuals, they may find it extremely difficult to gain any meaningful sense of self outside of their career (Carstensen 2006). Interestingly, during the interview process, a common finding of the study was that for some participants there was huge difficulty in letting go of their professional identity was often linked to a sense of uncertainty about the future. The absence of a structured plan (*not sure what to do next*) results in feelings of emptiness, almost as if work was the only contributor of purpose and clarity and without this, there is no clear new direction.

The **liminal effect** here proposes that the transition to retirement embodies more than just a physical withdrawal from work, but an identity rupture as well. Furthermore, the uncertainty of liminality strengthens such persistence of the professional identities since a degree of hesitation might prevent participants from letting go of their working selves.

In certain cases, some more than others, with retirement comes an "identity crisis" for retirees, that resembles feelings of loss similar to grief (Goffman 1959) as these retirees look ahead

wondering who they will be without the professional role they once attributed their value to. Male participants reported increased feelings of existential anxiety regarding coming to terms with the loss of the principal identity role. Some even feared that the loss of work may involve a loss of self. A 55-year-old male CEO of an automobile company added to these feelings of loss by stating: *“I think retirement should be done more gradually, maybe finding something parallel to keep doing so the transition from work to retirement isn’t such a huge shock.”*

As individuals confront the uncertainty associated with liminality, gendered experiences become a significant influence on their approach to handling challenges related to **identity complexity**. This transition is more problematic for men because they generally have more limited identity roles and show strong emotional investment in their jobs as the primary source of self-worth. In particular, female participants manifest greater flexibility; their propensity to assume new roles has very important implications for gaining insight into how to handle **identity complexity** in retirement.

Another essential element identified was the participant's gender as it impacted the transition journey to retirement. Males often had more difficult adjustments due to the highly interrelated nature of their personal and professional selves and the lesser availability of other non-professional roles to fall back upon. The female respondents more easily used the variety in their roles such as family obligations and social relationships to better ease into the transition. One 56-year-old female senior technician said the following: *“I’d like to have grandchildren in the near future so that I could take care of them.”* This statement pushes forward the narrative that female participants have much to look for when retirement comes.

In addition, retirement also brings changes within family dynamics which can also have an impact on identity, especially if the individual had focused more on their career than their family before retirement. Consequently, this impact on identity became far more significant for men,

most of whom had focused mostly on their careers and had either underdeveloped or secondary family roles. One 60-year-old male mechanical engineer and head of sales even said himself that: *“When I introduced myself earlier, I forgot to mention my personal life. I am married and have two children.”* This statement reinforces the findings that men often associate their identity with work first, and then with family and caregiving roles.

Research indicates that because multiple identities in women are reinforced by cultural norms, expecting them to take on every single role (e.g., mother, wife, daughter, professional, business owner, entrepreneur), this led to women developing a more flexible identity than men, allowing them to adapt to these changes more easily (Levinson 1978). One female participant, a 58-year-old high school professor and librarian stated: *“Besides being a teacher, I’m also a mother, so I am involved with house duties and my children’s education.”* Meanwhile, many men struggle with issues related to a dominant work identity that leaves little room for retirement adjustment.

Whereas the multi-role functioning of women, such as through their marital, professional, and community responsibilities, smooths the transition into retirement (Stryker and Burke 2000), for men there is often only one big role in life connected with work thus the transition to retirement is more difficult. The absence of multilevel functioning in men’s lives renders them more vulnerable upon retirement due to their limited other sources of meaning and fulfillment.

While many women found compensatory roles for their lost professional identity in caregiving and family responsibilities (Giele and Smock 1977), men were often less supported in these ways and were thus challenged by retirement. In these respects, male professional identity often plays the central role in men’s definition of self, thus rendering the transition to meaningful activities in retirement particularly problematic.

The *family care* theme identifies that for the women participants, caregiving was an activity imbued with much meaning and emotional satisfaction, enhancing emotional resilience in the

face of change (Moen 2001). However, male retirees are usually hit harder with a feeling of loss in life and meaning in retirement due to a broader range of non-professional differences between them. Without caregiving responsibilities, men are more prone to extreme existential fear during the transition period.

This shift toward *family roles* appears to satisfy the innate psychological needs of relatedness (Deci and Ryan 2000) and aligns with Erikson's concept of generativity (Browning 2004). While to some women, it may be a self-fulfilling activity that contributes to the psychological adjustment of retiring, to most men, the lack of diversified role options often means the intense experience of identity loss. Devoid of such compensatory roles, men are often confronted with a far more serious existential void when retire from professional life.

