Chapter 2
Self-Confrontation Method: Assessment and Process-Promotion in Career Counselling

Harmien Visser

In recent decades a lot has changed in vocational and career guidance. Former vocational psychologists made a match between the individual and suitable occupations by comparing personality traits to the requirements of a job. Later on, career guides translated someone's answers on interest inventories and aptitude tests to occupational possibilities. Those objective techniques are rooted in the assumption of stable personal characteristics and secure jobs in bounded organizations.

However, in today's globalized, complex world, with many reorganizations and redundancies, this approach neglects the subjective perspective of clients, living in a continuously changing and uncertain world. Career counsellors are confronted with existential questions about life issues from, for example, clients in the so-called 'mid-life crisis', long-term unemployed adults and elder people that want to phase out their career. People are forced to shape their own career over and over again. Many are required to change their routinized behavior, are forced to choose a (subsequent) study or to take substantial steps in their career, like choosing a quite different profession.

Such changes invite people to become engaged in processes of self-reflection and meaning-making. In addition to hard data as intelligence and skills, soft factors such as motivation, needs and values, have become important ingredients for good career (self) management. Concepts as locus of control, (labour-) identity and emotional intelligence were introduced. Therefore, the current objectifying approaches have become insufficient (Cochran, 1997; Savickas et al., 2009). The role of the career guide is changing from the role of the expert who gives advice, to a counsellor: a person who facilitates an awareness process. "People do not separate the rest of their lives from the career choices they make (…); decisions in a changing world are influenced by and grounded in prior experience. Allowing individuals to tell

H. Visser (✉)
Vis-à-Vis Agency for Career Guidance and Counselling, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands
e-mail: Hvisser@vis-a-vis.nl

their stories can help us to understand their concept of career and what is possible." (Reid, p. 135).

A method that offers an answer to these challenges in career counselling, is the Self-Confrontation Method (further referred to as SCM). The SCM is based on the Valuation Theory (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995) and Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Both theories are based on narrative psychology, in which people are considered as story-tellers. In dialogue with a counsellor, clients examine how they value experiences in everyday life (the manifest level) and how basic motivations give direction to their behavior on a less visible (latent) level. The SCM is a systematic method, that enables individuals to an indepth self-investigation, from which desired goals or changes can be determined. By composing their life story together with a counsellor, clients elaborate their pivot questions in a broader perspective. The SCM creates moments of reflections, from which people can survey themselves with all their strengths and weaknesses and thus can come to new insights. By analyzing the relations between various life experiences and interpreting the feelings underneath, clients can discover a unifying life theme, from where they are able to create a new, future narrative. The collaboration between counsellor and client, the use of a computer program (as discussed in paragraph 3) as well as the combination of objective and subjective data make this method a valuable resource for taking concrete steps in the direction of (career-) alternatives.

In this chapter I will discuss the Self-Confrontation Method in the context of career-counselling and outplacement. After an introduction to the history and background of the SCM and its place within literature about career counselling, the specific characteristics and the performance of the method are described. Next, the SCM is illustrated with a case study and finally, how it can be used effectively in everyday practice.

History and Background Behind the Self-Confrontation Method

Personality psychologist Hubert J.M. Hermans constructed in 1972, together with psychotherapist Els Hermans-Jansen, a quite unique approach. He designed a valuation theory and a self-confrontation method with the following characteristics: (1) a gradual and theory-guided *transition between assessment and change*; (2) people can express a great diversity of '*units of meaning*' (several concrete acts and events, related to each other, that play a significant role in their daily lives); and (3) a *cooperative relationship* between client and consultant in which clients are invited to act as the investigators of their own self-narratives and are challenged to take initiatives to change their situation (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). During the next 30 years, theory and method were continuously modified and expanded, based on feedback from practice.

The Self-Confrontation Method is a narrative method. People experience the world around them in their own way. But by telling their experiences to another person, events become particularly meaningful. By asking people what they perceive as important and meaningful in their lives when they look at their past, present and expected future, clients are invited to start an in-depth process of reflection. While telling, arranging and rearranging their stories, people explore how they are functioning, where they find strength and challenges, from which perspective they look at the world and how they are involved with work, family, friends, colleagues etc. Looking back at the past from the present, they can interpret the past in another, potentially more meaningful, way. By doing so, people can integrate new and sometimes confusing experiences in their life story and discover the deeper motivations underneath their behavior. From there, they can re-create their self-narratives and develop life- and career perspectives in a more conscious way.

Theoretical Basis of the Self-Confrontation Method

Hermans' vision on the 'self' is, just like Cochran (1997), influenced by the theory of William James (1890): the 'self' is not seen as a whole, but consists of multiple 'selves' or '*I*-positions', depending on where people are or which role they are playing at some point in their life. Those can be internal positions (*I* as uncertain, *I* as mother, *I* as employee, etc.), and external positions (for example an inspiring teacher, a sibling or neighbor, even opponents or enemies may take a place in our minds as we utter – as part of imaginary interactions – imprecations to them). Also a coach or counsellor may enter the life of a client as an external position in the self and may give, in a particular period of the client's life, a valuable contribution to his or her internal dialogues and self-reflections.

Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) were inspired by the polyphonic novel of Dostoyevsky, that is composed by a number of characters that are not subordinated to the author, but have their own voice, thoughts and behavior. Each of these characters can have independent viewpoints, sometimes disagreeing with the author, even rebelling against him. They can tell their own story and are involved in dialogical relationships. This idea led to the theory of 'The Dialogical Self' (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The central theme in his theory is that there is not only a dialogical relationship between the self and his (social) environment, but also between different positions in the self of one and the same person. For example: the '*I* as open' and the '*I* as closed'; the 'assertive one' and the 'wait-and-see' or the 'fighter' and the 'quiet one'. One has to know the parts, to understand the functioning of the self as a whole.

Two suppositions underlie Hermans' narrative and dialogical approach. First: space and time are basic components of storytelling ("in order to make a meaningful plot structure, it is necessary to move back and forth between 'plot' and 'events'"). Second: stories acknowledge both the perception of reality and the power of imagination ("stories are organized around actors who, as protagonist and antagonist,

have opposite positions in a real or imaginary space") (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995, p. 11). Even when people are outwardly silent, they have, for example, imaginary dialogues with others (rehearsing an important debate or repeating parts of earlier conversations), with their own conscience or their reflection in the mirror (Watkins, 1986). In the SCM people have the chance to discover their '*I*-positions'. Clients are invited to tell their life story and formulate short sentences, so-called valuations, that are related to their different *I*-positions. By examining these valuations, clients are broadening their view and are able to develop a '*meta-position*': to look at different parts of themselves from a distance and see their interrelationships. So they can move to different and opposite sides in the landscape of the self and search for dominant or hidden *I*-positions. From there it is possible to develop a so-called '*promoter position*', which organizes and gives direction to a diversity of other positions in the self and functions as a catalyzer that enables persons to come into action (Hermans, 2014, pp. 148–149).

The importance of such a narrative approach can be derived from the latest insights about career counselling. Cochran (1997), Reid (2005), Savickas et al. (2009)) and several international research groups show the need for new ways of career guidance, placing clients in their context. They emphasize the importance of human flexibility, adaptability and life-long learning in today's rapidly changing globalized world. Narrative-based approaches are considered as useful to facilitate clients to construct their own life story, make meaning of their experiences and take an active role in designing their future life and career, in connection with their environment. Some examples (I place the similarities with Hermans' theories in Italics):

- Schein (1985) developed the concept of 'career anchors'. He discovered that in their career managers are guided by a fundamental pattern of motives. For this purpose he designed a model for a *dialogue* - the career anchor interview - to help clients understand what factors shape a career (and by which it is limited) by *exploring patterns and themes* in events during their education, work situations and free time.
- Reid (2005) mentions the (international) concerns about young people who leave education early, often being unskilled employed, combined with periods of unemployment (p. 126). She discusses how *narrative-based approaches* can be useful for helping them with educational and vocational decision-making. In particular the need to place emphasis on '*meaning*' by *profound listening*. A listening "that believes that the client's understanding of the meaning of events, and how they think, feel and construe the impact of them on their lives, is the important meaning" (p. 129) and that "allows the client to construct a career narrative that resonates significantly with their values and interests for life, not just for a job" (p. 132).
- Like Hermans, Savickas (2005) believes that due to the increasing uncertainty and turbulence of the present world, it is more and more important *to develop a flexible identity*. Work loses its central role in the life course of people. It is replaced by something new, that Savickas calls 'biographicity': the ability *to integrate new and confusing experiences in one's own life*. He considers a career

as an *active construction* of the own life story and not passively diagnosed by tests or questionnaires. Savickas (2011) developed his 'Career Story Interview' (CSI) from the idea that language and stories qualify themselves to provide the best *meaning*. In the CSI Savickas works together with the client towards a *'life portrait'*, similar to Hermans' *life story*. In the space between client and counsellor unifying life themes from significant experiences emerge, in order to formulate career scenarios and to come to concrete steps.

