

Andy Blunden. April 2026

Part III. The Psychology of the Will

3. The development of the Will through adulthood

Introduction

I take 'adulthood' to refer to those ages after leaving secondary school when a person has entered training or further education, or is in a job or looking for work, up until the time when mental and physical decline predominate.

Although it was Vygotsky who devised the basic principle of the development of the Will in adulthood, he did not live long enough to develop it. Consequently, I also draw on the work of Vygotsky's younger collaborator, A.N. Leontyev, and the work of Leontyev's student, Fedor Vasilyuk, before he abandoned Marxism for Orthodox Christianity.

The crises of adult life that shape the Will and the entire personality are associated with rites of passage, career changes, marriage and divorce, deaths in the family, commitments to new life-projects and, in turn, the conflicts and blockages that such life-projects encounter, and so on. While no life is lived without such crises, each life story is unique.

These experiences differ from those that arise the course of child development chiefly because, here, the person is fully developed psychologically, whereas in the case of a child, the subject is as yet only partially developed and is not legally responsible for their own actions and their goals are set for them by adults. The adult does not face a series of more or less predetermined hurdles in order to reach predetermined goals; they more or less voluntarily set their own life goals under whatever conditions they encounter, and are responsible for dealing with what comes their way as a result, even if tragedy or good luck often shape their life more than their own decisions.

This chapter ventures into the territory of *social theory* but remains centrally concerned with the psychology of the Will. In order to develop a theory of the Will in the domain of social theory it will be necessary to conduct an *immanent critique* of the existing theories of Sociology. That is not yet my focus, but it will be dealt with in the next section. Nonetheless, this chapter can be taken as a kind of 'hinge' linking the two domains.

Whereas I have learnt at Vygotsky's feet insofar as I have learned something about the development of the Will in childhood, my appropriation of the work of A.N. Leontyev is qualified. Nonetheless, his formulation of a theory of the personality applicable to adult life makes the starting point for my enquiry.

Leontyev's Theory of the Personality

A.N. Leontyev was Vygotsky's youngest collaborator, although Vygotsky broke relations with him before his own death. Leontyev went on to found the current of Psychology known as Activity Theory. He managed to survive the Stalinist purges and was Dean of the Faculty of Psychology at the Moscow State University at the time of his death in 1979.

‘Personality’ is a complex and chameleon-like concept – which attributes of an individual are to be counted under the heading of ‘personality’ and are which not? A.N. Leontyev relegated to the category of ‘substructures’ of the personality “such various traits as, for example, moral qualities, knowledge, habits and customs, forms of psychological reflection, and temperament” (1978, p. 154). What he sees as composing the structure of a personality are units that he called ‘motives’. The motivational structure that results gives meaning to a person’s life, their identity, or, more generally, forms the *structure of meaning* for the person.

What is more usually understood as ‘personality’ today more closely approximates what Leontyev calls ‘forms of psychological reflection’, but, as I hope to show, it is precisely the structure of meaning more or less as understood by Leontyev that is of importance in connection with the development of the Will and the framing of an interdisciplinary social theory, even if it is only partially explanatory in the domain of Psychology.

The Russian word normally translated as ‘personality’ in this discourse is *lichnost* (личность). This word is probably best translated as *persona*, inasmuch as it refers to the ‘face’ a person shows to the world, as opposed to what A.N. Leontyev rather dismissively called ‘substructures’ of the personality.

For the purpose of a study of the Will, it is quite satisfactory to take ‘personality’ in the sense of ‘persona’ or *lichnost*. There are psychological features relating to how a subject processes reality that are already more or less fixed by the end of childhood. A shy child tends to become a shy adult, but the adult *learns* how to cope with their shyness and may go on to become an entertainer or politician notwithstanding their shyness. But, alas, little has been bequeathed us by Soviet Psychology as to how these ‘substructures’ of the personality are formed in the crises of childhood. However, they do not bear on the subject matter of this work. The shy person who does not speak up in a meeting can learn to ‘put on a face’ and adopt the persona of a person who speaks up in meetings and has their voice heard. How they do this is no different from any other issue in the psychological development of the adult, discussed below.