Whereas involvement in activities concerning family or any personal matter generates a feeling of fulfillment in women (Stryker and Burke 2000), in men, the element of emotional transition might be comparatively harder because their professional identity is considered to be attached to their careers.

For many men, one of the main problems at retirement is finding satisfying activities that they find meaningful. Without the old structures or communities of support, far too many struggle with trying to redefine themselves at this life stage.

The social expectations about family obligations also explain why women retirees have an easier transition in terms of identity changes than men. Whereas men seem to have based their identities primarily on their careers, the lives of women more often have emphasized the importance of flexibility and relational identities, making it easier for them to delve into their multiple identities outside of their work-sphere.

The social structure regarding family and community involvement has been a substantial facilitator of the retirement transition for women. Typically, the woman's identity encompasses

a broader array of roles, allowing them to transition from professional duties to family obligations with minimal perturbation. For men, however, the lack of supplemental roles outside their professional duties complicates the transition and often results in a more challenging adaptation process.

Although women usually balance this loss of professional identity with family caregiving and other roles not directly related to work, men often do not have these compensatory outlets. Therefore, men could experience a much greater loss of identity during retirement due to their work-related sense of self.

These diversified identities - women's family caregiving and personal hobbies - therefore help them buffer against this professional identity loss in retirement. By contrast, for many men, the transition is likely to be more complicated since they have fewer other roles to fall back on. Therefore, HRM strategies should facilitate support for both genders during these complex identity changes.

Smoother transitions to retirement on the part of women are also because they manage to balance personal and professional identities in perfect harmony. For men, this diversified expectation might be lacking and may prevent them from redefining their identity in the post-retirement stage. Such a gendered difference points towards another obvious reason for HRM to recognize the different challenges men face in preparing for retirement.

Retirement is a critical life-altering event for people with a strong work-related identity. There are issues revolving around self-value and self-concept. HRM can help in such matters by addressing the unique challenges both men and women face, especially the extra problems men have when trying to redefine their identities.

5. Practical Implications

5.1 Recommendations for HRM Strategies

HRM has a critical role in ensuring smoother retirement transitions. Organizations should implement targeted strategies to address both emotional and identity challenges. Pre-retirement counseling programs can help employees mentally prepare for the shift in identity, while phased retirement programs can provide a gradual transition rather than an abrupt exit from the workforce. Additionally, mentorship and knowledge transfer initiatives allow retirees to maintain a professional identity while contributing to the organization. Flexible post-retirement roles, such as consulting or advisory positions, can also help retirees stay engaged while adjusting to their new phase of life.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

One of the main limitations of the study was the small sample size, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the sample consisted primarily of individuals from similar socio-cultural backgrounds, limiting the ability to draw conclusions across different cultures. Future research should consider expanding the sample to include a wider range of industries and geographical contexts. Another limitation was the reliance on self-reported narratives, which may be influenced by memory biases or social desirability effects. Future studies could complement interviews with longitudinal research to track identity shifts over time.

6. Conclusion

Retirement signifies a complex transition that involves a lot more than mere financial factors, profoundly impacting one's identity and mental well-being. According to studies, experiences in retirement vary and depend on many factors, such as work involvement, gender, and personal adaptability. The findings emphasize that organizations must move beyond traditional pension programs and attend to psychological and social factors involved in retirement, in addition to financial ones. By following human resource approaches focused on resolving identity-related concerns, organizations can ease such a transition and, in the long run, promote a continued sense of purpose and well-being for retirees. In conclusion, a well-planned retirement process brings not only positive benefits for retirees but for society and organizations in general, fostering a more sustainable and inclusive workforce transition