- Savickas et al. (2009)) and eight representatives from various countries formed an international research group to formulate innovative approaches of career counselling. They developed a 'life-design intervention model', rooted in *contextualism*, focusing on *meaning making* "through intentional processes *in the ongoing construction of lives* (…). *Self and identity are constructs built by the person through continuing reflection and revision* (…). Career denotes a moving perspective that imposes *personal meaning* on *past* memories*, present* experiences and *future* aspirations by patterning them into a *life theme* (…). Today, it is the life story that holds the individual together and provides a biographical bridge with which to cross from one job to the next job" (p. 246).
- The Australian lecturer McMahon and three South African psychologists (2012) proved that a narrative approach was being successfully trialled in a developing country with a non-western population of disadvantaged clients. Facilitating the client's development by *reflection, connectedness, meaning making, learning and agency*. They believe that "*telling stories* assists clients to *make meaning* of their life experiences and to recognize the holistic, culturally embedded nature of careers" (p. 128). "*The identification of life themes, or the threads or patterns that connect life stories, is facilitated through meaning making*. Meaning making and interpretation help individuals make sense of what has happened in their past and present, and more importantly, project their future life career course" (p. 134).
- Cochran's (1997) narrative approach of career coaching also depicts the person as a motivated storyteller: "Narrating a story about oneself creates a distance between *a person as narrator and a person as an actor or participant in that story*" (p. 25). Cochran describes several narrative techniques that (in *a strong collaboration between client and counsellor*) can contribute to: elaborating the career problem – composing a life history – founding a future narrative – constructing reality – changing a life structure – enacting a role – crystallizing a decision. According to Cochran, the counsellor has to support the client in getting a *sense of agency*. "A person has a strong sense of agency if he or she has formed an authentic narrative of self as an agent taking meaningful and effective action toward major goals of life" (p. 30).

The SCM includes most of the foregoing elements; even goes a step further (see also the following paragraph). The use of open-ended questions can overcome the problem of one-sidedness or partial stories. Formulations of valuable experiences are put in the words of the clients themselves. Analyzing the outcomes of affect scores on previously phrased valuations, it is not the subjective perspective of the

counsellor but the clients' own interpretation that matters. The SCM takes stock of subjective data (valuations and affect-scores), analyses these in an objective manner and offers methodic steps for the use of the results. This procedure, as well as the visual representation of all data that offers an overview of the clients' life story, make it an accessible and structured method that gives clients the feeling to be in charge.

The Self-Confrontation Method: How It Works

People are always situated in time, place and space (*contextualism*, Hermans, 1995, pp. 7–8). The meaning that people attach to their most important experiences, will change depending on the stages in their life and the context or environment in which they operate. Every recollection of an event, all circumstances that individuals have been going through, touched them more or less. This will influence their outlook on life and themselves. People and their valuation systems are therefore considered as a dynamic whole that is continuously evolving. Thus, the SCM has three functions:

- A *diagnostic* function: as an assessment of content and organization of the valuation system as a whole.
- *Process-promotion*: as a validation/invalidation process in which clients reorganize their life (or parts of it) through self-reflection and action.
- *Evaluation:* evaluating the changes when people retell their self-narrative, enabling them to investigate how actual experiences or actions contribute to their feelings of well-being.

In a cyclic process clients – as spectators – are telling about their past, present and future – as actors in their own life. By re-interpreting their past, they are better able to understand the present and to create a new future in a more conscious way. Thus, new vocational choices, life- or career perspectives are developing.

Reason and emotion alternate in identifying all facets that are meaningful in one's life. Facets that have shaped the person and that affected the person's functioning, motivation and sense of well-being. In an intensive process of self-reflection clients analyze their thoughts and feelings. This is supported by a computer program that produces insight in similarities among valuations by means of the Pearson's correlation coefficient. A high correlation between the affective similarity of several different life experiences is likely to reflect a common underlying pattern or a guiding life theme. The leading thread, the basic theme in the story, becomes perceptible. This way, clients' self-confrontation with their own actions and feelings create a process of growing awareness, in which they develop a better insight into the organization of their valuation system and the themes that govern it.

While telling and reflecting, clients discover which fundamental motives have a guiding influence on their behavior. In the many years of their research and practice, Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) became aware of the importance of the

duality of human motivation. On the one hand a person is an autonomous entity that attempts to maintain and enhance itself as an independent being. On the other hand one has the need to be part of some larger whole and feel love and contact with others. So in the valuation theory two main basic motives are distinguished:

– The S-motive: the pursuit of self-enhancement (for example by defending, to maintain or to develop oneself); to distinguish oneself from other persons.
– The O-motive: longing for contact and union with something or someone else (for instance a person, group, object or the surrounding world in general); the desire to be part of a larger whole.

These two basic motives can be conflicting (e.g., if someone consolidates him- or herself while opposing another person), but also mutually complementary (e.g., feeling self-esteem while being accepted and loved by family members). Both the S- and the O-motive can be experienced in positive as well as negative ways, depending on the satisfaction or frustration of the motive.

In the SCM clients analyze how the basic motives S and O occur in their life. Based on this, they design a plan, clearly showing which basic motives they want to accentuate in the future. Do they want to have a high degree of autonomy, being independent and standing out from others? Or would they prefer to make themselves serviceable, feeling connectedness, in a receptive attitude? Or do they wish those two motives being more in balance? Through this increased self-knowledge, desired personal changes, career directions or vocational goals become clear and measurable.