As Leontyev saw it, during the first phase of development of a personality the child or youth is mostly just an expression of the class fraction and cultural group in which they have been raised (bearing in mind the limited scope of personal attributes that Leontyev has in mind).

The subject’s belonging to a class conditions even at the outset the development of his connections with the surrounding world, a greater or smaller segment of his practical activity, his contacts, his knowledge, and his acquiring norms of behaviour. All of these are acquisitions from which personality is made up at the stage of its initial formation.

1978, pp. 178–9

Leontyev says that at this stage it cannot properly be said that there is a personality, because the person is merely an ‘object’ of their social group:

Later this situation is turned around, and they become a *subject* of their social group, unconsciously and then consciously, ... decisive or vacillating ... at every turn of his life’s way he must free himself

of something, confirm something in himself, and he must do all this and not simply 'submit to the effect of the environment',

1978, p. 179

What were formerly the traits of a person of their kind later become merely the *conditions* for the formation of a personality properly so-called. The subject gradually frees themselves from their biography, discarding some aspects of their 'indigenous' personality while consciously developing others.

Personality thus no longer seems to be the result of a direct layering of external influences; it appears as something that man makes of himself, confirming his human life. He confirms it in everyday affairs and contacts, as well as in people to whom he gives some part of himself on the barricades of class struggles, as well as on the fields of battle for his country, and at times he consciously confirms it even at the price of his physical life.

1978, p. 185

A person's motivation is represented to them in the shape of the activities to which they are committed, so, to the extent that the subject actively commits themselves to an activity, acquiring, in the meantime, the knowledge and skills, the norms and all the attributes associated with that activity, these motives, represented by the object of the activity, become a stable part of the person's personality. The activities themselves wax and wane, prove successful or fail – their fate depending largely on factors in the wider social world. The personality, however, constitutes a stable base in the inner world of the subject. The development of the personality is tied up with the development of the subject's Will and the subject's emotional life is linked to the fate of these activities, but the personality remains a relatively stable psychic formation, according to Leontyev.

In the next logico-historical phase of development, the subject arranges the units of their personality into a *structure*. The units of this structure are the 'motives', so this life-world could also be called a 'motivational structure'. Some motives make their way to the top of a hierarchy, dominating and leading others that become conditional upon it. Sometimes the personality becomes split, with some motivations dominant in some situations while others predominate in others. There will also be conflict between motives, and development of the personality entails resolution of these internal conflicts, either sublimating a motivational conflict into more profound motives that transcend the conflict, or by relegating or discarding one motivation.

Although Leontyev claims a 'stable psychic formation' for the personality, it is surely self-evident that, if seen this way, the personality itself is subject to the fate of the various activities which are the basis of a person's motives.

The final phase of the development of a personality is entailed in the motivations connected to the material needs tied up in maintaining life in their social group becoming subordinate to more abstract motivations and ultimately, following Aristotle, 'the good life for humanity' becoming the leading motive, conditioning and leading other motivations in the subject's life and personality. This rosy opinion of the senior citizen is not necessarily shared, but this was Leontyev's view.

In the earliest stages of personality development, it is driven by *need*, according to Leontyev. Needs develop, of course, and do not remain at the animal level. “Personality cannot develop within the framework of need; its development necessarily presupposes a displacement of needs by creation, which alone does not know limits” (1978, p. 186). Once the subject begins to free themselves from subordination to the needs and norms of their social group, and their personality is composed of ideal social motives, Leontyev increasingly refers to the motives as *otnosheniya* (отношение, *pl.* отношения) rather than motives (мотивов). ‘Отношения’ is usually translated as ‘relations’, but it is also used to mean ‘priorities’, or ‘attitudes’ or ‘orientations’. I will translate this word as ‘commitments’.