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8. Appendix

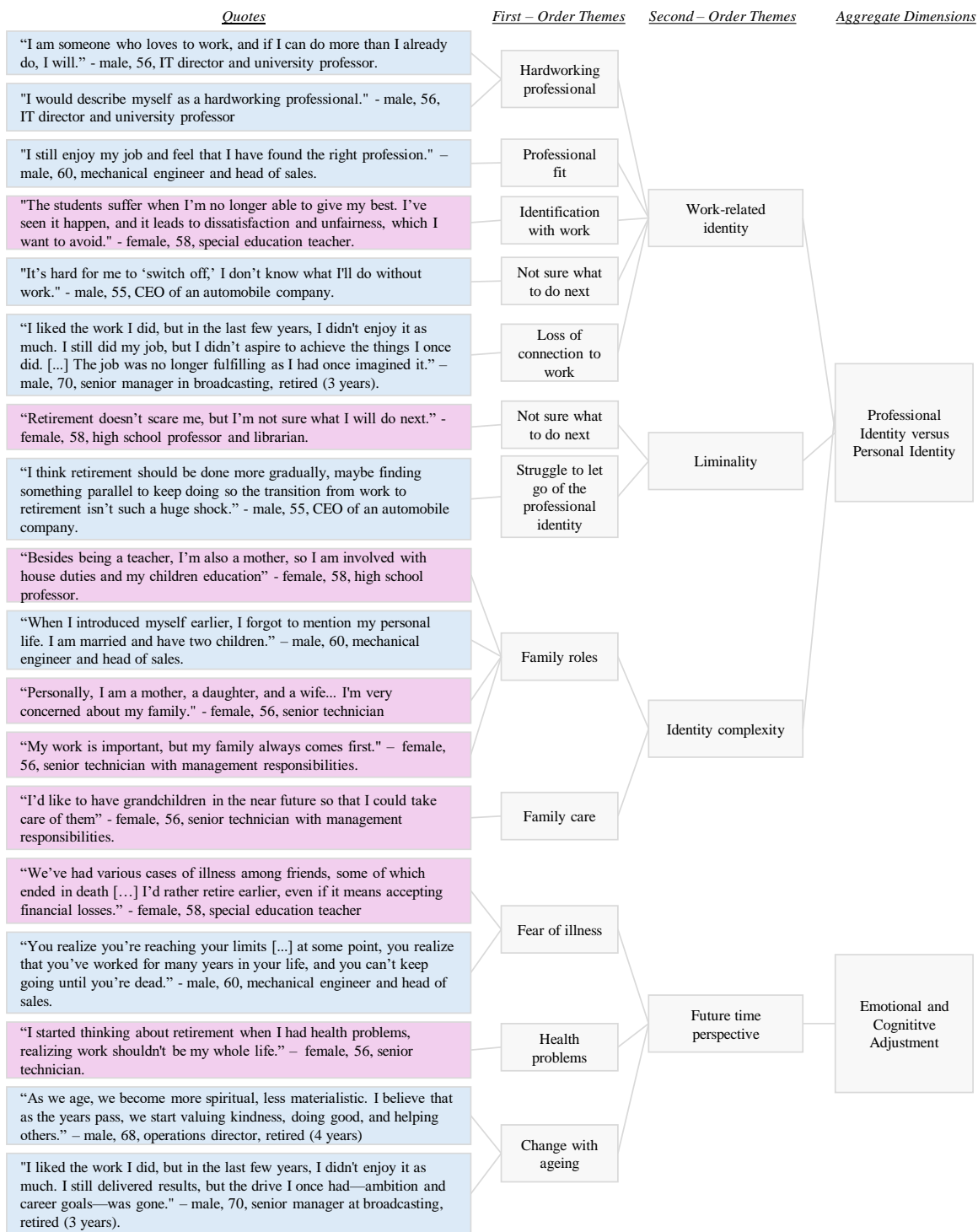
Appendix A - Interview Guidelines¹

1. How would you describe yourself, both as a person and as a professional?
 - a. You said that [specific quality] is something that determines who you are as a person. Could you tell me how does that quality of yours play out in your professional life?
2. How would you describe your career since the beginning?
 - a. Could you share with me what led you to choose this career path? Were there any influences or events that happened in your life that guided you in this direction?
 - b. You mentioned that you went from job A to job B, what made you go ahead with this change? How was this transitioning experience like? Where there any challenges that you had to overcome with this change?
3. Looking back, what were the most significant moments in your career and why? How do you think these significant moments contributed to your career and the person you are today?
 - a. Why was this project/challenge/achievement so meaningful to you?
 - b. You mention event x was a turning point for you, how did it change that way you approach your career goals?
4. **(4,5 and 6, if the person is not retired)** What does retirement mean to you. Will you consider retiring when eligible to retire?
5. When have you started thinking about retirement? And what triggered these thoughts?

¹ All interview transcriptions are available upon request.