The Process of Self-Investigation

The self-investigation process follows five steps:

1. **Constructing a self-narrative: formulation of valuations**

In the first stage of a self-examination people are invited – based on a fixed set of open-ended questions (so-called 'triggers') – to tell their life story, referring to past, present and future. E.g.: "Has there been anything of major significance in your past life that still continues to exert a strong influence on you?" Depending on the setting, special sets of triggers are being used. For example career-triggers, triggers for delinquents, for adolescents and for chronically ill patients and triggers about bereavement. Special sets of questions have been developed for stress and burnout, vocational guidance, team management and personal leadership. Even a set of drawn pictures for children from 9 to12 years is being used.

Career-triggers focus on issues like:

– persons, circumstances and experiences from the past;
– the current function and tasks;
– one's strengths;

– one's weaknesses;
– leisure activities
– major changes in career;
– goals that one is trying to achieve in life and work
– persons against whom one is opposing;
– persons with whom one feels attachment.

By asking the questions, an association process starts, in which clients tell those experiences that have a particular meaning to them: events that may have touched them or affected them in some way. Those can also include a thought, a film they recently saw, a dream or a fantasy, even a picture or a drawing. Thus, in an intensive dialogue with themselves and with the counsellor, clients explore their own life like a voyage of discovery. At the end of each self-investigation two questions are added, concerning the General Feeling ('How do you feel in general recently?') and the Ideal Feeling ('How would you ideally like to feel?') both in work and private.

In about 3–4 h a complete overview of a person's situation is created, in which the main facets of the client's life emerge. These facets can include one's present career question, influential persons or role models, competencies, values and future fantasies, and issues in the person's social and private life. The wide variety of life experiences is becoming manifest in the formulation of 20–50 short sentences depicting a valuable event located in time and space, so-called 'valuations'. They should reflect the personal meaning that the '*I* as author' relates about the '*Me* as actor', involved in the interactions with others. Clients write these valuations on little cards.

Of course, a complete life cannot be described in full. The intention of the triggers is to enlighten precisely those experiences which constitute the tip of the iceberg and which are typical for the life of the client. From this perspective looking at their own lives gives clients already order and structure.

Examples of valuations you will find in the following case study.

My client, let's call him Roger, has fulfilled various technical positions at the Foreign Office, but could not serve operational functions any more due to his weak physical condition. He was transferred several times against his will, resulting in conflicts with his executives. Besides, he was not happy with the content of those functions. The disappointing experiences affected him so much that he got overstrained. On his own initiative, he had himself retrained to ICT specialist, after which he was many years responsible as a manager for the automation of various departments. Because of the poor health of his son, he let himself transfer from abroad to the Netherlands. Later, he refused a new foreign appointment and therefore resigned.

At the time of the self-investigation Roger is interim manager at a temporary staffing agency. However, due to lack of jobs, the agency has no more application for him and requests counselling support aiming at outplacement. In the first interview I suggest to do a self-investigation using the Self Confrontation Method. This method appeals to him, because he gets the chance to investigate the deeper motivations in his life, so he can make a well-thought choice in which direction he wants

Table 2.1 Some of Roger's valuations

Till my 15th it was as if my father wasn't there. Either he was at work, or he was studying and then I had to be quiet.
Before my 27th I didn't have any urge to perform. If I only enjoyed the things I did.
The message that my son had a brain tumor made me feel paralyzed.
Despite of my weak ankles I keep running, though I should choose another way of exercising.
I think it's great to see my kids grow up. I am thankful to help them to develop into independent actors.

to develop in the next 5 years. Roger takes this opportunity to get answers on three specific questions:

– *Why have the conflicts with his executives had such a great impact on him?*
– *People in his surroundings find him hard to fathom because he does not show any feelings; what does this say about his emotional world?*
– *Which career options are possible to him?*

   Some of Roger's valuations are provided in Table 2.1.

2. **Connecting valuations with affects**

   The things people care about, are fed by deeper lying feelings. Hermans had the fundamental assumption that each valuation has an affective connotation, i.e. emotional value. Those feelings become visible by means of a computer-scoring program, using a list of affect terms. The affects are assigned to a number of categories:

– Self-enhancement (S), expressed in feelings as self-esteem, strength, self-confidence and pride.
– Contact and union with others (O), reflected by affects as caring, love, togetherness and intimacy.
– Positive (P), expressed by joy, happiness, safety or inner calmness.
– Negative (N), expressed by anxiety, loneliness, inferiority or anger.

   In career counselling sometimes the following category is added:

– Stress (S), reflected by affects as nervousness, stress or agitation

   Reading each valuation, the client is asked to indicate the affect intensity on a scale from 0 to 5. This results in a typical affect profile, the so-called 'affect modality', which is a quantified pattern of affects that is connected to the sentence.
   Some other valuations, combined with their affective indices, are mentioned in Table 2.2.