... the personality of man also ‘is produced’ – it is created by the *otnosheniya*, into which the individual enters in his activity.
1978, p. 152

I will examine the word *otnosheniye* in more detail presently.

These priorities or relations are the commitments the person makes to activities and which take up more or less leading positions in the structure of their motives. What is indicated is an ideal motive, which I would prefer to call a ‘life-project’ inasmuch as, in the fully developed personality, it does not represent a ‘need’ so much as a ‘quasi-need’, a commitment to an ideal of some kind.

Leontyev (1978) notes a pathology of the personality found in “superprosperous consumer society” when the intrinsic value of objects as means of satisfying needs has been lost and commodities perform only the function of confirming a person’s prestige. In such a situation the personality may take on a “configuration of flatness devoid of real summits when what is small in life man takes for something large, and the large things he does not see at all” (1978, p. 183).

Although Leontyev correctly emphasises the subjective side in the formation of personality, his theory lacks a satisfactory explanation of how the subject comes to adopt motives and discard others in the early formation of the personality or how and why a person might change their life-world. It seems to me that the concept used by Vygotsky and later by Fedor Vasilyuk, *perezhivaniya* (переживания) – deeply felt or possibly life-changing crises in a person’s life together with the person’s response to them – has the necessary power. In the course of a political conflict against Vygotsky, Leontyev denounced the use of this concept, and it was only restored to its central place later by Vasilyuk.

Leontyev’s Activity Theory remains a powerful and complex approach to the psychology of the personality, especially if it is used in conjunction with Vygotsky’s Cultural Psychology. In the above, I have focused on Leontyev’s *theory of the personality*, and passed over his treatment of how the interaction of ideology associated with a person’s social position and their personal experiences together shape the *sense* that each activity to which they are committed has for them and other aspects of his work.

Vasilyuk’s Theory of Personal Crises

Fedor Vasilyuk was a postgraduate student at the Faculty of Psychology of Moscow State University when he wrote his PhD thesis later published as

Psychologia Perezhivanie (1984). Vasilyuk became the Chair of Individual and Group Psychotherapy at Moscow State University of Psychology and Education.

As Vasilyuk saw it, a patient comes to a psychotherapist because they face some *impossible situation* (see Blunden 2015). Basing himself broadly on Leontyev's theory of the personality, Vasilyuk saw such impossible situations as resulting from one of four types of dilemma arising from the fate of the life-projects to which the patient was committed. The set of life-projects to which a person is committed constitutes their 'life-world'. These life-projects are selected from among those activities existing in the society and arranged in the structure of the person's *lichnost*, personality.

He defines a *difficult* life-world in which a person's life-project is blocked in some way, and a *complex* life-world in which a person finds life-projects in conflict with one another. The easy/difficult and simple/complex dichotomies provide him with a four-part taxonomy of archetypal crises. In each case, the relevant commitments have to be identified and the subject must engage in a *perezhivanie* – understood as the cognitive and emotional labour required to reorient their commitments so as to resolve the impossible situation. In each case, a particular kind of work has to be done and a particular virtue developed according to the type of life-world the patient must restructure.

Vasilyuk was a psychotherapist, however, concerned with how people survive those 'impossible situations'. That is, he looked at these impossible situations as the counsellor, whose task was to help the patient *survive* when their Will could not resolve the situation that was, by definition, impossible.

Despite what the change managers like to tell us, there is a significant difference between your partner dying and your boss making your job redundant, or the government cutting your pension. In the latter two cases, although things appear to be impossible, they *can* be overcome in reality as well as survived subjectively.

The concern of this work, however, is the psychological issues that arise when the aim is to not just survive but to *transform the apparently impossible situation*. Granted, a life-partner who has died cannot be brought back to life, but there are many other apparently impossible situations that *can* be resolved. This is what people are talking about when they speak of 'having agency'. I will remain, however, within the discourse of the *Will* because we can benefit from the centuries-long history of the study of the Will that I have reviewed above.