6. Have you thought about how you will transition into retirement? Do you have a specific plan in mind for this transition, or is it something you haven't thought much about?
7. **(If the person is retired)** Do you consider yourself different from who you were prior to retirement?
8. As you approach retirement, do you have any ideas on how you'd like to spend your free time during retirement? Are there activities, projects, or passions you're looking forward to dedicating yourself to?
9. How is your routine today? (exercise, social interactions, hobbies, family)
10. How do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years from today. What do you hope the next 5 to 10 years will bring? What things would you like to explore or achieve during that time?

Appendix B - Gioia Method Table



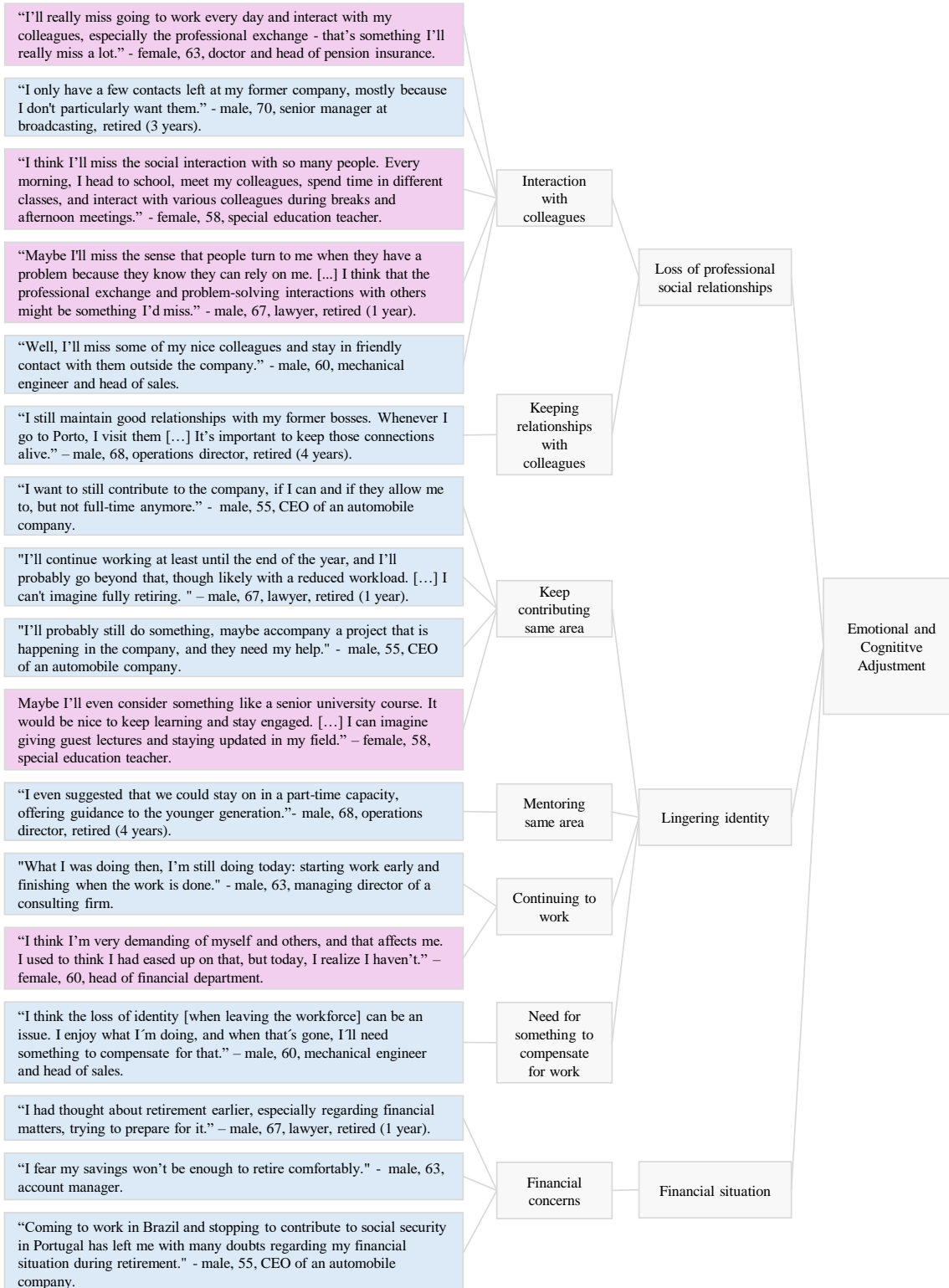
Legend: ■ Male ■ Female

Quotes

First – Order Themes

Second – Order Themes

Aggregate Dimensions



Legend: Male Female