3. **Analysing the results**

   With the aid of a computer program, client and counsellor together are examining the valuations and their affective profiles: whether the S or the O-motive is dominating, whether both basic motives appear to be equally strong, and whether the profiles are positive or negative.

Table 2.2 Valuations with their affective indices

		S	O	P	N
1.	Due to my weak physical condition they assigned me to a job I did not want.	4	1	2	22
2.	The combination of reassignment, no appreciation and low working pressure made me overstrained when I was 28.	1	1	1	29
3.	Due to the brain tumor of my son I have not been able to enjoy life for at least a year.	4	13	2	19
4.	When I was young I had regularly fights with my sisters: I often lost my temper and stroked them a blow. I regularly got punished, sometimes unearned.	5	5	1	24
5.	The dentist pulled 8 teeth when I was 12. Because mom and dad weren't there, I went on my bicycle to our former neighbor to be comforted.	9	10	2	27
6.	I became angry when my boss addressed me on the bad functioning of the group. I thought that criticism was not justified.	14	1	4	20
7.	After the conflict with my executive, I burst in a fit of crying. The doctor arranged for me to be taken home and I spent three months being ill from stress.	0	4	0	29
8.	How did I recently feel in general?	23	24	19	11
9.	How would I ideally like to feel in general?	29	26	30	1
10.	How did I recently feel in general at work?	12	8	8	15
11.	How would I ideally like to feel in general at work?	29	18	26	1

Note. S: affect referring to self-enhancement; O: affect referring to contact and union with the other; P: positive affect; N: negative affect. All indices range from 0–30.

In the first analysis of the outcomes of Roger's self-narrative, we take a look at the General Feeling (nr. 8 in Table 2.2). It becomes clear that both feelings of self-enhancement and feelings of contact and union are rather high. However, in the General Feeling with respect to work (nr. 10) Roger feels less Self-enhancement and Contact with the Other, and there are less Positive and more Negative feelings. It is very unpleasant for him being put on the sideline, especially now that he's been unemployed for the last half year. There is a rather large discrepancy between his General Feeling at work (nr. 10) and his Ideal Feeling at work (nr. 11).

Subsequently, one of the valuations is taken as a starting point for further analysis. The choice of which is to the client. People often choose a valuation referring to the main issue they want to discuss. It also can be a sentence that strikes them, an affective rating that has surprised them or a sentence that shows an extremely high or low score on any of the affects. The computer program has calculated correlations between the affective profile of starting valuation and the profiles of all other valuations. The chosen valuation and the highest correlating valuations, each of them written on separate cards, are compared and explored. One by one clients place the relating cards next to the chosen valuation, being invited to explore what these experiences have in common. The counsellor supports this association process by asking specifically about the common meaning (the latent emotional level),

accurately writing down the answers and at the end repeating them all. This way, clients can create a summary of the theme that emerges from the interdependence of this group of valuations and write it down on a colored card.

The very first valuation Roger selects for a modality analyses, is sentence 2:

"The combination of reassignment, no appreciation and low working pressure made me overstrained when I was 28." This valuation shows extremely low scores on the basic motives S and O, like on the positive feelings, together with a very high level of negative feelings. In the pattern of affective indices we find strong similarities to successively valuations 1, 7, 4, 5, 6, and 3 (see Table 2.2).

Comparing these sentences one by one with the chosen valuation nr. 2, Roger points to the similarities with the following keywords: "things I do not control; unhappy; lack of appreciation; feeling powerlessness; loneliness; anger and injustice; my lightheartedness was gone."

Looking back at this cluster of valuations, Roger tells me that in his youth he experienced his social world as unjust to him. He often responded as a hothead, resulting in much hassle (with sisters, parents or executives). Roger: "When I experienced injustice or powerlessness, there was a great risk of becoming angry. I tried to maintain myself, which was suppressed. At those moments feelings of loneliness and unhappiness laid in wait." The affective patterns in the sentences 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 are showing that Roger has no grip on the situation. The valuations are highly loaded with negative affect, together with a low level of self-enhancement and contact and union with others.

I continue by asking him how he managed to survive in this threatening, unfair world. Roger replies: "If I can control situations I don't like, I am trying to change them. I am approaching people and looking for the confrontation." The emphasis on the negative feelings, together with a higher level of self-enhancement in the valuations 6 and 10 in Table 2.2, reflect this need for self-maintenance. Roger feels opposed to someone or a situation that is threatening his self-esteem and he is trying to defend his position. This movement is reflected by strength, energy and self-confidence.

After that, the opposite pole can be examined, based on the most negatively correlating valuation with the pivotal sentence.

When we examine the opposite pole of sentence 2, we discover sentence nr. 12 (see Table 2.3). A valuation with a completely opposite emotional pattern, with maximum scores on S, O and P and a score of zero on N.

Valuations 13 to 18 (Table 2.3) are highly correlating with sentence 12. Roger mentions the following keywords about this group of phrases: "happiness, connectedness, joy, being active, being in connection with my feelings, personal growth; pursuit of happiness for myself as well as for another."