Otnosheniye

Etymologically, *otnosheniye* means 'to carry from', and the dictionary says that *otnosheniye* can be translated as 'attitude', 'relationship', 'connection', 'how someone feels about someone or their connection to someone' and can refer to diplomatic ties. It is a relational word, expressing a person's relation to something else, but what? Alex Kozulin, a Russian-speaking Vygotsky scholar reviewed Vasilyuk's book in 1991 and referred to *otnoshiniya* as 'life-projects'. Vasilyuk's teacher, A.N. Leontyev used *otnosheniye* in a similar sense, in which what is being connected to is some *activity*. An activity, in Activity Theory, is a very general concept.

Activities are the units of Activity Theory; everything is an activity in one sense or another. Activities are usually named according to their object, that is to say, the ideal form of the object being acted upon (see Blunden 2023).

I find that *otnosheniye*, in the sense used by Leontyev and Vasilyuk, can be adequately translated as ‘commitment’. Commitments are to some *really existing* project or activity to which a subject is committed. So it satisfies Vygotsky’s demand for a unit in that it *contains moments of both the environment and consciousness*. The commitment could be to the subject’s job, their family, or their country; it could be the environment, Socialism, honesty, prosperity, Hegel, the subject’s home town or Country, or Donald Trump. Whatever a person is committed to functions as a unit of the motivational structure of their personality. So, for example, even something as diffuse as ‘honesty’ I do not conceive as a ‘value’, but rather, alongside Feminism, Social Democracy, Science, and Christianity, and so on, as a *really existing aggregate of actions* in the real world in which the subject lives, all directed at, working on, or embodying that common ideal. Values are abstractions, but people develop commitments only to concrete, really existing ideals, invariably alongside others committed to the common ideal.

With all the above caveats, I embrace Vasilyuk’s conception of a person’s ‘lifeworld’ as the structure of all those activities represented in the subject as the structure of their commitments.

The object of analysis is the ‘lifeworld’. This has external and internal aspects, denoted ... as ‘external world’ and ‘internal world’.

The external world can be either easy or difficult. The internal world can be either simple or complex.

Vasilyuk, 1984, p. 92

Thus a person’s fate is tied up with the fate of the projects to which they are committed. Exactly *how* it affects the subject depends on the project’s position in the structure of the personality; how it affects the rest of the community depends on the place of the project in the totality of all those projects that make up the activity constituting the community to which the subject belongs.

I propose that for an interdisciplinary theory of social life, the unit be *otnoshiniya*, understood as active commitments to really existing activities. This contrasts with social theories that take social formations to be groups of people held together by some shared attribute, or intangible structures, or those phenomenological social theories that take the units of social formations to be individual persons who create bonds between them, or axiological theories of the persona based on an ordering of abstract ‘values’.

The choice of commitments as a unit is not a simplifying assumption – there are more commitments than individual people, and certainly more commitments than there are activities in the sense Leontyev intended.

A commitment is the smallest irreducible unit of social life. The Will is a structure of commitments.

Perezhivanie

Augustine of Hippo invented the word Will, so as to be able to name the personal crisis he faced: his inability to choose between two courses of action to

each of which he was committed in different ways. Likewise, even though the Will is active in every action we take, we can best make sense of the Will when we are considering such *crises* – Vasilyuk’s ‘impossible situations’.

Perezhivanie is a common word in the Russian language (see Blunden 2016); it simply means ‘an experience’. But the term in Russian differs from the English because (1) it carries a connotation of *suffering*, (2) it is active, not so much something that happened to you as how you dealt with a difficult situation and (3) it is inclusive of the catharsis, that is, the way you changed your personality as a result of surviving. Etymologically, in fact, *pere-zhivan-ie* means *sur-viv-ing*. Russian speakers can, however, use the word in an everyday way just as we use the word ‘experiences’. However, *perezhivanie* does differ from the Russian word *opit*, which is like ‘experience’ in the expression ‘work experience’ when you’re filling out your CV, and cannot be used as a countable noun.

So *perezhivaniya* are like the chapters of your autobiography – the critical situations you’ve faced, and how you survived them and made yourself the kind of person you are today, specifically, the commitments you hold to.

Vasilyuk’s work is entirely about the mental labour of, for example, taking up a new project in lieu of the project that has come to an end, such as launching a charity in the name of the loved one who has died. Or when two life-projects come into conflict with one another, re-evaluating your commitment to one or the other. And so on.

The issue for us is different, however. Rather than just changing our relation to the world, adapting to the difficult and complex reality, the question is, in general: how can *you* change that reality?

Changing Reality

As Vygotsky said, there is no such thing as an unmotivated action.

The context here is that the ‘motive’ is some really existing life-project. By definition, every emancipatory action is always also a transgression, always violating some social norm. But it invariably also mobilises social norms, ‘taps into’ dispositions that already exist.

I can simply illustrate this idea that I will elaborate much later with the following report:

When Rhea Liang and her colleagues (2019) enquired into why so many well-qualified female trainee surgeons abandon the discipline before completing training, [they] used professional networks to recruit research subjects who had already chosen to leave surgery and these subjects helped recruit others and also participated in analysing the data; they were participant observers. The inclusion of research subjects in the research team itself was possible because the researchers approached the topic with a feminist perspective consistent with aims of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) to identify and break down barriers to female participation in the professions.

Blunden, 2023

In other words, Liang et al. drew on three life-projects existing in the community: an existing professional network and the Women’s Liberation

Movement, or simply Feminism, to recruit colleagues, plus the well-established scientific journal, *The Lancet*, to prosecute their attack on the domination of patriarchy in Surgery.

I will leave this line of enquiry at this point and turn to Sociology, which has developed quite independently of Psychology, Soviet or otherwise. In the meantime, however, I shall review another investigation that will be relevant to many people in today's world, where every career entails protracted university or other professional training before even entering the workplace.

The trainee dilemma

A critical phase in the development of the Will in young adulthood is the 'trainee dilemma' (see Anakin et al, in press). This dilemma marks the transition from being a formally qualified professional to an actually capable professional. For those of us who have had to endure years of university training for a profession, we are often required to undergo many years of on-the-job training before we have any say over the conditions of our working life.

The development of professional competence extends beyond formal education to include the development of a new professional identity shaped by workplace experiences and interactions with senior colleagues. Formal education cannot fully equip trainees for the practical demands of professional life. The workplace introduces new stimuli originating in the working environment that require the integration of scientific and everyday concepts through experiential learning and social interaction.

Perezhivaniya, transformative experiences, are integrated into the trainee's personality, reshaping their professional identity through challenging events and interactions. Measured support systems, such as mentorship and authentic tasks involving risk, foster the trainee's development while providing safety nets to mitigate failures. Becoming a competent, confident, and committed professional is a transformative journey that not only enhances practical skills but also aligns the trainee's professional and personal identities.

Today, an increasing proportion of people complete an extensive program of post-secondary education to qualify for a profession. Even occupations not formerly recognised as professions, such as early childhood education, now require formal post-secondary education. Becoming a professional is an important life stage. But being qualified in a profession does not mean a person is capable of acting as a professional.

This gap is the *trainee dilemma*: qualified but not yet capable, as important and difficult as any other transitional stage of personal development.

Successfully completing formal educational tasks is a different kind of activity from diagnosing and treating a patient or teaching multiplication to a class of children. Being a professional is a different kind of activity and requires a different kind of person. Becoming a professional requires a development of the *whole* person, not just the acquisition of additional skills. The transition requires a restructuring of the personality, so that the person responds appropriately to stimuli originating from the workplace situation.

For the trainee (as for the child), of critical importance is *measured* support from the people working around them. Support is *measured* when colleagues

provide neither too much nor too little guidance, advice, coaching, or mentorship. However, the trainee is an adult, not a child, and is responsible for their own actions.