By placing the summaries of the positive and the negative pole (typically, sources of energy and sources of frustration) next to each other, an important theme can emerge. For example, people may discover that they have never effectively used their S-motive, always gratuitous doing what others expected. Such a client could formulate as a theme:

Table 2.3 The opposite pole

		S	O	P	N
12.	S (wife) is my buddy. We share weal and woe and although sometimes we tell each other some hard truths, we always make up again and we love each other very much.	30	30	30	0
13.	My trip to the Caribbean made me very aware of the question: what is the meaning of life?	24	25	27	5
14.	I am dreaming about emigrating with my family to a developing country to do something in the domain of housing, education and income.	27	27	20	12
15.	I like to challenge people to look across borders, in order to get them thinking.	28	24	27	4
16.	I can enjoy a good glass of whiskey and good food with my family, with friends or just with the two of us.	30	30	30	0
17.	I love to perform on stage with my choir. I would like to have some more performances, to stay motivated to practice.	27	23	24	3
18.	I intend never to get overstrained again.	30	23	27	1

"I do have a lot of power, but I have used it only to keep up appearances. At important moments I often have exhibited escape behavior. I always easily pulled back and let other people make decisions, handed down to what is happening around me."

Frequently found themes are, for example, the dilemma between freedom and union, or between looking for challenges and the desire for safety/security.

Putting the two summaries side by side, the following conclusion, referring to basic themes in Roger's self-narrative, arise: "Without connectedness happiness cannot exist. In my surroundings I want to be leading and not following. But at the same time I want to do so in union."

The dialogical self is appearing from Roger's inner world: the position 'I as a leader' referring to the S-motive and 'I as longing for union' referring to the O-motive.

4. **The validation process: awareness and change**

The confrontation mentioned above stimulates an awareness process. A similarity in affective profile between two sentences that are very different in their formulated content, may hint at a connection on a deeper level. Individuals become aware of behavior or circumstances that are preventing them from functioning effectively or from being happy. A client may discover a repeating pattern of feeling useless or inferior that emerges in stress situations. It is even possible that this person develops a certain perfectionism through the years, to compensate these unpleasant feelings of inferiority, resulting in becoming stressed out or even burnout. Through this increased self-knowledge, the tension between inferiority and perfectionism can be recognized. Together with the counsellor clients formulate changes or goals for the future in specific and achievable steps.

Roger formulates a vision for the future. He seems to be a bit moved when he realizes: "One of the most important things is that I want to be significant for people that surround me. If I can be liable to service other people, I can be happy." Roger has reached a meta-position from which he becomes aware that the S-motive has been dominant in his life hitherto, suppressing the need of being devoted to other people. Now, in formulating this vision, the balance of the S- and the O-motive is becoming more central. Self-enhancement and contact and union coexist, creating a high level of well-being. In the periods of his life in which he experienced no connection with others, both the S- and the O-motive were declining to nearly zero. "I got lost", in Roger's words. This discovery is very important for him for the future: connectedness is essential, even a precondition for a new job.

After this, an action plan can be formulated to be realized in everyday life. This so-called period of validation includes three phases: attending – creating – anchoring (the ACA cycle).

- First, persons are paying attention to the disadvantageous behavior that they discovered in their self-investigation, with particular attention to behaviors which deviate from this pattern, as an exception to the rule.
- In the next creating phase they will explore alternative ways of behavior and step-by-step experiment with it, gradually rising the degree of difficulty.
- In the anchoring phase clients are focusing on the conditions that are necessary, in order to get used to this new behavior and being able to show it in different situations.

To make a gradual transition between the foregoing discussions and the validation period to come, Roger is invited to formulate a concrete plan for the next few weeks. As an assignment to himself he writes down: "Every day I'm going to observe myself, being alert on the emergence of feelings of injustice and powerlessness. If they occur, I try to make a connection with people that surround me and consider it as a challenge, instead of feeling powerless and unhappy." He agrees to make daily notes in a diary, writing down all specific details: e.g. when, where, and with whom it occurs. This procedure enables him to integrate his different I-positions and to develop a promoter-position, that organizes other positions in his self and helps him to create a future self.

In career counselling various valuations about work or study and vocational choices (possibly obtained through psychological tests) can be related to the self-narrative. Based on the intended direction in which the basic motives should go according to the client, these alternatives can be judged as more or less desirable. Besides, the highest affective correlation with the 'Ideal Feeling' can give direction to career choices. Through the increased self-knowledge and new stimulating experiences people get inspired to change the plot of their life-story and to re-shape their own life and career.

In our next meeting we look at Roger's future career options, from the perspective of his new vision on the future. In his self-investigation he has formulated three options (see Table 2.4) in such a way that he is able to connect them with the emotional impact. That is, as if it has been realized already.

Table 2.4 Roger's future career options

		S	O	P	N
19.	I'm going to immerse myself into the theory of change management, because then I can create a more focused contribution to changes in organizations.	25	17	24	6
20.	I'm going to study a Master in Management of Information so that I can further develop in professional knowledge, to be able to support the goals of the organization better on a theoretical level.	26	14	20	7
21.	It would be a challenge for me to be in the public service, coaching managers and team members. Also, I would like to improve the efficiency in the technical field.	29	22	28	6

In the hierarchy of correlations with the Ideal Feeling at work (valuation 11 in Table 2.2), we find sentence 21 (Table 2.4) at the top. The basic motives S and O, as well as the positive feelings, show higher ratings than options 19 and 20, and it shows a relatively low score on the negative feelings. Besides, valuation 21 is a realistic way to go, because there exists a vacancy for such a job. But at the same time there is still another option, which takes up Roger's thoughts. That is sentence nr. 14 (see Table 2.3): dreaming about emigrating to a developing country. However, this option has a lower rating, because Roger has associated it with more negative feelings. The thought of emigration, giving up everything he has, produces a lot of fear and uncertainty, we discover in the matrix of feelings. But the idea to do developmental work in a poor country, fits perfectly with his newly formulated vision to be at the service of others, as appears from the high level of self-enhancement and affects referring to connectedness with others.

In the final phase of the outplacement Roger decides to apply for the in option 21 listed public function, but at the same time to investigate the possibilities for developmental aid in a poor country. His contract with the temporary staffing agency will not be extended, but he rents himself as an entrepreneur to the agency, to get started as an interim manager at the civil service.

5. **The second investigation**

After a period ranging from several months to a year, a second self-investigation can be realized, if necessary or desired. The same steps 1–4 are repeated. This investigation has an evaluating function: it shows if progress has been made and to what extent the formulated goals have been achieved. Also the direction of the change from the perspective of the basic motives is assessed.

There is no need of a second investigation with Roger. Because a year after our last meeting he writes me that he has moved with his wife to a Caribbean island. He has found a position as responsible for the governmental ICT facility. This position represents a productive combination of his experience as a manager in automation, and contributing to the development of this island. He tells me he is enjoying this new challenge in a very different environment, climate and culture. It is an acknowledgement for the self-investigation that we performed together. With the insights he received, he went to work: now he is more stable and calmer, he writes. He is

suffering less from conflict situations, trying to follow the strategy he mentioned in his validation plans. According to himself, he has better control of his temper and he has learned to have a more relaxed view of life.

In Summary

Referring to this client, the Self-Confrontation Method initiated a process of increasing awareness, in which the search for the basic motives has worked very enlightening and has provided an important orientation towards his future career options. In the conflicts with his executives, the focus was on self-defense and opposition: a defensive form of the S-motive. His self-investigation has resulted in the unveiling of a basic need for connectedness, which was already present on a latent level, but which has now become more manifest. As his emotional world has become more transparent for Roger, it has become clear that when his need for connection with other people was not fulfilled, he got so upset that he got overstrained. At those moments he was not able to move from negativism to positivism, nor to reach self-esteem and union with others, feeling himself imprisoned in those unpleasant experiences.

Roger discovered not only *I*-positions like '*I* as a hothead' and '*I* as a victim of conflicts,' but also '*I* as a caring father,' '*I* as a loving partner,' and an '*I* as a technical civil servant.' And finally he became aware of '*I* as connected with others,' '*I* as a development worker' and an '*I* as independent entrepreneur.' In dialogue with himself, he has created a 'self' as a more integrated whole. He is now able to move from one type of valuation to another. In Hermans' words: he has reached 'psychological flexibility' (1995, p.115-117). Of course his 'hothead' will still appear in his life, sometimes. But his need to be subservient to others and feeling connectedness, revealed a new '*I* as going for challenges'. Learning the impact of his basic motives, he has now the capacity to move flexible between these various '*I*-positions.'

The formulation of a guiding theme has changed Roger's self-narrative. The discovery that the O-motive is essential for him, gives direction to his future prospects. The SCM has been empowering and encouraging him to face uncertainties in life and work. He is prepared to consider future life events, both positive and negative ones, as new possibilities for his further development.

Application of the SCM in Everyday Practice

Despite of the fact that it uses figures, statistics and a computer program, the SCM is definitely <u>not</u> a test. Individual data are not compared to a standard norm and clients should not expect to get a cut and dried advice. On the contrary: data and ratings only get their value by interpreting them by the clients themselves. The personal meaning, in the language of the clients themselves, is the central element.

For Whom?

Career counselling with the Self-Confrontation Method gives clients their own responsibilities and is therefore meant for those who want to reflect on their work in the broader perspective of their whole life. Outcomes from vocational tests or psychological therapy can be part of the investigation. But clients always have to be willing to submerge themselves in a process of deep self-exploration, and therefore must be in a psychologically healthy condition. That is, they have to be able to communicate clearly and to take some distance from their own situation. The SCM should not be used with people who are severely depressed or addicted to alcohol or drugs. Besides, some problematic situations can prevent clients of thinking about career options or changes. Clients who are in a divorce, for instance, are often involved in legal cases that have to be solved first.