Lev Vygotsky and Alexander Luria demonstrated that human beings control their future behaviour 'from outside', so to speak, by creating relevant links in advance of the situation arising. This insight leads to a theory of the development of the personality which emphasises the person's relations to the world (*otnosheniya*) rather than traits, such as temperament or introversion. In this view, the trainee's fellow workers play an important role in modelling, guiding, supporting, and supervising the trainee. Offsite training can do only so much.

There are two interrelated aspects to becoming a professional. Firstly, a person must be able to access the formal knowledge, acquired by institutions over centuries, and apply this knowledge appropriately in the work situation. Secondly, others must give recognition to the person that they are capable. Only when both are true can the person say, "Yes, I'm a professional."

Vygotsky's well-known distinction between 'scientific' and 'everyday' concepts is important here. 'Scientific' concepts are first acquired via instruction in an institutional setting and in a formal learning context such as by reading books or listening to lectures. While such concepts develop by becoming more concrete by connecting with other scientific concepts as part of some *system* of concepts, initially they are only *formal* in the sense that they have no direct relation to personal experience.

'Everyday' concepts, on the other hand, are acquired in everyday interaction with other people and the cultural artefacts of a community. Everyday concepts are constituted by *life experience*. If the scientific concept remains as it is, without merging with personal experiences, then it remains merely empty words. Conversely, if the everyday concept remains unschooled in the historically acquired knowledge of the relevant culture, then it cannot rise to the demands made on an experienced professional.

Central to the personality will be a commitment to the profession itself. Passage through the trainee dilemma is not a gradual process. It is made up of a series of discrete and relatively minor *perezhivaniya*. It is through many *perezhivaniya* that the trainee builds the concrete ideal of what it means to be a capable doctor or teacher. These *perezhivaniya* are experienced each time the trainee confronts an unfamiliar situation and either succeeds or fails. Failure and success in these *perezhivaniya* and especially how they cope with these crises have a cumulative effect on the trainee; they shape their personality and how they view their profession.

Initially, the trainee's *otnosheniya* include their commitment to their ideal of their chosen profession. This conception will at first be abstract, perhaps the image of one good teacher that inspired them or a general understanding of the word 'medicine'. Later, all the little *perezhivaniya* – minor embarrassments, traumatic mistakes, exhilarating achievements, successful interventions by others – will fill out and colour the ideal the trainee has of their profession. Their concept of the profession will be a *concrete ideal*, that is, an ideal that has been enriched with nuances and connections through experience.

A qualified trainee will not automatically become a capable professional. The trainee may experience traumatic failure and become a capable professional only after experiencing humiliations, embarrassment, burnout, and possibly even causing injury to others. Such *perezhivaniya* may disfigure their professional abilities and identity. To avoid such negative outcomes, newly qualified professionals need assistance from senior colleagues. This assistance might include mentorship and coaching. But support must include authentic tasks with real people that include a risk of failure but failing safely so that no one is injured. Passively observing someone performing the task correctly is insufficient because the trainee must learn to master their own actions in the midst of the relevant stimuli.

Failure is an integral part of professional development. Rather than avoiding failure, it should be moderated and embraced as a valuable learning opportunity. Trainees need to engage in authentic tasks that carry a risk of failure but allow them to fail safely without harming a client or themselves. Rather than fail-safe tasks, the 'safe-fail' task is one that can tolerate risk while providing opportunities for trainees to learn from their mistakes. The safe-fail task can help trainees learn from their negative *perezhivaniya* by reflecting on and adjusting their subsequent practices.

The riskiness of tasks in the workplace is an essential characteristic of a profession. Simulation exercises help prepare the student for work situations but cannot replace the *perezhivanie* of completing a task in which such risks are successfully negotiated. We describe the tasks in which a trainee either fails or succeeds despite the difficulty and risks as a *perezhivanie*. It is only through such *perezhivaniya* that personal development takes place.