Under the preceding conditions, the next groups of clients, in particular, are expected to have advantage from the career-SCM:

– persons who have to make a choice for vocational education after finishing high school or after a few years of vocational training and who are uncertain as to their professional direction;
– clients who are questioning their chosen current career track to be the right one;
– persons who – after a period of illness or unemployment – want to participate again in the labour market;
– within the context of management development, a human resources officer can apply the SCM with people who want to reflect on a next career move. What skills and capacities must be strengthened?
– if a discrepancy arises between job requirements and person, one may search for solutions either within the organization, or through outplacement in order to gain an insight into new opportunities and challenges.

The Duration

If it concerns only a relatively simple choice between some career options, the counselling can be done within a few weeks. The minimum number of sessions is four (one for telling the life-story, two for discussing the results, and one for formulating goals). However, it is possible that personal or relational problems show up in the course of the SCM. Still, also for those clients the SCM can be valuable, as an instrument to discover which next step (e.g., a particular kind of psychotherapy) is necessary. In other situations, when it concerns outplacement, or when it is necessary to investigate personal pitfalls and drawbacks that prevent clients from being effective, it possibly leads to a radical reorganization of their valuation system and future career perspective. In such cases the SCM can result in long lasting counselling from several months till over a year.

Required Skills for the Counsellor

Of course, SCM counsellors have to be familiar with the most common interview techniques and have to be able to keep a professional distance, being aware of possible transference and counter transference problems. But they also have to acquire knowledge about the theoretical framework and the details of this special methodology, combined with getting experienced to apply it in practical situations.

In this method, the client has a very active role. This requires a specific attitude of the counsellor, playing the part of an (active) mirror. First of all, SCM counsellors have to be very empathic: opening themselves up to the story of the client, inviting, listening actively in silence, asking in-depth questions, recapitulating and summarizing, remaining faithful to the client's words and intentions. When necessary they seek clarification, asking for specific details. In this way, a safe atmosphere is created, at first supporting the client in formulating valuations and structuring the self-narrative, later on in discovering connections between valuations and affect.

Further, there is a precarious balance between a following and a leading attitude in the dialogue. At one hand, counsellors are responsible for gathering a variety of valuations, both positive and negative ones. At the other hand, they must prevent clients from repeating themselves or becoming sidetracked. It's very important that counsellors withdraw from making normative statements and offering solutions to the clients' problem. Besides, they have to be prudent when giving their own interpretations and opinions. In dialogue with a less assertive client, it is not desirable to do so. With more assertive clients, the advice can yet be given, if the role of an expert is needed. Sometimes it even can be necessary to confront the client with contradictions in his story. It happens often that people repeatedly stick to existing themes and plots, because they experience a certain advantage of their old behavior. At some point in their life this was helpful for some reason. For example to survive extremely traumatic events by neglecting their negative feelings. Such clients are avoiding any exploration of negative experiences. The counsellor may have the impression that the client is attached to instant happiness and comfort, but this attitude has a deeper cause. However, not going into their negative experiences is preventing them from listening to the message of these experiences as a valuable source of information (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Counsellors have the opportunity to support such clients either by a compassionate or a more confrontational approach.

References

Cochran, L. (1997). *Career counselling: A narrative approach*. London: Sage.

Hermans, H. J. M. (2014). Self as a society of *I*-positions: A dialogical approach to counseling. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, 53*, 134–159.

Hermans, H. J. M., & Hermans-Jansen, E. (1995). *Self-narratives, the construction of meaning in psychotherapy*. New York: Guilford Press.

Hermans, H. J. M., & Hermans-Konopka, A. (2010). *Dialogical self theory: Positioning and counter-positioning in a globalizing society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

James, W. (1890). *The principles of psychology* (Vol. I). London: Macmillan.

McMahon, M., & Watson, M. (2012). Story crafting: Strategies for facilitating narrative career counselling. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 3*(3), 211–224.

McMahon, M., Watson, M., Chetty, C., & Hoelson, C. N. (2012). Examining process constructs of narrative career counselling; An exploratory case study. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 40*, 127–141.

Reid, H. L. (2005). Narrative and career guidance: Beyond small talk and towards useful dialogue for the 21st century. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 5*, 125–136.

Savickas, M. L. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In S. S. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counselling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 42–70). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Savickas, M. L. (2011). *Career counselling*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Savickas, M. L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J. P., Duarte, M. E., Guichard, J., et al. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 75*, 239–250.

Schein, E. H. (1985). *Career anchors – Discovering your real values*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer (A Wiley Company).

Watkins, M. (1986). *Invisible guests: The development of imaginal dialogues*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.