When undergoing formal training for a profession, a student learns rules such as 'when I see this, then I do that'. It is through such action rules that the Will is trained so that the trainee responds automatically to stimuli with the appropriate action. This is what Vygotsky called 'closure' as discussed earlier. These action rules are located within a scientific conceptual structure, but concepts always have a *motive* at their heart that can be realised only insofar as the person is able to recognise the appropriate stimuli and respond with the appropriate action.

The *actual* concept that the seasoned professional has mastered, merges both paths of development: the scientific and the everyday. It is this merging of everyday and scientific knowledge that is the trainee's experience. A trainee who lacks sound everyday interpersonal abilities and is unable to *read the situation* when they meet a pupil, patient, or client is unlikely to become a good professional even if they have a good foundation in formal scientific knowledge.

The stimuli that have been acquired in a formal setting are not present in the work situation. The subject's formal knowledge must be worked over, and new stimuli acquired in the only way possible; while acting in their professional capacity with real patients, real clients, or in real classrooms. In this way, a new mode of action is constructed alongside the existing formal mode of action acquired in the university setting – professional action in the workplace.

When a person decides to study and takes up a job in that profession, their ideal of that profession takes up a leading position in the structure of their

personality, at least while they are at work. As such, it functions as the key component of their identity. That initial ideal may be a thin abstraction based on the image of a family member or fictional character. It will also be a highly conditional ideal because the person is not yet able to say, “I am a professional.” The question is: how does their personality develop to the point when they are able to say, “I am a professional” and all those around them affirm that claim, and they survive the ‘trainee dilemma’?

The process of development of the personality takes place through a series of *perezhivaniya* in which the person forms new relationships to their environment (*otnosheniya*) or ‘commitments’. In the professions, there are two distinct referents: the person’s own perception of their performance, and the actions of others signalling their assessment of the person in the profession. Both the self-perception and that of others must affirm the person’s identity as a trained professional for the trainee’s identity as a professional to be established.

Inevitably, the trainee will make mistakes. While signalling to the self and others that the trainee is not yet a professional, failures do not necessarily damage the trainee’s identity. They may act as a spur to learn and do better, but, most importantly, by experiencing the failed action the trainee is enabled to recognise and overcome that failure in the future. The active supervision and corrective action of more senior professionals in this instance are vital.

The trainee dilemma is a critical phase in professional development, marked by a transition from formal education to practical competence. It entails the transformation of the trainee’s entire personality rather than mere skill acquisition. Through their interactions with more experienced colleagues and authentic workplace challenges, trainees engage in a dynamic interplay of support and independence that fosters their development. This journey is punctuated by *perezhivaniya*, intense transformative experiences that integrate personal and professional growth.

The experiences of a person who begins a new job for which they *do not* have formal qualifications are not materially different, presuming that the job is indeed one for which the subject’s past experiences are deemed to qualify them. So, the ‘trainee dilemma’ is an experience most of us are likely to experience many times in our life.

References

- Anakin, M., Yang, H., Yu, S., Ivanova-Miloshevska, B., Blunden, A. & Cripps Clark, J. (in press). The Trainee Dilemma. *Culture and Education*. Sage.
- Blunden, A. (2021). *Fedor Vasilyuk’s Psychology of Life-projects*, Hegel, Marx & Vygotsky Essays on Social Philosophy, Leiden, NL: Brill.
- Blunden, A. (2016). Translating *perezhivanie* into English. *MCA*, Taylor and Francis.
- Blunden, A. (2023). *Activity Theory. An overview*. Leiden, NL: Brill.
- Leontyev, A. N. (1977/1978). Activity and Consciousness, pp. 395-409, *The Development of Mind*, (Soviet translation) Erythrós Press and Media.

Liang, R., Dornan, T. & Nestel, D. (2019). Why do women leave surgical training? A qualitative and feminist study. *The Lancet*, vol 393. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier.

Vasilyuk, F. E. (1984). *The psychology of experiencing. The resolution of life's critical situations*. Progress Publishers Moscow. English translation (1988), Hemel Hempstead, UK: Harvester-Wheatsheaf.